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# Fieldwork Encounters: Being Foreign and Female in Gilgit

Anna Grieser

> *"Neither of us was ready for the sense of powerlessness and dismay resulting from our lack of control over how we were perceived. This was both loss of control of the direction of the research and also loss of control in terms of their self-presentation. A woman entering a male-dominated setting is often the target of innuendo, rumour and boasting. A female ethnographer, though, is expected to deal with this situation such that the research does not suffer."* (Gill and Maclean 2002: 4.4-4.5)

The discussion of subjective and intersubjective aspects of fieldwork arrived in mainstream anthropology in the 1970s when anthropologists started to turn their attention towards a reflection of the fieldwork process and the resulting representations. As Kirsten Hastrup contends, knowledge grows out of registered – or silenced – experiences, roles and frames in the field (Hastrup 2004: 456). "The connections that the anthropologist makes are not so much backed by an experience of culture as by an experience of the contingency of frames within which everybody plays his or her part" (ibid.: 467).

In this article I argue that fieldwork experiences are shaped by an interplay of the researcher and local patterns, and describe how my fieldwork in Gilgit, the capital of Gilgit-Baltistan in the North of Pakistan, was shaped by aspects of foreignness and femininity.[1] As such, this is one way of arguing that

1 This contribution is a by-product of a two month pre-study visit to Gilgit from October to December 2011 and approximately six months of fieldwork in Gilgit from April to September 2012. Both visits were conducted within a doctoral research project in social anthropology on the social and cultural meaning of water in the high mountain areas of Pakistan as a sub-project of the Research Network *Crossroads Asia*, generously funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. Permission for fieldwork has been kindly granted by the Pakistani Ministry of Interior. The contribution goes beyond my central research topic of looking at the waterscape in Gilgit. As I argue in this article, I believe that the collection of data and data analysis are shaped by fieldwork experiences, as well as by rules and patterns of social interaction. As I will argue, gender is the variable that most obviously affected the research process in the current project. Matters of gender thus have to be problematized, negotiated and understood both during the fieldwork and in writing, as is suggested by Coffey (1999: 78) – a task which I attempt in the current article.

what anthropologists get to know and can claim to know "is inseparable from their relationship with those they study" (Mosse 2006: 937). In other words, knowledge about other cultures, other people, and other settings is not something that can be just extracted or plucked like berries from a bush. Instead, the knowledge which is imparted or gained from fieldwork is being created in the course of the fieldwork, and it is being created in interaction. Thus, it is shaped by the locale, the people there, their frames of actions and ideas, as well as by the fieldworker and the way he or she is seen and fashioned by the people. As Golde maintains, the question as to which particular aspects of the "fieldworker-self" or which relational issues[2] will be of the most importance is established in the field; they will be "dramatized" in the interaction between the fieldworker and the local people and can only be controlled by the fieldworker to a limited degree. During my fieldwork in Gilgit the biggest issues revolved around local images and expectations with regard to foreigners and women, shaping the way people in Gilgit saw and reacted towards me and how I, in turn, tried to navigate through a field dominated by gender ideals and gender boundaries that radically differ from those at (my) home. I maintain that gender issues (and the way they were dramatized through malicious rumours and resulted in suspicion, surveillance, self-surveillance, and more rumours) came to the fore in my fieldwork process because people were confused between the attributes of "female gender" and "foreigner" and because different people put the emphasis on one or the other. The problem is that those two attributes engender totally different roles, expectations, and reactions.

This article first gives an introduction to theories about intersubjectivity in fieldwork, the fieldworker's subjectivity, and "embodied fieldwork". The main part discusses gender boundaries in Gilgit, the unresolved status of single women, how I attempted to be acceptable in the field (resorting to changed bodily practices, monitoring my own and others' behaviour), and how the local idea of Western women's "hypersexuality" subverted such attempts. In conclusion I argue that my experiences certainly question the idea of first-time fieldworkers that one can ultimately control the data collection process. I want to contend, though, that too little attention is sometimes paid to the subjection of fieldworkers to local norms and standards and the resulting impairments. My fieldwork in Gilgit-Baltistan rather raised questions

2 Such aspects may be tentatively distinguished as dimensions of the "fieldworker-self" that contains variables such as age, personality, origin, or skin colour, while issues of language, reciprocity or commensality may be termed "relational issues". Although the aspects listed here seem to be quite heterogeneous in kind and although we might sort them tentatively into these two categories, these variables and the manner in which they affect the research process might be less separable than it seems at first. Additionally, all are subject and open to interpretation, and the fieldworker is only partially able to influence them as well as people's interpretations and reactions.

about the potential powerlessness of the fieldworker who may be subjected to local frames, games and rumours.

Since this means that my account is to a large part (auto)biographic, it is necessary to protect the privacy of both the people I interacted with and myself. Hence, I chose to anonymize persons and blur identities where this seems necessary and advisable – not only out of stylistic and narrative constraints, but out of the need and the right to protect both other people and myself. In order to limit damaging consequences as far as possible, some sections and episodes are left fragmented (cf. Flueckiger 2013: 4).

## (Inter)subjective Aspects of Fieldwork

The reflection and discussion of subjective and intersubjective aspects of fieldwork was long ignored in anthropology; as Golde argued in 1986, "perhaps because it would have been considered unessential or irrelevant to the communication of information about other cultures, the central scientific task" (Golde 1986: 1). Interviewing and observation were long considered to be objective methods; hence, little importance was attached to either the biography or the social position of the researcher in the respective locale or the relations established by him/her in the field. Consequently, the ethnographer made him/herself invisible in the written ethnography, focusing solely on the other culture (ibid.; Kulick 1995: 3). For many ethnographers the "reportable significant knowledge" was distinct from and thus needed to be kept separate from the "participatory details of the fieldwork experience [that] is still considered as embarrassingly unprofessional" (Tedlock 1991: 70–71). An empathic but distancing methodology was hoped to produce data that is "scientific" because of its disengagement from reflection, while at the same time reproducing "the native's point of view", as was famously propagated by Malinowski in 1922 (ibid.: 69). Thus, fieldwork experiences either went by the board or were published separately or even under a pseudonym (ibid.: 72).

After the reflective and representational turn of the 1970s and 1980s most anthropologists acknowledged that the analysis and reconstruction of the research material is to a large extent shaped by the personal context and the field experiences of the researcher (see e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986; Tedlock 1991; Collins and Gallinat 2010; Flueckiger 2013). Such an understanding went hand in hand with self-examination and the examination of the processes of fieldwork, and resulted in ethnographic accounts that analysed "the political, philosophical, and poetic implications of such work" (Tedlock 1991: 79)[3]. It was acknowledged that if we want to understand "the

3 At the same time, ethnographies became treated as a literary genre, which means that the process of writing came increasingly under scrutiny as well. In this context, the debate around the process of "Writing Culture", as collected in the famous anthology of Clifford and Marcus (1986), is exemplary and seminal.

other" (even if this idea of an "other" should be dealt with critically), we must also improve our understanding of the fieldwork encounter itself; that is, we have to explore its context and its human intersubjectivity (cf. Tedlock 1991; Collins and Gallinat 2010). The idea that it is possible to "do objective science" and that researchers need to avoid under all circumstances the pitfall of "going native"[4] has come under criticism. Instead, the notion of "human intersubjectivity" was fostered. This means that shared dialogue and shared experiences are understood to create an intersubjectivity which enables the ethnographer to understand the other (Tedlock 1991: 70-1). The fieldworker and his or her biography hardly exist in a cultural vacuum. Instead, one is "placed in a cross-cultural encounter" which is ultimately made up of interpersonal relations and relationships that have to be kept track of, scrutinized, and analysed. As has been called for by Okely, "the autobiographical experience of fieldwork requires the deconstruction of those relationships [in the field] with the rigour demanded elsewhere in the discipline" (Okely 1992: 2).[5]

Thus, ethnographies shifted from allegedly scientific accounts of "others" to analyses which include the time and experiences shared by the ethnographers with those others in the field. This also increasingly resulted in auto-ethnographies that explicitly engage with the ethnographic self and its interactions with other selves in the field. They focus less on the understanding of the other or of the self than on the understanding of the shared and the dialogic; as Okely put it: "the lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge" (ibid.: 2–3). Tedlock discusses this development as a shift from participant observation to the observation of participation. The "embodied lived experience" ought to enliven and consolidate the writing and production of theory, and reveal the interests of the researcher and the people in the field, the course of the research process, as well as frictions in the making of the ethnography (Tedlock 1991: 78-1). After all, as Šikić-Mićanović argues, "the researcher's experience is crucial as it is not the unmediated world of others but the world between ourselves and others that adds reality to the field" (Šikić-Mićanović 2010: 45; cf. Okely and Callaway 1992; Hastrup 1992: 117).

4 The term "going native" designates and criticises a comprehensive secondary acculturation to the perspective of those set out to study. "Going native" involves the inability to return to one's original culture successfully, the loss of a scientific perspective, and the inability to ponder differing perspectives (see e.g. Spittler 2001: 14).

5 A next step, as Mosse argues, would be to end the separation of fieldwork from deskwork. Based on the actual relationships in the field, we have to do away with "ethnographic objectifications" of those we presume to write about. Through this, Mosse, too, argues the case that "what anthropologists know is inseparable from their relationship with those they study" (Mosse 2006: 937). Personal narratives, dialogue and collaboration are recently tested solutions to this issue; another alternative is "objectivity" through the possibility to object to the resulting ethnographic product (ibid.: 937-9).

Although it remains disputed whether the author's emotions and intentions are accessible to the reader (or even to the author him/herself), many authors claim that through (self-)reflexivity personal experiences *are* accessible and can thus be used as a source of ethnographic data. Šikić-Mićanović, for example, argues that experiences can and should be used for a critical understanding of the research process, its development and outcome (Šikić-Mićanović 2010: 46-7). But as Okely maintains, this reflexivity and disclosure in the ethnographic work must not be misunderstood as a form of narcissism or navel-gazing. Self-reflexivity and self-awareness involve scrutiny which is rarely flattering or complimentary (Okely 1992: 2).[6]

But while the fieldwork process is generally an intersubjective process, I argue that we still can distinguish local patterns which come to the fore in shared time, shared space and shared experiences. As Hastrup argues: "The situation of the fieldworker is characteristic of the conditions being studied [...]. This is the reason why fieldwork is a valid way of gaining knowledge about other people, even if it cannot be backed by positive evidence in the old sense of the term" (Hastrup 2004: 466). At the same time Hastrup contends that although our experience is embodied we can understand our parts and roles only *partially* and only describe them through inference. Whatever happens always remains liable to individual contestations: "The connections that the anthropologist makes are not so much backed by an experience of culture as by an experience of the contingency of frames within which everybody plays his or her part" (ibid.: 467).

## The Fieldworker's Self and Subjectivity

While we have argued so far that ethnographic accounts are shaped in intersubjective events which are, in turn, shaped by local patterns and frames, this also includes the other side of the coin, i.e. the fieldworker, his or her cultural background and personal attributes. It is a contested question whether ethnographies are just as subjective as fieldworkers. In her discussion of ethnographic writing of the 20th century, Tedlock (1991) claims that the researchers' subjectivity was neglected most of the time. The fieldworkers and their experiences (the "data") were mostly kept separate, i.e. from the analysis and even more so from the resultant text. Often the researcher is considered the primary instrument of data collection; yet we need to keep in mind that the researcher is not a neutral instrument but an embodied social actor. "What is presented to the host community is a body: a size and shape, hair and skin, clothing and movement, sexual invitation or untouchability" (Warren 1988: 24-5; see also Moreno 1995: 246; Coffey 1999: 60). The research is always shaped by the specific conditions of its setting, by how the researcher

6 Okely argues to the contrary that "indeed those who protect the self from scrutiny could as well be labelled self-satisfied and arrogant in presuming their presence and relations with others to be unproblematic" (Okely 1992: 2).

is perceived and how the ensuing intersubjective interaction plays out. Leaving these processes out of reflection, analysis and writing reduces everyone involved to mere carriers of information that lack agency and importance as individuals.

The subjectivity of the fieldworker is discussed in terms such as "positionality" or "embodiment". Positionality refers to different aspects of identity that either the researcher him/herself or his/her partners of interaction perceive, such as age, gender, sexuality, class, race, religion, nationality, personality "and other attributes that are markers of relational positions in society" (Šikić-Mićanović 2010: 46). Coffey discusses this matter under the term of embodiment, e.g. the "bodily conduct and bodily presentation" of the fieldworker and how these are interpreted and charged with meaning. The researcher's body is thus "part of the identity work of the ethnographer" (Coffey 1999: 64). Although this may be possible only to a limited extent as we will discuss below – most field researchers actively or passively *seek* to produce a "physical body image, acceptable to the research setting" (ibid.). Which particular aspects of the fieldworker-self or other relational issues (for example, which language is spoken, which, how much and with whom food is consumed, or how reciprocity is enacted) will be most significant is established in the field.

I believe that, as Golde suggests, this is a process which the fieldworker is largely unable to control, and which will "become *dramatized by events*" rather than by the fieldworker's intentions (Golde 1986: 10; emphasis added). On the other hand, I believe that the researcher's biological sex and social gender, as well as associated issues such as sexuality – depending on the fieldworker as well as on the research setting and locale – can be of greater or lesser importance, but they will always matter. Starting from feminist and post-colonial criticism, especially gender is discussed as having an important influence on the fieldwork process. Gender is often taken as the prime case in point to illustrate the influence of the researcher on qualitative research. As Coffey asserts, "issues of bodily conduct and bodily presentation" also encompass gender, sex and sexuality (Coffey 1999: 65). Gender thus can become a variable that can easily be used to acknowledge the fact that the research process and its results are invariably influenced by the researcher, and also to acknowledge and learn to appreciate the impact of subjectivity (Golde 1986: 2; Gill and Maclean 2002). Gender and sexuality, literally embodied in the fieldworker her/himself, are always relevant, no matter whether they are dramatized or neglected. Gender and sexuality are part of every social research process just like other characteristics of the fieldworker-self (cf. Coffey 1999: 77).

During my fieldwork in Gilgit, aspects of female sex, gender and sexuality were the variables that were dramatized most, whereas they might also have come to the fore but not have such dramatic consequences for other

foreign yet male anthropologists working in the same region[7]. Cook's (2007) research on foreign, i.e. Western women living in Gilgit in the 1990s also affirms the importance that is attributed to gender and sexuality. Although her interlocutors were not anthropological fieldworkers, I find emotional parallels and practical similarities in how those women experienced their time in Gilgit, especially with regard to their physical appearance and their bodies. The constraints stemming from the limitations and boundaries set for women (be they local or foreign) then beg the question of methodology, especially of how to design the research with regard to male-female interaction. While in my case this matter had a rather detrimental effect on the research, fieldworkers might ideally try from the beginning to design their object of research and methods in a way that is less disastrous, or even advantageous, for the research. Yet, all conversations prior to the fieldwork with other male and female researchers who had done research in Pakistan, had not prepared me for the intensity with which the matter of gender would influence my fieldwork. Thus we may infer that it may not always be possible to schedule and achieve the task to commit ourselves to a specific topic, plan of work or method.

## Embodied Fieldwork in a Gendered Field

Inadvertently (due to my cultural upbringing) and methodologically (by my obligation to do research) I was not able to completely conform to local ideals of how a woman should behave, i.e. basically not to interact with men who are not related. Since I came to Gilgit with a research topic that did not focus on the women's sphere (as did, for example, Marhoffer-Wolff 2002, Cook 2007, Varley 2008, Gratz 2010, Halvorson 2011), interaction with men was part of the research design. On the other hand, other women had done their research work with local men before (for example, Stellrecht 1978, Göhlen 1997, Schneid 1997, Lentz 2000, Ali 2009). Consequently, the question arises as to how to conduct fieldwork when, because of cross-gender contact, one is impeded in the field by a number of people in the locale. A second question follows: to what extent can and should the researcher make efforts to be locally acceptable? What consequences is he/she ready to bear, and which efforts are acceptable so as to render fieldwork possible?

In Gilgit, gender seems to be the most obvious and immediate aspect defining both a person's role and the response of people. Conforming to the local gender role, however, was not as easy for me as it first seemed. A commonly held (erroneous) assumption – which at the beginning of my project had been held by my supervisors and me as well and had caused my trouble

7 While some male colleagues working in Gilgit-Baltistan completely refrain from contact with women, others have contact with women but, for example, only with Ismaili women who handle gender segregation by and large less strictly.

in the first place – is the idea that in a society and locale where the male and female realms are separated, female fieldworkers may have access to both male and female social circles and thus may have an advantage over male fieldworkers.[8] Unfortunately this is not always true, as becomes apparent from my own experiences and as publications of other female researchers made clear later onwards. In certain settings with a certain degree of gender segregation, the female ethnographers, too, have to restrain themselves in order to do their research successfully. Particularly to engage in the public realm may be perceived as "misbehaviour". Often women are met with (subtle) disapproval, even if there is not necessarily any verbalized reprimand or open restrictions (e.g. Golde 1986: 8-9; Gill and Maclean 2002: 1.2). Gill and Maclean who did fieldwork in Britain and Scotland, for example, argue that female behaviour is often scrutinized much more critically in the field than that of male fieldworkers and that female ethnographers thus become (maybe consequently) often "more aware of their sexual status and its impact on fieldwork and relationships" (Gill and Maclean 2002: 1.8; see also Golde 1986). As Gill recounts, while she considered herself "basically a genderless entity", she was (unexpectedly) perceived and treated "as a gendered and sexual being" (Gill and Maclean 2002: 2.5). Gill and MacIean conclude that ultimately they were not able to exert much influence on how the local people chose to see them (ibid.: 3.11). They argue that gender-related problems during fieldwork had impacts both on them (emotionally) and on the research process.

Hence, I would like to stress the fact that one's own gender and local gender conceptions may always influence the research process, although male researchers hardly discuss this as an issue. This so-called "male bias" has been identified and strongly criticised by feminist anthropology: though the question of the role of gender and sexuality within fieldwork is very significant, it has been addressed only rather reluctantly (Golde 1986; Bell 1993: 1; Moreno 1995; Coffey 1999: 77). Ethnographies written by men have long kept an air of imparting some gender-neutral, generalised knowledge that applies to the whole population. The misperception and confusion of "male and white" with "neutral" becomes obvious only in the critique from feminist and post-colonial perspectives. In locales where gender segregation is practiced, male fieldworkers often simply restrict themselves to the male realm, e.g. to male interlocutors and male spaces, either voluntarily or due to restrictions imposed by the conventions and habitus of the local people.[9] Additionally, the male space is often erroneously understood as being equivalent with the whole society. Women's ethnographies, in contrast, are mostly un-

8 See also Moreno (1995: 247-8).

9 Talking to Western male researchers doing fieldwork in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, I got the impression that for them the chance to meet local women are nearly non-existent – a circumstance which for some of them is unfamiliar and not easy to cope with either. Conversely, this also entails that they get less the chance to flout gender norms.

derstood as being "limited", speaking only for the local female population (cf. Bell 1993: 2-3). From the 1960s onward, female ethnographers in particular began to consciously reflect on their gender, sexual and marital status, and the impact those matters have on the fieldwork. It came to be realized that the fieldworker-self is not simply a given, but is subject to curiosity and concern in day-to-day interactions with the research participants and therefore inadvertently influences the research process (Coffey 1999: 79). However, one common reason why issues of gender and sexuality are often concealed is that by discussing them, researchers fear to risk their respectability and their careers (cf. Kulick and Willson 1995: 4; see also Moreno 1995: 246, Gill and Maclean 2002: 1.11).

Hence, we can say that the researchers' self is always a partial, positioned self that is engaged in different contexts (cultural, historical, political, gendered and sexual). Conversely, however, positionality ultimately allows us to generate awareness of the fieldwork itself, of the relationships established and the knowledge produced (Coffey 1999: 94). I therefore support the argument that trying to render oneself "asexual" in the field (as well as ahistorical, apolitical or unbiased, for that matter) and to establish a strict boundary between personal and professional life means "to reinforce a false dichotomy between the fieldworker self and other selves. This in itself denies the reality and complexity of fieldwork and the identity work that it entails" (ibid; see also Kulick 1995). As Gill and Maclean argue, by ignoring gender-related issues in the field and thus ignoring the intersubjectivity of fieldwork, much experience and insight will be missed, since the very advantage of such engagement and encounter would be left out of consideration: "The ethnographer ceases to be a 'complete' person, being portrayed as a machine for the recording and analysis of data" (Gill and Maclean 2002: 1.12). Correspondingly we have to infer that the usual ignorance of these issues may reduce the interlocutors and those involved in the research to mere "data-carriers".

The positionality of the researcher always influences the research process and its outcome. Many ethnographers now acknowledge that this positionality should not be seen as a limitation, but on the contrary can be used as an advantage that helps to generate new ideas and insights (ibid.). Okely, for example, encourages graduate students

> *to value their own resources. Individual personality, biography, ethnicity, nationality and gender will all have specific implications. The anthropologist should recognize that seeming weaknesses, along with incomer naivety, are qualities to explore creatively. The traditional, often masculinist mask of competence has to be dropped.* (Okely 2009: 3)

Nonetheless, entering a field as a complete outsider with completely different patterns of behaviour is difficult. Behaviour and ways of interaction that are normal at home suddenly become inappropriate (or as the case may be

even immoral) with regard to gender norms and interaction between women and men (cf. Gill and Maclean 2002: 4.2).[10] While fieldwork manuals suggest that an "appropriate" gender role or identity should be adapted, Kulick points out that this is not as easy as it seems at first hand. Firstly, each local gender identity is not necessarily coherent in itself and may also be contrary to the researcher's own convictions. Secondly, such manuals diverge or even contradict one another, some advising to appropriate a local identity, others cautioning the ethnographer to remain secure in his/her own identity (Kulick 1995: 9-11). Anxiety about how to behave is a common consequence for fieldworkers. Not everyone feels comfortable with the implementation of what is often subsumed under "the glib phrase 'adaptation'". Often this would include to submit oneself to a "set of disciplinary practices that seems to demand (in order to avoid rejection and expulsion) evasion, concealment, and lying about one's opinions, identities, and activities outside the field" (ibid.: 11). Therefore, uncomfortable situations seem to be unavoidable, regardless of whether the researcher adopts local habits and behaviour or sticks to his/her own identity and behaviour (even though it needs to be stressed, in order not to paint a thoroughly gloomy picture, that there are always happy and comforting moments during fieldwork as well).

## Gender Boundaries in Gilgit and their Transgression

Life in Gilgit-Baltistan, including its capital Gilgit City, is very thoroughly influenced by *pardah,* i.e. quite strict gender segregation in space and communication. In most parts of society, *pardah* rules are defined rather strictly and transgressions are quickly noticed.[11] As is discussed by Cook, however, many Western *women* in Gilgit – whether they visit for a short time or live there for some years – willingly or unwillingly transgress local social boundaries and do not strictly observe *pardah*.[12] For example, they "frequently violate boundaries between public and private space" (Cook 2007: 70-1); they enter (and are invited to enter) spheres that are prohibited for (local) women, interact with men who are not their relatives, wear different clothing, visit games of polo, use the non-*pardah* section of restaurants, participate in work conferences, or (by mistake) use the part of public transport that is more or less reserved for men instead of the front seat next to the driver which is al-

10 Questions and insecurities of how to behave are not limited to a *pardah* society, but can as well arise in European contexts (e.g. Gill and Maclean 2002; Dubisch 1995).

11 Vis-à-vis foreigners, though, transgressions are hardly directly reprimanded and advice on how to behave properly is given only reluctantly, which, at first, seems very tolerant and open-minded.

12 While male visitors are more or less automatically included in practices of gender segregation (i.e. they will not get the chance to enter women's spaces), female visitors almost inevitably touch the male space, while they may also be invited into the female realm as well.

located for women (ibid.). Thus, the question is: how to actually behave? As Cook writes after her own research in Gilgit,

> *Western women are never sure how they should act and where they belong. I often experience negotiating daily life in Gilgit as if I were walking a tightrope without balancing aids. Is my dupatta [headscarf] placed properly? Is it appropriate for me to sit in the back of the Suzuki [the local public transportation] with Gilgiti men? Is my raucous laughter acceptable? Am I free to visit the library or see a movie without a chaperone? (*Cook 2007: 61-2)

Such seemingly banal issues may cause serious problems such as malignant rumours, as well as distortions of one's self, as I will show below. In my case I attribute those to being a foreign woman, which is locally associated with an ambiguous status.

Following Golde's seminal compilation, I maintain that such boundary-crossing activities by foreign women (be they regular visitors or researchers) are considered problematic by local people for at least two reasons. Firstly, they are problematic because of the perceived vulnerability of women and the provocation as which such boundary-crossing may be understood (Golde 1986: 5-6). Secondly, boundary-crossing behaviour and non-conformity may be understood as threatening the local habits (ibid.: 8-9).

In order to explain my argument, I will go into some detail. I had come to Pakistan the first time in October 2011 for a pre-study visit for my doctoral dissertation. Beforehand, my supervising professors from Germany and Pakistan had submitted my project outline to the Ministry of Interior and successfully applied for a research visa on my behalf. However, my introduction to Gilgit-Baltistan took a quite unfortunate course.

Due to fortuitous circumstances, the first Pakistanis I got to know were young men from Hunza, a valley in the North of Gilgit-Baltistan. They showed me round in Gilgit and their home town Hunza, introduced me to local NGOs and also to their cousin who worked in the local bureaucracy. (They were of the opinion that I should meet him because he might help me in case I got into any difficult circumstances.) I was glad for someone at my side while beginning to navigate unfamiliar and sometimes intimidating situations. In view of my dissertation project on water, they took me along on a work trip to evaluate drinking-water projects in villages, showed me gardens, fields and irrigation channels, as well as local cultural heritage sites. They invited me to their homes, introduced me to their families, invited me to join them for dinner, and even offered me accommodation. I was grateful for their help and advice, and the idea that something was going wrong did not cross my mind. Only months later did I realize that I had been enticed by situations and behaviour that seemed familiar but were actually not; this ultimately made it

difficult to navigate and successfully appropriate local "proper" behaviour, especially concerning gender norms and seclusion. As turned out bit by bit, despite or because of their guidance I was flouting local rules and gender norms – but not willingly; I was rather following my acquaintances' suit.[13]

The resulting problems can presumably be attributed to jealousy and mistrust that were acted out, along my being both a woman and a foreigner – two identities which, taken separately, involve completely different and opposing roles and reactions and, taken together, result in considerable ambiguity.[14] While a number of activities may be tolerable in a foreigner, they are not in a woman, and while most interlocutors handled me as a foreigner, others (such as agency officers) may have expected me to behave like a woman. Retrospectively I picture that the young men whom I had met in the beginning of my fieldwork and whom I regarded as helpful did not think about the public image that resulted from our interactions. They cautioned me to be careful not to trust others (a common warning in Gilgit which at the same time is never explained or elaborated). However, they too were not aware – or failed to enlighten me on the matter – of how negatively some activities (like going for a hike, or having dinner in a restaurant) might be interpreted and construed by others – including their cousin in the bureaucracy. I was well aware that actions are not only culture-specific but also culture-specifically interpreted, and already made efforts to adjust myself. But many activities did not even occur to me as being problematic since they were rather ordinary for me at home and were portrayed as ordinary by my acquaintances. For example, I wrongly assumed that it would be innocuous to pay visits to different city quarters on my own or in company, or to talk to men in public, that is, under public control. But although such activities were not reprimanded immediately, they were later made the basis for rumours and fabrications about immoral behaviour. Additionally, I trusted that the people with whom I interacted would point out local dos and don'ts. However, if advice was given it was mostly given rather hesitantly and vaguely or seemed rather odd, such as the advice to bluntly lie to people and tell them that I was happily married and had four children and a husband waiting for me at home. As Nancy Cook carefully puts it after her own research in Gilgit, "local guidance can be valuable, if offered, but miscommunications and misinterpretations abound" (Cook 2007: 61). Similarly, Emma Varley, an anthropologist also working in Gilgit, remarked that transgressions often only become clear af-

13 I am extremely thankful though to the persons and families from Gilgit, Hunza, Yasin and other places, who hosted and cared for me, my unusual activities notwithstanding.

14 Gratz points out that she, too, felt as if people might see her as a kind of hermaphrodite, in the sense that she was a woman (even if without a husband [at hand] and without children) but nonetheless moved about autonomously like a man. In Gilgit, such (men- and childless) women are otherwise the most restricted in their mobility (Gratz 2006: 105).

ter certain lines are irreversibly crossed and personal ties are finally broken (personal communication).[15]

## Ambiguous Status of Woman and Foreigner

To further my argument, I will expand on the ambiguous status that is locally attributed to foreign women. Local gender norms for a woman and the role of a foreign researcher can be conflicting. This may lead to confusion and resentment on the side of the interlocutors and interaction partners in the field, as well as for the researcher herself (cf. Golde 1986: 8; Gill and Maclean 2002: 4.10). Thus, during the course of the fieldwork I attempted to actively shift my appearance and behaviour from "foreigner" to "woman". I tried to comply with local conventional notions of femininity and made efforts to conform to local gender roles through bodily practices, most noticeably dress and demeanour, though I was not wholly successful. At the same time, to conform to local gender norms was difficult in the light of my research objective.[16] Furthermore, my efforts were not appreciated by everyone (for example, not everyone appreciated my efforts to wear the local dress), and also they lead to culture shocks and serious distortions of myself, both in and out of the field.

The uncertainty of how to behave begins with seemingly trifle matters such as clothing or taking food in public (for example, where to dine, with whom, or maybe rather: if at all) and culminates in the most basic but also most difficult question of where to go, with whom to interact, and how. For example, to arrange interviews and to go there alone may be interpreted as unrespectable and dangerous. However, going with a local woman is possible only within her own family or neighbourhood. Going with a local man, on the other hand, may give rise to rumours. Thus, during every field stay I tried different modes of doing interviews, all of which were deemed problematic either by local people or by me.

During the course of the fieldwork these matters were points of uncertainty not only for me but also for the people interacting with me. Torn between the often opposing ideas of "foreigner" and "woman" and contradicting sets of proper behaviour and proper reactions, it must have been difficult for people to classify me and thus to determine appropriate behaviour towards

15 When I – naïvely but without bad intents – once badly breached norms of proper behaviour myself (an episode on which I will not go into detail here), I had to face grave consequences; some people found my conduct unforgivable. Others, however, pardoned me and offered support even after they came to know my transgression, for which I am extremely thankful. They excused my inattentiveness to local norms and procedures with my different cultural background.

16 Neither was I planning to focus solely on women´s perspectives, nor, as it turned out, did the biggest number of women feel able to answer even questions regarding household water (see also Gratz 2006).

me.[17] This was disconcerting both for me and the people whom I met in the field. For example, physical contact is generally avoided in Gilgit between men and women who are not first-grade family members.[18] Yet many men in Gilgit feel that it is their responsibility and an expression of respect to shake hands with foreigners. Giving preference to the attribute of "foreigner", this also includes *foreign women*, even when men would not shake hands with *local* women. In the beginning of my fieldwork I found it unsettling when men did *not* offer me their hand to shake, since I interpreted this as disregard of women. Later on, a friend of mine explained that not shaking hands was actually meant as a sign of respect, and advised me to act in the manner of local women and not shake hands with men at all. Thus followed a period in which both I and many men seemed to be at a loss about how to greet at initial hellos; despite local female clothing, some men kept seeing me first and foremost as a foreigner, and offered me their hand to shake. Since I found it too impolite to leave them standing there with their hand put forth, I reluctantly and half-hearted shook hands contrary to the advice until my research assistant explained that with this – even if unintentionally – I was expressing distrust or hostility.[19]

Furthermore, even if the researcher learns certain rules, such as to avoid contact with men, uncertainty may remain about whether she/he is actually willing and able to adapt to the rules. In addition, there is no guarantee that following such rules will be successful. Noncompliance, on the other hand, may have nebulous but often frightening consequences such as disapproval – being laughed at, ridiculed, scorned and disrespected for social misconduct (cf. Cook 2007: 61-2) – and even the threat of rape.

## The Unresolved Status of a Single Woman

Regardless of my conduct in the beginning – when I was as modest just as my acquaintances' behaviour was modest – my role was quickly associated by a number of people with notions of gender, sexuality, and related norms and behaviour (cf. Gill and Maclean 2002: 1.6; 4.10). Doing research and living

17 Ruth Göhlen, a female researcher who had been researching in the neighbouring valley of Astor in the 1990s, and who had been talking to men as well, also notices that she seemed to flout the norms for a woman, and that as a result she was placed in the category of men. She infers this from the fact that she was sometimes addressed as "Mister Ruth". She explains: "The public sector is exclusively that of men. […] As a foreign female conducting field research and moving in the public sector, it was obviously difficult for men to place me in the social and gender-specific categories" (Göhlen 1998: 465).

18 Deprived of and depriving myself of physical contact in the field, I experienced that even shaking hands can get charged with importance and meaning.

19 Another female colleague of mine generally refused to shake hands with men for introduction, which was met either with appreciation or disapproval by different people.

in Gilgit as an unaccompanied woman without a spouse or fellow researcher was more problematic than expected. In addition, the topic of marriage is a very pressing issue in Gilgit for any unmarried person over 18, and the pressure to get married grows drastically as people grow older; this is true for everyone: male and female, local and foreigner.

Correspondingly, marriage, sexuality, and the marital status of women are topics not only of interest to anthropologists, but also to the people in the field (cf. Kulick 1995: 3; Coffey 1999: 79). Coffey asserts that the status of a woman who is on her own[20] is one that is prized but has to be solved in the long run. Being on one's own implies to be unmarried and thus potentially vulnerable or even abnormal; "hence it is indicative of a problem for which the solution is attachment, usually to a man and usually through marriage" (Coffey 1999: 79).

In the same vein, Golde writes tongue-in cheek that the marital status of the researcher, especially of female researchers, is always of interest to the local people:

> *If the fieldworker is single, the community will be concerned about why she is not married; if she is married but her husband is not with her, people will wonder about that situation; if she is with her husband, attention will focus on why she has no children. These questions are irksome rather than troubling, but they do require the researcher to search for explanations that are meaningful to informants.* (Golde 1986: 10)

She furthermore points out that a lone woman's vulnerability is not only dangerous for the woman herself; her status may look like a provocation for men to take advantage of this situation or, the other way round, to feel seduced into a liaison – a culpability that increases when the woman in question is considered attractive in local terms (ibid.: 6).

Nonetheless, I found the immediacy of these issues, with which I was confronted in the field, inescapable and overwhelming. As a young woman on my own, educated, assumedly affluent, young, tall, blond, and having a fair complexion, I seemed to fit many criteria of attractiveness or prestige, and to represent a potential sexual or even marital partner to many young men and young men's families. When I once complained to a female friend of mine that some men (i.e. the bureaucrat and his companions) had created serious troubles (such as creating rumours that set the intelligence agencies on me) which hindered me in conducting my fieldwork, she explained to me that it was simply my bad luck that I was so pretty in local people's understanding – according to her this was the source of all my troubles. Indeed, I received

20 Coffey talks about this under the term of "virginity" which I find too narrow here.

a two-digit number of proposals, overtures, and offers for marriage,[21] as well as for romantic and sexual relationships. Some of the more overt offers, encroaching comments and harassments were based on the general assumption that Western women customarily have non-committal sexual relationships.[22] In the light of the trouble I had, the same friend's father offered to find me a husband for the period of research so as to resolve my fieldwork difficulties related to singleness: with a husband I would have someone to protect me both from harassment and troubles with intelligence and law enforcement agencies.[23]

More or less quickly I became aware of the overall problem regarding my gender status and transgressions of gender boundaries but found it impossible to find a good way to end misunderstandings or transgressions.[24] One way might have been to change my research plan and restrict myself to the realm of women. Instead, I chose to act as much gender-conformist as possible and to conceal my (lacking) marital status. I did this by asserting that I had a "husband" or "fiancé" in Germany, using these more definite terms for my partnership, as well as wearing a golden ring, in the naïve hope that these tactics would lend me a more acceptable status and that mentioning a partner back home would be enough to deflect interest and romantic attention (cf. Pollard 2009: 11). I adopted such strategies (trying to appear modest and sexually unavailable) in the hope to reduce sexual attention during fieldwork.

21 One aspect that certainly also plays a role in Gilgit is the aspiration for social upward mobility connected with the oftentimes high social status of Westerners (Wade 1993: 204; 210). This is not meant to say that genuine affection for the woman may not be the case if a relationship is contracted; I would argue that in most cases a mutual affection will be the basis for most cross-cultural marriages in Gilgit. Nonetheless, there are many stories and allegations of local men marrying (older) foreign women simply for their money and the foreign passport. Additionally, motives of social upward mobility or intergenerational physical change may easily be presumed at least by others, as Wade suggests for Colombia: "Such a motive may be absent, but may easily be inferred by others" (Wade 1993: 210).

22 As Willson sums up, in many locales the idea prevails that Western women are sexually available and open for liaisons. This is fostered by media representation, as well as by Western women themselves (who think of themselves as sexually liberated). This then results in the concept of Western women as morally "loose" (Willson 1995: 262-3). The large number of foreign tourists in Gilgit-Baltistan in the 1990s – who were possibly equally open for non-committal sexual liaisons – will have contributed to this image here as well (see also Cook 2007).

23 Curiously, this was not the offer of a *mutah* (temporary marriage) which is allowed in Shia Islam. The person suggesting this was a Sunni recommending a permanent marriage that could be kept or divorced at the end of the research, according to my wish.

24 Other articles suggest that I am not alone with this dilemma (e.g. Gill and Maclean 2002: 3.14; Moreno 1995: 247-8).

In addition, there is a commonly held idea that modesty and chastity are "considered the norm during anthropological fieldwork" (cf. Wade 1993: 211; Dubisch 1995: 30; Kulick 1995: 9-10; Coffey 1999: 89).[25] On top of my deliberate attempts, some interlocutors actually interpreted even more aspects in this light; one, for example, claimed that my plain clothing must have been a tactic aimed at deflecting men's attention, too (a tactic which, according to his statement, would not be successful though).

Despite all efforts to conform to gender rules and models, people (especially intelligence officers) judged me in the first place according to my gender and related gender stereotypes (measuring stereotypes of foreign women against local women's), and only to a lesser extent by other criteria such as my age, nationality, or language – in the words of Golde "dramatizing" the aspect of gender (Golde 1986: 10).[26] Set off by rumours started by the bureaucrat, a number of sexualized and malicious rumours, gossip and insinuations of wrongdoing were spread. This resulted in efforts of the local intelligence officers to control and restrict my movement and contact with local people, since they concocted the idea that I might seduce local men in order to elicit confidential information.[27] As Golde explains, such local reactions reveal local people's attitudes. At the same time, they "serve as mechanisms of social control. They contain a message that may be manifestly solicitous, but at the same time constitutes a veiled warning to both the field worker and the community that the limits of tolerance may not be pushed too far" (ibid.: 6). The rumours came up due to my spatial mobility, contact to a number of families, and the fact that I talked to people (including men) – i.e. essentially all activities that are the basis of anthropological research. The act of moving and collecting data was transformed into the concept of "roaming around", which is perceived in a negative way.[28]

Consequently my freedom of movement was limited and controlled by the agencies, my hosts, and increasingly also by myself. Conversely, I also began to monitor and evaluate *men's* behaviour, looking for "improper" behaviour on their side, as I was anxious not to give any motive for misun-

25 As Wade adds, it is common that sexual encounters are later on suppressed in the writing for fear of impacts on the professional reputation (Wade 1993: 211).

26 For a similar idea see also Hastrup who speaks of "living our part" and the notion that "this 'part' is very much a part allotted to us by the others" (Hastrup 2004: 465).

27 Golde sums up such actions towards women, remarking that "the fieldworker who is physically attractive in terms of the prevailing aesthetic standards of the community she is studying will pose a greater threat and will suffer these suspicions to a greater degree" (Golde 1986: 6).

28 Gratz attests that in Gilgit spatial mobility of women is restricted. Women who move about extensively risk their good reputation; her motives and aims are questioned and people assume immoral activities. It requires thus a lot of work and social skills to keep a good reputation (Gratz 2006: 675).

derstandings or for rumours about improper behaviour. But what is more, I increased my "self-surveillance of 'good' conduct" in the attempt to be and appear modest (Cook 2007: 65; see also Ali 2009: 107). While this was appreciated by many women, it prompted reproaches from research assistants and friends, who warned me not to make a fool of myself (for example by covering my head at all times). I constantly scrutinized myself for "good conduct", to the extent that my research assistant eventually reproached me: according to him, my attempts to behave shy like a local woman would irritate people and would be detrimental to my actual goal to do interviews and to collect data. Effectively, just like many women felt shy and unable to answer my questions in interviews, I myself felt increasingly shy and unable to ask. I had internalized not only the interpretation of the "male gaze", but also often felt embarrassed, ashamed, and guilty when I transgressed – consciously or by mistake – gender boundaries or local social rules (as did the women in Cook's study), even if this was necessary in light of the research, and even if it would be considered perfectly normal at home. With each stay in Gilgit, the feeling of being constrained and limited in the access to social events increased; these constrictions were due to both by my own aspirations to comply with local notions of femininity and surveillance by local agencies.[29]. I felt trapped in the restrictions, and regularly when returning to Gilgit from a short trip to the surrounding valleys I started to cry once the city came into sight. To counter such feelings I tried to adapt to the situation and find relaxation joining families with whom I was friends for their everyday activities – an endeavour which later on was also vetoed by friends who explained that spending time with families would again not leave a good impression.

## Modest Appearance and Monitoring of the Body

As Coffey discusses, impression management, negotiating and establishing (an) acceptable field role(s) is part of a salient and conscious presentation of self during fieldwork. Among other things this includes most importantly dress, demeanour, and speech and is directed towards producing a "fieldwork body" that is acceptable as well as plausible. Many texts that deal with conduct during fieldwork address physical appearance and dress and give advice on how to successfully accomplish "impression management". But as Coffey complains, most authors touch this issue rather superficially. The requirements actually go much beyond simply wearing "appropriate" clothes (Coffey 1999: 64-5), although even this is not as easy a matter as it seems.

29 I had to report to local intelligence agencies when and where I intended to move and whom to meet and had to submit reports about my actions for vetting. I was successively restricted to eat in restaurants, meet persons for "private purposes", visit local NGOs, talk to government employees, as well as to move out of Gilgit without their approval. Furthermore, they successively and on a seemingly random basis prohibited me to visit places like glaciers or other touristic areas of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Since clothing and public conduct go hand in hand with judgements about morality, I wore jeans and long shirts from the beginning, trying at a compromise between my usual jeans and shirt and full *shalwar-kameez* – a dress prevailing in South Asia with matching long shirt (*kameez*), loose-fitting pants (*shalwar*) and scarf (*dupatta*). However, I soon realized that I felt uncomfortable in Gilgit when wearing jeans and not covering my head in public.[30] I was stared at by both men and women, and approached by random men on the street who did not perceive a (respectable) woman but a foreign-

30 While in Gilgit all women cover their heads in public (many also in the private space of the family), there are different styles and cloths to do this. Inside the house, a smaller head-scarf (*dupatta*) is preferred. A *dupatta* mostly measures a bit less than 1 by 2 metres, is mostly from a rather lightweight quality (even to the point of translucent) and often matches a set of s*halwar-kameez*. It is usually worn around the head and upper part of the body. It may be worn rather loosely, showing hair or hairline (though it is sometimes fixed with a pin on the top of the head), or rather tightly, covering all hair. Especially when in one's own house, *dupattas* may also be worn only over the shoulders covering the chest, but they are put up in order to cover the head as well, especially when men other than one's husband, father, or brothers are present. Many women tie them tightly at the time of the prayer-calling (*azan*) and during prayer, as well as during physical work in the household. When leaving the house, many women resort to an additional larger head-scarf, in Gilgit referred to as *chador*. *Chadors* are often a bit bigger than a *dupatta*, but also around 1 by 2 metres, opaque, and bought independently of a set of *shalwar-kameez*. They are worn around the head and upper body, showing only the face by virtue of their sheer size. (*Chador* here does not refer to the big circular black cloth worn in Iran.) A few women (particularly Shia) may wear a *hijab* when leaving the house, as is fashionable in Iran. *Hijab* are worn tightly, veiling hair and chest, and often the women combine with the *dupatta*, or *chador*. A number of women (particularly Sunni) wear an *abaya* when leaving the house (a kind of cloak, in Gilgit referred to as *burqa*). The *burqa* is often black or grey and often of a firm synthetic cloth. Fashions differ and they can be either loose or slim-fitting. *Burqas* are combined either with a loose *dupatta*, a tight *hijab* or with a *niqab*, a sewed cloth that covers head and face. While many women, particularly Ismaili, do not cover their heads at home, probably all cover their heads when stepping into the public space. I cannot recall a single time that I have seen a woman in public in Gilgit without some kind of veil. (One exception may be the picture of a female police officer which I found on a social media platform). How much of the head and body is covered, and how, is related to the respective space and identity (see e.g. Gratz 2006: 614-5; 623-4). While Gratz (2006: 651-5) writes that up to the 1990s some women were wearing all-encompassing *burqas*, covering from head to toe, I never saw this kind of *burqa* in Gilgit. Gratz reports that in the 1990s when she conducted her fieldwork, women would describe the idea to walk in the bazaar without the face covered as strange due to the intense looks of the men (Gratz 2006: 645). Whereas I myself often got disturbed by my head-scarfs, local women laughingly explained that they are completely used to have the scarfs on their heads and are not disturbed at all.

er.[31] I thus resorted to outward signs of "modesty" and "respectability" such as wearing plain, unadorned clothing and increasingly bigger *dupattas* and *chadors*.[32] Only during my third visit to Pakistan did I begin to wear more colourful and fashionable clothing again, but I hid it almost completely under a big *chador* when leaving the house.

But while Cook (maybe mockingly) writes that her female Western research partners "hope that shalwar kameez will define them as morally acceptable and culturally appropriate to indigenous people for the sake of work, family, and personal safety" (Cook 2007: 114), I can only confirm this. After I wore full *shalwar-kameez* and covering my head, encroachments by local men (even if not the staring) were drastically reduced. Nevertheless, during every stay in Gilgit I encountered men and women who curiously and sometimes even reproachfully asked me why I did not continue to wear jeans and instead switched to wearing full *shalwar-kameez* and covering my head with *dupatta* or *chador*. Many local women seemed to resent that I did not attempt to pioneer in making trousers and jeans acceptable for women in Gilgit as well. Local men in particular seemed to interpret my switching to *shalwar-kameez* as masquerade and an attempt to disguise, some ridiculing me for my odd attempts to fit in and challenging me to wear "my own" clothes instead. However, throughout the research I found that much discomfort remained with me, even when I was making all efforts to conform. I often felt awkward in the local dress, like an actor trying to fill a strange and debilitating costume. Time and time again I wondered why I had adopted this attire in the first place. Then the memory of the disbelieving stares on the streets and the rape warning I had been given by the bureaucrat (when wearing jeans and a long shirt with sleeves that exposed my wrists) came to my mind, leaving me to wonder why I had begun and continued research in this location in the first place.

As a consequence of trying to appear modest (or what I imagined as being modest), I inadvertently changed not only in dress but also in demeanour. I walked less upright, avoided to look men into their eyes or to shake hands, and was careful to avoid to even accidentally touch men, for example, when handing over money to a shopkeeper or driver. I made efforts to avoid any appearance of "moral laxity" by curbing my range of vision, and to limit interaction with men in public as far as possible. For example, when avoiding to look into men's faces in public spaces such as the street I sometimes became aware of persons known to me only after a loud greeting from them, through which

31 Out of curiosity or boldness, many asked about my whereabouts, or for example, steered towards awkward conversations in which I was immediately requested to provide invitation letters for Germany, a German visa, or even a German spouse for them.

32 Cook mentions as well that *dupattas* (while they are loathed by all foreign women of her research) are presented as a marker of solidarity and respect (Cook 2007: 113).

I recognized them by their voice. While I adopted these features during my stays in Pakistan, they sometimes lasted even longer. Of course I knew how I was supposed to behave at home, but some of those practices had become so habitual that I could not switch back quickly, even if it was disturbing for me and people back home. For example, when male friends and acquaintances at home expected me to greet them with a friendly hug, it took weeks after having come back from Pakistan until I did no longer offend or alienate them by flinching and backing off.

Strategies of behaving and dressing modestly in public in Gilgit, including the observation of gender segregation (avoidance of [eye-]contact with men, trips to the bazaar etc.), are effectively strategies to elicit local sympathies and respectability, as is suggested by Cook (ibid.: 114); yet we have to keep in mind that such strategies are only copying the behaviour of local women. In contrast to Cook though, who refers to the Western women's internalization of "their interpretation of the indigenous male gaze" (ibid.: 73), I maintain that the issue is more complex. One the one hand, when I was in public space both men and women stared at me; the notion of an "indigenous male gaze" is thus only one side of the coin. On the other hand, local women affirm that men stare at them, too, when they are in the public space; in this case it is rather a *general* challenge between women and men and less between foreign and local (or its odd twin-term "indigenous" employed by Cook). Local women, too, have to deal with such situations, often feeling similarly uneasy in a public context, subjected to male gazes or assaults.[33] Local women take measures for their protection, such as covering their heads or even wearing a *burqa*, avoiding contact with non-family men, leaving the house only in daylight, hardly ever moving unaccompanied and especially never unescorted after nightfall, and even locking the doors of their rooms at night.[34] Their behaviour has to be "in line with the culturally prescribed notion of femininity supportive of the man they are with" (Lowe et al. o.A.: 127); if they do so, their men or male family members will go to any lengths and to the full extent of their capabilities to protect them.[35]

But to wear *shalwar-kameez* and to limit contact with men as far as possible was not only a strategy to feel well or less uneasy in Gilgit and to gain

33 For example, Gratz also refers to the local women´s complaint about intense looks of men in the bazaars due to which they cover their bodies in public (Gratz 2006: 645). Beyond that, local women may be or feel even more regulated due to a close monitoring by their family.

34 I would thus argue that many women in Gilgit are not only "afraid of violating male space" (Lowe et al. o. A.: 127) but also afraid that men may violate them, even when they are at home, i.e. in their own / the right space.

35 When I had complained from time to time that some persons damaged my research by spreading malicious rumours, some interlocutors offered to go and beat that person up. Another offered to marry me and to kill anyone who would continue to thwart his wife-to-be.

acceptance. It touches on the question of whether and how it is possible for the researcher to live up to local ideals like that of gender segregation and whether clothes may help by publicly displaying modesty, especially when full compliance with the local gender ideals cannot be achieved. Advice on how to behave is not as easily checked off as is sometimes suggested in travel literature, ethnographic handbooks, or supervisors' suggestions; either type of behaviour – compliance with or resistance to local expectations – may be very difficult to manage and may have much more far-reaching consequences than discussed generally in fieldwork manuals and ethnographic publications. While my supervisors suggested that I should dress "properly", wearing *shalwar-kameez*, under certain circumstances even this attempt may be rather ineffective, as I want to illustrate along Fischer's reference to the *burqa* as a "symbolic clothe": Fischer suggests that the *burqa* is not a sign of modesty and honour as such but "an expression of non-interaction". Hence, even when a woman wears full *burqa* as a sign of honour, this is being challenged when she is seen interacting with a man outside her family (Fischer 1991: 109). Likewise, wearing *shalwar-kameez* alone does not necessarily lend respectability or legitimacy (although I happily admit that I was, for example, approached a lot less by random strangers on the street). So the question remains as how to behave, and how to accomplish interviews and fieldwork, if one has to work in a setting that will, for instance, construe the mode of the work (e.g. talking to [male] people) as morally problematic.

## Hypersexuality and Fear of Change

In the last part of this contribution I will explore the question as to what "morally problematic" means in relation with gender ideals and stereotypes in Gilgit. In her thesis on female Western development workers in Gilgit in the 1990s Nancy Cook comes to the conclusion that the Western women who participated in her study perceive local men in Gilgit as "'lascivious' racialized men, who pose an overriding threat to white women due to their sexual, cultural, and racial 'primitiveness'" (Cook 2007: 65).[36] I want to argue that this apprehension may be exaggerated on one hand and not as unidirectional as it seems on the other. The attributes of being "uninhibited", "morally lax", "morally suspect" and "lascivious" which, according to Cook, are ascribed to local men by foreign women, are equally assigned to Western women by local men (less so by local women), and especially by law enforcement of-

36 According to Cook, a colonial narrative informs Western women's discourse about men in Gilgit. She criticizes that colonial narrative, according to which sex is threatening the "moral order of Western civilization" (Mercer and Julien 1988: 107, cited in Cook 2007: 50) and according to which colonizers, in a civilizing mission attempted to transform the "naked, uninhibited, impetuous 'savages' [...] into cultured individuals" (Cook 2007: 50).

ficers.[37] From a local perspective, Western women are construed to be sexually dangerous; Western women's moral laxity is a widespread stereotype in Gilgit. They are said to have affairs with married and unmarried men alike, tempting them into indecent liaisons. This notion is often rationalized by referring to Western female tourists' behaviour and the local interpretation of that behaviour; that is, talking to men, shaking hands with men, not covering their heads, as well as (assumed, offered or actual) sexual relationships with local men are (even if not unanimously) interpreted as obvious signs of Western women's immorality.[38] Particularly female foreigners who contracted relationships (whether formal or informal) with men from Gilgit may have contributed to the idea that Western women are morally lax and have frivolous sexual relationships. As Cook mentions, this gives rise to the idea (shared both by locals and the Western female development workers of her study) that "unknown and transient foreign women are apparently freer game" (ibid.: 61).[39]

While Cook writes that Western women perceive themselves as (sexually) vulnerable and "Gilgiti men as the source of sexual danger" (ibid.: 65), I want to elaborate on her argument and then to broaden it. Cook relates this fear of the "lascivious male Other" to colonial discourses of educating and civilizing the colonial subjects (an idea that in colonial times was also referred to as "the white man's burden"), inscribed in colonial narratives and perpetuated in travel writings; otherness of the colonial subjects would lead to "racial anxiety" which finds expression in sexuality and sexual fears (ibid.). The perceived fear that "social, sexual and spatial boundaries" are transgressed is also implicated in such racialism (ibid.: 74). Cook argues that these notions result in a "monitoring of sexually dangerous Others" (ibid.: 65), which she relates to the monitoring of local men and their actions by foreign women in Gilgit. I argue, though, that this idea needs to be broadened to include the monitoring of foreign women by locals as well. My experience was that intelligence and law enforcement agencies conceived or construed *me*

37 Cook hardly discusses the question of how and why local men in Gilgit may understand Western women as equally sexually dangerous, yet she gives some indications and relates that "non-Muslim, Western women, especially those traveling unchaperoned, are morally suspect" (Cook 2007: 61; see also ibid.: 120). Unfortunately, since, as Cook herself concedes, "Gilgitis are largely overlooked as independent social agents in [her] project" (ibid.: 23), she does not pursue this problematic much further, and instead concentrates on the Western women´s allegations against local men.

38 In Gilgit, "Westerners" or "angrez" are the terms used for foreign visitors, almost all of whom are from North America, Europe, East and South-East Asia.

39 This is by no means a phenomenon related to Pakistan; as Dubisch relates for Greece, there, too, "loose" and "foreign" are almost synonymous (Dubisch 1995: 31).

as being a threat. Prompted by rumours about alleged improper behaviour – be it drinking alcohol, alleged illicit relationships or "roaming around at all hours" – they spread and checked these rumours, searching for evidence of improper behaviour. In search of people who would support their suspicion they interrogated first and foremost my hosts and interlocutors as well as their employers, telling them stories of improper behaviour and testing their reactions. One intelligence officer, for example, gave one of my interlocutors a hard time because he had suggested that I join him on his trip to a nearby valley for the duration of a religious holiday that sometimes results in fierce clashes between different religious groups. Due to the monitoring of my movements the officer had been informed about our plans to leave the city. Getting pressurized from all sides via the mobile phone, we had to turn round and cancel the journey. Later on, the officer insulted my interlocutor by asking why "enjoyment with the foreigners" should be reserved for him; with that remark he indirectly alluded to alleged immoral behaviour and expressed the idea that female foreigners are ultimately "fair game" who – when unaccompanied – may be chased by any man (i.e. my interlocutor as well as himself) (cf. ibid.: 61). Images of Western women as morally suspect on the one hand and as approachable and desirable as fair game on the other hand are thus not necessarily mutually exclusive as one might infer. Instead, Western women seem to be viewed as combining both characteristics at the same time, being both detestable and desirable (cf. Golde 1986: 8). Officers, for example, did not refrain from accusing me of behaving immorally *and* from hitting on me.[40] While Cook refers to a perceived "hypersexuality" of local men (Cook 2007: 48), I argue that this is accompanied by a "hypersexualization" of Western women (see also ibid.: 56). In my case such a hypersexualization became especially apparent in the suppositions of bureaucrats and law enforcement agencies. They not only spread rumours that I spied on the terrain and on geological resources used in international warfare, but also rumours alluding to sexual misconduct, e.g. insinuating that I used my physical assets to seduce local men in order to elicit secret information. As I was a woman unaccompanied by a spouse or colleague, interaction with men was transformed into the idea of a seductress and spy. Two locally popular fears may have contributed to this: firstly, allegations which suggest that foreigners are spying (both historically as well as recently), and secondly, the fear that today it is particularly women who are spying. Suspicions, mistrust, and fears actually apply to Cook's lascivious male Other, but on top of this also to a lascivious female Other.

40 One high ranking official, for example, extended an invitation for dinner and barbeque, to exchange movies and to spend time in the valley of Hunza, which is popular with tourists and where, as he indicated, the water makes men sexually very active. Diverse officers also commented on my appearance – a liberty that in Gilgit is else essentially restricted to persons of the same gender and to spouses.

As Golde remarked about the lone female researcher, she may be seen as a provocation herself. She is presumed to be naïve; a person "who may become a dupe for those who will be ready to capitalize on her incapacity and inexperience" (Golde 1986: 6). This also results in the perceived need to protect her. "Protection, then, has a double aim–the direct need to insure the safety of the woman, and the protection of others through the prevention of situations that might provoke others to exploit her" (ibid.: 5-6). If a lone woman is seen as fair game, all men have the potential to either protect or trap her. In the end, however, although there were many attempts to trap me, for example through malicious rumours, there were more people who trusted, protected and helped me, and this in spite of continuous allegations of immorality.

I think that the suspiciousness of Western women as being lascivious and immoral can be explained as an anxiety about uncontrollability and change. In an attempt to explain such hypersexualizations of female foreigners, Willson suggests that "nearly any woman outsider who cannot be controlled by the norms of the dominant society is typecast as loose: loose because she is truly independent, and because she is not controlled by the male-ordered society" (Willson 1995: 263). Western women may thus be anticipated as pioneering in behaviour which is regarded as immoral but may (nonetheless) be appreciated and copied by local women. As Cook mentions, drawing on a discourse about female British Muslims, "women are regularly constructed as biological reproducers of the nation, carriers of culture, and bearers of the markers of group identity, their roles, activities, bodies, and sexualities are often controlled to serve the collective interest" (Cook 2007: 41). Local women are thus rarely allowed to follow the lead of Western women. Conversely, we can infer how difficult it may be for local women to (re) define gender roles and identities. For example, the aspiration of local women to work outside the house (probably alongside men) is a fiercely discussed issue in Gilgit. Women are often denied permission to work or study by their families, who will refer to possible dangers connected with potential boundary-crossings regarding *pardah*. For instance, when I had been to the parental home of a female Sunni interlocutor, we had gotten into a hot discussion with her younger brother who had reprimanded her for her ambition to go to the U.S. for further education. On the way home she explained to me that her husband had given her the support and permission to pursue her plans. Hence, while her husband was less concerned about *pardah*, her brothers were much stricter. Even when she was seen greeting a male neighbour her brother would rebuke her while her husband had no problem with this. Many local families are very reluctant to let their daughters leave for extended stays in Western countries – even if they accompany their husbands – for fear that they might return "changed". Likewise, a presumed increase in pre-marriage (emotional or physical) romances is condemned and blamed on the increased private space created by mobile telecommunication and an increasing moral

laxity in Gilgit – all of which is greatly bemoaned by many, especially older people.[41] Perhaps the importance attached to my clothing and the rumours about my "sexual" conduct in Gilgit were also an indicator of such fears of change. Foreign women are especially said to have lax morals and may thus be seen as role models that pose a threat to local morals. Drawing on an article on fieldwork, mobile phones and rumours in Mozambique, I argue that in Gilgit, too, women's behaviour and conduct may be evaluated in the light of "broader socio-economic reconfigurations"; it is feared that they intensify transformations in "a time when intimate relationships, household formation and gender hierarchies are being redefined, alongside changing consumption patterns" (Archambault 2009: 8). As Golde summarised regarding issues of women, rumours, and social expectations:

> *Gossip and rumors, insinuations of wrongdoing, overt and disguised sexual encounters initiated by men, and active attempts to control and limit the [foreign] women's freedom of movement are further expressions of this attitude. [...] Such behaviors not only reveal these attitudes, but they also serve as mechanisms of social control. They contain a message that may be manifestly solicitous, but at the same time constitutes a veiled warning to both the field worker and the community that the limits of tolerance may not be pushed too far.* (Golde 1986: 6)

I thus argue that while one's actual conduct may influence people's ideas to a certain extent, it may not always be possible to anticipate local ideas, patterns and stereotypes and find ways to behave that seem acceptable to everyone (including the researcher him/herself). Doing things one way or the other, one is ultimately subjected to the local patterns of interaction and assessment. It seems as if in Gilgit withdrawal is the only way to counter this – withdrawing to one's own house and family and limiting social contacts and participation in events, which again raises the question of how to do research based on participation and on communication with diverse people.

Other female researchers equally found themselves enmeshed in rumours about their immorality. After not being responsive to a local man, colleagues of mine were accused of being lesbians; others were accused to prostitute themselves, based on a confusion of persons, time, space, and dirty imputations. By the same token, allegations that I had affairs or relationships with various men must have abounded, and I am sure that only a fraction of those rumours was eventually conveyed to me. While many rumours were

41 For example, love- and elopement-marriages are discussed in Gilgit with awe. Though it is common knowledge that there are romantic and physical relationships before (and also outside) marriage, people seem to be torn between admiration of the romantic bravery and disgust of the involved supposed immoralities. While young men frequently speak with fascination and desire about this topic, it is nonetheless socially unaccepted.

just framed in terms of improper behaviour, others were carrying additional allusions to spying. Several interlocutors told me that a group of people – incidentally the bureaucrat I had been introduced to in the beginning for support, but who had continuously kept putting obstacles in my way, and his colleagues – repeatedly nurtured malicious rumours about me, suggesting that they had seen me visiting the Five Star Hotel in Gilgit with a number of men, such as an intelligence agency's colonel or the local Chief Secretary.

But while such lies may have been spread by the bureaucrats on purpose, they resorted to a mode of speculation which seems to be common in Gilgit. To illustrate this point, I want to elaborate on one particular rumour that exemplifies the common mode of hypersexual imaginations in Gilgit. According to this rumour, I had caused the transfer of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan by involving him romantically. More than one interlocutor had heard this explanation of his transfer, and had related this rumour to me. The rumour has the following backdrop: when I was mid-way in my research, several months had already passed in the process of obtaining a second research permit; hence, some families who were friends of mine eventually approached the Chief Secretary, the highest bureaucrat in Gilgit-Baltistan, for help in my case. While at this point in time the Chief Secretary's order for transfer had already been decided for at least one week, this information was not disclosed to the public. When receiving the information that the transfer was finally set for the next day, I swiftly got the opportunity for a quick meeting the same evening; since the introduction of a new office-bearer takes some time, I gladly took this chance. When both social media coverage of our meeting *and* news of his transfer were released the next day, some people immediately related his transferral to our meeting, drawing on the idea of the (imaginary) hypersexuality of foreign women.[42]

While Willson argues that the authority of female anthropologists may be dismissed within the scientific community by negative portrayals that undermine women's "objectivity" and ability to do science, I experienced in the field that there, too, "a woman with authority is a threat to a male established order" (Willson 1995: 266). In my case, paradoxically, malicious rumours projected women's power in order to undermine and diffuse their threatening authority.

## Conclusion

I have argued that my experiences in the field question any authority of the fieldworker as well as the ability to control the course of the research and the outcome.[43] At the same time, the fieldworker him/herself may be exposed to

42 Other people related the Chief Secretary's transferral to the doing of the Chief Minister, drawing on issues of envy and nepotism, as well as negotiation of hierarchy and competencies between politician and administration.

43 This may apply especially to Western fieldworkers in non-Western settings.

local modes of speculation as well as (power) games, experience powerlessness and lack (full) control over the progress of the fieldwork as well as the manner in which he or she is seen by the people in the field – both issues which go hand in hand to a large extent. Although I attribute the difficulties I encountered mostly to my female gender, I maintain that such problems are not necessarily limited to women. As Hastrup suggests, fieldwork experiences have to be considered more generally with regard to control, power relations and knowledge in fieldwork. Anthropological knowledge is emergent from and dependent on the fieldworker, his or her background, as well as the people and the circumstances in the field. Being rendered unable to take control over the process of fieldwork and data collection may lead to diverse problems, such as extremely fragmented knowledge or emotional impairment. The question that remains, however, is how fieldwork can be done when fieldwork itself is contrary to local norms of acceptable behaviour; this question equally touches methods, logistics, ethics, and emotions.

Arguably, a different researcher in the same field may have very different experiences and face less damaging dilemmas, or may be able to use the existing local patterns and norms to his or her advantage. At the same time, the data generated through such impaired work is by no means invalid. As Hastrup argues, anthropological knowledge is always performative and relational. Thus, anthropological writings gain authority less through what other disciplines regard as positivistic evidence but instead through individual and interpersonal experiences and "narrative ethics". While this also makes anthropological writing vulnerable to positivist demands for proof and evidence, Hastrup reasons instead that "the ethical demand is to 'get it right', not in any ontological sense, but in being true to the world under study and to the epistemological premises of anthropology" (Hastrup 2004: 469). Even if lack of control as to the direction of the research as well as one's self-presentation results in powerlessness and dismay, as Gill and MacIean observe in the introductory quotation, this does not mean that the results are invalid. To the contrary: I contend that even if the topic the researcher initially set out to study cannot be studied as easily as expected, it is the core premise of anthropological work that the specific social environment in which the data is collected has to be understood and used as the background against which the data must be reflected and analysed. For example, through my experiences I learned a lot about issues of mis- and distrust, but also about the importance and joy of trust – especially when it is granted in view of events and rumours that, if taken at face value, argue against it.

Even though my experiences illustrate the disadvantages and even dangers of entering a setting naïvely and unprepared for backlashes, when I discussed the events with colleagues their statements supported the notion that it is hardly possible to prepare oneself from top to bottom for what will happen during fieldwork; to the contrary, unexpected fortuitous events may

quicken the fieldwork and often make the very advantage of anthropological work. This is meant to say that the researcher should remain flexible and adjustable to essential local circumstances, currents and frames. Instead of trying to pursue only some certain, expected knowledge, it may be fruitful to value and expand on one's own individual experiences and explore them creatively in order to do justice to oneself, the people in the field, and the academic output.

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