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Introduction

Ethnography requires a personal lens, its historicity made explicit.¹

In this paper, I reflect on my experiences of doing fieldwork in Goa, India (1999-2000) from my position as a female anthropologist, of Hindu Indian parentage, raised and educated in the United States. I take as my starting point three seminal fieldwork encounters that shaped how I was perceived by 'others' in the field in order to both illuminate and complicate the gendered and racialized postcolonial politics of conducting anthropological research, specifically on the topics of tourism and religion. My first encounter involves a published article that was written by a wellknown Goan journalist for the local newspaper, a man I had interviewed on numerous occasions in connection with my research. In this editorial, he mentioned my name, and posed the question: 'What is a North Indian Hindu girl doing, conducting research on Catholicism in Goa?' A second fieldwork encounter involves the Jesuit archival center where I regularly conducted historical research. Upon gaining affiliation, I had been informed of its standard policy that barred all researchers from taking photographs of documents older than one hundred years; imagine my surprise when I witnessed the rules being bent 'on this one special occasion'—according to the center's chief archivist—, for a white male researcher visiting from the U.S. A third and last encounter, one that is less directly tied to conducting research but part of the day to day interactions that comprise fieldwork—no less significant in my mind—, involves a verbal exchange I had with one of the security guards at the apartment complex where I resided throughout my research stint in Goa (fourteen months). As I was leaving at the end of my fieldwork to return to the US, I learned that he had never quite believed that I was Americansomething I had mentioned on numerous occasions in casual conversation—, hence his statement and the title of my paper: 'I thought you were one of those modern girls from Mumbai.'

Interestingly, in two of the above cases, I was referred to as a "girl", and in all three cases, my identity was tied to my racial and regional background (in India) over my national, diasporic, and academic location. In other words, I was more easily perceived, or rather fit more neatly into the category of "modern Indian girl" over that of "American female academic." Further, I pose these

¹ Judith Okely and Helen Callaway (eds.) *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xiii.

² 'Modern' meaning from the North, specifically in this case Mumbai because that was the point of reference for this security guard, who was from Goa.

encounters as dilemmas, not to be resolved but rather explored as impacting and complicating the (gendered and racialized) fieldwork process. Thus, my point here is less one of elaboration on these three distinct fieldwork encounters, but rather the utilization of them to think through a set of larger issues concerning the nature of fieldwork, and its gendered, racialized, and reflexive components. Firstly, I briefly examine the historicity of reflexivity suggesting that it was purposely rendered a gendered practice at a specific historical moment, before highlighting the inherent reflexive and gendered quality of fieldwork. That is, I turn to my own fieldwork experience to argue that the very nature of fieldwork is always already deeply gendered and reflexive even as these moments may not be recorded on paper. Secondly, I highlight the autobiographical (and thus gendered) component of fieldwork, including the choice of topic; relevant to my own case is the study of tourism and religion. Thirdly, I explore the potential of using gendered and reflexive fieldwork encounters to develop a theory of participation wherein these encounters are no longer marginalized, bur rather set up as central to the ethnography itself. Throughout my discussion, I rely on my own personal fieldwork experiences to simultaneously augment and/or complicate the more generalized discussion.

Part I: Fieldwork: Historicity and the Engendering of Reflexivity

Reflexivity is not narcissism, it is not apolitical, not self-adoration, nor can it be dismissed as a gendered practice.³

As a graduate student in the US in the mid to late 1990's I distinctly remember the iconic image of Stephen Tyler taking fieldnotes on the cover of James Clifford's and George Marcus' co-edited book, entitled Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (1986). This book was always a standard requirement, generally included on a syllabus in the section on "Reflexive Anthropology." At the time, I never thought much about the fact that it was an image of a man and not a woman on the cover of this seminal book. However, looking back, it is more than interesting; rather, it is illuminating for suggesting the gendering of our anthropological genealogies. Specifically, the school of "Reflexive Anthropology" as it was called then had been first under the purview of male anthropologist such as George Marcus, Michael Fischer, and James Clifford. However, by the time I was taking graduate seminars ten years after the apogee of the "reflexive turn," this school of thought had been marginalized, meaning that it had also become gendered, now largely under the purview of female anthropologists. More than one seminar I took bemoaned the narcissism of Ruth Behar's Esperanza's Story despite its popularity and innovation as a reflexive ethnography. The more important point I am trying to make here, and relevant to the topic at hand in this paper, is the fact that "reflexivity" itself as an anthropological practice has a distinctly gendered historicity, one that needs to be taken into account in order to fully understand that reflexivity was not always a gendered practice; it only became one, or was conveniently labeled one, as it waned in popularity at the same time that gendered ethnographies (still largely written by female anthropologists) were harnessing reflexivity to suite their own purposes. Moreover, it is important to remember that reflexive and gendered analyses were overlapping developments, thus, the rendering of their historicities as complicit with one another an easy oversight in the writing of the history of the discipline. Lastly, as Okely rightly points out, we must look more closely at how early exclusions in the history of

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³ J. Okely, "Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge," in *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p.

⁴ I just happened to attend the university where Ruth Behar taught (University of Michigan). I distinctly remember that if you took classes with her (the majority of her students were female), you were labeled by the other graduate students as doing work on women, as working on gender exclusively. The power of graduate school for reinforcing gendered stereotypes, as acting as the gatekeepers for access to domains of knowledge, cannot be overemphasized for they are carried on into your professional careers.

anthropology—in this case gender and reflexivity—continue to have implications for later texts and the writing of ethnographies.⁵

When I was developing the idea for this panel with my colleague and friend Hazel Andrews, and conceptualizing my individual paper topic, I think it is illuminating and relevant that instead of looking at my fieldnotes for guidelines, I simply reflected on my fieldwork and remembered very easily the small incidences that had marked me during the experience. These were small acts, typically occurrences written down as angry asides in the margins of my composition books, almost as diary entries, rather than included in my fieldnotes. In other words, I myself had relegated what I considered (at the time) somewhat irritating comments to the sidelines, neither considering them to be central to the fieldwork process, nor including them in my final ethnography. For as anthropologist Okely points out, "While it is taken for granted the fieldworker writes extensive and personal notes in the field about the others, it is not considered necessary to analyze and take notes about his or her relationship with them." Thus, upon reflection, it is not surprising that I had, unwittingly perhaps, engendered my own personal or "private" thoughts while what I considered more "gender neutral" public information—such as a meeting with so and so or notes from an interview—took center stage in my fieldnotes. Nor I am alone in doing this for as anthropologist Helen Callaway argues, there is a "male-oriented default system" that is at the very heart of the fieldwork process. In other words, the act of fieldwork itself is gendered male—evidenced in anthropology's very historicity—, so as a female anthropologist I very clearly had a sense of what activities were considered appropriate or not to fieldwork. Thus, my private [read gendered female] thoughts were rendered just that and not considered part of the very [read gendered male] ethnography I was trying to write. However, it is also more complicated than that for as Okely points out, "the split between public and private self has been contested as gender specific. 10 In other words, the domains of private and public are very different for men and women, which in turn shapes what we include and exclude in our ethnographies. Nor can we escape these gendered and reflexive realities; they form our ethnographies even as as we may choose not to include their details in our final written ethnographies. As Okely writes: "reflexive knowledge of fieldwork is acquired not only from an examination of outside categories, but also from the more intangible inner experience." It is this idea of the "intangibility" of the fieldwork experience that I want to reinforce here, for it is always deeply gendered and autobiographical at the same time, a point I take up in my next section.

However, and here I want to reflect however briefly on my own case study given the above discussion, I want emphasize once again, that it is less the tangible details of the three incidences which shaped my fieldwork experience, but rather how they viscerally (or intangibly) marked me:

⁵ Judith Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 14. The argument made by feminist anthropologists is a familiar one in that the early exclusion of gender in our writings has had serious implications for later texts. That is, how do we write about women today when they have been excluded from the past ethnographic record? Here I want to extend this same argument to reflexivity.

⁶ Ibid, p. 13.

⁷ Ibid. Here I think it is important to realize Okely's point that the split between the private and public self is in fact gender specific in that as a woman, the divide between what is considered public and private is very different from that of man in the same position.

⁸ H. Callaway, "Ethnography and Experience: Gender Implications in Fieldwork and Texts," in Anthropology and Autobiography, p. 29.

I think every graduate student was deeply affected by the publication of B. Malinowski's diaries; they were an example of what you did NOT include in your ethnography.

¹⁰ J. Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 16.

both why they had such an impact on me despite their seeming triviality at the time, and what these comments did for my own sense of worth and self consciousness. Moreover it is upon further reflection in the act of writing and researching this paper, that these encounters have also forced me to look more reflexively, and even perhaps more critically, at my own actions: specifically, how I was representing myself as a female (American) academic during fieldwork?; how in fact by doing research in India on the chosen specific topic, was I in some sense (consciously or not) confronting my own biography?; in what ways did my gender impair my accessibility to resources and seriousness as a researcher, and concomitantly, how much did I rely on my own gender(or internalize it) during fieldwork for increased access in certain arenas?; and finally, what do these past fieldwork encounters reveal about postcolonial Indian society, gender relations, and cultural representations of the Other on the part of both fieldworker and subject? While these are questions that I ask myself now in the act of reflection and writing, I believe that each anthropologist has his or her own set of questions, complications, and reflections to deal with during fieldwork, and which are left up to the individual to decide what to do with them. As Okely rightly points out, every ethnographer is a positioned subject."

Part II: Ethnography, Autobiography, and Gender

Our past is present in us as a project. 13

I still remember a conversation I had once with another Indian American female anthropologist who, similar to me, chose to do her fieldwork in India. We were swapping fieldwork stories, when she made a comment that resonated with me. She said that if she had to do it all over again, she would have never done research in India as an "Indian American" female for she was treated as representing the worst of both cultures—Indians largely viewing her alternately as a spoiled American whose parents had betrayed their homeland(part of the "brain drain"), or not really American ("pretending"); at the same time, she was neither given the status nor the benefits of being American (read "white") in a country that had a strong British postcolonial legacy. In other words, being "Indian American" was not a category that was easily translatable in terms of race, class, and gender and in the context of doing fieldwork. She told me how at the time she had had no idea how much this fraught representation of her followed her throughout fieldwork, and how much it shaped her encounters with individuals. In the end, she said, interestingly, it made her realize how "not Indian" she felt. 14

I start this section with this anecdote to suggest that I strongly believe that the topic one chooses to study as an anthropologist, particularly since this discipline involves a fieldwork component that, by its nature is a deeply personalized experience, is reflected in and reflects one's biography. This "biographical bias", if one wants to call it that, in turn, shapes the types of encounters one has during the fieldwork process. In other words, it [fieldwork] is a highly dialogic process that needs further elaboration and examination. Is it that one picks a location and topic for its seeming "difference" from oneself? In my own case, I can make the argument, only upon reflection of course, that "Goa" was the exotic south to my normalized upbringing as North Indian, the topic of Catholicism to my normalized (relatively non-existent) Hindu-ness, the topic of tourism because

¹³ J. Fabian quoted in Anthony P. Cohen, "Self-conscious Anthropology," in *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 222.

¹² Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 14.

¹⁴ It is interesting that the tension was more about her hybrid identity(as Indian American) and less having to do with her gender, although I do wonder how different an experience it is for Indian American males doing research in India.

as anthropologists, we typically do not like to think of ourselves as tourists, thus "tourism" as an object of study creates a convenient marker between us (anthropologists) and them (tourists). Or obversely, is that we pick a topic for its seeming "sameness" to oneself? Once again, I rely on my own case for reflection. Did I choose to do fieldwork in India because of my own biography? Here I would resoundingly and consciously argue that yes, for me it was a way to get closer to a place/space that I had grown up with largely as a discursive creation by way of my parents. More specifically, as a diasporic Indian, I had created an imaginary India that perhaps in some way I did want to experience and or confront through the act of living there. Or perhaps it is a combination of both that are factors in our choice of place and topic—that is, distance and closeness, or sameness and difference, which of course are already key analytics of anthropology. Thus, perhaps it is not surprising that these personal factors end up shaping our professional choices, choices that in the case of anthropological fieldwork are deeply individualized and gendered at the same time.

Another issue to be explored in conjunction with that of gender is domains of knowledge. Here one must ask whether or not, gender plays a role not only in the choice of topic but access to that same topic, as Callaway points out.¹⁵ In other words, gender differences themselves create very different sets of social relations that in turn set up access to different domains of knowledge. Simply translated, men and women take up different topics¹⁶, a fact that is no doubt shaped by gender differences and all their implications. With regard to the study of tourism, one must explore a set of difficult and unanswerable set of questions revolving once again, around issues of sameness and difference. Not only is there an obvious appeal in studying tourism and tourists because we like to make a convenient distinction between "us" (as anthropologists) and "them" (as tourists), but we must delve deeper to ask: how different in fact are anthropologists and tourists if we look at them in relation to gender, race, and class? And if there is a quality of sameness or difference amongst anthropologists and tourists, does this in fact enhance or hurt accessibility to one's research topic?

Once again, I rely on my own fieldwork experiences to elaborate one such case. Thus, with regard to my study of tourism in Goa, it was inextricably linked to the topics of religion and colonialism for my subject was the expanding tourist economy surrounding a postcolonial Catholic religious festival. In other words, the object of the tourist gaze and of my research project was not without a past, and it was this history combined with my own that I would argue directly shaped my fieldwork encounters, including my access to different domains of knowledge. Earlier I discussed my representation as a "North Indian Hindu modern girl" on the part of a large number of Goan Indians; interestingly, or surprisingly perhaps, I found that this representation was consistent amongst the foreign tourists I interviewed. In other words, in the perception of me as "Indian, but not Goan" by locals and tourists alike, I felt that it actually made "tourism"

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¹⁵ H. Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 35.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 35-36.

¹⁷ Very few "foreign" tourists asked where I was from or noticed my American accent; I believe that they mostly assumed I was from India. Question: Are tourists in fact more comfortable being interviewed by researchers (who more easily fit the description of foreign tourist) in that they can more easily embrace and elaborate on the sameness of their experiences when faced with such difference as that taking place in front of them? At the same time, I would argue that just as I apply this idea of diasporic identity to myself as a researcher, we need to do the same for the tourists under study, for "foreign tourist" is an increasingly diverse category; no longer restricted to the "white Western male/female heterosexual" tourist, there are increasingly more complex categories of tourists visiting different sites of tourism. In other words, do we have a way, both in terms of theory and method, to complexify the identities of both the researcher and the tourist as both groups become increasingly more varied (including but not restricted to the idea of the diasporic researcher and diasporic tourist)?

and "religion" as the objects of my study more difficult. Specifically, my positionality was one of too much difference, in that I was a non-tourist (replace with non-white here) studying tourism and a non-Catholic (replace with Hindu here) studying Catholicism in an area where it was once the religion of the colonial oppressor and now the minority religion against a Hindu majority. At the time, of course, I was barely making sense of all of these representations that were in play and shaping my fieldwork encounters. Neither did I have any sense prior to conducting fieldwork in Goa that history (both my own and that of the place under analysis) would play such a defining role. It is only now—in the act of writing this paper—that is, by embracing a reflexive stance towards my subject that I can critically assess or make sense of some of my fieldwork experiences. Thus, here I would argue that it is once again, all of these "intangible factors" that comprise fieldwork that tell us so much, not only about the nature of fieldwork, but also the role of gender and race (and class) in the act of forming representations (both by us and them of each other), and in complicating the distinctions between sameness and difference, the importance of being reflexive both in the field and during the write-up phase, and lest we not forget, about the object of analysis itself. These are all points I expand on in my next section on developing a theory of participation, one that I strongly suggest should be incorporated into our written ethnographies.

Part III: Towards a New Theorization of Gendered Reflexivity and Ethnography

Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity on the contrary, can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge. Other factors intersecting with gender—such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class and age, also affect the anthropologist's field interactions and textual strategies. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness. ¹⁸

In this section, I develop a theory of participation, suggesting its potential for transforming the way in which we think about fieldwork and how we incorporate the many "intangible" thoughts evidenced in the act of fieldwork into our final written ethnographies; the discipline of anthropology will be empowered in the process. Firstly, I argue that we need to realize the power of reflexivity as an ethnographic tool, and revitalize its use in our fieldwork encounters. In other words, reflexivity can neither be relegated to the domain of women and extreme narcissism, nor can it be labeled "comfortably neutral." Instead, as Okely argues, "in its fullest sense, reflexivity forces us to think through the consequences of our relations with others, whether it be conditions of reciprocity, asymmetry, or potential exploitation." In other words, we need to first recognize and then harness what reflexivity does in fact do, instead of focusing on its negative aspects. Not only can it reveal much about power relations, and the insidious ways in which they operate during fieldwork and always in relation to gender, race, and class, but a reflexive approach makes us much more aware of our own complicity—in the act of fieldwork itself— in perpetuating these power relations. Here I want to suggest that a reflexive approach is a more *ethical* kind of

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¹⁸ H. Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 33.

¹⁹ J. Okely, Anthropology and Autobiography, p. 24.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Here it is important to remember the uneven power dynamic that operates between fieldworker and subject. Thus a reflexive approach would help us to see how in fact there is typically a gendered relationship between fieldworker (gendered male) and subject (gendered female) in most cases. In my own context, I would sometimes get uncomfortable in certain fieldwork situations wherein my own position of authority was reinforced, and not challenged, wherein I was given access to things, and experienced extreme acts of kindness that I did not how to fully reciprocate. There is always an uncomfortableness with

fieldwork, which in turn, makes anthropology a better discipline. As Callaway asserts, "there are choices to be made in the field, within relationships, and in the final text." For my own case study, I believe that adopting a more reflexive approach empowers me to make sense of my own positionality doing fieldwork in India as simultaneously American, (Hindu) Indian, and female.

Secondly, and this point follows from my first, not only do we need to be more reflexive in our fieldwork encounters, but we need to incorporate these reflexive moments, including the more "intangible" aspects of fieldwork, into our written ethnographies. In other words, we need to develop a more sophisticated theory of "participant observation" rather than simply list it as a methodology, included in the anthropological tool kit. Instead of the nature of relationships during fieldwork being marginalized and rendered to the sidelines of our fieldnotes, they should become a key analytical focus in their own right. As anthropologist Kristin Hastrup rightly points out: "it is not the unmediated world of the others but the world between ourselves and the others" that typifies the reality of fieldwork.²³ However, as Okely asserts, "we simply do not know how to explore the specificity of the fieldworker in those relationships, in order to theorise participation."²⁴ Even as there is much work to be done in this area, I want to suggest its potential: the critical analysis of social relationships during fieldwork has the power to reveal much about representations of Self and Other, sameness and difference, and the role of history in shaping present encounters. For my own case, that of being Indian American doing research in postcolonial India, it helps me make sense of how much my positionality today is imbricated in the history of this nation-state. As a result, I am also more able to reconcile both the rewards and difficulties of doing anthropological research in India given my complicated "not quite insider/outsider" status.

Thirdly, I want to revitalize a point made much earlier by feminist anthropologists writing in the 1970's and 1980's, and which resonates with many of the contemporary anthropological dilemmas outlined here. Here I want to suggest that somewhere along the way, many anthropologists, even while recognizing that "gender" is a useful category of analysis, seem to have lost the crucial point that it has the ability to tell us much about the society under study, as Marilyn Strathern has demonstrated for the case of Melanesia.²⁵ Not only is gender a "primary organizing principle"²⁶; it reaches beyond relations between men and women to "structure the whole of social relations and events."²⁷ Moreover, a more reflexive stance towards one's own gender on the part of the fieldworker is a prerequisite for revealing the full potential of a gendered analysis. As Callaway argues, "the close analysis of gendered selves alerts us as well to the submerged operations of gender in other societies and how its rules and negotiations reveal patterns of social organization."²⁸ In other words, gender serves as an entry point for getting at the very heart of anthropology: social organization. In my own case study, such attention to gender (both my own and how it shapes Indian society) helps me to realize how much colonialism is simultaneously a discourse about gender, which in turn, has complicated postcolonial consequences, both for India and its diasporic members (researchers and tourists).

fieldwork, as I think that there should be if one is mindful of and attentive to one's precarious position "in the field."

²² J. Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 24.

²³ Kirsten Hastrup quoted in Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 1.

²⁴ Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 13.

²⁵ M. Strathern referenced in H. Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 34.

²⁶ H. Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 34.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 44.

A fourth and last point that I want to make here emphasizes a more nuanced way of looking at ethnography, as always being relational. Neither does experience come neatly in segments, nor is the relation between masculine and feminine experience a simple one for "one is never *just* a man or woman." ²⁹ In other words, a fieldworker always also is and represents many other qualities beyond his or her gender; gender always operates in relation to power and to other characteristics such as race, class, religion, status, and age. Expanding on anthropologist Karen Sacks' development of a "unified" theory of class, race, and gender, 30 we must take it one step further by applying it to ethnography itself. Not only must we view those people under study as complex beings, 31 but we must also apply these same standards to our own positionality during fieldwork, as being just as complex and as confronting two different sets of historical complexities, our own and those of the place under analysis. Nor must we exclude these reflexive and gendered encounters from the writing of our ethnographies. It is only then can we begin to grasp the relational quality that is at the center of ethnography, and the domains of power that always operate, and that can shift in surprisingly subtle ways during fieldwork if we are perhaps more reflexively attentive to them. 32 Thus, for my own case study, such a nuanced approach to the experience of fieldwork allows me to realize how much my gender was in fact tied to, and inseparable from my race, class, and religion, which together, shaped my study of tourism. Again, all of these qualities are always operating in relation to one another and within a specific context; for me it was that of postcolonial India in the year 2000. Thus, the very nature of my Indian-ness, female-ness, and Hindu-ness were very much structuring categories in a place like Goa. Thus, as we anthropologists increasingly become more transnational ourselves, develop new research topics in relation to tourism (including the study of diasporic tourists), encounter different sites of fieldwork, and grapple with new issues "in the field", we need to continue to revisit our gendered and reflexive historicities at the same time that we forge new research agendas that take into account the increasing complexities, communications, and cosmopolitanisms that mark globalization and that are always shaping epistemologies of sameness and difference, and which lie at the heart of the discipline of anthropology, and its concomitant, fieldwork.

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J. Grimshaw referenced in Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography* p. 34 (emphasis, author).
 Karen B. Sacks, "Toward A Unified Theory of Class, Race, and Gender," *American Ethnologist* (1989) 16(3): 534-550. This piece had a huge influence on my own writing and thinking in graduate school.

Once again, I argue that there needs to be a larger focus within the anthropology of tourism on the study of diasporic tourists; such a focus would complicate how race, class, religion, and gender operate in different postcolonial settings, which in turn, would reveal much about the societies under study.

32 For example, anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup recounts a great story of her experience in Iceland where

her autobiography and fieldwork was staged as a play and then sent on an international tour. K. Hastrup referenced in Okely, *Anthropology and Autobiography*, p. 23. This is a great example of shifting power dynamics between fieldworker and subject.