
The politics of identity in organizational ethnographic research: Ethnicity and tropicalist intrusions

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Abstract

The article addresses aspects of the politics of identity that became manifest in the researcher–researched relationships in the context of an organizational ethnographic field study at a UK-based printing business. As the fieldwork commenced, it quickly became apparent that the researcher’s Brazilian nationality and Latin American ethnic identity were being performed and responded to in certain specific and problematic ways. This study analyzes the dynamics of identity work and identity politics in ethnographic and other qualitative research. However, the specific contribution of this article is that it examines the questions that arise when the typical structures and patterns of research practice – which are themselves embedded in a spatialized politics of knowledge – are reversed. Historically, research in the social sciences (including management and organization studies) has been conducted by researchers from the center in relation to others in the non-center. Furthermore, in so doing, epistemologies, theories and methods developed in and for the center are deployed to examine and explain phenomena in those other places. This article addresses the question of what

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happens when the researcher is from the non-center and is conducting research on those from the center. This inversion is increasingly common and has significant implications not only for research practice and the politics of knowledge but also for international business relations more generally.

Keywords

ethnicity, identity, organizational ethnography, otherness, postcolonial studies

Introduction

This article addresses aspects of the politics of identity that became manifest in researcher–researched relationships in the context of an organizational ethnographic field study at a UK-based printing business. Although the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched and the potential politics of identity inherent in that relationship have been addressed previously (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Hatch, 1996), the distinctive nature of this case is that the researcher is Brazilian and is investigating aspects of organizing practices in a British factory, which means that, within the context of the extant geopolitics of knowledge, the directionality of research is reversed. As the ethnographic fieldwork commenced, it quickly became apparent that the researcher’s national/ethnic identity was being performed and responded to in very specific and problematic ways. The identity of the researcher was being constructed in stereotyping and essentializing ways that were an affront to his sense of self and his understanding of his nation and its culture and at odds with the identity that he sought to perform. These dynamics problematized the research process, not least because they embroiled the researcher in identity politics and, as we will argue, in the wider discourses and conditions of postcoloniality. Notably, the ethnographic fieldwork was not initially undertaken with a view to exploring these identity dynamics. However, because identity issues surfaced almost immediately, the researcher decided straightaway to monitor and record them as part of his research practice.

The article is structured as follows. First, because these issues emerged in the context of an organizational ethnography (OE), we discuss the historical trajectory and current status of OE and focus on the relationships among ethnography, anthropology and the colonial project in particular. More specifically, we discuss the significance of considering identity, identity work and identity politics within the research process generally and within ethnography in particular. We next describe the methodology that informs the empirical aspects of this article, and this methodological explication is followed by a presentation of four themes that emerged from the analysis, all of which bear on identity issues within the research setting. Following this presentation, the next section seeks to explain the themes we identified and their implications. We conclude the article by highlighting the significant implications that this research holds for the dynamics of identity work, not just in ethnographic research but also in other modes of qualitative research and for the wider question of human relations in relation to the shifting geopolitics of research. The article makes a specific contribution by focusing on the politics of identity within contemporary research in management and organizational studies (MOS) when,

as is increasingly the case, a researcher from the non-center – from a formerly colonized, peripheral location – conducts research on/in the center, that is, the former colonizing center.

Organizational ethnography, reflexivity and identity

The conditions for the emergence of ethnography are relevant to the concerns of this article. The provenance of ethnography is typically held to be within anthropology; however, Yanow (2009) suggests that ethnography actually developed within the practices of colonial administrators as they sought to better understand and control the people within their jurisdiction. The role of anthropology in general and ethnography in particular within the colonial project has been attested to (Asad, 1973; Fabian, 1991, 2001; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Prasad, 2003).

Initially, ethnography was informed by the prevailing orthodox, realist assumptions of the scientific method, which include the ethnographer's privileged position as an objective observer, the turning of the ethnographers' scientific gaze on the (often colonized) *other* as an object of research, and the extraction of neutral observations from which accurate accounts and representations might be produced. There was little critical reflection on the paradigmatic location, the role of the researcher or the potential complexities of the relationships between the researcher, the researched and knowledge production. There was, in short, little or no reflexivity until the critical ruminations of the late 1970s and early 1980s that precipitated the so-called reflexive turn in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986).

The value of ethnography for local situations, including organizational life, emerged primarily in the post-Second World War era. Recent historical or bibliographic overviews situate the earliest OEs in the 1940s (Down, 2012; Geuijen, 2009), but a series of classic contributions to this literature were clustered in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2011; Yanow, 2009). This approach has remained a tool for researchers since that time; although some argue that its occurrence and significance has increased (Czarniawska, 2012; Erbele and Maeder, 2011), others suggest that it remains relatively neglected among organizational researchers (Zickar and Carter, 2010). Some of the disagreements regarding OEs involve the existence of various and sometimes conflicting conceptions, assumptions and practices (Brannan et al., 2012). The diversity of OEs is partly related to differences in core assumptions and paradigm commitments, but is also related to the contingencies of particular studies.

Although the reflexive turn led to a profound change in thinking and practice among anthropological ethnographers who largely heeded the call for reflexivity and divested themselves of realist trappings, recent evaluations of OE indicate that it remains widely infected with realist assumptions and little reflexivity (Neyland, 2008; Yanow, 2009). It remains common to find contemporary scholars advocating the maintenance of a distance between the researcher and the researched (e.g. Erbele and Maeder, 2011; Ybema et al., 2009). The observational aspects of ethnography that privilege an active researcher making observations regarding passive objects of research and extracting and representing aspects of their life-world as true and accurate accounts are also commonly emphasized (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). Such positions work against the co-constructed, dialogic aspects of ethnography and the related reflexive requirements that are advocated by those scholars who encouraged the reflexive turn.

Such realist positions also draw attention away from researchers, their relationships with the researched, and with any identity dynamics in the field (Bell, 1999; Van Maanen, 2011), which is our focus in this article. The reflexive turn made the nature of such relationships and related dynamics more salient and precipitated the recognition that fieldwork involves identity work for both the researcher and the researched (Coffey, 1999).

Reflections on identity and identity work in OE practice are relatively rare (for exceptions, see Bell, 1999; Kunda, 1992). More specifically, the encounter between the global South and global North in terms of racial identity in the context of OEs has been almost untouched as a theme. Conversely, within anthropology, reflections on researcher identity in the research process have been relatively common for some time. Wax (1979: 513) was one of the earliest researchers to address the issue, noting that, 'It is obvious that a fieldworker's gender, age, prestige, expertise or ethnic identity may limit or determine what he or she can accomplish'; thus, in fieldwork, our identity is very much exposed, even amplified. However, Wax was principally concerned with matching researcher-researched demographics to increase data collection efficiency. Concern with researcher identity tended to focus on the racialized structure of the research community and on matters of validity or on the insider-outsider debate (Blauner and Wellman, 1973; Zinn, 1979). Such considerations were not informed by more contemporary theories of identity as fluid and socially constructed (e.g. Gergen, 1991; Pullen and Linstead, 2005), and they did not address the intersectionality of identity – a topic feminist analysts were later to draw attention to (Andersen, 1993; De Vault, 1996). Indeed, feminist theory and methodology has ensured that gender identity has received more attention than other features in this field (e.g. Harding, 1987; Smith, 1990). However, Stanfield (1994) points to the hegemonic, white, male-dominated nature of northern social science with its corresponding erasure of alternative ethnically informed models of research. He also notes that when matters of ethnicity, race and, indeed, gender are attended to, such attention remains directed most often by white scholars working out of the academies at the center, whereas scholars from the periphery (or semi-periphery) are frequently compelled to study even their own communities from a Eurocentric perspective. This point is reiterated by Tatli (2012), who laments the poverty of genuine reflexivity even in critical management studies, including a lack of reflexivity about its own European, white, male, heterosexual and able-bodied internal structures.

As noted above, although identity has been discussed in MOS research, in terms of actual research *practice*, and even in methodological prescription, reflexive consideration of researcher identity and identity politics has not been commonly practiced. Indeed, Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 365) maintain that, 'within organization and management studies articles addressing research relationships and positionality are relatively rare,' citing Zickar and Carter (2010) as an exception. Where identity issues have been considered, gendered features have been the focus. For example, Bell (1999) suggests that OE is affected by masculine dominance, which can pose significant challenges to female researchers while facilitating the research process for male ethnographers.

Comparatively, reflections on ethnic/national identity in research relations, certainly in MOS, have been uncommon. As Stanfield (1994: 175) noted, 'There are certain corners of Western life, such as modern social sciences and sciences in general, in which the fundamental influences of ethnicity in shaping interpretations of reality are ignored or

given only minimal attention.’ This notion echoes Nkomo’s (1992) reflections on the treatment of race within MOS. While urging the acknowledgement of the fundamentally racialized nature of social systems, including organizations, and the rewriting of race into (organization) theory, this author argues that MOS assumes that organizations are ‘race neutral’ and that there is an ‘unconscious assumption by organizational researchers that majority group members [Northern, white, and mostly male] do not have a racial identity and, consequently, it is a ‘nontopic’ for research’ (Nkomo, 1992: 500). Nkomo urges scholars to be fully aware of ‘how prevailing societal race relations influence their approach to the study of race ... they must *also understand the effects of their own racial identity and experiences on their work*’ (Nkomo, 1992: 490, emphasis added). The reluctance to carry a reflexive, constructivist and relational view of ethnic identity into methodology is noted by De Andrade (2000):

... qualitative methodology in racial and ethnic research has focused on how the racial and ethnic identity of the researcher and participant impact the research process. The effect is to present race and ethnicity as *external* phenomena that are imposed on the research process rather than as *dynamic phenomena that are actually constructed and reinforced through it*. (De Andrade, 2000: 269, emphasis added)

If identity is viewed as fluid and socially constructed in specific contexts, then it cannot be assumed that aspects of identity, and in particular race and ethnicity, are fixed elements that are ineluctably established prior to engagements between the researcher and the researched during field research; instead, identities are constructed within the research process itself.

Stepping away from traditional assumptions of ethnography that assert objectivity, distance and disengagement entails seeing the ethnographic encounter as interactive, if not dialogical, and as involving co-constructions not only of meanings but also of selves and identities. As Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 365) assert, ‘Immersion in the field often means that ethnographers become implicated in the lives of research respondents and wrestle with choices about positionality, identity, and the nature of these relationships.’ Thus, there are interactions and negotiations involving the relationship and regarding roles and identities. These authors emphasize (citing Fine, 1994 and Hastings, 2010) that researcher–researched relationships in field research are characterized by fluidity, multiplicity and emergence, and that researchers seek to position themselves and are positioned by the researched in complex and evolving ways, with implications not only for research design and methodology but also for identities. However, as Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 366) indicate, ‘The intricacy and impact of these relationships are rarely addressed within mainstream OMS empirical and methodological accounts, yet they are often crucial to the success of a research study.’ This lack of discussion has implications for research practice and success but also for identity issues relating to both researcher and researched.

Other aspects of identity, including gender, age, class and sexual orientation, are likely to be part of identity politics, but so are ethnicity and national identity. That aspect of identity is made more problematic because the history and geopolitics of knowledge in the social sciences have been characterized by unidirectionality, asymmetry and

dependency. Social science, including its epistemology, methodology and knowledge, have been produced by and disseminated from the center. When venturing outside the center, research has been performed by the center on the non-center/periphery, rendering accounts that are refracted through the center's theoretical and ideological lens for the center's consumption and consistent with its interests. This process is particularly true for anthropology and ethnography, and resonates in the intimate relationship between anthropology and the colonial project noted above and with the persistence of the conditions of postcoloniality with respect to the politics of knowledge (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Mignolo, 2000, 2002). Given current geopolitical shifts, such patterns of research are also changing, and a situation is arising where scholars from previously colonized locations and the non-center are conducting research into the previously colonizing locations and the center, as is the case with the research at issue in this article. The question then involves what occurs when a researcher carrying the signifiers of an identity of someone from the formerly colonized South enters the institutions of the North seeking to make the people there the object of scrutiny. More specifically, how do identity dynamics and politics play out in such a situation? Does the ethnic/racial identity of such a researcher become an issue and, if so, with what effects?

Method

The material for this article was generated as part of an ethnographic study of a newspaper printing shop in the United Kingdom. The goal of this ethnography was to analyze aspects of organizational change and organizing. However, as tends to occur in qualitative research, other researchable issues became apparent (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Among them were issues relating to the role and identity of the researcher, researcher–researched relationships, and the entire question of the politics of identity within a wider politics of knowledge.

The researcher's accent typically led to questions about his nationality/ethnicity, and the declaration of 'Brazilian' was frequently followed by various comments and interactions around that identifier. Indeed, such an interaction occurred at the first meeting with those who were in a position to approve research access to the organization. The researcher immediately realized that such interactions were of interest and so began an exhaustive annotation of such events and how he felt about them. This provides the material we analyzed in our story. In this regard, this analysis was an adjunct activity in relation to the main research ethnography and was a passive and incidental research practice.

The setting for the research was the printing shop of an important media group (referred to hereafter as Press Inc.) located in England. The print shop produced several weekly periodicals and daily newspapers with large national circulations. The vast majority of those working at the plant were male, English, white and 40–59 years of age; only three employees did not conform to this categorization. In comparison with other organizations in the UK, Press Inc. is somewhat racially homogeneous. Such racial homogeneity can be related to the fact that the printing industry has traditionally been unfriendly to ethnic minorities (Thanki and McKay, 2005).

The over-arching study – of which the data and analysis in this article are by-products – conformed to rather orthodox ethnographic field research practices. It should be made clear that there was no initial plan or intention to examine aspects of identity, nor to focus

reflexively on the dynamics of the researcher–researched relationship. Indeed, the researcher had been schooled in rather orthodox methodology, including orthodox ethnography, consistent with the review of OE set forth above. The researcher’s intended ethnographic practice could be characterized as subjectivist on Cunliffe’s (2011) continuum from objectivist through subjectivist to inter-subjectivist. This practice involved extended immersion in the field to make informed observations to generate ‘rich and detailed accounts of the daily life of the community’ (Locke, 2011; Ybema et al., 2009). It was assumed that a degree of detachment and objectivity would be maintained; the research was not dialogical in concept or design, nor was reflexivity salient in the approach; in this regard, the work conforms to much contemporary OE within which realist, objectivist assumptions persist (Neyland, 2008). In conformity with these broad injunctions, the fieldwork was conducted over a 10-month period. During this period, one of the authors observed everyday activities at the Press Inc. plant while attending the company five days a week, spending eight to 12 hours per day at the plant. At the end of each day, field diaries were written according to prescribed practice (Sanjek, 1990), which resulted in a little over 2000 pages of field notes. After exhaustive reading of these diaries, the researcher codified the data to identify empirical and theoretical themes. Atlas Ti software was used, but automated coding was not employed, which ensures that the researcher remained immersed in the process. For this article, only those parts of the data and analysis pertaining to the researcher’s identity and reflections and memos on those topics are used.

The field researcher, as is apparent, is a Brazilian male and was in his late twenties at the time of the fieldwork; he is upper-class and self-identifies as a professional academic and researcher. His command of English is excellent, and he had been in the UK for a year before the fieldwork began; thus, he had some familiarity with general British culture and had honed his language skills. He chose (and chooses) to adopt a relatively conservative and sober mode of attire and personal grooming. At the beginning of the research, he sought to project the image of an academic researcher and to perform that identity. He did nothing in particular to signify his Brazilian identity, although it was apparent to any native English speakers that he spoke with an ‘accent.’

This article aims less to present an ethnography than to use aspects of the ethnographic encounter to reveal facets of the dynamics of identity and the politics of knowledge that emerged within it. The identity politics that this research addresses were not actively engaged within the field study itself; instead, they were noted, monitored and recorded together with reflexive journal reflections and commentary, and this article is our attempt to make sense of those encounters and politics. The writing acknowledges the presence of the author both in the research and in the writing, and the first person singular is employed. In so doing, we share an affinity with the confessional tale (Van Maanen, 1988). For Weick (1989: 308), confessional tales ‘exemplify the ways in which orthodox science is flawed when it forgets that social facts are human fabrications rather than neutral, objective observables. Confessional tales at their best represent a dialogue between experience and interpretation.’

Themes: Aspects of identity politics in a research setting

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of the field notes pertaining to researcher–researched relations, identity politics and instances where the researcher’s

nationality/ethnicity was cause for comment by participants. As noted, his accent – rather than other identity signifiers – was apprehended by participants, and the researcher would affirm his Brazilian identity when asked about it. As we will discuss, to be Brazilian is constructed in the interaction between the researcher and some employees in several ways, some of which had derogatory characteristics. We argue that the interactions around his ‘Brazilianness’ perform, among other things, a type of *othering* and participated in a form of *tropicalism* that itself is a variant of *Orientalism* applied to South America (and other locations). We do not assume that there is an essential Brazilian identity or that there is an equally essentialized English identity. Additionally, we do not claim that the British in general or the workers at the company studied are essentially racists. The exchanges that we will present here are the outcomes of specific encounters with particular individuals and are circumscribed in a particular space and time, that is, in the conditions of postcolonial Britain.

The beautiful game: Locating the researcher

I begin with an opening encounter, one that occurred at the beginning of the research project while access to the field site was still being negotiated.

After some minutes waiting in the reception area, I was called upon to begin a meeting with the editor of one of England’s local newspapers. Through a common acquaintance, I had finally managed to arrange a meeting to discuss the possibility of conducting ethnographic research at a newspaper. I walked into the room, which was decorated like a typical office, with all the accoutrements of the modern corporate domain. A man in his forties, wearing a well-tailored suit, was sitting at a desk but rapidly rose and came to the door to greet me. He shook my hand firmly and effusively. As soon as I began to speak, he asked, ‘But where do you come from?’ When I tell him that I am Brazilian, he smiled and immediately started to talk about football (soccer). We spoke for approximately 10 minutes about football and about Brazilian and English players. It appeared that the ice had been broken and the atmosphere became cordial, so we moved on and began to talk about the research. I felt that our conversation had created a favorable atmosphere and established the rapport that research orthodoxy recommends. In this instance, the discussion of my national identity was innocuous and had a positive and facilitating effect on the research process, as I noted in my field notes. I did not feel any prejudice.

The same events occurred when I met the newspaper’s CEO, whose permission I also needed to secure access. We also spent most of the time talking about football because he knew Brazilian teams and players. We discussed differences between the Brazilian and British styles of football. The conversation concluded with the CEO asking his secretary to bring four tickets for his corporate box for an English Premier League match that weekend. I was surprised but also pleased with this turn of events. It appeared that being constructed as ‘the Brazilian’ brought me some benefits, both materially and in terms of facilitating the research process.

Of course, in both situations, I also went on to explain the research, and its aims and methods, and presented the necessary documentation. In so doing, I was positioning myself as a researcher and as an academic. In both instances, I was able to successfully perform researcher/academic, but I was also obliged to co-produce a Brazilian identity.

My interlocutors were able to successfully perform corporate manager, soccer enthusiast and, that can be seen, a form of normative masculinity.

Discussing football or car racing was a common reaction from people whom I met during the field research once they found out where my accent meant I was from. From a research practice perspective, these were, to an extent, useful ethnographic encounters, that is, encounters that smoothed interactions, enacted a degree of naturalism, and facilitated rapport. Thus, the way that my national identity was being constructed was helping me obtain access and conversations with people.

However, I did wonder whether the topic of football would have emerged if I had said that I was from India or Lebanon. The English, on the basis of my nationality alone, assumed that I had a passion for and knowledge of football. In fact, I have only a passing interest in the game and have always been a terrible football player. I follow matches occasionally, sometimes attend games with friends, and know enough to continue a conversation. Despite this relative lack of interest in the sport, I went along with my interactants; I guess to some extent I was faking a level of interest and a football enthusiast identity to engage with them. However, given the associations, one can already interpret this type of interaction as a situated construction of my Brazilian identity.

At one level, there appears to be nothing more of interest here than natural conversation between strangers that centers on themes of assumed common interest. However, the talk trades sometimes in rather crude cultural signifiers and stereotypes. The fact that both managers and others at Press Inc. assumed that I would *ipso facto* be interested in soccer and motor racing simply because I am Brazilian represents a form of essentializing. There is a form of exoticism that has been common in the center's representational practices in relation to other cultures – practices that were established in the earliest flush of colonial encounters but that persist even today. Initially, I did not contest these representations or the version of my Brazilianness being constructed; indeed, I rather colluded with them because it helped me talk to people and sustain access to data. However, soon other exoticisms emerged that were less benign.

Exoticizing and eroticizing the other

It was common for people at Press Inc. to express incredulity that someone from Brazil would elect to move to England – a surprise that centered on perceptions of climate and lifestyle. Typical of such reactions was, 'You're from Brazil? Really? How do you stand the weather here?' Questions about how often I danced and about Carnival and beautiful Brazilian beaches were insistently frequent. Indeed, interactions would commonly begin with talk about football and/or Formula 1 racing and then move to the Brazilian climate and paradisiacal environs. Overall, the talk of the participants implied that they had previously constructed a stereotype in which Brazilians were friendly, happy people with a hedonistic outlook who inhabited a land of permanent sunshine, beaches and parties.

Although the initial interactions about Brazil had a relatively innocuous tone, some of the questions and remarks became more problematic and challenging for me as time progressed. For instance, a recurrent theme was Brazilian women. Participants would ask me countless times and with great curiosity whether women wear skimpy clothes every day, if their bodies are really as perfect as shown in the media, and above all, if they actually have distinctively large buttocks. Occasionally, this line of inquiry would

move on to more explicit domains with people simply asking outright what it is like to have sex with a Brazilian woman. An even more specific but common line of questioning was to inquire whether it was true that Brazilian women readily have anal sex. Many would tell me about friends who had been to Brazil for easy sex at parties that were steeped in available drugs and alcohol. Others told of friends who visited Brazil and found wives easily because, according to them, Brazilian women crave the opportunity to move to Europe and have a house with a washing machine, dishwasher, and so forth. Some even asked whether all Brazilian women would consider moving to the UK in exchange for a house with electricity and the possibility of watching TV and enjoying a plate of food every day. My interlocutors appeared to conceive of Brazilian women as underdeveloped people with an almost bestial sexual wantonness.

The initial exoticisms that appeared rather innocuous had thus taken a darker turn. When conversations turned to Brazilian women, I would initially answer jokingly and in ways that might have tended to confirm the stereotypes. One might read these interactions as a type of masculine banter that is common in many male-dominated work settings (Collinson, 1988, 1992; Hearn and Collinson, 2006) that I initially engaged in to a degree. In this sense, those employees and I were co-producing a form of hegemonic masculinity. In part, I was conscious of the need to maintain research access; therefore, I wanted to behave in ways that fostered inclusiveness. I also felt that ‘playing along’ conversationally would keep people talking and thus help generate ‘data.’ However, the sometimes-persistent focus on distorted, essentialist, racist and neo-colonial imaginaries of Brazil, Brazilian identity and Brazilians led the exchanges beyond typical masculinist banter. I became increasingly conflicted over my participation in hegemonic masculinity that was increasingly sexist in tone and my desire to perform to secure inclusivity. In some exchanges with particular shop floor workers and managers, the ethnic/nationality aspect of my identity was being singled out, resulting in my being constructed in essentialized, if not racialized, ways. As noted, I have only a passing interest in sport and soccer, I do not particularly enjoy Carnival parties or dancing, and I have lived most of my life in São Paulo – a city that looks more like a set from the movie *Blade Runner* than the tropical paradise that was the imaginary Brazil of my interlocutors. As for the notion of hypersexualized women with libertine attitudes and rampant appetites, that image hardly corresponded to my experience of women from a large and mainly catholic country.

Thus, as some remarks became more frequent, intrusive, and were clearly fed by a racialized or neo-colonial purview, I began to get annoyed, which showed in my reactions, which became more facetious and ironical. The distance and detachment that I had naively presumed would be available to me rapidly eroded as I engaged with the participants at a personal level and as responses beyond the neutral and unemotional were engendered. For instance, I made a rather facetious response along the lines that Brazilian women do indeed wear fewer clothes in hot and sunny coastal towns but that I found it strange that English women wore skimpy clothes to go out at night in near-zero temperatures. On another occasion, I brought up the fact that I had seen people having sex in toilets at clubs in the UK – something I had never witnessed in Brazil. When asked about Brazilian women wanting to move abroad, I began to respond with versions of ‘many Europeans come to Brazil in search of “slaves” to take to Europe and also to practice pedophilia.’

The responses varied. Some just laughed at my comments; with others, there was some bristling and I could sense tension developing. I recognize that such reactions

were emotional and perhaps not wholly appropriate in the research context, given orthodox normative expectations; however, I felt the need to counter and put into context the recurrent depreciatory views about Brazilian women. In most instances, I let things pass, although at times I felt offended; with hindsight, I wonder if I could have been more robust in expressing myself. Although some of the remarks were offensive in and of themselves, I am a male from the elite class in Brazil with a white European background. I had enjoyed all the privileges of private education and health in an economically unequal country, and I had never encountered any type of prejudiced comments regarding me before. I disclose this information to emphasize that my circumstances in Brazil made me even more astonished by the comments that I received while I was at Press Inc. The comments were affecting my fieldwork in various ways, such as avoiding certain people. However, I had not anticipated such things and was not prepared for them, neither as a person nor as a researcher; hence, it is difficult for me to be clear about the impact of these issues on the data collection and my interpretations.

Fairly clear exoticizing and eroticizing practices are apparent in some of these exchanges – practices that are relatively common in tropicalism and Orientalism. These were frequently accompanied by additional othering tropes, such as those that position Brazil as backward and underdeveloped; I now turn to these.

Regressing the other

The imaginary of Brazil as underdeveloped, backward and inferior became apparent on some occasions in the discourse of participants. For example, on a few occasions, I was asked whether Brazilian houses are made of brick and tile and whether we have broadband internet. I was also asked about Brazilian hygiene habits. On one occasion, when the meeting room we were in was infused with a bad smell, one of the managers asked jokingly: ‘So Brazilian, was it you who farted?’ I was embarrassed and incapable of reacting. On another occasion, a stomach bug had spread throughout the company and, upon realizing that I had not caught it, a manager said, ‘You have not caught the bug, have you? It’s because you come from Brazil and your body is used to this virus, isn’t it?’ I said nothing on that day but became indignant upon noticing that the standard of hygiene in the company’s kitchen was far lower than I was accustomed to in Brazil. Another incident occurred in the printing shop when its director said that in the past, when people in England wanted to make phone calls, they had to call a central telephone switchboard where operators connected the calls manually. He then turned to me and said, ‘You must know already, it must still be like that in Brazil.’ These insinuations that Brazil was underdeveloped and regressive were sometimes accompanied by a related set of insinuations that represented Brazil and Brazilians as uncivilized, primitive and brutal.

One incident in particular illustrates this type of discourse. I had a meeting with the financial director of Press Inc.’s holding group, which occurred a few weeks after the shooting of the Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes on the London underground by the British police. As soon as the director found out that I was Brazilian, he said with some vehemence:

How dare your government question the actions of the British police after it put an end to the life of an illegal immigrant? In your country, the police enjoys itself killing people and nothing

happens. That person was an illegal immigrant, like thousands of others in South London. They come over here, they have no right to live in my country, and when something like that happens, you put the blame on our government? What has your government done to protect people in your country from the police? What does it do to prevent these starving people from coming over here? Before clamoring for justice here, they should ensure that there is justice in your own country.

Although these remarks clearly made me uncomfortable, I could not react incisively because the director was in a position to veto my research access. All I said was that I was not an official of the Brazilian government, and I then suggested that he write to the Brazilian Embassy. His remarks reveal a perception of Brazil as a barbaric and lawless land that lacks an adequately developed civil society; the remarks also intimate a lack of civilization and backwardness. Again, it should be stressed that these remarks came from a senior manager, and similar attitudes were found on the shop floor.

Themes relating to lawlessness, violence and a lack of civil order were the subject of questions on a number of occasions. I was asked if I used to run from the police when I was young, if I had ever starved, and if my father was a drug dealer. Again, my sense of self and the professional aspects of my identity that I thought I was performing were being repositioned by such interjections. Others brought up government corruption and broader social issues in Brazil. For example, several people asked about deforestation in the Amazon and asserted that the Brazilian government was unable to sustain the forest, whereas others commented on what they imagined was a prevalent and violent drug culture in Brazil. Because we were working in a newspaper printing shop, negative news pieces about Brazil occasionally came up, typically related to drug trafficking, environmental problems and food issues; each time, someone would draw such articles to my attention. My response was to feel embarrassed, to acknowledge that such things did exist, but to try to put them into context. The raising of such issues, in addition to misinformation or faulty contextualization, led to my feeling embarrassed or affronted, which affected my interactions in the field in a limiting and negative way.

Bricolaged identities

One incident during the field research encapsulated the problematized researcher–researched relationship and the subject–object inversions that were occurring, which precipitated intense reflection regarding how this type of incident affected my identity and that of others.

At the plant, workers had the habit of putting photos on the wall to make fun of situations or colleagues. One day, on arriving at the factory floor approximately five months into my fieldwork, an employee said, grinning, ‘Hey, go over to the notice board to see the photo of you they put up. You look great!’ On doing so, I found the image of the character ‘Borat’ from the mockumentary of the same name in which the lead actor plays a visitor from Kazakhstan who tours the US, getting involved in all manner of absurd situations while interacting with real Americans (Borat, 2006). I discovered that approximately 25 copies were spread around the factory floor.

On the photo, an arrow was drawn pointing to the man’s genital region; underneath, it was written that I was ‘showing-off my Brazilian’ – a *double entendre* that refers both to

the male anatomy on display and to the colloquialism used in the UK to describe the depilation of pubic hair. Although I understood the joke, I was puzzled by the choice of Borat and by his wearing of a skimpy outfit to represent me. I believe the joke was based on that *double entendre*, but that depended on the identification of me, a Brazilian, with the figure in the picture. The movie had just been released in the UK, and its imagery had perhaps not fully percolated into the everyday cultural domain; on that basis, the signifiers present in the poster can be read in a somewhat unmediated manner. In that sense, the key signifiers might be read as composing a *mélange* gesturing to hyper-sexualized attire and a type of lascivious sexuality – precisely those tropicalized eroticizations of Brazil that had emerged in the field setting. Thus, although Borat was supposedly from Kazakhstan, this symbology served the purpose of representing both me and aspects of an imaginary Brazilian identity.

I was perplexed by the image; however, because I did not wish to create an interactional hiatus or appear contestive and thus risk being positioned as an outsider, I simply laughed. This representation of ‘me’ was quite some distance from my intentions to perform an academic researcher identity. With my laughter, I colluded with this performance of a form of normative masculinity, making fun of and othering a sexualized male with possibly some cross-dressing connotations. I was also colluding with a construction of Brazilian identity that conformed to these types of eroticized and exoticized representations. However, my laughter also seemed to be read as the ‘right’ response from the employees’ point of view; my outward reaction apparently precipitated other acts and interactions that suggested I had been accorded a greater level of inclusion and acceptance. For example, some employees shared sabotage strategies and methods to delay work with me, told me personal secrets, and so forth. The Borat incident can then be understood as a type of rite of passage that is not unusual during long-term ethnographies and that provides researchers with a deeper, insider-level of access to their setting (e.g. Johnson, 1984). However, in the emergent identity dynamics, it represented a rather uncomfortable trade-off in which I had colluded in some questionable identity constructions but had thereby secured a degree of acceptance and inclusiveness.

In summary, the interactions around my identity at Press Inc. caused varied reactions and emotions. I had certainly not expected these things to occur and was not prepared for them. Despite being offended by some of the remarks, I most often did not challenge them, partly because I was concerned about losing research access and partly because I felt any challenge would be useless because people did not appear willing to listen and appeared certain about their notions of what Brazilians are like. In terms of the research process, feeling challenged and insulted began to constrain me to some extent. I began avoiding some people and felt inhibited in some situations. Tensions had been created between some participants and me, and this tension created an environment within which I was somewhat anxious and hesitant and that caused me to distance myself from some people, and made me doubt my right to ask questions to a certain extent. However, I must admit that colluding with or permitting the enactment of the stereotypical Brazilian was helpful in establishing an image of someone who was harmless to the people on the shop floor, which thus facilitated interactions with the participants.

Discussion

The preceding analysis suggests three interrelated moments that are discernible through the identified themes. First, and most obviously, a complex politics of identity is at work in this research. Second, a facet of the identity politics involved is the processes of othering, that is, moments where the researcher's identity is constructed and positioned in and by Orientalist/tropicalist representational practices. Third, and emergent from the other two moments, the researcher–researched relationship is problematized, and an inversion occurs. Through each of these moments, the identity of the researcher is being constructed as the research unfolds.

Identity politics in research

Identity is complex, multifaceted and characterized by fluidity, intersectionality and being constructed in context (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Gergen, 1991; Pullen and Linstead, 2005; Webb, 2006). Citing Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) above, we noted how researchers immersed in the field are engaged in extended interactions with others and how processes of identity construction and identity politics are inevitably at play in such research settings. As Vanderbeck (2005: 388) argues, 'relationships between the researcher and the researched are always entangled with systems of social power based on gender, sexuality, class, 'race', ethnicity, age, (dis)ability and other factors.' In this case, the organizational setting is dominated by middle-aged, white males. The prevailing sexual orientation is espoused as heterosexual, and indeed, most interactions suggest a form of heteronormativity. The researcher is a young, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, highly educated, upper-class Brazilian.

In relation to masculinity, we are aware that in male-dominated shop-floor cultures, forms of masculine banter and humor are common (Collinson, 1988; Willis, 1979). Such banter is frequently sexual, sexist and aggressive (Lyman, 1987) but can serve various self-identity, social identity, solidaristic and resistive purposes (Collinson, 1988, 1992). The shared masculinity in the research setting created the opportunity for the exchanges that occurred, particularly in relation to sport and sex. Our researcher colluded with this masculinized banter to a degree and participated in the production of a form of orthodox masculinity. To some extent, there is also a collective performance of heteronormativity. However, the gender and sexuality of our researcher is almost always imbricated with his nationality and ethnicity in the participants' discourse. In most exchanges, masculinity was discussed in relation to Brazilian women and Brazilian sexual relations and sexuality. Moreover, such a focus also occurred when interacting with company directors and senior managers, which suggests that something other than the masculinist working-class, shop-floor culture is at issue.

There were no distinctive remarks made in relation to his age, but age may have provided a frame for the exchanges – for example, in permitting the teasing of a younger man by the predominantly older men in the plant. However, the content always returned to national/ethnic identity. The social class of the researcher is at issue to some extent. In the first instance, his location of privilege within the Brazilian upper class had not prepared him for the array of derogatory representations of his country and culture, particularly

when they were personalized. He had not encountered such behaviors before and was not prepared for them, which not only inhibited and stilted some exchanges but also made it difficult for the researcher to make sense of things and react in the moment.

These aspects of identity and identity work notwithstanding, most of the time it was his national and ethnic identity that was brought to the forefront, and these other aspects of identity were frequently linked with his nationality/ethnicity. We maintain that the fact that a particular aspect of the researcher (i.e. his ethnicity/nationality) was the object of focus rather than his age, gender, class or professional qualifications is not incidental; we will attempt to explain this object of focus below.

We noted above the relative neglect in MOS in considering how ethnic identity plays into research relationships. In the sociological fieldwork of her own cultural group, the Cape Verdeans, De Andrade (2000: 271–272) suggests that race and ethnicity are a ‘constant and dynamic presence in fieldwork in ways that may or may not be explicit.’ She further argues that race and ethnicity are not fixed givens but are ‘produced through institutional and interactional processes’ and that an individual, including a researcher, may emphasize or de-emphasize various signifiers of race and ethnicity in a ‘doing’ of race and ethnicity.

In our case, the Brazilian researcher made little explicit attempt to perform his ethnicity, but neither did he seek to disguise it, and he was happy to self-identify as Brazilian. His accent made it impossible for him to pass as an insider and was a clear signifier of difference; thus, his ethnicity was consequential in the research setting and embroiled him in identity politics, which was sometimes unwelcome and unsavory. De Andrade (2000) notes that in the situated ‘doing’ of ethnicity, social actors ‘... reinforce, reshape, or construct the meaning of race and ethnicity.’ For reasons of research expediency and because he was surprised by and not prepared for such encounters, our researcher was circumspect in challenging the stereotypical and occasionally negative and derogatory representations of his country and culture. However, in being quiescent, our researcher colluded with such constructions to a degree. As time progressed, our researcher became somewhat more resistant, and perhaps this resistance made some inroads into reshaping the views of Brazilian identity that were apparently held by his British interlocutors, which were in turn embedded in local discourses within the British social milieu.

The identity politics clearly affected the research process and inflected the ethnographic practice, which impelled the researcher to collect ‘data’ regarding such matters. An emotional reaction was certainly involved because the representations of Brazil and Brazilian identity increasingly bemused, upset and angered the researcher; thus, this reaction was a consequential aspect of the research process. This unease and discomfort can be part of the field experience. As Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 379) posit, such experiences can engender a ‘visceral response, mediated through the values, beliefs, and the personal and cultural background of the ethnographer ... [and] be especially uncomfortable if the cultural norms or values of the researcher are somehow transgressed.’ The researcher’s responses were varied: sometimes he was angry, resistive, ironic and facetious, whereas at other times he participated in the banter, acquiesced in the representations, colluded in the identity constructions or was silent and withdrawn. Again, as Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013: 379) have indicated, the nature of the response is situational, ‘often mediated by moments of rapport, empathy, and shared

experience as well as opposition, hostility, and confusion. Such moments can lead to dilemmas of identity fuelled by feelings of connection and disjuncture.’ This description aptly describes the situation and feelings of the researcher in our case.

In relation to ongoing research practice, the researcher came to feel constrained about asking questions or following the work of some workers who tended to be more aggressive toward him or who confronted aspects of identity in a manner that was too challenging for him. As Vanderbeck (2005) notes above, there is an inherent power dimension in research relations. In this case, we have at one level a younger, junior academic with limited power in the research setting. We also have the conditions of postcoloniality working on long-established and persistent power dynamics that bear on center-periphery and North–South relations that began to be played out in the relationship between the researcher and the participants. We will explore these aspects of identity politics more fully in the next section. The researcher experienced some erosion of confidence because the Brazilian identity that was being constructed relegated his professional and academic identity to the background. To a degree, the researcher came to feel less capable of asking questions in general, as if, as a Brazilian, he was not really expected to assert himself and speak.

Conversely, the researcher’s participation in and, for the most part, lack of reaction to the tropicalist representations did help engender inclusion and productive field relationships. People came to him to share their thoughts and confidences. As Warren (1988) argues, organizational ethnography involves ‘finding a place’ in the organization. The place of the stereotypical Brazilian, although uncomfortable and even insulting, also facilitated acceptance of the researcher as someone harmless – which is, of course, also problematic. The Borat image can be read as a crystallization of identity issues in this case. In addition to manifesting assumptions about the Latin subject made by the workers, the Borat incident serves as a nodal point in which the places occupied both by the Latin and the European subjects coincide. At one level, the image signifies some of the common tropicalist motifs of Brazil and Brazilian identity already encountered: from the beach in the background suggesting the ambrosial places imagined by the British, to the exotic swimming costume suggesting both the erotic and the effeminate, to the lasciviously exhibited genitals that connote the hyper-sexualized image of Brazil.

However, other peculiarities about using this image suggest readings that are more complex. First, an ironic reading is suggested by the parallel roles of Borat and the researcher. In the movie, Borat exposes the biases, prejudices and bigotry of certain USA citizens. There is a parallel between Borat in this role and the role of the researcher. The researcher is a foreigner who interacts with local people, and in some instances, their talk reveals their prejudices and neo-colonial fantasies. There is nothing to indicate that those putting up the image in Press Inc. consciously had this ironic meaning in mind, but this reading is suggestive of another, related reading – one which works through the dynamics of self–other relations and the construction of self in the process of constructing other and which also bears on the historical and cultural situatedness of identity.

The movie not only reveals the prejudices and bigotry of Borat’s USA interlocutors, it also reveals Borat as chauvinistic, homophobic, anti-Semitic and an apologist for pedophilia and incest. Borat’s identity, including his ghastly prejudices and moral bankruptcy, are forged in a particular socio-cultural and geopolitical context. We suggest that

the parallel is that, in their distorted and biased representations of the Brazilian researcher and Brazilians, some of the British workers at Press Inc. are enacting in that particular encounter not only their fantasies and tropes culled from a sedimented, tropicalist discourse but also their own identity locations that were forged within the socio-cultural and historical milieu of Britain. To be clear, we are not making any claims that the English people who work for Press Inc. express an essential racist identity. The identities of some of the workers articulated in this article are outcomes of discourses that emerged in the specific encounter analyzed here – an encounter that is circumscribed within a particular space and time and also in the conditions of postcolonial Britain.

We note that for Mignolo (2000: 170), homogenized entities such as ‘Europe’ and ‘Latin America’ are present in the ‘imaginary of the modern/colonial world system. They reveal and they occlude. They are also the grounding of a system of geopolitical values, of racial configurations, and of hierarchical structures of meaning and knowledge.’ Such imaginaries are discursively available to these English workers and managers, and they use them as a resource in their discourse and in co-constructing the identity of a Brazilian from Latin America. Such homogenization is in the realm of the imaginary and is not taken to indicate that there is an essential Brazil with essentialized Brazilian identities, nor, equally, are there essentialized English identities. This stipulation brings us to the processes of othering that were apparent in the interactions in the field and to our discussion of this othering against the backdrop of the persistent conditions of postcoloniality.

Problematizing researcher identity through processes of othering

The interactions at Press Inc. can be plausibly read as instances of othering and of the construction of Orientalist or tropicalist representations. The various but patterned representation of Latin America(ns) in general, and Brazilians in particular, over decades has sedimented into a limited set of motifs that are mobilized in this case. It is worth noting their mobilization in the context of a university research project in the contemporary UK. The thematic analysis reveals motifs of essentializing, exoticization/eroticization and regressive motifs of inferiority, underdevelopment, backwardness, being uncivilized, brutality and barbarism.

The historical order of things has meant that the colonizing center has spoken of its ‘discovery’ of the rest of the world and enabled it to write not only its own history but also the history of the world. The center’s representational apparatus not only invoked the myth of ‘discovery’ but also a panoply of practices that constructed the non-European world as Europe’s *Other*. These representational practices and their effects have been well documented and are frequently collected under the rubric *Orientalism* (Said, 1978; Sardar, 1999) or, in relation to Latin America specifically, *tropicalism* (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, 1997). The analysis of such practices is a key component of the post-colonial approach that also seeks to re-historicize and deconstruct the colonial and neo-colonial power–knowledge nexus and to reveal the persistence of the colonial into the present (e.g. Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Prasad, 2003).

Mignolo (2003) has documented how the New World has variously been represented in ways that diminish, inferiorize and denigrate the region relative to the ‘Old World’ (see also Ramirez, 2007). Such constructions have persisted; independence movements

and decolonization processes did not put an end to it; indeed, these constructions were largely reconstituted in the region's relationships with an ascendant US economic and military power. From the core of this idea of Latin America emerges the Latin American subject as its embodiment. The Latin American subject is the result of a colonial encounter that has been named 'discovery,' and s/he represents the meaning construed around the phenotypic differences between the European (and later the American) and autochthonous subjects. According to Quijano (2000), these differences produced racialized identities that enabled ascriptions of superior/inferior and dominant/dominated. It is important to outline this broad backdrop because it continues to inform the Orientalist/tropicalist discourses and othering practices that are enacted in the speech and interactions in this case, within which our Brazilian researcher and his identities – and those of his interlocutors – are constructed; it represents the intellectual backdrop and theoretical resources that are available to help make sense of such practices.

Essentializing practices, which are very much a part of Orientalism/tropicalism, were apparent in this case. Once the Brazilian nationality of the researcher became apparent, the staff at Press Inc. assumed that he would *ipso facto* be interested in soccer, motor racing, dancing and partying, and that he would have certain sexual attitudes and inclinations. These classic essentialisms were constructed despite the fact that the researcher neither conformed to nor exhibited such characteristics, interests and proclivities. Essentialisms relating to Brazil as a physical, cultural and economic place were also present. Some conformed to classic Orientalist tropes that constructed Brazil as backward, primitive and barbaric; others were classic tropicalist tropes constructing Brazil as paradisiacal with an exuberant (if not excessive) physicality and culture.

Clearly, neither Orientalism nor tropicalism is stable and homogenous; the Other has always been variously and changeably represented. The West's Other(s) has frequently been constructed as much as an object of desire and wonderment as of disdain, fear and/or inferiority. Thus, another common feature of the West's Orientalist fabrications is a tendency to exoticize (and at times eroticize) the Other, which has been examined extensively by Said (1978) and others (e.g. Di Leonardi, 2000; Sharpley-Whiting, 1999) and in discussions of images of China (Friedman, 1993), in addition to the tropicalist representations of Latin America (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, 1997). The exoticization and eroticization of the other accentuates difference and separation and introduces a desire that can also contain fear and distrust.

In relation to Latin America, an exoticized and somewhat paradisiacal discourse was engendered through successive constructions in travel writing, literature, academic texts, movies and other media that emphasized an exotic and luxurious subcontinent characterized by exuberant and unique flora and fauna and a florid climate (Mignolo, 2005). Such tropicalist tropes were apparent at Press Inc. where participants' discourse frequently focused on climate, beaches and a relaxed and hedonistic lifestyle. Particular illustrative instances of exoticism are revealed in the attention to sport and physicality when speaking about Brazil, specifically in relation to the ways in which Brazilian soccer has been represented in the UK. This focus has romanticized the 'natural' physical talents of the Brazilian with frequent references to 'flow', creativity and exuberance in their football. Phrases such as 'samba' football have been used; when people talk of soccer as the 'beautiful game', Brazil is the exemplar. The construction of Brazil as paradisiacal

reflects the politics of alterity, particularly as aspects of self-denigration are apparent in the discourse at Press Inc. such as the surprise expressed that someone from the imagined paradise of Brazil would come to a cold and gloomy Britain. In some interactions, these English people were constructing self as lacking the *joie de vivre*, physicality, sexuality and exuberance of the Brazilian and as located in a place that lacked the warmth and beauty of that imagined other place in South America.

Latin American tropicalisms also include constructed notions of lethargy and backwardness, and the tropics are imagined as a decadent place of pleasure occupied by an inferior people (Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman, 1997; Ramirez, 2007). The imagined backwardness, underdevelopment and inferiority of Brazil and Brazilians are indexed in participant's speech at a number of points, as noted above. It is notable that the imagined sexual availability and licentiousness of Brazilian women is linked with a lack of development, such as is indicated by the presumption that these women are attracted to northern men because the men can offer the accoutrements of development and modernity – washing machines, televisions and a 'square meal' – that are thought to be lacking in Brazil. We will turn to the eroticization of Brazilian women shortly.

Notions of underdevelopment shade into notions of being uncivilized. One of the most telling moments indexing this notion was the finance director's tirade against Brazil's lack of a civil society in reference to the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes. The fact that such remarks were made by a financial corporate director reinforces the notion that we are not dealing primarily with masculine shop-floor banter. His comments about Brazilian police enjoying killing with impunity, a lack of justice and starving people represents Brazil as uncivilized, barbarous and backward. Once again, note that these comments were not made in a detached manner, but face-to-face and in an accusatory, interrogative style: 'what has your country done ...?' Indeed, much of the representation of Brazil and Brazilian identity was personalized regarding the Brazilian researcher – most obviously in the references to sexuality, personal hygiene and health. This personalization is important because it ineluctably embroils the researcher in these representational practices and the dynamics of identity politics, endangers the research process, problematizes the researcher–researched relationship and inverts the subject–object relation – matters that we will examine shortly.

Other exoticisms edged into the sexual and the eroticization of the Other. The analysis reveals talk about women and sexuality that resurfaces an Orientalist/tropicalist eroticization and that gestures to an extension of the hedonistic fantasy into a type of sexual libertinism. In such talk, the patriarchal location of these European subjects is revealed because they construct women as inferior objects of pleasure and lust. As Said (1978: 207–208) notes, Orientalism is an 'exclusively male province,' and 'women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.' This statement aligns alarmingly well with the male constructions at Press Inc. The reduction and banalization of the feminine as merely a sensual and skimpily clad body indexes texts from the colonial period, in which the continent was described as a type of Eden populated by naked, sexually available and adventurous women unencumbered by shame. A number of postcolonial theorists have analyzed the representation of women in colonial and neo-colonial discourse and in the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity (McClintock, 1995; Ponzanesi, 2005; Sharpley-Whiting, 1999; Yegenoglou,

1998). In the politics of alterity, complex psychosexual dynamics are frequently at play. Such exoticism and eroticism are at once reflections of northern desire – and possibly the invention of an imagined Other as a counterpoint to the repressions of ‘colder,’ Anglo-Saxon sensibilities – and moments for moral censure, opprobrium and the inferiorization of the Other. A trajectory goes from hypersexualized to uncontrolled and uncivilized to inferior; hence, exoticism and eroticism accompany uncivilized existence and inferiority.

The researcher is increasingly offended by these eroticized and diminishing representations of Brazilian women but also becomes situated within them through the Borat image and by conversations and solicitations relating to his own sexuality and sexual behavior. In these areas too, the othering is personal, affecting the researcher and unsettling the researcher–researched relationship. The researcher’s identity is being constructed through these interactions in problematic ways. His sexual identity is problematized, and under direct solicitation he is compelled to resist and assert his heterosexuality. However, in laughing with the participants and in complacency at the Borat image, the researcher participates in the problematized construction of his sexual identity. This expedient reaction, which appears to result in greater acceptance and inclusiveness, might indicate a form of male camaraderie and bonding. It might also signal that some of the northern white males are only prepared to accept the Latin interloper once he has been feminized and inferiorized.

Beyond the immediate problematization of the researcher’s identity and of the researcher–researched relationship and its impact on research practice are the implications for and ramifications of this problematization of identity for a wider politics of knowledge. Here, the researcher–researched relationship and its expected structure within the traditions of the politics of knowledge are particularly significant. The identity work and politics that De Andrade (2000: 285) encountered in her research practice resulted in some inversion of that structure: ‘... the participants were able to, and often did assume the role of investigator, and shifted me into that of participant. These role relationships did not remain distinct in the interview process’. This inversion brings us to the final analytic reflection engendered by our case.

The inversion of subject–object relations in research under postcoloniality

The analysis above shows the machinations of a politics of identity and the intrusion of othering processes into the research relationship that are unsettling, not least to the normal ordering and distance of the researcher–researched relationship that begins to unravel and become inverted. More specifically, the Brazilian researcher struggles to maintain the distance and separation of subject–object relations of northern scientific orthodoxy, and he is made, through the talk of and interactions with the participants, into the object in a manner that resembles De Andrade’s experience.

We argued in the introduction that, even within the social constructionist, qualitative and ethnographic practice that espouses the rejection of positivism, it is uncommon to see either the structure or the presumptive right of the researcher to sustain a distance between themselves and the researched challenged. As Wray-Bliss (2003: 307) notes, it is more common to ‘construct researcher and researched as independent rather than interdependent, with the researcher critiquing and commenting upon, rather than

co-constructing and contributing to, the lives of the researched.’ The maintenance of distance is, for Wray-Bliss, a function of inattention to the microphysics of power within the research relationship. Smith (1990) maintains that power relations are reproduced *within* research practices, and we have previously noted Vanderbeck’s (2005) position. Individuals are always ‘simultaneously undergoing and exercising ... power’ (Foucault, 1976: 98); thus, it is important to reflect ‘not only on how the power relations in the research process affect the researched, but also on how such power relations can turn back and affect the researcher’ (Wray-Bliss, 2003: 321). In this case, not single but multiple plateaus of power are at play, as is common (Fleming and Spicer, 2002). One plateau consists of the widespread discourses and practices of orthodox scientific practice that typically construct and support the ‘dominance’ of the researcher, promote distance between the researcher and the researched, and sustain the structure of the subject–object distinction. However, another power plateau consists of the neo-colonial discourses and Orientalizing practices that conspire, in this case, to construct the researcher as Other and destabilize, even invert, researcher–researched and subject–object relations.

Our researcher entered the field following a rather traditional view of ethnographic fieldwork. The paradigm position that he assumed was broadly social constructionist and subjectivist. It was not informed by nor did it embrace a dialogical, reflexive or intersubjective position. The researcher did not enter the field encumbered by the still dominant neo-positivist model of scientific inquiry that continues to beset MOS, but, as Neyland (2008) intimates, realist residues persist in much of orthodox OE. The researcher assumed that he could pursue an ethnographic practice in which he could immerse himself in the field, observe what was going on, and construct an account of the world he had witnessed and been a temporary part of. Thus, he was loosely schooled in a traditional approach to ethnography that is common in MOS, and this approach is the way in which we train most of our trainee researchers in business schools, that is, if they progress beyond quantitative methods (we are aware that there are exceptions).

The researcher was not well prepared for the intensity and complexity of the interactions and was certainly not prepared, either professionally or personally, for his ethnicity and nationality to be at issue to such an extent and to embroil him in the rather dense identity politics explicated in the preceding sections. The researcher was also not prepared for conditions of postcoloniality to infuse the situation and shape the research relationships. As we have made clear in the preceding discussions, his relationship to his research ‘subjects’ and the entire structure and dynamics of the researcher–researched relationship were problematized and destabilized. The identity politics were such that he was rendered Other and became an object in and through the discourse of the employees. The researcher became the object of their scrutiny, their representational practices and their identity positioning. It is reasonable to suggest that, at least at moments during the dynamics of the research, the traditional researcher–researched, subject–object relationship was inverted. The othering practices and the conditions of postcoloniality that enabled these practices are not issues typically encountered by the northern scholar. This infrequency explains why race and ethnicity are relatively neglected as issues of identity politics in research practice in comparison with gender identity politics, for example, which are central to the concerns of the scholarship of the center. Scholars from the periphery and from the global South are most likely to encounter such dynamics and to

be most troubled by them, which adds further to the difficulties that such scholars face in a northern-dominated academy.

We must be mindful of Foucault's (1998) general injunction that all knowledge is situated because it is always constituted by and emerges from a place in power relations. Furthermore, as Mignolo (2002) posits, we always simultaneously occupy both a social and an epistemic place; thus, a geopolitics of knowledge is always present. Northern knowledge is privileged and exerts a force that is imperialistic and hegemonic and that resides within the geopolitical place that Grosfoguel (2006) denotes as the 'European/Euro-North American modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.' A core feature of northern knowledge so situated is, according to Grosfoguel (2006) an 'ego politics of knowledge;' that is, the traditions of northern science instantiate a non-situated, abstracted, decontextualized and presumptively objective 'ego' that is hidden behind a nameless and faceless enunciation. The disengagement of 'epistemic place' from 'social place' in the prevailing geopolitics of knowledge preserves the figure of the universal subject and thus secures its alleged neutrality and objectivity and sustains the gap between subject and object. When postcolonial criticism insists on the inextricable simultaneous recognition of both epistemic and geopolitical location in any production of knowledge, it begins to de-center the presumptions of northern science, to destabilize the subject-object dichotomy, and to challenge the legitimacy of the universal subject as the holder of the truth about the Other. Freed from this epistemic prison, the former object becomes the subject and begins to produce knowledge about itself and about the former universal subject, which now can become the Other in research.

Nevertheless, our case enacts the resilience of the discourses, asymmetries and hierarchies of neo-colonialism under the conditions of postcoloniality. These features of neo-colonialism are enacted in the speech of the researched, serving to ensnare and re-position the researcher in their frame. In this dynamic, the conflation or inversion of the subject-object/researcher-researched relationship is not emancipatory and decolonizing as post-colonial theory aspires to, but reproduces those asymmetries and hierarchies and works to re-locate the researcher as an inferior, backward and merely exotic Other.

Conclusion

The analysis of events at Press Inc. reveals a set of interrelated themes that bear on the politics of identity and the politics of knowledge in research practice and on social relations at work more broadly. The history and politics of research and knowledge production in the social sciences, including in MOS, displays a certain directionality and asymmetry. In broad terms, research and the production and dissemination of knowledge have been conducted by the center/global North in relation to the peripheral/global South. This pattern and structure persists, with the contemporary geopolitics of knowledge production and dissemination exhibiting a sustained asymmetry (Connell, 2006; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Mignolo, 2002). Only recently has a nascent reversal begun to emerge in which the periphery/semi-periphery and the formerly colonized initiate research in relation to the center. The dynamics and import of that development has not yet been subject to much scrutiny. This article discusses a specific instance at a focused and micro-level and addresses questions about how the research process unfolds and

how identity politics are negotiated when such a reversal occurs. The article shows how the southern researcher's ethnicity and nationality are brought to the forefront in interactions in the research setting and become the focus of talk and positioning. In the process, an essentialized and tropicalized researcher identity is constructed in ways that problematize the researcher–researched relationship and jeopardize the research practice. Indeed, we suggest that these are othering practices and that an inversion of the traditional researcher–researched relationship occurs.

Like many MOS researchers, the Brazilian researcher entered the field with a rather traditional approach to ethnography and was not prepared for the level of identity politics and the problematization of the research relationship that he encountered. There are clearly lessons here about research expectations and preparation and about MOS properly embracing the reflexive turn that has altered ethnographic practice in other disciplines, principally through the adoption of practices that are dialogical, intersubjective and reflexive. There are also lessons to be learned about the place of nationality and ethnicity in the politics of identity within research practice, which remains an under-researched and under-theorized area, at least within MOS. However, such adjustments alone will not address the underlying conditions that engender such identity politics; these conditions exist within a wider geopolitics of knowledge, which are themselves embedded within persistent conditions of postcoloniality.

Our article suggests that conditions of postcoloniality indicate that a person from formerly colonized locations continues to be positioned in the discourses and binaries of the Other and struggles to overcome such representational and locational practices – even in the context of 21st century England and when the foreign person carries accoutrements of privilege, high status and the academy, and when his interlocutors are educated, modern business professionals. This finding not only reveals something about the complexities of research relationships and identity politics in research but also reveals more broadly that the conditions of postcoloniality inflect social relations at work in the UK and beyond, such that decolonization (e.g. Smith, 1999) still faces the obstacle of persistent neo-colonial discourses, hierarchies and asymmetries. The identity politics explored in this article are centered on a research setting, but they could just as readily be manifest in non-research settings, bearing on in-ethnic relations in the workplace. In particular, some workplace relations involving people from the North and the South are shown to still be framed in conditions of postcoloniality that can readily engender othering practices and difficult identity politics.

Furthermore, the issues addressed in this article are important in the context of ongoing shifts in global organizational geopolitics and the increasing likelihood of different and reversed flows and structures of knowledge production and dissemination about work organizations. It is to be hoped that we do not simply reproduce new unequal, inequitable and asymmetrical structures and processes that reconstitute dominance and dependency in such shifts and reversals. It would be unfortunate if we were unable to learn and if a new Occidentalism were to supplant the old Orientalism. The risk of this replacement is apparent. Even within the micro-content examined in this article, it would be unfortunate if we had constructed an account that stereotypes the others and essentializes the English as arrogant, crude, racist, hyper-sexualized and obsessed with football and sex workers, and trapped by the desire for an imagined exotic other and lamenting

their own inadequacies. That is not our intention, and although such crude reversals may appear to undermine the traditional position of the dominant white, western male, such a result would indicate that this text participated in precisely those practices and effects that it seeks to critique and transform.

What we hope we have contributed through our examination of the interactions between the global South and the global North in our fieldwork is to have revealed something that has remained underexplored in the literature: the complex interplay between the localized politics of identity, the wider politics of knowledge, and the problems still to be confronted in the persistent conditions of postcoloniality. We might say that we have analyzed an empirical and contemporary case of colonial difference, the place where the coloniality of power is in fact enacted (Mignolo, 2000); affirming Mignolo (2000), we accept that no outside place remains untouched by European modernity. Nevertheless, the way forward does not lie in rejecting modernity and producing a fundamentalist southern perspective that denies and neglects western knowledge completely or in simplistic reversals that merely invert but sustain crippling binaries. Mignolo (2000) proposes that, strategically, there is a need to engage with the oppressed side of the colonial difference, as we do in this article; however, to work to go beyond the oppositional binaries of North/South invariably results in the valorization of one and the inferiorization of the other and, thus, in the insinuation of a dominating and colonizing epistemology that presumes universality. A dialogue must be engaged between North and South that not only recognizes and acknowledges colonial difference but also engages with it. At the micro-level, co-authorships between academics from the North and South can provide possibilities for decolonizing dialogues.

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