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„PORTUGUESE LIKE US, PORTUGUESE LIKE THEM": REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN FIELDWORK

Introduction

Issues pertaining to identity and fieldwork have been a very attractive subject for anthropologists since the 1980s. Especially the ways in which „the ethnographer constructs knowledge of the other culture (…) one's construction of identity and relationships and one's reflection with regard to the process by which ethnographic knowledge is generated" (Kirschner 1987: 213). A space was created to present and discuss fieldwork experiences from a perspective that had not been as common up until that time. Approaching identity and its influence on ethnographic construction led to descriptions about the ways in which gender (Callaway 1992), ethnicity (Johnson1984) and sexuality (Cesara 1982; Altork 1995) have influenced fieldwork.

What became particularly evident was the importance placed upon the self-reflective process as part of a concern regarding the way modernist anthropology constructed other cultures. Within the so called „post-modern turn", anthropologists finally seem to be prepared to deal with their political position in the field and with fieldwork relationships as means for cultural construction. By arguing that cultures are continuously being produced, reproduced and revised among their members, Bruce Mannheim and Dennis Tedlock urged us to see how ethnography „itself revealed as an emergent cultural phenomenon, produced, reproduced and revised in dialogues between fieldworkers and natives" (Mannheim

and Tedlock 1995: 2). The dialogical nature of ethnography draws our attention towards the involvement of the researcher with their setting and especially with those who constitute research subjects (Marcus 1995; Coffey 1999).

The main purpose of this article is to tackle certain issues concerning intersubjective relationships in fieldwork. I will consider intersubjectivity as a „site of constructive, destructive and reconstructive interaction" (Jackson 1998), paying attention to the interactional process through which knowledge is constructed. By doing so, I will employ my observations on reflexivity, a concept which has been vastly important since the 1970, and for some authors remains at „the center of methodological thinking" (Seale 1999), although, for some others, it is „not so much a methodological matter as an ideological one" (Marcus 1998: 190).

In *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, George Marcus discussed the „desirability of reflexivity" as

> the opening up of the ethnographic tradition to new possibilities, to a departure from the ideology of objectivity, distance, and the transparency of reality to concepts, as well as toward recognizing the need to explore the ethical, political, and epistemological dimensions of ethnographic research as an integral part of producing knowledge about others (Marcus 1998: 198-190).

Although there are several „styles of reflexivity" (Marcus 1998), related to distinct fields where the concept has been approached (sociology, anthropology, and feminist studies) and although reflexivity contains in itself many analytical dimensions, we might generally say that it emphasizes a conscious self-examination of the ethnographer's interpretative assumptions (Davies 1999; Finlay 2002; Robben 2007). Some authors have eagerly insisted upon the fact that:

> If anthropology is about „otherness", any definition of our subject matter necessarily involves a corresponding self-definition (...) we require that our „selves" become objects for scrutiny in the same way that our research has rendered „objects" to become those other selves with whom we have interacted in the field (Crick 1992: 175).

Nevertheless, it is important to stress how this introspection or self-critique, a „null form of reflexivity" (Marcus 1998: 193), must not make the ethnographers autistic in relation to the subjects of their research. It is obvious that in ethnographic procedures we cannot discuss the researcher without discussing the subjects, even though there was a time when it seemed possible to discuss interviewees without considering the ethnographer.

The examination of field experience leads us to reflect upon relationships established in the field, about their nature, intensity and selectivity as well as about the expectation surrounding the researcher and their presence, as well as about the

internal and emotional conflicts experienced in the field. These matters, because of their largely personal nature, used to be „diligently avoided or carefully circumscribed" (Davies 1999: 11). Furthermore, certain classic contributions such as those made by Hortense Powdermaker (1967) or Louis Dumont (1978) are worth mentioning as exceptions to this tendency that saw reflexivity as „threatening the cannons of the discipline" (Okely 1992: 24). This was mainly because they attacked positivist notions of knowledge construction. The subjectivist and interpretative approaches reversed this tendency and it became „normal" upon opening anthropology books to find references to intersubjective relationships and friendships (Rabinow 1977; Crapanzano 1980).

Among the various dimensions of reflexivity, I will explore the dynamics of subject-researcher relationships. Mutual meanings involved and also evolved into a research encounter and some of their consequences are interwoven throughout this paper.

It is anthropologically orthodox to say that „the inter-connectedness of researcher, researched, social actors and significant others is the very essence of fieldwork" (Coffey 1999: 56). There is a vast scope of literature theorizing this relationship and its consequences (Crapanzano 1980; Clifford and Marcus, eds., 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986; Finlay and Gough, eds., 2003). Although I believe that since each fieldwork experience is unique, and as such is unrepeatable, it is worth trying to reveal some of those aspects that have become so tremendously important and that have earned their own „place" in my own research.

One of the aspects that became salient was the way in which research subjects „constructed" the researcher. The identity they attributed to me was based not only on their impressions about how I looked or talked but particularly on my nationality. I was being seen as someone with a dual-identity: I was Portuguese like „us", or Portuguese like „them".

Another issue was the fact that I was being constantly identified with those with whom I established the closest relationships. The image some villagers constructed of me, both as a person and as a researcher, was attached and somehow dependent upon the image they had of the group that included my smaller circle of acquaintances. I experienced some difficulties in dealing with the fact that the people whom I worked with attached an array of identities to me. What is more, because I was so focused upon completing my fieldwork „successfully" this put me under pressure to the point where I often reconsidered decisions that had been taken in advance and I also wondered if previously drafted strategies were methodologically adequate and safe. This was intended to find a level of psychological comfort, which it later on turned out impossible to attain. These issues have proved persistent throughout my fieldwork and were responsible for generating a period of conflict, both on epistemological and emotional levels.

The setting

The field experience my article deals with, took place when I was researching my doctoral research. I conducted fieldwork in a part of the Portuguese-Spanish border area between 2001 and 2003. After a period of uncertainty in choosing the research location I decided upon the border region in the north of Portugal between the Portuguese district of Guarda and the Spanish province of Salamanca. Both territorial areas are part of one of the most depressed areas not only along the Portuguese-Spanish border but also in the European context. The border zone is characterized by many small villages (*aldeias* and *pueblos*) with just a few hundred inhabitants. This is a hinterland area very remote from the Iberian economic and power centers. It was witness to significant falls in population since the mid-1950s when both Iberian countries were subject to dictatorships. This caused many border dwellers to leave for the main cities in their respective countries and especially to migrate to other European countries such as France or Switzerland. Neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish villages recovered from those population losses as many of the returning migrants, after decades of living abroad, chose not to return to their native villages but rather to keep houses there as second residences. Many could not adapt to „coming back" after living in the suburbs of Paris and consequently moved to urban centers. Some did not return at all.

I selected eight villages, five on the Portuguese side and three on the Spanish side. The interstitial nature of the field demanded that during the fourteen months of research I had to move, on a daily basis, between the Portuguese and the Spanish territory. The border was approximately 300 km from my real home and it was accessible only via regional roads which meant a commute of at least three hours. I tried to find accommodation in one of the villages. The process of finding a house in any of the villages turned out to be very complicated. Even though a large number of residences stood empty, as their owners only used them for one month a year during holidays, they were not available for rent. I approached several villagers and asked for their help in suggesting owners who might consider renting me a house. After a period of eight months of entering and leaving the field for short periods, I finally managed to rent a house in a Portuguese village and stayed there for fourteen months.

Perceptions of ethnographer's identity

Since the 1990s a theoretical framework has been developed that defends the idea that borders are places where identities are be brokered and broken (Berdhall 1999; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Strüver 2005). After drawing upon this theory framework I explored identity-related discursive processes and especially the in-

fluence of international border upon the way in which border populations construct and reproduce their local and national identity. As with most border areas, the feature that is originally imposed upon border dwellers (and for that matter upon the researcher as well) is the constant movement of people, goods and culture. The presence of the border implies the need for crossing it (Donnan and Wilson 1999).

I concentrated a great deal upon the ways in which the subjects address identity, both theirs and others. Due to the complex nature of the topic, people always adopted a discursive stance by resorting to conventional answers or by making use of stereotypes thereby revealing a divergence between discursive practices and social practices. This was exacerbated by the fact that the researcher shared her nationality with only a part of the subjects, in my case I was part of the in-group with some and seen as a foreigner by the rest of the research group. During the time I spent in the field I felt that my statuses altered every time the nationality of my interlocutors changed.

In the village where I was living, after a while, people got an idea of who I was and what I was doing there. Even though they could not quite comprehend what an anthropologist was or what the nature of my interests were they constructed and reproduced a narrative surrounding my presence that became popular hearsay: I came from Lisbon, I was a professor at some university and wanted information about smuggling and Spaniards. Although I had not mentioned any of these issues – smuggling or Spaniards – when I approached them for informal conversations or even during the actual interviews, they willingly described their identities to me as follows: locally they are smugglers (even if they have not smuggled for more than thirty years) and, nationally, they are different from the Spaniards. In the village, people usually referred to me as „the professor who is here doing some work". When I approached the person who was later to become my landlady I told her that I was teaching at a university. This information was passed on to the villagers through gossip channels.

In the other Portuguese villages, I was „the lady who is staying in Foios", the village I was living in. I was identified in this way because each time I approached any of them, they would ask me „where are you from?" I always told them that, for the time being I was living in Foios, and so they labeled me with a kind of temporary identity. The issue of origin is very important. The Spanish and Portuguese villages are geographically close and subsequently there is a high level of familiarity. What is more, people in these villages have a shared history of past hardships when they needed to support each other in a number of ways. In their past as smugglers, they were buying and selling outside of their villages and thus a tight network of social relationships developed. On the other side of the border, my identity was completely diminished so I was recognized solely by nationality. It was the most important criteria for my identity. The interviewees in the Spanish villages always referred to me as: „la chica portuguesa", i.e. „the Portuguese girl".

When I mentioned to my Portuguese interviewees that I would repeat with their Spanish neighbors the very work I was doing with them, they altered their entire previous statements. They redirected their discourse in a way that made me feel that they considered me as being one of them, i.e. „on this side of the border". Thence I was no longer an metropolitan person who had come to the hinterland to „write a book" but I became a member of the in-group. The ability and capacity of imagination that Benedict Anderson (1983) distinguishes as the main feature of both the nation and national identity operated here very effectively. The subjects thought of both themselves and the researcher as being in a horizontal structure.

Depending on the power of imagination, the idea of including the researcher as part of in the in-group generated all sorts of expectations. They felt that they had to use their knowledge in order to prepare me for certain difficulties they envisaged I would encounter once I arrived on the other side of the border. The first warning was related to the use of language, the main characteristic of national identity and one of the first elements of inclusion or exclusion within these kinds of groups (Smith 1991; Thiesse 1999). It was expected that the Portuguese and Spaniards would understand and communicate in both languages. There is, of course, a geographical and cultural proximity and to some extent, a linguistic similarity. The Portuguese language and Castilian itself share a similar sonority and some words are even written in the same way.

The Portuguese who I interviewed mentioned that, once I got to the other side I would have to speak Spanish because my interlocutors would simply refuse to communicate with me if I addressed them in my native Portuguese. It was a matter of „will", they said: „if you speak to them in Portuguese they will understand you perfectly, but they will tell you they don't get a word". The next snippet of information was related to identity: they believe that although their Spanish neighbors spoke Portuguese as well as Spanish they were certain that they would refuse to do so, because „that's just the way they are". When I pointed out that Spaniards have a general difficulty in pronouncing some Portuguese words, they seemed somewhat astonished, as if I could not have been an authority on this matter. They offered an alternative explanation: „Spaniards are very good people, we get along tremendously well, but the truth is that they think that the Portuguese, because we are smaller as smaller nation, have to adapt to them, so they expect us to speak their language". This difference of opinion excluded me from the group. I went back to my status as an outsider that I had before.

This kind of asymmetry in being willing to speak the others' language is real. I do not believe that it is based exclusively, as my informants insisted, upon the bad will or even linguistic difficulties. It is also related to a very aggressive cultural policy to protect the vernacular that has always been implemented in Spain. Films in Spain, for example, are always shown in Spanish, regardless of their origin. In Portugal, however, subtitles are used and the original language is preserved. In a way Spaniards are used to receiving information in their vernacular

language. Furthermore, the Portuguese living near the border often watch Spanish television programs which increases their familiarity with their neighbors' language. But this is not reciprocated. A survey conducted on the Portuguese--Spanish border revealed that:

> Only 16% of the Spanish population occasionally watch Portuguese television. Regular transmission reaches only 11% of the entire country of Spain. Percentages on the other side of the border are much higher: 53% of Portuguese people watch Spanish television (De Miguel 2000: 253).

As soon as I entered the Spanish villages I decided to verify the information I obtained from the Portuguese people I spoke to. It was just as they had told me. My Spanish interlocutors understood every word I used in my native language, but were eager to let me know that they could not speak Portuguese. They expected me to speak Spanish because in the borderlands every Portuguese does so. The border, a cultural and symbolic barrier, was there again and it was language that defined the limits of inclusion and exclusion.

Like with the Portuguese, the Spaniards did not find it hard to place the researcher into the social order: I was a Portuguese to them but there was a difference. I was somehow „more" Portuguese than their Portuguese neighbors. While they referred to the Portuguese border residents nearly always by their name and by place of dwelling, since I was not a permanent resident in the area the most appropriate way they found to define me was by referring to my nationality.

The Portuguese became surprised and sometimes apprehensive when I casually mentioned that I had met some people on the other side of the border and talked to them. They were eager to know whom I had talked to and when I answered they always felt that they needed to tell me how well they knew these people, how they had maintained some kind of relationship. Remembering what they might have told me about them, about their group, they then tried to minimize any subsequent damage to their reputations. My Portuguese interlocutors were afraid that the way their neighbors had described them was unfair, and what is more important, that I believed them.

This attitude frequently made me feel pressured and demonstrated the precarious nature of my position. I also realized that my informants had acknowledged that they had some power over me. Intimately they were expecting that because I was Portuguese I would paint a positive picture of them. As they realized that part of the information I had acquired about them came from the other side of the border they were afraid that the construction and representation that they had made of themselves could be compromised. Although they always maintained that a social climate of respect and even friendship that united them with their Spanish neighbors was indisputable, when speaking about their self-definition they were using several strategies of persuasion. Their necessity for justification

„of how and why we are like this", gave me access to impressive narratives, life stories and biographical reports which then led my research into areas where, initially, I had not intended of going.

Identity issues in the fieldwork process were compelling. I entered the field to explore border dwellers' discursive identity constructions and found myself completely entangled in the construction of my own identity. I reached a point where, as a researcher, I turned myself „into another subject in my own fieldwork" (Fadzillah 2004). It took a while for me to move forward from the pressure to „get it done well". I considered unfolding strategies of all types, for example reviewing my interview topics. I toyed with the idea of depending more on observation and informal conversations, in which the theme of „us and the other" appeared casually, rather than asking directly about it, and to a point when I considered treating these issues as „epistemologically productive in the analysis of fieldwork" (Coffey 1999: 20). I was fully aware that no change at all in research technique would have altered the identity construction to which I had become subject to. Nothing could alter the situation of being „Portuguese like us" on the one hand and „Portuguese like them" on the other.

This duality of representations about the researcher constructed my research in such a way that it influenced the way I related to the informants, the kind of information I collected from one group or another, the way I analyzed the data and, above all, the way the results were presented. The relationship I developed with the Portuguese informants was, from the outset, arguably closer than with the Spanish ones because I was a resident in a Portuguese village. I spent more time there. In terms of formally gathering and applying research techniques, I tried to maintain a fair standard. However, I soon realized that the information I had acquired informally during my long walks across the village or simply by being in public places, and even in private ones, was of no lesser significance. This kind of information came mainly from the village where I lived. I learned a lot about my subject while watching people playing cards in the village cafés, during relaxed chats with people I met on the street, who would interrupt a stroll to ask how my stay „with them" was coming along. They would also give some sweets to my children when they accompanied me on fieldwork and I would even learn from those who sought to keep some distance with regard to my person and to my research.

Although all my interlocutors touched upon similar topics, the narratives that I gathered from the Portuguese informants were more intimate, and contained a lot more details. Through them I gained access to smuggling experiences and stories of solidarity between Portuguese and Spanish neighbors as well as of political persecution during the Iberian dictatorships. They used all of their discursive capacities and mnemonic resources in reproducing their image of themselves, always emphasizing through the use of discursive strategies, whether they were addressing a peer or a stranger.

Those aspects of borderland identity that were revealed to me as ethnographer during informal conversations, interviews and biographical reports proved so important in the process of collective identity construction that I decided to create a space in my ethnographic text where these stories could be told. Again, the process of selecting material to be included reflected not only how I had seen them, but also the way in which they had allowed me to see them. They had shown themselves as: a marginalized population, both in economic and political terms, with a difficult relationship to the Portuguese state, but also with a great awareness of their capacity to employ local strategies of the kind that James Scott (1985) called „the weapons of the weak". On the other side of the border there were similar stories despite the fact that they lacked the depth of the Portuguese ones. There were also stories of smugglers and migrants, but narrated from the perspective of someone who had had, by comparison, a different experience, especially by receiving more support from the state. The Spaniards whom I interviewed always emphasized that their situation in the past, albeit difficult, especially during the years of the civil war (1936-1939), was not as tragic as that of their Portuguese neighbors. It was very interesting to notice how this duality of representations was transferred entirely to me as a Portuguese national. On both sides of the border I was constructed as a Portuguese, although it was done differently. Throughout their discourse, the Spaniards excluded me from their group stressing the difference between the two national groups by starting their sentences with expressions such as „you, the Portuguese...".

The President, the landlady and the café owners

Another issue that proved very important in the way research subjects constructed my identity was revealed through some of my personal connections in the village. As noted by Amanda Coffey „the people of the field and our relationship with them provide not only the bulk of our data but they also provide us with the building blocks of our identity in and beyond the field" (Coffey 1999: 39). Relations in the field are not homogeneous, in the sense that we do not relate to everybody or to everyone with the same degree of intensity.

The idea that close personal relationships with informants enhance and broaden analysis has been widely acknowledged. Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (1987: 31) have been particularly assertive when they argued that participant observation is grounded in human intersubjectivity. Friendship and other personal aspects of fieldwork became topics of reflection especially within the so called „intersubjective turn" (Jackson 1998). In this context it has become somewhat frequent to read about personal frustrations, conflicts and emotions in fieldwork. Before that, however, the idea of the very existence of close relationships that can be labeled as „friendship in the field" such as in the example referred to by Paul Rabinow

(1977) or Malcolm Crick (1992) attracted some criticism. Clifford Geertz (1968) argued that many of the descriptions of the emotional climate surrounding the moment of leaving the field are in part an effort for professional recognition and in part a fiction. Even Crick questioned the use of „friendship" to label relations in the field, considering it a „strategy that is merely part of the extraction of information" (Crick 1992: 176). Coffey also argued that although it is possible to find situations of a genuine commitment, „more often than not the reason for the initiation of a relationship is tied with the actual pursuit of fieldwork" (Coffey 1999: 42) leading us to question if we are really talking about friendship.

The way villagers saw and evaluated me was influenced by my narrow circle of relationships. A group of people whose houses I visited frequently and who frequently saw me became labeled „my friends". This group included my landlady, the owners of a café in the center of the village and a local political leader. My proximity with them led the others to classify them differently from the rest. I sensed a certain criticism as if this situation had not been expected. For different reasons, no one in the community was innocuous. In a relatively small community, amounting to less than five hundred people, knowledge through verbal communication is widespread and based on a detailed knowledge of each other's lives. I became aware that my proximity to these people influenced the way others related to me and the way in which they talked about the group and about themselves.

When I decided to start fieldwork, I did not know any members of the community. First, I presented my research plan to a local official. Thus, one of the first people I met was the political leader of the village. Complying with the standard procedure, I contacted him formally by letter giving an account of my intentions. I then approached him personally. He assured me that the local reception to my research would be very positive. I knew, however, that he had not spoken about it with more than two or three other people. Even so, I decided to stick to the idea that everyone was informed about my presence. A constructed knowledge of the group based only on him provided me initially with a degree of psychological and emotional comfort which cannot be ignored.

He was very involved with village projects and saw in the research an additional opportunity to present his community to the outside world. His support was essential as it was through him and through his connections that I succeeded in gathering initial information. He acted as a patron, introducing me to certain people, solving some of my initial practical problems. Above all, he seemed very pleased that I had chosen his village from among the group of border villages to live in.

I constantly questioned myself about the possible effects of this patronage on the fieldwork experience and on the data, especially when the topic of conversation moved to daily life and intra-community relations. These questions persisted during much of the time that I stayed in the field and although he was the first person with whom I had made contact in the village, he was also the last person

to be interviewed. I feared that his eagerness to depict local culture would influence my perspective so I decided to collect almost all of the information before interviewing him.

My landlady was the source of other revealing and relevant information. The owner was an elderly widow living alone in a two storey house. She rented me the first floor which she had let from time to time to school teachers who stayed in the village for periods of one year or to some neighbors. She was one of the people whom I became closest to. I chatted with her to gather some practical information about the ways of life in the community and to fill the loneliness of those initial weeks in the field. It was the first time I had lived alone and even though I knew that „the field is not inhabited in the same way that home is" (Bornstein 2007: 489) I tried to imitate a „normal" life. At the end of the day I found dining alone very difficult and had nobody to talk to. She pre-empted the situation, and invited me downstairs to watch TV with her by the fireplace. Those conversations with her and some of her friends who visited her regularly helped me to familiarize myself with the social and physical spaces that slowly emerged through stories that transported me to the past.

Before 1960, the whole village had been living a double life, during the day they were farmers and by night they smuggled everything they could sell to Spain. Spanish neighbors did exactly the same. There were a few families in the village whose financial situation was above average because they were land owners or because they had shops in the village that aided the business of smuggling. This was the case with my landlady. She and her husband were an especially active couple in the business and were recognized as one of the few families who had succeeded in getting rich through that. They had men working for them as smugglers, both Portuguese and Spanish and this situation generated a patron/ /client relationship that was still the main point of reference in the social network. More than once people in the village would refer to them, in a critical way, as being rich, adding that their economic wealth was accompanied by a lack of social and cultural refinement. They were rich but never got beyond the limits of the village and „knew" nothing more than the village. This was a point that returning emigrants emphasized because some of them had worked for this couple as smugglers before the emigration flows to France begun. Emigration inverted the social pyramid in the village – those who did not have many resources later on returned with economic capital. Furthermore, as they had returned with financial capital but with little social capital in the village they remained a marginalized population.

During fieldwork, past relationships involving my landlady became imposed upon the present and people never let me forget this. Whatever the topic, the past was still structuring relationships in the present. The fact that she rented her house to me, to a person she had never met before, did not pass unnoticed. Villagers saw this as her „natural" behavior: she just wanted to make money. Each

time her name was mentioned they were eager to „fill me in" with remembered details from olden stories. They seemed to doubt her capacity to inform me and my own capacity to discern the „truth" about them. Their doubts remained very important and constantly reminded me to question my assumptions. I forced myself to reflect upon gossip and realized that the only reason why I gained access to much of it was because it was this particular person, and not someone else, who rented me the house. They assumed that she had some power over me, because of how close we became.

The café owners were an ex-emigrant couple who owned an establishment in the center of the village. She was a Portuguese, who had left the village as a young girl to work in Switzerland. There she met her husband, a native Swiss, who returned with her to Portugal and had been living in the village for ten years. Their café was one of the first public spaces I visited in the village. It was extremely close to „my" house, similar to the cafés I was used to, and thus it was more attractive than the other bars in the village. My relationship with them was arguably the closest from the outset. During my third week in the field their daughter got married. A few days before the wedding, I was sitting at a table having coffee and she called me from behind the counter. I went over to her and she led me inside and upstairs to her home. There, she told me that she wanted me to see something nobody in the village had seen yet. Then she showed me the wedding dress that her daughter would be wearing a few days later. That triggered all sorts of contradictory feelings in me. As she was showing me the dress, she emphasized how it was different from any other dress that had ever been worn by other brides in the village. It was generous of her to let me into such a private moment of her family life but I felt that it was also a statement, a way of differentiating from the in-group.

The café was one of my main focal points during the time I spent in the field. Every day, before I began work, I stopped there for a coffee and to chat with them and with their customers. I met many of the people who would later become key informants in my research there. The way in which the community evaluated this space was in many cases very negative. Many locals refused to go there. As time went by I was aware that some of the villagers would never be found there. This opposition was due, according to the owners, to envy. The reason for this was „the way they lived their life" was considered to be very different from all the rest. Their habit of going out with friends for dinner or shopping out of the village were considered to be signs of cosmopolitanism and this made them different from the rest of the villagers. I later found out that there were ulterior motives for this climate of latent hostility, namely, the fact that their café was the most recent in the village. Its clientèle was established at the expense of others. What is more, they had a very modern space, in undeniably better condition than any of the others that existed in the village. They constantly used this to promote themselves, and their critics saw this as a sign of unnecessary ostentation.

As was the case with my landlady, the frequency with which I visited the café was a tool that people used for constructing my identity. And, in the same way, those people whom I interviewed were always ready to inform me about „my friends". They began by reassuring me that they were not always rich. They knew their story: she had to emigrate illegally to France and then to Switzerland. And, once she arrived there, she was no different from any one of them. She did the same kind of unskilled work. Often, these explanations caused me a great discomfort. I was fond of these people who had received me so generously and it seemed that everyone else expected that their words would „open my eyes" and that this would somehow show these people, whom I thought I knew well, in a different light. As Krista Van Vleet noted gossip, like all personal narratives, „often concerns unexpected events or incidents in which someone has transgressed social expectations" (Van Vleet 2003: 499). I was the guardian of information about them and information provided by them about the others. I often felt that the loyalty that all social relationships imply, in respect to all of them, was threatened by listening to this kind of gossip.

Concluding remarks

The pressing nature of relationships formed during fieldwork led me to look closer not only at the level of researcher and subject relationships but also at the complexity of relationships between individuals and between the individual and the group. The multiplicity of expectations on the part of the researcher and on the part of subjects raised epistemological and ethical doubts. I believe that some of the episodes described above and the gossip network that surrounded my presence and my relationships were fundamental, not only for the entire fieldwork process and for the necessity of self-reflection, but mostly to recapture my attention for the subjects. Invariably, each time I debated with myself about the influence of intersubjectivity on fieldwork and on the overall construction of ethnographic knowledge I would continue receiving data on the subjects, writing about them in my notebook and analyzing them as a group. So, it is of course inevitable to reinforce the immense importance of intersubjectivity and reflexivity upon fieldwork and upon the production of ethnographic knowledge. Reflexivity can be very interesting as a methodological tool. Even though we are reflecting and writing in the first person, and texts dealing with reflexivity are full of „I", „me" and „myself", all of this becomes just another way of doing what anthropology has always done: looking towards the „other", their culture and their „ways".

Key words: intersubjectivity, identity, research encounter, ethnography, fieldwork

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Maria de Fátima Amante

„PORTUGUESE LIKE US, PORTUGUESE LIKE THEM": REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN FIELDWORK

(Summary)

The main purpose of this paper is to approach some issues concerning intersubjectivity in fieldwork. The field experience addressed here was conducted on the Portuguese--Spanish border area demanding from the author to move across the border and assume, on a daily basis, her status as a Portuguese citizen like half of her interviewees as well as being a foreigner like the other half. One situation that was particularly relevant regarding the level of researcher's identity was caused by the dual-perception subjects formed about the anthropologist: being Portuguese like „us" (anthropology at home) or being Portuguese like „them" (anthropology abroad). Within this framework of reflection this paper looks at the interactional process through which knowledge is acquired, shared and transmitted. It also explores the dynamics of the subject-researcher relationship in order to understand how this relationship influenced both collation and analysis of the author's data.

Key words: intersubjectivity, identity, research encounter, ethnography, fieldwork