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Anxious Spaces:

The intersection of sexuality,
the senses and emotion in
fieldwork in Nepal

Sarah Homan

Abstract

This chapter argues that personal sensorial and emotional experiences in fieldwork can be important for the acquisition of anthropological knowledge. Conducting research on gendered subjectivities and discourses of honour and shame in remote Western Nepal as a first-time female fieldworker, I had a clear realisation of the intersection of senses, emotions and space. The Nepali lifestyle and lived spaces gave rise to a specific bodily praxis, in which corporeality, senses and emotions played an important role. In particular, being categorised as both woman and other attracted much unwanted sexual attention. As a result I 'felt' myself 'in' my body acutely, which at times gave rise to a high level of anxiety and awareness. My chapter will focus on this experience, which led me to feel and (re)act in certain ways. This relates to wider themes of gender, sexuality, comportment and honour in Nepali life, which are issues that Nepali women confront on a daily level. In the chapter, I explore the extent to which managing my visibility and 'dulling the senses' (see Desjarlais 1997) of sight and hearing as techniques of comportment and ease of movement during fieldwork had a significant impact on my understanding

of how it 'feels' to be a woman in Nepal. This chapter will seek to explore the importance of such corporeal and emotional experiences of the intersection of senses, space and emotion in the acquisition of anthropological knowledge in 'the field'.

Introduction

To feel like a woman in Nepal and feel like a woman in Australia are different experiences. In Australia as a woman I feel more confident, respected and carefree. It's almost shameful to say, but I never thought about what it meant to be a woman in Australia, what it feels like from the inside looking out at the world. In Nepal it is a completely different and embodied experience. In Nepal I mentally prepare myself as I step out of the house, my own private space. I put up a shield to protect my sensitivities, as people are prone to laughter, sniggers and catcalls. Or not even so nasty as this; a simple 'Namaste!' still requires me to prepare and return the pleasantry in a language I am not accustomed to. The smile and hand prayer signal is a performance I am not familiar with. I feel my shoulders drop and my eyes cast downwards as I walk past large groups, especially men. I shut my mouth and listen more than I talk. I act demure and subordinate. I wear sunglasses not for the glare but for the shield it offers my face and eye contact. When I engage in a pleasant and wanted discussion with someone I take them off. When I don't want to do so, I put them straight back on, to act as a barrier between the unwanted and me. I feel entirely naked without them for they are, in a sense, a weapon of sorts. I wear loose 'Western' clothing or Nepali clothing to prevent the attention my body attracts to men. Pornography and alcohol¹ and lack of opportunity (education, too) are some major problems of young men in this district, presumably much of Nepal. Many people tell me young men gather, drink raksi and even watch pornography together, forming an objectified view of women, particularly foreign women. I am one of two young Western women in this town. The other is a good friend of mine and has lived here three years. We both share experiences of being addressed as though we were prostitutes and constantly asked, 'I fuck you?' with a dirty snigger from the Nepali boys. In Australia I would more likely talk back, feeling a little braver. Here you physically feel stopped by an unseen force. That force is a mixture of things I cannot place; language barrier, propriety, fear, culture, uselessness. They want photos of me all the time and I can't help but wonder, 'Why?' I feel so desperate to be invisible. They perceive me as a promiscuous Westerner from American film. That is the violence I experience and feel every day. (Excerpt from field diary, 2009)

This chapter will look at womanhood in Bhaktanagar, Nepal², and my experiences in my first field site, as I sought to study gendered subjectivities in relation to discourses of honour (*ijjat*) and shame (*lāj*). While I came across a variety of ethnographic information, reflexivity generated by personal experiences was, in many ways, very

1 The Nepali word for alcohol is *raksi*.

2 The name of this town is a pseudonym.

informative. Through my own experiences, I came to understand the central influence *ijjat* played in directing women's practices, understandings and experiences. That is, I shared 'similar processes of embodiment' (Unnithan-Kumar & De Neve 2006:8) with my informants. Reflexivity is useful as long as it contributes to the anthropologist's understandings and generates knowledge (see Bourdieu 2003). As a term it 'makes a problem out of what was once unproblematic: the figure of the fieldworker' (Strathern 1991:108). It dares the ethnographer to subject herself to the same scrutiny to which she subjects her informants and asks, 'What is the basis for my knowing?'

This chapter looks at a number of intersecting elements — namely, gendered subjectivity, sexuality, honour, comportment, senses, emotions, and space/place, and how the interaction of these led to the acquisition of a level of knowledge within me.

By contextualising sexuality in the fieldwork experience, anthropologists may add elegant tools to their scientific and intellectual toolboxes. This involves working from the body, as well as from the mind. By funnelling data gathered in this way through the senses, fuelled by access to the full range of human emotions, it is possible to create texts which I contend will better enhance our understanding of other cultures (or groups within them) and of ourselves. (Altork 2007:93)

Altork's sexual experience in her field site was predominantly a positive one. Mine was a mixture of both negative and positive aspects. However, examining this dimension of fieldwork and the emotions that arose out of it — whether a positive engagement in a consensual relationship or the experience of sexual and verbal harassment — was an informative element of my project. To omit emotions in the pursuit of objectivity would obscure what I experienced and learnt in the field, which, at least in part, helped me to understand the situations and relationships of the unfamiliar social world I had entered. I do not argue that experiential knowledge is somehow 'denser', and therefore better, than other forms of knowledge. However, I do propose that it adds valuable insight and depth to the anthropologist's understanding and is, therefore, useful when carried out in conjunction with other ethnographic methodologies (see De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar 2006).

It was through analysing my emotions in the context of the unfamiliar that for the first time I actually 'felt' what it was like to be a woman — or, as Altork puts it, 'I became more aware of myself as a gendered being' (2007:107). I never really felt I understood the abstract data I was reading until I 'experienced' my gender, and was influenced by frameworks of honour and shame in ways similar to my informants. In this chapter, I will look at negative sexual experiences I encountered in the field, particularly verbal sexual harassment both from members of the community and as a by-product of the commencement of a new relationship. I will look at these as a context in which certain emotions were evoked, which in turn prompted me to engage with my senses and my body differently. Upon looking back on some of my diary entries, I realised that in an attempt to cope with the anxiety I felt from sexual harassment

and maintaining my reputation, I was 'dulling my senses'. I also transformed my normal bodily comportment, which aided me in understanding the experiences of my informants, as I had become aware of similar occurrences through interviews with, and observations of, them.

Visibility, gendered performance and comportment in and between public and private spaces were of great importance to the women in my field site, because it was through these that they acquired and maintained honour and managed their reputations. As I engaged in a new relationship and experienced harassment, I also became aware of 'being seen' and tried to manage my visibility and comportment in ways that would make me seem honourable. The consequences of this were the production of tension and anxiety. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that both emotion and space were mutually constitutive. That is to say, the space elicited certain emotions; and in turn, my emotions — as constructive, complex and processual — altered my experience, and therefore the meanings, of the space.

Using the senses in ethnography: Experiencing and dulling the senses

Come now, observe with all thy powers how each thing is clear, neither holding sight in greater trust compared with hearing, nor noisy hearing above what the tongue makes plain, nor withhold trust from any other limbs, by whatever way there is a channel to understanding, but grasp each thing in the way in which it is clear. (Empedocles, as cited in Guthrie 1962:139)

This statement from ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles (490-430 BC) displays the longevity of the debate between reason and sensorial intelligence. Throughout history, there has been a rivalry over the importance of using senses and emotion versus rationality and reason in the acquisition of knowledge. There has for some time been an acknowledgement of cultures consisting of 'contrasting ratios of sense' (see Carpenter & McLuhan 1960). However, despite its fundamentally subjective foundations, paying attention to the senses, particularly in anthropology, is relatively new and has influenced a number of anthropologists (Jackson 1983; 2010; Feld 1988; Stoller 1989; Classen 1990; 1997; Howes 1991c; 2003; Feld & Brenneis 2004; Desjarlais 2005; Pink 2006). Essentially, anthropology of the senses grows out of the interest in bodily modes of knowing and the place of the body in the mind (Howes 1991a:3). In an anthropology of the senses, we are directed to looking at 'the sensorium', defined as 'the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex' (Ong, as cited in Howes 1991a:8). This is combinatory, for it is through the combination of the five senses that humans come to perceive and form understandings of the world (Howes 1991b:167). An anthropology of the senses is not only concerned with the patterning of sense experience from one cultural context to the next, but is also concerned with 'tracing the influence such variations have on forms of social organisation, conceptions of self and cosmos, the regulation of the emotions and other domains of cultural expression'

(1991a:3). Howes advocates that we do this in three ways: first, by reconvening our senses; second, by recognising cultures as 'ways of sensing the world'. Finally, we do this by learning how to use and combine our senses in accordance with the preferences of the cultures we study, 'so that we actually *make some sense* of them, instead of looking for a worldview where there may not be one ...' (1991a:8, italics in the original text).

I would add that it is necessary not only to learn to use our senses in accordance with other cultural paradigms, but also to pay attention to how we, as anthropologists, engage with our own senses, and to the effect this has on our anthropological projects. I did not seek to engage with the senses in approximate accordance with Nepali custom, but spontaneously doing so led me to certain understandings. Instead, over time, I recoiled from my senses, dulled them and made an effort *not* to engage with them as a form of protection from those elements of Nepali behaviour which were uncomfortable. However, in order to dull them, I had to be aware of them. Becoming so elicited valuable knowledge with regard to Nepali notions of womanhood and gendered experience.

I am walking down a dusty, hot and littered street in Bhaktanagar and my cheeks are burning bright red. A group of young men of about eighteen years old have just gathered around almost blocking me as I walk past. Each of them has got out their 'camera phones' and are pointing them in my direction, smirks on their faces. One brave young teen yells out after some jeering from his friends, 'Eh! Kuireni! I fuck you?'³ and he is met with a sea of laughter from his peers. I know there is nothing I can do or say. I rearrange my scarf as I round my shoulders, keep my sunglasses on, look down and keep walking. (Excerpt from field diary, 2009)

I became aware that my bodily comportment changed. This was almost instantaneous upon arriving in Kathmandu, and intensified later in Bhaktanagar. I went about changing my bodily movement and posture and cutting off the visual, olfactory, auricular and tactile senses in every way possible in an attempt to make myself less noticeable. I focused particularly on covering my body and blocking out sounds and avoiding eye contact, with the hope that doing so would, in turn, block out any unwanted, potential physical contact. I would not go outside without a broad cotton scarf, which I used to wrap my shoulders and blonde hair and cover my nose against unsavoury smells. I was always anxious when I left the house without my sunglasses or headphones. These tactics helped to quell my anxiety and to limit unsought interactions. They did not always work, though, as I found myself more than once reduced to tears from unwanted whistling, photography, profanity and, occasionally, the grabbing of my arms and breasts.

Desjarlais speaks of his informants 'dulling the senses', which he observed when conducting fieldwork amongst the 'homeless mentally ill' of downtown Boston (1997; 2005). What is of concern to him are certain 'subjective orientations to time, space,

3 The term *kuireni* means 'light eyes' and can be considered derogatory.

sound, otherness, meaning and distress that are commonly adopted by many during their stays in the shelter' (2005:369). He talks about seeing this in his informants. What is of interest to me here is seeing this manifest itself not only in my informants, for it often did, but also in me, the ethnographer. Desjarlais says:

For many, the sensorium of the street involved a corporeal existence in which a person's senses and ability to make sense soon became dulled in response to excessive and brutal demands on those senses. Bodies sometimes became the most prominent instruments of engagement and awareness. (2005:372)

After being confronted with overt and covert sexual harassment by Nepali men, I noticed myself become more drained and weary. I called my headphones, scarf and sunglasses 'weapons' and dressed in Nepali clothing because the laughter and debasement of my person were 'brutal demands on my senses'. I became anxious because 'in short, considerable effort was required at times to act, think and move about in life' (Desjarlais 2005:374). I did not have to rationalise why I needed to protect myself through dulling the senses. I simply responded to the stimuli; the verbal abuse, sounds, smells, sights and touch, and the emotions they invoked — namely, anxiety, tension and shame. Thus I found myself dulling the modes of information acquisition, especially sight, sound and touch, as a matter of course. As Desjarlais says of those staying in the shelter, '[they] sought refuge from the world in certain ways' (374) — and so did I.

'Being seen' as a woman in Nepal

'Can you drop me on the back road please?' my Buddhist translator Priya says to me from behind me on my scooter.

'Sure, but isn't this road in the market place quicker?' I ask her, yelling back over my shoulder.

'Yes, but I don't want to go that way. I don't want people to see me in the market place twice in one day and I was already here this morning. I don't want them thinking, "What is she doing outside her home twice in one day?"' (Excerpt from field diary, February 2010)

Priya was the first woman to bring the issue of visibility to my attention, but once she had, I saw concern for it amongst most of my informants. Women felt they needed to calculate when, how and with whom they were seen outside the home because these things factored greatly into the ways they garnered and maintained honour and respect. It became very clear that for women generally it was important to 'be seen' — especially to 'be seen' to be 'good'. In Nepal, being a woman is particularly associated with the bodily comportment of passivity. There is the notion of an *asal māhila*, a 'good' or respectable woman, who acts and speaks in certain ways. With the exception of bad luck or bad morals, which by contrast makes a *kharāb māhila*, a 'bad' woman,

it is presumed that a Hindu woman will follow a particular and socially accepted life path (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner & Cain 1998).

Socially, this concept is generally attached to many other non-Hindu Nepali women. However, the life-world of Nepal is complex and it is rare that anyone falls into one identity category. Instead, people activate certain elements of complex and multifaceted identities according to different contexts and relationships (see Holland et al. 1998). Priya's comment to me that day implied that being seen outside the home twice in one day would portray her as a *kharāb māhila*. It also displayed the extent to which women strategise in order to visibly maintain their reputations as *asal māhila*. Therefore, for women, it can be said that being *seen* to fall into the category of *asal māhila* is of the utmost importance.

Women and men often voiced notions of what it meant to be a 'good' woman, and these notions resonated with how women should be and act as set out in Hindu or Brahmanical texts (see Holland et al. 1998). The traditional view of women and their reputations is dichotomous in nature; in basic terms, they can be seen as belonging to one of two categories. In one, women are seen as *asal māhila*: ideal, ritualistically clean, pure and chaste. A woman should control her body, mind and speech, keeping them in line with the wishes of the respective male in her household at all times. In the other category, women are seen as *kharāb māhila*, who are dangerous, sexually potent and deviant (Bennett 1983). A woman is presumed to be linked to male relatives: her father before marriage, her husband during marriage and her son (presuming she has one) after the death of her husband. One informant, Jyoti, told me:

So honour is always linked with male and family ... So there is no any honour of women ... If woman go late home then her honour is always linked with her husband, or with her father or with her son. Everyone says that, 'What type of woman is this? She's travelling around in midnight. Whose daughter is this? Whose wife is this? Whose mother is this?' (Interview with Jyoti, 11 August 2009)

The reason for women's reputation being so highly contested and visible is the Nepali notion of *ijjat*. Sociality in Nepal revolves around *ijjat*, which is defined as 'a learnt complex set of rules an Asian individual follows in order to protect the family honour and keep his or her position in the community' (Gilbert, Gilbert & Sanghera 2004:112). Both women and men 'have' *ijjat*; however, it is created, manifested and utilised in different ways. Honour in the Nepali context not only relates to an individual's personal sense of honour but is also explicitly linked to that of one's kin (Cameron 1998:136). In this sense, the responsibility to act honourably is not simply reflective of one person's positioning within society, but directly reflects on the social standing and honour of the family as a whole. However, as Cameron found in her field site in Far Western Nepal, while one is born into a caste, family and gender, one is not automatically ascribed honour; that must be earned (136). Women in this setting are afforded primary responsibility for a household's honour. Cameron states:

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the honour of the collective depends on the honour of its women. A household's absence of honourable women (or abundance of dishonourable women) prevents a collective — be it a household, a patriline, or a caste unit — from claiming *ijat*. (137)

Simone de Beauvoir tells us, 'One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one' (1973:301). Butler (1999) reiterates this, saying there is always a 'doing' of one's identity. I argue that gender is 'done to' women through certain actions by others (see Quigley 2003). Thus, knowing that essentially everywhere, not just in Nepal, women both 'do' their gendered identity and have it 'done to' them, what does this say of gendered comportment for Nepali women? Dr Gita, a prominent woman's activist and founder of a woman's empowerment NGO in Kathmandu, asserted to me that women are controlled in three ways in Nepal — through their production, sexuality and comportment. She brought up an idea during one of our interviews.

Like first time when I menstruated then I was kept in a small dark cowshed for twelve days. Ha! ... So what it means that is, 'Okay, you are growing, you need to be under control' ... This is control over sexuality ... I don't know; I actually hate this. [Holds up the shawl around her shoulders.] Because without knowing, our family say to us, 'Okay, you are a woman so you cannot walk like this'. [Sticks her chest out.] You know. It means you can't show your boobs! All the time, 'Don't do this, and wear this type of clothes and do this type of thing and then don't do this!' (Interview with Dr Gita, 5 August 2009)

Comportment is key to being a woman in Nepal. Young asserts that the category *feminine* is a set of 'normatively disciplined expectations imposed on female bodies by male-dominated society' (2005:5). Young grounds this notion, of what is essentially an example of docile bodies (see Foucault 1977), within the context in which bodies learn such behaviours (Young 2005:7). Young writes that 'the body as lived is always layered with social and historical meaning and is not some primitive matter prior to or underlying economic and political relations or cultural meanings' (7). My body was neither layered with, nor a product of, Nepali social and historical meanings. However, I felt and learned to react to those social meanings quickly. I changed my bodily praxis due to the objectification of my body by others and in order to attempt to 'fit in' in a world where I clearly did not. These changes were often in terms of my comportment — how I dressed, the way I moved, and my behavioural patterns. Young makes an essential point, to my way of thinking, which is that women's bodily comportment, spatiality and mobility do not find their origination in biology or some 'mysterious feminine essence' (42); rather, they find foundation in the 'particular situation of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society' (42).

As a first-time fieldworker, I found it unnerving to be stared at and scrutinised so consistently. In my field diary I wrote:

I can't get used to people staring. Especially men! Why are they staring? Taking photos? Other than that I am different, there's a quality to staring that is unnerving. I think I might dye my hair (dark) so people would just stop staring! (Excerpt from field diary, March 2009)

Ackerman, having studied sensory modes, tells us that, 'Seventy percent of the body's sense receptors are in the eyes, and it is mainly through seeing the world that we appraise and understand it' (1990:230). Many anthropologists have argued that the other senses are also important ways of sensing the world (see Classen 1990; Howes 1991c). However, in light of the attention my body received, the question I posed in my field diary was: Why is it that the prolonged gaze has sexual connotations? Ackerman draws our attention to the fact that lovers close their eyes when they kiss in order to shut out visual distractions. Altork (2007:97) reasons that this is why intense encounters in the field can have a seductive quality, or, as in my other experiences with male Nepali strangers, a sexually predatory one. When we are met with offensive stimuli, it is offensive to our senses as the means by which we understand the world. Changing my comportment in the manner described, and choosing different modes of presenting myself, were strategies I intuitively employed in order to avoid unwanted attention.

I had arrived in Bhaktanagar full of anticipation. My senses were stimulated as I took in the colours of women's saris, the smells of the market mixed with petrol fumes, the sounds of goats bleating and Nepali chatter wafting through the air. Very quickly, however, the effect of unfamiliar interactions, sights, smells and sounds overwhelmed me to the point that I felt compelled to alter my comportment on a day-to-day basis. Daily, I would negotiate my practice to try to lessen my discomfort. I changed my dress and wore loose Nepali clothing. I often rounded my shoulders and set my gaze at the ground when walking past large groups, particularly of men. I also lied about my whereabouts and about my life history. By no means was this a malicious attempt to deceive my informants. However, I had been told that in order to be understood and to 'fit in', it was best for me to say that my 'husband' was home in Australia, and that he could not leave his work and was happy for me to pursue my education.

This was, in fact, not far from the truth. I had been with my Australian boyfriend for three and a half years, and we were happy, although the time I was taking to fulfil my studies meant that we were apart. We knew he would visit at some time and so it just seemed like the right thing to do by Nepali standards and expectations. I even wore a plain gold wedding ring. When he came and stayed, he got along with members of the community extremely well. When he left, they asked after him often. As the months wore on, we started to grow apart. I chose not to tell anyone in Bhaktanagar about this aspect of our relationship. I never imagined that this would put me in any kind of predicament.

'Come and meet my colleagues', my new Indian-Nepali friend had said. I thought this was a great improvement socially, as I was in my sixth month in Bhaktanagar. While work was satisfying it was also difficult and I was starting to feel socially bored and isolated from people I could relate to. I met this young man on a flight from Kathmandu. We became friends for a time and I rode over to his house, a crew camp where he and his colleagues lived communally. He met me at the T-junction, followed by three strangers, two other Nepalis and a fellow foreigner. 'Who is he?' I thought to myself, taking in the appearance of the foreigner.

'Hi, I'm Hemi', he said in a New Zealand accent. He smiled and our eyes locked. I felt my knees buckle as I tried to smile back. 'We're going to the market, but I'll see you when we get back', he said as he strolled away.

My eyes followed the attractive figure down the road. What I did not know then was my life in Bhaktanagar was about to become a whole lot more complicated and interesting. (Personal notes based on field diary, 2016)

Hemi and I became friends and before long we started a romantic relationship. Two things compounded the complexity of this relationship. First, there was the fact that I had had a relationship with someone in Australia; though this had ended, all members of my community who knew me thought he was still my husband. Second, our relationship attracted unwanted sexual harassment from Hemi's colleagues living in the crew camp. After it started, I was struck with an enormous sense of wanting to keep it a secret. This was driven by the horror of what people would think of me should they find out I was 'cheating on my husband'. However, more issues arose out of this relationship, all too familiar from my experiences with young male strangers on the street. Hemi's colleagues started to harass me and make me feel sexually objectified by crudely indicating their interest in engaging in a relationship with me.

I draw attention to this example not as an argument for or against having intimate relationships in the field (see Jarvie 1988:428) but rather in order to explore how my behaviour changed as a result. I started to lie about my whereabouts to my Nepali landlords. I would arrive at, and leave, Hemi's house at certain times of the day. Furthermore, I was experiencing a great deal of anxiety and was fearful of being caught out by community members. My feelings were starting to mirror some of those of my informants, in terms of my anxious consideration for reputation management. I became concerned for my own *ijjat*.

Being brave in the field: A new sense of space and place

As place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place.
(Feld 1996:91)

Traditionally, 'place' has been conceived of as 'space' imbued with meaning (Vanclay 2008:3). However, I felt strongly that the 'space' of Bhaktanagar was imbued with much meaning, those of its inhabitants as well as mine, even before I had a sense of

it as 'place'. 'Space' in Vanclay's definition (2008) implies that to begin with there is a vacant expanse that is meaningless. However, Casey contests the idea that space is somehow 'waiting' for cultural configurations to make it 'placeful' (1996:14). For me, even before I arrived, I had assigned it a meaning ('the field'). When I was there, its meaning, I realised, was dynamic. It evolved and was inextricably linked to my (and my perception of others') experiences within its borders. Being 'in place' evoked emotions, which in turn reproduced meaning of the place, which elicited further emotions, and so forth, in a neverending dialectic.

Casey (1996) tells us that emplacement has a close relationship with embodiment and connects issues of place with the anthropological problem of knowing 'local knowledge'. Place is not secondary to space, nor is it laid over it, but rather 'is the most fundamental form of embodied experience — the site of a powerful fusion of self, space and time' (Feld & Basso 1996:9; see also Casey 1996). If we are to take knowledge as being of the localities (and associated meanings) in which knowing subjects live, then local knowledge and lived experience can be seen as one. As Casey argues, 'to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in' (1996:18). Therefore, to be in place is to know, because the sensing, and therefore knowing, lived body is always already in place.

In Bhaktanagar, with so few foreigners on site, let alone women who looked like me, I was a highly visible presence. As a result, I became more visible to myself as a woman. Having my gender reflected so consistently by those with whom I came into contact brought me ultimately to a point where I became more aware of myself as gendered. Furthermore, I came to know how powerful a force *ijjat* is in the lives of Nepalis, because it became a powerful force in mine. It was through this that I was finding resonance in the experiences of the women I worked with. One day, I remember that I was complaining about the sexually charged calls of the strange men on the street to my research assistant, Priya, and I asked her if it was only me this happened to. She replied, 'No! Sometimes they say bad things to us. If we're brave we tell them off. If not, we walk in the other direction and ignore them. But it doesn't feel nice so I try to feel courage'. This helped me to analyse the concept of feeling brave, especially with regards to honour. For Nepali women, being 'brave' enough to speak out generally meant going against the concept of being a 'good' woman (Bennett 1983:3; see also Skinner 1990). As was explained to me several times, to voice discomfort, even when catcalled by strangers on the street, often risks people talking about the woman's lack of decorum. This is changing, however; as Priya notes, the desire not to suffer the embarrassment of being sexually harassed is, on occasion, starting to outweigh a willingness to suffer in silence. Slowly, women are finding it honourable to raise their voices (see Kunreuther 2009).

De Neve and Unnithan-Kumar contest the idea that anthropologists construct knowledge. They argue that they 'slowly build upon the practical and theoretical

reflections' of their informants (2006:6) — and, I would add, upon their experiences embedded in relationships and the field. For me, over time and with a follow-up field visit, while the physical space remained relatively the same, the meaning changed for me, and so did my behaviour and comportment. I learned the bravest retorts, such as '*Tero Āmalai ban?*' or '*Kāsto lāj-sharam nabhayeko?*', meaning respectively, 'Do you say that to your mother?' and 'Don't you feel ashamed?'. These phrases served to highlight the shame of the men doing the yelling. I found that when I had bravery, as suggested by Priya, I felt lighter and satisfied. I learned to laugh more and hold myself with confidence.

For example, I remember that one day, towards the end of my fieldwork, I was sitting in a local café, with my head down peering over my field notes, when all of a sudden a flash of light occurred. Shocked, I looked up to see a Nepali man with his camera pointing straight at me. I was outraged. 'Did you just take my picture?' I demanded in English, before thinking — forgetting both propriety and the need to speak in Nepali. The man cowered in fear. He stammered in simple Nepali, 'No, Sister, I didn't take your picture'. Furious, I stood up and walked over, as I did not believe him. By this time, the whole restaurant had stopped to watch the spectacle. He cowered down and fumbled with his camera, deleting, I believe, the photo he had just taken. 'Ma herna sākchu?' — 'Can I see?' I demanded in Nepali. He passed his camera to me and I searched his pictures for my image. Then I handed it back, and resumed my seat without speaking, satisfied there was no photo of me. I would never have felt able to do this had this occurred at the beginning of my fieldwork.

First was the question of reflexivity — or the reciprocal interplay of one's relationship with oneself and with others — or, as I phrased it at the time, the twofold movement that takes one out into the world of others and returns one, changed, to oneself. (Jackson 2010:36)

I do not wish to find myself straying into a narcissistic mode of inquiry, for that is not, in my view, at the heart of what anthropology is. However, for the purposes of *my* ethnography, I cannot ignore the fact that my experience, and the knowledge that arose from it, were pivotal in my knowledge of the people I was seeking to understand. By putting ourselves 'in place', we engage with embodied experiences, from which we can gain valuable knowledge. Where there has traditionally been a dominant view that to be emotional equates to a failure in the rational processing of information and therefore undermines the possibility for intelligent action and informed ethnography (Lutz 1986:291), there is now a shift in the weight given to emotions and senses in the acquisition of anthropological knowledge (see De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar 2006; Davies & Spencer 2010). The task is to uncover how the anthropologist's emotions and senses provide useful ways to understand the people, interactions and contexts that make up the life-worlds in which we immerse ourselves. The point is rather not to ignore them but to learn from them. Emotions and experience, when treated with

the same intellectual rigour as empirical work, can support, more than inhibit, an anthropological project and can assist our understanding of the community in which we find ourselves (Davies 2010:1).

For me, paying attention to senses, emotions and space did at least two things. First, it engaged me directly with the themes of my study: namely, gendered subjectivity and honour, and how these influenced women's practice. Second, it forced me to think about how my experiences generated knowledge that might, in part, find resonance with someone else's experience, and therefore help me to understand their experience better. Through my experiences, I became aware of the multitude of ways which exist of feeling like a woman, as well as of how to use my body to acquire knowledge — which is, after all, the anthropologist's job. This was not the means by which I 'constructed knowledge'; it was one of the means by which I 'came to know'.

Upon reflection on my fieldwork, I have come to know that people's practices in, and understandings of, the world are crafted in the crucible of our everyday lives, which include a gamut of experiences, including our anxieties, senses and emotions. That we might, at least partially, share these experiences with others is no surprise. That they were unavoidable was, for me, argument enough for embracing anxiety and emotion in the field. If we deny that anxieties exist and fail to look at what we experience with and through our instrument (that is, our body), we fail to acknowledge the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: 'What is the basis for my knowing?' In not acknowledging that question, we disconnect ourselves from accessing valuable knowledge itself.

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