Chapter 16

On Ethnographic Love

By Catherine Besteman

A number of years ago I presented a paper at the University of Cape Town that offered a critique of Robert Kaplan's infamously dystopic depiction of Africa in the *The Atlantic* called "The Coming Anarchy" (Kaplan 1994). My paper, titled "Why Robert Kaplan Should Have Studied Anthropology," reviewed Kaplan's characterizations of Africa in order to refute them, claim by claim, using anthropological evidence (Besteman 2000). While my ostensible argument was to use ethnographic data to correct Kaplan's account, my primary goal was one of disciplinary patriotism: to argue that, had Kaplan studied anthropology, he would have produced a description of Africa far different than the shallow, cartoon-like, nightmarish representation of Africa as a doomed continent of violence, disease, and deteriorating culture.

A political scientist in my audience that day challenged my assertion that if Kaplan had studied anthropology he would have produced a different portrayal of contemporary Africa, or one that conformed more closely to what I suggested he should have written. To the contrary, my critic suggested that anthropologists are as prone as anyone else to finding what they wish to find, no matter their training--that if an anthropologist wants to find violence and disease and cultural degradation, he will, disputing my claim that no anthropologist would have produced a portrait like Kaplan's and that anthropological training would have saved him from his egregious errors in representation (at least as I saw them).

Although this event occurred over a decade ago, I have returned time and time again to my critic's two part question: "How do you know that Kaplan would have produced a different portrait if he had studied anthropology, and how can you predict how anthropological training would have altered Kaplan's perspective on Africa?" Over the past decade, these questions have resonated for me far beyond the specific concern with Robert Kaplan and his trashy travel writing. The questions provoke, even demand, an assessment of 'the anthropological perspective' and in particular the assumptions I hold about what is particular and unique to the experience of ethnographic practice that distinguishes it from other forms of reporting. Are there particularities about ethnographic practice that would mitigate against the kind of portrait produced by Kaplan?

In my session at Cape Town, I stumbled through an answer about anthropology's holistic perspective; about our attention to context, most especially regional and global political economies; about accounting for history; about our abhorrence of essentializing culture. But I remained unsatisfied by my answer, which did not adequately capture what I consider to be unique about the anthropological perspective. I have finally realized that what I failed to acknowledge in my response is anthropology's signature embrace of mutuality, a fundamental experience of the ethnographic encounter.

While there is an obvious danger in suggesting that all (cultural) anthropologists find mutuality as a dimension of their work, in this chapter I probe the ways in which some anthropologists have expressed their experience of mutuality as a central dimension of ethnographic practice and experience ethnography as a practice of mutuality. In what follows I will build an argument about the importance of 'ethnographic

love' to the anthropological endeavor, a form of love defined by the experience of mutuality, solidarity, collaboration, and self-transformation that I believe shapes the ethnographic encounter for many anthropologists. As will become clear, my argument about mutuality and ethnographic love is particularly shaped by contexts in which anthropologists are engaged in discussions and understandings of social values, struggle, and change, an orientation that characterizes my own history of ethnographic engagement. But I believe ethnographic love is often as present in encounters that are not necessarily tied to projects of social change.

Who are We to Our Interlocutors?

The post-colonial and post-modern critique required anthropologists to take account of our subject positions with regard to our interlocutors (by which I mean our research subjects), quite rightly exposing the ways in which, among other things, anthropologists constructed heroic selves by constructing research subjects as Others through a process that offered both personal and professional validation (see Moore 1995:107-128). Anthropologists have been talking ever since about how to define and imagine our professional identity, if not that of heroic anthropologists. Several alternative models that acknowledge, resist, and deconstruct the power relations and hierarchies often intrinsic to anthropological research are currently ascendant in the discipline. Luke Eric Lassiter (and the journal he edits, *Collaborative Anthropologies*) promotes a model in which anthropologists work with interlocutors as collaborators to produce ethnographies attuned to and defined by the interests of the collaborators

(rather than just those of the anthropologist) (Lassiter 2005, 2006). Others promote anthropology as activism, where the anthropologist embraces as her own the concerns of those whose lives she is writing about and orients her research toward promoting those concerns in politically meaningful ways. The anthropologist as activist means, for many, subverting academic goals and products of anthropology and using the privileged position of anthropology to advocate for specific objectives defined and desired by the anthropologist's co-activists (see, for example, Checker 2005; Sanford 2006).

The turn to envisioning anthropology as a collaborative form of activism troubles some, however, who warn that activist engagement defined by the goals of our collaborators might displace theory. In a provocative interview, George Marcus (2008) wonders if theory has been replaced by (reduced to?) activism in anthropology, producing a discipline where "the center is fragmented and, while not empty literally, is indeed empty of coherent ideas about what anthropological research is, does, and means in the contemporary world." He opines, in what is perhaps an additional jab at activism, "In place of ideas, anthropological discourse has become overly moralistic" (2008:4). He and his collaborators suggest that anthropology might be redirected towards a sort of ethnographic camaradarie with opportunities for co-theorizing with curious intellectual collaborators who are "paraethnographers" engaged in reflexive, critical analysis of their work (Holmes and Marcus 2008; Westbrook 2008). For Holmes and Marcus (2008), interlocutors are not subjects in the classic sense, because through their intellectual curiosity they are already engaged in paraethnography; the anthropologist joins them in this endeavor. David Westbrook, a paraethnographer-interlocutor of Holmes and Marcus, envisions the ethnographer as a navigator who

learns things of interest through a series of conversations in which she positions herself as a collaborator rather than a critic with the goal of experience and education rather than critique. While all parties to the conversation are engaged in collaborative paraethnography for epistemological purposes, professional ethnographers document the discussion with attention to context and history, provide the audience beyond the subject, and speak truths that are often difficult for others to articulate (Westbrook 2008).

The experience of mutuality sought in these models thus varies, from collaborating on a commonly defined documentary or activist project to engaging in stimulating intellectual exchanges about particular topics of mutual interest. All of these models position the anthropologist and his or her interlocutors as subjective equals engaged in a common project, whether of documentation, social transformation, or epistemology.[1] Marcus and Holmes's model of paraethnography attempts to recapture the possibility for theoretical innovation that Marcus suggests may be absent from activist collaborations, but anthropologists engaged in the latter argue that a collaborative approach to activist engagement can enable co-theorizing about topics of mutual interest that are useful to the pursuit of activist goals *and* theoretical progress. In a reflective article about her application of activist feminist praxis to her interpersonal engagements during fieldwork in her husband's family's Nepalese community, Elizabeth Enslin observes, "we need to create a space for praxis, where both theory and practice are constantly clarified through critical engagement in social struggles" (1994:540). Bruce Knauft (2006), in his configuration of "anthropology in the middle," similarly claims that anthropology's engagement with activism and advocacy emerges from and

produces a much more nuanced theoretical landscape because practical engagements provoke specific theoretical interventions for anthropologists based in the academy, and critical reflection brings a sustained counterbalance to shifting agendas of policy and activism. “Viewed positively, the respective trade-offs between these alternatives [academic and activist/engaged/policy anthropology] can provide an important check and balance on their respective excesses--ivory tower detachment, on the one hand, handmaiden service to the organizations and ideologies of others, on the other” (Knauft 2006:416). Knauft suggests that activist engagement and theory-building as a mutually enriching process has been particularly evident in the work of environmental and medical anthropologists, and increasingly with anthropologists of human rights issues (and, I would argue, feminist anthropologists).

David Graeber’s (2004) innovative project of theorizing an anarchist anthropology offers another example. Graeber, most recently of Occupy Wall Street fame, describes ethnography as a gift given in reciprocity by anthropologists to those who are its subjects; a gift that emerges from intentionally engaged conversations with a reciprocal and reflective component and potentially transformative power (Graeber 2004). Graeber’s conception of an anarchist anthropology assumes, among other things, an interactive co-theorizing of models of social transformation and alternative forms of sociality and politics, drawing on diverse ethnographically documented forms of social organization, social and political theory, and the imagination. Maximilian Forte echoes Graeber’s understanding of the anthropologist as co-theorizer in the collective project of understanding in order to transform when he writes:

This type of engagement, for me, is among the better forms of anthropology that I can envision for now… If anthropology is not about seeking peaceful coexistence between diverse peoples, about dialogue across the boundaries of cultural difference, about a world big enough to permit the self-determination of multiple and divergent societies, about respecting the autonomy and self-determination of others, about questions of the contemporary human condition in a specific context of war and capitalism, and *about participating with others in building an understanding of these problem*--then what is anthropology about, and why should anyone care about it?" [Forte 2011:15, emphasis mine]

Collaboration between anthropologists and activists in pursuit of anarchist transformation and/or understandings of human social problems is not unlike Marcus's paraethnography; the primary difference is the importance of an explicit desire to change society through collaboratively envisioned interventions.

Yet, there is still something important about mutuality missing from these outlines, which capture the pragmatic, strategic, intentional, goal-oriented interests of anthropologists as well as our interlocutors/collaborators. Anthropologists' interlocutors certainly expect assistance in achieving their goals, documentation of their beliefs, practices, and/or life-worlds, and, possibly, interesting conversation (see also Edelman 2009). But this sort of description gives anthropological collaboration the veneer of a business partnership where each participant invests intellectual energy and time in the process and expects certain outcomes desirable to all parties. Left unremarked and unacknowledged is the emotional interpersonal dimension of anthropological

engagement, an affective component of ethnography often inadequately acknowledged by even the most passionate writers in the discipline. For example, in his recent collection of powerful and moving essays, Paul Farmer advocates and models an ethnography of solidarity, which he calls “perhaps the noblest of human sentiments” (2010:431), yet on the next page he admits that “one thing that scarcely appears in this book is the deep emotion that accompanies the work of solidarity” (2010:432). Some ethnographers do reveal glimpses of the close emotional bonds they form with research subjects that transcend the research altogether, such as in this passage in which anthropologist Alisse Waterston quotes one of her research subjects, a woman living in a homeless shelter: “Nora took my hands in hers. ‘The book, the book, the book, you’ll write the book,’ she admonished, ‘but the really important thing is--you’ve come into my life and I’ve come into yours’” (1999:24).

I imagine that many anthropologists have developed, over the course of long-term research, a similar understanding that perhaps the most profound and significant outcome of their research is their personal relationships with research subjects rather than their published results. The sort of love that characterizes such long term relationships is often fraught, marked by tensions, ambivalences, ambiguities, disappointments and ruptures, all of which inflect and stumble the experience of mutuality. But ethnographic love is also persistent, demanding effort and the belief that the relationships are worth it, even when, or especially when, the ethnographic commitment transforms those involved. Is it important, for our discipline, to address how the participants in the ethnographic encounter are personally changed by their involvement, and how this change is significant for ethnography?

A Focus on Process

The focus on the *research process* in the work reviewed above insists on the centrality to disciplinary self-understanding of anthropological praxis. Anthropology is distinguished from other social sciences and from journalism because of our methodology of social embeddedness, forming relationships, developing trust, building networks of care, and working with collaborators who have a role and a stake in the shape and focus of anthropological research and in whose goals and dreams anthropologists invest. The praxis of anthropology is an effort in building social relationships, so turning the spotlight on what that interpersonal engagement means and feels like ethically, politically, personally, and professionally is part of the quest to understand the anthropological experience of mutuality (see also Pina-Cabral 2013; Enslin 1994; Jackson 2010). Anthropologists are seldom just intellectual collaborators--we are often also friends, kin, neighbors. Theorizing the multiple forms of engagement that anthropologists construct and experience with research subjects and collaborators can be a productive and critical dimension of our work because the process of doing anthropology is the process of creating our own humanity--not as heroic selves, but as human beings centered in networks of social relations and communities.[2]

It is a creative, imaginative process of becoming.[3] Discussing their own work, respectively, with a woman consigned to a zone of abandonment in Brazil and a country defined as collectively suffering from PTSD, Biehl and Locke (2007) write about how the ethnographer supports the visions of people struggling against social structures that

oppress or constrain them by listening with great personal investment to their stories, striving to grasp and write about subjectivity-in-the-making. Suggesting that Foucauldian and Marxist theories of oppression are useful but confining, Biehl and Locke advocate an ethnographic praxis of listening, with a literary sensibility, respect, and empathy, to what our research subjects have to say about their lives and dreams. “Listening as readers and writers, rather than clinicians, our own sensibility and openness become instrumental in spurring social recognition of the ways ordinary people think through their conditions” (Biehl and Locke 2007:335). They make a strong case for the vital and fundamental importance of ethnography, while arguing that because of its embrace of the everyday messiness of life, the ethnographic encounter breaks through the constraints imposed by theoretical models to bring a perspective on the emergent: “Simply engaging with the complexity of people’s lives and desires--their constraints, subjectivities, projects--in ever-changing social worlds constantly necessitates the rethinking of our theoretical apparatuses” (Biehl and Locke 2007:320). Wanting to write in a way that “unleashes something of this vitality rather than containing it” through theoretical edifices or doctrines, they explain they “are more interested in writing for a certain vision of anthropology and the anthropologist’s relationship to people than against a set of simplified foils” (Biehl and Locke 2007:320). Thus, for Biehl and Locke, mutuality as praxis nurtures both theory and the intimate involvement of the ethnographer in the emergent.

The ethnographer is not immune to personal transformation through such intimate engagements. When ethnographers join with those who are pushing against socially and materially defined boundaries to transform society as well as their own

subjectivities, ethnographers participate not only in writing new realities into possibility but also a new self. My six years of fieldwork in Cape Town on social transformation initiatives, where all who participated in these initiatives did so specifically in order to change themselves, as well as in the hope that they could contribute toward creating a better society, could not but transform me as well (Besteman 2007). Many of these initiatives were characterized by enormous tension and conflict where the daily excitement of activist work was focused less on the imagined outcome (or theoretical model of a possible outcome) and more on the day-to-day struggle to confront and overcome deep divisions (based on race, class, historical experience) amongst participants in order to hold an open discursive space for talking to each other about how to envision and work toward a better society. As an anthropologist-participant in some of these initiatives, I was as subject to personal transformation as the other participants, and thus the lessons I learned about the rage of poverty, the guilt of white privilege, the fear of violent crime, the mistrust of forgiveness, and the enormous challenges of learning to trust those with profoundly different life experiences were as personal as they were anthropological. My point here is that participatory engagement in which my own subjectivity was as available to challenge and redefinition as the subjectivities of my research subjects enabled me to write about post apartheid transformation in a way that is distinctly anthropological specifically because of the embrace of ethnographic mutuality.

The initiatives I wrote about were organizations with concrete and material goals, but the participants were actively involved in the process of becoming, envisioning a new kind of society and new possibilities for personal subjectivities. Many

participants drew inspiration from the South African concept of *ubuntu* (despite its arguably overused application in South African reconciliation initiatives and moral discourses). Its popular definition, as captured in South African President Thabo Mbeki's memorialization of Steven Biko, sounds affirmingly close to the anthropological ethic:

> Ubuntu places a premium on the values of human solidarity, compassion and human dignity. It is a lived philosophy which enables members of the community to achieve higher results through collective efforts. It is firmly based on recognising the humanity in everyone. It emphasises the importance of knowing oneself and accepting the uniqueness in all of us so as to render meaningless the complexes of inferiority and superiority. Indeed, Ubuntu connects all of humanity irrespective of ethnicity or racial origins. [Mbeki 2007]

The concept of ubuntu contains a philosophical claim that people are constituted through their engagements with other people (an understanding of personhood shared by a wide range of non-Western societies, cf. Sahlins 2011a, b), not in order to produce a uniform whole but rather to create a collective of singularities, to borrow an image from Hardt and Negri (2009). To the extent that anthropologists purposefully and meaningfully seek out transformative engagements with other human beings, conscious attention to how we are shaped as human beings through these engagements is to focus on the experience of mutuality. Anthropologists construct themselves as individuals through anthropological engagements; we reshape our understandings of

ourselves, our place in the world, our personal relationships, and the kind of society we desire through our close attention to and involvement in the lives of those we study as well as through their involvement in our lives. Paul Stoller recounts how his mentor "of things Songhay" (2007:178) used to tell him, "You may write a good deal about us, but to understand us, your life must become entwined in ours. To understand us you must grow old with us" (2007:181). In his love letter to anthropology for Valentine's Day in 2011, Rex (Alex Golub) at Savage Minds blog wrote:

> I love anthropology because it is the discipline that takes seriously the idea that our common humanity with those we study is a boon and a strength, not an impediment that distorts objective judgment. It works with and works through the fact that we can be powerfully changed by our research, and that this change is a strength…. Above all I love how anthropology, a science of the human, articulates with our lives: we study kinship, and raise children. We read about enculturation, and we teach students. We analyze power and we try to create a democratic, just world. Our discipline is connected, intimately and irrevocably, to our whole persons--and that's what I love about it most of all.

Similarly, Maple Razsa recounts how his anarchist informants in Croatia engaged in politically motivated activities as much to change themselves personally as to provoke political change, noting that anthropologists who study direct action as a form of paraethnography, like himself, are also engaged "in a process of becoming-other-than-we-now-are as ethnographers" through fieldwork (Razsa and Kurnik 2012:33).

My Cape Town book is only a footnote to the enduring friendships I maintain with some of those whose stories are captured within its pages, some of whom have never read the book because they do not consider it a particularly important part of our friendship or work together. The relationships I developed through my Cape Town research changed the quality of the friendships I have at home in Maine specifically because of what I learned about racism, trust, and reciprocity--qualities I attempted to describe in book chapters that alternate with chapters on ethnographic material. In writing *Transforming Cape Town*, the best way I could imagine to demonstrate the most vital, important, and disturbing currents of post-apartheid city life was by articulating as clearly and intimately as I could how I came to understand and feel the impact of those currents through my personal relationships with city residents. Readers tell me that the most compelling dimension of the book is the emotional commitment to my research subjects they perceive through my writing. This emotional commitment is love.

Where Is the Love?

As noted above, an anthropologist's interlocutors might collaborate with anthropological research as a strategic move toward achieving a goal. Less certain is whether an anthropologist's interlocutors expect friendship, personal commitments, trust, or love, and yet, as I have noted for Farmer, Waterston, and Stoller, those sentiments are often (if ever so subtly) apparent in ethnographic accounts. In her biography of Bourdieu, Reed-Danahay explains that he chose to interview only people known to members of his research team for his 1999 book, *The Weight of the World,* "in

order to minimize the social distance between" interviewer and interviewee and to ensure "there was no omniscient narrator who adopted the "lofty" gaze" that in Bourdieu's opinion so often characterized the position of the researcher (Reed-Danahay 2005:145). Bourdieu promotes the researcher's involvement in a sociological interview as "a sort of intellectual love," "a welcoming disposition, which leads one to make the respondent's problems one's own, the capacity to take that person and understand them just as they are in their distinctive necessity" (Bourdieu 1999:614), perhaps a reflection of Bourdieu's interest, at the end of his career, of directing his research toward political interventions sympathetic to the concerns of his research subjects. A reviewer remarks that, for Bourdieu, "the concept of `love' represents a relationship of mutuality that, however momentarily, rises above or steps out of the agonistic relationships characteristic of most human life. This relationship provides the ground for true understanding" (Barnard 2008). But one is left wondering if this kind of 'intellectual love' that produces 'true understanding' is only possible between a researcher and research subject who share a common identity.

In an essay on love in anthropological fieldwork, Virginia Dominguez argues that love rather than identity politics is the most important sentiment enveloping ethnographic research and representation. She argues that, whereas minoritized scholars are usually expected to undertake research with their 'own people' out of a commitment we might identify as intellectual love, other scholars are not, even though she is certain that many scholars experience--and are motivated by--a love they feel for their research subjects yet are hesitant to betray: "Let us not make the mistake of assuming that only longtime `insiders' are ever driven by love--or even that they are

always driven by love.… Love, yes, love--the thing most of us are not open about in our scholarly writing, the kind most of us have been professionally socialized into excising from our scholarly writing" (Dominguez 2000:365). She challenges her disciplinary colleagues to acknowledge and describe the love they feel for their research subjects as a powerful dimension of anthropology that gives it validity and value.

It is important that we all pay attention to the presence or absence of love and affection in our scholarship--at all stages of the production of our scholarship. If it is not there, it is important to ask ourselves why and what we should do about it. If it is there, we owe it to our readers to show it, to enable them to evaluate its role in the nature of our work. To maintain a bifurcated view of who should and who should not is to diminish us all and to make everyone's work suspect. [Dominguez 2000:388]

Dominguez's argument is that anthropologists should be able to defend their scholarly interests not through a politics of identity but rather through an acknowledgement of love, a defense that could claim: 'I study these people because I love them (rather than because they are 'my people'). 'My people' are those I love, regardless of the identity constructions that define categories of political belonging (on the basis of race, religion, citizenship, and so forth).' This understanding of love is closer to the form of "love as a material, political act" advocated by Hardt and Negri (2009:184), for whom alterity, not similarity, is the basis of love that produces new subjectivities, "new forms of the common" (2009:186). Love of the same and love that insists on unification, Hardt and Negri clarify, are corrupt forms of love that champion

nationalism, racism, patriotism, and other sentiments of exclusion, as opposed to the form of love they commend, “love that composes singularities … not in unity but as a network of social relations” (2009:184).

Among those anthropologists who do acknowledge how and why their love for their subjects motivates their writing, Dominguez finds particularly compelling evidence in the photographs some anthropologists choose to accompany their texts, such as those of Sidney Mintz’s cherished friend Don Taso Zayas in his classic *Worker in the Cane* (Mintz 1960), which Dominguez calls “a testimonial of love” (2000:368). A more recent example is Ruth Behar’s (2007) book, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*, which is a visual love letter to Cuba in which her text responds to the photographs taken by Humberto Mayol, and her loving longing for the present-absent community depicted in the photographs is a central story of the book. Not all loving photographic depictions are images of beauty; consider the extremely disturbing photographs that accompany *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009), the collaborative photo-ethnography of homeless heroin addicts by Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schoenberg. About this project, Bourgois writes, “Anthropologists cannot escape seeing, feeling, and empathizing with the people they study” (2011:11), a sentiment that Bourgois says he intentionally displays in the choice of photographs and their strategic placement throughout the book with no captions, surrounded by running text.

While Dominguez suggests anthropologists’s love for their research subjects may be most evident in their choice of photographs, it is worth remembering Roland Barthes’ critique of *The Family of Man* photography exhibition, which warns of photography’s failure to offer a representation of a common humanity when the

photograph is devoid of context. Remarking on the exhibition, he says, “To reproduce birth or death tells us, literally, nothing. For these natural facts to gain access to a true language, they must be inserted into a category of knowledge which means postulating that one can transform them, and precisely subject their naturalness to our human criticism” (1972:100). The context in which photographs are taken and exhibited makes all the difference, and for anthropologists, that context is often shaped by ethnographic love.

Exhibiting Mutuality

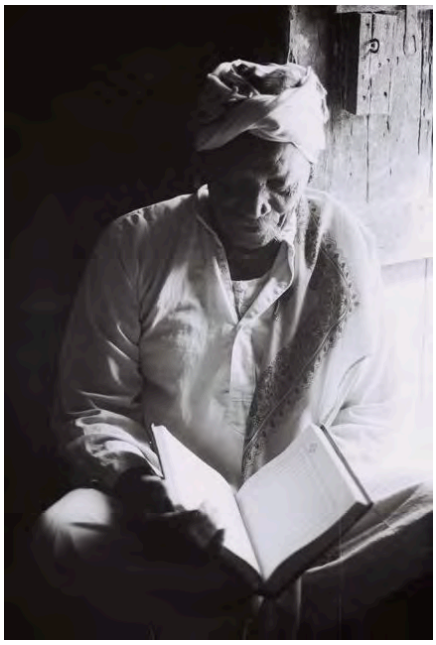
Photographs, then, can be testimonials and representations of ethnographic love, and, as such, they can be strategically utilized in ethnographic projects in an attempt to render visually, and perhaps produce in viewers, an experience of mutuality. Incorporating photographs into ethnographic museum exhibitions, websites, and films can offer a powerful intervention in a viewer’s consciousness. I had a remarkable opportunity to use my collection of ethnographic photographs from fieldwork in Somalia (taken by myself and Jorge Acero) for a project specifically designed to evoke sentiment and empathy in viewers. In 2006, refugees from the small village in Somalia where I had conducted my dissertation fieldwork in 1987-1988 began moving to Maine, where we rediscovered each other after almost twenty years. The upheaval caused by Somalia’s civil war and the flight of many villagers to Kenyan refugee camps, as well as the challenges of illiteracy, meant that I had lost touch with everyone I knew until our surprise encounter in 2006. After the joy of our reunion and the delight of sharing our

collection of hundreds of photographs of their younger selves and family members (many now deceased), the refugees in Lewiston were eager to use the photographs to collaborate on a variety of projects to educate the broader Maine public about their background and experiences in order to combat the predominantly negative popular perception of Somali refugees as criminals, poor parents, immoral foreigners, and undeserving welfare dependents (see Besteman n.d.). Drawing on

Amina Abdulle with her baby, Bilow Ali, in Banta, 1987. Amina died in the war. Bilow now lives in Texas. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

the photographic collection, a collaborative (formed by members of the refugee community, my college students, and myself) created a website (www.colby.edu/somalibantu) and a museum exhibition that traveled to three different

museums in Maine. Our desire in crafting these exhibitions was to use the photographs to provide a visible representation of Somali community life, faith, love, strength, and happiness--to humanize refugees as people who actually do have a



Macallin Caddow studying his Koran, in Tey Tey, Somalia, 1988. His son lives in Lewiston. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

meaningful history in ways that might provoke respect, admiration, greater understanding and even feelings of mutuality in viewers. Some of the photographs included here were among those on exhibition.

Ali Deerow with his kids Aboy and Isha in Banta, Somalia, 1988. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

The exhibition at Museum L/A in Lewiston, which included text and audio authored by those represented in the photographs and a program of educational events intended to introduce the people in the photographs to Lewiston's citizens, was viewed by thousands of Mainers. At the conclusion of the year-long exhibition, the museum's director, Rachel Desgrosseilliers, remarked that despite continuing to "hear the same old garbage" about the Somalis from her local acquaintances, she believed the exhibit shifted the thinking of some in Lewiston's predominantly Franco-American community. Visitors to the exhibition commented on their new understanding of how much the refugees lost in the war, how much they had to sacrifice to come to the U.S.,

Ali Osman, a poet, musician, carpenter, and farmer, in Banta, 1988. He died in the war. His wife and youngest children live in Lewiston. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

as well as how much Lewiston's Franco-American community and the Somalis shared as people with personal experiences of immigration. Rachel also reflected on how the exhibit changed her own attitude toward her new neighbors, making her "curious to learn more. Now I'm not afraid to walk down the street and to walk through a bunch of them." She noted her particular realization that "family is very important to them. It reminds me of my childhood, how every Sunday we had to spend with our family. It was very, very important."

Kaltuma and her friends, in Banta, Somalia, 1987. Photograph by Jorge Acero

Brothers mugging for the camera at a village feast, Banta, Somalia, 1988. These men died in the war. Their relatives live in Lewiston. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

Much more can be said about why some of Lewiston's residents might be more comfortable viewing photographs of Somalis than meeting or interacting with them (or

walking through a bunch of them) face-to-face, but the important point here is that a museum with deep roots in the local Franco-American community could collaborate with a local anthropologist and a group of refugee newcomers to the city to use photographs taken and displayed in a context of trust, empathy and love to chip away at the potential hostility of viewers about those depicted in the photographs. The photographs of Somalis laughing, playing, and working offer to viewers a glimpse of the potential for mutuality, a way to possibly insert themselves into the frame.

Abdulle Abdi and his neighbor, the anthropologist, Banta, Somalia, 1987. Abdulle died in 1990. His son lives in Lewiston. Photograph by Jorge Acero.

Does Anthropology Have a Common Set of Values and Morals?

Since a fundamental perspective guiding anthropological research is the desire to understand how and what others think, anthropologists engage in interpersonal relationships in order to grasp what the world looks like to our interlocutors. For those anthropologists who enter into collaborative projects with interlocutors motivated by a desire for social change, ethnography is often about the imagination, hope, and the desire for beneficial transformation. The presence of the ethnographer, according to Biehl and Locke, Razsa and Kurnik, Graeber, Knauft, and others cited here, catalyzes a description or a reflection of the emergent, a vision of future possibilities collaboratively imagined by the ethnographer and his or her interlocutors. But projects of social change are always values-driven. Although anthropology has a code of ethics, to what extent are ethnographers also guided by a commonly understood set of values? Should we be?

In his call for a radical anthropology, George Henriksen hopes for an anthropology that explicitly contests "urgent issues of domination, conflict and structural violence" that continue to structure relations between indigenous peoples and the state. But, he cautions, "To engage in this kind of anthropology … necessitates that one has an idea of what a good society is" (Henriksen 2003:122). For anthropologists, where does that idea come from? Do anthropologists have a shared idea of what it takes to make a good society? Henrikson insists that such ideas must come from those with whom we work, whose visions are then adopted and advocated by the anthropologist-as-collaborator.

But should anthropologists who seek to explicitly contest domination, conflict, and structural violence always do so from a relativist position in which we accept and

work within only the definition of a good society constructed by the communities in which we work? Jeffrey Deal (2010) explores this challenge in an example from his work in Southern Sudan as a physician and anthropologist where torture and excessive beatings are used by authorities as a way to reduce violence. Because everyone with whom he spoke affirmed the necessity of these sorts of beatings, even when used against the innocent, Deal reasons that in the immediate context he must also accept these beatings as legitimate forms of social structure and governance, even as he seeks (sometimes unsuccessfully) to offer treatment to the victims. But he also argues that in the broader context anthropologists must begin to acknowledge the possibility of a universal human rights that does not subordinate the interests of the individual to the social group, such as when innocent people are tortured in a socially sanctioned practice. Deal argues that anthropologists have to date mostly avoided any real engagement with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because of our disciplinary insistence on relativism and social construction, an insistence that contradicts the discipline's simultaneous commitment to resisting violence and torture--even when all participants seem to agree about their appropriateness. For Deal, the choice is to advocate for the interests of the individual and to resist the idea that a 'good society' might be one in which innocent people might be subject to torture in the name of the public good.

We have many examples of anthropologists who reject the relativist position on violence and choose, instead, to intervene on behalf of those being harmed even when the social context defines violence as moral, laudable, and necessary. For example, Philippe Bourgois, who works within the U.S. with homeless drug addicts, rejects his

society's definition of a good society, in which there is widespread agreement that those who break the law, including those who use illegal drugs, are criminals who should be held accountable for their actions according to the law. Bourgois discredits the application of a strictly legal/criminal assessment of the actions of homeless drug addicts, arguing instead that the cultural mores are wrong and that repeated incarceration of homeless drug addicts contributes to a form of violence he calls "lumpen abuse" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009).

Thus while anthropologists may indeed share a desire to use anthropology to make the world a better place and to fight violence, torture, and social structures that cause suffering, exactly how to do that is, of course, subject to considerable debate. Anthropologists do not subscribe to a single vision, nor are we in agreement about whether to promote a relativist or a liberal or a personal understanding of what constitutes a good society (see also Rapport 2011). Didier Fassin worries that the desire to use anthropology for the benefit of humanity may cause moral confusion if anthropologists conflate or mix up moral indignation with critical analysis (2008:338). Thus, he urges anthropologists to consider "moral reflexivity" in our analyses, questioning the values and judgments that underlie our work.

If we understand that anthropological values rest on a disciplinary orientation to an ethic of social justice that emerges from mutuality (rather than paternalism or charity), then perhaps what is called for is a reflexive acknowledgment of mutuality. In his book of essays about the impact of neoliberalism in Africa, James Ferguson (2006) writes about how Africans assume inequality must be explained; their queries are the same as those of their anthropologist. Anthropologists *are* in agreement about the value

of listening to and engaging with our interlocutors who are asking similar questions about how to envision and work toward a better society, and, as I have argued, anthropologists who acknowledge mutuality recognize how their personal and theoretical understandings of social formations are continually evolving with their research as a result. Perhaps a shared anthropological value is the desire to be open to alternative and new visions of society and to seriously engage with these visions in a collaborative process of imagining societies-to-come; to simultaneously document the emergent and the imagined, and to place our personal values alongside those held by our research communities, thereby stretching, challenging, and transforming the values of all who participate in the ethnographic encounter. In his book on ethnographic sorcery, Harry West (2007) suggests anthropologists conjure worlds alongside and in dialogue with our research subjects; ideas about what makes a good society are also collaborative imaginings conjured by anthropologists together with those with whom we work. As Biehl and Locke suggest,

> Grasping subjectivity as becoming—rather than structural dependence—may be the key to anticipating, and thereby making available for assessment and transformation, the futures and forms of life of emerging communities…. This project includes the active participation of readers. Thus also at stake is our capacity to generate a "we," an engaged audience and political community, that has not previously existed—our craft's potential to become a mobilizing force in this world. [2007:337]

One of the most exciting things about anthropology is how the understandings that emerge from relationships of mutuality reverberate along networks of engagement. This is why it is so important for anthropologists to be able to recognize how their values are shaped in dialogue both with their interlocutors within the profession and with their interlocutors in their sites of research and engagement and to continually reflect and infect each arena with insights from the other. An anthropology conceived in mutuality is about what it means to be a human being engaged in discussions about what makes a good society and what sorts of actions are provoked by such imaginings.

Interlude

And yet, we cannot be too hasty in assuming a universal 'anthropological perspective' defined by an ethic of mutuality as the basis for collaborative visions of a good society. In Somalia's ongoing agony, the current political scene (in 2012, prior to the September 2012 presidential election) includes a variety of militia leaders claiming control over swaths of territory and the populations who live there. One of these militia leaders, Mohamed Abdi Mohamed--a man who calls himself Professor Gandhi and who used to be the Defense Minister in the ineffective, impotent, foreign-aid supported Somali government--declared himself President of Azania, a breakaway new republic comprising the southern quarter of Somalia. As President of a country largely of his own creation, he heads an armed militia that is allegedly supported by Kenya and China (Gettelman 2011). He claims that his status as President and militia head will allow him to destroy al Shabaab (a group identified by the U.S. as a terrorist organization with ties

to al Qaeda), but he has no democratic mandate, most of those who live within the borders of so-called Azania played no part in its designation and do not support his presidency, and he himself does not even live there. But what makes his behavior relevant to my dilemma about the shared values of an 'anthropological perspective' is that he is a trained Ph.D. anthropologist with many publications on Somali political and cultural life and a long record of work in peace and demobilization efforts in Somalia. Can we reconcile a belief in a shared anthropological perspective, with its insistence on mutuality, with the reality of an anthropologist who takes up arms and claims political and military leadership of a territory whose population does not support him? That the anthropologist-turned-warlord is such an anomaly may be a meaningful indication of the discipline's orientation to seeking a model of a good society through collaborative, non-violent means.

When Mutuality is Antagonistic

Showcasing mutuality--or at least acknowledging it--offers a counter narrative to popular images of anthropology that portray disciplinary practitioners as cold, detached, unempathetic observers/critics of others (Hannerz 2010). Dominguez argues that writing with an ethic of love imbues our work with clarity and power. But writing with an ethic of love, and understanding oneself to be engaged in a mutual project of imagining a new and better society, is challenged when the anthropologist's vision of a good society directly contradicts those of his or her research subjects. In her review of ethnographies of the far right, for example, Kathleen Blee reveals just how rare it is for anthropologists

to study social movements whose aims they do not share, a lacuna she attributes to the limitations of anthropologists' personal and professional networks and political allegiances, problems of access, and a profound mistrust of outsider academics by the leadership in far right movements.

Yet powerful and empathetic portrayals have been penned by those who loath the values or actions of those they study--for example Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's (2003) portrait of South Africa's heinously murderous former security official Eugene de Kok, or Antonius Robben's reflection on his interview with an Argentine Dirty War General (1995)--or reject the politics or practices of those they portray--such as Susan Harding's (2001) ethnography of Jerry Falwell's potent evangelical Christian movement, or Hugh Gusterson's (1998) portrait of nuclear bomb makers. Each of these ethnographies succeeds precisely because the subject is humanized through an account shaped by ethnographic mutuality rather than political or moral reproach. By drawing the reader into an imagined association with the subject, the ethnographer locates the reader in a moral universe that requires critical reflection through engagement rather than disengagement or alienation. Writing with love, respect, and/or empathy rather than moral indignation about the immoral, harmful or unpalatable actions or beliefs of research subjects offers readers an experience of mutuality that might prompt productive self-reflection and potential enlistment in a collaborative project of envisioning alternatives.

Nevertheless, ethnographic engagements with those whose values or practices the anthropologist loathes may require such a dramatic reformulation of the concept of mutuality that we would be better served by using terms like respect or sincerity instead.

Ethnographies of the odious, such as torturers like Eugene de Kok, may be a place where the anthropologist probes the limits of ethnographic mutuality. Yet, to the extent that anthropology is about creating a shared understanding--even about something like torture--that is translated to readers by the ethnographer, the ethnographic experience of mutuality inflects the text in a way that few other perspectives enable.

Conclusion

I suggest that the relationships forged through ethnographic praxis are a variant of Sahlins' (2011a, 2011b) definition of kinship as "mutuality in being," an ontology that distinguishes kin relations from other sorts of social relations because "kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent" (2011a:11). As analyzed by Sahlins, kinship involves the incorporation of others into the constitution of the person, a quality-of-being found in ethnographic reports of kin relations from throughout the world and elucidated most beautifully by Marilyn Strathern in her description of the Melanesian understanding of the person as: "The plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them" (Strathern 1988, cited in Sahlins 2011a:12). Although he argues that the *incorporation* of others into the person distinguishes kin relations from other sorts of relations, I wonder about the fungibility of Sahlins's kinship model for ethnographic relationships, which often assume qualities of kin relations.[4] The mutuality of ethnographic relations may lack certain characteristics of the 'mutuality in being' of kinship, such as "transpersonal praxis" (where the actions of

one are attributed to the many, the group is held responsible for the actions of one, experiences of one may be shared, mystically or magically, by others by virtue of their kin connections (Sahlins 2011b:230), but there is an essence here, sometimes experienced through the presence or formation of kin relations in ethnographic fieldwork, that is important and distinct to anthropology. The “mutuality-in-being” that Sahlins describes as the basis of what kinship is thus might be extended to ethnography as well, to the extent that people become anthropologists, in part, through the social relationships created during fieldwork that, quite actually, make them. Sahlins argues that, for understanding kinship, we should privilege “intersubjective being over the singular person as the composite site of multiple others” (2011a:14) because the former better captures the special and specific qualities of kin relations, qualities that I argue exist in ethnographic relationships as well.

To return to my interlocutor in Cape Town, an ethnographer writing about Africa would not produce a portrait like Kaplan’s because ethnographic praxis is so often an experience of mutuality. Mutuality emerges from a commitment to collaborative solidarity, the creative process of imagining new forms of sociality and society, and ethnographic love. Often engendered through the exploration of difference, the ethic of mutuality is an openness to self-transformation and to the changes in intersubjectivity that happen over time. It insists on moral reflexivity, a critical moral awareness that shapes and defines the ethnographic encounter. Rejecting the self-love of the heroic anthropologist--the sort of self-love evident in Kaplan’s work--ethnographic love combines moral reflexivity, affection, solidarity, and an embrace of the ethnographic process as an experience of becoming something other than who we are now.

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Notes

[1] I wish to be clear that in defining collaborators as "subjective equals" I do not mean to imply that power dynamics are absent. Obviously this is never the case. Anthropologists are 'disciplined' by their interlocutors even as their class and citizenship status may afford them other kinds of power. I am trying to get at the ways in which ethnographic love works through these power gradients to produce mutuality, as a form of engagement and not of equalizing.

[2] Although my discussion is oriented toward the interpersonal dimension of ethnographic praxis, mutuality and ethnographic love may not depend on face-to-face encounters but may also emerge from sustained engagement in collaborative projects with large groups and networks, including those mediated through technology. See, for example, Boellstorff 2008.

[3] Pina-Cabral writes,

The ethnographer and the informant are not only exchanging information, they are jointly attentive to the world. Being jointly attentive, however, is a gesture that goes beyond communication, as it is formative of the worldview of those involved. The desire to help mutual understanding is part and parcel of the ethnographic process. The ethnographer affects his informants in their future life choices quite as much as their concerns and fascinations affect his work, his personality, and the worldviews of his future students. [2013:261]

[4] João de Pina-Cabral (2013:269) argues that Sahlins is incorrect in asserting that kinship is “a separate realm of sociality.”