

Ambivalent Encounters: Childhood, Tourism, and Social Change in Banaras, India. Jenny Huberman. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780813554068

Jenny Huberman, an anthropologist, provides us with an apt ethnographic study on children, tourism, and the place of power in working class life. Her place of study is Banaras, India, where she completed her research in 2000 and 2001. Here, she attempted to immerse herself within the local community, ingraining herself in social situations with the local children, and even having a teenaged girl become her translator/guide. These methods are structurally sound for what the book provides, as it focuses on the western eye examining the daily lives of locals. In short, the “tourist gaze” centers this study, as tourists view these riverfront children—often peddlers of tea, postcards, and other nickel-and-dime tchotchkes—as cultural ambassadors of sorts. The young girls sell these token goods, the young boys—given more freedom and leisure than the fairer sex—provide tours to eager and bright-eyed tourists, and through these interactions a space of production and consumption arises. These children are actors within a global industry, and by default they sell the atmosphere and the ideal as the “tourist gaze” consumes them for capitalistic gain (5).

In the course of her research, as Huberman diligently tried to observe the children in their work environment while not interfering with it, she noted the creative tales told to her and other tourists about family members in grave states of health. Within these stories the expected plea for rupees prevailed. As she notes, a most compelling tale told to her from a young boy cried for 5000 rupees to save a dying male relative. In 2015 numbers, 5000 rupees is 78.22 USD; thus, for the western tourist on the USD, the Euro, or the British Pound, this cry is not terribly financially burdensome. Yet, these enthusiastic pleas and creative measures to procure extra rupees from unsuspecting travelers are most common and expected in this community. Of course, the fact that Banaras has been a tourist location and thoroughfare for more than four hundred years as merchants and explorers traversed the area and town only heightens the story. In our more modern age, low budget travelers find “the old city” compelling for its hub of cheap rooms, restaurants, and its overall charm. We should note that the popularity of Banaras has expanded so much that by 1987 *Lonely Planet* moved the city from a “Freak Center” to an important locale of interest, particularly noting the low-budget “old city” as a hotspot for the young and energetic traveler (29). Of course, as Banaras grew, so did its underbelly.

This underbelly concerns the use of children as a main source of familial and social income. Along the river the gender divides of the youth were excruciatingly prevalent. Girls sold the lower priced goods along the riverfront, as they could be monitored by kinsmen and neighbors. After all, traditional lines mandated that they must be protected and guarded against possible corruption and sexual advances. As teens, these girls are pulled from the riverfront, brought back into the home for domestic labor, production, and tasks, as their maturity via body development and possible sexual awareness makes the peddling of trinkets dangerous for the protection of morality. Yet, do not be fooled. These young girls have their own safety valves to revolt against this gendered system, as they are known to talk salaciously about the foreign women in various stages of undress. Particularly poignant among these discourses are notes on exposed skin and projected tales of possible “sexcapades” that these women certainly have in

Banaras (35-49). Of course, for boys this world of tourism and selling of time and space serves a slightly different parameter. Here Bollywood, *not* Hollywood, provides the portal for escapism and what life should look like. These boys, then, stay in the public sphere and do not see their sisters' exclusion as discriminatory (58). After all, the boys are working as guides—making the more lucrative pay and bringing in subsidies from commissions—and by protecting their sisters from engaging with strange and foreign men they are protecting morality, virginity, and even the nation itself. These concepts, long held across the world in peace and in wartime, are no shock or strangers to the world of gendered discourse.

The western traveler then, as would be expected, sees these girls and boys as little adults, traversing public space. Both sides engage in forms of conspicuous consumption, as tourists buy tchotchkes for sale—the tea, the postcards, the *diyas*—and the boys and girls buy goods for the home, clothing, and hairpins. The procurement of goods on each side, tangible and cultural interaction, becomes the performative function of this space (139–40). Of course, the “pleasures of the city” then serve and flourish for both the locals and the travelers. Though, as we see, the debate resides not on the children but on the gendered nature of touristic production.

Overall, this petite tome is of decent quality, though some points of concern focus on the long delay between the performed research and publication. This reviewer has to wonder what the past ten years have done for this locale, especially as cheap travel, Groupon travel, and the access to travel have flourished, now making the foreign and exotic locale obtainable for the working class. Among these notes, the lack of interconnectivity of this study leaves me longing for more. Here, an easy—and perhaps common—source of connection concerns children peddling across the globe. In Istanbul, Turkey, young children and elderly women flock to congested tourists crossroads to sell tissue packets, evil eye key chains, sketches, and postcards. They unabashedly knock on car windows and reach in open doors and windows in search of a sale. These same techniques are seen in Juarez, Mexico as walkers and drivers across the US-Mexican border are assaulted by young children stroking arms and exposed skin exclaiming how soft and luscious it feels, begging for sales of gum and tissues, and—just as children of Banaras do—weaving tales of dying relatives, starvation, and near death if pesos are not procured. In any regard, the viability of these children's work is unchallengeable. Their incomes are brought home, they feed the family, keep the lights on, put clothing on their backs. Huberman's study provides us with a palatable portal to examine the interconnectivity with travel and the expectations—and misconceptions—of the western eye. The apt student and researcher will need to weave this account into the larger fold of human discourse.

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