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Sexual(ized) harassment and ethnographic fieldwork: A silenced aspect of social research

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Abstract

Sexual(ized) harassment during ethnographic fieldwork is often described by female researchers as a 'rather common' experience, yet it continues to be marginalized in methodological discussions and anthropological training. Rather than silencing accounts of these experiences, it is necessary to include them in the analysis of acquired data and to reflect on them in ethnographic writing. This article raises awareness and stimulates discussion about this neglected aspect of social research. It considers ethnography as a gendered practice in which gender norms, the (a)sexuality of the fieldworker, and power relations directly influence research and the researcher's safety. It discusses the consequences of sexual(ized) harassment for the ethnographer, makes suggestions regarding how to deal with it in situ, and highlights the complex relationship between personal safety and researchers' ethical obligations towards their informants.

Keywords

ethnographic fieldwork, sexualized harassment, power relations, patriarchic societies, Guyana, sexual violence and abuse

'Say no, and no means no!'

Driving along the public road that stretches through the coastal settlements and forms the lifeline of the Guyanese countryside, I encountered a variety of governmental signboards displaying educational messages. Statements such as 'Attend school regularly' and 'Drinking destroys families' indicated current problems and debates in Guyanese society. One signboard, which I encountered on a weekly basis during my anthropological fieldwork, relentlessly summoned its beholders to

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'Say No!' and further reminded them that 'No means No!'. As I was to find out, this signboard would gain significance for me, not during my first stays in Guyana, but during one of my return visits and preliminary trips to prepare my postdoctoral research in early 2015.

The first time I arrived in Guyana was in April 2011, to conduct ethnographic research for my doctoral dissertation on the exchange and consumption of clothing in transnational Guyanese Hindu communities and the (re)construction of closeness in the course of migration (Kloß, 2016). I had been fortunate to have formed close relations with a respected working-class family in the region, with whom I stayed during all my visits. Over time we created bonds of fictive kinship.[1] Besides the family becoming important informants, my host father also became a gatekeeper, granting me access to the temple community that formed the basis of my research. On my visit in early 2015, almost four years after our initial contact, I had spent months living closely with them without ever encountering any serious problems. Suddenly I was confronted with sexualized approaches by my host father, as discussed later. I felt unprepared to handle such a situation and constantly asked myself if I had become too close to the family, had blurred or crossed the vague insider/outsider dividing line, or had done something wrong as an anthropologist. I felt this confusion on both the personal and professional levels. As a result, I interrupted my fieldwork, and returned to the capital to look for literature on sexual(ized) harassment and assault, but was unable to find much that was of immediate help. Besides the fact that my internet connection was slow and, in the countryside, only accessed through my smartphone, I faced a lack of easily accessible literature focusing on harassment in the field. The general available literature and websites on how to cope with sexual(ized) harassment were only of minor assistance, as they did not take into account the highly complex ethnographic situation and the implications of having been harassed by a gatekeeper and major informant.

I do not consider myself someone who approaches the field unprepared or who conducts fieldwork naively. I had read about potential dangers during fieldwork, especially the risks involved in being a lone female researcher, and had informed myself about what possible consequences this situation implies when conducting interviews and establishing relations, especially with male informants. I had read about the eventualities of rape, assault, kidnapping, and various other dangers prior to my fieldwork, largely through literature available to me from a development corporation, where I had previously conducted an internship. I felt prepared to minimize the risks associated with dangerous situations, yet with regard to professionally dealing with such cases, I acknowledge that I have experienced some difficulties. Writing from a position of a 'fledgling' anthropologist who is yet to establish a reputation in the discipline and is uncertain how such a 'confession' could impact an academic career, I am convinced that reflected accounts of sexual(ized) harassment help to raise awareness of a topic that is often neglected in preparations for fieldwork, ethnographic training, and analyses of acquired data. I believe that my uncertainty about how to deal with harassment is not simply a

personal issue, but must also be considered as a result of a gap in anthropological education.

Sexual(ized) harassment during fieldwork, although acknowledged to be a common problem for female researchers, continues to be considered something unremarkable or even trivial, and is seldom reflected in anthropological accounts (Herbert, 1997). A parallel can be noticed with regard to the general 'Western' discourse on harassment, in which such accounts are often stigmatized as oversensitive and hysterical (Cairns, 1997). With the trope of fieldwork as an adventure that only a few are able to master (Hovland, 2009), a rite of passage that one has to endure without addressing difficulties unless they may result in higher anthropological credibility (Gearing, 1995; Isidoros, 2015), the anthropological silence regarding harassment and rape consolidates tropes of 'good' fieldwork and recreates male fieldwork experience as normative. Consequently, female researchers may feel inadequate as anthropologists for having encountered sexual(ized) harassment – incidents characterized as 'unremarkable' yet personally traumatizing, which may lead promising scholars to abandon fieldwork as a methodology.

After an in-depth assessment of the topic, I link the 'Say No' signboard more consciously to not only domestic but particularly also sexualized violence. 'No means no' was a popular slogan promoted during 'Western' feminist campaigns to address sexual(ized) and domestic harassment, assault, and rape (Langelan, 1993). Being confronted with such statements as slogans on signboards indicated that these topics were significant in the society and the lives of my informants. Interestingly, I did not relate this message directly to myself and did not read them as personal warning signs. I reflected that I was participating in a hetero-patriarchal society in which domestic violence and sexual(ized) harassment are generally not uncommon, though seldom openly addressed (Trotz, 2004). Creating bonds of fictive kinship with my extended host family, a welcomed circumstance that provided me with access to intimate knowledge, I no longer remained an outsider of this society. But this implied that restrictive norms at stake for Indo-Guyanese women became increasingly valid for myself, a 30-year-old, white, heterosexual, unmarried, childless, and European woman. While at first these norms did not feel too restrictive, in my long-term relationship with the family, expectations about my behavior were adapted and intensified. I was designated the role of daughter and younger sister, meaning that I was supposed to act as a rather submissive and docile woman who would, until she found a husband, engage in domestic chores and rarely leave the home. The longer my relationship with the family existed, the more my moral integrity and sexuality were controlled, as any instance of misbehavior would influence the reputation of the entire family. Such control was tacitly expressed in comments about (modest) clothing, the length of my hair, or critical comments regarding the fact that I did not want to 'settle down'. While at first I did not perceive these comments to be oppressive, they noticeably increased during my visit in 2015. Upon reflection, and as I elaborate later in this article, the sexual(ized) harassment that I experienced I now interpret as my host father's demonstration of

patriarchal power. It was indicative of the continuously changing roles and intensifying relations an anthropologist experiences during long-term fieldwork.

This article promotes the discussion on sexual(ized) harassment and assault during fieldwork, its implications, and the necessity of raising awareness, particularly among early-career fieldworkers. It discusses existing literature of feminist anthropology, provides practical knowledge, and highlights the problem of personal safety vis-à-vis ethical obligations towards informants. With this contribution I do not seek to sexualize fieldwork or the researched 'other', as indeed sexual(ized) harassment occurs everywhere. I instead aim to break the continuing silence on a topic that was addressed as early as the 1970s (Easterday et al., 1977), yet continues to be marginalized in methodological discussions, training, and textbooks. Therefore, I discuss what is defined as sexual(ized) harassment, what consequences incidents of sexual(ized) harassment have for fieldwork, and how researchers may deal with such situations in situ. I emphasize that fieldwork has to be considered as a gendered practice in which the (a)sexuality of the fieldworker directly influences his or her research, acquired data, and safety. Finally, I provide some suggestions for the education and training of fieldworkers.

What is sexual(ized) harassment?

The term 'sexual harassment' was coined during the 1970s, mostly by 'Western' feminist movements (Langelan, 1993). It labelled practices that were previously undifferentiated, with the aim of defining specific practices as unwanted, and was applied to protest against, resist, and demand changes in men's behavior towards women. Sexual(ized) harassment is defined as coercive behavior, which may include gestures, actions, and other modes of verbal or nonverbal communication, with sexual connotations, which intimidate, humiliate, and exercise power over another person.[2] Mostly it is men who act as the harassers, directing their actions largely at women, although men are sometimes victimized by other men, especially if they are considered 'effeminate' or if they express a 'non-normative' sexual identity (Berdahl et al., 1996). Sexual(ized) harassment is thus often applied to discriminate against people who claim a 'non-normative' ethnic, racial, and/or sexual identity, hence racial or homophobic harassment is often expressed in terms of sexual(ized) harassment (Sharp and Kremer, 2006).

Sexual(ized) harassment is a means of sustaining (gendered and racialized) hegemony, and has to be understood as a 'manifestation of the larger patriarchal system in which men dominate women' (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997: 1). It is a social control mechanism, reasserting and recreating masculine dominance. Although both men and women often (mis)understand sexual(ized) harassment as primarily based on sexual attraction, it is largely an expression, exertion, and recreation of (male) power to control the recipient's behavior. In this context, to label sexual(ized) harassment 'an inept form of courtship' (Langelan, 1993: 40) masks the involved abuse of power. General feminist literature further defines sexual(ized) harassment as a means for men to (re)construct their masculinity

through misogyny or homophobia, to assert their status and boost their egos (Epstein, 1997). Certainly there do exist various kinds of harassers and motivations, as discussed extensively by Langelan (1993), and sexual excitement may be a reason for some incidents of sexual(ized) harassment, as is the case with 'predatory harassment'.[3] It must be considered, however, that the (unconscious) exercise of power remains a dominant characteristic in all cases, as its abuse, acts of submission, and dominance form the basis of eroticism for the harasser.

Although the term 'sexual harassment' is frequently referenced in general literature, I use 'sexual(ized) harassment' to emphasize that at the core of this behavior lies not in sexual attraction but modes of reinforcing (patriarchal) power. This power is usually a combination of male economic power, gender-based social power (providing men with higher status in relation to women), and role-based power, since most figures of authority, for example in churches or politics, are male (Langelan, 1993). Racialized hegemonic power may form another aspect of sexual(ized) harassment, when, for example, men apply sexual(ized) harassment to reinforce or destabilize existing power imbalances and instrumentalize (black or white) women's bodies to (re)gain or maintain power.

Sexual(ized) harassment is no trivial behavior, as it implies conscious as well as unconscious psychological motives of individuals (Langelan, 1993). It should thus not be considered solely as a product of societal structures and norms, but also of an individual person's agency. It is essential for (female) researchers to be prepared for such incidents, and to emphasize that emotional reactions do not indicate a weakness or inability to conduct fieldwork. The traumatizing effects and challenging emotions such incidents may evoke, particularly during periods of isolated fieldwork, are frequently underestimated. Their inclusion in fieldwork accounts contributes to knowledge production. For this reason I now describe my personal account of sexual(ized) harassment during field research rather than relegating it to silence.

Experiencing sexual(ized) harassment during fieldwork

Phagwah day was finally there. For days, Guyanese Hindu women had been cleaning their houses, changing curtains, sweeping their yards, and buying groceries. For years, they had told me to come and witness Phagwah, the Hindu festival of colors, also known as 'Holi'. While it is common on Phagwah mornings to 'soak' other people's clothes with water, this practice changes to throwing colored powder at each other during afternoons. My host family – at this point reduced to my host parents, Ramlall and Sandra, and my older host brother Suresh – were mourning the absence of their (grand)sons, who had usually made Phagwah a special day but had recently migrated to the US.[4] On this day, their absence was intensely felt, and the atmosphere in the house was dull. My host father, a 62-year-old retired cane worker, decided to take a trip to his childhood village, a trip he rarely undertook due to bad road conditions, a circumstance indicating that he was in 'a mood'. Feeling the excitement of the day from every visitor who passed the house, I helped

Sandra to quickly finish cooking and then embarked on a walking tour through the village, 'coloring up' anybody whom I encountered. My final stop was the house of my host grandmother. I had developed a close relationship with most members of my extended host family, who usually declared me to be 'part of the family' during visits. I had known most of them for four years now, had 'witnessed' some of my 'cousins' finish high school, and had attended various familial celebrations. Similarly, they had witnessed my personal ups and downs during various stretches of fieldwork, and had provided support.

After a cheerful evening I returned to my host parents' house early, as Ramlall and Sandra always waited for me in order to let loose the watchdogs and to lock the house for the night. Upon my return, Sandra was sitting in her hammock in the bottom house,[5] accompanied by Suresh. Immediately I noticed that their spirits had been lifted, and Ramlall, having returned from his trip, was eager to photograph my now-colorful appearance. Sandra politely asked me to shower outside at the spot where we usually washed our clothes, as I would 'mess up' the bathroom that she had polished for the holiday. As she and other members of the family had done this before, I did not object, and went to the back of the house to scrub the powder off my skin. I bathed in my clothes, wearing a tank top and loose calf-long pants, as the spot was visible from both the street and bottom house. Sandra and Suresh laughed at me from the hammock, giggling how 'white gyal' (white girl) was taking a 'bucket shower'. Ramlall was busy in the backyard and once came over to point out where I had missed powdered spots. I was irritated when he directly touched my shoulder, but did not worry about it for long. When I had finished bathing, I hid behind the car to dry my skin. The car was parked on the house lot, and prevented people passing through the street and inside the bottom house to see me. I was acting in line with previously established behavioral norms of family life that I had witnessed during prior visits. I did not notice that Ramlall was still busy in the backyard and was surprised when he was suddenly standing next to me, behind the car and unseen by his wife and son. Immediately I felt confused about his stare, which felt different from our usual father-daughter-like interactions. I assumed that he was still feeling depressed because of the absence of his grandchildren. I suspected that he was suffering from depression and, feeling the need to cheer him up, I asked if he had had a good day instead of leaving. When I turned around to change inside the house, intuitively sensing that something was different, he grabbed my arm, forced me into a coercive hug, grabbed inside my shirt, touched my breast, and tried to force a kiss on me. I pushed him away, plainly saying 'No!', and hurried upstairs, telling Sandra and Suresh, who had not been able to witness anything, that I was tired and wanted to sleep.

Shocked and intimidated by the experience, I sat in my upstairs bedroom not knowing what to do and unable to explain what had happened. I called a friend, who told me to leave immediately, but being aware of my role as ethnographer I felt obliged to consider the potential backlash that any impulsive behavior might have on my research and relations to informants. I decided to stay the night and calm down. One of my most urgent thoughts was that Sandra, not having been in

good health since the departure of her grandchildren, might not be able to cope with such a situation if I told her. I was also afraid that nobody would believe me, with Ramlall holding a respected position in the community and being vice president of a religious organization on which my previous work had depended. From recent conversations with Sandra and other women I was further aware that victim-blaming reactions are as common in Guyana as elsewhere, even in cases of rape and (female) murders (Persaud, 2011). These incidents were usually explained as having been caused by the allegedly immodest and promiscuous behavior of the victimized woman. Questions and worries formed in my head, such as: what implications would my revelation, if believed at all, have on my personal as well as professional reputation? Whom could I or should I tell about this incident, and what was I supposed to do? Leave the field? Would it be best to establish a similar network of informants in another area of the country for my postdoctoral fieldwork to avoid any future risks? Even though I am not easily scared with regard to my personal safety, I tried to lock my room for the night, only to find out, after four years, that the lock was not working. I went to bed with a pair of scissors, as potential protection, and placed my suitcase in front of the door to block easy access to the room. I faced a sleepless night. Under false pretenses I left the house early the next morning to return to the capital. Self-doubt and self-blame followed in the next days, combined with the gnawing question of whether something like that would have happened to a 'good anthropologist' and whether I had crossed some common-sense line that I should have seen.

Although I knew I needed to act responsibly and respectfully towards all my informants, including the harasser, I was unsure how to handle the situation in an ethical and 'anthropologically correct' way. I searched the internet and online journals for possible 'guides' and articles referring to similar situations, only to realize that the topic of sexual(ized) harassment during fieldwork, although acknowledged by a large number of researchers as 'rather common' in personal conversations, has not been sufficiently dealt with in theoretical and methodological discussions of ethnography. While there have been calls to do so, it is mostly theoretical analyses of the power–patriarchy nexus that have been published, and though these are certainly of great value, methodological discussion is still required (Williams et al., 1992; Kulick and Willson, 1995; Kenyon and Hawker, 1999). Since the mid-2000s, some studies have addressed the need to discuss gender-specific difficulties and dangers during fieldwork, particularly also concerning sexual(ized) harassment (Sharp and Kremer, 2006; Pollard, 2009). Most recently, for example, Leanne Johansson describes how during her fieldwork she struggled with 'Big Men', who would only grant her access to information by demanding 'something' in return – those 'somethings' usually consisting of sexual favors (2015: 57). Although she never considered these demands as an option, she still felt unable to straightforwardly reject them due to the possible consequences such rejections would have had for her research. She states that she 'spent the year [of fieldwork] ducking and diving sexual encounters, massaging

bruised egos and trying to keep in the good books of powerful men whose expectations of exchange I was not willing to fulfil' (Johansson, 2015: 58).

Johansson's account, as well as the accounts of a number of female anthropologists that were narrated to me in person, reveal similarities to my personal experience with regard to coping strategies, self-blame, and insecurity concerning methodology. Fieldwork is an experience which I consider highly rewarding, and an exceptionally valuable methodology, and it must be highlighted that certainly not all researchers are confronted with sexual(ized) harassment. In this context, I want to emphasize that I do not narrate my experiences as a way to glamorize them or to engage in tales of fieldwork hardship, as discussed later. Instead, I use my detailed example to portray the strong emotional reactions such incidents may cause, regardless of whether the researcher considers him- or herself 'sensitive' or not. My first reactions, as described above, seem 'normal' when compared to other accounts. While handling situations of sexual(ized) harassment in one's personal life may be difficult as it is, the experience of such incidents in an environment in which the personal support network is absent leads to additional stress and more difficulty coping (Congdon, 2015). Such experiences may be particularly destabilizing for first-time ethnographers, who are often more insecure about 'correct' ethnographic practice. For them, fieldwork is still a novel experience, and its difficulties and questions of conduct are always potential sources of insecurity.

Defining sexual(ized) harassment during fieldwork

Ethnographers are often new to the socio-cultural context in which they conduct their fieldwork. Therefore, it is not always easy to define an action as sexual(ized) harassment and as being outside locally accepted norms of courtship. What may be understood as sexual(ized) harassment in the researcher's home society may be conceived differently in the host society, as norms of courtship and banter vary. It takes time for a cultural 'apprentice' to understand what may or may not be defined as sexual(ized) harassment in a 'different' society, and it is crucial for every anthropologist to learn about and reflect on these local definitions and 'customary expressions of sexuality' (Isidoros, 2015: 47).

Verbal or nonverbal actions may be defined as sexual(ized) harassment when local concepts and prevailing sexual norms are violated, when they are unwanted, and when they form an 'extraordinary disruption to the routine of everyday life' (Mott and Condor, 1997: 69f). If a situation is perceived as disturbing or uncomfortable, would be defined as sexual(ized) harassment at 'home', but one is yet uncertain about naming it as such in the novel context, it may be advisable to confidentially discuss the incident with an unrelated friend or trusted local person before labelling it as harassment. Some specific modes of behavior, such as assault or physical harassment, are more easily definable as surpassing accepted societal norms than others, however. Having developed an in-depth understanding of my field, and considering the physical violation I had experienced at the hands of

Ramlall, I was certain that the incident was to be labelled sexual(ized) harassment in the local context, but I also had this confirmed by a trusted Guyanese friend.

Precisely the situation of feeling insecure about defining an informant's behavior as abusive, while not yet being certain about local norms and values, leads to a high degree of vulnerability, especially of female researchers. This is exacerbated by anthropological (hyper-)reflectivity and cautiousness about potentially misjudging 'other' behavior on the basis of Euro- or ethnocentric bias (Clark and Grant, 2015: 8). For anthropologists, these questions not only trigger self-doubt and challenge personal experience and knowledge, but are commonly extended to the professional level. Accordingly, Johansson relates:

> I felt paralysed by my desire to be a 'good anthropologist' – one who actively deconstructs her own authority in an attempt to minimize the power she exerts over social situations. . . . Thus, I hesitated to respond from within my own ethnocentric conceptions of gender relations and definitions of 'harassment'. I doubted myself. Was I reading the context right? Was my experience of this encounter – and the feelings it engendered – really legitimate? (2015: 58f)

Professional self-doubt may lead to destabilization, and harassed researchers often express the fear that a 'good anthropologist' would not 'have gotten herself into such situations in the first place' (Clark and Grant, 2015: 2). Unfortunately, victim-blaming perspectives prevail even in academia, and sexual(ized) harassment is sometimes still evaluated as an anthropological failure or an inadequacy on the part of the researcher. For instance, when Eva Moreno told her (male) supervisors about having been raped in the field, she later found out that one of them had blamed her and had stated in the presence of another graduate student that she 'must have acted like a fool in the field' (Moreno, 1995: 247). Cases of rape, assault, and sexual(ized) harassment must not be considered in terms of victim-blaming however. All anthropologists need to be made aware of the intricate power relations that are the causes of sexual(ized) harassment. Particularly female and LGBTTIQ researchers should be taught that it is legitimate and the right of a 'good anthropologist' to label an informant's behavior as sexual(ized) harassment and to act accordingly if he or she feels uncomfortable, particularly if the incident is not in line with locally accepted norms. In such cases the informant is an aggressor (who has agency) and it is not the victim who is to be blamed.

Confrontation and assertiveness as self-defense

With regard to the specific local contexts of ethnographic fieldwork it is impossible to provide fixed guidelines that deal with sexual(ized) harassment. The question of whether or not to directly raise the issue of incidents of harassment with the harasser cannot be generally answered. I experienced the decision about whom to tell and whom not to tell to be the most challenging question during my research, as I needed to approach this both on a professional and personal level – levels that may

be separable in theory but which are inseparable in practice. I felt the (personal) need to confront Ramlall because I felt hurt and deceived, and I was aware that my decision to not raise the issue with him might have long-lasting effects on me. Indeed, women 'who "ignore" harassers must deal with all the emotional repercussions of victimization: fear, humiliation, feelings of powerlessness, rage' (Langelan, 1993: 98).

Confronting the harasser is an option to vent negative feelings. Confrontation is conducted either immediately, or some time after an incident, and is a structured action of non-violent and non-aggressive self-defense. It is a verbal statement, accompanied by appropriate body language, and is a 'careful, planned, ethical act of resistance to a pervasive form of power abuse' (Langelan, 1993: 92f). It is neither passive nor aggressive, and does not include any mode of appeasement or cursing which might escalate the situation. An effective confrontation is: 1) to name the behavior as sexual(ized) harassment; 2) to address the inappropriate behavior; and 3) to state the necessary change in the harasser's behavior. Furthermore, physical harassment 'requires a dual response: if the harasser is touching you, for example, physically reach over and move his hand or knee away from your body, at the same time you say, "That's harassment. Keep your hands off me. I don't like it – no woman likes it. Don't you ever do that again"' (Langelan, 1993: 123). It is necessary to conduct the confrontation in a respectful manner that adheres to the values one seeks to defend, and to avoid insulting the harasser. Only thereby can one effectively make an ethical statement. I agree with Venetia Congdon, who, from her own fieldwork experience, advises that it is useful to prepare and practice phrases that can be used in a confrontation, although I disagree that these statements may include insults (2015: 19).

If the benefit of the doubt is given to the harasser, for example if the researcher is still uncertain about local norms and customary expressions of sexuality, the self-defense strategy of 'assertiveness' may be preferred. Assertiveness is 'milder than confrontation, and can sometimes be an appropriate initial response to casual, low-key male-dominance harassment when the harasser is a boss, coworker, neighbor, classmate, or other acquaintance with whom the woman has regular contact' (Langelan, 1993: 105f). It includes the woman's explanation about why she feels harassed, and leaves some space for dialogue, in contrast to confrontation, in which a change of behavior is demanded. It depends on the situation, the relationship to the harasser, and various other aspects that influence which mode of addressing and resisting the harassment is more appropriate.

In all cases, it is particularly relevant to reflect on the status of the harasser in the host society and his relevance to the study, although it is equally important not to forget one's personal needs. Harassers are often gatekeepers who have the power to restrict a researcher's access to the community and information. In such cases, harassers are often aware of their power and authority in relation to the researcher and her work, and assume her dependency on him. Indeed, harassers may 'count on their status to silence the women they victimize' and may (threaten to) 'use their authority to try to discredit any woman who dares to speak up'

(Langelan, 1993: 62). As they often do not expect women to confront or reject their behavior, the element of surprise forms the effective aspect of confrontation and assertiveness. Through confrontation the harassed turns around the power positions which the harasser thought to reinstate, often leaving him speechless. In my case, I was aware of a strong victim-blaming attitude among most members of the host society. As mentioned earlier, I was concerned that a confrontation would have resulted in a negative backlash affecting my own reputation. I thought it highly likely that if I had told too many people about the incident, it would have led to my own discredit and an interpretation that I was trying to 'smear' the person's reputation (Wilson and Thompson, 2001). I therefore decided that I would not confront Ramlall publicly, nor let any other fictive kin in on the incident. I refrained from explaining my sudden departure to the extended family, and decided to confront him once my mind had settled. I was in the lucky situation of having arranged a break from fieldwork close to the incident, and hence I was able to leave shortly after. This allowed me to research available literature and plan my next steps carefully. I advise all researchers in a similar situation, if possible, to leave the site of fieldwork for some time and to decide with the benefit of distance what would be the best way to deal with the incident so as to minimize the negative consequences for both self and research.

Some researchers describe how they decided not to confront their harasser out of a concern that they would then lose an informant (Pollard, 2009). This may be plausible for some people and in some situations, but while it is crucial for anthropologists to be concerned about their informants and the outcome of their work, non-confrontation should not be considered the norm, as 'good anthropology' must take the personal – physical as well as emotional – safety of the researcher into consideration. It cannot dismiss emotional reactions as hysteria or as revelations of inadequacy. Although we as anthropologists have to be particularly cautious and reflective with regard to the people we study, we do not have to forgive our informants everything. This may sound trivial, but as a young researcher I had to remind myself of this fact at certain points in time, feeling relieved when reading Gary Alan Fine's 'confession' about hating certain informants (1993).

The described incident of harassment has significantly impacted my research. I called my host mother and brother several times after the incident, trying to explain my sudden departure and reassuring them of our friendship. I chose to let Sandra believe that I was not the 'good' daughter any more, keeping in mind that her knowledge about the incident would have worsened her mental condition. Upon my return after my fieldwork break, I decided to start my new project in a different location. This decision was based on my wish to start the project in a new community as a way to expand my perspective, but it was also influenced by my knowledge that a return to my original field site would have inevitably resulted in questions and skepticism as to why I was no longer staying with 'my family'. I considered other risks resulting from the fact that my host father had a good reputation in the community and could easily raise doubts about my work and morality. To the community, I explained that my new project necessitated a change

of locality. I never faced my host father again, but told him on the phone that he had destroyed our relationship, without receiving a response. Even today, I feel insecure about whether this decision was 'anthropologically correct', and feel saddened about having lost friends, more than the fact that I have also lost informants and gatekeepers.

'Othered' ethnography and power relations

> There are situations in which a harassed ethnographer finds it impossible to continue fieldwork in the established site. As in my case, moving to a different area and/or terminating the research phase are valid decisions, which do not inevitably imply that the anthropologist is incompetent, incapable, or not 'strong' or 'adventurous' enough (Abdullah, 2011). Most anthropologists are prone to an almost fetishized myth of fieldwork during their training, making such a decision look like failure. Fieldwork and participant observation are considered the ultimate foundations of anthropology, being recognized and appreciated as such by numerous disciplines. Fieldwork is often further considered a liminal phase and a rite of passage for anthropologists (Gearing, 1995; Isidoros, 2015).

Adventurous tales and 'tropes of hardship' (Hovland, 2009) are usually part of fieldwork narratives. Through fieldwork tales, professional prestige and status are sought. Difficulties that arise during fieldwork are seldom openly addressed and may even be belittled, as is often the case with sexual(ized) harassment, assault, and rape. The assumption persists that if you cannot 'take it' you are not strong enough, or 'meant to be' an anthropologist (Delamont, 2009). As no researcher wants to look unqualified or 'bad', they self-censor much information regarding fieldwork difficulties (Fine, 1993). Especially among graduate students, who are yet to acquire status, struggle for recognition as anthropologists, and (believe that they) need to impress and convince their supervisors of their capacity to conduct 'good' ethnography, such perceptions lead to the silencing of accounts of experiences and/or the downplaying of difficulties, with severe consequences for the students (Pollard, 2009).

The silencing of accounts of sexual(ized) harassment as a kind of fieldwork experience ultimately results in the maintenance of hetero-patriarchal anthropology as an unchallenged norm. For at least two decades, feminist anthropologists have highlighted the androcentric bias of ethnography (Gearing, 1995). Yet, unfortunately, concepts of the gendered ethnographer and reflections of sexuality and fieldwork are seldom brought to students' awareness. There remains an often uncommented upon and unquestioned norm of the white, male, heterosexual ethnographer. Opposed to this androcentric norm, women's experience is usually constructed as 'other' (Cairns, 1997). 'Othered' female experience is largely based on concepts of female subordination, as is the case for example in Euro-American patriarchal societies. Here, women's 'abilities, their characters, and the accuracy of

their perceptions of the world' (Cairns, 1997: 95) are often questioned, and their subordination impacts their work as well as its appreciation.

Gendered and sexual identities always have to be considered during fieldwork, as these affect the safety of female or LGBTTIQ researchers, especially if one conducts fieldwork in a hetero-patriarchal society. Being female and perceived as young, I frequently experienced that male informants did not consider me to be a serious researcher. This situation was not always a hindrance, as I was perceived as 'not threatening' – this sometimes was a benefit concerning gaining access to information and places (Easterday et al., 1977). On the other hand, to be 'no threat' was also a source of risk and danger, as this often meant that I was perceived as powerless and vulnerable. In patriarchal societies, such as my fieldwork context, the subordinate position of women meant that I had an arguably more complex status position than fellow male anthropologists. While I was in a dominant power position in relation to female informants, this was not inevitably the case for male informants. As Sharp and Kremer discuss, my contextual subordinate position as a woman, despite my being foreign and white, implied that I had 'less power vis-à-vis male subjects than would be expected given [my] professional, highly educated status' (2006: 319). It is misleading to consider anthropologists as automatically and at all times claiming high-status positions, an understanding that would deny the agency of informants. This misconception is common, however, and ultimately results from an androcentric bias in theoretical ethnography. Certainly, there exist unequal power relations between researcher and researched, but these must be reflected as dynamic, not static, and as relational. A female or LGBTTIQ ethnographer is not necessarily in a position of power and privilege, and to disregard or fail to reflect upon these negotiations of power increases their vulnerability. This is also the case, for example, for black researchers in white communities, as not only gender but also race (and class) constitute critical aspects of hegemonic structures. It is also very likely that some male researchers are harassed in the field, as sexual(ized) harassment is not only – although it is predominantly – addressed at female or LGBTTIQ researchers. To compare such accounts, it is necessary to engage in dialogue about such incidents from all perspectives.

Ethnographers generally have to reflect upon their various dynamic positions during fieldwork. This lowers the risk of victimization and raises awareness of one's own vulnerability to on-site risks and dangers. Vulnerability, in this context, should not be confused with weakness. Fieldwork is a gendered practice and experience, which does not take place outside gender and racialized hierarchies (Newton, 1993; Kulick, 1995). All ethnographers 'are always approached from a gendered, sexual perspective by their informants' (Clark and Grant, 2015: 7), and vice versa. Often ethnographers also engage in love or sexual relationships with informants; thus anthropologists cannot be viewed as asexual, ungendered, and racially unmarked (Kulick, 1995). They must reflect upon how sexual and gendered identities and ethnicities influence their fieldwork practices and safety. They have to keep in mind that although a fieldworker may not have this intention, his or her effort to achieve close relationships to people in a short amount of time may be mistaken for sexual

interest by others. Concerning my case, I did not sufficiently consider that power relations between Ramlall and me were dynamic, and I did not automatically claim a higher status position. My status in his home was indeed inferior in relation to him, and became increasingly so over time as I became his fictive daughter.

Reflecting on sexual(ized) harassment

> As described above, I was prepared for potential dangers and met male informants mostly in public. I had trained myself to avoid dangerous situations and actively minimized my risk of being harassed, assaulted, or raped. I had taken all the precautions I was able to think of, and yet, after the incident, I experienced a period of self-blame and self-doubt with regard to my ability to conduct ethnography. Fortunately, this period was limited due to empowering conversations with friends, my support network at home, and general literature on the causes of sexual(ized) harassment. I learned that I had not actively 'provoked' the harassment, something I had immediately believed. My drying my skin in the backyard was not the cause of Ramlall's harassment.

Initially I had hypothesized that the liminal time of Phagwah had allowed Ramlall's transgressive behavior. Phagwah, like Carnival, is a phase of liminality, a day during which social hierarchy is dissolved or reversed temporarily (Turner, 1969). After some consideration, I was convinced that liminality was not the basis for his actions however. Several other incidents of harassment had occurred during the weeks preceding Phagwah. A couple of times he had 'accidentally' brushed my breast, for instance when passing me in the kitchen. Similar contact had not happened before, and these incidents had increased. I ignored the possibility that these acts were intentional at first, but after the main incident of harassment and, upon reflection, these acts now support my assessment of his actions as an exertion of power and as a kind of 'punishment'. However, the fact that the incident occurred on Phagwah day needs to be taken into consideration, a situation that influenced his actions at least to some extent.

Today, I interpret his actions as a combination of his assertion of power, his reconstruction of masculinity and status, his demonstration of my supposed dependency on him with regard to my research, and as a means of 'putting me in my place'. As I had become his fictive daughter, he felt responsible for my 'proper' conduct as a woman. I was an unmarried, childless woman at the age of 30, an unusual – and rather subversive – role according to local gender norms; possibly even a menace from Ramlall's perspective. In a conversation a few weeks prior to the incident, Ramlall had suggested politely, though insistently, that it was time for me to 'settle down' and that I was not on the 'right track'. Having acquired funding for postdoctoral research, I had explained to him that I could and would continue my job as a researcher. On reflection, I realize that, from Ramlall's perspective, I was thereby setting a wrong example to other women. I later

remembered other incidents when he had commented on my shoulder-long hair, stating that women should wear long hair. He had also addressed his disappointment in my not wanting to marry a Guyanese Indian man whom he and Sandra had suggested. Taking the component of race into consideration, Ramlall's sexual(ized) harassment may be further interpreted as his means not only to boost his ego but, as a man of color, to destabilize prevalent racialized hegemonic structures by claiming superior and more powerful status in relation to a white woman.

When I sought to understand Ramlall's behavior, my possible 'explanations' were often discarded by well-meaning friends and colleagues, who suggested that I should not concern myself with his motives, but take care of myself. Trying to understand him was my way to process the incident, and what was misconceptualized as trying to find 'excuses' for my harasser was rather my curiosity to understand his thoughts and behavior, which led me to assess the possible causes. Although my interpretation is certainly only an interpretation and not the truth, as is all anthropological work, understanding motives is a necessary aspect of anthropological assessment of harassment during fieldwork. My reflection on the incident by writing this article has evoked my deeper reflections on sexual(ized) and domestic violence towards women in the host society. Similar actions are experienced by a large number of rural Indo-Guyanese women in various forms of verbal and physical abuse. They reflect the discrimination against women by men and are a form of violence that is 'a backlash in response to women assuming new roles' (Bagilhole, 1997: 193). In my follow-up research, I thus paid more attention to local gender roles and power relations, which I henceforth considered relational and dynamic.

Although I still consider the incident to have been destabilizing, and strongly emphasize that it is necessary to take all measures to prevent such incidents, it is inadvisable to remain silent about this experience. Incidents of harassment, as well as other gendered and sexualized experiences, are intricate aspects of fieldwork practice, data, and writing. They must be openly addressed, without authors running the risk of being labelled 'bad anthropologists', or considered too sensitive. I am certain that insights produced by reflecting and addressing such emotions and experiences will enrich future ethnography (Okely, 2009; Abdullah, 2011). In this way, the trope of hetero-patriarchal fieldwork may be deconstructed, encouraging female and LGBTTIQ researchers to consider their work, emotions, perceptions, and experience not as 'other' but valid sources of knowledge (Barry, 2009). The inclusion of risk perceptions and vulnerability into the analysis of collected materials facilitates more nuanced interpretations of cultures and society.

Practical suggestions

With this article I do not euphemize the experience or claim the specific status of a 'good anthropologist' who was 'strong enough to survive' difficulties during fieldwork. I strongly object to the idea that ethnographers need to experience difficulties in order to 'produce' more insightful work. But incidents of sexual(ized)

harassment sometimes do occur. To prepare and empower particularly early-career researchers, anthropological training has to address the issue of gendered and sexual(ized) violence. New researchers must be encouraged to reflect on dynamic and contextual power relations during fieldwork. Pre-fieldwork reflections on sexual(ized) harassment help to create better coping mechanisms. Mentoring groups may open spaces for dialogue before, during, and after fieldwork (Begley, 2009; Pollard, 2009). In small groups of graduate students and early-career researchers, types of danger and ethical aspects of dangerous incidents may be identified and discussed (Abdullah, 2011). While such measures may not have prevented the incident I described, they may have helped me to cope better with the situation.

Guidelines or hard-and-fast rules about how to avoid and deal with situations of sexual(ized) harassment may seem stiff and not reflective of the highly specific local contexts of fieldwork. Yet, I believe, it is useful to provide some basic advice. First, it is helpful to note down personal ethical guidelines before fieldwork (Vanderstaay, 2005). Researchers should consider what kinds of situations one may be confronted with, and at what point one would find it necessary to interrupt fieldwork. Second, it is necessary to pay particular attention to one's intuition and feelings of (dis)comfort when meeting informants (Miller, 2015). This may sound like common sense, yet most scholars who describe incidents of sexual(ized) harassment and assault, including myself, have highlighted that they ignored uncomfortable feelings immediately before an incident. Third, when attending potentially dangerous meetings, it is helpful to inform one's support network about it. If an informant is unknown, a preliminary meeting in a public space minimizes the potential of dangerous situations. Generally, it is safest to conduct interviews during daytime hours and in public places. In case an ethnographer meets with a male informant in a private place, such as his house, it may be advisable to have a trusted person call the ethnographer at a set time and to have fixed a 'danger code' that may reveal a dangerous situation to the caller.

Among the most critical decisions is the question of where and with whom to live during fieldwork. Most cases of sexual(ized) harassment and assault are not perpetrated by strangers, but by acquaintances, friends, or people living in the same house. In my case, the decision to live with a family was extremely rewarding and it granted me insights into everyday life. Yet, before making such living arrangements, one must critically keep in mind that the 'home' is an especially vulnerable place. It may be preferable to live in a shared apartment or hire carefully chosen personnel (such as female research assistants) who live in the same house.

Despite these negative aspects addressed in this article, and although at times it can be challenging, I consider fieldwork to be a highly rewarding experience, both on a personal and professional level. With this article, I hope not to scare away potential ethnographers, but rather to raise awareness and stimulate discussion of sexual(ized) harassment during ethnographic fieldwork.

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Notes

1. Fictive kinship refers to social bonds and forms of kinship that are not based on consanguinity or affinity, yet are not necessarily experienced as less 'real' than consanguine or affinal kinship.
2. The list of what women have defined as sexual harassment includes: wolf whistles, sexual innuendo, sexually explicit gestures, unwelcome touching and hugging, obscene phone calls, 'accidentally' brushing sexual parts of the body, pressing or rubbing up against the victim, indecent exposure, soliciting sexual services, stalking, etc. (Langelan, 1993: 25f).
3. Langelan categorizes predatory harassers (sexually aroused by acts of harassment), dominance harassers (harassment as an (unconscious) means of gaining status and respect), and strategic and territorial harassers (planned behavior with defined objective) (1993: 38ff).
4. All names have been changed to secure my informants' anonymity.
5. The bottom house is the open space under traditional-style Guyanese houses, built on stilts.

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