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Single or Married? Positioning the anthropologist in tourism research.

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Abstract

In this paper I reflect upon the difference 'stages', appellations, and roles I went through during my fieldwork in Botiza, a village situated in the North-western part of Romania. The village has developed a form of locally managed rural tourism since 1994. My fieldwork coincided with a period of transformation, in which there were very few tourists and local tourism politics were hardly developed, through a period of exponential growth in tourism demand between 1995 and 2001. Both the populace and the administration have had to review local social dynamics, in order to organise the village and deal with the increasing tourism demand. I was particularly interested in tourist-local interaction. I observed that whilst the impact of change is present in politics and in practises of tourism, it is not recognized in the narratives. Having lived for a long time with a family in Botiza that hosts tourists, I observed the everyday practices of the hosts and, at a certain times, I, the ethnographer, played a part in the context I was observing. Far from home and alone I entered local houses and met people, being named each time 'the guest', 'the sister', 'the friend', 'the teacher', 'the tourist', 'the stranger', 'the easy girl'. The very first question I was always asked was "Married or not?" The extent to which I was rejected or accepted according to the context or/and the information brought me inside my research and formed part of my fieldwork experience.

Keywords: Host – guest relationships, social roles in fieldwork, reflexivity.

Introduction

This paper draws on a wider research on the anthropology of tourism carried out for my PhD (Cipollari, 2005). The topic of the research was the analysis of the interactions that are part of the ethnographic encounter that is realized through practices and narratives around specific issues such as locality, tradition and search for the past. The relationship between gender and ethnography was not considered during fieldwork, it was not my intention to

discuss my gender identity since I was not observing local gender identities, or so I thought. Such issues, however, have become important to me over years and through deeper examination of my research data.

In this paper I will consider the question put by (Callaway, 1992: 42) 'Can autobiography become anthropology?' According to Crick (1995: 213) anthropology is inherently semi-autobiographical, the extent of the 'semi' is to be found in the blurred border that scholars choose to draw somewhere, at some point in their writings. The intent should be to make findings clear without deleting researchers from the situation itself, nor suffocating the context with their presence.

Reflecting on my presence and my positioning means considering my gaze (Urry, 1990) on those that observe, and so this paper will deal with the question of identities surrounding the supposed host - guest opposition from which many authors warn that distance should be kept. Smith's (1989) hosts and guests distinction was immediately adopted by many scholars and was widely used but, like many other categories, it is now being called into question. The evolving host - guest distinction refers to socially-constructed categories that are shifting even though they appear to be distinct and distinguishable. In some cases the host - guest distance may appear ambiguous and weak, while in others it is strongly marked (Chambers, 2000, Waldren, 1996). Considering the two 'poles' (tourists - non tourists, hosts - guests) as dualistic and homogenous communities necessarily entails errors of interpretation that anthropological literature has widely underlined (e.g. Boissevain, 1996, Simonicca, 1997). Distinctions between hosts and guests become more and more blurred since the practices of each subject overlap and change according to innumerable variables. Ethnographies show that tourism analysis must consider the complex heterogenous scenario in which subjects play and must give account of situations where borders are more and more shaded and categories become fluid, permeable, porous. (Cipollari, 2009).

However, relational processes of categorisation, typifying and manipulation are central for the anthropology of tourism, constituting our 'professional habitus' (Bourdieu, 1998). For example, Tucker (2003: 118) claims that the terms hosts and guests may be used to refer to the relations she observes in Göreme (Turkey). Contemporary ethnographies reflect on how the subjects of the analysed encounters build relationships and how definitions are used to name each part of the encounter. It is a process which does not avoid problems, ambiguities, misunderstandings or controversies, but which enables the researcher to refer to subjects and their practises without using a *priori* constructed categories.

Crick (1995) and Michel (1998), among others, have showed that among the subjects in a tourist setting, relations between tourists and anthropologists are no less problematic than those between hosts and guests. On one side we have anthropologists observing tourists who are in turn observing locals, who observe both tourists (to gauge their needs) and anthropologists (to understand what is worth observing). On the other side, anthropologists observe locals too, and analyse their observations and adaptation or reaction to tourists (Boissevain, 1996, Cipollari, 2007). It is a 'mirror game' reflecting what one side expects to see from the other (Cipollari, 2008: 126).

In this paper I show that whenever I reflected about my positioning, I felt uncomfortable and uneasy. Despite interacting 'nicely and helpfully' with local people, and being honest and frank in satisfying their curiosity (leaving, as far as I know, good memories of myself in several people's minds). I believe I never fully gave an image of myself that truly reflects what I am: an (independent) female researcher. It was easier for me to convey that to tourists that I met for short periods, rather than to the people I lived with for months. The relative difference and parallels that ethnographers have with informants play into relations creating distances and closeness that affect mutual understanding and knowledge.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical discussion on the debate about reflexive practice and gender in tourism research through ethnographic data collected during different periods of fieldworks¹ and re-elaborated through the 'filter of biographical time' which is part of post-field analysis (Coleman, 2006).

The second purpose of the paper is to highlight some significant moments that make the difference in ethnographic experience. I will consider troubles and conflicts as 'significant field events' (Fortier, 1996: 305), as revelatory issues that help the researcher to proceed a step deeper in the field and in the production of knowledge. I will argue that '...intimacy can in itself be disadvantageous' (Pemunta, 2009: 2) and that distance and closeness must be considered each time in relation to subjects' multiple identities, rather than to the insider/outsider distinction, applicable to both ethnographer/informants and tourists/locals. There are examples of behaviours that transcend such dichotomies, proving to be deeper relations, incidents of some kind, misunderstandings or expectations, and generally they occur unexpectedly (Bell, Caplan and Karim, 2003). On a more pragmatic level, this article deals with subjects shifting their positioning, their identities and with the myriad complications involved in gaining access to different subjects' worlds.

Reflexive practice and gender

Although this article does not aim to give an overview of literature on reflexivity in ethnography, I will cite some works that helped me proceed in this direction. I mention selected works to highlight the path that led me to the writing of this article but they do not represent a comprehensive review. First of all, some writers of anthropology of tourism monographs '...make no apology for where [they] include [themselves] in [their] text[s]' (Tucker, 2003: 16). This to some extent helps avoid the impasse created after Crick's 1995 article on anthropologists' defensiveness about being together with and confused with tourists. Anthropologists such as Bruner (2005), Satta (2001),

¹ Fieldwork was carried out for 18 months between 1999 to 2001, and one month in 2007

Tucker (2003) and Waldren (1996) put themselves into their monographs as their research includes participant observation and interviews and they know that the relations and encounters that they analyse cannot be removed from their presence in the field. However, given that tourism is a ‘...highly mobile field of study’, the ‘relational processes of positioning’ are rather awkward and insecure (Simoni and McCabe, 2008:186). In particular, in the anthropology of tourism, identification of the anthropologist with locals or with tourists is commonly made each time by different observers (ibid, Crick, 1995).

As well as using academic tourism literature including personal reflections, I drew hints and suggestions from works where the authors reflect on their personal experience as sources of knowledge. In this regard all chapters in Bell, Caplan and Karim (1993) as well as those in Okely and Callaway (1992) are insightful, as are Cowan (1990), Fortier (1996), Frohlick and Harrison (2008), Gallo (2009) and Hastrup (1987). As it is apparent most of the authors are women scholars, it seems to give credence to those authors that claim that the ‘I, the ethnographer’ was first discovered and used by women (Okely and Callaway, 1992, Davies, 1999). Callaway (1992) notes and explains this following Dumont’s suggestion that women ‘...were left with the task of conjuring the impurities of experience ... while the men were exclusively doing ‘the real thing’ (Dumont in Callaway, 1992:37).

Research context

Doing fieldwork in a specific area, I studied the processes of social and cultural change which tourism introduces in a rural area essentially formed on a micro-economy and popular traditions. I examined the dynamics activated by tourists’ encounters with the local community, bearing in mind that these encounters are often mediated and influenced by other subjects, such as the institutions that promote, organize and manage tourism both at local and at international level. The research was in Maramureş²: a mountain region in

² The current administrative territory is much smaller than in the past: about two thirds of its territory belongs now to Ukraine, the present borders were defined by law n.2 in 1968.

Northwest Romania, occupying a vast area of the Eastern Carpathians. Since the seventies, Maramureş has been highlighted by the Romanian Ministry of Tourism for its landscape and local traditions that have been the focus of much research on folklore and popular traditions by several anthropologists, both Romanian and not. In the nineties, interest in tourism within Romania increased due to post-revolution policies aimed at promoting tourism. In 1989 the PHARE Programme (an aid programme of European Community for Eastern and Central European countries) began to invest in local development. At the beginning the project did not focus directly on tourism, but little by little some activities on the promotion and development of local tourism began to be developed.

In 1993 Romania became a member of Eurogites, a European federation for the development of tourism and the promotion of rural habitats, funded by the European Union and by PHARE (Bran, Marin and Simon, 1997:128). To support this activity, the Romanian government put in place new tax regulations for tourist businesses, sometimes granting credits to those farmers investing and restoring their houses to attract tourism. Since 1994 two major associations have been registered at the Ministry of Tourism and Agriculture and have organized rural tourism in Maramureş: The National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism in Romania (ANTREC) and Opération Villages Roumain (OVR) established after the 1989 revolution to act in three complementary sectors: in the agriculture, tourism and handicraft sectors and help stimulate economic development.

One of the features of tourism in Maramureş is the limited capacity of reception. This fact, together with a highly reduced public transport system and information centres, necessarily leads to smaller and easily manageable groups of tourists and to a made-to-measure interaction of tourists with the environment and with the local community. Some local houses have been selected according to parameters of countries with a long tradition of tourist management (e.g. Belgium and France). Host families thus play a key role in

linking two worlds: on the one hand they represent, in tourists' eyes, the foreign family with whom they share the house, on the other hand, they represent the entire community of which that family is only a part. All the above (hosts, guests, intermediaries, the local community) represent *the interlocutors* of my research. They are men and women, each with a personal role both within the family and in tourist management. My informants were mainly middle-aged people, again of both sexes, all married and with children mostly younger than myself. Interacting with younger people was more difficult than with older ones for various reasons. First of all, young families rarely run a guest house because women are too busy with child-care, secondly, - on average - unmarried people are still studying in university towns, thirdly, students who visit their families during school holidays are kept busy by their parents with chores, as a way of reciprocating the money invested in their education.

Tourists choose Maramureş as a family holiday, leading to a sort of 'familiar' hospitality, as if the tourists were visiting relatives. It is quite common for the women to get to know each other, with the woman on holiday trying to be of help to her host. Men may also try to communicate – though this is less frequent – and sometimes share some heavier work around the house (or even work in the fields). Groups of tourists can be made of groups of friends or of organised package tours. In the latter cases it is less common for any closer relationship to develop, though the spaces to be shared are the same. On the rare occasions when the tourist is a single traveller, family life is not shared or explored to the same extent on either side. In the case of a female tourist, it is possible for the host family to feel protective towards her. This leads mainly to two sorts of reaction: the tourist might enjoy this 'warm' hospitality and accept local 'presence' in her holiday plan, or – most commonly – interact as little as possible with the family and spend time on her own, trekking or visiting nearby villages.

Gaining access

During my fieldwork I lived with three different families: the Mihai, the Petrov and the Petric³. The first time I visited Botiza I was travelling with my husband and some friends. We asked at the local information bureau, as suggested by the Rough Guide (I later discovered that it was the O.V.R. office), and we have been directed to the Mihai's. During this first and rather short stay I was treated as a tourist usually is: coddled, pampered and fed in a pleasant and relaxing way.

On a second trip, I asked for a different family (the Petrics), out of curiosity and desire to see other people. I had the same experience: a pleasant welcome and comfortable stay. The next year, when I returned to Botiza to conduct fieldwork, I managed to stay with the second family again, but I arrived earlier than planned and for a few days I was hosted by a third family, the Petrovs. After that, every time I returned I lived with the Petrics.

On the way I was hosted, the most obvious difference I personally experienced was between the first two families and the third. The warm and cheerful hospitality I received was the same from all three families, but I was surprised to note the different reactions to my explanations for being there. The first two families had little or no reaction to my explanation of why I was going to live there for such a long time (compared to the 4 to 7 days usual for a holiday). Neither my long-term rental, nor my continual questions, provoked much reaction from my hosts, in particular at the beginning. I was taken to be one of those 'ethnic' or 'cultural' tourists that bombards them with questions because they are interested in local life.

Quite differently, the Petrov family, being less used to receiving tourists, showed from the outset a marked curiosity towards both myself and my reason for being there. Before I could start asking about them, the whole family was trying to understand parts of my life, my work and my plans while in their village. I found myself completely absorbed in trying to explain about

³ Local people will appear under pseudonyms.

anthropology, ethnography, fieldwork, tourism research and issues relating to the presentation of my work and the explanation of my presence there, all with rather limited vocabulary because my Romanian was quite poor at the time. Once we overcame the understanding of basic anthropology, their curiosity turned to my personal life, family, education as if this was their moment to take a sort of snapshot of myself before allowing me to enter their world. I was asked about all the information they thought important in order to get to know me. Only after a full and exhaustive explanation about myself was I allowed by the Petrovs to enter their world. In fact, just few days after I arrived at the Petrovs I was invited to a wedding with them. They suggested me to wear their family's traditional wedding clothes and I was allowed to participate with the women in the bride's preparation before the marriage. As a matter of fact, after long and deep conversations approximating *interviews* by most of the members of the family, I was to some extent considered as one of them⁴. In their eyes, I represented no danger, I was interested in them and in their lives, I was considered somebody with whom they could share their house and their daily life. The distance between *me* and *them* was partly overcome through their way of admitting me, which was testing me and my willingness to answer their questions.

Besides agreeing to the wedding invitation, I found no problem in letting them accept my presence in various circumstances. Even though I lived with them for only a short time, I joined them in the fields where they worked everyday, not only while I lived with them but also on several other occasions.

Later, during fieldwork, I realised that what happened with this family was exactly how anthropologists behave with their informants. Answering local people's questions about myself was a sort of prelude to the relationship I wanted to achieve in order to work on my research. I found it to be a sort of

⁴ This situation fits Macintyre's (1993) challenging question: 'Fictive kinship or mistaken identity?', in which she reflects upon being taken as 'fictive kin'. As kin of this fictive kind, anytime I returned to Botiza I went to greet them and they always expected this from me, as they do from any relative that goes to Botiza. Moreover, anytime I left Botiza I was asked to give them a call once I reached home, so they felt sure I had arrived safely. The only time I was not clearly asked for this phone-call, was the time I went to visit them with my husband, as if my travelling with him provided guarantee of my safety.

'questionnaire' I could cope with, and after a while I expected it. I also found I should not try to elude it since, in some way, it would be a way of 'paying up front' for what I was going to ask of them: time and information. It could be considered a sort of mutual and fair exchange, time for time, 'information for information'. How could I ask them for time and helpfulness if I myself was not willing to give them some of mine? At times, I recalled the work of ethnographers and the feelings of anxiety that we 'record regarding the taking of information from people with no significant return' (Tucker, 2003: 20). I also wondered, whether I got used to a certain category of questions and found answering them particularly easy, sometimes even repeating myself, what would then be my interlocutors' reactions to my questions? Besides tourists, who rarely meet again and would therefore have little opportunity to talk about me, local people do discuss my presence there, so would they also prepare answers to my own questions? Would they also be comparing my questions to them and finding a common way of answering them?

On the one hand, people's questions about ourselves are the easiest way of satisfying curiosity and getting to know who we are. On the other hand, they reveal their expectations of us. Reflecting on other people's expectations is an effort that I believe is worth making when in the field. As in homeopathy the doctor often asks the patient: 'how do you think people see you?', in the field the way ethnographers believe they are seen and interpreted by 'others' says a lot about 'the relationships we can establish with our informants and how these (often transient) relationships give us access to differing realities and interpretations' (Simoni and McCabe, 2008: 177).

Entering the closed-off spaces of the Petrovs was a form of full immersion in a rite of passage (van Gennep, 1909): once I emerged from their testing of me I became something similar to a family member. I adapted myself to living in a house without a toilet, I went to the fields with the women and the children, I ate and drank with the family, sharing kitchen utensils, while the mother made sure I was always reserved the best bites or the less strenuous jobs,

compared to other family members older or younger than myself: being an 'outsider' family member had its privileges. However, even though I spent all my time with the family (parents, children, grandparents) who lived and worked together, the only person I really interacted with was the mother. She drew the boundaries between myself and the others as she was the one in charge of tourist activity, therefore deciding for everybody acting as communicator when there were problems of understanding. Furthermore, I was able fully to understand her, communicating both verbally and by gestures, whereas I did not understand others and vice versa, a reciprocal difficulty in understanding. Even so, her acceptance of me made the whole family open and indulgent to me.

On the contrary, with the Petrics I was able to enter the backstage (MacCannell, 1989) once I made myself accepted by all as a member of the family. Even though the mother was, even in this case, the central element in family interaction, living in the house for so long meant deeper knowledge and sharing with each person individually. In both families people were always nice and respectful to me, but my efforts to penetrate their personal and familiar boundaries were different. The different ways the two families acted on several occasions allowed me to live through different experiences. On the one hand, the spontaneous curiosity towards a stranger and the genuine acceptance of the other entailed their involvement in family practices, on the other hand, familiarity with the stranger due to a longer and more structured activity related to tourist led to a more distant and formal relationship. In due course, I was able to participate more fully in family life as well, but it entailed a long and careful preparation on both sides. The Petrics are quite used to coping with tourists, they speak a bit of French and can manage basic conversations with visitors. Hence boundaries between the family and outsiders are more formal, though not evident, leaving less space for immediacy and spontaneity.

Gaining intimacy

Once I was considered one of Petrics' *musafir* (guest) and being a woman, I was allowed to go further into their *backstages*, for example I could eat in the kitchen with them, go to the market and see the butcher slaughter a calf for them, follow them to the fields, observe them preparing the room for new tourists, accompany the daughter to relatives' houses and join her at girls' afternoon tea. I helped them with these and several other activities, I shared some of their sorrows and finally I was called *pui mami* (mother's chicken) when I expressed homesickness.

As an anthropologist I had access to people's stories, as a woman I had access to the private sphere where both locals and tourists believe they behave freely. 'Women may have access to other women in the field by virtue of gender, marital status, or childbirth' (Warren and Hackney, 2000: 6), the possibility of observing women doing the washing or chatting at tea-time was made easier by virtue of my gender⁵. Gaining access to certain spaces means access to anecdotes, chatting, gossip etc, all forms of information that reveal more than other modes of speech.

In Botiza I learned to live in the numerous social places I was assigned and in each I was interpreted differently. In the relationships between ethnographer and informants, circulation of reciprocity applies also to mutual interpretation, negotiating engagement and obligations is part of long interactions with people within the context of the research. Entering other people's families, societies, milieux, necessarily means being part of an interactive game and therefore accepting being interpreted, named, labelled.

Over months my position has shifted from that of being a particularly interested tourist, at times perhaps obtrusive (though most of the local hosts are used to answering tourists' questions and satisfying their curiosity) to

⁵ To analyse the symbolic universe of commensality, Cowan (1990: 67-70) describes women's gatherings in each other's houses for coffee, taking part to such visits helps the author to penetrate intimate contexts and to take part to the exchange of local news.

being one of 'the Petrics' guests'. This can be considered an advantage to both sides. On their side, the Petrics were lucky enough to have a long-term paying guest, a language translator, and, at times, a nice girl that a lot of families would not mind 'adopting'. On my side, I no longer needed to clarify where I was living, with whom and sometimes, by being introduced as 'the Petrics' guest', people already knew who I was and what I was there for. With each different status I 'acquired', I clearly observed different attitudes and expectations. As intimacy became deeper, family obligations increased. The distance between ethnographer and tourists can be proportional to the proximity in which the researcher is with the local family. For example, tourists are free to spend their time as they wish both outside and inside the guest-house. However I was sometimes asked to participate in the interaction between hosts and other guests even though I would not have chosen to do so at that precise moment.

Sometimes my presence was clearly requested by the Petrics⁶ for various reasons: a need for translation, or in order to show and explain to tourists the exhibition room (carpets, handicrafts) or even to sell carpets or receive guests on their behalf, for example if they had to work elsewhere. I remember once I got particularly annoyed by the father who came to knock at the bathroom door (while I was taking a shower) because they needed me for a translation with tourists, something I usually did willingly, although not on this occasion. By acting as translator, on several occasions, I gained access to negotiations about prices. I realised then that the borderline between my presence for my research interests and my being there for the needs of both my hosts and their guests was narrowing.

During my fieldwork, boundaries between myself as a person and myself as a researcher have been constantly shifting. If, on the one hand, I wanted to observe tourist arenas (I frequently asked people to introduce me, or to let me

⁶ I refer to the parents since children, though involved in chores connected to tourist hospitality, are not decision makers in the tourist business.

participate in events), on the other hand, I wanted to feel free to decide whether something was of interest to me or not. Sharing experiences may constitute a basis for identification and a way of being accepted (Macintyre, 1993), however it may also lead to ambiguous and demanding situations that the researcher must cope with.

Relationships are not static, nor can they be considered unproblematic, whether at home or in the field. Working with people, wherever it is, necessarily leads to relationships, the longer the stay, the more 'the nature of relationships and roles the fieldworkers find themselves in will change' (Warren and Hackney, 2000: 13). Once this is accepted we must take a step further in considering the fluidity of the process of building and having relationships 'we view the roles and the relationships of the fieldworkers as the dynamic and fluid processes of interaction and negotiation' (ibid: 14). Over time, both places and relationships change, and sometimes reflecting on those changes is neither easy nor painless. Shifting from a level of knowledge to an intimacy, or from the observing of practices to the sharing of similar practises is the ambiguous and challenging path that the ethnographer is prone to follow. Ethnographers' roles change over time and situation, ranging 'from spy to adoptive child or both'⁷ (ibid: 14).

Another issue in ethnographer's positionings is related to dress and appearance⁸. On the one hand, appearance would underline my gender during fieldwork and on the other hand, my proximity with outsiders. Thinking it over, I realize that both at the beginning and at the end, of my stay in Botiza, my appearance was less similar to village women than it was to tourists. (see plates 1 & 2) In this respect a tourist is much less gendered than a local. Wearing casual clothes most of the time, either shorts or long trousers and nearly always sportswear, makes a lot of tourists broadly similar. (Photo

⁷ Even though Warren and Hachney (2000: 14-15) give an example of a male being assigned a kin role, in anthropological literature such examples are conveyed mainly in women's accounts.

⁸ Being ascribed to a certain category through the way one is dressed is an issue that Cowan (1990: 59) too discusses when she finds she is taken for a high school student by her shoes.

n. 3) Apart from one dress and one skirt, both very simple, I had packed only trousers. My clothes were not so different from most European or north American tourists in Botiza, a western concept of comfortable and casual

Plate 1



Photo courtesy of the author

Inside a local bar, a married (on the right) and an unmarried woman (on the left). The younger woman is wearing mix elements of modern with traditional inspired clothes, a habit very diffused in Botiza. (August 2007)

uniform that makes gender distinctions really weak and blurred (Plates 2 and 3). However I did not realise for a long time that this sort of ‘uniform’ defined the image I was given by locals.

To the family I was married but I did not act as a married woman would, my actions were confusing. Beside not having my husband on a day-to-day basis and not sharing many of married women’s daily concerns with household work, I spent a lot of time with tourists, a category whose marital status was unknown to local community. As a matter of fact on my birthday or on other evening occasions when I decided to wear the only skirt I had brought to the field, I was again observed by the family I lived with, and once they drew attention to the ambiguous fact that I was going out to a bar with a male tourist, wearing a skirt. To the family, wearing a skirt implied going on a date, and yet this was inconsistent with what they knew about my marital status.

Plate 2



Photo courtesy of the author

Two tourists walking in Botiza wearing “typical” tourist’s clothes. (July 2007)

Plate 3



Photo courtesy of the author.

A couple of Belgian tourists posing with the ethnographer and the host before leaving, everybody is wearing trousers and T-shirts. (August 2007)

Again, attention was drawn to something without importance from my personal point of view (see plate 4). Furthermore, had I wanted to dress like local women I would not have been able to, since people make their own

clothes. On the occasions when I was given traditional dresses to wear, it only partially simulated village women and anybody could tell I was not local. (see plate 5)

Plate 4



Photo courtesy of the author

The ethnographer and host family young girls wearing 'Sunday clothes': blouse and flowered pleated skirt. (August 2007)

Furthermore, had I wanted to dress like local women I would not have been able to, since people make their own clothes. On the occasions when I was given traditional dresses to wear, it only partially simulated village women and anybody could tell I was not local (see plate 5)

From my shoes to my glasses, from my watch to my shaved legs I simply looked like a foreign woman wearing local clothes. In this case old women liked me more, as if I were expressing a deeper acceptance at their traditions, whereas young women found me funny and 'too traditional' as young women mix elements of modern with traditional clothes, for example high-heeled shoes with Sunday skirts while men, both young or older found me of no interest at all.

The faint line between being considered a woman doing her job or a woman with a private life like any other (therefore subject to flattery or flirtation) was

overcome by appearance. The value placed on appearance is a crucial issue among respondents and informants: ‘...different dress and hairstyle may be adopted to fit into the culture’s gender role, to dissociate oneself from those roles for some particular purpose, or to satisfy other demands based on age or social class’ (Warren and Hackney, 2000:23).

Plate 5



Photo courtesy of the author

A Rumanian family and the ethnographer posing wearing local traditional dress during a folklore dance festival in a Botiza’s nearby village. On the left somebody is staring at the photo-group. (August 2000)

Giving an account of personal experience challenges the traditional insider/outsider distinction because it is too simplistic and freezes all other differences. The multiple identities each subject embodies ‘suggests that everyone is an outsider / insider to a certain degree’ (Pemunta, 2009:1). Often tourists feel they are part of the game much earlier than the ethnographer, since their ‘search for authenticity’ makes them transcend mundane differences. Feeling included in the host family is part of the tourist experience they are looking for (Cipollari, 2005). Gaining access to tourists' intimacy took place with grater immediacy than with locals. With some of the tourists I lived with in the same house, closeness was due to culturally shared background, knowledge, humour, intentions, etc, all sentiments that we experienced in environments and spaces that did not belong to us.

After my first trip to Botiza the majority of village people did not see me as a tourist. Even though the reasons for my research were not clear to most of the people I interacted with I was given a different status from other foreigners who were in the village for a long time or who returned periodically. For most of the people I was 'Petric's fata', that is Petric's girl in the sense of (acquired) daughter. About one month after my arrival, village people referred to me as Petric's *musafir*. At that time the term 'guest' sounded rather ambiguous since I could still be a simple paying 'guest' or a personal family guest, such as other people they received from time to time. In Botiza, people call *musafir* relatives or friends who come to visit and are lodged in the same house. Even when I would be considered a 'member of the family', I would be introduced to others as *musafir*. It was hard for me to distinguish when somebody was a tourist on his second visit, and therefore named *musafir*, or a guest invited by somebody of the family, for example when children return home during the holidays they may travel with some city friends, even those who have moved from Botiza to a city and are married may visit their parents with some families, *musafir* again. Basically, I had (and still have) no clue in telling if a *musafir* is considered a closer relation but still a guest that will pay for the service, or somebody invited by the family. Just like 'tourist', 'guest' is a situational transitory term, an identity given or adopted episodically in people's lives (Frohlick and Harrison, 2008).

Familiarizing themselves with local people is something that both tourists and anthropologists like and have to do. 'Going native' may include a pretence of being a member of the host society. Being identified and introduced to people as *musafir* has the double effect of telling the other who the outsider is (or at least in which family they are located) and, on the other hand, makes the guest feel a more familiar tourist. The notion of *musafir* is obviously used with different registers according both to the person using it and to those to whom it is applied, nonetheless it may be used ironically to indicate someone who is to be considered an insider.

Being associated with the local family I lived with had consequences of two kinds: on the one hand, it allowed me to enter the emotional sphere of family life, and on the other hand, it obliged me to shoulder responsibilities and duties on a par with other family members. Thus, I found myself hemmed in the domestic sphere. Each time I went out to meet someone I was asked by the father who I was going to meet and why, sometimes he tried to persuade me not to go, claiming I was bothering people, or that I should not stick my nose into other people's business. Restrictions on movement and on meeting people were applied to me as they were to his wife and daughter. My overstepping such limits was not painless for me, causing anger and anxiety, nor for the family, who saw me as a rebellious western woman, potentially giving rise to problems of decency. Gallo (2009) accounts for similar considerations as part of her participant observation during fieldwork in Kerala (India). She compares women's lifestyles in Ernakulam with their female friends and relatives who migrated to Rome, and sees their different lifestyle as a '...liberation from oppressive patriarchal hierarchies' (Gallo, 2009:94), the straightforwardness of this interpretation is progressively reached by cumulative prolonged multi-sited fieldwork. In my case I could not fall into such a patriarchal interpretation, since Romanian families are not so structured, however I painfully and personally experienced the problems of limitations and boundaries imposed by local men on family women. Besides women's explanation that I was thus treated as a way of providing protection and expressing parental love I could not avoid experiencing it as a personal restriction of my liberties and choice. Overstepping such boundaries was on every occasion a compromise between myself and Ioan Petric (the father), one of us always had to yield both freedom and power to the other, sometimes it went more smoothly than others, depending on each other's patience, the willingness to joke or be mocked for a while, my capacity not to react, etc. My desire for discretion and my discomfort in the face of the prospect of accepting subjugation to male authority put me in a state of anger and anxiety more profound than it would have been elsewhere, in places or situations where I would feel able to negotiate borders and limits. As Gallo

argues '...my relations with men and women were tainted with more tension, competition and suspicion that raised many questions on the role of conflicts between the ethnographer and informants in shaping fieldwork relations and outcomes' (ibid:94). Ambiguous love-hate relationship with the field work often colours research experiences and so did mine, 'emotional polarities of longing and anger, friendship and contempt, attraction and detachment' (Fortier, 1996: 305) are at stake all the time.

This is nothing new to anthropologists, nor does it pertain only to specific research, rather it is the constitutive essence of the ethnographic method in different contexts. I trod a fine line between being outsider, house helper, language mediator (between locals and tourists) and family member, with all that these roles imply. These identities allowed me to work on my research, switching from critical observer to embodying forms of participation that allowed me to enter the locality, with its spoken and unspoken worlds (Davies, 1999: 72). The different ways I was from time to time called, introduced, labelled, indicated as being... represent at once the levels of intimacy to which I was somehow promoted. As Satta (2001:163) observes during his fieldwork, social relationships with informants locate researchers in the space where they can act, move, perform. The area in which I could freely move was determined by the ways people named me.

Single or married?

Fieldwork ensured that I started and am still walking a path of self awareness of my gender identity. Perceiving myself as a cosmopolitan woman, I thought I was relieved of the obligation of gender, or that I could give virtually no importance to my being gendered. I did not need to think about my being a woman, embodying the results of generations of struggle for women's independence, of course, reflection on the extent and consequences of those achievements is still relevant, but it would locate the discussion in a larger debate that has no place here.

I was of course not gender blind, but I thought I could literally leave certain personal components of my private life at home, as if life before fieldwork could be left behind together with unnecessary baggage. Fieldwork is often an opportunity to realize that some 'baggage' intrinsically belongs to us and, as such, we cannot avoid taking it with, as Callaway (1992: 30) points out 'a deepening understanding of our own gendered identities and the coded complexities of our being' is often offered through '...insights into the lives of others'. Caplan also admits that in spite of her 'attempts to be ungendered, even 'asexual' ' (1993:172) she became conscious of her gender as never before during the time she spent in Mafia Island (Tanzania), where she took important decision regarding her private life and her intimate relationship. As for me, Botiza did not lead me to major changes in my personal life, but I started to refer to my husband as such and not by his given name, something I had had difficulties with before, fearing that using this relationship term, characteristically used by older women, would make me seem older than I actually was.

Every meeting with someone new was hallmarked by an initial question that I still 'hear' in my mind very clearly when I think of all the times I met somebody new in the village (local, not a tourist): '*singura sau casatorita?*'. This literally means 'single or married?'. Marital status divides local women into two groups: being married means running a house, taking decisions, being less dependent on the parents but more on the husband. I never think of myself as a married woman, and in that situation I thought of myself as an Italian PhD researcher, a student of anthropology of tourism, 'a young and intrepid fieldworker' is the image I most liked of myself.

Being married was something I had left to one side during fieldwork because, to my mind, it is something that has little or nothing to do with work. In reality, it turned out that I could not have been more wrong. The category of 'married woman' encompassing all others including gender, as a way of defining identity through relational processes (Caplan, 1993), is something I learned

during my fieldwork. My being identified as a married woman was the first instance for a number of initial questions. My positioning within married women as a category was followed by the assumption that I would enact the local identity of a married woman. My interacting with tourists (both male and female) and my establishing relations with men and women was sometimes read as a statement of lack of seriousness. Even though I never openly received any injunction to behave as a respectable woman should, it was nonetheless an expectation that people's expressions and comments revealed. For some locals I was believed to be frivolous even in my home, otherwise why should I act with such perceived impropriety in their environment? This reflection shows how locals used to identify me with outsiders perceiving the sense of lack of limitations and adventure that animates tourist activities.

During my fieldwork I was 25 years old and according to local custom already supposed to be married and perhaps with one child. Once assured that I was indeed married, the second big issue remained of why I was there alone. There ought to be a good reason (or rather some sort of problem) explaining why I was so far from home alone, that is without my husband. Quite often, when I explained that because of work we had to live apart from time to time, my interlocutors asked questions in order to determine if my husband agreed to my absence and openly mentioned the fact that I should not take it for granted that he would wait for me. In their eyes, my husband might have agreed to my being away, but that did not mean that he would wait for me to return, he might change his mind and find another woman. In Botiza, as well as in many other places, issues of 'trust' between husbands and wives are very common in women's chats and in local jokes. Cowan (1990) too reports of local people in Sohos (Northern Greece) warning her that her husband would find someone else while she was conducting research.

Accepting to be the butt of gender jokes is part of fieldwork, in my experience I constantly fought with myself in order to stay in the tricky position of being

the object of such jokes, blaming it on the pretended poor mastery of the language. However, on the occasions where I openly refused to play the game and openly disagreed with some male comments, I was not understood by the majority of the people involved. Once I got used to such comments, and understood that they are actually a reflection of local strategies and practises and are not personal, I found it to be a sort of routine, a 'game' that I was willing to play in order to start a conversation.

When my husband came to visit me, he was considered a *musafir* but my position of a 'member of the family' was not extended to him (plate 6)

Plate 6



Photo courtesy of the author

The Petric family, the ethnographer and her husband posing in the house courtyard before the farewell greetings (January 2001).

He was not asked to help or to talk about himself, he was of no interest apart from being my husband. However, we as a couple were treated as family members and family protection was extended to him, therefore we had to say where we were going and had to call in case we were home later than planned. This also involved being asked to share a room with the son as ours was needed for tourists. I had previously on occasions been asked to share my room with family members, but I had not expected to be asked to do this when not alone. Local people change the use of the rooms according to the

contingent needs, for example the kitchen can become a bedroom at night if all bedrooms are occupied by tourists and such home promiscuity was applied to me both as a single woman and as a part of a couple, intimacy being of less value than hosting tourists, which means money in the bank.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that the practice of reflexivity is fundamental to the analysis of the experience of tourism, providing as case studies my fieldwork and my account of the shifting positions of the ethnographer researching tourism. I have shown that it was necessary for me to take part in their 'games' and act accordingly, in order to gain access to natives' and tourists' practices and narratives and to transcend an *a priori* ascribed position and to deal with the cultural complexities of the field situation.

Simoni and McCabe consider ethnographers' shifting positions as potentially challenging in tourism research, and the analyses of these as helpful in the interpretation of the 'complexities of interactions between researchers and their interlocutors', therefore 'ethnographic research in tourism can be affected by positional issues and thus to contribute to wider methodological reflections in the anthropology of tourism' (2008: 174). Moreover, the gaze focused on the anthropologist can help to question the host - guest opposition which ethnographic research has showed to be not a stark contrast. As well as a large variety of positions which may be assigned or become available to researchers, removing them from the tourist - outsider opposition, similar considerations can be used to identify any foreigner as a tourist, therefore encompassing a broader range of identifications that accounts for the variety of practices, motivations and relationships that distinguish each subject. Looking at tourist encounters through the lens of reflexivity leads to viewing them in a different light and to questioning the relationships observed and experienced.

My troubles and struggles in Botiza are part of my fieldwork experience and

have helped me become the person I am now. The gender troubles I experienced shaped my interpretation of research data and helped me in gaining gender self awareness. Processes of inclusion and exclusion, encompassing and annulment are at play all the time, during both fieldwork and writing. Paraphrasing Caplan (1993) (on her changed perspective during her third fieldwork visit) both my personal circumstances and the paradigms I referred to have shifted, affected by the collection of data, the experiences I lived and the subsequent work on my research. Through the eyes of other people, especially the people I lived with more intimately, something was revealed to me of my condition that I had not thought of myself but that did affect my position in their world, in other words being a married woman. Thinking about the knowledge that comes from awareness of the fieldwork situation reveals reflexivity to be an indirect practice of my research.

Going back to the question of whether autobiography can become anthropology, I do not look for an answer but I do claim that this article represents one way (a personal one) of including autobiographical data in ethnographic writing. Although I believe that anthropology is not about *our selves*, I also believe that it being about *selves* means it must include researchers, otherwise it would be iniquitous to exclude *ourselves* and include only the *others*. Given that the anthropological 'self' is the 'research instrument' (Crick in Tucker, 2003: 16), then autobiography is a substantive part of the research. Fieldwork notes of daily observations and personal thoughts are kept in research journals, diaries, recording etc. and will be filed somewhere whether their content is considered to be an aspect of the issues to develop in writing or not, and yet autobiography remains one of the parts of the whole research.

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