

Moving Beyond from Within: Reflexive Activism and Critical Geographies

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Introduction

I begin this chapter with a discussion of ‘activism’. Noting the discursive nature of this term, I argue that a broad, inclusive understanding of activism can offer a number of ways for us to develop critical geography conceptually and practically. Drawing on the Gandhian notion of Satyagraha and critical work on reflexivity I note the overlaps between these reflexive processes and inclusive understandings of activism. I suggest the term ‘reflexive activism’ describes this form of activism and may help us develop our critical geography praxis. Indeed, central to this reflexive activism is a critical reflexivity that can help us question boundaries such as those between theory/practice, academia/activism and the very notion of engagement ‘within/beyond’ the academy. However, I do not suggest that such boundaries can or should be ignored or entirely. In particular, I note academia’s shrinking spaces for activism under neoliberalism and the resultant pressures on activism ‘beyond’ the academy. I draw on my own experiences with grassroots groups to illustrate the value of such engagement within critical geography. However, I also acknowledge the pressures on activism ‘within’ the academy and suggest there is a continuum of reflexive activism from the internal/personal to the more external and from engagement located within academia to that beyond. I share these thoughts and experiences in the hope we, as critical geographers, can learn from them as we explore and develop critical geographies into the twenty first century.

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Bringing it home – reflexive activism

Activism is a discursively produced term, actively constructed within a range of discourses such as those found in the media, grassroots organisations and academia. My own experiences of non-violent direct action (NVDA) within the British anti-roads movement of the mid-1990's highlighted how dominant macho, physical understandings of activism can produce their own series of oppressions and exclusions. This echoes the experiences of others within radical/critical geography such as Gerry Pratt, co-organiser of the Inaugural International Conference of Critical Geography (IICG): 'It seemed to me that a type of deep-seated sexism defined what counted as radical and activist at the IICG conference' (Pratt, quoted in Katz 1998, 265).

The discursively produced nature of activism and its subsequent potential to foster as well as challenge oppression encourages me to advocate a broad, inclusive understanding of the term (Maxey 1999). Activism is not restricted to those directly opposing genetic engineering by destroying test sites, or to those who gather to block world trade talks or the latest War for Oil. Rather, activism is something we can each engage with in our everyday lives. I see it as attempting to do as much as we can from where we are at. 'Where we are at' includes our status emotionally, physically, financially, politically, etc. As a critical, on-going process this acknowledges that my position is always changing and on some occasions I will have more time and energy for certain forms of action than at others. However, this process is progressive, so that ultimately, over time I hope to see positive changes in terms of both building equality/overcoming oppression and the roles I play within these changes. As I am committed to this process in the long-term I strive to celebrate my successes and what I am able to achieve, rather than denigrate myself for what I am unable to do.

This inclusive approach to activism draws on a rich tradition of theory and praxis highlighting activism as an everyday practice in which we are all, at least potentially, engaged. Gandhi, for example, developed the notion of Satyagraha, which extends well beyond the tactic of NVDA, for which it is often confused. Satyagraha, the search for and practice of 'truth', involved a continual process of reflection and practice (Gandhi 1984, Merton 1996). This has many overlaps with the notion of activism I am concerned with, particularly as the search was not for a universal truth, but for truth grounded in the everyday contexts of each of our lives. More recently many feminists have developed similar notions of activism, suggesting, for example, that overcoming patriarchy requires all women to be engaged in building equality (hooks 1994) and that activism includes our everyday theorising and practices (Stanley and Wise 1993). Indeed, these ideas can be found in the feminist slogan 'The personal is political'.

Following these approaches to activism, and drawing on post-structural understandings of power as saturated and performative (Foucault 1980) we can see the social world as (re)produced through the acts we each engage with every day. We – you and I – are already involved in shaping the world. Critical reflection allows us to place ourselves more actively within this process. A strong body of work on reflexivity within critical geography also informs this approach to activism. This work on reflexivity demonstrates the value of questioning our shifting positionalities, assumptions and actions (Rose 1997; Gormley and Bondi 1999). Critical engagement of this kind encourages us to question internal as well as external forms and sources of oppression, including our own

values and assumptions and the various boundaries surrounding us and our work, including those between academic disciplines, researcher and researched, theory and practice and even those surrounding discursive terms like activism. In particular, critical engagement and the notion of activism explored here, has led me to question the boundary between activism and academia (Maxey 1999). Rather than separating activism off as something we do 'beyond' the academy, this approach suggests every aspect of our work has the potential to help overcome oppression, liberate and empower ourselves and others. Drawing on these critical understandings of reflexivity and their overlap with the inclusive, reflexive view of activism I outlined above, I suggest the term 'reflexive activism' may be useful in helping us negotiate our engagement as critical geographers. Reflexive activism involves a continuous interaction between reflection and practice.

Reflexivity is an important and useful tool for shaping critical geographies. However, as developed so far within academia, reflexivity has tended to be a rather cerebral, individualistic enterprise. As an academic I am prone to residing in my own head, agonising over what I have done, why I did it and even who I was when I did it! I am not suggesting these questions, or such forms of activism are unimportant, rather that this is a limited approach to critical engagement. To be fair there have been valuable departures from this solitary, cerebral process of reflexivity throughout critical geography. In addition to ad hoc discussions between individuals and several conference sessions, there is a growing body of published material in which critical geographers (and others) have developed an elaboration and appraisal of reflexivity, sharing their own ideas and experiences and the problems they have faced (Aldridge 1998; Blomley 1994; England 1994; Katz 1994; Roberts 2000). In many respects this chapter is a contribution to this sharing. Reflexive activism, however, offers us one way of helping to extend and broaden our critical geographies. Reflexive activism is something we can engage with alone and/or with others, within and/or beyond the academy. In engaging with others we have opportunities to share in the process of reflection-action and to help, support and inspire each other in a diverse range of ways, limited only by our imagination (and time/energy!). Such support is certainly needed as academia's spaces for activism shrink under neoliberalism.

Academia's shrinking spaces of activism

Increasingly, throughout the world academics are feeling the effects of neoliberal macro economic policies which privilege the 'free' market as a mechanism to promote 'efficiency' and 'value for money'. 'Performance' tends to be measured in crude quantifiable terms such as the number of students taught and how much money we as academics can generate – as Smith (2000, 330) puts it, how many sausages are churned through the 'higher education sausage factory'. Above all, money is becoming the measure of, indeed the reason for academia. This places particular tensions and strains on our abilities to act as critical geographers, from concerns over censorship and the control of research data to the conflicts between our epistemologies and the paradigm within which we work. In particular, we are faced with increasing pressures on our time (Roberts 2000).

The implications of neoliberalism in general and the time pressures it generates in particular are felt within every sphere of activism throughout the academy. Further discussion of these implications, how they are experienced and how we may address them,

would be useful in developing our critical geographies. This discussion may include, for example, how we, as critical geographers, can work individually and collectively to foster personal values and professional contexts which are not dominated by money. There have been some useful and provocative contributions to this debate from critical geographers as illustrated by the special issue of *Antipode* (2000). However, a focus of the discussion so far has been upon critical geographies 'within' the academy, for example, looking at the tensions, conflicts and activist potential of teaching (Roberts 2000; Heyman 2000) and writing (Sidaway 2000). As I and others in this volume suggest, critical geography is more than the teaching, research and writing that takes place within the university, it also encompasses our engagements with groups and individuals beyond our academic institutions. From both my own experiences and discussions at several conferences and workshops, it appears that activism 'beyond' the academy has been most immediately and significantly hit by the pressures implicit in neoliberalism. Colleagues report that whereas perhaps five or ten years ago they would have carried out a certain amount of research, consultation and support for free with grassroots and community groups, this has gradually been replaced by work that brings in revenue:

'They get you both ways. A, the focus on 'core business', i.e. revenue generation, means we don't actually have scope to work with groups in the wider community anymore. B, if you do want to get involved the University's concerned about 'Risk Management' and guarding against legal liability so they insist on contracts and these are very expensive, so you end up having to charge. These act as twin constraints against participation' (Miller, A. 2003, personal communication).

Many suggest they had not noticed such changes until we began discussing them.

Responding to such insights, I began to see a value in the within/beyond academia distinction as it could perhaps help us focus on and re-invigorate the most eroded forms of activism beyond academia. However, there is a danger that in accepting boundaries such as this we encourage the privileging of one form of activism, or begin to see them as mutually exclusive or rigidly separated. This need not be the case. Reflexive activism insists that activism is not restricted to particular people, places or contexts. It emphasises the blurring of boundaries and the shifting, contingent nature of reality. This allows me to question the boundary between activism within/beyond the academy, as I employ it in considering my own experiences of reflexive activism beyond the academy.

Reflexive activism 'beyond' the academy

Following the critical discussion of boundaries above and their often fluid, relational character, I suggest my own experiences of activism with grassroots groups beyond the academy can be described by three loose levels or types of engagement:

1. Initiating role – where I have been involved in helping to start the group and/or keeping it running on a regular basis
2. Supporting Role – where I contribute to an existing group on a regular basis
3. Peripheral Role – where I am more removed from the group physically/socio-culturally and my support is irregular.

I use these categories as a tool to help me reflect on my experiences of activism, the different forms it has taken, how my positionality has shifted and the tensions and implications such changes, and indeed the activism itself, brought about. The experiences I draw upon concern my involvement with three grassroots groups, GENEaction, STIC and SANE.

GENEaction

GENEaction is a diverse group of citizens who wish to inform and inspire themselves and others to act on the issue of GE [genetic engineering]. We welcome everyone to join us in our monthly meetings and regular actions. Our actions include everything from two people leafleting together to hundreds gathered with costumes, banners, music, Street Theatre and song, from talks with school and community groups to lobbying industry and government (GENEaction, 1999).

Although the group formed in October 1999 in Toronto, Ontario, where most of its activities were carried out, it also inspired and supported the formation of similar autonomous groups across Canada and participated in a Canadian-wide alliance of groups including Greenpeace and the Council of Canadians.

As the quotation above suggests, the group sought diversity and inclusivity in terms of both membership and the way activism was understood. In many ways GENEaction was successful in this respect, adopting a largely consensus based decision making process, the membership consisted of a considerable age range, including children who participated with their parents, teenagers and retired people. However, with the exception of two active members, during my time with GENEaction from Oct 1999-August 2001, the group was overwhelmingly white, middle-class and English-speaking. As both a group and individuals we tried addressing this. For example, French and Mandarin versions of GENEaction's brochure were planned and promised, but never materialised as the translations were never completed. This highlights one of the central vulnerabilities of grassroots groups working beyond the academy – their frequent lack of resources. If there had been money to pay for a translation this would not have been a barrier. Instead, we were dependent upon voluntary work for all the organising, research, writing and dissemination that the group carried out. Although membership was predominantly what may be described as broadly 'lower-middle', such descriptors are problematic for several reasons. We were, on the whole not a wealthy group of people, but included students and others, including myself, who were unwaged. As it was, members often clubbed together to buy the materials for props, leaflets, etc., so financially our resources were always stretched thinly. Within such contexts, support from academics (and other 'professionals') can often bring vital in-puts to a group, including advice, research and knowledge, but also physical resources such as access to photocopying, office space, telephone, email, and so on.

Another point raised by GENEaction's attempts to be diverse and inclusive within its membership and activism concerns gender dynamics. Women were always at the forefront of GENEaction. Three of the four founding members were women and throughout my time with the group there was a gender balance amongst active members, those regularly attending and contributing to the creation of meetings and other actions. However, whilst women were usually a majority in terms of numbers and level of

involvement, the group was by no means free of patriarchal oppression. As time went on it was clear to me that a significant part of the activism GENEaction was facilitating had less to do with GE than with more 'internal' forms of activism. People who had never previously done so began to question and change their own assumptions, values and patterns of behaviour in the wider interests of the group. This process, however, was by no means neat or linear and at times the behaviour of one or two men in particular caused tensions within the group.

For those of us in GENEaction this posed questions pertinent to all of us as critical geographers/reflexive activists. When and how should these issues be raised? To what extent should the group focus on personal/internal forms of action and issues of group process rather than wider issues of activism, in this case GE? These questions revolve around tensions central to our identities and practices as activists-academics. For example, one man left the group after a heated discussion in which his patterns of behaviour towards other members were raised. Some members expressed regret at this as he was an enthusiastic member who clearly gained a lot from his involvement in the group. As far as I know no one had intended to exclude him from the group, yet if his behaviour had gone unchecked it was likely to have excluded others, particularly women in the longer term. From this experience I suggest that it is better to raise such 'internal' issues or behaviour and prejudice directly and explicitly rather than leaving them to simmer and exclude by default. However, as reflexive activists we have some level of responsibility to all those we work with, and perhaps collectively, to develop ways of raising such personal issues in less confrontational and more supportive/empowering ways.

From initiating role to peripheral role

Whilst I was heavily involved with GENEaction for almost two years from its formation in 1999 to my return from Canada to Wales to complete my Ph.D. in 2001, I was generally reluctant to acknowledge my role as an initiator or leader of the group. I wanted GENEaction to be an inclusive, open group. I associated leadership with hierarchy and felt this may foster divisions and exclusion. My experiences within the group and in particular feedback and discussion with other members helped me to refine this view, however. I realise now that my reluctance to consider my role demonstrated a lack of reflexivity on my part. I did not take time to sit back from my involvement with the group and actually think about that involvement. It was only through the help of others raising this and sharing their thoughts that I was really able to think through the issues more fully.

A more reflexive appraisal of my roles with GENEaction was important in at least three ways. Firstly, it helped me see leadership in a more (g)rounded way. It takes time and effort to organise a group. As many members had very limited time and energy to contribute, doing some of this work ahead of time made it easier for them to get involved. This process should ideally be as transparent and reflexive as possible and the idea of consensus decision making is that the group does much of this work collectively. However, the theory and language of consensus is often adopted by, or pushed onto groups without sufficient reflexivity and as such is capable of fostering oppression (Maxey 2002). Secondly, acknowledging my 'leadership role' was more honest. At times I worked full-time with GENEaction and whilst I was rarely alone in this, it was clearly more than most other people could maintain, or be expected to maintain. This is an issue for all reflexive activists, including critical geographers – the extent to which we are free to put

in time and other forms of energy, and the implications this has for the group and our positionality. Putting so much time and effort into the group changed my position vis-à-vis those with different levels of involvement. A failure to recognise this would leave material differences within the group hidden/implicit. Reflecting on my positionality I was more able address its implications. For example, I developed more contacts between members and with others working on GE beyond GENEaction than any other member. This was particularly important when my position shifted from initiator to peripheral member.

Perhaps the best illustration of the value of reflexivity within activism is the fact that after I left Canada GENEaction not only continued, it went from strength to strength and indeed is still thriving today! The importance of reflexivity regarding my pending role-shift from initiator to peripheral member was highlighted when I learnt that although GENEaction filled a gap in terms of grassroots groups working on GE in Toronto, there had in fact been a group previously. However, this group had folded when its initiator, also an academic-activist, left the city. Learning this combined with other member's help focused my thinking about my own initiator role. I did not want my leaving Canada to precipitate GENEaction's decline. As other members of the group shared this concern we began to work on the transition of my role from initiator to peripheral member. Throughout the final six months of my time in Canada I and other members of the group consciously worked at this transference as I passed on contacts, information and ideas and played a progressively diminished role in the regular running and wider activities of the group.

This process was a success, albeit a qualified success. For example, one member has still not fully forgiven me for leaving. He acknowledges that this is in part due to his own unresolved sensitivity to rejection developed from childhood traumas. However, it demonstrates that my transition from initiator to peripheral member was striated and contested (see Sibley, this volume). Furthermore, this points to the tensions surrounding role-shifts when we work with groups beyond the academy. It also raises the question of where our responsibilities as academic-activists lie. Finally, my transition was problematic as although I intended to maintain a peripheral role by writing/editing documents and communicating via email from Wales, I actually had little time or energy for this once I was in Wales and setting up house, looking after two children and tying up the pieces of my Ph.D. My limited access to email exacerbated this so I ended up feeling like I had left GENEaction, rather than shifted to a peripheral role.

In many ways this story demonstrates the value of making a clear break with groups beyond academia. However, such apparently neat and clear-cut shifts may be both highly problematic and unnecessary. Although I did not pursue my peripheral role as I had hoped, by maintaining contact with the group my partner and I were able to re-engage with it when we returned to Canada for seven weeks in 2003. This was highly beneficial for us and the group. The value of negotiating roles and levels of involvement beyond a clear-cut dis/engagement and several other tensions around academic engagement are illustrated by my experiences with two other grassroots groups.

STIC and SANE – beyond dis/engagement

Stop The Incinerator Campaign (STIC) is resident-based group formed in January 2001 to oppose Crymlyn Burrows Incinerator, located adjacent to the neighbourhood of Port Tenant, on the east side of Swansea, South Wales (STIC 2001; SCHNEWS 2002). As

is the case with most incinerators, its location places the increased risk of cancer from dioxins, particulates and other pollutants predominantly on low income, working class households (Friends of the Earth 2002; STIC 2001, 2002). I became involved with STIC in 2002 because I concur with Chomsky's (1996) assertion that as a western academic I have a privileged access to knowledge and other resources which gives me a particular responsibility to act (see also Roberts 2000; Routledge, this volume). As I had both activist experience and research knowledge of environmental sustainability, I felt I could help those working on the incinerator. My experiences with STIC, however, demonstrated both strengths and limitations in this approach. Firstly, my scant knowledge of incineration contrasted markedly with that of several group members, who had been researching, writing and campaigning on this topic intensively for more than a year. Secondly, although I had energy and ideas to contribute I was highly aware that the group had already been very active and successful in its campaign for the year before I joined. Whilst the group was very open to and supportive of my contributions I appreciated the importance of being sensitive to the group's history and the impact this had on members energy and perspectives. This raises the importance of reflexivity for us as critical geographers engaging with groups beyond academia. Whilst we may be able to bring a range of skills and resources to such groups, we should try to avoid going in with pre-determined notions of what our contributions will be. Instead we should try to embrace and support the needs, limitations and competence of those with whom we work.

As I worked with STIC the motivations for my involvement changed. I developed considerable respect, empathy and friendship with residents who refused to sit back and have the incinerator forced upon them. Many residents felt Port Tenant was chosen because it was a financially 'deprived' area and the company (HLC) and local authority (Neath and Port Talbot Council) believed residents would be less able to oppose it! Furthermore, they suggested to me, and other examples support the view, that if they had been a wealthy neighbourhood they would have been able to stop it, pulling levers of power, paying for research, lawyers, and so on. Instead, residents did all this work themselves, clubbing together for monitoring equipment, so they could carry out their own research, wading through and responding to technical reports which were way beyond what I had time or energy for. I admired their energy and resourcefulness as they engaged with technical and bureaucratic reports and processes. I was clear that I could only offer a supporting role and limited this largely to helping publicise events, and supporting various letter-writing campaigns. Maintaining a supporting role allowed me to contribute to the group, without pushing myself too far.

This role was facilitated by the group's openness to my contribution, so I felt accepted as an equal, despite being far less engaged with the group than I had been with GENEAction, for example. In addition, my spatial distance from the group shaped my involvement as I lived on the other side of Swansea. Whilst this made cycling to meetings difficult, it still placed me within a 5 miles radius of the incinerator. Within this radius there is likely to be an significantly increased risk of cancer due to emissions from the incinerator (STIC 2001). Although pollution from the incinerator may affect up to a 50 miles radius, being placed so near helped maintain my level of involvement. The significance of space within my activism is highlighted by the fact that moving home to a location three miles further away has contributed to my shift from supporting member to peripheral member. I am still within the 50-mile radius, but the level of urgency I feel to

stop the incinerator in order to protect my children's health has dropped. At the same time, other commitments have increased, particularly my involvement in SANE (Swansea Airport No Expansion), which I co-founded in December, 2002. Swansea Airport is located four miles from my current home.

My adoption of an initiating role with SANE and a peripheral role with STIC was shaped by several factors overlapping with these socio-spatial ones. No grassroots group was opposing the airport's expansion until SANE was formed, whereas two groups, STIC and PAIN (Parents against Incineration) had already mobilised many residents and their commitment was clear. Equally, living so near to the airport, I am directly affected by it on a daily basis, again emphasising a spatial component to my activism. Before SANE started several residents from the surrounding area had complained to me about the airport's expansion and even suggested I helped do something about it. This spatial and socio-cultural connection has helped focus and maintains my commitment. Academically, I have more knowledge and background in transport and aviation than I do on incineration so I feel more confident working on this issue. Logistically, I have less distance to travel to SANE meetings and other actions than I do for those with STIC. Given the time pressures I am under as an aspiring academic and equal parent, as noted above (see also Roberts 2000), time tends to be a crucial factors shaping my activism. Given such time pressures, there is an attraction and value in a clear disengagement from groups beyond the academy, and it may be that this is the most appropriate path in particular situations. However, we should not see our choices as restricted to dis/engagement, but recognise the range of forms reflexive activism takes and the range of roles we may adopt as critical geographers. I am still a peripheral member of STIC. It takes little time or commitment to support the odd action if you do not feel obliged to help organise it, or even attend it. Reflexive activism emphasises the range of ways I may contribute, from circulating the odd flyer or pinning up the odd poster to including them in my academic work! Maintaining these varied spaces of engagement helps to broaden my own activism. Equally, keeping a connection with groups we have worked with may maintain space within which friendships and future work-activism can grow, within and beyond the shrinking spaces of academia.

These reflections demonstrate the role of space and other factors in shaping my activism and I suggest they are not entirely unique to me. Everyone has a point at which they feel able to get more actively involved in resisting oppression and building equality. For some it takes a road being built through their back garden, for others it may be reading a book, attending a talk, or thinking about things in new way! Part of the value I see in reflexive activism is helping us question and broaden our perspectives, so that we may draw on personal, spatial and other factors which help motivate us to act, without succumbing to NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard). There are a series of tensions here and addressing them collaboratively may help us develop critical geography and our other forms of activism. For example, part of the empowering and radical potential of reflexive activism is its ability to encourage us to move beyond narrower understandings and motivations such as NIMBYism, even if that is where we initially begin. I may begin opposing a road because it goes through my back yard, for example. However, in opposing it I may actively engage with others and, doing so reflexively, I may come to fuller, deeper understandings of transport policy and indeed the crises of sustainability! A good example of reflexive activism's transformative potential taken from critical geography is Amy

Freeman's (2000) insistence that graduate student unionizing is not just about graduate students seeking better wages and work conditions, but includes their participation in shaping the very future of education and resisting neoliberalism. As Freeman reports, the process of critical engagement was both empowering in itself and opened up numerous additional liberatory spaces.

My activism tends to coalesce around my own social, cultural and spatial positionality. When I am in Toronto I (re)engage with GENEaction, now that I have moved house I am more focused on SANE than STIC. My negotiation of a potentially simultaneous range of positions from initiator to peripheral supporter broadens and tempers, but does not eradicate this tendency. The locally embedded nature of my activism is, I suggest neither unique to me, nor something to be ignored for fear of its parochialism or NIMBYism. Under neoliberal globalisation the impacts of our everyday actions are increasingly displaced spatially and temporarily. Our ability to engage actively and critically with the world is thus challenged. Reflexive activism, I suggest, involves us doing as much as we can from where we're at. Starting from our immediate spatial and socio-cultural positions we are then able to progressively develop this through reflection-action and interaction with others.

Conclusion: reflexive activism – a continuum of critical geographies?

As critical geographers, 'starting where we're at' involves developing everyday practices within our academic institutions so they form part of our reflexive activism. There have been some excellent discussions of how we may do this in our teaching (Roberts 2000; Heyman 2000), writing (Sidaway 2000), research (*Area* special issue, 1999) and union organising (Freeman, 2000). More experimentation, reflection, analysis, collaboration and sharing is needed in all these areas, and others, if we are to continue developing critical geography. My own teaching on a course entitled 'Citizenship and Sustainable Communities' illustrates this. I developed the course with two colleagues and we ran each session collaboratively. We structured the course so as to give students as much choice and involvement in its organisation as possible, hoping that the course itself would be participatory and empowering. The small group size and students' background facilitated this (ten mature students took the course run through DACE (Department of Adult and Continuing Education)). For their final projects students, chose as a group, to undertake an evaluation of (and thus participated in) the local authority's Unitary Development Plan public consultation. Feedback from the course was highly positive. A key component of the course is the way we began to break down the boundaries between teacher and student. All three of us who initiated the course felt we also learnt from each session, so that we were co-learners with the students. We hope to further develop such participatory approaches as we run this and other courses in the future.

Reflexive activism, then, clearly involves us working critically and progressively within academia, whether resisting wider external structures such as neoliberalism, or our own internal assumptions and values such as those shaping our relationships with students. As I have emphasised within this chapter, reflexive activism can also inform our critical geographies by highlighting the value of engaging with forms of activism beyond the academy. Indeed, as the spaces for such activism shrink under neoliberalism it becomes imperative that we actively embrace them within our critical geographies. I have used a threefold schema to summarise the roles I performed within three grassroots movements. I

see this schema as a tool supporting analysis. It emphasises the shifting and contingent nature of our roles as we engage with groups beyond the academy and the tensions and concerns associated with this changing positionality. The threefold model of my activist roles highlights some of the ways reflexive activism can help us embrace the fluidity of our roles so that we leave as many spaces as possible open for questioning oppression and working towards equality within and beyond academia.

Indeed, the various experiences of activism I have outlined, and the notion of reflexive activism, highlight how boundaries such as those between research and practice, activism and academia blur. I suggest there is a continuum of reflexive activism from that within, to that beyond the academy. Many of the tensions and concerns I raise drawing on experiences with groups beyond academia resonate with my experiences of activism within it. For example, a sensitivity to the needs and status of all groups and individuals we work with can inform the roles we adopt in every setting. This sensitivity is itself supported by a reflexive approach to activism, so that we are more able to consider our own needs, motivations and levels of commitment and thus to communicate and share these with those working with us.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the importance of reflexive activism as a progressive, on-going process, breaking down boundaries between different aspects of our lives. Thus activism is not something we leave at home when we go into work, equally, it is not something we leave in the office once we return home. Rather, our reflexive activism is something we, as critical geographers, carry with us throughout the day, enriching our lives and helping us live them so that life more generally may be enriched. There are clearly limits to how much we can do, particularly given the pressures on us as academics working within a neoliberal macro economic paradigm. Within this, rather than over stretch ourselves or feel guilt that we cannot do more, it is far more constructive and healthy to celebrate what we can achieve, reflexively acting both individually and together.

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