

Reversing the ethnographer's lens: A reflection on the challenges and possibilities of doing 'off-shore' field research as a group

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ABSTRACT

In this article I draw on the experiences of an ethnographic field trip to Kerala, South India, undertaken by myself and seven postgraduate students in January 2012. I will address questions arising from our perceived group identity in India, including that of our representation as a group of New Zealanders (from varied cultural backgrounds); our own sense of groupness; our presence and practice as a group of researchers in the field; and the pros and cons of travelling as a group. While each student was exploring an independent dance research topic and while each came from very different backgrounds, we were nevertheless travelling as an organised group and were therefore perceived as culturally homologous. Finally, I address the educational efficacy of doing field work as a group in general, its impact on the cohort being researched, and the learning outcomes for students. I suggest that this kind of trans-locational or situated learning experience can lead to heightened reflexivity and allow greater insight both for the students themselves and the culture they are researching.

Ethnography is not simply a collection of the exotic 'other'; it is reflective of our own lives and cultural practices even when discussing another culture. (Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 352)

MEMOIR AS/OR PREAMBLE

We are finally on board the plane and bound for Trivandrum in Kerala, South India. We are a group of seven excited university Summer School students and me—their teacher. We have come together over the past five days to prepare for our three week "ethnographic reconnaissance", which Harry Wolcott (2008, p. 190) describes as a preliminary investigation of a potential field in order to establish relations and assess the potential for future ventures. Some of the group have not met before, though all but one has been my student at different times. None have been to India and two have never travelled overseas. Once we are seated on the plane, I pass my

notebook around the group and ask each person to write down their thoughts and aspirations for the adventure. They oblige with the kind of excited anticipation that is infectious yet to me reveals a naivety regarding the experience they are yet to have.

K: I am happy to embrace this Indian odyssey with an open heart and mind ... to be enriched with knowledge through cultural immersion. May my experiences be both glorious and challenging....

C: Full of anticipation. No doubt I shall come back changed.

E: I'm not as nervous as I thought I'd be ... wee hee India! I can't wait.

J: Full to brim with excitement ... ready to soak up new and different surroundings....

R. Beyond excited.

R: Looking forward to heat and all the smells and colours.

L: Going to a completely new and different land—an exciting and colourful culture for us to experience.

I note: I feel privileged that the students are trusting me to lead them on this journey of discovery to South India—a discovery of self and others and, though they might not yet anticipate this, of our group.

Having taken a previous group to Kerala four years before and then returned several times since, including a planning trip to our hosts, I have a fairly clear idea of what we are in for. My research focus on the trip will largely comprise of watching my students navigate the territory of ethnographic reconnaissance. More particularly, my study will involve an observation of the ways that the students negotiate the territory of themselves and each other as a group of disparate foreigners practising doing, and I will add, *being* ethnography in a very different culture and in often uncomfortable conditions. I refer here briefly to a list of educational learning outcomes, devised following my first dance research field trip to Kerala with eight students in 2007 (East & Rajendren, 2009). While further interrogation of these outcomes is not the subject of this article, they nevertheless signal the kinds of profound learning experiences that I have seen occur for students. I briefly list them here:

1. Discovering empathy, understanding difference;
2. Learning cross-cultural communication by practising 'being' and 'doing' understanding;
3. Understanding group co-operation;

4. Understanding embodied knowledge of self/other as ethnographic research.

It will be noted that outcome three particularly addresses one value of undertaking ethnographic research as a group. In this article I further unpack the pros and cons of travelling as a group.

Despite my good intentions, several days into this second trip I note in my journal that “I have not been recording the progression of the group as I had planned”. My objectivity had become blurred as I merged (imbedded myself) with this group of ‘younger’ women as we worked together to practise our *waiata* (Māori songs) and our dance item, hastily choreographed before we left Dunedin. We were rehearsing our coherence—endeavouring to present ourselves as a group of New Zealanders despite our very different backgrounds. We were New Zealanders of Polish, Scottish, Israeli, English and Chinese descent and of varied ages. The few things that we shared in common were our womanhood, our more or less pale skin, the English language and our residence in Aotearoa. While we identified unequivocally as a group of New Zealanders, defining our dance to these South Indian dancers who were steeped in ancient and established dance traditions (at least this was our understanding) would prove a major challenge.

WHO/WHAT ARE WE REPRESENTING? CONSTRUCTING OUR SENSE OF GROUP IDENTITY

I anticipated that we would be regularly asked to perform our style of dance—and, that it would prove difficult to explain the culturally and stylistically diverse practice that we call New Zealand Contemporary Dance. I had requested that each student bring a small (1-2 minute) autobiographical dance to contribute to a larger group dance. Performing these small offerings in the studio to the group also provided an opportunity to practise the kind of descriptive writing that I knew we would be doing in Kerala. Students were encouraged to weave clear descriptions of the movement with their own reflective responses. Shared readings of these texts highlighted perceptual differences amongst us from the outset as viewers.

These reflective descriptions from the group also provided the dancers with new ways of understanding their own work. Each then donated their solo to the overall building of a group dance that would serve as our performed contribution during the numerous informal community activities we would be engaging in. This collaborative dance would initially build itself around the seated actions of an injured member, interweave and at times repeat sections from each dance,

contain unison phrases, interactive duets and contrapuntal concurrent action. Our identity dance (as it came to be known) came together quickly but remained a work in progress. These small individual solo renderings, loosely assembled into a group dance, accompanied by a contemporary New Zealand music composition, along with our singing of a selection of Māori waiata, had to suffice as our national offering. The decision to include our country's indigenous people's song was my idea as a way of acknowledging our bicultural heritage. However, although I was comfortable and familiar with singing these well-known waiata, some felt uneasy. As one student later commented:

I was a bit uncomfortable performing Māori songs ... not knowing it [the language] properly at the time made me feel like I was misrepresenting Māori people. It also felt like we were using Māori epistemology as a fallback for our perceived 'lack of culture', in order to share something that gave a New Zealand 'essence'. (E.R., 2012)

Statements such as this are evidence of our ongoing dilemma, particularly as *Pākehā* (non-Māori) New Zealanders, regarding how we might represent ourselves in another country and culture. I was forced to acknowledge that it takes a lifetime and not just one week to become culturally literate in a bicultural society such as ours.

However, another student wrote: "I enjoyed singing these [waiata] as Māori is a beautiful sounding language and the messages of the songs were very powerful and universally relevant" (L.C., 2012). While this New Zealander, of Polish decent, actually had a Bachelor's degree in Māori Studies, she also confessed that

there were some days when I had had enough of Māori songs, because I felt that we were simply taking this custom from the indigenous people to show off to a people completely naïve about New Zealand.... None of our group were Māori, or necessarily connected strongly with Māori culture, and I think we would have liked to sing a more personally relevant song, perhaps a modern one by a New Zealand artist. It is a complicated debate, "What is culture?" and "How can we represent this overseas?" ... and I merely comment on the significant presence of this dialogue on our trip. (L.C., 2012)ⁱ

This student found an opportunity to informally share her Polish dance with Indian dancers on at least one occasion.

Reflecting on the India field trip some months later, E.R., a contemporary dancer of Jewish/Pākehā New Zealander descent, suggested:

Perhaps a dance about the NZ landscape, something we all share in common while living in NZ, would have been a good connecting theme. Talking about the native birds, the native trees, the sights, sounds and smells of NZ that we all love. Perhaps that way we could form a dance that represents New Zealand, especially if we could make a soundtrack featuring New Zealand *sounds* – or a dance about immigration because that's how all of us got here at some point in our genealogies. (E.R., 2012)

Perhaps a narrative dance of this sort might have had more resonance with an audience used to the storytelling that is in most traditional dance from Kerala. I am not sure, however, how a more elemental narrative, as this student proposes, would have satisfied our keen-eyed Indian dance exponents, who were perhaps expecting a more classically polished set of movement vocabulary. I was conscious that we were performing to an audience who had no historical context (Buckland, 2006) for our style of expressive dance, the Treaty of Waitangi or our colonial heritage, and who could, therefore, only appreciate what they saw as being representative of our New Zealand culture. While from an ethnographic perspective it would seem almost impossible to choreographically situate ourselves as New Zealand dancers, and therefore to collectively represent ourselves, Anthony Shay suggests that this power of representation is “a formidable power” (Shay, 2006, p. 225). Representing our identity through dance is one thing, but we must realise that the viewer will interpret it in her/his own way. Our group dance offering, though politely and graciously received, was, nevertheless, almost certainly seen by some of the local dance cognoscenti as a rather poorly danced ‘national’ dance of New Zealand—not our intention at all. As L.C. later pointed out,

When asked to show our ‘national dance’ by our Indian friends we had nothing to show—only a vague verbal response attempting to explain that we were a much younger nation, with a strong indigenous culture which has also been ‘blurred’ with ideas and practices of many other nations.... Whereas India has traditions which have been in place for thousands of years, NZ is still in the process of gathering its people and developing its culture, let alone choreographing unique and distinctive dances! (L.C., 2012)

Perhaps the mistake on our part was in portraying ourselves as anything other than a party of individual researchers (albeit an educational group of dance research students) who were simply travelling together. Rather than interpreting our lack of a shared traditional dance form as simply a result of our 'youthfulness' as a culture, or even a lack of racial cohesion, neither of which I agree with, we might simply have accepted our individuality within the group as an inevitable leftover product of the modernist attitudes that have been our major influence as westerners, artists and educators for the past century. Jonathan Freidman (1994) links modernity with a new kind of cultural production that emphasises self-representation, self-authority and autonomous self-expression. This comes into direct conflict with traditional cultural beliefs designed to reinforce tradition, collective identity, homogeneity and order. As well, Freidman states: "This [modernist individualism] in its turn fostered a logic of selfhood in which self, and the representation of self, become two very different things" (p. 213). In other words, our creative or theatrical expression (our choreography) might, rather than represent stories of a group's personal narratives, religious beliefs and mythologies, take any form and express any idea or whim that the individual artist desires.

I add here, that today's generation of contemporary New Zealand dancers are moving towards (or perhaps returning to) more co-operative and communal forms of art-making that resonate with a de-hierarchising of structures, and a more ecological concept of self-other-world identity. A strong affinity with the land/place of Aotearoa as a culturally unifying concept for many New Zealanders was borne out in my recent national survey of contemporary dancers in Aotearoa (East, 2012a). Expressions of *tūrangawaewae*—as an interwovenness with the land, a standing place and sense of belonging as part of place (Ka'ai, Moorfield, Reilly, & Mosley, 2004)—were expressed by a number of non-Māori as well as Māori dancers. A planned future investigation of these ideas within Indian dance will provide a necessary cultural comparison here. By 'owning' the nature of our group as the diverse individuals that we were (though with a shared, collaborative, original dance and a shared residence on the land of Aotearoa), our Indian friends may have been less confused by our portrayal of a national identity. This said, Rodney Fopp (2008) reminds us that our own cultural beliefs are the filter through which we come to understand another culture. Coming to terms with our cultural identity was necessary in order to understand our South Indian dancing communities. With more time in the field we would undoubtedly have begun to uncover some of the

contestations around the performance of regional and nationalist identity through certain dance forms in India. For example, Pallabi Chakravorty (in O'Shea & Carter, 2010) asserts that the Classical Indian dance of today is “a product of a complex mix of Hindu nationalism, regional chauvinism and national revivalism and is embedded in patriarchal views of the role and function of women in society” (p. 273). Suffice to say that we may not be alone in this questioning of how, as a group of New Zealand dancers, we might seek to represent ourselves and our country in dance.

Taking up the challenge to pursue what we began to acknowledge as our ‘national’ cultural dance identity dilemma, one of the students decided to write her research essay as a comparison of concepts of identity amongst dancers from both India and Aotearoa. She wrote:

Being in a group certainly made us question our own identity—as a group as well as individually! I felt we were seen very much as a homogenous group and were expected to have all of the same interests etc as New Zealanders. For example, numerous times we were asked what kind of dancing we do in New Zealand—a difficult question to answer considering we all had very different dance interests. (J.T., 2012)

Building on Theresa Buckland's (2006) notion that, “the aims of ethnography are to analyse and interpret evaluative concerns of insiders” (p. 9), this student would interview members of our group, building on her membership and equal participation within the group.

One aspect the New Zealand students did have in common was their identifying as dancers. All participants were practitioners of one form of dance or another. They were therefore able to utilise their combined skills as critical interpreters of their own, as well as other's actions, as beginning ethnographers. Their artist's ability to position themselves as both performer and audience (or in ethnographic terms, participants and observers), “to engage in a multiplicity of interpretive positions” and to “become critical interpreters of their own actions” (Grushka, 2005, p. 354) enabled rich somatic reflection. Grushka adds that “artists ask questions ... which are often as much about who they are as what they know” (p. 354). In our collective questioning we were discovering much about each other as well as those we had gone to research. Somatic (intrinsically and sensuously experienced) embodiment of culture (Cohen Bull, 1997; Fraleigh, 2004; Fraleigh & Hanstein, 1999; Ness, 2004) as a way of gaining knowledge of that culture is one of

the privileges of being a dancing ethnographer. This kind of phenomenological methodology provides opportunities for the interweaving of one's own and others' perceptions into the research discussion.

Given this rich source of somatic reflection of their shared unfamiliar dancing experiences, another of the students decided to interview three of our group in order to add depth to her own study, titled *Somatics and embodied participation: In the spirit of an ethnographic reconnaissance* (E.R., 2012). She wrote:

I was struck by how embedded in ritual and spirituality the dance and other Kerala arts forms were and wanted to know how attempting to embody these movements might make *us* feel. (E.R., 2012)

Interweaving the voices of the other students' somatic experiences of the act of dancing with those of her own added depth and validity to her partly autoethnographic study and highlights another benefit of travelling and researching together as a group who are all sharing the same experiences. This sharing of observations, sensations and ideas greatly enriched students' individual experience in the field and was evident in their written reports. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) affirm, "no two persons participate in and experience a setting exactly the same way ... [and] there is always more going on than the ethnographer [alone] can notice" (p. 86). Researching together enabled the students to ask questions of each other later, to seek clarification regarding what they had heard, seen or felt. It provided an informal form of reliability testing and cross-checking of information so necessary in undertaking ethnography (Davies, 2008, p. 97).



**Figure 1: Shared somatic experience of Kalaripayattu Martial arts.
(Photo: Babu Anand)**

While each student had identified a separate research topic before setting out (although these tended to change once in the field), they were able to contribute to the development of each other's themes, sometimes finding a complementary question to ask an interviewee and often gleaning information for their own topic from the response to another's question. However, at times shared question sessions resulted in a loss of flow for the respondent and an untimely shifting of the focus in another direction. One student commented:

In some situations, being in a group was quite frustrating. Because we all had different research goals, group conversations would go off on tangents that were nothing to do with what you were trying to find out. Often I felt I would ask a question—this would get answered which in turn opened up lots of different questioning opportunities to delve deeper into the conversation. However just [as] I would go to ask a follow-up question, someone else would swoop in with a question on a completely unrelated topic and the train of thought/conversation was lost to a new one. Once I realised this was happening amongst the group, I started to make a conscious effort to avoid doing this to other people. However, when the conversation did flow and the group allowed it to take the course that it was headed I discovered

information that I myself would not have asked the right questions to reach. So in the end, letting other group members ask their own follow-up questions allowed me to learn things that I wouldn't have if I had butted in with my own pre-planned questions. (J.T., 2012)

As they struggled to make sense of the vast overload of information, and even to frame up a coherent topic for themselves, students realised that these brief encounters could only ever constitute the very beginnings of possible future ethnographic research. Ours was merely an initial scoping of the field (Wolcott, 2008). Still, as Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis (2008) explain, “we work[ed] as a community of scholars and share[ed] these experiences with one another as we tr[ie]d to arrive at some sense of what was going on” (p. 353). In Agar's words, we were simply “trying to figure out what some other humans [in this case dancers and artists] were up to” within their respective communities (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 353).

NAMING OUR PRACTICE

I am still not sure what to call this particular mode of group ethnography or our doing ethnography as a group. Little has been written that unpacks the challenges and possibilities that working and travelling as a group offers—hence my attempt here. In the sense that the decision-making regarding what was deemed important for us to experience rested partly with our host as resident expert, and with various others such as our tour manager, the research design might be considered participatory. This term, according to Andrea Cornwall and Rachel Jewkes (1995), can also be used to mean “the co-opting of local people into the agendas of others” (p. 1669)—in this case, our ‘scholastic’ agenda. Since Dr Jayarajan (Chairman of the Folkland Institute, Kerala)ⁱⁱ and I co-designed the overall learning experience it might also be called collegiate (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1669). Other terms such as consultative, contractual, co-operative, collaborative or complementary tend to focus on the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Biggs, in Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1669). Here I am also faced with what to call ethnography that “reverses the ethnographer's lens”, as my title suggests, where researchers become the subject and data source of each other's study. It might fit best within the current category of “autoethnography” (Madison, 2012, p. 197). Perhaps group autoethnography? Or group “confessional ethnography” (p. 197), where, as Madison describes, “the focus is on the

ethnographer himself or herself (as the signifier) rather than the field subjects” (p. 197).

SELF/OTHER REFLEXIVITY

When one group is studying another, when they are sharing the same studio space, and when each is learning from the other, there is more of a sense of the creation of a new (albeit temporary) community of shared interest. I might also borrow Pam Burnard's “reflective ... community of practice” (cited in Burnard & Hennessy, 2006, p. 8) to describe the combined groups of Indian artists and New Zealand dancers. In the process of dancing together, the students became both “insider and outsider, friend and stranger” (Frosch, 1999, p. 264) and gained rich insight into the lives of their dancing friends. The ensuing reflective conversations between the groups and amongst each group, along with the analytic self-reflection of each dancer, served to enrich their sense of individual and group identity (Burnard & Hennessy, 2006). Both groups were coming to know themselves through their conversations with others (Madison, 2012).



Figure 2: Indian and New Zealand dancers—a shared community of practice (Photo: Babu Anand).

Not only were we each undergoing profound personal transformation in coming to terms with our self and group identity, but we could also observe this same process of change (Tomasselli et al., 2008, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) in the communities of dancers and artists with whom we were interacting. In sharing our different perspectives and cultures (though we were still deciding how to describe ours), we were all, Malialis (the people of Kerala) and 'Kiwis', experiencing a broadening in understanding of our art forms and an increased sense of empowerment and ownership of our respective skills and knowledge within our community. It is my observation that the very act of travelling, or being what Jamilah Ahmed (2004) refers to as "the self that moves beyond boundaries" (p. 293)—especially when it is a self that is reflecting on itself and acknowledging some uncertainty and change, might also perhaps have some fit with Braidotti's concept of a "nomadic subject", where "[i]nstead of the fixed stable notion of the self, she [Braidotti] posits a concept of nomadic consciousness" (Thomas & Ahmed, 2004, p. 293). However, Braidotti uses the term 'nomadic' very differently from that which describes a movement by certain tribes across grazing lands. For her it means a "way of resisting assimilation" (1994, p. 25) and definition. My students are not toying with multiple identities here or resisting definition. They are merely dealing with a slightly confused national identity.

TRAVELLING AS A GROUP: PROS AND CONS

Travelling as a group meant that students were able to retreat each evening to the comfort of their hotel room and speak in English. One student commented:

I remember telling one of the girls that sometimes it felt like we had visited India for the day and then gone home for the night, as we would often mainly interact with each other in isolated settings (like the hotel) during the evenings. While I did feel like I was being well immersed in the culture of the local people, I suppose this group setting did prevent me from feeling one hundred percent immersed. It meant we could hang back in the comfort zones a bit more than if we were by ourselves. This helped in that I was more confident to get into conversations with the locals and ask questions—because I knew the group was there to support me (and I was there to support the rest of the group). (J., 2012)

In the sense that the students considered the hotel 'home', their research makes a connection with Virginia Caputo's critical evaluation of "undertaking field work at

home” (2000, p. 25). We, as subjects, were far from the ‘exotic’ others that they had been expecting to study (p. 22). However, their ‘in-house’ interviews offered rich data that would be woven into their data gathered from the field.

Shared hotel rooms, while they provided an opportunity to re-group, were also challenging for some on a personal level, especially the older students who had become used to a more private daily existence. One student confessed to locking herself in the toilet in order to get some private time. Individual patterns of behaviour tested some students’ tolerance. However, the close-living arrangements (three to four in a room) also offered the chance for the ongoing reflection and critical dialogue regarding the day’s activities to which I have referred. This, at times, included debating the appropriateness of one or another’s actions, both in the field and the hotel room, in polite but direct critique. While this had the potential to cause some discomfort, it actually meant that most problems were dealt with before they festered in the group.

I note here that this ‘behind the scenes’ group interpersonal critical reflexivity required more formal mechanisms such as daily group meetings in order that matters were properly resolved before each day in the field began. This was one of my insider/outsider roles as teacher, learned from a previous trip. I also asked this group to choose a leader who could bring any issues from the entire group to me. Looking back on this time I realise that my mere presence as their teacher and guide played a large role in perceptions of our groupness, both from the inside and outside and in ways that may have at times been misleading for our hosts. On the other hand, I was able to protect the students by playing the often required role as speech-maker, overall organiser and health and safety officer.

Travelling as a group meant that we possessed between us a wide variety of expertise, ranging from organisation and management skills to bargaining, knowledge of music, textiles, technical dance skills and group facilitation. Importantly, some individual members possessed the ability to listen to and nurture each other through challenging moments. At one orphanage, our collectivity enabled us to workshop with and organise several hundred eager young students at once. In this sense we were not exactly a “team ... of specialists” (Buckland, 2006, p. 9) or ethnographic experts in the field, but we were collectively more functional as a group.

Finally, travelling as a group of eight attractive women increased our visibility markedly in the still male-dominated professional arena. This was both useful and difficult for us. One of our hosts saw our presence as an opportunity for

some publicity for his institute and for the (often marginalised) folk artists who we were visiting. He arranged for a media presence at every opportunity. One student recorded:

All of a sudden, the tiny room we were in was filled up with media men and their intrusive cameras! ... It was crazy, they were right in our faces and wouldn't let us leave until Ali gave an interview and our photos were taken, outside, inside, every bloody where.... It's like we're celebrities but all we want to do is play with some puppets. I guess the tables have turned. We have come to scrutinise their dance culture.... I guess they have every right to study us too. Also the publicity is good for the local artist's work. [He was the last skilled puppet maker in the region.] (R.E., 2012)

Travelling and working as a group includes collaborating in the field as well as the hotel room and understanding one's identity through understanding others. We came to recognise the positive role we played for our hosts in providing much-needed publicity for marginalised local artists.

EDUCATIONAL EFFICACY

Group-oriented situated learning, or what I have referred to as “trans-locational education” (East, 2007, p.48), is becoming more valued and more widely researched. Citing a number of other authors on the subject, Jennifer Brubaker (2011) suggests that “rather than merely the transfer of information in a fixed classroom setting, knowledge becomes ‘know-how’” (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, in Brubaker, 2011, p. 5). “Students are given the opportunity to make sense of the social world in ways outside of the logic of a textbook” (Jovanovic, 2003, in Brubaker, 2011, p. 5). As one student suggests:

It was one thing to watch DVDs of Kathakali performance and read about them, but that is two dimensional learning. It was more than a three dimensional encounter to be actually watching and being actively part of the audience during a live performance in India. To see, to smell, to touch, feel ... sense and embody the experience, brought the topic to life ... aided understanding and put performance in its cultural context. (C.O., 2012)

Situated learning is part of the greater trend in higher education of experiential education or expanded classrooms. This kind of learning experience has three primary goals. It “allow[s] students to become more effective change agents,

developing students' sense of belonging within their community, and developing student competence" (Brubaker, 2011, p. 5). Feast, Collyer-Braham and Bretag (2011) suggest situated learning outcomes that develop and demonstrate attributes such as teamwork, communication skills and flexibility along with an increased sense of one's own individual (and I add national) identity. My previously listed four learning outcomes fit well here. As an elaboration of my previous third learning outcome, 'Understanding group co-operation', I now add the often unarticulated benefits of travelling outside of familiar territory as a group and having to negotiate one's place within that group while, at the same time, coping with the stresses and strains of daily existence.



Figure 3: Dance ethnographers travelling as a group, 2012. (Photo: Ali East)

CONCLUSION

Travelling as a group of dance ethnographers might be likened to collective food gathering. Each gatherer may come home with a different contribution to the communal food basket. As students gathered, sifted and reflected on their experiences, and as they critically and reflexively conversed with each other and their Indian dance colleagues, they were engaging in what Sherry Shapiro calls "a radical pedagogy" of critical, ethical and embodied social analysis capable of

engendering “a sense of universal connections and responsibilities” (2008, p. 269). Challenges regarding how we might perform ourselves or represent our country aside, our moving as a group—going as a community to research another community—placed us on a more even footing as ethnographers in the field. Often we were two groups of dance artists meeting, interacting and sharing skills and knowledge with each other. Perhaps our presence as a small delegation from Aotearoa, New Zealand served to highlight aspects of specialness and cultural particularity for our hosts within their own community? Perhaps it caused them to question aspects of their own dancing identity? As they practised informal interviewing and reflected on ourselves and others, the students' field reports became powerful reflexive interweavings of intercultural perspectives (albeit according to each person's maturity and prior life experience). Among their many self/other discoveries, students expressed a broader appreciation for the sacredness and respect with which other cultures view their dance and, in the process, gained a deeper understanding and critical appreciation of their own cultural identity. As D. Soyini Madison (2012) attests,

By travelling to someone's world, we open a greater possibility for identification; moreover, we gain the opportunity to glimpse ourselves through their eyes. We see more than self-recognition with the other, but the other's recognition of us. (p. 125)

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Photographs

All photographs have been approved for use in this article by members of the student group.

ⁱ I have observed, in the current generation of New Zealand students, a nervousness amongst non-Māori New Zealanders of causing cultural offence by 'doing the wrong thing'. This appears to stem largely from a lack of real understanding caused by an education system that has not yet made it mandatory to incorporate Māori language and cultural practices and philosophies into all school programmes.

ⁱⁱ The Folkland International Centre of Folklore and Culture is an institute established for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Kerala. This includes performance of all kinds, productions, exhibitions, documentation and research. The Centre organises workshops, seminars and festivals in and beyond Kerala. Chairman: Dr V. Jayarajan.