

Doing Reflexive Research in a 'native' Field

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Abstract

The relationship between the ethnographic text and cultural background of the anthropologist hailing from a culture different than the people he studied has already been well discussed in the wide range of anthropological literature. This paper explores the relationship between ethnographic text and the native anthropologist that has seldom been discussed so far. The paper also discusses the problems and strengths of the native research in comparison to research in an alien cultural context. The conclusion of paper is that reflexivity and positionality of the anthropological researcher is not only relevant for alien contexts, it is also important in native research. It should encourage the field researcher in exposing the circumstances of the field instead of concealing them. Such writings clarify and help in understanding the local ethnography better and thus strengthen the local fieldwork.

Introduction

This article is my third contribution to the theory of knowledge with a particular focus on how the production of knowledge is influenced by the researcher's background. In

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the first article¹ the focus was on field research in a foreign (Germany) setting. The main concern in that paper was my alien background. The basic idea was that my Pakistani Muslim background had influenced both me and the 'subject' of my research during the research process. The second article² discussed my fieldwork in Northern Areas of Pakistan presently called Gilgit-Baltistan. Here I was in one sense a local i.e. a Pakistani in Pakistan and from another perspective an outsider i.e. a Punjabi in Yagestan (Chials/Gilgit). Another factor that influenced my research there was my affiliation with a German research team. My three researches in the Punjab i.e. the province I hail from especially the one in my own village was the main focus of that paper. Present article also compares my different positions and roles in different field researches. Is reflexive positionality only relevant for alien research contexts or it also has any significance for native contexts, is the precise question attempted in this paper. This paper also looks at the problems and strengths of research in one's own culture in comparison to the research in an alien cultural context which is the routine in anthropology.

Before presentation and analysis of the relevant data from the research in the Punjab, it is important to define the relevant concepts and prepare a theoretical ground for academic debate. Reflexivity has already been defined in my earlier publications³, as the position of the researcher with reference to the field in ethnography. There are several other names for 'reflexivity' such as 'agency', 'acting', 'autobiography of the field' etc.⁴ Salzman defined it as "the

1 M. A. Chaudhary, "Rhineland Ethnography and Pakistani Reflexivity", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, No. 131, 2006, pp.1-26.

2 M. A. Chaudhary, "Betwixt and between Roles and Locales: Fieldwork Experiences in Chilas" in *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, Special Tribute Edition, Vol. XXXI, No. 1-2, 2008.

3 *Ibid.*

4 G. D. Berremann, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); J. Okely, H. Callaway, 1992, Preface, in J. Okely, H. Callaway (eds.), *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge), pp. xi-xiv.

constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of inter-subjective research and the consequent research findings".⁵ It aims at telling us "about lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge".⁶ It is "the conscious use of the self as a resource of making sense of others" that "does not belong to an individual or cultural vacuum but to a cross-cultural encounter. It is not the unmediated world of the 'others', but the world between ourselves and the others".⁷

Debates about reflexivity in anthropology are indicators of the wind of change that is blowing in anthropology today. These may be indicators of the conceptual moves in the discipline i.e. from an anthropology that tried to achieve 'true' and 'authentic' ethnography to an anthropology that considers ethnography as a 'true fiction' or 'partial truth'.⁸ Noted these developments in anthropology as follows: "Over the past decades, the traditional positivist view of hard ethnographic data has been irreversibly replaced by a vision of reality as in some way created through an encounter between the ethnographer and the people under study". The position of the author in relation to the field and those aspects of the fieldwork that did not fall under the 'traditional' methods remained hidden in the private diaries 'at best' and 'at worst' were published posthumous-Malinowski. These experiences were "concealed or

5 P. C. Salzman, "On Reflexivity", *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3): 2002, p.805.

6 J. Okely, "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge" In: J. Okely, H. Callaway (eds.), *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.3.

7 P. Hervik, "Shared reasoning in the field: Reflexivity beyond the author", in K. Hastrup, P. Hervik (eds.), *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.93.

8 J. Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths", in J. Clifford, G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.6.; K. Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 47.

minimized"⁹ because they were considered "signs of weakness or incompetence".¹⁰

With regards to my views about reflexivity I would like to reiterate what has already been published that is 'subjectivity', 'reflexivity' or 'autobiographical element' in ethnography "implies progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge"¹¹ hence should not be considered a part of any project of shattering the foundations of anthropology as considered by many anthropologists¹², but a way forward to "give the discipline a new life and a new pertinence" by "confronting the critique and turning it into a vital part of the anthropological debate".¹³ This is not to render the Malinowskian 'classical' fieldwork as useless quite the opposite it is emphasized that for the interpretation of the "culture as a text" or a "thick description"¹⁴, to find out "Partial truths"¹⁵ or to write "true fictions"¹⁶ it is important to follow the 'traditional' fieldwork, whatever it is. The debates relating to 'agency', 'positionality' and 'autobiographical elements' should be seen as part of making research methods transparent using Malinowski's words 'candid' though without treating anthropology as the 'natural science' of human society.

The idea of positionality was originally made popular by E. Said when he wrote that "no production of knowledge in

9 G. D. Berremann, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) p. xviii.

10 *Ibid.*, xviii.

11 See Chaudhary, "Betwixt and between Roles and Locales" 2008.

12 P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990 (1972), p.1.; K. Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 8; P.C. Salzman, "On Reflexivity", in *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), 2002: pp.805-13.

13 K. Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.i.

14 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books Publications, 1973).

15 J. Clifford, Introduction: "Partial Truths", in J. Clifford, G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, 1990), pp.1-26.

16 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.11

the human sciences can ever ignore or disdain its author's involvement as a human subject in his circumstances" i.e. his "... class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society".¹⁷ This he also called the 'strategic location (...) the author's position in the text' was but mainly with reference to "(...) a European or American studying the Orient (...)".¹⁸ This indirectly implied that 'native' ethnography was non-ethnocentric because the author shares political, historical and local cultural identities with the people he studies. And this could mean since there is no difference of loyalty, therefore, there can be no need of reflexive interpretations. I am of the view that there may be a difference of degree rather than of kind as far as the issue of reflexivity in the 'native' and the 'foreign' fields is concerned. This could be compared to the degree of difference between what has been defined as 'other' in the sense of 'foreign', 'afar' in contrast to 'own', 'native' or 'at home'.

In comparing native ethnography with the classic ethnography of the other it is argued that the knowledge of the own could at least theoretically be more in-depth implying the nearer the better known. The best known in one's own society is the author's self, his family and his kinship, etc. Therefore these stand in the centre of the 'native' ethnography. In other words, in anthropology 'at home', the anthropologist uses his self, his family and kinship in making sense of or in interpreting the 'other' 'at home'. This also means that the individuality and cultural background of the researcher is important both in anthropology 'at home' and of the 'other'.

Native Village as Field of Research

Fieldwork in the village, where I was born and brought up could be called the most 'native' of the 'at home' experiences. Here still lived my extended family, kinship and *biradari* (patrilineal descent group), though me and my parents had already shifted to Islamabad. I will show that my

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17 *Ibid.*, p.10.

18 *Ibid.*, p.12.

individuality and cultural background including family and kinship were the main sources of information. This is in support of the argument that has been presented in the beginning of this article that we normally generalize from the known to the unknown. The information relating to my individuality and family background was naturally best known to me therefore it was generalized to the whole village hence they stood in the centre of the research and writings about this village. My individuality and family background also influenced the information I got from others and also the access to informants and the type of informants. The village is divided into different factions locally known as *parti bazi* (faction). Each family in the village is associated with one group or the other and naturally has only access to one side or the other. The information that reaches other side or the members of the other faction is filtered. Before explaining further how these functions affected my research, we need to know the basic ethnographic details.

Ethnographic Setting

Field research was done in a village which was named Misalpur by the author to hide the identities of the informants. It is located in the central Punjab some fifteen km from Faisalabad the third largest town in Pakistan. Due to the vicinity of Faisalabad also known as the Manchester of Pakistan, the cotton industry (power-looms) has been steadily expanding in this village. One result of this industrial expansion is a rapid increase in its population. The people of the village can be divided into two groups of farmers and craftsmen. The farmers are further sub-divided into several patrilineal groups known as *biradaris* which include *Jats*, *Araeens*, *Rajputs*, *Gujars* and *Dogars*. These *biradais* are so divided that none makes a dominant majority in this village. Craftsmen known as *kammis* (artisans) are categorized as barbers, blacksmiths, carpenters, sweepers, oilmen, weavers, tailors, potters and musicians. These different professional groups are also sometimes called *biradaris* for example the barber *biradari*, the carpenter *biradari*, etc. Craftsmen in general but those working for the farmers especially are considered inferior to the latter. They

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are paid from each crop at the end of the cropping season according to a system known as *seyipi* (Work in lieu of grains) system.

At the time of partition (of the Punjab) in 1947 a large number of refugees were attracted to this area due to the high fertility of its agriculture land, which in result gave birth to the present social mix of its population. Some *biradaris* were, for example, further divided into old inhabitants or immigrants. The vicinity of the urban industrial centre changed the nature of its population further. A lot of people who worked in the urban industry started living here. Some members of the craftsmen *biradari* became rich due to their early shift to power-loom industry. The local social hierarchy was further disturbed by the water logging and salinity caused by artificial irrigation. Many of the farmers lost their traditional high status due to this water logging and salinity which made the agricultural land infertile to a large extent. The normal face to face village society was lost especially in the newly settled parts of the village. The physical structure of the village has also undergone pronounced changes. Previously, the village was more or less clearly divided between the *zemindars* (farmers) and *kammis* with the farmers living mostly in the centre, having their *havelies* (animal house) on the periphery, where the *kammis* also lived. The central space of the village was further occupied by the farmer *biradaris* and these were also known by the names of these *biradaris* such as *Jat* quarters. With the onset of capitalization and the disturbance of the so called old order of the village, the structure of the village also changed.

My Background in the Field

My family belonged to the middle class farmers in the village, the class that had suffered the most from this erosion in their socio-economic status. My background identities were the source of in-depth information and at the same time the looking glass, a perspective to perceive and understand things in a particular way, i.e. from a middle class farmers' perspective. Some details relating to the

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impact of my personal background on my ethnography are provided below.

The topic of research was 'Rise and Resolution of Conflicts in the Rural Punjab'. The decision to write about conflicts and their resolution, i.e. justice in practice came from my own family involvement and experience of conflicts particularly one in which our *haveli* was forcefully captured by our opponents. The case study *Dispute over Ashraf's Haveli* [Punjabi: Animal-house]¹⁹ served as the central experience around which the whole thesis revolved. This was also an emotional experience in result of which my family had to leave the village. The cause was the loss or at least the damage to the family honour in the eyes of the villagers. I was personally involved in this dispute and had experienced the procedures of the *Panchayats* [Urdu: village council], police, courts, etc. firsthand. In case of a conflict between people belonging to different *biradaris* the whole village gets involved. Being a resident of the village which is normally a face-to-face society, I was connected to all other villagers. The conflict took place between two big *biradaris* of the village (*Jats* and *Rajputs*) and my membership of one of these helped me to understand and depict the relationships between the people of the village. Thus being members of *Jat biradari* also limited my access to this side only. The other side was almost a no-go area for me. This I think was different from a situation where fieldworker will be a guest of one of the two factions in a village. I had the idea to write about this even before I knew that it was possible to write about such topics as an anthropologist. The first intention was to write a novel. My education in the urban centres, particularly the study of anthropology in Germany, provided the stimuli to engage in writing about this experience.

The other important piece of data is provided in the case study, *Conflicts in the family of Ashraf*²⁰, the longest among

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19 M. A. Chaudhary, *Justice in Practice: Legal ethnography of a Pakistani Punjabi Village* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.192.

20 *Ibid.*, p.212.

the six case studies listed at the end of my monograph.²¹ This was again about my own family and consisted of a collection of conflict cases grouped under two headings: those related to marriages and those about division of property. The details dealt with included marriage negotiations, the potential and realized marriages and conflicts arising out of marriages or failed attempts, etc. In the other section there were details relating to division of property, the issue of inheritance by sisters/daughters, the conflicts between brothers over property, etc. These were all own personal, family and kinship experiences in different roles, i.e. as a son, as a brother, as a cousin and the likes. The conflicts and later solutions within the families or larger kinship groups are kept hidden from outsiders including village fellows or even own kin depending upon the nature of the case. The honour of the family and the individuals involved could be at stake. A large number of conflicts listed in chapter two *Types of Conflicts*²² were either direct personal experiences or those in which my family or close kin were involved. There were also conflicts relating to illicit sexual relations that I could find out about or had witnessed as a village resident. The reason for inclusion was the in-depth information I had. The sensitive nature of the information required me to give an arbitrary name to the monograph and the persons involved. I doubt if such minute details of conflicts and their resolutions would have been possible for an outsider to find out.

Likewise in-depth analysis of the social and physical structure of the village was facilitated by me and my families' long-term knowledge and ties in the village. My family migrated from the Indian Punjab. They are farmers belonging to the *Jat biradari*. We lived in the village centre which used to be a prestigious place – the menial groups that were of lower socio-economic status lived at the periphery of the village. My family used to be very strong and influential in the village. At one stage they demonstrated this strength

21 *Ibid.*, p.191.

22 *Ibid.*, p.41.

forcefully for two times. In first instance they used the irrigation water for two full days against their right of just a few hours. Nobody dared to oppose them. In the second instance they could take possession of a *haveli* against the wishes of most of their fellow villagers. This started changing with the change from agro-based economy to the industry-based economy. This change of fortunes between farmers and artisans became visible in the village's social topography — the farmers were selling their houses to the artisan groups who had acquired new money. These new rich artisan groups were using other symbols of power and prestige like naming their houses, sitting and working places *havelis* and *deras* (both are places of gathering for men), which were formerly the prerogative of farmers only. This though could not be generalized. All the information were experiences which I made in different positions some with the larger family and kinship group and some as a member of the village. I claim that this would not have been possible, at least not in such a short span of time of one or two years fieldwork, had I not been a native of the village.

Summarizing, we can say that the information were certainly in-depth, the experiences were intense, even emotional and in a way very 'real', yet they were only partial truths because these were made with a particular background, and status, etc. We can say that it was a representation of a point of view of village justice by clearly middle class. My personal experiences and family background were the main sources of information. These were naturally data about the middle class. The people belonging to menial groups may experience it differently. I fear I did not have such a deeper access to or knowledge of that world. The menial *biradaris* often deny the existence of the *biradari* as a system because they hold only low positions. The village society is still very structured and this structure controls a lot of interaction between the members of different *biradaris*, particularly between farmers and artisans. This can be illustrated with an interesting episode. Two women, one belonging to a Jat *biradari* and the other a water carrier and thus of lower status, became good friends

in Islamabad without ever inquiring their backgrounds. Each invited the other to visit her parents' village; they happened to be adjacent ones. The Jat woman who was accompanied by her husband persuaded him to pay a visit to her friend's family. They went to that village and when it turned out that her friend belonged to the water carrier family, returned home without entering their house. Such may not happen every day, but it is not far-fetched. I am of the view that as much as I benefited from my insider's position, the people of the village provided me with information keeping me and my family's place or *biradari* in view. My experience of urban life and most of all my education abroad also had an impact on my research and writings. I find this article an opportunity to profess and acknowledge the place of my individuality and family background in my research. At the time of writing the monograph²³ I did not have the courage to accept this fearing that it could be considered not a proper fieldwork. Writing this down therefore is an experience of relief as well.

The Research Experiences among Mullahs

An interesting experience with regards to my individuality, religious sect and ethnic background was my fieldwork among the mullahs [Punjabi: Muslim Cleric]. In interviews with Shia or Sunni mullahs, the difference between Shia, Sunni, me and mullah was always present. Extracts from an interview with Agha Mubarik, a Shia mullah from Islamabad, are presented here to give an idea of how my identity influenced my research. I introduced myself as a teacher from Quaid-I-Azam University, interested in understanding the life and work of mullahs in Pakistan. I barely completed my introduction that the remarks came: "So you are from Quaid-I-Azam University. Can you tell me what Pakistani Universities are doing? They have not been able to invent even a needle for this country. Do you have any name in the World? Tell me just one thing the universities in Pakistan have contributed to. Look at the

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23 M. A. Chaudhary, *Justice in Practice: Legal Ethnography of a Pakistani Punjabi Village* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999)

universities of the USA or Europe!" This was naturally reflecting the tensions between the universities and the religious schools at the time of my research in the aftermath of 9/11, 2001. My religious sect was always a reference point in these interviews. In one I asked: "Do you also have a Hifiz section [Urdu: learning the Quran by heart] in your madrisa [Urdu: religious school]?" The answer was: "Unlike Sunni madaris (plural of madrisa), where only handicapped, dull, low class and poor children are admitted we take brilliant and the best children and provide excellent conditions. We make use of modern methods of teaching here. We make pairs of students who learn together. There are cassette players in their rooms repeating their lessons all the time. They listen before going to sleep and when they wake up that page is being played again. Only one page is learned one day. The students have that page in their memory like a photograph."

Later on I told him that I was going to Germany to teach Islam and Pakistani culture in a university in Berlin. Agha (the Shia *mullah* I interviewed) became very angry and asked: "Who has made this selection? How could you teach Islam or Muslim culture? What do you know about Islam?" In interviews with the *mullahs* of my own Sunni sect it was often repeated that I should present a positive picture of Islam and their sect. After the publication of this research I was criticised for not doing that.²⁴

Research at the Shrine of Bari Imam

Another interesting experience belongs to my field research at the shrine of Bari Imam in Islamabad, but from another perspective, i.e. the impact of the fieldwork on my person. The participation in the *urs* [Urdu: Annual celebrations on the Sufi Shrines] celebrations for research changed my relationship to the shrines and Islam as a whole.

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24 Most details relating to the mullah research have been taken from my earlier article: M. A. Chaudhary, "The Mullah as different — the Mullah as same: A Local anthropologist's reflections on the Lebenswelt of Mullahs in the Pakistani Punjab", in *Ethnoscripts: Analysen und Informationen aus dem Institut für Eth-nologie der Universität Hamburg*, 7, 2005, pp. 57-84.

My views about the shrines were rather typical of the urban educated middle class that considered them places where illiterates and rural folk go, where amulets are given for all ills in the *piri/muridi* [Urdu: religious leader and follower] relations by the *gaddi nishin* [Urdu: living inheritor of the *Sufi* saint] and the poor are exploited, etc. This fieldwork that was conducted in a group with students from the Department of Anthropology of Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, changed my perception of shrines, at least the one of Bari Imam. I found it a place of solace for the marginal groups like *khusree* [Urdu: something like transvestites], prostitutes, fortune tellers, *malangs* [Urdu: religious mendicants], women, the ill, the childless, in short the poor and destitute of Pakistani society. This shrine re-integrates many of these groups (*khusree*, *malangs* and prostitutes) into the mainstream society and religion. This aspect has been dealt with in detail in another article (Chaudhary in press: *Muslim religious shrine as cultural system*), here I would like to explain it very briefly.

The activities of groups like *khusree*, prostitutes and *malangs* are considered irreligious by certain section of general people. But Bari Imam and now his shrine has accepted these professions by allotting them certain functions at the shrine; for instance *khusree* bring *hina* [Urdu: Herbal substance use to Colour the hands for beautification], and drums, *malangs* lit fire and prostitutes sing and dance. Giving them responsibility is like accepting their professions hence their integration in the society and religion. Childless women and ill find a hope and other poor groups like fortune tellers and traditional healers find a place to earn a living. This shrine is a big social welfare institution. Above all I found a message of peace and love here among people belonging to different cultures, religious sects, professions and regions. This convinced me that religion was much more a cultural system than just a belief in a supernatural deity. This changed understanding of the shrine also affected my writing on it. For me it was the most illustrative example of the interaction between subject, object, research, ethnography, turning into a circle.

The impact of the cultural background on research is also dependent upon techniques of research and the locale. In this regard the most striking experience of research was in a team where we applied cognitive methods for data collection. The details of this will be the topic of a separate article. Here I only want to mention that the selection of this method and working in the team were the requirements of the funding agency. The research team consisted of two males and four females out of which one male and one female were principle investigators. The team dynamics, like the presence of men and women, age, status of the researcher, the presence or absence of the principle investigator that again was male or female were very evidently influencing the nature of data. Similarly interviews in groups or group discussions were different from individual interviews.

The German field revisited

As I have already mentioned in the beginning of this article the impact of my individuality and cultural background on my German fieldwork has been dealt with in detail in another article called Rhineland ethnography Pakistan Reflexivity²⁵. Here I will add only brief details of my recent revisit to my previous locale. In the last article the affects of my cultural background as Pakistani Muslim were discussed in two categories. The first I called 'cultural shock' that included the details of my cultural background influencing my interaction with the people. The main themes were my problems with humanized pets particularly dogs, body excrements/hygiene especially urine/semen, food notably pork, and the issue of nudity. The second category discussed the influence of my cultural background on the local people and their attitude towards me during the fieldwork stay. This was divided into my being a foreigner, a South Asian, and being Muslim, i.e. the debates relating to Islam and terrorism. My individuality in the field was still another issue that had an impact on my fieldwork. The 'compromise' behavior was defined by me for different situations, for example, inside and outside my apartment. As a whole I compared this fieldwork with acting on

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25 M. A. Chaudhary, *Rhineland Ethnography and Pakistani Reflexivity*, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 131, 2006, pp. 1-26.

the stage for impression management. Both the people of the locale and I were engaged in role performing.

The main message in this article was that my individuality and cultural background were both part and parcel of the fieldwork and the data that I collected was a source of learning or a particular type of learning or hindrance to learning. The hindering aspect included all that I could not do, for instance, I could not do a participant observation in a pub because I did not drink. Due to my being a foreigner from South Asia people did not seem to believe I could do something like fieldwork. Similarly, my fears that I would get into trouble with people kept me from behaving 'naturally'. At least some of these fears proved true during my recent (2007) revisit of the field. I had changed the name of the locale as well as of the informants in my publications, I thought. Thanks also to the local people who did not take me seriously in the sense of 'really doing fieldwork for writing about it'. Very few people enquired during the revisit if I had already published something. Some of those who knew about the publication were angry on grounds which confirmed my fears. A friend stopped communicating – she had considered me a 'very well integrated' example of the foreigners in German culture and society. In discussions I learned that she had held the Turkish migrants themselves to be responsible for not being integrated into German culture. From reading my account of the fieldwork impressions she realized I was rather acting than integrated. She did not want to be mentioned in the acknowledgements. I had the impression she also did not want that the people of her village read my article. I had similar fears about other informants in the locale, for example those people who could have identified themselves or others being described as *Spiesser*²⁶, about my perspective on aspects of nudity, on offering of pork or my acting in matters relating to the dogs, etc. This included my play-acting in matters relating to my creed, which I am used to express in a different way when not in the field.

The point that I missed in my last article but consider important and want to consider here is the significance of my individuality and cultural background in making sense of the 'others'. This became particularly evident during my revisit and from the reaction of those who had read my previous article and a

26 A derogatory term applied to a person who is correct in an excessive manner and wants others to behave in that way.

feature about my research in a German periodical²⁷. Some said it was amusing to read how 'others' see Germans. Some said that they learned something about the Pakistani/Punjabi/Islamic culture. There was both an urge and dismay in this knowledge from Pakistani as well as German readers. The Germans expressed different things ranging from we did not know it to the extent of 'they (Muslims/foreigners) must learn to accept the local realities and to adopt them'. Other reactions to the article I detected in changes of attitude of people I had known before. Some of them made it a point to mention or remark before shaking hands or offering me something: "I have washed my hands". Others would say: "This meat is bought from the Turkish shop on your behalf." A friend told me he locked the dog in the other room due to my visit. There was an almost comparable reaction in Pakistan among my students with whom I discussed this article in a seminar. There were a few complaints like 'over-interpretation' or 'misunderstanding' of information conveyed to me. On my part I complained that some readers did not fully understand the main issue I have raised in that article, i.e. the significance of the author's self and cultural background in the field research and ethnography.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed mainly my fieldwork experiences in Pakistan especially in my native village. Starting with theoretical debate about reflexive field works in traditional field setting where the researcher hails from a culture distinct and remote from that of the people s/he studies. The actual question raised here was if this debate was relevant for 'anthropology at home' or not? The answer in brief is that this debate is equally relevant to 'native' research. My individuality and cultural background were important determinants not only in my fieldworks abroad (Germany) and remote areas of Pakistan Chilas (Gilgit-Baltistan) but also in my own native village. With reference to my research in the Gilgit-Baltistan I have already noted that "I found myself in many ways 'comparable to the actor on stage", which was the experience I also made during my research experiences in Germany²⁸. While doing fieldwork in Chilas (Gilgit-

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27 A feature about my fieldwork research (called Deutschstunden) was published by Ulf Schubert in the German economy magazine Brand Eins, November 2007.

28 M. A. Chaudhary, *Rhineland Ethnography and Pakistani Reflexivity*, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 131, 2006, p.3.

Baltistan) I grew a beard, started praying in the mosque, or almost showed conformity by at least not openly rejecting the local peoples' views on Shias, whom they considered heretics and hunted them down. In my research in Germany and Chilas I had adopted behaviours that were correct in the views of the local people but were not necessarily my own personal views. This acting was not only done by me but also by people²⁹.

The case of my research in my native village was different. There was hardly any acting in the research. The villagers and I knew each other so well. Here my person, family background, kinship and ethnicity were the major sources of in-depth information, which were then generalized during the analysis to the rest of the society. When comparing the two in the case of Germany and to some extent Chilas my individuality and background was a hurdle in the way of my research. This does not mean the data collected here was not ego-ethnocentric. One danger was that I could take things for granted in the sense of not questioning or taking notice of them. Similarly, very often when I asked question, people said: "you know as much as we know". I also sometimes felt hesitant in asking certain questions fearing I could offend the informants. My data was also biased, as I had already noted, in terms of my status, position, gender, etc. My ethnography could easily be called an educated male, farmer view of the village. Further I am of the view that my knowledge could have remained non-reflective if I had not been exposed to the 'other' in terms of my anthropological training and my fieldwork in Germany and Chilas.

Boiling it all down to one sentence, reflexivity and positionality of the researcher is not only relevant for alien contexts it is also important in native research. It encourages the field researcher in exposing the circumstances of the field instead of concealing them. Such writings clarify and help in better understanding the local ethnography and thus strengthen fieldwork.

29 M. A. Chaudhary, "Betwixt and between Roles and Locales: Fieldwork Experiences in Chilas", in *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, Special Tribute Edition, Vol. XXXI, 2008, No. 1-2.