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# Researching tourism: Reflexive Practice and Gender

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## **Researching tourism: Reflexive Practice and Gender**

**Hazel Andrews and Pamila Gupta**

### **Introduction**

This special issue journal is the end result of a reflective process that started with a casual conversation around gendered fieldwork by two anthropologists - Hazel Andrews and Pamila Gupta researching tourism, in two very different places—Spain and India, respectively. It was this conversation—one initiated in Dubrovnik, Croatia in 2005 and continued a year later in Durban, South Africa that formed the basis for a joint panel convened at the annual ASA conference (the theme of which was ‘Thinking Through Tourism’) held in London at London Metropolitan University in April 2007. We not only wanted to raise some of the critical concerns we shared with respect to our gendered experiences of conducting anthropological fieldwork, but wanted to see how other scholars researching tourism responded to these same dilemmas but coming from very different locations, academic trainings, and (auto-ethnographic) spaces. In the original call for papers for our panel we wrote:

The panel focuses on the dilemmas involved in undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in tourism. The immediate question that arises is how far removed from the practice of being a tourist is the participant observer? As an issue this is not unfamiliar in anthropological studies of tourism (Crick 1985), this panel wishes to expand on these ethnographic concerns with a focus particularly on the role that gender has in influencing the form content and conduct of research, including the degree of reflexivity involved on the part of the researcher. Questions to be explored include (but are not limited to): does the role of the participant observer become like that of the tourist due to factors

such as gender, and to an inter-related degree, that of race and class; how often are such factors acknowledged as shaping encounters in the field; does reflexivity aid in separating the anthropologist from the tourist or does it in fact have the opposite effect; to what extent does gender influence the distance between the researcher and his or her subject; and finally, we ask if reflexivity itself is a gendered practice, and if so, in what ways? We intend less for the panel participants to resolve these epistemological questions, but rather to generate new arenas of discussion for research in tourism and from contextual, gendered and reflexive standpoints. This panel will further the understanding of ethnography as a research technique in the discipline of anthropology in general.

The panel convened with four very strong paper presenters (all female) committed to the themes outlined in the call for papers. As a discussant we were privileged to have an esteemed anthropologist from outside tourism studies, but working on gender at the crossroads of knowledge, in the interstices of categories and meaning-making. Interestingly, after the presentations were complete, including an insightful commentary by our discussant, the panel was received by the audience with a sense of puzzlement rather than with a clear acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issues just raised. A senior anthropologist, one of the few males in the room, asked a somewhat pedantic but perhaps telling first question. He asked one of the panellists why she did not share her menstrual experiences in the field, her response was one of momentary pause, ours was one of a slight feeling of discomfort mixed with annoyance. Only in hindsight perhaps, can we recall that this male anthropologist was reducing our gendered fields of analysis to biological distinctions. His comment proved to be a productive one, not only for pointing out the continued male-oriented 'default position' of fieldwork, but also how much gender issues continue to be relegated to gendered fields of reception (wherein there were no

males on the panel as well as very few males in attendance at our panel). We (perhaps naively) had tried to create a critical and sensitive space for thinking about the social construction of gender, as well as sexuality, a topic that was addressed less explicitly in the call for papers, but rather more implicitly by the four authors in relation to their gendered subjectivities in the field. It is in this last endeavour that we believe the panel showcased its strengths, through exposing gender's multiple relational vulnerabilities.

Thus in some ways, the panel itself showed both how much things have changed and how much they have stayed the same with regard to researching gender and reflexivity within Anthropology. As feminist scholars committed to producing feminist work we sought to 'think through tourism', but less from our vantage point as female anthropologists, rather we wanted to tease out the affective journeys of our anthropological fieldwork in order to say something not only about the usefulness of adopting a lens of reflexivity for tourism research specifically, but also say something more substantive about the nature of fieldwork and participant observation, how each of us (male or female) as ethnographers have to make sense (and sensibility) of what we confront in the field, in order to constitute ourselves in relationship to others, which in turn says so much about the nature of sociality in general, which of course is at the heart of the anthropological endeavour. Thus, as these papers and research notes suggest, fieldwork is at the same time a 'contact zone' (between fieldworker, tourist and local; between different tourists; and between contesting subjectivities and roles on the part of the fieldworker), and an 'auto-ethnographic space' (blurring and complicating the distinctions between home and field, personal and private, tourist and ethnographer). It is a complex positionality that each of these authors embraces fully and critically in her engaged writings. It is also a point that Marilyn Strathern elaborates on in her eloquent Afterword. We would like to thank her, not only for her invaluable support and insightful commentary as our panel

discussant but for her continued clarity and commitment to raising the stakes for occupying gendered fields of knowledge.

Before introducing each of the papers we would like to think about the role of reflexivity and the reflexive process in field work.

**There is nothing so strange, in a strange land, as the stranger who comes to visit it.**

This line, taken from the opening of Denis O'Rourke's (1987) by now well known ethnographic film *Cannibal Tours* highlights the feelings of alienation and spectacle of oddity that the presence of an outsider can experience and cause in a community. O'Rourke's work is directed at the relationship between a group of white, wealthy, Western tourists, holidaying along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, and the people who live there and make up a component of the tourists' site seeing itinerary. One of the many things that the documentary demonstrates is that not only are the Papuan New Guinean's seen as exotic curiosities but that they in turn view the tourists with puzzlement and curiosity. In his insightful essay Malcolm Crick poses the question '...what is the difference between being an anthropologist, being a tourist, and being an anthropologist studying tourism?' (1985: 74) It is not the intention to respond in detail here but rather to observe that one thing that unites them all is perhaps the oddity of the situation, this being out of place. What does become important and is not confined to the study of tourism *per se* but to all field work is that there is a need to recognise that being in the field, like being on holiday, can evoke feelings in ourselves and in others that form part of the field work process and by corollary the data. We enter the field and immediately it is no longer *the* field but is a place and space with our presence, already the field has changed. Here we might turn to the issue of scientific objectivity with its ideal of subject-object relations but note that to engage in fieldwork is to practice and to participate. Bourdieu (1990) claims that objectivity prohibits practice, and this in turn calls into question the relationship

between the observed and the observer. Such relationships are part of the scientific endeavour, forming part of the method of data collection. Therefore, they need to be considered in a process of reflexivity, for as Ruby notes '...to be reflexive...is to insist that anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data generation' (1980: 153).

In heeding this advice it is important that researchers, not only in connection to the ethnographer's main tool, that of participant observation, but all areas of qualitative enquiry, increase the transparency of their research and results by examining how it is influenced not just by their subjective selves but by the inter-subjective nature of their work (Finlay, 2002). As Crick (1985) also attests, we need to understand how the constructs in our research are produced in order to interpret them. In short, reflexivity is an invaluable tool in providing greater depth of understanding and rigour in the research process, the latter achieved by the placing in the public domain of 'a methodological log of research decisions' (Finlay, 2002: 532). Fundamental to this endeavour is that rather than considering the data collection process as a subject-object relationship we develop what Ruby refers to as a '...science of subject/subject relations' (1980: 160). The relationship is one of a flow between people and places, in which the researcher is one such person. However, the self awareness of the researcher is not merely a preoccupation with him/herself, but is a mode of sensibility that acknowledges and reflects upon the experience at hand (Finlay, 2002). Thus in being reflexive, researchers are not merely acknowledging their role in the research process and the myriad of roles and relations within that, but also recognising the complexity of the social world. There is no one fixed experience to be identified and reported on but a multiple of experiences that articulate the social world and relations within.

Reflexivity should not be viewed as a practice that can be simply sectioned off or categorised as belonging to the academic world, and further still into the preserve of research methods. Rather, it is worth reiterating the point that, it is a mode of behaviour that informs the world at large and is, therefore, part of that which we seek to study. Indeed, according to Ruby (1980) the emergence of increased reflexivity in the social sciences mirrors wider developments in society for increased transparency in everyday practice. For example how are products made, by who, what do they contain, and where do they come from? Ruby's observation was made some 30 years ago yet over two decades later Finlay still finds need to comment on the hegemony of positivism (2002: 543) and, more recently still Goslinga and Frank (2007) note that a wall of resistance to reflexivity remains in place.

Goslinga and Frank write as part of a volume<sup>1</sup> dedicated to foregrounding the ways in which our encounters in the field and the knowledge, understanding and who we are as people in part shape our production of knowledge. What the editors - McLean and Leibing - refer to is what they call the shadow side of fieldwork, those experiences that often remain concealed and are yet fundamental to our epistemological foundations. The hidden nature of these events and emotions which that volume seeks to expose and explore reflects a more general dichotomy between public and private that is present in many aspects of life, and notably, in what is by now known in populist discourse, as 'work-life' balance. As Goslinga and Frank contend:

...the separation of 'work' and 'life' marks a politicized and disciplined border in the very constitution of the modern subject, his relationship to the living world, and what he can know about it' (2007: xiii).

They argue that this observation is deliberately gendered as the original 'split' has a historical basis in male hegemony the result of which 'naturalizes in our thinking an ontology of exteriorities and interiorities, of public and private realms,

and of general, ubiquitous categories of experience presumed to be shared by all' (ibid).

Here, we wonder to what extent this public-private split remains gendered. The lack of male voices in this debate - absent from our panel of presenters and few in numbers in McLean and Liebing's (2007) work suggests that the world of reflexivity is still very much women's preserve. It reflects a social world in which women fall prey to demarcations between public/private or civic/domestic and that further the affective or emotional world is one still associated with being female. The normalisation of an interior/exterior dichotomy and by corollary the continuation of this apparent schism is an issue not just for women but also for men in a world in which models of masculinity still often promote stereotypical ideas of the emotionally detached and controlled/ing 'alpha male'. The promotion of reflexivity challenges the dominant positivist paradigm strongly associated with the founding 'fathers' of the social sciences. Our point being that the 'reflexiveness' or not of research methods has long had gendered biases. The positivist paradigm '...demands that knowledge conform to a shared public standard that contrasts with and reinforces the existence of *Man's* private interiority' (Goslinga and Frank, 2007: xiii, emphasis added). This poses a more general question. In her afterword Marilyn Strathern identifies the need to *tell* in all the papers included in this volume. We contend that this telling is an integral part of ethnographic enquiry for all the reasons discussed in this introduction in relation to the reflexive process, but is it only the preserve of women? Our answer is no, the reflective researcher is an essential ingredient in the research process and in turn our gendered selves are an essential element of being reflexive.

In the next section we provide an overview of the proceeding papers highlighting the ways reflecting on gender moves forward the science of subject/subject relations.



### **Related Presence**

In this last section, and by way of an introduction to the three papers and the research note that make up this special issue, we want to pick up on a theoretical point raised by Marilyn Strathern in her afterword where she writes:

One could re-read the papers as being less about the fieldworker's presence and more about the multiple relationships that presence triggered, which in turn would lead the fieldworker to think about the multiple relations others had too.

Specifically, we want to take up her intriguing idea of 'related presence' as a central thematic, both for outlining each of the individual contributions as well as to showcase the multiple strengths of this collection of sensitive (and sensitized) essays.

In a piece entitled, 'Touristing Home: Muddy Fields in Native Anthropology' Claudia Campeanu finds herself returning 'home' to Romania to conduct fieldwork. For her, fieldwork is conceived as a 'gift', a form of reciprocity not only to herself, but also to her family and friends. Claudia's 'related presence' is very much tied to her background, her nostalgic diasporic self 'returning home, financially independent, and politically engaged' as she describes it at the outset of her paper. Instead of writing from a space of 'love and sweet yearning' as she had initially hoped, she finds herself writing from a space of 'anger and disappointment' as home gets posited as [ethnographic] field. It is a not an easy position to learn from, but one that she manages to do so through a variety of theoretical interventions and clever methodologies. She interweaves snippets from her fieldnotes with more distanced critical analysis to touch on a range of relevant topics, epistemological as well as practical, and not only those that expose the difficulties (of 'distance and difference') of researching tourism: her aversion to drinking alcohol, but a realization that its widespread practice is

largely a sign for upholding male sociality (as well as for revealing gendered and classed dimensions of work and leisure) in the small town of Sighisoara; her multiple identities as daughter, friend, and acquaintance caught in a 'web of supporting and contriving relationships' during fieldwork; the perception of Claudia, the anthropologist, despite her familial ties, as akin to the tourist, for 'both can leave at any time for a better place'; her delving into fieldwork, despite its constraints, and her realization that her affective engagement with field/home does not end with fieldwork, but rather continues in the space of writing ethnography; and finally, fieldwork as a 'muddy' and 'shifting' space filled with 'tension', but also as a feminist stance that Claudia comes to inhabit with 'peace' and 'sincerity' (and 'as a compass for sanity' she writes) and that resonates with ethnographic practice more generally.

Filareti Kotsi's research notes entitled, 'Mirroring the Anthropologist: Reflexions of the Self' makes her 'related presence' known at the outset; not only an anthropologist, she also inhabits the space of a pilgrim, a tourist, a guide, and a saleswoman, whereas in other instances she is perceived as a journalist, photographer, and even as a spy while conducting fieldwork on tourism at the pilgrimage site of Mount Athos in Northern Greece. In other words, her relationships were formed around these various (gendered) positionalities that she found herself occupying at different moments. Like Claudia, fieldwork was also a (distanced) home, but one that she wanted to embrace in all its reflexive complexities (and in the process rediscovering herself as a woman, Greek, and an orthodox), and as an explicit form of 'auto-ethnography,' (Denzin, 1997) a turning of the ethnographic gaze that looks inward as well as outward with an equally critical stance.

Conducting fieldwork in Greece, however was not Filareti's first choice, as reflected in numerous reflexive passages that wrestle with ideas of exoticism and familiarity, of home and field, of wanting to go elsewhere very much like a tourist,

but at the same time her 'paradoxical contempt' for the tourists she wanted to study, and finally, her surprising discovery of the 'enchantment' she felt for reflexive and indigenous anthropology, and as a result, her decision to study, as a single Greek female, the inter-relation of tourism and pilgrimage not on a far away island, but rather closer to home, at a sacred site in Northern Greece. Fieldwork became a sort of 'homecoming,' but one accompanied by a feeling of 'strangeness' as a 'halfie' anthropologist (Narayan, in Gefou—Madianou, 1998) a hybrid category that sometimes came in handy. Filareti also kept a remarkable set of field diaries, written in three different languages—English, Greek and French; these allowed her to maintain her multiple identities, as a student and scholar, a Greek, and a foreign researcher (from Belgium), respectively. It also provided a window onto herself as an additional 'other' that soon became more naturalized with time, and became part of her ethnographic tool kit.

Filareti's situation was also complicated by the fact that women were traditionally barred from entering Mount Athos; as a female anthropologist, she could not access the very site she studied, instead she remained on its fringes, a 'milieu' that turned out to have its own set of advantages, both with regard to her access to certain individuals, both female pilgrims and men more generally, as well as how people related to her presence as a single woman, overtly sexualized given her unmarried status, and without origins. It is the visit of her mother that moors her unexpectedly, and allows her to be accepted and understood not necessarily for who she is in all her complexities and multiple identities, but as someone worthy. It is these insights, the 'perturbations' that she provoked in this small village, that serve as ethnographic data, and thus have much potential for showing the workings of sociality more generally.

Chiara Ciporalli returns us to Romania, the site where Claudia conducted her fieldwork. However, her essay, entitled, 'Single or Married? Positioning the Anthropologist in Tourism Research' is less about her fieldsite as the return of a

'diasporic nostalgia' for home as it was for Claudia but rather a rethinking of the role of gender during fieldwork, but explicitly after the fact, that is, in retrospect. Her 'related presence' is very much tied to how others (tourists, locals, community members, hosts) perceive her, including her much discussed marital status in the remote mountainous village of Maramures. Ciporalli is invested in thinking through a set of distinct epistemological reflexive concerns regarding tourism research: the increasingly blurred boundaries between autobiography and ethnography; the guest/host distinction in anthropological studies as akin to the troubling anthropologist/tourist dilemma; and finally, the practicalities of distance and closeness during fieldwork as central to understanding the social worlds of subjects. However, as Chiara rightly points out, while reflexive writing is now more or less an established professional given in Anthropology, the 'relational process of positioning' is more complicated in tourism studies due to the fact that it is in itself a 'highly mobile field of study.'

But these ethnographic encounters, precisely because of their awkward and insecure status, are as much a source of knowledge for the author. Tourism in Maramures takes place on a small scale, precisely because of its remote location, and with locals more than likely playing host to family stays. Ciporalli herself stayed with three different families during her multiple visits to Botiza, and was treated with warmth and hospitality throughout. Reflecting on one family's perception of her during fieldwork (and in particular the role of the mother in controlling her access to the rest of the family), she argues persuasively for its incorporation into the knowledge production process (as it allows one to gain access to different realities and interpretations), and is on par with the established role of the anthropologists in understanding how tourists are perceived by local communities. The line drawn between her research interests, her personal space, and what she was expected to do as a guest/host was increasingly a fragile one - it both allowed her access to the emotional lives of the different families she stayed with but at the same time obliged her to the duties

and responsibilities as a family member, in one instance as Petric's 'girl.' Her most profound realization perhaps came when she was labelled with the category of 'married woman.' She somewhat reluctantly accepted it even as her husband had not accompanied her during fieldwork. Interestingly, it became the central way of defining (her) identity, encompassing her gender even. Thus, it is sometimes inadvertently the cultural and gendered complexities of the fieldwork process that continue to surprise us as anthropologists, as well as pose challenges for tourism research, leading us on the way to new theories of relatedness and personhood.

Last is Pamila Gupta's contribution, entitled, "I thought you were one of those modern girls from Mumbai": Gender, Reflexivity and Encounters of Indian-ness in the field.' This piece is very much a rethinking of the role of gender (and its concomitants race and sexuality) after the fact of fieldwork, in much the same way that Ciparolli reflects backwards in time on her own gendered fields of analysis. In a similar vein, by way of her label as Petric's 'girl', Gupta too was labelled a modern 'girl' while conducting tourism research in Goa, India. However, she 'read' this category as less about her fictive belonging to a family or group as was the case for Chiara, but rather as key signifiers of how she was perceived: her regional, racialized and religious identity (North Indian and Hindu) and marital status (single) as presiding over her diasporic existence as an Indian American (she was raised in the US by parents of Indian descent) for whom India was in many ways a distanced other, discursively, materially and sensorially.

Gupta both contemplates and complicates the role of autobiography in ethnography, as well as looking at the racialized politics of conducting research as a hybrid 'halfie' (as simultaneously an American scholar and an Indian American female) to suggest that her Indian-ness was always perceived as more authentic than (her perceived put-on) American-ness. These perceptions are not with historical context, for as she demonstrates, how she was viewed both by

local Goans (more often than not as 'North Indian'), Western tourists (as 'Indian' mostly, and rarely as an authentic tourist in the Western sense of the term), says so much (more) about the politics of whiteness in Western tourism (and its exclusion of the increasingly diasporic tourist as a participant), as well as postcolonial India geopolitics and its uneasy relationship to its diaspora.

Lastly, Gupta describes in a reflexive manner three distinct fieldwork encounters to raise critical issues of identity, gender, and personhood during fieldwork, less in an attempt to resolve them, but rather as dilemmas, in much the same way as the three other contributors to this volume have expressed their own unique set of fieldwork 'situations' to better theorize participant observation as a practice, interpretation, and form of knowledge onto differing social worlds (and worldings), not only our own. Not only does she make a case for the deeply gendered, racialized and sexualized site that is fieldwork's very culture and nature, and thus determines our access to 'domains of knowledge' in a given society, but she wants to transform the fractious space of fieldwork as a potential site for developing a theory of sociality in Anthropology.

It is in these myriad ways that the term 'relational presence' that Marilyn Strathern evokes so beautifully in her Afterword truly becomes an operational category of critical analysis, one that as these four volume contributors have demonstrated, we must incorporate into our more nuanced (not only gendered and reflexive) studies of tourism.

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