

**On trusting ethnography: Serendipity in anthropology: Methods, selves and the reflexive return to the fields of Gujarat**

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*We draw on David Pocock's fieldwork of the 1950s in central Gujarat, India, as a comparative resource to think about social change and anthropological knowledge. Revisiting where Pocock had been through new fieldwork, we were encouraged to think about the ways in which places are accessed and subsequently understood. Against our conscious will, the pathways we were able to take through the field strongly resembled those Pocock took sixty years earlier. The coincidence is such that the material casts shadows of doubt over the potency of the terms such as 'serendipity' and 'chance' to characterise key moments of ethnographic fieldwork. Against the primacy given to the self in much reflexive anthropology, we demonstrate that the personal attributes of the anthropologist might influence the production ethnographic research less than is generally assumed. The double bind of our 'reflexive return' comes from revisiting an anthropological field and experiencing the agency of that field in making what we can know.*

The Pocock had a reputation as a flamboyant erudite old bird who crossed continents in circular and repetitive flights and calling cries. With a keen nose for gossip and an even keener

eye for social change the Pocock alerted watchers to strange new routes ... The Pocock was seen here regularly in the 1950s ... The last vision was in the eighties at Novratri – the festival of Good over Evil. In front of the house was a scintillating bonfire. The spirit of the Pocock danced the Gurba as the flames rose and the burning papers flew to the heaven. From the ashes, rose the Pocock's myths (Lyon and Lyon 2012: 41–43).

In the last three decades, anthropology has worked hard at eating itself alive. Clifford and Marcus (1986; and Marcus and Cushman 1982) had one of the first nibbles, others soon started to take chunks out of themselves. Now it is disciplinary convention to begin writing with a self-wounding caveat limiting the truth claims in what is to follow. Things are partial, contextual, in-the-making and more complicated than had been previously thought. In the broadest terms, those who have been chomping away at themselves have deconstructed the methods and structures of the discipline, often rightly demonstrating how these features produce knowledge in distinct ways (Asad 1973; Fardon 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In history and fiction, auto-cannibalism never ends pleasantly. What remains of worth within the corpus of anthropology? Do anthropologists any longer trust ethnography as the flesh and bones of disciplinary knowledge?

As a consequence of the broad turn to post-structuralist theory, truth became taboo, empiricism for the weak-minded and fact ethereal. At the time, an older generation stepped up to defend the traditions of the discipline, often dismissing post-modern thought as faddish. Ernest Gellner, for example, mockingly characterised meaning in post-modern theory as little more than a ‘conceptual intoxicant’ and ‘instrument of self-titillation’ (1992: 30). Others described the project as intellectually irresponsible, seeing the stress placed on post-colonial political and hermeneutic egalitarianism as unable to differentiate market gardening from genocide (Lindholm 1997).

As the debate matured and began to accumulate a history of its own, it was suggested that the confessional mode of self-reflexive anthropology had roots in Christian traditions, class politics and the rise of audit cultures, including those of self-accountability and governance (Skeggs 2002; Graeber 2013). Various scholars also discovered, often painfully, that anthropology when seen from the outside appears very differently to how it is conceived of on the inside (see Scheper-Hughes 2001; Simpson 2016). In sum, both the looking glass and anguished reflection were themselves part of a complex and distinct system of knowing: anthropology had turned itself into a subject of its own inquiry.

After the feast, the dust began to settle (well represented by Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). Fresh ideas and refined practices emerged: greater analytical humility, a shift away from alterity as the central generative idea, and the realignment of the discipline with the state of the world, or a ‘post-exotic anthropology’ (Elie 2012). One of the significant consequences of this

long-historical moment was a new move towards collaboration and the co-production of research (Marcus 2012).

Critical focus on the techniques, conceits and structures involved in the production of disciplinary knowledge and practice left no doubt that the world had changed since the advent of modern anthropology. In the case of India, this ‘advent moment’ might be best understood to coincide with the rise of ‘village studies’ in the aftermath of World War II and Indian Independence. Researchers of the period, including Pocock, rejected the naturalism of their predecessors, who had largely focused on ‘tribes’ in the spirit of late colonialism. The new generation of anthropologists worked in a country where electoral politics, modernisation theories and the early posturing of the cold war dominated public culture. Since then, democracy gained traction, and with it came new ideas of equality and justice. New communication technologies altered what and who could be known. Mobility became entrenched as a way of life. The villages of India were progressively ‘opened up’, first by state-partnered capitalism, followed by liberalisation of the economy and, more recently, the deregulation of land markets.

The authors of this paper were variously schooled in anthropology during periods and by institutions where the ‘reflexive turn’ saturated undergraduate curricula (Manchester in the 1990s and SOAS in the 2000s). We were therefore genuinely surprised by what we saw emerge from our revisit to David Pocock’s fieldsite in Gujarat, western India, some sixty years after he conducted research there. Pre-empting ourselves, the findings of the second period of fieldwork strongly resembled Pocock’s research, both in form and

content. We had not wanted this to be the case and had, in fact, actively sought to look at things differently, through contemporary eyes. However, once we realised that the field had had a strong influence on making the research what it was – and the anthropologist had not simply made it so through myopia, fantasy or writing – the result was like a breath of fresh air, albeit rather chimeric and air-like in character. While this revelation can be presented in these very simple terms, the story we tell below of how we reached such a conclusion is rather more cumbersome, time consuming and resource intensive. In other words, this simple observation took a lot of work.

In the debates lightly referenced above, the inter-subjective and personal nature of fieldwork has been scrutinised and elaborated to the point that fieldwork is now sometimes regarded as little more than a voyage of self-discovery. The ‘I’ of the participant and the eyes of ‘I-the-observer’ are now key. In what follows, we present evidence which should deflect attention away from the ‘I’ and back towards the field. To do so, rather than rooting fieldwork solely in the literature on epistemology and knowledge production, we report our research findings, ethnographically: the ethnography of conducting research in the fields of Gujarat in the long shadows of Pocock’s own research.

Along the way, we make a case for more trust to be given to ethnographic research, mindful that research is not all equal in its sincerity, quality or depth.

Among the conclusions we reach is that anthropology as a set of research practices and methods might not be quite as compromised as some anthropologists seem to think, although it is difficult to prove this beyond reasonable doubt.

### **Happy accidents? Or, the role of serendipity...**

Chance and serendipity are sometimes described as two of the key characteristics of the ethnographic method (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). In anthropological writing, there is very often a chance encounter which changes everything. More than chance, serendipity also involves the accumulated knowledge to make the connections which appear serendipitous. In this sense, happy accidents are often seen as shaping the ethnographic encounter, as something that was previously hidden comes into view: pennies drop, ideas click and so forth. In this light, the fieldworker is endlessly surrounded by potentially serendipitous moments, but only as she or he learns more of the relevant and contextualising prerequisite knowledge can they understand these as serendipitous.

How does an anthropologist distinguish a serendipitous moment from an inevitable one? Fieldwork is typically at first a one off and lone affair; therefore, the ability of the anthropologist working in one location to make any sensible judgement about the role of either serendipity or inevitability in fieldwork is, we suggest, hope understood as deduction. Encounters during which certain ideas drop into place or things are explained to make other things make new sense are usually understood by anthropologists as serendipitous. However, what if the focus of our gaze is switched away from the self and towards the field? Might then we begin to see such moments as a communication of form or structure? Might we also, on occasion, better see inevitability over happenstance?

When we first studied anthropology, it was a basic fact, and one supported by a vast and thought-provoking literature, that the personal characteristics of the fieldworker would determine what and how things could be known. The fieldworker as a body capable of generating objective facts without bias was taught to be a myth. Gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, age, intelligence, political proclivity, sexuality and so forth all came to bare on how the fieldworker perceived, conceived and described the world. The theoretical predispositions and training of the fieldworker would further determine where they saw power, rupture, history and salience. Therefore, we ask, if the personal characteristics of the anthropologist are the predominant vehicle for acquiring a practical knowledge of life in a field, how is it that two quite different anthropologists working in the same place at different times have had such similar and similarly influential encounters? Could this too be serendipitous? We think not. We explore reasons for relegating serendipity as an explanatory trope through the reconstruction of David Pocock's research in Gujarat and a description of Alice Tilche's work in the same field six decades later.

### **Shadow anthropology**

The instances we are aware of when one anthropologist has ventured into a field already ploughed by another anthropologist have not done much to bolster the reputation of anthropological research. Such studies have a curious and exciting history, often drawing critical, personal and dramatic attention to the methods of anthropology.

Robert Redfield's (1930) work on Tepoztlan in Mexico emphasised harmony, equality and stability. Fourteen years later, Oscar Lewis (1951) found the village divided, and best characterised by conflict and violence. The ensuing debates focused on whether the divergent findings could be attributed to methodological or theoretical myopia. Reflecting on the status of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in this debate, Wilk (2001: 209) makes the simple and disarmingly effective point that more can be gained from reading the books together.

The bitter debate on gender, honesty and authority provoked by Derek Freeman's reappraisal of Margaret Mead's claims for the sexual lives of Polynesian youths is also usually evoked as an example of a 'restudy' (see Levy 1984; Marshall 1993 amongst others on this episode). In short, Freeman claimed Mead was wrong: she had been hoaxed. According to Freeman, Mead had reproduced the jocular comments of a small number of girls, as if they represented a broad truth. In turn, some of Freeman's critics argued that he misrepresented Mead's own views. Furthermore, he had ignored changes in Samoan society between Mead's work in the 1920s and his own in the 1940s, including an increasing and conservative influence of Christianity. Looking at this debate with the benefit of hindsight, it seems to us to have been more about cultural versus biological ways of understanding social life than it was about studying the same thing from a particular disciplinary context.

The Redfield-Lewis and Mead-Freeman literatures prompt important questions about social change, evidence and the relationship between theory and ethnographic vision. More recently, and in contrast, Anand Pandian (2009)

‘revisited’ the villages in Tamil Nadu where Louis Dumont had conducted his fieldwork in 1940s and 1950s. Pandian aimed not only to see if Dumont’s analysis was accurate, but to understand how and why Dumont saw rural India as he did. This seems to take the idea of a ‘restudy’ in a more productive direction, towards context-setting work, intellectual collaboration and methodological empathy, a lead we follow here.

Over the past few years, we have been part of a larger group of anthropologists conducting research in locations in India where fieldwork had previously been undertaken in the 1950s. We originally thought of this as a ‘restudy’ project, a word which has a particular and tainted currency within the discipline (for the reasons outline above). Later, however, we conceptualised this as ‘doing the same fieldwork twice’. As the project matured, we increasingly saw both labels as falling short. We could not countenance a ‘restudy’ when there had been such a long and eventful interval between the first and subsequent fieldwork. Doing the same fieldwork twice was pithy, heuristic and provocative, but unhelpfully glossed the changes that had taken place within anthropology since the 1950s. Furthermore, because of our schooling in reflexive anthropology we already *knew* (and were repeatedly told by those advising us) that an Italian woman revisiting the field of an English man in India sixty years later would introduce too many varied variables for the second visit to properly be considered a ‘restudy’ of the first.

In the end, and largely because of the experience of fieldwork, we found the metaphors of ‘shadow’ and ‘shadowing’ to be useful. Shadowing evokes the passage of time, ghosts and past encounters. It suggests following, learning

and apprenticeship. Shadows offer suggestions and highlight traces of other objects and moments. Shadows can be one shade lighter than darkness and thus obscure, disguise or distort other realities; at other times, shadows are lost in the light and things appear with clarity.

### **David Pocock and Sundarana, 1953-1956**

David Pocock (1928-2007) read English literature at Cambridge, under the guidance of the literary critic F.R. Leavis. Pocock later moved to Oxford, where he was awarded a doctorate under the supervision of E.E. Evans-Prichard. The direction of his original research among Gujaratis in Zanzibar and Tanganika was influenced by his supervisor (Parry and Simpson 2011). Pocock (1955) observed a shift from a 'caste system' to the existence of 'individual castes', prefiguring contemporary debates about the 'substantialisation' of caste in India (Gupta 2004). Perhaps in search of cultural authenticity, he became interested in understanding the formation of castes in India.

In India, Pocock was affiliated with the Department of Sociology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. M.N. Srinivas, who Pocock knew from Oxford, was then the head of department. Srinivas helped him to find a suitable village for his fieldwork (Shah 2012: 393). He introduced Pocock to his friend Nanubhai Amin, a wealthy industrialist, who took him to the village of Dharmaj in Central Gujarat. Even then, this was a prosperous and notable village. Some residents had played central roles in the nationalist struggle for independence from colonial rule (Hardiman 1981). The local economy was

buoyed by the success of migrants who had made good overseas, particularly in East Africa at that time. Today, Dharmaj it is popularly known as the ‘Paris of Asia’ and the ‘Switzerland of Gujarat’, as wealth from overseas continues to return.

Given his previous experiences in East Africa, Pocock now wanted a field somewhat less bent by the corrupting winds of the colonial experience.

Pocock’s patron in Dharmaj had recently established an electric pumping well for agricultural irrigation in nearby Sundarana. Pocock visited the village and seems to have instantly found its relative remoteness and unremarkableness to complement what he had imagined for his research. The place was small, of lowly rank and slightly too far from the brash lights of Dharmaj to be under that particular spell.

In Sundarana, Pocock took up residence in the house adjacent to the pump well, an arrangement that must have associated him firmly in the minds of the villagers with the wealth and prestige of Dharmaj. The sociologist A.M. Shah was a student of Srinivas in Baroda and corresponded with Pocock. From him, we learn that Pocock initially found fieldwork challenging. The generous hospitality he received in Dharmaj turned out to be excessive and prohibitive in Sundarana: ‘I hoped I could be independent but this is not so. I am not even allowed to wear my own bed clothes. If I want to buy cigarettes people buy them for me’.<sup>1</sup>

Pocock spent eighteen months in Gujarat, between 1953 and 1956, visiting at least once again in the 1980s. He spent a few months at a mission in the nearby

town of Anand, combining his personal interest in Christianity with the study of Gujarati. When he took up residence in Sundarana, he continued to visit Baroda regularly, maintaining a room in I.P. Desai's house, a scholar to whom he was particularly close. In town, he spent time writing, visiting friends and participating in the intellectual life of the university.

Pocock understood anthropology as an interpretative rather than a natural science and society to constitute a changing moral order. He was influenced by Émile Durkheim, whose work he translated as an undergraduate (Durkheim 1953). His writing presents a world thick with contradictions, displaying a conviction, unusual for the time, in the contingent and relational nature of our views of the world (see Parry and Simpson 2011).

During his subsequent career at the University of Sussex, Pocock (1994) developed the pedagogical and methodological idea of 'personal anthropology'. This he defined as the personal *and* shared attributes of 'implicit and explicit judgements about the nature of man' (1994: 20) which underpin an individual's writing. Pocock encouraged students to read texts as an 'interaction', by keeping their own personal anthropologies in mind and by analysing the personal anthropologies of others. The ultimate goal of research, in his view, was not the 'wholesome hygienic exercise' of eliminating preconceptions, but to gain awareness of as many of them as possible. He wrote:

If I start from the position that my understanding is contingent upon what I do not understand, and that my understanding is

itself a relationship, then I can claim a future for anthropology  
and justify its vocation as a new humanism (Pocock 1994: 28).

Despite Pocock's clearly articulated inclinations, his books contain little explicit discussion of his own personal anthropology, or his preferred methods. From a careful reading of *Mind, body and wealth* (1973), it becomes obvious that Pocock had an assistant or a 'research companion' named Momad, who was close to the family at the centre of the ethnography in that book. In *Kanbi and Patidar* (1972), Pocock briefly mentions having designed questionnaires to trace marriage alliances among families in Sundarana and in villages with which Sundaranians married. Letters to A.M. Shah also contain glimpses of his methods: 'Things told you are far more valuable than things asked for. I really have seen eminent fieldworkers drive village people mad with their stupid questions'.<sup>2</sup>

Pocock did not write a 'classic' village ethnography in the British tradition of the period. When he returned to Oxford from Gujarat, he began an intellectual partnership with Louis Dumont as co-editor of the journal *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. In the early issues of the journal, both men expressed forthright scepticism about the resurgent tradition of village studies (Dumont and Pocock 1957). Pocock was to sit on his research materials for more than fifteen years before publishing the two slim monographs to which we have already referred. In both, he eschews the village, choosing caste, hierarchy and marriage in one (1972) and a poorly defined, almost abstract, region in the second (1973).

*Kanbi and Patidar* (1972) describes the historical transition from Kanbi or agriculturalists to Patidar, which Pocock defines as 'both a name and an ideal'. Pocock identified a structuring contradiction at the heart of being Patidar. While caste is endogamous and, in theory, Patidar marries with Patidar, in practice, Patidars were thoroughly obsessed to the point of distraction with proving themselves superior to other members of the caste. Characteristically, he concluded that 'the unity of the Patidar can only be approached in terms of their disunity' (1972: 67).

The tension between equality and hierarchy existed on various fronts within the routine lives of Patidars. The community's pride in descent and family cohesion went alongside strong rivalries between brothers, the dissolution of joint families and the fragmentation of land-holdings. These trends ran deep in their everyday social interaction and in the physical architecture of villages. Status competition was however most strongly expressed through hypergamous marriage. Accordingly, it was the desire of every Patidar to marry their daughter 'up' the social ladder. If being Patidar was 'a state of affairs to be achieved' marriage was 'the sacrament of confirmation' (Pocock 1972: 1).

In this respect, Pocock documented an ongoing tension between escalating practices of hypergamy and equalising practices, through the social institution of endogamous marriage circles (*ekada*). If hypergamous marriages introduced status differences between spouses and were traditionally accompanied by high dowries, then marriage circles sought to uphold Patidars' ideal of equality

and to keep dowry escalation in check. However, status continued to operate within these circles, leading to a kaleidoscopic hierarchy of village circles and divisions opening up within both villages and families.

*Mind body and wealth* (1973) shifts the enquiry from marriage to the nature of belief. The book opens with the same ideas: brothers are rivals and ‘the good life implies immediately superiority, superiority over someone else’ (1973: 23). His appreciation of popular Hinduism begins with a discussion of the ‘evil eye’: the desire and envy for the possessions and looks of others. He suggests that this is a key feature of a society in which both fundamental ideas of equality and hierarchy coincide. In the chapters that follow, he offers a deft account of the moral choices individuals face in the everyday practice of Hinduism. He describes a world dense with contradictions, hierarchies and competing sources of legitimacy in which pure and impure castes mix with pure and impure gods.

Pocock also traces the historical transition from the ritual inter-dependence of pure and impure castes towards new ideals of purity and from orthodox to schismatic and sectarian movements (also Tambis-Lyche 1997). In particular, he documents the emergence of the Swaminarayan sect as a ‘modern’ movement that successfully synthesises the older values of the village community with the new modern and urban values of individualism. ‘... by putting a new emphasis on *bhakti* [devotionalism] and on obedience to the Guru [the sect] gives courage to the individual conscience relatively deprived of social support in a situation of continuous change’ (1973: 163). In examining the relationship between caste and sect, Pocock argued that sects

offered a space for rural-based professional and commercial classes to meet and share commitments that transcended their separate caste ties. However, he also emphasised the continuing paradox of inequality within equality that, like in the world of caste, also existed in the world of the sect.

We have not been able to reconstruct the reason why Pocock wrote two narrowly-focused monographs rather than a general one. In order to do so, he had to divide kinship and religion between the two volumes. This exercise must have been technically difficult and clearly ran against his experience of fieldwork. It also meant that the role of religion in the hypergamy of the Patidar was only ever partially explained. Nor have we been able to access the other materials we imagine he collected on politics and migration because he famously burned his notes when he retired from the professional academic life, from the ashes, rose the Pocock's myths.

A.M. Shah describes *Mind, body and wealth* as 'patchy', based on cursory observation and influenced by Pocock's personal tendency towards asceticism (Shah 2012: 395). Michael Lyon, another long-term visitor to Gujarat, describes the book in personal communication as 'offcuts'.<sup>3</sup> Like Wilk's observations on the Redfield-Lewis debacle, we think the books are best read together. They do not mirror or speak directly to one another, but the story of changing religious practice in Gujarat is part of the logic expressed as the hypergamy of the Patidars and vice versa. Together, the books also make a broad but accurate prediction of the changing relation between caste and hierarchy in Gujarat more generally, a trend made clear by new fieldwork in the region, as we discuss further below.

### **Shadowing Pocock: Sundarana, 2012-2013**

Originally from Italy, I studied anthropology and Hindi at SOAS as an undergraduate between 2002 and 2005. Through friends and connections at the university I had travelled to India several times and decided to move there following my degree. I worked for a while with a research centre based in Baroda, documenting Adivasis' (tribal/indigenous) languages, art and cultures. Returning to the UK, first to Oxford and then to SOAS, I pursued a doctorate bringing together interests in art, identity and politics under the supervision of David Mosse. At the end of the doctorate, I started to revisit the work of David Pocock.

I was initially sceptical of 'old' anthropologies. Rather than recreating what Pocock might have done, I was keen to pursue the contemporary methodologies and perspectives of the discipline. Patricia Jeffery, the co-investigator on the 'restudy' project, sensibly suggested that I should look at marriage from the perspective of women, representing women in their own terms rather than as the wives or sisters of men.

While preparing for fieldwork, various anthropologists added to these recommendations and encouraged me to 'study', rather than 'restudy' Sundarana: 'forget about Pocock's work'. His books were of their time, imbued with unfashionable and clumsy words such as 'caste' and 'hypergamy'. The fear was that the new research would simply reproduce the biases and categories of Pocock's account and thus replicate a reality that no

longer existed, if indeed it ever had. To be clear, when I left for the field, I knew, and had been told by figures of authority, that it would be unwise and perhaps even detrimental to my career to try and follow Pocock's circular and repetitive flights across continents.

I left for India, ready to embark in a new journey. Only later I realised that, without ever planning to, my arrival to Sundarana followed a very similar route to the one Pocock had taken sixty years before: through the Gujarati diaspora and Sundarana's neighbouring village of Dharmaj. At the turn of the twentieth century, many Patidars from Central Gujarat moved to East Africa as a consequence of a famine and economic depression, and of status seeking practices (Tambs-Lyche 1980). Following the expulsion of 'Asians' (most were Gujaratis) from East Africa in the 1970s, they relocated to other wealthy Anglophone countries (Poros 2010), notably the United Kingdom.

Before leaving for India, we approached some of the many organisations in London connected to Central Gujarat. It was straightforward to find people and caste associations with links to wealthy villages like Dharmaj; it was much harder to find people from Sundarana. Numerous studies of the Patidar caste trace (not by chance) the historical transition from agrarian labourers to farmers and then from farmers to commercially-minded international migrants (for example, Tambs-Lyche 1980; Rutten and Patel 2002; Gidwani 2008). Popular representations of the caste generally place them at the forefront of Gujarat's development and India's story of growth. Stories of success are those that travel best. As a smaller village and of lowly rank, outmigration from Sundarana was for most Patidars an unrealised aspiration. Besides a few

successful engineers and post-office owners, those who made it abroad generally migrated through temporary tourist and student visas or illegally. In London, for understandable reasons such people were much harder to find.

I was twenty-nine when I started fieldwork, approximately the same age as Pocock was in 1953. The Dharmaj Society of London kindly helped me settle in Gujarat. Like Pocock, I lived at the margins of the village and under the patronage of Sundarana's richer rival. I also kept a base in Baroda where I returned regularly to write, meet scholars and friends.

The first person that I met in Sundarana via earlier contacts in Dharmaj was a wealthy tobacco farmer, who introduced me to his young nephew. Samir had just returned from London after his student visa expired. He aspired to leave the village for good and spent much of his time complaining of boredom and the remaining time applying for visas. He did not show much interest in my research and introduced me to another friend, Pinakin. Pinakin had also tried to migrate overseas and, after repeated and costly failures, decided to remain in the village. Like many of those who stayed back, Pinakin was educated and underemployed: he supervised the cultivation of his family's land and spent his days doing 'timepass', drinking tea and riding around on his motorbike. He had the time and good will and became my research assistant in the compilation of the village census. I found out that all these characters were descendants of people whose genealogies Pocock had traced as the central part of *Kanbi and Patidar*. Without wanting to, my study also became rooted in the same division of the village that Pocock had been closest to and had written so much about.

In 2013 Sundarana was twice the size it was in Pocock's day. Circular, permanent and semi-permanent migration to nearby towns, urban areas and overseas had widened the influence of the village (Gidwani 2000). Since the 1950s, various waves of development policy had been unevenly implemented in the region, along with political devolution, notably the passing of responsibility for economic development, social justice and taxation to the village level through the Panchayati Raj. Affirmative action of caste-specific and gendered 'reservations' had created new forms of difference. Public health programmes enhanced children's chance of long-term survival and education had practically erased illiteracy in the village. Land reforms, the 'green revolution' and new technologies transformed agriculture. Cash crops had entirely substituted subsistence crops. Landholdings had both shrank, following a pan-India crisis of agriculture and trend towards the fragmentation of land, and increased in size. The region continued to be described, as it was in Pocock's time, as 'the garden of India'. The fertility of the soil coupled with middle-caste entrepreneurship meant that not all those involved in agriculture were impoverished. However, and despite the verdant nomenclature, land no longer underscored power and prestige. Other technologies had compressed time and space, allowing/necessitating new forms of migration and employment for the villagers of Sundarana. For the Patidars in particular, migration had become the new culture of the caste.

Pocock was not the hero of the village when I first arrived; there was no statue of the man at the centre of the village and no tangible trace of his past presence. As a way of starting conversations and explaining my purpose, I

showed people copies of his published works. Nobody knew English well enough to understand the content. But people flicked through the pages, always pausing at the foreword and at the appendixes which trace the genealogies of the division of the village Pocock had known best. There, they recognised the names of Pocock's older patrons, of his research assistant and of their own forefathers. Pocock's books soon became ethnographic objects, agents in their own right and catalysts for conversations about how the past had been and the future should be.

In time, elders came forward who remembered him, variously as 'Knocok', 'Kollok', 'Pollok', 'Davidbhai' and 'the one who lived next to the pump'.

Pocock's research assistant Momad returned to the village to aid the memory process. In the 1950s, Momad had just passed the matriculation exam and was the only person in Sundarana who could speak English. He was about to leave the village when Pocock hired him for a salary just higher than local standards and persuaded him to stay. After Pocock left, Momad moved to a village fifty kilometres away where he served until retirement as primary school teacher.

Momad and the group of elders who claimed to have known Pocock spoke of him fondly, as a man with an extraordinarily good character and affectations.

All recalled his transformation from Englishman to native, and competed with each other in telling stories of who fed him, and who was his best friend or favoured travel companion. He arrived wearing 'English clothes', smoking cigarettes and disliking local foods. By the time he left, he had taken on the local dress, smoked hooka, ate chapattis with his hands, and sported a formidable moustache in the approved style of the day.

From people's memories it became clear that Pocock spent most of his time with men, and did not have much access to women's lives or domestic spaces. People remembered him endlessly writing and asking questions about trees, habits and gods. Momad spent evenings on the veranda of his house at the outskirts of the village, dictating stories as Pocock typed them up. As I developed close relationships in the village, I imagined that as a young and affable woman I had more ready access to the inside of the home, to the kitchen, and to people's personal lives. Sundaranians learned quite a lot about me, unlike the aura of mystery that enveloped Pocock's life. They met my family, followed the beginning of my first pregnancy and kept in touch electronically once I left. They wondered if Pocock had ever married.

Unearthing memory traces allowed for new relationships and dialogues to become possible and opened a new form of heritage in the present. Momad still owned some land in Sundarana, which was now cultivated by the family that Pocock had described in *Mind, body and wealth* as Momad's patrons. He occasionally returned to the village to get his share of revenue, though his visits had become sporadic. In the 1950s, Pocock had not deemed the relationship between Momad, the Patidars and himself to be worthy of comment. However, in the intervening years (and especially the last decade) many villages of the area had been purged of Muslims. Following the anti-Muslim violence that swept Gujarat in 2002, Muslim families had taken refuge elsewhere; many had never returned. The minaret of Sundarana's mosque was destroyed and never rebuilt and relationships of suspicion had hardened.

Momad's return to the village as the star protagonist of my interviews, and of

the film 'Sundarana',<sup>4</sup> would have been unthinkable without the presence of the anthropologist

At the same time, memory traces also became appropriated to reinforce dominant narratives. Given the success of genealogies as the focus of memories and conversations, I decided early on into the research to update Pocock's record. The genealogical exercise was well-received and gained me the favour of some Patidars and the evil eye of others. Genealogies were also an indigenous practice and in more prestigious villages it was customary for wealthy families to commission books and websites tracing their pedigree to an apical ancestor. In Sundarana, although some had drawn and framed their family trees there was no official record keeper or records. As such, people were pleased with the endeavour and pleasantly surprised that I did not ask for money.

The attempt to trace women's line was less successful. In a patriarchal and patri-local community, genealogies traditionally trace the male line. Such were the genealogies of the Patidars. Women, when present, appeared as sisters but disappeared in the next generation. Efforts at tracing female genealogies were interpreted locally as bad research practice. Many (men and women) did not remember with precision the names or ages of their daughter's children or their daughter's children's children. Some simply withheld information thinking that the question was misplaced.

Like Pocock, I was drawn to spread my research to a wider network of villages with which Sundaranians inter-married. I took questions into nearby wealthy

villages from where most Patidars had successfully emigrated and visited 'tribal' areas of Gujarat in order to document patterns of marriage from below (the logic of which is discussed later). I completed a household survey of the village and spent time with other (Muslim, Christian and Dalit) communities to understand contours of caste and religion in the area. If initial access appeared to have been easy, shifting the focus of the research beyond the Patidars was not. The community had taken ownership of the research. Interactions with those that Patidars considered 'lower' became a nuisance for my patrons and discouraged as a waste of time and a threat to Patidars' prestige. In a sense, my presence as a researcher became part of the prevailing logic of hierarchy and status within the village; Pocock's letters of complaint to A.M. Shah were perhaps responses to a similar experience.

Defeating plans to pursue a new research project, marriage emerged as *the* problem and conundrum of Patidar society, as it had for Pocock. If unfashionable in anthropology, status competition and hypergamy remained at the heart of being Patidar. Clearly it was not just all the same. There had been a profound shift in the ways in which people calculated status: from *land* to *migration*. In the 1950s, Patidars were primarily an agricultural community, and, although some had left for East Africa, it was land, agricultural-know-how and descent which remained important to the ways people imagined themselves and others. In 2013, against the backdrop of a national crisis of agriculture, farmers were considered poor and undesirable. Instead, white collar work, commerce, clean finger nails and a green card had become the materials of status.

This new set of values, and the impossibility for many to achieve them, was exacerbating the ‘problem’ of bachelorhood in a society that as already ‘short’ of women given a history of female infanticide, sex selective abortions and son preference. Migration had become the new culture of the caste; but in a context of tighter international frontiers and of economic growth *without* employment not all successfully migrated. Young women were often better educated than men and, reluctant to remain peasants, aspired to marry in urban areas and possibly abroad. For young men, therefore, the failure to migrate also became the failure to marry (women did not want to marry peasants) and to become socially recognised adults in the village.

It became clear, then, that moving ‘up’ and being Patidar was predicated on practices of downward mobility; migration rested on pockets of failure and immobility of which Sundarana was one. Pocock had described the shift from bride price to dowry as part of the process of upward mobility from the status of agricultural labourers or Kanbi to Patidar. As per his predictions, the price of dowry had continued to escalate: although men were in theory numerically more than women, men with green cards were far and few between and, as such, could demand high dowries. But there now (more clearly than Pocock had allowed for) existed multiple marriage markets and men who had failed to make it overseas were prepared to pay bride price in order to find a woman willing to marry them. As aspiring young women refused, some went to brokers to find women from poorer and ‘tribal’ areas of the state.

These findings corroborated Pocock’s and brought attention to elements such as bachelorhood and marriage ‘from below’ that he only discussed as footnotes

and as exceptions to his hypergamous system. This was, in part, due to a shift of approach from a focus on ‘the ideal’ system to a focus on ‘the system’ as ideology, discourse and practice. What Pocock had described as peripheral now appeared central to the reproduction of the caste. The oversight of the ‘problem’ of marriage was also due to the fact that, while bachelorhood existed in the 1950s, it was then not perceived as a social problem. In 2013, most men failed to achieve the values of the caste associated with international migration (such values could not easily be bought and sold) which exacerbated the problem of numbers.

In sum, hypergamy and status competition remained crucial to Patidar identity although the ‘shadow research’ brought attention to how upward mobility was more intimately bound to downward mobility than Pocock had described.

These days many Patidars in Sundarana, despite their best efforts, are moving ‘down’ rather than up.

### **On trusting ethnography**

No matter how many times we had read Pocock’s monographs before fieldwork, ‘being there’ brought the orientation and perspective of his writing to life. Sentences and passages became people, objects and forms. We could see how fields, time and space were assembled beautifully and with precision in his prose. Pocock’s words were given shape by the rhythms, spatiality and invisible structures of the village, not all of them of course, but those he considered dominant. His texts inflated with life, dimension and texture,

spilling from the page and back into the fields of Gujarat from whence they had once come.

The house Pocock inhabited in Sundarana stands today. We tried to imagine the changes it had been possible to view from that spot since he had reclined there to smoke sixty years earlier. We sat on the veranda, reading Pocock's descriptions of the village. Pocock explicitly, although probably unconsciously, oriented some of his ethnography around the house. In a memorable passage in *Mind, body and wealth* (1973: 25), Momad dressed in Pocock's raincoat and trilby and pranced down the lane towards the village. Momad had returned crestfallen, having been told he looked too beautiful and therefore vulnerable to the illness of the evil eye.

Much as then, the house marks the edge of Sundarana, beyond the point when the dense tangle of houses gives way to lush tobacco and chilli plantations.

The village has expanded of course and back then Pocock's 'pump house' (an irrigation works) must have seemed quite removed from the safe and protected core. When Momad left the village to take up a position in a school, Pocock took on Choto as his 'companion' (1973: 32). Choto was an employee of the irrigation works and was part of the crowd who gathered there at night.

Experiencing the vantage Pocock had on Sundarana, and understanding who he worked with and how during his research, made us also appreciate how the field had worked on him.

We had initially attempted to reconstruct Pocock's intellectual passage from Oxford to Sussex as a way of coming to grips with his own personal

anthropology. Reading him in the field, and on a veranda at that, it was more straightforward to see why his ethnographic descriptions of the village gave so much weight to the nocturnal, ambiguous and the irregular. At night, the house and environs, both before and after Pocock's time, became a place of ghosts, ancestral spirits and divine interventions: the 'underworld' of the village (Pocock 1971: 33). It was a place associated with wild animals, the dangers of the jungle, illicit love and intoxication. The pump house was a place apart, separated from the moral, social and physical regulation of the village. Pocock took an active part in the village night, and the conversations he had then in the carefree-dark strongly influenced how he knew the day.

The anthropologists who made the long voyage to India in the 1950s documented a sophisticated agrarian society ordered by caste and institutionalised inequality. The division of labour was mirrored by patterns of ritualised hierarchy and exchange relationships. In the following decades, Nehru's socialism, influenced by post-colonial and cold-war politics gave way to the forces of (neo)-liberalisation and globalisation. Much of what was documented in the 1950s has disappeared, as markets and cash have deposed moral and customary relationships (they really have, this is not romantic nostalgia).

The decline of the role of agriculture in the public life of villages such as Sundarana left hollow rituals and arcane hierarchies in place, which have either slowly fragmented or accommodated new realities. During the same period, Sundarana doubled in size, its residents growing increasingly

transnational. Changing technologies and opportunities accelerated and expanded the inflationary draft of hypergamy.

We can also now see the partiality of Pocock's descriptions and where he drew lines to demarcate and limit his materials. The outer limits, so to speak, of Pocock's stand the test of time less well than the style and spirit of his analysis. Pocock did not aim for the kind of holism that is sometimes attributed to the anthropology of the period. Instead, he delimited his material by appropriating, variously, the boundaries of the caste, village and region. He also made choices about limiting the thematic reach of his materials. Significantly, he does not mention the central role that the Patidars played in Gandhi's peasant-led movement for Indian Independence; nor does he dwell on the campaign to make Gujarat a separate linguistic state in the 1950s (while he was conducting fieldwork); nor does he comment at length on the role of international migration from the region. He must have been aware of these things. He had after all previously conducted fieldwork in Tanganyika and Zanzibar and spent considerable time with intellectuals in the drawing rooms of Baroda. Pocock presumably saw his writing as a contribution to the study of humanity of which the Patidar were a case study, rather than an account or explanation of that society. As he saw it, the realities of organised peasant and class politics were not part of the problem of hypergamous marriage.

Secondly, and as we have discussed, Pocock divided his research material between two monographs. The separation of the material is in many ways unfortunate because each book tells half a story. Pocock predicted that the hierarchy of caste would wane, reflected in the growth of congregational

religious organisations such as the Swaminarayan sect. It continues to be the case that in Gujarat today competing ideas about Hinduism (roughly divided between sacrificial and devotional/sectarian) have found home in both caste and party politics. In the case of the Patidar, inflationary ideas about vegetarianism and devotion to the sect have become part of the hypergamous logic – both internal to the caste and externally towards other castes.

Over the same period, anthropology also changed in character and reach. As we discussed at the beginning, the role and relationship between ethnography (as a form of knowledge and practice) and anthropology (as a discipline) has been continually questioned. Emergent understandings of post-colonial power politics and guilt seem key strands in this debate to us, particularly in the Indian context. The drift from understanding the native's point of view in Malinowski's mode to the skeletal 'personal anthropology' we identified in Pocock's corpus is perhaps representative of changing practice, at least in western Europe.

Recently, traces of a new generative or restoration genre of anthropological writing have emerged. These authors often echo the sentiments cited at the start of this paper from those who wrote against methodological solipsism. Tim Ingold, for example, writes: 'A discipline confined to the theatre of its own operations has nowhere to go. In its spiraling descent into irrelevance, it has no-one and nothing to blame other than itself (2014: 383–384). Ingold suggests, gently mocking a recent manifesto for ethnographic theory (da Col and Graeber 2011), that less stress to be placed on ethnography in

anthropological practice, other methodologies, according to him, are more fitting for the moment and for public engagement.

Ingold's mischief has not perhaps quite had the intention he desired. As Andrew Shryock points out, having shouted loudly 'That's enough about ethnography!' those who heard or read Ingold have now started to talk about ethnography once again.

In a rather different register, Ellen Hertz 'fueled by irritation with obscurantism in and posturing around "theory" in contemporary anthropology' (2016: 146) examines the various uses of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1988) *A thousand plateaus* in the work of three contemporary anthropologists (including coincidentally Ingold). She demonstrates how anthropologists have developed casual and inconsistent relationships to philosophy that weaken the strength of anthropology as she sees it: 'data' (2016: 153); or, using another register ethnography from which theory can be spun. Both Ingold and Hertz make prospective arguments for anthropology, to paraphrase: 'stop messing about with ourselves and get on with it'. We see this paper as a contribution to the central impulse of this genre; however, we see the results of having shadowed Pocock as a rather fine endorsement for ethnographic research and for the theories that can be generated from it.

Ingold (2014) has also resurrected the older idea that 'ethnography' and 'fieldwork' should be best understood as relations and practices of education and apprenticeship rather than as 'data' collected in 'places' (see Coy 1989 for a landmark contribution). These ideas sit well with how we have been able to

understand fieldwork in Sundarana. According to Ingold, an education anthropology does more than give us knowledge about people and societies but alters our perception of the world and instructs us in the ‘art of inquiry’. If good relationships are, generally speaking, mutually transformative then good anthropology transforms and is transformed by the people, landscapes and ideas that it encounters; this is, we think, a refinement of a how Pocock saw anthropology as a vocation.

The ‘field’ was one of the greatest scientific discoveries of the twentieth century (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997 on anthropological fields). Field theory emerged through the study of electromagnetism, relativity and more recently quantum mechanics. In a field, matter and energy come together not to operate *in* space but *are* in themselves space and time (Rovelli 2014: 17). Movement is the product not of simple cause-effect but of the relation between a set of forces that transform individual units to the point of making them irreducible to what they once were.

These ideas have slowly seeped out of laboratories, but have not vanquished all the older certainties of social science. They have been taken up by geographers (amongst others) working with concepts of space, who have demonstrated the fallacy of a popular flat and generalised notion of undifferentiated and value-neutral terrain. According to Massey (2005), space is a product of human and non-human relations always under construction with numerous and undetermined futures. ‘Place’ should also not be opposed to ‘space’, as the particular or parochial is opposed to the general. It should be rather understood as an ‘event’ and a coming together (a ‘throwntogetherness’

in Massey's words, 2005: 149) of processes in human and non-human form: layers of geology, the moving of rocks, things and memories made and forgotten, and the routes that people, animals have marked and unmarked.

This unfixing of place has gone alongside research that brings attention to the politico-economic construction of boundaries and, more broadly, of difference. Adopting the physics-derived notion, Bourdieu saw fields as systems of differentiation and distinction in which sets of choices and rules allow for 'the most fundamental social differences to be expressed' (1984: 223). They are collections of forces hierarchically arranged in any given society in relation to a predominant field, generally the one of power. They have their own logics and structures. In Bourdieu's own somewhat circular logic, fields are both the product and producer of embodied ways of being in and understanding the world.

If we see Sundarana in this light, then ethnographic practice must engage and seek to understand the forces at work in making the field a field. Anthropology is not only a personal account of the world but a kind of apprenticeship that can itself (and beyond the self) be transmitted as a knowledge in and of the world. If we see not only anthropologists' texts but also fieldwork as a relationship between different assumptions and worldviews (replete with power, politics and inequality) then we also see that 'truth' is not with the self or with other, but is rather in the relationship with elements of a field.

Considering anthropologists' texts and fieldwork as relationships (and as a 'we') might give us ways to trust ethnography, just as we do some relationships, while struggling with others.

Moving in Pocock's shadows, we have found that what might have appeared as serendipity or chance to the first fieldworker was probably nothing of the sort. Instead, what could only appear as chance was in fact almost inevitable, as the first anthropologist had been incorporated within the invisible dynamics of politics, history and social differentiation of a particular place, altering them slightly as he did so. We do not intend to evoke a predetermined world, but with hindsight we do not think it was a coincidence that Alice ended-up working with the same subsection of the Patidar caste in Sundarana as Pocock; rather, the unwitting replication of experience by very different people in the same place at different times points to the 'agency' (a shorthand for now) of the field as a place and set of structuring structures, albeit with an 'empty' and unaccounted period of sixty years.

Like us, Pocock reached out to the village long before it was in sight. We found our way to Sundarana first through Pocock's writing and then through the goodwill and facilitation of a transnationalism focused on the neighbouring village of Dharmaj. Gatekeepers and fixers helped pave the way into the village and then into its shadows. The anthropologists who found themselves in Sundarana were drawn into the centrifuge of the Patidar caste, coming to rest, almost remarkably, in the ambit of one of the most influential Patidar lineages. In time, the forces of genealogy, marriage circles and the irresistible updraft of hypergamy began to exercise influence over how the anthropologists could see and describe the village.

Of course, personalities and individual characteristics matter in the conduct of research, but perhaps less so than is often thought. In Sundarana two quite

different people were allowed to see the village maze in remarkably similar ways. Most anthropologists are not yet so fortunate to have keen-eyed predecessors in the shadows. Most anthropologists still conduct research in the flat light of shadowless landscapes. They look to the field and can only see serendipity and chance as guiding them. By shifting the emphasis away from the anguished anthropologist and back towards the field the role of ethnography might be further recuperated.

The compounded agency of various networks, institutions, people and the sublimated structures of kinship and polity give Sundarana a distinct shape and character. Knowledge of what Pocock had to say gave us initial resolve not to simply repeat him. However, the attempt to shift the focus away from the Patidar was met with resistance and research findings became part of the master-narrative of caste hypergamy, which remained the principal generative social force of which marriage was the dynamic confirmation. There are two significant caveats: migration has replaced land as the key marker of social distinction and, secondly, practices Pocock saw as exceptions or peripheral to the hypergamous system are now central to its reproduction. In this sense, new fieldwork complemented rather than replicated what Pocock had had to say. In exploring these things, we also enlivened shadows, intellectual legacies and fleeting glimpses of former relationships. In the process, David Pocock became part of the story of hypergamy.

The role of anthropology is generally no longer to contribute case studies to a general store of examples from around the world; rather, we may aim to see connections, networks and to understand the operation of power between

forces and scales. We are also aware that the region has history and perhaps also we would wish to tell a story along the way. It turns out then that the greater intellectual aims and style of contribution to knowledge have changed more than the methods at the core of the discipline.

Building relationships with villages such as Sundarana is about the quasi-mystical figure of the local gate-keeper and the rather more prosaic figures who have time on their hands. But it is also about engaging with the accumulated materials of centuries alongside new fancies and distinguishing the corporate message from the guru's chant, the magnificent from the mundane and shadow from light.

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<sup>1</sup> Letters to A.M. Shah, April 12<sup>th</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup> 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to A.M. Shah, October 18<sup>th</sup> 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> *Sundarana: Marriage and migration among the Patidar community*. Dir. D. Bajranje, and A. Tilche 2013. 43 min. Nomad Movies Production.

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