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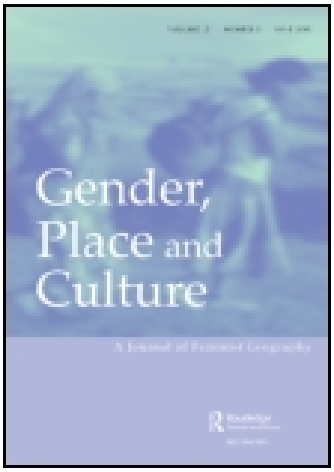

Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20

Still methodologically becoming: collaboration, feminist politics and 'Team Ismaili'

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Published online: 16 Feb 2010.

To cite this article: Serin D. Houston , D. James McLean , Jennifer Hyndman & Arif Jamal (2010) Still methodologically becoming: collaboration, feminist politics and 'Team Ismaili', Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, 17:1, 61-79

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09663690903522339

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Gender, Place and Culture
Vol. 17, No. 1, February 2010, 61–79

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Still methodologically becoming: collaboration, feminist politics and 'Team Ismaili'

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This article mobilizes a feminist analytic to examine team research and collaborative knowledge production. We center our encounter with team research – a collectivity we named 'Team Ismaili' – and our study with first- and second-generation East African Shia Ismaili Muslim immigrants in Greater Vancouver, Canada. We draw upon feminist politics to highlight the ways in which 'Team Ismaili' at once destabilized and unwittingly reproduced normative academic power relations and lines of authority. A 'backstage tour', of 'Team Ismaili' shows the messiness and momentum of team research and sheds light on how collaborative knowledge production can challenge and reconfirm assumed hierarchies. Even as we are still methodologically becoming, through this discussion we strive to interrupt the prevailing silence on team research in human geography, to prompt more dialogue on collaboration and to foreground the insight garnered through feminist politics.

Keywords: team research; power relations; knowledge production; feminist politics; Ismailis

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Introduction

In July 2005 four geographers – at the time, two master's students, one instructor and one tenured professor – gathered in Vancouver, British Columbia to embark upon an intense six weeks of fieldwork with East African Shia Ismaili Muslim immigrants.[1] At one of our first group research meetings, we adopted the name 'Team Ismaili' to signify our collective commitment to the research and to each other (see Figure 1).[2]

Through focus groups and interviews we sought to probe the impact of migration on the settlement processes of the Ismaili community living in Greater Vancouver, Canada, and to understand more about transnational linkages, intergenerational relationships and interactions, and identity expressions (see also Houston et al. 2006a; 2006b; Jamal 2006; McLean 2007).[3] We spoke with Ismaili immigrants who departed from East Africa from the 1970s to 1990s (first-generation Ismailis) and their adult Canadian-born children (second-generation Ismailis).

Although our substantive research archive is vast, in this article we shift away from the empirics to consider teamwork and its implications. Specifically, we mobilize a feminist analytic to critically examine our research team and collaborative knowledge production. Inspired by reflexivity and positionality, we draw upon feminist politics to underscore the ways in which 'Team Ismaili' at once challenged and reconfirmed normative academic

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ISSN 0966-369X print/ISSN 1360-0524 online
© 2010 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/09663690903522339
http://www.informaworld.com

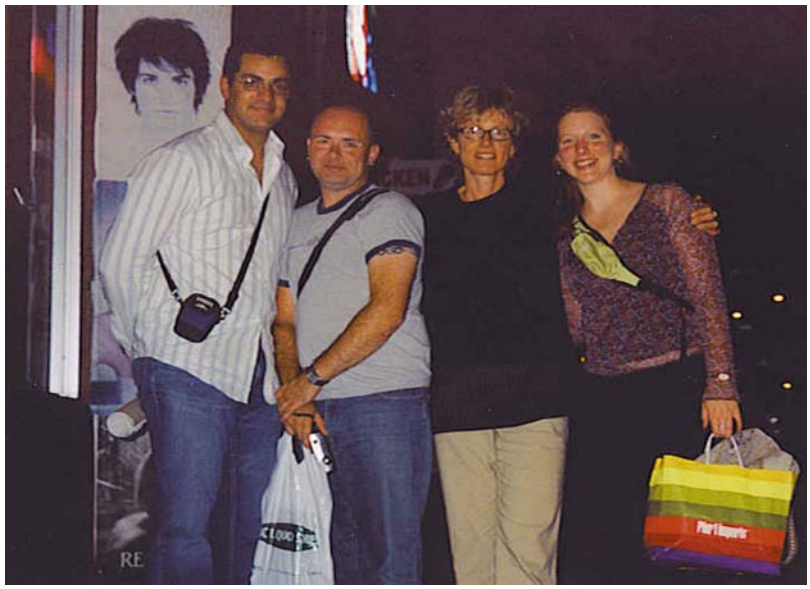

Figure 1. 'Team Ismaili' – Arif, James, Jennifer and Serin.

power relations and lines of authority. We realize that much 'feminist research in geography is masculinist in its practice, not out of intention, but more so out of training for being an academic and for survival in the field' (Moss 2002, 4); indeed, aspects of our research echo such masculinist tendencies. Yet, we also want to highlight the moments in which we embodied feminist politics and successfully created an inclusive team environment. Through this discussion, we probe team relationships to think through collaborative knowledge production and to reflect on how feminism works in practice.

While many feminist geographers explicitly invoke feminism from the outset of a research project (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Jones, Nast, and Roberts 1997; Rose 1997; Moss 2002; Nagar 2002; Cope 2003; Mountz et al. 2003; Pratt 2004), we have drawn upon feminist politics implicitly and often unintentionally throughout the research process. For example, at times our feminist politics were infused in our actions, in the sense that for some of us feminist politics arise as an embedded (perhaps even unconscious) perception of and engagement with the world. In other instances, our feminist politics were very much embodied, evident in the ways that we acted and reacted to one another in tense moments and in our attempts to dismantle hierarchies. Most recently, feminist politics and its attention to power has emerged as a compelling framework for teasing apart and unpacking the delights and difficulties of team research. In this article, we therefore follow Staeheli and Kofman (2004, 2) and define our politics as concerned 'with the relations and practices in sites other than the state that construct, maintain, and sometimes challenge power'.

Our motivations for this article are threefold. First, we endeavor to add to the literature on team research, particularly within human geography, because the demands of the academy and the protocols of funding agencies signal increased interest in team research. Indeed, the current political economy of academia within the fiscal constraints of funding social science and the humanities demands this kind of knowledge production. The practice of research and the literature must expand accordingly. Second, while

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we clearly learn from our shortcomings, we also learn from our accomplishments. Thus, we offer reflections on our teamwork and our feminist politics to illustrate some of the positive attributes of collaborative knowledge production. We study our team process – and write about it collectively and individually – because 'Team Ismaili' seems different than the familiar narrative of exploitative and contentious 'collaborations'. Yet our discussion pairs with notes of hesitation because 'Team Ismaili' both destabilized and unwittingly reproduced prevailing power relations. Explicating these paradoxes, our final intention, helps us make plain that research and research teams are always in 'perpetual state[s] of becoming' (Mountz et al. 2003, 30). Since we are still methodologically becoming, we seek to analyze power relations within the context of an academic research team to outline the possibilities for forging different kinds of research strategies and relationships.

Feminist politics provide our framework and help render clear the institutional pressures that condition research practices and the openings teamwork creates for methodological innovation[4] and for challenging assumed hierarchies between researchers. With this in mind, we first outline some central elements of our team through a sojourn into the sparse and generally prescriptive scholarly literature on team research. A discussion of how we negotiated, embodied, challenged and performed various power relations and hierarchies through 'Team Ismaili' follows. In this space, we also scrutinize the constellation of social relations that underpinned and stemmed from hierarchies of power. We lay bare aspects of the unpublished (and often seemingly invisible) affective attributes of the research process 'to make some of the boundaries of social science conventions visible, in order to clear spaces for more varied research practices' (Pratt 2000, 639).

Mountz et al.'s (2003) piece, 'Methodologically becoming: Power, knowledge and team research', originally published in *Gender, Place and Culture*, on team research threads through our discussion in numerous important ways. This article provided inspiration for reflexively considering our team process and it served as a point of comparison during these contemplations. Furthermore, Alison Mountz's requested commentary on our two teams reminds us how knowledge productions continually evolve. This too interweaves with our feminist politics as the ongoing textual and verbal engagements with both 'Methodologically becoming' and Mountz illumine that ideas are far from static. There is motion even in the printed word.

We seek to build upon and extend the conversations that Mountz et al. (2003) initiated in human geography about qualitative methods, feminist politics and teamwork. We add layers and texture to the dialogue in an effort to augment and sharpen future research projects. In sum, despite the challenges of team research, the unique methodological, intellectual, political and social benefits catalyzed by this mode of inquiry and the related collaborative knowledge production deserve greater attention within human geography.

Placing 'Team Ismaili' in the literature

The majority of scholarship on team research focuses on two primary themes: the professional and personal perils of collaboration; and the mechanics of creating uniformity within a team. Bradley (1982), for example, investigates the potentially damaging career and intellectual impacts caused by team research. Specifically, he details the exploitative and unethical relations that often develop amongst team members of different academic rank, especially in the case of junior team members conducting most of the work and receiving the least amount of recognition (Bradley 1982, 89). He therefore suggests that the

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success of a team frequently comes about at the expense of individuals: 'By emphasizing the priority of the project's well-being and success, and by deflecting attention from a direct concern with personal interests, it leaves the individual vulnerable in a situation of high personal risk' (Bradley 1982, 89). To counteract these circumstances, Bradley (1982, 90) offers 'an agenda for the negotiation of team research conditions', which includes stating in writing everything from the 'scope and duration' (1982, 91) of the project to all the 'products that are anticipated' (1982, 92). While these strategies often diminish potential negative ramifications of team research, they also indicate a fairly prescriptive approach to collaboration. Notably, although Bradley addresses symptoms of academic power relations, he does not explicitly name the relations as such and does not offer ideas for how to subvert or challenge such standard modes of research.

Speaking to the desire for uniformity, Driedger et al. (2006, 1146, 1148) advocate the use of the 'convergent interviewing method' – an in-depth interviewing model developed in Australia for the purposes of organizational change – within multidisciplinary research teams so as to establish epistemological and ontological commonality between team members. Using their study of people with chronic illness as the primary data source, the authors argue that the convergent interviewing method enables quicker and more effective quantitative and qualitative data collection because researchers frequently compare notes and try to find points of convergence amidst the data through utilizing a highly structured interview framework (Driedger et al. 2006, 1147–1148). The authors underscore the potential for developing team-wide epistemological and ontological unity through this method and assume that multidisciplinary research endeavors require overarching structure and intellectual consistency.

Mitigating or streamlining difference emerges as a common concern in other facets of the literature as well. For example, Day, Dosa, and Jorgensen (1995) outline assumptions and barriers that reduce the transmission of ideas in multicultural teams. They offer concrete suggestions for alleviating such challenges, such as hiring facilitators, using technology effectively and extensively preparing team members for the collaboration (Kayworth and Leidner 2001). In a related vein, Bartunek and Louis (1996) also focus on difference as they stress the importance of creating equitable positions on insider/outsider (I/O) research teams. They define I/O teams as those that include both academics – specifically 'social scientists' (1996, 2) – and practitioners or professionals – 'teachers, self-helpers, and… employees' (1996, 2). Bartunek and Louis (1996, 20) delineate common points of tension that occur within I/O team research, including differing intellectual persuasions, desired outcomes and degrees of commitment to the project.

Within this literature, little is said about the positive possibilities of collaboration, the insight gained through harnessing and teasing out difference within teams, the opportunities for challenging normative hierarchies offered through teamwork, or the ways in which team research extends standard qualitative methods. The synergy of teamwork arises as something to be managed, contained and predicted. Indeed, this scholarship emphasizes the ethics and mechanics of team research rather than the power relations and knowledge production implicated in this method. Even though power cuts through the research team, these relations are often unspoken and understudied in the literature (see Gerstl-Pepin and Gunzenhauser 2002 as an exception). In contrast, we gravitate toward prying apart and studying the contingency of team research to make visible power relations, to showcase the potential for enacting feminist politics within this context and to highlight the compelling insights generated by team research.

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'Methodologically becoming' and 'Team Ismaili'

We are not alone in our interest in team research, feminism and geography (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Mountz 2002; Nagar 2002). For example, Mountz et al. (2003) argue that feminist research could benefit from a deeper theorization of the relationship between academic research and the broader political movements that drive such projects. The authors delve into these themes vis-à-vis an investigation of their own team research on the transnational migration experiences of Salvadorans in the US and El Salvador. Mountz et al. note that their desire to be a part of the Salvadorans' political struggles for recognition in the US influenced how they perceived their research: 'As we became more immersed in the community's struggle for residency, we began to introduce the project as an attempt to support their efforts' (Mountz et al. 2003, 34). They also actively positioned their research as participatory, although they acknowledged that team members had different perspectives on what participatory research entailed (Mountz et al. 2003, 34). They spent several months working with Salvadorans and tweaking their methods and methodology. While these efforts foregrounded the political nature of their work, the politics of the research team itself at times diminished the degree of engagement with Salvadorans.

The bold decision to 'publicly revisit… methodological difficulties of a completed project' (Mountz et al. 2003, 30) prompted us to reflect upon our own team process. In addition to the shared commitment to examining team research, however, there are important distinctions between the team composition and research specifics presented in Mountz et al. (2003) and 'Team Ismaili'. Whereas three faculty members and one graduate student (with the student doing the majority of the fieldwork) comprised the Mountz, Miyares, Wright and Bailey team, we were the inverse: at the time two students, one instructor with a MA and one professor, all of whom had active – and different – roles in the fieldwork. We cannot help but wonder if our individual institutional rankings and shared involvement in the interview process contributed to our fairly harmonious experience. Moreover, we all spent a summer together conducting the fieldwork. Mountz et al. did not experience the luxury of geographic proximity and instead negotiated significant distance.

The parameters of the two projects diverge remarkably as well. Mountz et al. spent months in the field, whereas our fieldwork timeline was short. We completed 47 in-depth interviews in one month. This condensed research schedule meant that we did not pilot the interview questions or engage in any social justice or political struggles with Ismailis in Canada. As 'Team Ismaili' we collectively understood that we would use qualitative methods so we avoided the challenges that Mountz et al. (2003, 35) experienced amongst both team members and research participants about the choice of methods. We also individually and explicitly articulated a commitment to feminist research practices and politics (understood and enacted in multiple ways) on 'Team Ismaili'; this facilitated some presumed epistemological continuity and shared understandings of power.

Arif's self-identification as Ismaili and his affiliation with the organized Ismaili community in Greater Vancouver significantly aided our ability to gain access to research participants. Indeed, Arif's contacts made the recruitment of Ismailis relatively easy. While these connections were invaluable, they also limited and skewed our sample in several important ways. The kind of access to community members that we had through Arif does not parallel the experiences of Mountz et al. as they depicted tremendous challenge recruiting and interviewing Salvadorans. The precarious and vulnerable immigration status of most of the Salvadorans (mainly Temporary Protective Status)

combined with the trauma of civil war violence and flight from El Salvador contributed to the recruiting difficulties. By comparison, all Ismailis interviewed were established in, and citizens of, Canada.

The emotional context of the research also varied considerably between the two teams. For example, Mountz et al. (2003, 36) described the stress and depression that 'loomed large' in their research context (see also Lalor, Begley, and Devane 2006). On the other end of the spectrum, we often felt energized by our fieldwork. While both research projects included refugees who endured forcible exile from their home countries, Idi Amin pushed the Ismailis out of Uganda more than 30 years ago. There was some sense of distance between the relative comfort and security of the contemporary interview setting and the historical experiences of trauma (Edkins 2003). In contrast, the Salvadorans that Mountz et al. interviewed grappled with the immediate and life-altering consequences of their uncertain immigration status.

While the research projects and team dynamics between Mountz et al. and 'Team Ismaili' differ notably, Mountz et al.'s decision to critically examine their collaborative research process captured our imagination. These authors delineate power relations and do not shy away from the heated and contested elements of teamwork. We echo this strategy and position ourselves as augmenting the instrumentalist literature on teamwork, which outlines ways to minimize the risks of collaboration and craft uniformity, through our discussion of power relations and knowledge production. We also respond to and build upon Mountz et al. in our engagement with feminist politics and our explanation of the possibilities and pitfalls of team research.

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The momentum and messiness of 'Team Ismaili'

Grossman, Kruger and Moore (1999, 132) suggest that feminist collaborations – and we would add research informed by feminist politics – entail addressing power relations, fostering 'a more egalitarian structure of decision making', and recognizing the 'inseparability of the process and the content of a research project'. Similarly, Mountz et al. (2003, 41) state that feminist research calls for including 'a range of agendas and products' through '[c]areful management' of research teams. These authors also point to the importance of taking identity, difference and positionality seriously (Mountz et al. 2003, 41). Building upon these themes, Stewart and Zucker (1999, 141) advise that the development of rigorous feminist research necessitates 'more backstage tours, more discussions of how practices work on the ground, and more accounts of how we do what we do'. Reflexive considerations of collaborative knowledge production build upon the work of feminist scholars and open up space for envisioning more feminist research practices and politics (Moss 2002; Sharp 2004). Taking seriously these recommendations, we draw upon a feminist analytic to offer a 'backstage tour' of 'Team Ismaili' (Goffman 1959). Difference, positionalities, power relations and identities are all key themes in this journey.

Holding up the mirror to our experiences and dwelling upon some of our successes and shortcomings illustrates how our team perpetuated *and* challenged normative power relations and hierarchical structures of knowledge production. While the following account is certainly partial and many of the bruises and irritations of fieldwork have healed, we hope that delving into the power relations and negotiations of our team – 'typically hidden aspects of the research process' (Grossman, Kruger, and Moore 1999, 118) – will inspire more collaborative team research and broaden the interpretative space of feminist politics (Staeheli and Kofman 2004).

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Momentum

'Team Ismaili' coalesced due to the presence of grant money and a short time frame in which to conduct intensive research. In addition to these pragmatic factors, recognition of intellectual depth certainly motivated the formation of our team; as Wasser and Bresler (1996, 13) explain, through team projects 'researchers bring together their different kinds of knowledge, experience, and beliefs to forge new meanings through the process of the joint inquiry in which they are engaged'. Joining together as 'Team Ismaili' in the summer of 2005 not only got the work done, but also incorporated numerous perspectives into the research process. We each had different skills to offer and divergent research experiences and histories to contribute. The driving assumption underpinning our team formation was that more minds produce greater insight, inspire the active juxtaposition of manifold intellectual perspectives and make a potentially overwhelming research task and timeline possible.

We represent a fairly ad-hoc team construction. Unlike what Bradley (1982) recommends, we have no formal written agreements about how to work together and we spent relatively little time during the field research phase collectively discussing our team formation. How we all felt about the research, its organization and process, or how we might modify our modes of communication with each other were not common topics in group conversations and meetings, although these themes arose in one-on-one dialogues. The relative silence about the internal dynamics of our team created some tensions and reproduced power-laden lines of authority during fieldwork, as we later discuss. At the same time, the flexibility of the team meant that we each found ways to offer our diverse talents and to build ourselves into the research process and archive. We were all invested in the success of this project. Such collective responsibility and shared ownership may have been one of our most successful feminist moves (see Box 1).[5]

As the sole professor, Jennifer provided the key point of connection between the team members. She brought us all together to create the team, secured the funding and mentored James, Arif and Serin. We wonder how having only one tenured professor on the team, and a woman at that, influenced our experiences. Harding (1996, 443) states that 'men and women often have different, socially developed ways of organizing the production of knowledge'. She further asserts that women researchers usually do not gravitate toward the 'hottest' topics in research and 'tend to organize their research teams more around cooperation and less around competitive relations' (Harding 1996, 443). While these are vast generalizations, Harding's claims make us question how the gendering of Jennifer's institutional and structural roles informed our embodiment of feminist politics.

In addition to our array of relations with Jennifer, during the course of fieldwork, other alliances emerged between different team members. These relationships served various purposes throughout the research: they helped us process tension and frustration; they worked to justify individual perspectives; they softened the blow of team confrontation; and they deepened our commitment and inspired us to continually share ideas. They became, in many ways, part and parcel of our feminist politics. We subtly scratched away at prevailing hierarchies of power and presumptions about expert knowledge through such conversations (see Box 2).

Our group embodies a broad set of gender, racial, socio-economic class, spiritual, age, sexual, national and academic identities, and this added to the vitality of our team. According to Bantz (1993, 2), 'the advantage of the diversity of membership in a cross-cultural team is greater than in a mono-cultural team as variability of culture will bring greater diversity of concepts, theories, and methods'. Moreover, accounting for our multiple identities encouraged us to engage with positionality in relational and ongoing,

Box 1. Jennifer reflects on 'Team Ismaili'.

I'd like to say that this research approach as a team was carefully premeditated. The truth is that I had extra money in a SSHRC grant, which explored the relationship of transnationalism among refugees to Canada and its impact on 'social cohesion', and a deadline to spend it. The Ismaili project and the hiring of lots of hands for a short period of time seemed to fit the bill. Arif was interested in exploring migration histories and their impact in Canada within the Ismaili community to which he belongs for his master's and the pieces fell together when Serin offered to come from Seattle to help and James was willing to assist with interviewing.

Working with 'Team Ismaili' changed me and my thinking about team research. In grad school, I witnessed models of exploitation on research teams, between advisors and the post-docs and grad students on their 'teams', so if anything my sense of team research was a bit tainted at the outset. Yet, I didn't explicitly take steps to set up research protocols or contracts with team members to prevent such things from happening within our own ranks! Before long, we had an issue. Who would the research belong to and who could access it? I felt that everyone had to have some stake in the project and/or incentive for involvement, otherwise they would be alienated from the work and it would become just a job. We agreed (or rather I suggested) that each of us should have access to the 'archive', even if we all have different time commitments and professional ambitions in relation to it. We all produced it and feel some ownership of the material and the ideas we derived from it.

Our group meetings, trading of stories, celebrating project completion and reuniting to prepare seminar presentations were all joyful moments in different ways. By working intensely together for a short summer season, we got to know each other far better than we would have in a 'normal' academic milieu. We defied the solo nature of the academic project, if only for a summer, and the ways in which we catalyzed ideas together was phenomenal. We've had our bumps and scrapes, but have sorted most of these out without hard and fast rules. The ethos of collaboration has been the most valuable dimension of this work.

Jennifer

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rather than singular and static, terms in team meetings and preliminary analyses of the transcripts. We all occupied both insider and outside positionalities at different times and spaces (for more discussion on insider and outsider positionalities see Jamal 2006). This dynamic animated our fieldwork process and knowledge production. Indeed, the active articulation and examination of our many identities prompted reflexive conversations on positionality within and beyond the fieldwork. Team research forces scholars to consider relationality in ways that solo knowledge production projects often do not.

The reality of multiplicity and group unity remained a productive tension that we constantly (explicitly and implicitly) negotiated. For instance, we presented ourselves as a collaborative team during household interviews and were equally well received by Ismailis. Families welcomed us into their homes, offered us tea and candidly shared their perspectives in interviews. Early on during a team meeting, we also stated some of our individual interests and ambitions in relation to the project. Consequently, during interviews we tried to ask questions that would address some, if not all, of these themes. This kind of mutual obligation and indebtedness prompted assorted levels of reflexive dialogue, as we were simultaneously engaging with research participants, attending to each

Box 2. James reflects on 'Team Ismaili'.

Becoming part of this team, building on existing relationships and forging new ones, was a pivotal experience in my academic development. It marked a shift in my understanding of what it meant to think about and undertake research; what the process entailed; how exhilarating it could be; how challenging it could be; and, in the end, what wonderfully interesting connections can be made with others. In particular, our post-interview discussions were heated exchanges of energy, awe and inspiration. These conversations about the research process, the interviewee dialogues, the coming together of family narratives rekindled my desire to start back on my own academic journey, to recreate that same invigorating passion for research and writing for myself.

There was an exchange through academic generations, so to speak, that marked the power relations between team members. I had been a student of Jennifer's and Arif a student of mine; now we found ourselves working together as colleagues. I continued to see Jennifer as my mentor (as I do to this day) and felt myself to be a kind of mentor for Arif. Serin quickly became my teacher and confidante as well. Our skills and positions, when grouped together, made it rather difficult to accept that there was a hierarchy, that any one person's contribution was more critical than any other. Still, this is not to say that there weren't challenging 'research moments'.

One of the first difficult 'research moments' came early on when Serin and I stepped into the scene, about seven months into Arif's graduate work. Of course, he had already developed very strong feelings about the project, how it would be conducted, the questions he wanted addressed and the thesis he wished to explore. We met on an outdoor patio to go through his interview guideline and, with two more researchers added to the mix, there was much editing, shifting, deleting and questioning. Serin and I had discussed our approach both before and after the meeting. We were concerned about being respectful and constructive; still, I certainly sensed frustration during and even after the meeting about our increasing involvement. Serin and I were aware of the importance of being clear and communicative so we reinforced our position as team members and noted that our efforts were *for* the project and not *against* any of Arif's previous work. There were several more difficult or uncomfortable moments; yet, in the end, so much had been taught, learned and appreciated among the four of us.

James

other's interests and conceptualizing the overarching project. While this threw up some challenges, it also created a profound depth of empirics.

We grappled with individuality and collectivity, a familiar conundrum for many feminists, in other venues as well. On the one hand, we could not be read off by interviewees in an entirely unified way due to our differences in appearance and presentation. Furthermore, we accented our gender identities during fieldwork as James and Arif interviewed the men and Jennifer and Serin the women. Yet, on the other hand, we wanted to be perceived as uniformly talented and respected researchers. This led to not just a theoretical contemplation of the individual body and the collective team; on the contrary, we daily navigated the meshing of separate and shared histories, knowledges and experiences. It is hard to know whether or not we could have carved out space for exploring the cleavages and fractures within our group cohesiveness given a longer field season. We remain uncertain as to how much the goals of the team overshadowed individual aspirations and how decisions made in the field continue to inform contemporary situations and relationships.

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Even with these constraints, engaging with different and numerous perspectives characterized much of our collaboration. As Bartunek and Louis (1996, 56) suggest, success on research teams with insiders and outsiders means that:

> team members must be willing to make intellectual shifts. Outside researchers must work to appreciate insiders' mind-sets, and insiders must work to appreciate outsiders' points of view. Both must be willing and able to deal directly with conflicts that arise among them, whether the conflicts are cognitive, value based, or interest based.

We all performed the 'intellectual shifts' that Bartunek and Louis outline. This practice resonates with our implicit feminist politics because '[f]eminist methodology has always stressed the importance of listening to the voices of others so that research is a collaborative process' (Sharp 2004, 72). We sought to share insights and spark dialogue. Often, in our extensive team meetings, we would feel the intellectual energy escalate as we worked through the dynamism of fieldwork together.

We relied upon the ideas of 'rooting' and 'shifting' (Cockburn 1998, 9; Nagar and Sangtin Writers Collective 2006) that stem from transversal feminist politics throughout the research process as well. For example, after household interviews we often embarked upon post-interview dialogues amongst team members, as James described. These discussions emerged as we tried to make sense of the divergent and multiple stories we were hearing. We engaged in intellectual versatility and lateral thinking as we sought to recognize 'the specific positioning of political actors and the situated nature (and limits) of knowledge claims' (Giles and Hyndman 2004, 8). The movement was furthered by a positive and dynamic attitude that usually infused the team. This outlook helped us listen carefully to different perspectives, work through moments of conflict, heal fractures and enjoy the research.

Aware of asymmetries, we challenged obvious hierarchies and power relations, as much as possible, during our fieldwork. For instance, we took turns running meetings and writing up the notes from these conversations. Although Jennifer was usually tasked with moving us through moments of anger and miscommunication and for laying out basic guidelines, we strived to treat each other as equal participants and collaborators. Moss (2002, 3) suggests that feminist politics are central to feminist research. As we explained earlier, we were not overtly involved in a political struggle. Yet, our approach to teamwork – and especially our efforts to bear out egalitarian ideals – carries the ethos of a feminist politics because we tried to attend to structures of power.

Other important facets of our team success relate to social reproduction, domestic responsibilities and timing. The project came to fruition at a good time in that we were all in a place professionally and personally to take part. The composition of 'Team Ismaili' would not have been the same if the project had come to light at a later date. The flexibility of summer schedules, matched with minimal domestic responsibilities, enabled us individually and collectively to dedicate a substantial amount of time to long interviews and team meetings within the relatively short fieldwork season. This afforded the rare luxury of focus and connection – we openly shared our questions, notes and brainstorms – amidst the chaos that usually engulfs academic lives. Our relatively unstructured schedules and the few domestic responsibilities enabled us to cultivate team relationships and enact aspects of our feminist politics.

We spent nearly every day together so we tried to interweave different dimensions of our lives. We might find ourselves debriefing after a household interview over dinner, or taking a hike before another interview, or merely walking around Vancouver trying to make sense of all that we were learning. The general ease of interactions reveals as much about our personalities as it does about the ideal timing of the project. It also points

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to a crucial factor in teamwork. Team building is an active exercise that requires tending and attention. We nurtured our team through forging relationships that surpassed the meeting and interview contexts. This marked for all of us a rare fusion of work and play.

The economic rewards for this project were minimal at best. We all received different compensation and although this variability might have been a source of tension in other contexts, it strengthened our team relations. Since our paychecks were small (or nonexistent), we had to find benefit in our connections to the Ismaili community, the intellectual questions and each other. The privilege of not needing to reap economic returns from this research project allowed other non-material attachments to flourish. In many ways, these developments helped propel the momentum of our team.

A confluence of factors contributed to the forging of mutual respect and trust on 'Team Ismaili'. We consciously and serendipitously embodied feminist politics as we strived to challenge norms and craft an egalitarian research team. The timing of the project, our diverse backgrounds, our flexibility and our team ethos have been central to the successes of our collaborative knowledge production. Teamwork came to represent a dynamic method for gathering and analyzing data and for producing knowledge. It prompted the development of other methods, nuanced our interpretations and forced us to confront the implications of our own institutional positionalities. Incredible synergy and intellectual growth happened when we were together. We wonder, though, if these kinds of developments are possible in other team configurations and how such energy could be maintained over time and space. While our team cohered in certain ways, it also had moments of splintering and stumbling. In these instances, we lost sight of our feminist politics and returned to deeply entrenched power relations and presumptions about authority.

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Messiness

The practice of collaborating and working together was far messier and more challenging than we originally anticipated. The points of tension on our team have been both structural and interpersonal in form (Bantz 1993). Since we did not all arrive on the team at the same time, some miscommunications and misperceptions about the goals and intentions of the project arose when the four of us initially convened (see Box 3).

Not only did the staggered arrival on the team engender misunderstandings, but also it meant that the focus group and interview questions were not entirely collaboratively created. Thus, team members had to work within an *a priori* framework to maintain a semblance of continuity between the focus groups and interviews (this was certainly challenged and resisted in interview settings). This situation precluded input from some members, but also enabled relative consistency across interviews.

Our personal intentions, motivations and skill sets were not explicit in the beginning and this affected the kinds of work we each did during the summer. We did not have clear job descriptions, although over time we established concrete responsibilities. For instance, Serin and James took the lead on the interviewing (Jennifer and Arif interviewed fewer people) and Arif transcribed all of the focus groups and interviews. This division of labor meant that Arif did not have as much of an opportunity to develop his fieldwork skills as he had originally wished (see Box 4).

The delineation of tasks caused some fractures amongst our team and, despite our best intentions, vitalized certain power inequities and lines of authority. The team members conducting the interviews experienced a more immediate connection with the data and could initiate preliminary analysis more easily; in some ways, James and Serin often assumed more authority in research discussions as a result. The balance shifted over time

Box 3. Serin reflects on 'Team Ismaili'.

Connection. Enthusiasm. Intellectual buzz. These are some of the words that immediately spring to mind as I reflect upon 'Team Ismaili'. In many ways, my role on the team was the most unscripted primarily because I was the last to join the team, the only non-Canadian and the person without any long-standing affiliation with other team members. I had not met James or Arif in person prior to the moment we began fieldwork together! Perhaps as a result of this 'outsiderness', I seemed to take on the role of a team mediator and morale booster of sorts (save one particular conversation that I describe below). For instance, I unintentionally coined 'hurray!' as our team mantra. This word became quite important when we came to impasses; indeed, reminding ourselves that this research process was mostly *fun* helped us muddle through the frustrating moments. I also spent a fair amount of time speaking one-on-one with other team members as we tried to sort through the challenges facing the team. Thus, the process of establishing rapport and trust far surpassed the interview context and informed my daily interactions with other team members.

There were times when tensions ran high, as my field notes attest. One notable example speaks to the confluence of norms of authority, gender dynamics, communication breakdowns and disparate expectations. Upon arriving in Vancouver, I quickly connected with Arif as a friend and peer mentor. He taught me volumes about the Ismaili community and I endeavored to share insight about interviewing. I thought he knew my intentions for joining the team and why Jennifer had invited me. In a heated exchange during my first week, however, it became obvious that we had different perceptions about how the fieldwork would unfold. We had a conversation that exemplified the academic pressure to establish boundaries and ownership around knowledge production and to legitimize oneself through hierarchies of status and experience. Our conflict forced all of us to become more transparent about why we were there, what skills we could offer and what we hoped to gain individually and collectively from the research. Overall, this knowledge helped us value each other more and create a genuine culture of respect. Perhaps allowing for this kind of eruption enabled us to actively wrestle with power relations and the parameters of teamwork. Although the tension was painful and frustrating at the time, we collectively worked through it, regained our footing and became good colleagues and friends.

Serin

since Arif transcribed all the interviews and gained intimacy with the data while writing his master's thesis. Although this might have been the case for the months immediately following fieldwork, we find ourselves now questioning what unspoken lines of authority continue to infuse our team. What silences lurk in the corners of this narrative? What perspectives have not gained full expression? Who gets to tell what stories? Questions such as these about authorship and when and how to acknowledge collaborative knowledge production in papers and presentations continue to be points of discussion and debate.

Concerns with 'whose' project this was, who had access to and control over what kinds of information, and who determined how the research unfolded emerged as the most contentious issues for the team. When problems around ownership happened, we quickly resorted to standard modes of academic relations and authority. Indeed, Jennifer (the professor and principal investigator on the grant) explicitly articulated our respective roles through individual and group meetings and expressed the goals of the fieldwork. She also decided that the research archive would be collectively 'owned' and used by all of us for

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Box 4. Arif reflects on 'Team Ismaili'.

I was anxious and excited to tackle the research for my master's thesis. I was passionate about the research and I quickly developed a strong bond with the study. I would talk to my colleagues about my upcoming interactions with participants and about how rewarding the experience would be. I was excited to engage in my first research project!

Being a novice with research studies, however, a group decision was made to let Serin and James lead this phase of the research and conduct the majority of the interviews. Both of these team members were highly skilled in conducting interviews and we all felt the research would benefit from their expertise and experience.

While I was in agreement with this arrangement and recognized its methodological benefits, it was very difficult for me, on a personal level, to loosen my bond with the study and forgo my opportunity to lead the interview phase of the research. Moreover, it was hard for me to express these feelings to my team members – not because there wasn't an opportunity or channel for me to do so, but because of my insecurities as a novice researcher – which only added to my dismay.

I worked to balance my personal interests and aspirations as a new researcher with those of the team and study at large. I gradually realized that the project, and I too, would benefit from Serin's and James's experience in research. While I was frustrated at times, in retrospect I believe that the wealth of information we gathered and the knowledge I gained about research is attributable to our diverse team of people and their multiplicity of perspectives and expertise. I learned much from my team members and value them highly as colleagues and friends. Our experiences turned into a very personal journey of reflection and analysis for me, one that continues to shape me as a researcher.

Arif

various professional aspirations and ambitions (see Box 1). In many ways, affirming the assumed roles of students and professor, although seemingly contrary to our ideals of collaboration and notion of feminist politics, enabled us to move through conflicts. Standard power hierarchies operated as a useful short-term tool for resolving these roadblocks.

Since James, Arif and Serin each had individual relationships with Jennifer – and she was an important mentor for each individual – she wielded a fair amount of power. She held the funding and the institutional authority. Thus, when Jennifer determined how the archive would be 'owned', James, Arif and Serin tacitly agreed. These tensions about intellectual property and control also catalyzed other alliances amongst team members; some of these relationships built upon existing mentorships whereas others stemmed from new connections. Importantly, these associations signal how teamwork engenders continual negotiations of authority and, in our case, both destabilized and edified standard academic hierarchies. Ironically, the conflicts about intellectual property surfaced when we sought to be more egalitarian and less hierarchical in team composition and definition. The subsequent disciplining of the team relied entirely on mobilizing existing hierarchies and power relations.

The friction we outline shows how team research is messy and far from straightforward. Compromises caused by collaboration create silences. In our situation, these tensions led us to reproduce hierarchical power relations and norms of authority. Feminist politics and an active pushing back against prevailing power relations receded in such instances. Looking ahead, the future of 'Team Ismaili' is hazy. We have each shifted

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institutional affiliations, taken new jobs and forged different research interests. We are no longer all in the academy or in the same geographic place so we hold varying degrees of commitment to and involvement in the project. The future negotiations of our teamwork remain unclear. Still, despite the uncertainty, messiness and challenges, remembering our weeks of active fieldwork usually inspires animated conversation. It represents a positive and possible example of the intellectual, political and personal benefits realized through collaborative knowledge production.

Concluding thoughts

A focus on the research destination, the output and the product characterizes the majority of academic scholarship. In contrast to this tendency, we highlight the research process, the meanders, the roadblocks, the crashes and the serendipities to draw attention to collaborative knowledge production and feminist politics. This is our attempt to 'grasp the present situation and articulate a politics adequate to it' (Frankenberg and Mani 1993, 486), even though we have enacted and detracted from our feminist politics.

Feminist scholarship often seeks to unsettle and disrupt normative assumptions and we have tried to do that through delving into the process of our team research. We also have sought to upset presumptions about the sedimentation of ideas, especially once they go to press. Accordingly, we asked Alison Mountz to read a draft of our article and to reflect upon 'Team Ismaili' and the team of geographers who wrote 'Methodologically becoming' (see Box 5).

Box 5. Alison considers different team research processes.

Writing 'Methodologically becoming' was a struggle that went on for a long time. Much of the entire first draft was ultimately eliminated, the rest revised. The writing process in many ways reflected the team research process: heavy negotiations, silences, so much left unsaid amid the weight of things put into writing. I remember laughter, too, after I said that I was going for something Pred-ian [reference to Allan Pred]. After so much disagreement with my first draft, I asked co-authors to write their own narratives. They each sent along frustrated, emotional statements and asked me to not to share them with the others. I did the same and the painful truths began to emerge.

Reading a draft of this article, it is hard to believe the divergence between team research processes. This narrative emotes positivity, even names it with words like fun, inspiring, connection, camaraderie and even joy. Joy! I recall our own team process with words like stress, frustration and angst. I feel downright gothic. But, how could the study of the endless moment when post-traumatic stress disorder intersects with the limbo of the wait and hope for asylum be anything but depressing; life in war-torn El Salvador likewise. If Serin's team motto was 'hurray' ours was '*Es muy complicado*' (it's very complicated), a phrase lent to us by a respondent in El Salvador.

And yet, these were my friends, Salvadorans and academics alike, Salvadoran academics and academics in search of refuge too; the lines between us all blurred. We learned together and grew together. We are still becoming. [. . .] I was angry then, but now I understand more of what it means on a daily basis to be on faculty, to hope that the capable research assistant in the field can do her thing while the rest of us attempt in our own small ways to do our own, to fight our battles and muddle through.

Alison Mountz

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Team research offers a valuable site for engaging with feminisms as a reflective political praxis because discussions about ideas and collaboration are ongoing. It bears repeating that each of us, along with 'Team Ismaili', are still methodologically becoming. Furthermore, teams comprised of individuals from different institutional ranks and social locations offer the possibility for challenging institutionally imposed hierarchies of intellectuality. Interacting with these modes of knowledge production provides deeper insight into the power relations underpinning student and faculty relations. As our foray exhibits, such intellectual journeys can be both complicated and joyful.

There is tremendous room for further investigating how other axes of difference unfold in team research contexts. Continuing to unpack research teams as an object of study could reveal some of the assumptions written into traditional styles of knowledge transfer, production and recognition. For instance, how do co-authored pieces and projects bear the weight of tenure? How can teamwork challenge normative practices of academic labor? These are just a couple of questions that future research could take up since collaboration is a fraught if fruitful process.

Our reflection on 'Team Ismaili' strives to show how joint knowledge production usefully shifts the focus away from research that re-inscribes the assumption of an all-knowing individual (Haraway 1991; Gerstl-Pepin and Gunzenhauser 2002; Sundberg 2003). We engage with the multiple power relations, institutional affiliations and practices, and myriad social relations and identities circulating within and constituted by our team to emphasize the links between feminist politics and 'power, knowledge, and context' (Moss 2002, 6). We emphasize the difficulties and delights of teamwork as we contribute to conversations on collaborative knowledge production and feminist politics. We penned this 'backstage tour' (Stewart and Zucker 1999, 141) of 'Team Ismaili' because if the wounds *and* pleasures of research are never voiced and analyzed then we cannot hope to find practical ways to tend to these pains or celebrate these joys, to encourage scholars to participate in collaboration, or to compel academic institutions to honor and legitimate such teamwork.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the Ismaili community for welcoming us into their lives and sharing their perspectives and experiences. We also thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions. This manuscript is based on research supported, in part, by a SSHRC Social Cohesion Grant and a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

Notes

1. Ismailis are a sect of Shia Muslims spiritually led by the Aga Khan, a living Imam. We worked with Ismaili immigrants whose ancestors came from India, but who personally experienced dislocation from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. In August 1972, Idi Amin, then president of Uganda, ordered the expulsion of all non-citizen Asians living in the country. Even though most Ismailis were citizens, Amin soon extended the decree to include all Asian Africans regardless of citizenship. Within a matter of months, at least 60,000 Asians were forced to leave Uganda (Adams and Bristow 1978, 1979). The majority of the refugees sought amnesty in India or Britain. As the social, economic and political climate became increasingly unsafe throughout the region, Asians in Kenya and Tanzania elected to leave East Africa.

   Canada accepted approximately 6500 of the first Ugandan Asian refugees – this marked the first time that Canada offered amnesty to non-European refugees (Adams and Jesudason 1984) –

and subsequently became an important destination point for the growing East African Asian diaspora. The majority of immigrants and refugees settled in Toronto and Vancouver, although now there are East African Asian communities scattered throughout the country. Despite the relatively small size of the initial group of refugees (not all of whom were Ismailis), roughly 75,000 Ismailis currently live in Canada. About 15,000 Ismailis reside in British Columbia, with the largest concentration in the Lower Mainland (for a more in-depth history of the Ismailis in East Africa and Canada, see Jamal 2006).

2. This title takes inspiration from the Mountz et al. (2003) piece, 'Methodologically becoming: Power, knowledge and team research'.
3. 22 first-generation men and women, and 16 second-generation men and women participated in the focus groups. Subsequently, 'Team Ismaili' conducted individual interviews with 24 first-generation men and women and 23 second-generation men and women. Within this group, we interviewed 13 households (interviews with two or more people of the same household, but different generations).
4. In a separate article we address the methodological innovations that emerged from our collaboration (see Houston et al. 2009).
5. When Serin began writing this manuscript she sought to incorporate individual perspectives into this collective commentary. Thus, she asked team members to respond to the following: 'Please reflect on how team research furthered our engagement with the Ismaili community, the literature on immigration and identity, and each other. Please comment on any joys, inspirations, bumps, mishaps, limitations, or shortcomings of our team research as well. In other words, what really worked and what didn't work as well with this team and this research project? Feel free to use specific examples rather than just generalized statements about the process.' As is the case with Mountz et al. (2003), the resultant narratives are interwoven throughout the manuscript. Jennifer's reflection here marks the first of the four team member responses.

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Arif Jamal was born in Nairobi, Kenya. He soon moved to Vancouver, British Columbia with his family in search of better educational opportunities and social security. In 2006, he graduated from Simon Fraser University with a Master of Arts degree in human geography. His master's thesis examined the migratory experiences of members of his community, the Shia Ismaili community of

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

Aún metodológicamente transformándose: colaboración, políticas feministas y 'Equipo Ismaili'

Este artículo utiliza una óptica feminista para estudiar la producción colaborativa de conocimiento e investigación en equipo. Inspirados por Mountz et al. (2003), centramos nuestro propio encuentro con la investigación en equipo – una colectividad que llamamos 'Equipo Ismaili' – y nuestro estudio con inmigrantes musulmanes de primera y segunda generación del Shia Ismaili del Este africano en el Gran Vancouver, Canadá. Nos basamos en la política feminista para remarcar las formas en las que el 'Equipo Ismaili' a la vez desestabilizó e involuntariamente reprodujo las relaciones de poder y las líneas de autoridad de la normativa académica. Un 'recorrido detrás de la escena' (Stewart and Zusker 1999, 141) del 'Equipo de Ismaili' muestra el desorden y el *momentum* de la investigación en equipo y da luz a cómo la producción colaborativa del conocimiento puede desafiar y reconfirmar jerarquías ya asumidas. Aún mientras estamos todavía formándonos metodológicamente, a través de esta discusión nos afanamos por interrumpir el silencio prevalente sobre la investigación en equipo en geografía humana, para generar más diálogo sobre la colaboración y remarcar la comprensión obtenida a través de la política feminista.

Palabras clave: investigación en equipo; relaciones de poder; producción de conocimiento; política feminista; Ismailis

停留在方法论上的流变中：合作，女性主义政治，与「伊斯麦理团队」

本文采取女性主义的分析以讨论团队研究与合作共事于一个团队中的知识生产。受到孟兹等人在2003年的著作启发，我们在一个研究团队中共事，称之为「伊斯麦理团队」，进行一项在加拿大大温哥华地区的第一代与第二代东非什叶派伊斯麦理穆斯林移民的研究。我们通过女性主义政治的观点来强调「伊斯麦理团队」在研究的初期便反抗性与不自觉的通过许多方式再生产了标准的学术权力关系与权威界线。一趟「伊斯麦理团队」的「后台之旅」显现出团队研究的混乱与动力，并说明了知识生产的合作方法能挑战却也重新确认了科层分化的假设。尽管我们停留在方法论的流变中，但是通过这项讨论，我们试着中止了人文地理学当中对团队研究的静默，激起更多合作研究的对话，并强调女性主义政治视角的洞察 力。

关键词：团队研究; 权力关系; 知识生产; 女性主义政治; 伊斯麦理

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