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Abstract
This interdisciplinary Note is a creative form of writing that engages in post-research reflexivity through a process that it terms 'cross-threading'. Using the trope of a cloak, which it links back to the author's childhood imaginings of having an invisibility cloak, it cross-threads through the medium of this cloak a series of thoughts and feelings about a recently concluded research project (led by the author) exploring some of the ways that victims-/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence demonstrate resilience. Drawing on empirical data from Bosnia-Herzegovina, it illustrates the utility of the cloak as a thinking practice in relation to some of the stories that interviewees told, and it highlights the relevance of the cloak as a way of thinking about resilience. It also discusses the cloak as an identity, and in so doing it draws attention to an important aspect of the research process that is rarely talked about – the feelings, emotions and anxieties that researchers might experience when a major study or project ends. This Note concludes by underlining the potential benefits to researchers of having an acoustic cloak.

Keywords
Bosnia-Herzegovina, cloaks, identity, invisibility, protection, reflexivity, resilience

By way of introduction

Story completion is a method that involves presenting research participants with a story and asking them to finish it. According to Clarke et al. (2019: 1), 'qualitative story completion offers an exciting and compelling way of collecting qualitative data'. It is certainly something that I would be keen to explore in my own future research. Indeed, when I am analysing qualitative data, I often find myself contemplating how the interviewees' lives and stories might have been very different. I envisage in this regard a cloak, a protective cloak, that could have fundamentally changed the course of events and what

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people experienced. I thought a lot about this cloak as I recently approached the end of a large research project about some of the ways that victims-/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) demonstrate resilience (see Clark, 2022, 2023a). From initially just imagining how these women and men could have benefitted from a protective cloak and, relatedly, how they might have used it if they had been asked to complete their own stories, I started to think about the cloak's larger and multi-dimensional significance—and what it personally meant to me—within the totality of the research project.

In this interdisciplinary Note, which is a creative piece of writing, I invoke the trope of the cloak as part of a process that I term 'cross-threading'. Framing this as a novel example of 'continual reflexive practice in qualitative research' (Folkes, 2022), I cross-thread through the medium of the cloak a series of thoughts and feelings about the research data and research experience. First, and consistent with Haraway's (2018: 102) argument that 'Storytelling is a thinking practice, not an embellishment to thinking', I illustrate the utility of the cloak as a thinking practice in relation to some of the stories told by interviewees in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH).[1] Second, I highlight the relevance of the cloak as a way of thinking about resilience. Third, I discuss the cloak as an identity. In so doing, I draw attention to an important aspect of the research process that is rarely talked about—namely, some of the emotions and anxieties that we might experience when a major research project, and particularly one that has been an integral part of our lives over an extended period, comes to an end. I conclude this Note by underlining the potential benefits to researchers of having an acoustic cloak.

From invisibility and protective cloaks to interviewees' stories

Many of us engage in 'people watching'; at a train station or airport, in a café, in a park. According to what Boothby et al. (2017) refer to as the 'invisibility cloak illusion', we often believe that we observe other people more than they observe us. Our desire to control our social world—rather than to be controlled by it—is a probable factor in explaining the persistence of the invisibility cloak illusion (Boothby et al., 2017: 604). This idea is particularly interesting in the context of qualitative research. We spend a lot of time observing those with whom we co-create our data—their body language, their facial expressions, their mannerisms (see, e.g., Ezeh, 2003; Smit and Onwuegbuzie, 2018)—but they observe and, no doubt, wonder about us too (two-way observation).

There is more, however, to the notion of an invisibility cloak. Some scientists have sought to translate the idea—which immediately conjures up images of Harry Potter and Hogwarts Castle—into reality, and there have been significant developments in this regard using transformative optics (see, e.g., Ergin et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2017). A team at the University of Wuhan in China, moreover, has created an 'invisibility cloak'—InvisDefence—designed to allow the wearer to avoid detection by artificial intelligence-monitored security cameras. According to Wei Hui, the PhD student whose algorithm generated the particular pattern on the cloak, 'We use algorithms to design the least conspicuous patterns that can disable computer vision' (cited in Cuthbertson, 2022).

As a child, I often used to imagine what it might be like to have my own invisibility cloak and what it would allow me to do; to get up and play when I should be in bed

sleeping, to eat sweets before dinner, to 'disappear' whenever I felt scared. In my teens, I started to think much more about this desired cloak as having an important protective function—an idea that has been expressed in many different contexts, including physically in the form of architecture and the iconography of charity (see, e.g., Van Asperen, 2013). Imagine having a protective cloak that you could throw around any person or animal that was in danger. More recently, I have often mused over how wonderful it would be if we all had our own 'cloak' that we could activate simply by pressing the palm of our hand whenever we felt unsafe, threatened or fearful.

I think about the women and men whom I have interviewed over the years in BiH and the former Yugoslavia—victims and survivors of war crimes and heinous human rights violations—and how different their lives might have been had they been able to rely on their own protective cloak that shielded them from guns, paramilitaries, camp guards. In 2019, during my most recent fieldwork in BiH, I interviewed 'Sara',[2] a Bosniak woman who recounted being forcibly expelled from her village in 1992, early in the Bosnian war, and being taken to a large building—a disused furniture store.[3] The men were separated from the women, and the older women and small children were separated from the younger women and girls. 'And then the soldiers come and pick who they want, take them outside, from among us women and girls', Sara explained. She was 32 years old at the time of these events and recalled how two soldiers came and took her and another woman outside. The four of them walked through an abandoned village to a house. As I reflected on this interview afterwards, I thought about the juxtaposition of the absent cloak that could have changed everything and the presence of an enveloping cloak of darkness that was part of Sara's story. In her words:

> And so, he led me into this house. You could hear that there was a woman in the next room, crying. Some woman or a girl, I don't know who it was. I have never found out who it was. And, so, he raped me, too … I did not see anything. I did not see him well then, what he looked like, because there was no light, only some coming through the window. That was all the light there was (interview, BiH, 20 March 2019).

I subsequently wondered about the significance and effects of this darkness. Did it make Sara's experience more frightening? Shaw (2015: 595), for example, maintains that 'the proximity of the two bodies in the darkened space allow the perpetrator of violence to exercise power over the other—a power which I argue is exacerbated by the effects of darkness in opening the self up to affectivity'. At the time of the interview, I did not think to ask about the darkness. In any case, I probably would have refrained from doing so, for fear of being too intrusive and unnecessarily taking Sara back to what happened that night (everything that she told me was in response to my question 'Can you tell me something about your war story?').

As I left, I gave Sara a box of chocolates to thank her for her generosity in speaking to me and welcoming me into her home. They were a mix of milk and dark chocolates; I was not sure which she preferred. Dark chocolate has known health benefits and protective functions, including for our cardiovascular system (Lüscher, 2021). Did the cloaking effects of the darkness that Sara experienced that night in 1992 ultimately have any protective effects (unacknowledged by Shaw), in the sense of how she has dealt with what happened to her? I am reminded of Edensor's (2013: 456) argument that 'where gloom

thickens, the boundaries of the body become indistinct, merging with the surroundings and providing an expansive sense of the space beyond us as we become one with the darkness'. Did the darkness allow Sara, in some way, to 'become one' with it, while becoming invisible to the man who raped her, preventing him from seeing her eyes—from looking into her soul—and the emotions they expressed?

'Esma', a Bosniak woman in her mid-40s, had been a combatant in the Bosnian war, and it was two of her army colleagues, not enemy soldiers, who raped her. One of the most powerful parts of her interview was when she spoke about how her experience of sexual violence continued to affect her more than 20 years on. As she explained,

> I still fight not to think about it too much, although I have it on my mind a lot. I mean … it is visible on my face. The change, change in me. You can feel the exhaustion, my strength goes away … Simply, darkness comes out of me, as if all the ships have sunk. But what can I do, this is it. You have to keep on living (interview, BiH, 2 June 2019).

While in Sara's case, darkness had formed a potentially protective cloak around her experiences, the darkness to which Esma referred evoked a strong sense of heaviness and pressure. This was reinforced later in the interview when, reflecting further on what she had gone through, she revealed: 'Being with two people, among two people without any clothes on. For me, that was unbearable … I have no air when I form those images. I cannot breathe'. As I think about these words, I picture a thick memory cloak wrapped around her body, weighing her down both physically and emotionally. I close my eyes to better imagine the pull of it. As I do so, two further points increasingly stand out in my mind.

First, Esma had never disclosed to her family that she was raped during the Bosnian war; she had actively woven together a cloak (and she was by no means unique in this respect) designed to protect them from knowing what she had gone through. Speaking about her two sons (young adults), she explained: 'The children, well, like, got some of it [i.e., found out some details about her war experiences], but I turn it into another story with them because I am afraid to tell them the truth. I would ruin their lives. I am sure they would want revenge'. In her determination to cloak her family, thus, she was in many ways carrying the burden of the past alone, adding to the heaviness of her own cloak. Second, there was an interesting dynamic in Esma's interview between depth (sinking) and altitude (climbing). She spoke with great enthusiasm about her love of hiking in the local mountains; 'I mean, this is where I feel best, and I recharge my batteries and I heal, simply'. Hiking, in other words, was an activity that she had found to help move forward with her life and to liberate herself, if only temporarily, from her enveloping cloak of memories and a way of extending to herself some of the care that she showed to those around her.

In her work on palliative care, Hudson (2014: 187) underlines that 'The first thing to say about the cloak metaphor is that when a standard size is the only one offered, the older person's symptoms are missed or misinterpreted, assessment is less than optimal, and all families are treated the same'. When, as a teenager, I first used to think about the potential benefits of a protective cloak, I was imagining it as a fairly standard, 'one-size-fits-all' garment. The examples of Sara and Esma challenge this idea, their stories exposing a more complex cloak with different dimensions and

layers. What also emerged from the research is that some of the interviewees, speaking about stigma and feeling exposed, might have wanted an invisibility cloak, but in fact many of them did already have some form of protective cloak. I started to think in this way, thus, about resilience.

Resilience as a protective cloak

Adjectives such as 'astonishing' or 'extraordinary' often accompany usage of the term resilience (see, e.g., Driskell et al., 2001: 80; Jenkins, 1997: 42; Viswanathan et al., 2021: 168). What Masten (2001) has underlined, in contrast, is the 'ordinary magic' of resilience; according to her, 'Resilience appears to be a common phenomenon that results in most cases from the operation of basic human adaptational systems' (Masten, 2001: 227). These systems, however, do not exist in isolation. They are supported by, and entangled with, the many different systems—from families and communities to religious institutions and ecosystems—that constitute a person's social ecology (environment); and resilience is located within and shaped by the relationships and interactions between individuals and these wider systems. As Theron et al. (2021: 361) argue, 'a social–ecological approach is unequivocal that positive adjustment to significant challenges is co-facilitated by individuals and the systems of which individuals are part'.

For many of the Bosnian interviewees, their families were a fundamental 'system' in this regard. The majority of them (including some interviewees who had chosen not to share with their families all of their war experiences) underlined the crucial role of their loved ones in helping them to deal with the past and to move forward. 'Jelena', for example, a 51-year-old Bosnian Serb woman, emphasised the strong support that she had from her husband, a war invalid, and two grown-up children. Describing it as 'spiritual' support, she insisted that 'Simply, everything is intertwined with the children. This is the spirit, you know. The spirit of a family' (interview, BiH, 6 March 2019). 'Mehmed', a Bosniak man who was 58 at the time of the interview, described his 18-year-old son as 'a friend and everything I have', and he also highlighted the moral and spiritual support that he got from this relationship. In his words, 'When I see him, then I see that there is a reason to live, to fight, not to give in to … I mean, when this, this craziness, when my nerves get to me because of what I went through down there [in another part of BiH], then I just think of my son' (interview, BiH, 4 March 2019).

Resilience scholars frequently refer to protective resources that help to cushion individuals from some of the effects of shocks and stressors (see, e.g., Friborg et al., 2003: 65; King et al., 2016: 784). In my previous work, I have argued that 'resources' is a utilitarian-sounding term that is ill-suited to capture and convey some of the emotional depths and dynamics of relationships that give them their 'protective' qualities. I have opted instead to use the term 'connectivities' (see Clark, 2022, 2023a). As I picture these connectivities in my mind and how they might look, I imagine different threads and fibres woven together, intertwined, forming a protective cloak.

This protective cloak, in contrast to Esma's coarse and heavy cloak of memories, feels light and buoyant. I think about 'Slavica', a Bosnian Serb woman in her late 30s, who, like Jelena and Mehmed, underscored the importance of family and children. She explained to me that 'my family … are the biggest source of support. And children; they keep me alive. Without them, I think, I would have sunk long ago' (interview,

BiH, 19 February 2019). The cloak also feels soft and comforting. Here I think about 'Anđeljka', a Bosnian Croat woman in her 60s, and the importance of her faith and relationship with God, central threads within her cloak. She told me: 'I get strength from my faith and from believing and praying. And I count on that. For as long as I pray, believe in God, it means that I will not hate anyone' (interview, BiH, 21 May 2019).

Ungar and Theron (2020: 443) argue that 'Across the lifespan, multiple PPFPs [promotive and protective factors and processes] at different systemic levels protect people against the diverse forces that threaten their mental health and psychological wellbeing'. Picturing these PPFPs, like connectivities, as multiple threads and fibres, of various hues and thickness, offers a more visual way of thinking about resilience. Imagine, for example, a qualitative coding system that assigned colours and materials to recurring themes, thereby effectively building resilience cloaks from the data. This would be an especially novel form of comparative analysis. Additionally, resilience is about *lived* experiences, and the idea of resilience cloaks brings us as researchers closer to these experiences. If, as Pink (2015: 3) argues, 'sensoriality is fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people's lives', the crucial point is that cloaks have a sensory quality—and are far more relatable than 'systems' or 'social ecologies'—that we can ourselves can vicariously feel and experience.

Thinking about my own cloak—and taking it off

As I reflected on the interviewees' multi-coloured cloaks and the degrees of protectiveness that they offered, I started to think about my own cloak. Thurairajah (2019: 134) argues that 'The process by which the researcher determines the extent to which they will cloak themselves (and their social locations) or reveal themselves (and their positionalities) to the participants has significant ethical implications'. My cloak, however, was not about how much I revealed about myself in the field. It was something else. In the five-and-a-half years that I worked on this research project about resilience and victims-/survivors of CRSV, giving it everything that I had to make a success of, it became a fundamental part of my identity. I wore the 'cloak' of a Principal Investigator (PI) and it gave me an enormous sense of purpose and direction. Unquestionably, there were times when I wanted to divest myself of it, when it felt uncomfortably heavy and burdensome. Moreover, there were times when interviewees themselves unknowingly removed at least a part of this cloak, as if they were taking off my coat or jacket and hanging them up for me.

I particularly think about my interview with 'Ana', a Bosnian Croat woman born in 1955. I had first met her four years earlier and she looked pleased to see me when I arrived at her home on a crisp sunny day in January 2019. She led me into an open plan room, which was both a lounge and a kitchen and felt very warm due to the log-burning stove in the corner, and she gestured for me to sit on the sofa. She sat opposite me on a chair and there was a long wooden table between us. We spent an hour or so chatting and 'catching up' before we started the interview. During the morning that I spent with Ana, I was very aware of being much lower than she was. Her raised position on the chair, in turn, strongly mirrored the dynamics of the situation. We established that at 63 years old, Ana was the same age as my mother. She was also university-educated and had enjoyed a very successful career prior to her recent retirement. Addressing me

using the familiar form '*ti*' (rather than the more formal '*vi*'), she very much took control of the interview, setting the pace and the tempo and freely giving her opinion on some of the questions. The more we talked, the more I felt my cloak begin to slip. Ana made me feel—and not in a negative way—less like a researcher, even though I was the one asking the questions. We were just two women talking. This is a good example of 'how, through talk, positionality is fluid and shaped by both formal and informal interactions during the research process' (Folkes, 2022).

As we talked, moreover, Ana's own cloak that she habitually wore started to become loose. Outwardly, she came across as a tough and slightly aloof woman. In her job, she had held a managerial position and stressed that 'Instead of starting my own family, I gave myself to that company'. She showed no emotion when she spoke about the Bosnian war (which she did in considerable detail) and about her own experiences, and insisted that 'those war years, they cannot be stronger than my other 60 years' (interview, BiH, 30 January 2019). Ana revealed a more sensitive side of herself, however, when she spoke about relationships and intimacy.

After I had switched off the digital encrypted voice recorder, we continued to talk and she jokingly asked me whether a local woman—with whom we were both friends—was still intent on finding me a husband. She then proceeded to tell me what sort of men she herself likes (tall and strong). We talked about marriage and about the pressures that women who have endured rape and other forms of sexual violence may experience from their husbands and partners in a sexual sense. What Ana also stressed, however, is that sometimes these women want intimacy and their husbands or partners do not know how to deal with this. It is significant that Ana's own relationship ended during the war (after she was raped) and she had not had another one since then. What has also stayed with me from this interview is that Ana spoke about how she likes to go shopping in Sarajevo, particularly during the sales. She mentioned a bra that she had recently purchased and as she said this, she drew attention to her breasts. I was left with the strong sense that she deeply desired a relationship and I felt privileged that she had trusted me enough to share with me parts of herself that her external protective cloak kept hidden.

Following Ana's example, I trust the reader with what was/is underneath my own cloak, which to some degree I continue to hold on to even though the project has now ended. As I write these words, I am curious about the experiences of other researchers who have undertaken large, all-consuming studies (although some might argue that research should never become all-consuming and that we should retain a healthy detachment from it, a 'buffer zone' (Bennett and Brunner, 2022)). What do they feel when the research comes to an end? Relief? Sadness? Loss? A sense of achievement? Almost certainly a mixture of different emotions. It is fascinating to me that reaching the end—and taking stock of everything that has happened—is a fundamental part of the research process, and yet one that so few of us openly write about.

Bashir (2020) has discussed some of the scenarios that can lead researchers to experience a sense of anxiety. These include situations where we feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the research environment, do not feel in control of the interview and how it is developing, or feel a deep sense of inadequacy and powerlessness at being unable to resolve an interviewee's problems. Many of us have probably grappled with such feelings—and may regularly do so. My own anxieties, as the research project neared its end, primarily related to the impending loss of my cloak. As a part of my identity, this cloak also had a

protective function. It gave me a focus during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of lockdown. It also, without question, helped me to deal with the challenges of living with an acquired physical disability and learning to adapt to a new reality. I now worry that I might not be lucky enough to secure another PI cloak—or indeed any cloak that would give me at least half of what this cloak has given me.

Conclusion and embracing an acoustic cloak

Arguably, what can be beneficial at the end of an intensive period of research is to make the space to re-connect with oneself, and here I find helpful the concept of acoustic cloaking. Our social ecologies that can both support and hinder resilience have important acoustic dimensions, as I have explored in a recent article (Clark, 2023b). Sounds affect how we feel, our mood, our emotions. Living in environments where there is so much sound, however, means that we do not always listen to ourselves. An acoustic cloak, as Norris (2008: 2411) notes, 'is a compact region enclosing an object, such that sound incident from all directions passes through and around the cloak as though the object was not present'. In other words, an acoustic cloak effectively renders an object 'invisible to acoustic waves' (Chen and Chan, 2010). Thinking about this in a slightly different way, I imagine a cloak that can make researchers similarly invisible to these acoustic waves, protecting us from the cacophony of ambient sounds and creating the space for us to better hear and listen to ourselves, our own desires, fears, hopes and dreams—and to figure out where we want to go next and what we want to do. Perhaps story completion, wherein researchers complete their own stories, has a part to play in this regard too.

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Notes

1. The research project focused on three countries—BiH, Colombia, and Uganda. Due to limited space to engage in comparative analysis, however, in this Note I draw only on the interviews conducted in BiH.
2. No actual names are used in this article.
3. For a detailed discussion of the fieldwork and how the interviews were conducted, see Clark, 2022: Chapter 3.

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