

## **What is in a name? How caste names affect the production of situated knowledge**

**Kamna Patel**

**University College London**

[Kamna.patel@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Kamna.patel@ucl.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

Patel, Desai, Kothari ... to those literate in the workings of caste these names describe a network and its power in relation to other networks, they infer the rules of engagement within and between network members, and they ascribe a geographical terrain to home. In research, rules of behaviour and assumptions of place that are coded into names can affect access to respondents, their disclosure of data and subsequent claims to validity. This paper explores the coded expectations of knowledge embedded in a name as seen by someone (me) fairly illiterate in the workings of caste by utilising the principle of Bourdieu's doxa – a 'pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge' (Deer, 2012, 115) – to untangle and explore the effect of names on the production of partial and situated knowledge. Drawing on fieldwork in Gujarat, India, I analyse reflexive accounts through the lenses of feminist geographers and critical race scholars to illustrate the effects of being unknowingly and unwillingly placed into a social hierarchy of power in the field, introduce the idea of 'us-ing' (an opposite of othering) to describe researcher-respondent relations, and explore how readers might interpret the presence or absence of data and claims to validity. These accounts make visible the effects of positionality on knowledge production in ways that speak to feminist-postcolonial research, and specifically to feminist researchers of colour conducting research away from 'home'.

**Keywords:** positionality, reflexivity, diaspora, names, doxa, caste

### **Introduction**

This paper draws on self-reflexive accounts of fieldwork in India and details the ways in which names, as a specific code for different types of identity, affect knowledge production in the research process; specifically, access to respondents, the disclosure of data, and subsequent claims to validity of the research. The argument in the paper builds on the arguments made by feminist scholars of the relationship between positionality, reflexivity and situated knowledge (Rose, 1997; Koyabashi, 1994; McDowell, 1992). Where this literature discusses identity markers such as race, age, class and gender (Milner, 2007; Rose, 1997) and behaviours such as the personality of the researcher (Moser 2008) to explore issues of positionality, this paper draws on studies of onomastics to focus on names and the cultural insights they reveal. Our names are a fascinating way to examine knowledge production largely because they represent us in a literal sense as a label, but they also represent socially and culturally coded expectations of our race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, class, mother tongue, place, social networks and family history. In this paper, I explore how our names, or rather my name coupled with my appearance, signifies an expectation of

knowledge among respondents which affects the research process and the production of situated and partial knowledge.

The aim of the paper is not to simply add ‘names’ to the list of identity markers that should be explored in reflections on positionality, but rather to share that through reflecting on my name and its codes I was able to delve deeper into processes of knowledge production. The compulsion to share arises from Aisha Giwa's (2015) call for epistemological reflections on methodology from people of colour which might provide different ways of thinking through positionality in fieldwork. This stands in contrast to the vast body of literature spanning more than 20 years that examines western white feminist positions in knowledge production (e.g. McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997; Moser, 2008; Caretta, 2015), and which serves to guide western white feminist researchers. In this paper, I aim to contribute to a small body of growing important literature from non-white westerners who conduct research away from ‘home’, and critical reflection on the ways in which such researchers are situated and the identities to which they are subjected (e.g. Fisher, 2014; Mahtani, 2014).

### **Names as label and signifier**

Our names, as a proper noun, uniquely identify us; we refer to ourselves by our name and are referred to by others. And yet our names mean more than a point of identification. Drawing on theories in psychology, Kenneth Dion (1983, 246) argues that names are a ‘focal point upon which self-identity is organized over the course of an individual's life’. Pointing to classic research on personality in psychology (e.g. Sherif and Candril's, 1947, theory that the name given to someone influences their identity and development, cited in Dion, 1983, 245) and debates around the metaphysical question ‘if we did not have the names that we have, would we be the same person?’ he notes answers to questions such as ‘who are you?’ or ‘who am I?’, draw upon a name. Names are a self-concept. They constitute a salient part of how we define and understand ourselves, ‘especially when they are . . . distinctive in the context of the groups of which we are members’ (Dion, 1983, 249). Consider here someone with an atypical name and the behaviours they might have developed to define themselves to their peers, and in the case of minorities with cultural minority names (where a peer can be outside of that minority culture), consider not only behaviours but the personality they might have developed from having to explain their name or constantly having to describe its and their origins. For example, I have a name of Indian origin coupled with a British accent. In my daily life, this seems to produce a disconnect for strangers I encounter and frequently results in having to explain a family history. These polite encounters that enquire on the origins of my name can feel like a code for enquiring on my origins. Though I realise this might not be what is intended by the questioner, but what may be little more than an ice-breaker for one party serves also to remind me that in a group of my peers I am made different, and that my claims to Britishness coded in my accent are more acceptable if accompanied by an explanation. Such encounters have certainly affected my personality and behaviour in general, and especially around any conversation of my name.

Cases where names force us to define ourselves and how we are defined, illustrate that names can have both an internal meaning and an external meaning. Where the former refers to self-identity (Dion, 1983), and the attachment we have to our names and what it means to us, which may affect how we feel about ourselves (Brennen, 2000); the latter is associated with connotations others might have, for example, names that seemingly represent a person's age,

gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion or class, and inferences derived thereof. Although in Brennen's (2000) psychological study on the meaning of personal names, he found the power of the external meaning of a name faded over time as people got to know one another. That is, once the person attached to the name was known better, the identity-based associations of that name were either questioned and debunked or accepted, rendering the process of seeking meaning in a name pointless after a while. This raises an interesting issue for fieldwork where a respondent can meet a researcher once or a few times only. In these brief encounters, where any one party's connotations associated with a name are not given time to stand corrected, they presumably stay adding another layer to the variables that can mediate relationships of power between respondent and researcher.

Where literature from psychology examines how personal names influence our sense of self and related behaviours (Brennen, 2000; Dion, 1983), anthropological literature examines how names order society and thus influence behaviours. Both of these literatures take further the idea of a name as more than a label (though Brennen (2000) ultimately disagrees). There is a power and politics to names and systems of naming. Jeffery Brewer's (1981) ethnographic study of personal naming systems in Bima, Indonesia, illustrates that naming systems, apparent in many societies, convey information about social relationships particularly family structure and lines of descent. For example, the Bimanese maintained a strict cultural code when it came to naming, with multiple names that are added or dropped over the course of one's life denoting phases where one is someone's child, parent or grandparent. The use of specific names indicated seniority, hierarchical relationships and flows of power. The system of naming was thus an 'instrument [...] for the management of social relations rather than [just] descriptions of social relations' (1981, 214). Brewer considers this system of naming a social model analogous to caste. Caste is a social model where names are a cultural code that indicate and govern social relations and power.

In South Asia, personal and family names code caste and sub-caste (*Jati*) identities. Caste and sub-caste are best understood as layerings (where layers can fuse together) of group identity rooted in three elements: Hindu thought (a philosophical element), class (a social element) and hereditary occupational groups (an economic element). These layers forge a social system based on order and hierarchy. Though scholars disagree on the extent to which these three elements are coterminous in describing caste, there is a broad consensus that caste is not a bounded rigid system, and historically had a greater fluidity than colonial accounts and surveys of South Asian caste systems allowed (Das, 2014; Fuller, 1996; Shinde, 2016; Waldrop, 2004; Witsoe, 2012). In post-Independence India, the fluidity of caste identities are now overlaid with a layer of state administration and ordering with categories of 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST), 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) and 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) in resource-based opposition to 'Forward Castes' (Das, 2014). These latest caste identities have taken on new meaning linked to securing greater advantages and privileges, and have produced practices of caste consolidation and/or construction in a (re)politicisation of caste so that groups can secure access to caste-based quotas, reservations and affirmative action policies (see Shinde, 2016 and Witsoe, 2012). At the same time, caste and its meaning is also being reworked through processes of urbanisation (discussed below) and practices termed 'Sanskritisation'. This is where traditional low-caste groups adopt higher-caste practices and associated behaviours (reported in Chacko, 2004, 55), which simultaneously disrupt and reinforce caste-based identities as well as increase the level of general Hindu consciousness. This all

suggests that in contemporary India caste has renewed and reworked importance in governing behaviours and social relationships with implications for names and the coding of caste and religious identity therein.

Onomastic scholarship on the effects of Indian urbanisation, 'Sanskritisation' and changing political landscapes on caste names appears to be absent, though some studies of urbanisation mention that migrants to urban areas change their caste-revealing names to something else (Kumar 2012), and suggesting the opposite Gupta (2004:xx, cited in Shinde, 2016, 105) explains that,

urbanisation gives caste identities a fresh lease of life [...] [for] It is not as if the urban world has made people more caste conscious, but rather towns and cities impart a certain level of freedom such that caste identities can now be fearlessly, and unabashedly, expressed.

In Shrestha's (2000) study of names and naming system in neighbouring Nepal, she argues that as caste is reworked in changing socio-cultural and economic times, naming practices change. With reference to Newars (a farmer caste) in Kathmandu, she found that over three generations personal names that once denoted one's affiliation to a caste and sub-caste group, had almost disappeared among the young whose names were inspired variously by movie stars, singers and parental preference. One explanation is that,

The increasing employment of Maharjans [a lower sub-caste] as drivers, clerks, shopkeepers, and lower level administrators has now motivated younger Maharjans to remove and to avoid all caste markers, hence the disappearance of *bhai*, *raja*, *kazi*, *narayan*, *babu*, *maiya*, *nani*, *chhori*, *sobha*, and others as names or parts of names. (Shrestha, 2000:41).

While personal names appear sensitive to changing times, family names do not. And so, despite changes to naming practices, young Newars remain in part governed by the principle that, 'Each caste has characteristic surnames by which members can be identified and placed in the hierarchy; thus the surnames indicate to others within the overall caste system the degree of deference or authority a Newar should have.' (Shrestha, 2000, 30).

Outside of South Asia, caste is reworked by diaspora. In Kumar's (2012) study of Hindu Indian diaspora in South Africa, Fiji and the UK, he found that amid the complexities of diasporic life (such as being made a minority within social contexts not governed by caste), many of the operational functions of caste have not survived to second and third generations. He writes, 'The present generation holds the caste names as last names, but they do not seem too concerned about the status issues in relation to marriage in particular and in relation to the priesthood' (Kumar, 2012, 216). Although in this research Kumar suggests Gujaratis (those hailing from Gujarat state in north-west India) are an exception. In South Africa, the history of most Indian diaspora is one of indentured labour in Durban, where ties to India are remote (Landy, Maharaj and Mainet-Valleix, 2004). Gujaratis tended not to be indentured labourers, thus their history of settlement meant whole families migrated and were able to maintain marriage and custom based practices.

For UK Gujaratis, Kumar found a particular ongoing connection to caste and sub-caste identities. Many UK Gujaratis are double migrants: leaving East Africa in the 1960s and 70s for the UK. The experience of major relocation, rather than weaken social bonds, may have

strengthened family and caste bonds and reinforced their importance. Michaelson (1979), notes that while caste-based practices around eating and touching tend to be rejected by UK Gujaratis, caste norms persist in religious leadership (which tends to be maintained by Brahmin castes) and marriage practices. Take, for example, UK Gujaratis (made up of double and single migrants) self-organisation into caste and sub-caste associations. These groups maintain directories of Gujaratis in that group in the UK (listing name, family members, dates of birth of family members, address, occupation and phone number) and organise social or religious gatherings. These functions serve mainly two purposes: socialisation among new and old acquaintances, and scouting for potential spouses for UK-born generations. The existence of these associations and the seeming importance attached to caste-appropriate marriage practices, is reasonably well known in Gujarat through the many Gujarati diaspora who frequently visit ancestral homes, and through practices among some second generation British men especially, of marrying from 'home' linked to the preservation of cultural gendered norms and behaviours (see Patel and Rutten, 1999). There are, of course, multiple other ways that connect Gujarati diaspora to contemporary Gujarat, including financial flows, religious devotion and political ideologies. For example, Sud (2008) examines the links between Gujarati diaspora and the rise of Hindu nationalism and violence in the state. So, what assumptions and subsequent effects might this create for researchers from the Gujarati diaspora, conducting research in Gujarat? One reasonable assumption is that such a researcher knows their sub-caste and it either matters to them, or it ought to. A focus on names and their codes, is thus relevant to thinking about positionality in postcolonial and feminist conversations on research.

Though the body of literature on onomastics and personal pronouns is an older literature and not directly related to research processes, later scholarship on the use of pseudonyms in research does draw attention to the power of names (Allen & Wiles, 2016; Creswell, 2014). Parts of this scholarship delves deeper than the ethics of naming, and borrows from literary critique (see Asempasah & Aba Sam, 2016) to examine the importance of names and their coded meanings for the researcher. Allen and Wiles's (2016) paper centres on study participants choosing their own pseudonyms and raises an interesting tension between choosing names as a technical procedure driven by a researcher (as Creswell, 2014, advises) versus the psychological meaning of a name for respondents. In Allen and Wiles's (2016) study, some respondents chose names that moved against age and gender stereotypes, others chose names with deep personal meaning, for example, taking the name of a loved one with little consideration of other identity-based meanings associated with the name. Contrast this to common practice in ethnographic research where the researcher aims to provide 'thick' description while upholding principles of confidentiality, which can encourage researchers to choose a pseudonym they consider as representative of a respondent's gender, age, class, religion as well as their cultural, ethnic and national background. Leaving Robertson (2002, 790) to suggest, thick descriptions that rely on labels, without unpicking the meaning behind these labels, can end up assuming a theoretical rigor. Pseudonyms used by researchers are designed to convey particular ideas about the respondent, and discussions on the use of pseudonyms makes visible and explicit the power of names to invoke other identities and their assumed meanings. Learning from this discussion with a view to examine one's positionality, why not also make explicit or at least reflect on the assumptions coded into real names? In the next section, I present brief vignettes on my fieldwork in India, and use these

to explore where assumptions coded in my name and appearance may have affected access to respondents and the disclosure of information, and subsequent issues for claims to validity.

### **Self-reflections on fieldwork**

In early 2014 and 2015, I spent two periods of time in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, collecting qualitative data to examine the social and political effects of a low-income housing resettlement scheme in the city. Ahmedabad is the commercial capital of Gujarat state. It rose to international notoriety in 2002 as a central foci of Hindu-Muslim communal violence. Known as the Gujarat riots, thousands of mainly Muslim Gujaratis were killed and thousands more Gujaratis displaced creating contemporary settlement patterns in the city along caste and religious based identities. This forged the political and social context to the research and specifically affected the resettlement site under study where residents were predominately low-income Muslims and lower caste Hindus (see Patel, 2016).

During the periods of fieldwork I kept a detailed field diary in which I recorded my observations, reflections on interviews and encounters that stuck in my mind. I utilise two principles to facilitate connections between the content of diary entries and critical reflection on positionality in fieldwork: the first principle is auto-ethnography as a legitimate feminist approach to unpacking relational power in fieldwork (Robertson, 2002), and as a technique of self-conscious writing that connects the “personal to the cultural and social” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix in Holman Jones, 2005, 765). As a self-conscious act, I discuss my name and expectations of knowledge. In some places in my writing and field notes I speculate on how the behaviours of respondents may have been affected by my presence and views, but ultimately I cannot report on the actual or revealed expectations of knowledge from respondents. Their voices and the voice of my research assistant are not apparent in this piece, which necessarily bounds any claims I make as existing only within my sphere of understanding, which is disrupted only by critical engagement with the second principle, doxa (on the powerful subjectivities of research assistants and their influence on situated knowledge, see Caretta, 2015). Doxa refers to commonly held values, practices and beliefs. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) uses the term to refer to that which is self-evident and undisputed, and which in the absence of questioning, is reproduced. Deer (2012,115) adds, doxa is:

The misrecognition of forms of social arbitrariness which creates the unformulated, non-discursive, yet internalized and practical recognition of the same arbitrariness. As such, doxa contributes to its reproduction in social institutions, structures and links as well as in minds and bodies, expectations and behaviour.

Understanding caste as doxa, means to question its invisibility in encounters between research participants and myself. I do this by treating diary entries and the encounters I relate below, as representing a pre-reflexive knowledge that is deconstructed through auto-ethnography.

Following each episode is a discussion that draws on feminist scholarship in geography on positionality and knowledge to unpack its effect on the research process. From this vast scholarship I draw from two pertinent discussions: making reflexivity visible in presentations of positionality and embracing the complexity that ensues (Caretta 2015; Milner 2007; Proudfoot 2015; Robertson 2002; Rose 1997; Sultana 2007); and the (in)adequacy of

‘insider-outsider’ frames of thinking for diasporic researchers and researchers of colour who are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ (Chacko, 2004; Fisher, 2014; Herod, 1999; Mullings, 1999).

Taking a cue from Robertson (2002) on the problematic use of labels and the assumed commonality of understanding of these labels in un-reflexive discussions of positionality (e.g. I am a woman, x years old etc.), instead I describe my situation which sets the context for these episodes. I was born and raised in London in the early 1980s, the daughter of parents who migrated to the UK from Gujarat, India in the 1970s. This London was mainly white, taking in the aftermath of race riots in the predominantly Afro-Caribbean areas of Notting Hill and Tottenham, and South Asian areas like Southall. London was a place where racist epitaphs on graffitied walls, in mainstream political slogans, or aural echoes on the street were not unusual to the ear and eye. In this environment I learnt race and ethnicity determined relational networks of power, life chances and the geography of London. I consciously make a distinction here between ‘race’ and ‘caste’, with the latter belonging to South Asia and relations between South Asians. Though I acknowledge the political moves led by Dalits to understand casteism as racism, and acknowledge the importance of this to a progressive and just Indian politics and society (see Das, 2014, for a detailed discussion of ‘race’ and ‘caste’ in India). For me, caste was an old-fashioned word from my parents’ old fashioned world. I heard it only in reference to disapproving talk on the marriage choices of family or friends. In my early awareness of caste, it meant nothing to me and did not knowingly govern my later life choices (although it may have had an affect outside of my control and consciousness).

### *Episode 1: ‘What kind of Patel are you?’*

I was conducting an interview with an elite who shares the same last name (no relation). I reached out to the respondent through social connections as the respondent was in a position to oversee key housing programmes in the city. Sitting in on the interview were two other people: a gatekeeper who had secured the interview and who I knew well, and the respondent’s assistant. During the course of early pleasantries and introductions, we established I was a visiting researcher from a London university, the interview would not be recorded and would be conducted in Gujarati. At this time, I was asked by the respondent if I was married, I replied that I was not, and in ensuing discussion the gatekeeper revealed my age. The respondent replied immediately, ‘that sort of thing works over there, not over here’ (all translations from the original Gujarati are mine). A few minutes later, the respondent’s assistant asked, ‘what kind of Patel are you?’ I gave the name of my father’s ancestral village. The respondent recognised what this meant and in context of the meaning behind the question, declared what kind of Patel I was i.e. what sub-caste grouping. I explained that the label meant nothing to me. The respondent replied, ‘I guess they don’t teach you over there’. For the remainder of the interview (some 40 minutes), the respondent made a number of factually incorrect statements on the resettlement programme I was researching, such as those who are resettled do not make any financial contribution. When I probed further on this and pointed out that people do make a payment (I had seen receipts, had oral testimony from payees and collectors, and had visited the offices where payments were made), all three people in the room insisted that I did not know what was really going on. They discussed me during the interview and said statements to each other including: ‘she doesn’t understand what living in a slum means’ and ‘she doesn’t know what poor people are really like’. We all read each other as misguided and ill-informed of poor people’s experiences of housing in the

city. Layered on top of this, in my field diary reflecting on the episode, I note that the interview left me feeling both frustrated and humiliated.

Interviewing elites is a notoriously difficult endeavour with challenges that are more pronounced for this group of respondents than for others, such as the challenges to securing an interview with an elite, building rapport and trust in the interview so useful information is disclosed, the effort that goes into self-presentation to create a favourable impression, and managing the interview itself so the elite is kept on topic. To this, Herod (1999) adds, when interviewing 'foreign' elites (foreign to the researcher), there is the challenge of cross-cultural (mis)understanding and the effects this can have on building rapport or managing an interview. Herod (1999) describes how he secures access to foreign elite respondents through particular presentations of himself that rely on utilising his position relative to respondents. For example, thinking through an 'insider/outsider' methodological frame (the former supposes a degree of knowing that might not be true, and the latter a degree of objectivity), Herod describes how in his research on trade union leaders in the USA and Eastern Europe, his position as a British-born man living and working in the USA, enables him to embody 'insider' or 'outsider' identities in different contexts that is instrumental to securing interviews with a range of different respondents and building a rapport that produces useful data (leading him to conclude insider and outsider categories are neither accurate or helpful in methodological discussions).

In the episode above, my social connections had secured the interview. I had successfully utilised family, kin and friendship networks and mobilised an aspect of my identity-based connections to gain access to an elite. I had also entered the encounter with a set of unquestioned privileges: a British identity that allows me to claim the status of an international researcher with an easy ability to move to and within India, a perceived kudos from being an academic at a UK university and a sense of entitlement to conduct interviews with elites or any other person whom I felt relevant to my research. The power of privilege lay in its invisibility. In consciously using aspects of my identity to further researcher privilege, my experience mirrors that of many people who have written on elite interviews and their identity. For example, Herod (1999) in describing using parts of his identity as variously an 'insider' or 'outsider', he is also describing being in control of those identities and being able to manipulate them to suit a purpose including building rapport. Mullings (1999) similarly describes a degree of control over how she used her identity as a British national of black Jamaican origin interviewing elites in Jamaica, to position herself and modify her questions and behaviours in relation to the identity of her respondents. She writes, 'As a partial insider I was aware that certain signifiers of my identity (my Jamaican ancestry and past affiliation with the local university) were likely to heighten levels of suspicion and distrust among both foreign and national managers. With this knowledge, I was able to draw upon my affiliation with a North American university and my British nationality to create a persona that was less likely to be perceived as a threat' (1999, 344). This allowed her to build rapport, set her respondents at ease and secure useful data. Both Herod and Mullings were successful in their strategies, in part, because they had anticipated (or assumed) what respondents were thinking about them based on national, ethno-cultural and/or racial-political codes, and positioned themselves accordingly.

Where I may differ from Herod and Mullings, is that the above episode has indirectly exposed my privileges by forcing a recognition of my expectations of respondent behaviour



and the role of my identity in setting those expectations (i.e. my Britishness, association with a UK university and social ties insofar as they secured an elite interview). In being asked my name, and specifically the information coded into 'what kind of Patel' I was, alongside the judgement of not being married at my age and possibly my display of Britishness over Indianess in my knowledge of caste names, the respondent and others in the room saw and placed me within a socio-cultural landscape that positioned me in very particular ways outside of my control, which I had not anticipated and not planned for (the option to deceive and either pretend I was married or attached to a sub-caste identity being ethically inappropriate). This positioning was relational; a sub-caste identity only has meaning in relation to other sub-caste identities. In which case, the question may have been to assert the power of the researched vis-à-vis my position as researcher and establish hierarchy as Shrestha (2000, 30) reports in Nepal, with surnames indicating 'within the overall caste system the degree of deference or authority' one should exhibit or expect. Another explanation could be the question served to place me within a wider network known to the respondent, possibly to deepen social connections. In which case the question 'what kind of Patel are you' is not the most suitable question to ask. That aim would be best served by asking the gatekeeper to make connections. My response, and possibly because of the order into which I was placed, served to establish the dominance of the respondent, respondent's assistant and gatekeeper, and a negative image of me, the researcher. The power dynamics exhibited in the interview directly affected the quality of data and because of my feelings towards the encounter and lingering feelings of frustration and humiliation I consequently saw very little that was useful or useable to understand housing in the city.

What makes this experience more than a bad elite interview, is the self-position and positioning of researcher and respondent that is made obvious when revealed through reflexivity. Feminist geographers have long engaged with reflexivity as a means to interrogate one position in relation to research participants, the wider world and its effect to produce situated knowledge. One of the gains of this influential feminist and race-conscious scholarship (Rose, 1997; Koyabashi, 1994; McDowell, 1992) is the ubiquity of discussions on positionality in social science research. Though, outside of explicitly feminist or critical race research, the discussion can sometimes be little more than the presentation of labels that describe aspects of the researcher's identity. For example: woman, white, young and so on, without ever unpacking the loaded meaning of those markers, which necessarily includes their meaning in relation to the researched, the site and context of the research, and wider social and cultural norms that are associated with 'being white' or 'being a woman', and their effect on the research. Without unpacking these, a presentation of researcher positionality is mainly the production and maintenance of stereotypes. Robertson (2002, 790), adds, the use of distinguishing identity labels can be useful, 'but only if they are not left self-evident as essentialized qualities that are magically synonymous with self-consciousness, or, for that matter, with intellectual engagement and theoretical rigor'. The loss of complexity in writing and thinking about the construction of knowledges, arises from a conceptual disconnect between positionality and reflexivity, where reflexivity demands a researcher making explicit (if only to themselves) the assumptions underlying the questions they ask, occasions they observe as noteworthy, how answers are interpreted and analysed, and the expectations they bring into an encounter (Robertson, 2002, 786).

This is not to suppose that full transparent reflexivity, though desirable, is possible in practice. The act of reflexive thinking, Rose (1997) asserts in her authoritative paper on situated knowledge, is inherently flawed if one enters it to find a revelation of one's self that makes fully visible a researcher's power and relation to the researched and research context. This is because ontologically, it demands an omnipresence to see and know all, in order to disclose what is seen and known, and what is not seen and not known. Instead Rose (1997: 319) works with the concepts of uncertainty, gaps and fragments to explore other ways of knowing and situating knowledge, which is then written in our research practices. I interpret this challenge as pushing different ways to make visible and render knowable that which lay invisible and can operate in unknown ways, especially for diasporic researchers who may be assumed to know more than they do, and who are positioned, judged and whose research is affected by invisible cultural and place-particular codes and norms. Current writing on positionality is charged with finding new ways to push visibility and consciousness through reflexivity, for example, Proudfoot (2015)'s psychoanalytical work to analyse dreams to reach a higher level of understanding on how he interpreted data and why he then made claims of it that he did; and Caretta's (2015) work on triple subjectivities to explore how her research assistants affected the gathering, interpretation and analysis of data. Here, I work with the concept of doxa to make caste visible and subject it to interrogation by deconstructing the codes in my name and their influence on accessing a respondent, the quality of interview data and mediating in that moment the respondent – researcher relationship. This is part of a conscious exercise to not be only inward-looking in thinking about positionality (my day-to-day social and professional world in the UK does not link my name to caste and thus affect my job, as far as I can tell), but to try and speak to the relational and hierarchical power structures that a researcher can be placed in and the effect of this on the production of situated and partial knowledge.

***Episode 2: 'Musulman here are not good, they are not like us'***

In an interview with a resettled respondent who identified herself as Hindu, she described what daily life was like in the new settlement. In the block where she lived were a mix of Muslim and Hindu families. Their religious identities were visible in their names, the clothes and adornments people wore, for men in the beards they kept (or did not keep), the language they spoke and religious symbols in doorways. In the interview, we discussed the governance structure in the settlement e.g. whom to complain to if something was wrong with the water supply, who ensured communal refuse was collected, and if there were any disturbances or issues between residents who would be involved in resolving them. In the course of this discussion, the respondent disclosed, 'the Musulmen [Muslims] here are not good, they are not like us'. She later elaborated, 'if we see children doing something wrong, we should be able to say something. They can tell our children, we don't mind. But we cannot say anything to their children. If we did, they would argue with us'. The sentiment expressed here is not unusual in communal Ahmedabad. For this paper what is noteworthy is the use of 'we' and 'us' in her response. At one level it referred to Hindu residents in the area. Though, it also seemed to include me, not that I was expected to correct children in the area but that I was part of the 'us' and so could understand the behaviours of Muslim children and parents was a deviation from 'us'; I was made a part of this verdict that 'othered' Muslims. Up to this interview, the personal information the respondent knew of me was my name (from which a reasonable, though inaccurate, assumption could be made of my religion) and that I had come

from London, anything else was inferred from clues based on my dress, hair style (including absence of hair covering), behaviours and language. Her reading of me may have facilitated this disclosure in a project where I was not asking about religious and caste identities (reflected upon in episode 3).

The ways in which a researcher is positioned by respondents in fieldwork, is captured by Sultana (2007, 367-377) as ‘dilemmas’ in fieldwork with ethical implications in terms of the “moral and mutual relations” between researcher and respondent. Particularly, in fieldwork involving non-elite respondents that engages in research on poverty or marginality and can draw a stark contrast to the power and position of the researcher (also in Koyabashi, 1994). In the context of this dilemma, Sultana describes a continual tension at play in the politics of her representation (which includes how she was seen by others as much as how she presented herself). At times her self-identification as an urban Bangladeshi woman engendered a hostile ‘othering’ of her by older male respondents who seemed to position her in a urban-rural hierarchy, interposed within a man-woman hierarchy that manifested in a refusal to answer questions or condescending answers. At other times, despite her urbane identity, she was able to foster a closeness and shared understanding with the rural Bangladeshi women she interviewed, explaining that she had become an ‘acceptable outsider’ (2007, 379), a term rooted in both her difference and familiarity. This status was partly triggered by the topic of her research and its perceived usefulness (water politics), and the mindfulness of power dynamics and cultural norms she exhibited through acts including how she sat and the manner of her address.

Like Herod (1999) and Mullings (1999), Sultana describes a deep awareness of her positioning by respondents and raises as a point of ethical engagement ‘how [...] could [I] play with different positionalities to build rapport with different people’ (2007, 379). The very idea of being an ‘acceptable outsider’ speaks to cultural ways of knowing that navigate acceptance. In episode 2, there is an assumed shared cultural knowledge of Muslims in the area (Chacko, 2004, 54, refers to this as a ‘cultural fluency’). Where Mullings (1999, 340), points out our positionalities are not fixed, but subject to and vary over time and space, in this episode I was read as empathetic, a confidante for the othering of Muslims in the area. It is possible the respondent was reaching out to communicate to me something that was important to her and thus draw me into her shared community. Yet, the basis for her assumptions of me are not at all obvious as I had not consciously given any clues that I was part of a cultural and religious ‘us’. I had (as I had done with all respondents) been attentive to power differentials and acted to minimise their influence during interviews in ways cognisant of Sultana’s ethical formulations. This manifest in acts such as using Gujarati forms of address usually reserved for relative elders (e.g. using *tame* and *tamne* over *tu* and *tane*), or sitting in the same way as a respondent (e.g. on the floor or in a chair when invited to do so). Where Sultana discusses processes of ‘othering’ based on her appearance, the assumptions coded therein, and its effect on her access to respondents and the disclosure of information (she reported condescending answers), this episode demonstrates the effects of processes of ‘us-ing’, an opposite of ‘othering’. There are no adequate words to capture the opposite of ‘othering’. Empathising or humanising can serve as opposites, but do not adequately describe the processes playing out in this case which resemble inclusion, adversely or otherwise. In being made part of an ‘us’, my research benefited from an assumed cultural knowledge with the respondent opening up and disclosing information about her

neighbours that influenced my understanding of religion and culture as a dynamic present in the area, but which I may not have otherwise known (as I made no enquiry of it).

Issues of cultural knowledge are issues that affect not only access to data, but crucially its interpretation and analysis. In Milner's (2007, 388) discussion of positionality, he draws on critical race theory to explore in cross-racial research (where the researcher is a different race to the researched), whether the researcher has 'the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences' of the researched. Critical race theory in research teaches us that racial and cultural thought and background affect epistemology and plays a role that is often invisible in interpreting data and ascribing to it an authenticity and truthfulness, which when presented as 'colour-blind' is deeply problematic. In this episode, race intersects with class, caste and religious identity to produce an ethical fieldwork dilemma of positionality, cultural interpretation and the subsequent representation of Hindu-Muslim relations in the area.

Thinking reflexively on this episode, which was memorable enough to have been written up in my field diary as a noteworthy experience, a key issue is flagged for especially diasporic researchers who may be more exposed to 'us-ing' processes: the power of assumed cultural knowledge and the need to recognise and be conscious of it in analysis and write-up. In this case, 'us-ing' presumed belonging (seemingly) based on a name and appearance, (even though my accent and vocabulary would have certainly revealed that I was not from the same place as the respondent), which then led to access to particular information, which may not have otherwise been disclosed. Discussions of 'insider' researchers typically explain that cultural knowledge can also produce a common ground from which to interpret and understand data (e.g. Sultana, 2007: 378; Giwa, 2015), but in this case, there may not be a common ground from which to interpret and understand; that is, a common ground based on diasporic connection may be assumed by both respondent and researcher. If this point passes without critical reflection, Milner's risk exists of cross-cultural researchers making representations that authenticate and validate data that is presented as colour, caste, class and religious blind. In sum, positionality effects knowledge claims, and for diasporic researchers the role of assumed cultural knowledge may obscure and make invisible epistemological interpretations of data.

In the two episodes above, the researcher has been subjected to identities created by respondents often based on a name or appearance, which have affected access to respondents and the disclosure of data, and raised issues of data interpretation, analysis and write-up. In this third reflexive episode, I focus on positionality and claims to validity.

***Episode 3: 'I have not so far seen any caste-specific explanation in the manuscript'***

This third episode does not come from fieldwork, but is the cause for this reflection. In an early draft of a paper on my research on housing, I had written: 'residents who are overwhelmingly from ST and SC backgrounds . . . are risking loss of shelter.' One of the anonymous reviewers asked that I say more about the caste of my respondents, stating, 'I have not [...] seen any caste-specific explanation', and referred me to a paper that does discuss caste and housing. But I could not say more about caste, I did not have this data. In the project, respondents self-referentially used ST and SC, state defined categories, only ever to explain their entitlement to a housing subsidy. I did not want to dig deeper than this.

Reflecting on why, (in addition to thinking the data was not relevant to the research questions, though of course, it could well have been), I realised that I felt ashamed to ask. This was fuelled by the shame I attach to the caste system and having a name that implicates me in it, and concern that if I asked about caste, would I be assumed to have one and be asked about it? In which case, I do not know its name, do not want to give it a name and thus play an active role in making it meaningful, and I want to give my respondents the opportunity to reject it too ('does naming caste make caste?' in a variation of Judith Butler's discussion of discourse affecting agency and the performance of our identities, in Rose, 1997, 316). A related concern was attached to revealing to respondents that I did not know caste, and the effect on our relationship of a disclosure of ignorance on a topic I may be expected to know about, such effects might include: no longer being candid, or using the space to answer questions to give only basic answers that do not assume a certain level of knowledge. In this exercise of reflection, I wonder: would other researchers have acted similarly? Perhaps, Indian researchers, through processes of socialisation, are aware of caste and sub-caste identities without asking? And, for non-Indian researchers including non-diaspora, are there fewer considerations to enquiring about caste? In any case, what are the implications of our positionality for the presence or absence of caste-based explanations in similar work on housing?

This question can be further explored by querying claims of validity in the research. Guba and Lincoln (2005) write that discussions of validity are emblematic of tensions between ontological differences. Unlike claims to objectivity in research, for which there are 'strong theoretical, philosophical, and pragmatic rationalities for examining the concept [...] and finding it wanting ... [V]alidity is a more irritating construct, one neither easily dismissed nor readily configured by new-paradigm [constructivist] practitioners.' (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, 205). They go on to explain that one of the main issues around validity is the 'conflation between method and interpretation', (2005, 205) in positivist research the method is the key to claims of validity, but in research where interpretation is emphasised then validity concerns the reasonability of interpretation i.e. 'a defensible reasoning, plausible alongside some other reality that is known to author and reader' (2005, 205). The idea of a reality similarly knowable to key research actors (researcher, respondent and reader; or rather typically researcher and reader), becomes an important element of validity claims and the trustworthiness of data interpretation.

Notwithstanding, as Foucault states, that readers hold their own subjectivities which gives text meaning and actively engage in interpreting it in ways different to the author (in Rose, 1997, 316-317), the researcher remains in a powerful position to interpret data and text in ways that are made knowable to others. Where feminist research marries ethics and morality to the search for validity by demanding researchers make visible one's positionality and thus basis for interpretation (Olesen, 2005, 254), black feminism pushes further to interrogate not only 'Whose knowledges [are present in research]? Where and how obtained, and by whom; from whom and for what purposes?' (Olesen, 2005, 238), but to ask who is speaking for whom, on what basis and in what historical and structural context (hooks, 1984). That is, the questions posed in black feminist research speak directly to the (presumed) relationship between researcher, respondent, reader and the context of research, and queries cultural ways of knowing the research.

Where attention is not called to different cultural ways of knowing, particularly where the researcher and respondent or reader live different racial and cultural lives, there is scope to give rise to Milner's (2007) concerns that racial and cultural epistemologies go unreported and unseen in research. To Milner (2007), making visible a researcher's positionality is an ethical duty (much like it is to Olesen, 2005), and essential to uphold any claim to validity and authenticity. This means the researcher must explore how validity is upheld, particularly what issues are silenced and made invisible. Where Milner focuses on race and culture and its effect on epistemology, I have focused here on culturally knowing caste and making explicit in this research what I know about myself, how I have come to know others and the cultural ways of knowing caste therein, and its effect on the research. From the outset, my knowledge of caste, its positioning of me (including my rejection of that positioning), and the values that I see represented in my relationship to caste set parameters for knowing (the questions I asked and did not ask, and the answers I received and heard) and thus bound the ensuing research. To one critically minded reader, in contrast to Johnston (2014), who writes on low-income housing and caste-based explanations in the same city, my cultural way of knowing caste meant the role of caste in low-income housing went underexplored. Furthermore, in the claims I make, where I do not give caste-based explanations to substantiate findings, I recognise through acts of reflexivity that I am in danger of interpreting and presenting knowledge as *acaste*, even though it directly affected the design of my research, interactions with respondents and abilities to access and interpret data.

### **Making sense of it all: why does this matter?**

This paper tries to make visible both reflexivity in a discussion of positionality (as encouraged by Robertson, 2002), and caste utilising the principle of doxa. I do this by explaining my relationship to caste as coded in my name, and the effect of this on access to respondents and power dynamics within interviews that affected the quality of interview data and my ability to read the data (episode 1), the disclosure of information I may not have otherwise known (episode 2), and the very claims and arguments I am able to make in the research project (episode 3). Through the three episodes I show that the knowledge I produced on housing in Ahmedabad is partial and situated. This interrogation of knowledge production and the conscious creation of a space in which to present new episteme of knowledge in north-south research is part of a rising consciousness in postcolonial development geography to illuminate the responsibilities of researchers in the politics of knowledge production (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010), and to both complicate and diversify voices and experiences writing on the Eurocentrism of research on the global south.

The central purpose of the paper is driven by Giwa's (2015) critique that most discussions on positionality in research centre on the western academy and the positionalities of white feminist western researchers, and her subsequent call for epistemological reflections on methodology from scholars of colour which might provide different ways of thinking through positionality in fieldwork. Giwa's discussion touches much larger points that I try to engage with through this paper though not directly in this paper: the positioning of black and brown bodies in geography research particularly, as research subject in a place and rarely research producers (Mahtani, 2014); and for those black and brown bodies that produce knowledge, discouragingly limited conversations about race, culture, epistemology and positionality in social science research, including an acknowledgement that a relationship exists between them and what this relationship might look like (Fisher, 2014; Mahtani, 2014 are exceptions).

In this paper, names are just one way, a prompt, to think about the myriad of ways in which western or other researchers who identify or are identified as ‘diaspora’ or ‘of colour’, hold particular epistemological ways of forming knowledge, this knowledge is partial and situated, as feminist geographers in the 1990s convincingly argued. The contemporary challenge and this paper’s contribution in writing on positionality is to find our own ways to make the partiality and situatedness of knowledge visible to guide future researchers of colour.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the journal editors and three anonymous reviewers for their encouraging comments and very helpful suggestions to improve the paper. My sincere thanks to the 2016/17 cohort of doctoral candidates at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit who heard a first iteration of this paper and in the ensuing discussion convinced me of the demand for more literature that speaks to race, ethnicity and positionality in research. The original research project that led to the fieldwork discussed here was funded through the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) - a Marie Curie Actions International Research Staff Exchange Scheme of the European Union – The Bartlett Development Planning Unit’s state and market research cluster, and was supported by CEPT University, Ahmedabad.

### **Disclosure statement**

There is no conflict of interest.

### **References**

- Allen, Ruth E. S., and Janine L. Wiles. 2016. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Participants Choosing Research Pseudonyms.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 13(2):149–65.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2000. “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai.” *Public Culture* 12(3):627–51.
- Asempasah, Rogers, and Christabel Aba Sam. 2016. “Reconstituting the Self: Of Names, Discourses and Agency in Amma Darko.” *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 2(4):154–68.
- Brennen, Tim. 2000. “On the Meaning of Personal Names: A View from Cognitive Psychology.” *Names* 48(2):139–46.
- Brewer, Jeffrey D. 1981. “Bimanese Personal Names: Meaning and Use.” *Ethnology* 20(3):203–15.
- Caretta, Martina Angela. 2015. “Situated Knowledge in Cross-Cultural, Cross-Language Research: A Collaborative Reflexive Analysis of Researcher, Assistant and Participant Subjectivities.” *Qualitative Research* 15(4):489–505.
- Chacko, Elizabeth. 2004. “Positionality and Praxis: Fieldwork Experiences in Rural India.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25(1):51–63.
- Das, Purba. 2014. “‘Is Caste Race?’ Discourses of Racial Indianization.” *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 43(3):264–82.
- Deer, Cecile. 2012. “Doxa.” Pp. 114–25 in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, edited by Michael Grenfell. Bristol: Acumen.

- Dion, Kenneth L. 1983. "Names, Identity, and Self." *Names* 31(4):245–57.
- Fisher, Karen T. 2014. "Positionality, Subjectivity, and Race in Transnational and Transcultural Geographical Research." *Gender, Place & Culture* 22(4):1–18.
- Giwa, Aisha. 2015. "Insider/Outsider Issues for Development Researchers from the Global South." *Geography Compass* 1–11.
- Herod, Andrew. 1999. "Reflections on Interviewing Foreign Elites." *Geoforum* 30:313–27.
- Kumar, Pratap P. 2012. "Place of Subcaste (Jati) Identity in Discourse on Caste." *South Asian Diaspora* 4(2):215–28.
- Landy, Frederic, Brij Maharaj, and Helene Mainet-Valleix. 2004. "Are People of Indian Origin (PIO) 'Indian'? A Case Study of South Africa." *Geoforum* 35(2):203–15.
- Michaelson, Maureen. 1979. "The Relevance of Caste among East African Gujaratis in Britain." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 7(3):350–60.
- Milner, Richard H. 2007. "Race, Culture, and Researcher Positionality: Working through Dangers Seen, Unseen, and Unforeseen." *Educational Researcher* 36(7):388–400.
- Moser, Sarah. 2008. "Personality: A New Positionality." *Area* 40(3):383–92.
- Mullings, Beverley. 1999. "Insider or Outsider, Both or Neither: Some Dilemmas of Interviewing in a Cross-Cultural Setting." *Geoforum* 30:337–50.
- Patel, Kamna. 2016. "Encountering the state through legal tenure security: Perspectives from a low income resettlement scheme in urban India." *Land Use Policy* 58:102–113.
- Patel, P. J., and M. Rutten. 1999. "Patels of Central Gujarat in Greater London." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34(16):952–954.
- Proudfoot, Jesse. 2015. "Anxiety and Phantasy in the Field: The Position of the Unconscious in Ethnographic Research." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33(6):1135–52.
- Robertson, Jennifer. 2002. "Reflexivity Redux: A Pithy Polemic on 'Positionality.'" *Anthropological Quarterly* 75(4):785–92.
- Rose, Gillian. 1997. "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics." *Progress in Human Geography* 21(3):305–20.
- Shinde, Pradeep. 2016. "City Creates Caste. Manufacturing a Caste Certificate in a Mumbai Slum." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 39(1):93–108.
- Shrestha, Uma. 2000. "Changing Patterns of Personal Names Among the Maharjans of Katmandu." *Names* 48(1):27–48.
- Sultana, Farhana. 2007. "Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research." *Acme* 6(3):374–85.
- Waldrop, Anne. 2004. "Dalit Politics in India and New Meaning of Caste." *Forum for Development Studies* 31(2):275–305..
- Witsoe, Jeffrey. 2012. "Caste and Democratization in Postcolonial India: An Ethnographic Examination of Lower Caste Politics in Bihar." *Democratization* 19(March 2013):312–33.