Photo from cover: "Every year the Northeast of Brazil commemorates St. John's Day with a 5-day festival in June. The Festa de São João is known for its traditional forro music (performed by a trio playing the accordion, triangle and base drum), quadrilha [akin to North American square dancing], and food (dishes made with corn and peanuts). The Festa de São João is an opportunity for Nordestinhos [people from the Northeast] to express regional pride and celebrate tradition. Small towns such as this one in the interior of Bahia, where I conducted my dissertation fieldwork, decorate the streets with ribbons and colored flags. My dissertation explores how social change impacts people’s intimate lives. Specifically, it examines transformations in gender roles and marital expectations, and the resulting increase in separation/divorce among low-income Afro-Brazilians living in this rural town.

Melanie Angel Medeiros, MA
PhD Candidate
University of Arizona
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Message from the New Editor

We are excited to release our third issue, my first issue as Editor of Student Anthropologist. This year the journal has seen many changes including assembling a new Editorial Board, the addition of a Book Review section, and general strengthening of journal processes. After a year of editorial work I have come to see the importance of close communication between authors, peer reviewers, and Editorial Board members as fundamental to encouraging productive publishing, of which revision is key. The writing process is a social effort and Student Anthropologist is committed fostering these conversations, which will improve research, writing, and representation practices among student scholars.

Updates

Open Access

The Student Anthropologist Editorial Board has aimed towards increasing visibility and respectability of the journal. The main thrust this year has been increasing visibility of the journal to the academic community via an accessible website and to have the archives searchable under google scholar. The next step in the process is to have the journal registered and distributed within open access channels.

While there are other established routes available for distribution, i.e., Anthrosource, endeavoring to have Student Anthropologist distributed as an Open Access journal gives the advantage of making the work of our contributors freely available to students, professionals, or otherwise without the pay walls and steep charges that is the standard by large Academic Publishers. These charges are often prohibitive to the public in general or academics and students from universities economically at a disadvantage, particularly on an international level. Arguments for open access have been recently increasing in the anthropological academic community and the establishment of journals such as Hau points towards the growing viability of a respectable, high quality, peer-reviewed anthropological open access journal.

National Association of Student Anthropologists

The National Association of Student Anthropologists (NASA), the sponsoring section for Student Anthropologist, has also made some exciting developments this year. NASA is in the process of redesigning their website: http://www.studentanthropologists.org/. NASA welcomes feedback on particular features or items you feel are lacking.

NASA also spread headed and exciting new program this year, the Emerging Leader in Anthropology Program (ELAP). Although the submission deadline has already passed for this year, do consider applying next year. The program was started to foster the development of leadership in the field of anthropology. NASA is partnering with the Association for Queer Anthropology (AQA), the General Anthropology Division (GAD), the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology (APLA), the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA), the Committee on World Anthropologies, and the Committee on Public Policy. Program participants will receive training in AAA and NASA governance, contemporary issues in anthropology on specific themes, as well as mentoring from anthropologists engaged in participants’ areas of interest. A small scholarship towards attending the meeting and the opportunity to attend a special event at the AAA Chicago meeting in 2013 will also be provided.
Editorial practices and turnaround time

As the new Editor I have worked with the Editorial Board to streamline and strengthen peer review processes. Student Anthropologist Peer Review Editors, including Laura Thompson, Brent Vickers and myself arrange double-blind peer review of manuscripts. All identifying information is removed from manuscripts before they are sent out for peer review. Peer reviewers identities are also not disclosed. Each manuscript is read by two peer reviewers who provide written comments to the Peer Review Editors. If there are stark differences in comments from peer reviewers the Editorial Board is consulted to make final recommendations. Once a manuscript is accepted the Peer Review Editors guide the authors through revision in order strengthen the manuscript to represent top quality student scholarship. Revisions require the author to exchange the manuscript with the Peer Review Editor and myself up to three times. Peer Review turnaround is generally three months; however, exceptions occur particularly in instances when finding an appropriate peer reviewer is a difficult. Once the manuscript has been accepted it will appear in our annual issue released in November in occasion for the American Anthropological Association meetings.

Please see our general call for papers and special issue call for papers on page 115-116. This and more information is also available on our temporary website: http://studentanthropologist.wordpress.com/

Acknowledgements

I want to extend a special thank you to Sarah Taylor, the former Editor of SA for all her guidance when I initially became Editor and for all her hard work on the previous two issues. Thanks also to our new Editorial Board for all their hard work on special projects, advising on manuscripts, recommending peer reviewers, and copy editing. Thank you to Paul Keil for his dedication to Open Access concerns. Anna Jaysanne-Darr and Paul also worked on creating our temporary website, which was much needed, many thanks. I also would like to say a warm thank you to Fabienne Labbé, SA Book Review Editor, and Laura A. Thompson and Brent Vickers, Peer Review Editors, for their continued dedication to the journal, which is reflected in the strength of the student scholarship presented here. The new Book Review section was only made possible by the generous funding of Brandeis University.

The Editorial processes is deeply rewarding, challenging, and time consuming. Thanks to all the authors for their persistence and patience in revising their manuscripts to create important and dynamic student scholarship. Special thanks to Catherine Buerger and all the peer reviewers who have offered their timely reviews and considered comments, ensuring only the highest quality submissions were published.

Jessica A. Hardin
Apia, Samoa
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Commentary

The Future of Socially Engaged Anthropology:  
A Student Perspective

Robin Lewis Brown  
American University

Abstract

Many anthropologists have begun to shy away from disengaged textual analysis and extreme relativism, which were common in the discipline’s earlier years. Instead, many have turned increasingly to issues of social justice and activism. These anthropologists must walk a fine line, respecting the agency of their interlocutors while remaining an assisting force in their struggles. In this article, I examine what socially engaged anthropology looks like to an undergraduate anthropology student. I comparatively examine the subfields of applied and public anthropology and consider the implications of such socially engaged scholarship for the broader discipline of anthropology. I also consider the relevance of these subfields to the newest generation of engaged anthropologists. In particular, I discuss public anthropology’s power to allow anthropologists to advocate for, while not drowning out the voices of, their interlocutors. In my own work, I have struggled to reconcile not just my own privileged position with the position of my interlocutors, but also my hesitance to impose my own viewpoints on them with my desire to perform effective social activism. I ultimately find that the most effective way to perform useful solidarity work as a student anthropologist is to negotiate solutions by directly confronting any differences of privilege that may exist between researcher and interlocutor.

Keywords: Public Anthropology, collaborative ethnography, Anacostia River

Introduction

The history of anthropology is often seen as rooted in the histories of colonial powers. Anthropologists have practiced forms of scientific investigation that today would be considered pseudo-science in order to justify the exploitation of groups they identified as intellectually, culturally, or biologically “inferior” to their own societies in accordance with a linear developmental model (Tylor 1889:1-25, Morgan 1877). More recently, some anthropologists have failed to recognize the agency of people in colonized societies by overemphasizing the power of colonial rulers in shaping their organization and thinking (Ranger 1983:211-263; Spear 2003:3-27). This legacy requires contemporary anthropologists to tackle questions of position and privilege as they venture out into the field. Based on my experience as a student anthropologist, I find that the question of how to address human rights issues is one of great concern to other students. I argue that students interested in solidarity and collaboration should be armed with the tools to negotiate privilege. I also argue that public anthropology may offer them a chance to most effectively put these passions to work toward bettering the lives of others.

Making Anthropological Research Useful to Interlocutors

In this brief commentary, I set out to explore how student anthropologists can use public anthropology to assist in the struggles of their interlocutors while still acknowledging the agency of these individuals. With their focus on social issues, the subfields of public anthropology and applied anthropology have taken center stage in debates over how to answer the question of what effective and ethical advocacy and activism will consist of in the future (Lassiter 2005: 83;
While the line between the two remains blurry, the subfield of public anthropology has been growing rapidly over the last decade. Many practitioners seek to distinguish public anthropology from applied anthropology in order to emphasize its ability to transcend conventional frameworks that have been long established within the discipline of anthropology and also to highlight its ability to move anthropological knowledge outside of the discipline (Borofsky 2007: 1; Purcell 2000: 30). Public anthropology can be defined as anthropology that works outside the discipline or works to change the discipline in order to solve practical problems relating to human rights. There is a particular emphasis on making anthropological knowledge and research widely available and understandable to non-anthropologists (McGranahan 2006: 255-256; Besteman 2008: 62).

Applied anthropology, conversely, can be defined generally as anthropology in practice. It is anthropology that puts its methods and theories to use to solve human problems (Rylko-Bauer 2006: 179; Bennett 1996: 25; Van Willigen 2002: 8). According to Robert Borofsky, “public anthropology shares applied’s concern with developing solutions to concrete problems” (2007:1). However, Borofsky also asserts that many traditional anthropological methods and theories act as “hegemonic constructions” and that anthropologists have the opportunity, “by making them public, to subvert their power to frame particular problems” (Borofsky 2007:1). In other words, simply making anthropological knowledge public and useful helps to upend any top down researcher–subject power dynamics that may exist and helps to make anthropological findings more useful to interlocutors.

Anthropologists encounter power relations of all kinds. There is not always a uni-directional power relationship between researcher and interlocutor. In fact, the assumption that the anthropologist always holds more power than the interlocutor is one primary reason that public anthropology is a useful concept. Public anthropology reminds us to keep in mind our interlocutors’ abilities to advocate and fight for themselves. Borofsky’s critique of applied anthropology is not that it does not address power relations, but that it does not always acknowledge the interlocutors’ abilities to find solutions to their own problems. This is not to say that applied anthropology does not engage with questions of power and privilege or that it does not engage in community-based research, the results of which are made available to interlocutors. However, an important implication of public anthropology’s particular emphasis on making anthropological research public is that this maximizes the ability of interlocutors to use this information to lobby for themselves, instead of having only anthropologists determine what kind of solutions can be drawn from the research and applied to interlocutors’ lives. Borofsky states “I have not seen applied anthropologists taking the lead in publicly addressing divergent views of a problem, seeking to publicly, effectively converse back-and-forth with others, who differ from themselves, so that democratically-organized citizens can decide for themselves what actions to take” (Checker 2010:5-6). Anthropological research is an important tool that is most powerful when those whom the research concerns are able to put it to their own use.

**Overcoming Limitations of Activist Anthropology**

Much activism by anthropologists would not be possible if constrained by traditional anthropological models like relativism. For example, when an anthropologist commits to not judging another culture based on her own norms, she can run the risk of turning a blind eye to human rights abuses. Philippe Bourgois claims that relativism “forbids engaged research and—when taken to its logical conclusion—denies absolute assertions including those of universal human rights” (1990:43-54). As a student activist anthropologist, this concern resonates with me. Because of their dedication to human rights work—dedication that prioritizes the demands of their interlocutors—I look to public anthropologists like David Vine, who in conjunction with his multi-sited research among both the Chagossian people and policy-makers in the United States.
and United Kingdom, has spent a decade lobbying for the rights of the Chagossians to return to their home island of Diego Garcia (Vine 2009). I also look to Paul Farmer for his fundamental belief in the right of all people to have access to basic health care and for his ability to make his work as widely available as possible to promote this cause (1999:1486-96). For student activist anthropologists like myself, these anthropologists are inspirational because they are willing to work outside the discipline’s traditional realms in order to perform the most effective solidarity work.

For me and for many of my peers, public anthropology means something hopeful yet attainable. It is something that does not stand in opposition to applied anthropology but can be seen as an advancement of it. By coming as close as we can to witnessing the first hand experiences of our interlocutors’ lives, anthropologists hold a special ability to observe the structural realities of people’s lives and to examine how high-level policy plays out on the ground. Public anthropology allows us to turn this information around, passing it on to our interlocutors to help them engage in powerful self-advocacy. This also means moving our work out of the strict field of academia and making scholarship accessible to those for whom it would be most useful. The implications of this kind of anthropological practice means moving highly valuable information into the public realm, whether by utilizing and publishing the voices of interlocutors, by changing the medium in which research is presented, or by engaging in more traditional modes of social activism in which anthropologists challenge the limits of cultural relativism. Public anthropology relies on the reflexivity of researchers who, like Farmer and Vine, face their own positions, privileges, and biases explicitly in their scholarship, while seeking ways to join interlocutors in solidarity either in spite of or because of these factors. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, for example, has taken the stance that postmodern critiques of anthropological methods1 do little to help the lives of suffering interlocutors. Instead she argues that, “seeing, listening, touching, recording, can be, if done with care and sensitivity, acts of solidarity” and that “not to look, not to touch, not to record can be the hostile act, an act of indifference and turning away” (1995:418).

Public Anthropology in Practice

In 2010, I worked on a small project of collaborative ethnography, which forced me to engage with serious methodological questions that are central to solidarity work: How do I negotiate differences of privilege? Have I benefited from the very neoliberal policies that produced structural barriers for my interlocutors?2 How do I “help” while avoiding promoting only my own ideas and values? As a part of the Community Voice Project, which was developed by Larry Kirkman and Nina Shapiro-Perl, I worked with the Anacostia Museum in Southeast Washington, D.C. to collect and video record stories of residents living near the historically neglected Anacostia River. In order to conduct collaborative ethnography, the aim of this project was for students to listen to community members’ stories and, with them, compile personal documents and family photographs that assist in the completion of the narratives for multi-media presentations exhibited at the museum.

The project was designed so that each student worked with a member of the Anacostia community who was in some way engaged with environmental efforts around the waterway. By deciding to make these videos, participants were able to perform a powerful form of self-

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1 Such critiques, according to Scheper-Hughes, tend to paint the anthropologist as an inherently exploitative power taking advantage of the interlocutor (1995:417).

2 My use of the phrase “neoliberal policies” here refers to policies that widen the gap between the rich and the poor via deregulation and otherwise systematically disadvantage residents of Southeast D.C. (primarily through a lack of social support).
advocacy in an engaging form (personal narrative) with a highly accessible medium (video on the internet). The intent was to explore, broadly, the importance of the river on these residents’ lived experiences in this economically disadvantaged area. The Anacostia River itself is a highly politically and racially charged space that serves as a metaphor for the historic neglect of the lower eastern side of the city. The littered, sewage-filled waterway that runs past economically disadvantaged areas of the city, inhabited primarily by African American individuals, contrasts sharply with the cleaner Potomac that runs through some of the whitest and wealthiest areas of Washington, D.C. (Williams 2001: 409–431).

My community partner, a man I will call Derek, worked at a nonprofit organization in Southeast D.C. dedicated to community improvement and the restoration of the river. He wrote a five minute narrative script outlining the importance of the river to him as well as the satisfaction he found through committing himself to environmental preservation of the waterway. The script he brought me was beautifully composed and full of powerful symbolism. He described the pressure of needing to provide for his family while being trapped in an unfulfilling job and the joy he felt when he daringly left that job to work for a nonprofit in environmental protection. He wrote:

A battle began to rage within me. Should I let my fears hold me hostage, or should I let the hope of a more rewarding future guide me. Something bigger was calling me and it was a call of purpose, but it wasn’t entirely clear. I decided to walk away from my comfort zone and take a leap of faith.

I raised questions and concerns about the structure and content of his narrative as it evolved, and I used my knowledge of video editing software to synthesize all of the elements that he created.

Though we collaborated, the decisions were always his: what images and sounds to use, how long each should last, and how they should align with the narrative. In many ways, the two of us could not have been more different. We live on opposite ends of the city and he was 16 years older than I. Because of my own position of privilege, my physical distance from the social conditions in which my interlocutor lived, and the fact that I was a great deal younger than him, I felt uncomfortable helping to shape the narrative he was putting forward. Through the process of collaboration though, I found the best practice was honest negotiation and acknowledgement of our differences, as well as our similarities. Derek spoke openly and vividly about the dire social and environmental conditions in his community, even as he commiserated with me over the stress of exams because he had recently gone back to school to get a university degree.

Ultimately, as a student anthropologist, I was able to use my own privilege in constructive ways that benefited my interlocutor and opened up new avenues for advocacy. In turn, the project bolstered my confidence in my ability to successfully participate in a meeting of minds between divergent cultures, and helping Derek with his narrative strengthened my own storytelling skills. My connection to American University gave me access to the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, which agreed to display his story and the stories of the residents other students were working with. The project gave my interlocutor and others whose stories are rarely told a venue to advocate for themselves in their own voices. They were able to present to the public, in their own style and voice, their own stories of environmental and human rights concerns in our nation’s capital. Projects like this, in which students learn to work with, rather than for, community members to help them publicly tell their own story (as they conceive of it) are examples of public anthropology in action. In this way, students like myself can learn the importance of prioritizing their interlocutors’ needs and desires.
Acknowledging and respecting the agency of our interlocutors is paramount in this kind of engaged study. I attempted to do this by making sure Derek always felt that the story was his to tell and that I was there as a tool for him should he need me. This is ultimately what public anthropology and collaborative ethnography have to offer: the chance for us to help advocate for our interlocutors in ways that are helpful and meaningful to them. However, we must directly engage with differences of position and privilege in order to put all combined resources to work toward social good.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the many professors in the American University anthropology department who have provided me with immeasurable guidance and mentorship over the past years and who shown me the importance of engaged scholarship. In particular, I want to thank Professor Emily Steinmetz for taking the time to provide her invaluable guidance on this project despite her busy schedule. I also want to thank Dr. Nina Shapiro-Perl for giving her students the opportunity to work collaboratively in the community. I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the man I refer to as Derek in this piece for opening his life up to me and for his dedication to the short film we made together. Finally, I wish to thank Jessica Hardin for her meticulous editing and continued encouragement.

Author Biography: Robin Brown is an undergraduate anthropology student at American University in Washington, D.C. She is interested in public and collaborative anthropology relating to political economy and health and labor rights in Latin America. She intends to further her education with a master’s degree after she graduates this year.
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More and more anthropologists are doing “anthropology of home” by researching within their own communities. Major methodological and theoretical contributions for researchers working in their home communities come from debates surrounding “native” anthropology. Since anthropology has historically involved going outside one’s community, the shift to research sites in an anthropologist’s home community has fostered debates about the application of traditional anthropological methods to one’s own community. This article outlines several important methodological issues that have been debated by native anthropologists including issues of distance, cultural competence, translation, and defining “native.” This article shows that native anthropology offers a critique of dominate anthropological practices by opposing the customary position of natives as objects and countering Eurocentrist domination in academia. At the same time, native anthropologists have been strong in voicing the fluidity of identity which shows that every researcher is both an insider and an outsider. These insights are important for every anthropologist of home.

Key words: native anthropology, anthropology of home, methodology

Introduction

Bernard Perley (2011) once told me about his first experience conducting fieldwork, an experience which he also describes in *Defying Maliseet Language Death: Emergent Vitalities of Language, Culture, and Identity in Eastern Canada*. One day when arriving to the classroom he was observing on the Tobique First Nation, he was told to sit across from the teacher and her assistant who sat down in the adjacent seat. Perley sensed something was up. When the teacher spoke, she demanded “to know the real reason” that Perley was there (2011: 25). Perley began to tell them of his interest in learning and helping when they started singing a couple of lines from the song, “Here Come the Anthros” which they followed with laughter. The assistant left, and the teacher went back to her work. As Perley describes, “I had just been told that I was an intruder and I was not welcome” (2011:25).

The song undoubtedly refers to the long history of exoticization of native people by white academics of anthropology, as is evident in the following passage:

Like a Sunday at the zoo  
Their cameras click away -  
Taking notes and tape recordings  
Of all the animals at play.  
Here come the anthros, better hide the past away.  
Here come the anthros on another holiday.  
(Westermen: 1976)

It is particularly interesting that this scene occurred even when the anthropologist in question, Perley, is a member of that tribe and grew up on the reservation. In the conventional sense of the term, he is a “native” anthropologist, an anthropologist who studies his or her own
community, commonly minority or marginalized populations\(^1\). As a student who is planning to do anthropology at home in the United States, I became interested in native anthropology somewhat naively. I thought the term referred to anyone who worked in their native communities, and thus began to learn about the topic in order to inform myself of issues pertaining to my fieldwork interests. However, I quickly learned that the term “native anthropology” has a specific history and connotation connected to colonialism and marginalized communities. Throughout the article, I use the term “native anthropology” to refer to this specific situation, and the terms “insider anthropology” and “anthropology of home” to refer more broadly to people doing research in their own communities.

Debates surrounding native anthropology are important for anyone doing anthropology of home because they highlight tensions present in studying one’s own community. This article reviews major debates surrounding the following native anthropological research issues: distance, cultural competence, translation, and defining “native.” In doing so, I show that native anthropology offers a critique of dominant anthropological practices by opposing the customary position of natives as objects and countering Eurocentrist domination in academia. At the same time, native anthropologists have been strong in voicing the fluidity of identity which shows that every researcher is both an insider and an outsider.

**Historical Context**

The methodological commitments of anthropology have historically been founded on the image of “The Stranger” offered by Alfred Schutz (1964). As Schutz depicts it, the stranger entering a foreign environment becomes highly aware of aspects of social life that he would take for granted in his own society. He quickly learns that his assumptions about the social practices of the foreign group were incorrect and that he needs native knowledge to survive. Thus, he begins the process of learning the cultural patterns of life in this new community. The objectivity of the stranger allows him to see the cultural patterns underlying everyday life, which the native community takes for granted.

Schutz’ depiction of “the stranger” largely parallels some of the tenets of fieldwork in anthropology. Traditionally, fieldwork involved going to a foreign place, living amongst foreign people, and then writing a description of them for an academic audience. Renato Rosaldo refers to the classic field situation as the “Lone Ethnographer” riding into the sunset “in search of his ‘native’” (1989:30). The Lone Ethnographer, like the stranger, must become detached and objective, and he must adhere to a strict division of labor between himself and his “sidekick” native (1989:31). He remains the final authority on the objective depiction of the cultural life of the native. This traditional image is a product, in no small part, of the colonial situation in which the discipline of anthropology emerged. Anthropology was a standard, institutionalized, degree-granting discipline at a time when colonial powers had a strong motivation to know more about the non-Western peoples they sought to manage. Anthropology was given what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) calls the “savage slot” which became essential to its disciplinary identity.

However, several factors brought this image of the ethnographer under question for the discipline leading to shifts in the traditional insistence that anthropology’s object of study had to be foreign, non-Western cultures. In the sixties, there was increasing alarm that with native populations rapidly disappearing, anthropologists would quickly become obsolete (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Peirano 1998). Instead, anthropologists asserted that it was not whom they studied, but how they studied them – through a particular relationship between the scholar and the observed (ethnography), that truly defined anthropology (Peirano 1998).

\(^1\) Perley does not refer to himself as a “native anthropologist,” but instead takes a reflexive approach to his identities as “both native and anthropologist” (2011:20-1).
Contemporaneously, decolonization and the increase in American imperialism fueled highly influential social movements in the United States such as the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War Protests. With social movements came increased calls for social analysis of sexism, racism, and homophobia (Clair 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Changes in the social sciences included an ongoing shift from making general claims to more particular interpretations. With a focus on the particular, objectivist notions of theory, language, and detachment slowly unraveled and the epistemology was destabilized (Clair 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties, there were increasing critiques of classical anthropology. These included critical review of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism (Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

Of consequence for anthropological methods, the distinction between the “ethnographer” and the “native” became blurred as the concept of bounded and homogenous cultures became untenable (Rosaldo 1989). In Reinventing Anthropology, Dell Hymes (1999) and others called for dramatic shifts in anthropology including a more reflexive anthropology that would consider itself as an object of study. As literacy spread to the non-Western groups that traditionally had been anthropology’s object of study, natives began to read and respond to ethnographies written about their own cultural histories and to offer alternative accounts (Kuwayama 2003; Rosaldo 1989). Increasingly critiques of power, knowledge, and cultural representation (for example, Said 1978), and postmodern contributions to theories of identity deeply complicated the concept of the “Other” (Clair 2003; Kuwayama 2003). Natives had typically been objects of thought, not the thinkers themselves (Kuwayama 2003), but these changes meant that anthropologists no longer held the “native discourse monopoly” (Trouillot 2003). With a rise in native anthropologists who were equipped with anthropological training to go back and study their own communities, Western anthropologists began to increasingly study themselves (Messerschmidt 1981a).

Early Debates

The historical moments described above, with the undercurrent of calls for increased reflexivity ever present, set the groundwork for a shift in the anthropological object of study, and more people began what was termed “native anthropology.” While other sporadic studies in insider anthropology had been completed previously (Mead 2000; Douglas 2002; Frankenberg 1966; Frankenberg and Gluckman 1957), the increasing numbers of people studying their own cultures led to a thorough and ongoing discussion of the methodological issues involved. Donald Messerschmidt (1981b) describes this as a shift away from cultures or places to an interest in issues. Debates then centered on the differences between methodological approaches of studying your own culture versus a foreign one. Some suggested that there was no essential difference between either site; both involved the same methodological commitments and challenges. Some deeply opposed the idea of “native anthropology,” while others debated the merits of each, pointing out strengths and weaknesses (Messerschmidt 1981a).

Proponents of “native anthropology” argued that “outsider” research was superficial as outsiders lacked the cultural competence to deeply understand the meanings and practices they witnessed. Insider findings would then be not only depictions of a culture but expressions of the culture. Similarly, they suggested that their unconscious inclusions are meaningful additions to the data as they were expressions of the native culture, whereas they are bothersome irrelevances in ethnographies written by outsider anthropologists (Messerschmidt 1981a). Supporters of native anthropology argued that their status as a member would lead them to blend in and not alter social situations in the way that a foreign person may (Messerschmidt 1981a). On a practical level, with decreased funding for trips abroad and less access to foreign
countries after decolonization, native anthropology was an economical alternative (Aguilar 1981). Additionally, application of anthropological skills to local situations was argued to be an invaluable resource for deepening understandings and finding solutions for problems of concern for anthropologists’ own communities (Messerschmidt 1981b). Finally, some early voices called attention to the ability of the “unique” native perspective to deconstruct colonial distortions on anthropological knowledge (Jones 1970).

Critics, however, asserted that an insider could never detach enough from their own cultural understandings to see the underlying patterns that are taken for granted in everyday interaction (Messerschmidt 1981b). The unfamiliar is easier to detect, they argued, and the familiar risks appearing to be true without question. Insiders, who are expected to know the norms, would be less likely to be forgiven for transgressions. Additionally, they suggested that being an outsider would provide more access to secrets, as an outsider anthropologist would have no reason to use such knowledge against participants. Being viewed as an objective observer, they argued, prompts participants to be more forthcoming in their disclosures (Aguilar 1981).

One of the key issues in the debate was the level of bias that might occur in native anthropology. Critics charged that insider ethnography would be inherently biased towards the native population. They raised concerns that insiders would approach their work as advocates, precluding them from the objective viewpoint required by science (Aguilar 1981). However, proponents argued that every ethnographer is biased, so “outsider” ethnography just slants the other direction. Some suggested that the role of a native anthropologist was to bring more perspectives into the discipline, so their inherent biases were welcome and important contributions (Jones 1970).

Largely these early debates centered on epistemological concerns. Those who opposed native anthropology still upheld the positivist values of objectivity and neutrality posited by conventional science. Proponents of the study of one’s own culture largely shifted away from those values (Jones 1970); instead they supported native anthropology as a possible “correction” of the historical exploitation of native people and employed a postmodern epistemology.

**Current Methodological Issues**

In the present era, more anthropologists practice “native” ethnography than ever before. The debate is not so much about whether should one study their own culture, but instead about what it means to study one’s native community. The issues emerging from early debates have evolved, and many appear in new forms in current methodological debates. Core concepts such as “culture,” “ethnography,” and “field site” were all subject to ongoing interrogations during this time, and their influences on the methodological aspects of native anthropology are clear. In current methodological debates, these core interrogations continue in the following threads: defining “native,” advantages and challenges of cultural competence, achieving distance, and translation. These are the focus of this section.

**Defining “Native”**

One current discussion involves the complication of what is meant by “native anthropologist.” The positioning of “native” and “non-native” is rooted in a colonial paradigm. Some early anthropologists (e.g. Franz Boas) worked with native assistants precisely because they could provide information that the anthropologist could not gather with their limited familiarity of the community (Stocking 1968). Critics of this practice point out that including early “native” anthropologists in academic circles was because of their ability to collect inaccessible data for white anthropologists (Narayan 1993). The relational opposition between
“anthropologist” and “assistant” indexed a conceptual distinction between “non-native” and “native.” This distinction continued as more people from marginalized populations became anthropologists who studied their own communities. However, with the postmodern view of identity as multiple, the term “native” is now recognized as a relational, and therefore fluid, category, and the non-native–native distinction is highly contested (Kuwayama 2003). This has shifted the debate from how insiders can contribute to the subjectivity of “being native.”

Applying the postmodern view of identity to anthropological methods, Kirin Narayan (1993) problematizes the distinction between “native” and “non-native” anthropologists, stating that other cultural factors, such as gender and social class, can outweigh the ethnic identities on which the distinction was historically founded. People have multiple identities, and are complexly located. Narayan describes her own experiences of having dramatic social class and cultural differences with her community of study regardless of her similar ethnic identity. Other native anthropologists describe similar complications in entering what is termed “their” communities (e.g. Jacobs-Huey 2006; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Perley 2011).

Native anthropologists are sometimes positioned as insiders regardless of their complex backgrounds. For example, Nayaran’s (1993) German-American mother was ignored as it complicated the image that people held of her as “Indian.” Stanley Barrett (1999) describes the issues specific to “halfies,” anthropologists whose cultural identity is mixed because of migration, education overseas, or biracial parenting. He suggests that such anthropologists doing work in their own communities are both the “native” and the “outsider” and are pulled between two audiences. Jayati Lal (1996) also described her experiences with such issues. As a woman of Indian descent, her research in India was labeled native anthropology by academic audiences. However, she found that her shared gender, language, and Indian identities were not enough to outweigh the social class differences between herself and the participants with whom she worked. Thus she was dislocated “even within that space [she] had thought of as home” (1999:193).

Similarly, numerous anthropologists comment that their academic training alone complicates their “native” status (Foster 1996; Page 1988; Williams 1996). The effects of academic discourse on the production of knowledge and creation of subjects was theorized by Michel Foucault (1976) who argued that power is located in the discursive relations of institutions such as the academy. Engaging in academic discourses means engaging in “an anonymous field whose configuration defines the possible position of speaking subjects” (Foucault 1976:122). Native anthropologists often recognize that their academic training alters their social class and educational identities in ways that can make them increasingly alien to their “home” communities (Barrett 1999; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Narayan 1993). Even assuming it is possible to have an “insider” identity with a community, it is uncommon for any stranger to be accepted without reservation. Native anthropologists often are not immediately thought of as insiders by community members no matter how close their backgrounds might appear. Just as any other anthropologist, native anthropologists experience suspicion towards academics by many marginalized groups historically exploited by scholars. Additionally, there will always be things about even a familiar field that a “native” anthropologist does not know (Narayan 1993).

“Native anthropologist” is a fluid label that may be adopted by an anthropologist, or may be imposed by the academy. It may be accepted or rejected by the community in which an anthropologist works. In general, anthropologists increasingly question the idea that any fieldworker truly becomes a “native” of their field site. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) suggests that the traditional concept of joining a community to gain an insider perspective is condescending. How can anthropologists think that after a relatively brief time in a community (one or two years) they would be considered a full member? Debates around defining “native”...
anthropologists complicate the traditional notion of fieldwork in anthropology in which the ethnographer joins the natives to gain an “insider” perspective by showing that identities are fluid and multiple in fieldwork. To categorize a researcher as “native” or “non-native” is a false dichotomy. Additionally, this debate moves away from the idea that an ethnographer can become a full cultural insider through participant observation and towards the idea that there will always be things that an ethnographer does not know about a community.

Cultural Competence

While what it means to be a “native” is contested, there are still particular methodological concerns named by those who identify as such. Debates in the eighties on the types of knowledge that can be gleaned from a native versus outsider perspective generally conceded that native anthropologists have several advantages due to their presumed cultural competence. Some possible advantages of cultural competence will be reviewed in this section. Additionally, some challenges that cultural competence can present for anthropologists will also be discussed.

Since language is a key way that anthropologists can build rapport and trust, native anthropologists, who are competent in both the speech and nonverbal communication of the participants, have an important tool available to them. Full communicative competence affords native anthropologists a faster ability to build rapport and deeper understandings (Kuwayama 2003; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Jones 1970). Similarly, cultural competence can increase one’s flexibility and access, and ability to collect data in the field (Messerschmidt 1981b). In African-American communities, for example, competence in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be an important aspect of establishing trust and rapport in fieldwork (Gwaltney 1993; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Nelson 1996; Williams 1996). Lanita Jacobs-Huey (2006) explains that communicative competence does not just mean knowing a language. It was the subtleties of knowing how speech styles are used in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) that allowed her to build relationships with some of the most skeptical participants in her multi-sited study that examined the symbolic meanings of hair in African American communities. As she conducted her research both on the ground and online, she relied on cultural discourse styles, and used them strategically, especially when discussing sensitive issues.

However, native anthropologists can still experience problems using native communication styles in their own cultural group. For example, African Americans who spoke varieties of English associated with academia had a hard time becoming accepted in the African American communities they were studying (Foster 1996; Page 1988; Williams 1996). Participants sometimes view African American researchers who use mainstream English varieties as “educated fools” ( Jacobs-Huey 2006:136). Beyond communicative competencies, because community members may have specific expectations of native anthropologists, their insider status may be “tested” in unique ways. A participant asked Jacobs-Huey how she wears her hair, and she knew that the participant who asked this question strongly felt that “afro-centric” styles (for example, braids) were essential for black women’s empowerment (2006:135). Jacobs-Huey quickly picked up on this question as an evaluation of her cultural competency, and responded accordingly in order to build rapport with the participant (136). Her “insider” status had to be proven through, not just her identification as African American, but through her appropriate use of discursive styles and appropriate response to culturally specific questions.

An additional challenge that cultural competence can present for anthropologists is the massive amount of input that native anthropologists, who do not have to rely on translators, receive in the field (class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011). Native anthropologists hear and comprehend everything, and the familiar social interactions that they are observing can appear natural. This even increases the basic task of choosing what to leave
in and what to leave out of fieldnotes, let alone the amount of filtering necessary to attempt at meaningful analysis (Becker 1971; Delamont and Atkinson 1995). One strategy native anthropologists employ to manage this issue is frequent assessment of what has been learned and what still needs to be uncovered in relation to the project goals (class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011).

Though little attention has been given to this issue in the literature on native anthropology, an additional challenge that full cultural competence brings for anthropologists working in their own communities is to define the field of research. As Alessandro Duranti observes, “The more we study different societies…the more we realize that the homogeneous community where everyone speaks the same language (or dialect) and knows everything there is to know for daily survival is either a romantic idealization…or a collective construct…” (1997:88). When people study their own communities, they are faced with the native knowledge they already have about the fluidity of the “collective construct” of their culture, and they have to figure out some way of narrowing their focus (Duranti 1997:88).

To address this problem, some early ethnographies of home defined their community of study by focusing on the exotic in their own communities. For example, ethnographies of the Chicago School included studies of hobos, street gangs, or drug users (Davies 1999). While such delineations of home communities persist, native anthropologists are particularly sensitive to representations of their communities (Jacobs-Huey 2006). Additionally, in some academic circles, professional credibility relies on reinforcing some of the old ideas of foreignness and distance (Jacobs-Huey 2006; class lecture by Paul Brodwin on September 26th, 2011). Thus institutional and professional pressures to create an exotic subject of study still persist even with opposition.

Another strategy for addressing the heterogeneity one recognizes when studying their own community is to employ multi-sited ethnographic techniques. Jacobs-Huey (2006) participated in multiple field sites (e.g. beauty parlors, online forums, and standup comedy) in order to be inclusive of the complexities of her community. Lila Abu-Lughod (1999) also found that she had to move beyond the bounds of a rural village field site in order to understand the role of television (produced in the cosmopolitan capital) in village women’s lives.

Distance

While the cultural competence of native anthropologists proves advantageous overall, as anticipated by early critics, those who identify as native anthropologists cite detachment or distance as an issue in their ethnographic work. As critics of native anthropology suggested, when a person is already an “insider,” they sometimes struggle to see what they take for granted (Becker 1971; Kuwayama 2003). Some describe entering their field site, eager and ready to document everything going on, but quickly losing momentum as everything begins to seem “normal.” Onuki-Tierney (1984) describes how even after living in the United States for two decades, her ethnographic project in her home country, Japan, quickly fizzled as the sites and experiences melded into the “norm” after a month and a half. For some, leaving the field and returning to a Western academic setting is necessary to refocus on the academic task (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Jacob-Huey 2006).

Narayan describes how the native lack of distance alters research methods: In some ways, the study of one’s own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known (1993:680).
While issues of distance are a particular problem for native anthropologists, they need not be a limitation. As Narayan has described, native anthropology can involve interrogating what is “known” in a new way.

Translation

One of the biggest issues of concern for native anthropologists is how to “translate” findings for both their community and the academic world, especially when native voices have traditionally been neglected or misrepresented in academic environments. Translation, as it is being used here, is about the politics of representing findings for a particular audience. All anthropologists contend with representation issues and choices regarding whose voices to include, and what to leave in and what to leave out of ethnographic writing (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hymes 1999). Laura Nader persuasively argued that anthropologists need to extend their study (traditionally of those who were colonized) and “study up” to complete more complex analyses (1972:295). Meanwhile, advocates of standpoint epistemologies argue that, “the activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought…from which humans’ relations with each other and the natural world can become visible” in ways that those positioned at the top cannot (Harding 1993:54-55). Native anthropologists are uniquely situated within the tension that standpoint epistemologies present, so translation has several particular aspects for them which will be explored in this section.

The unique positioning of many native anthropologists often leads them to feel loyalty to more than one world. Not only do native anthropologists have to consider how to translate their work for their community members, they also have to translate native knowledge to academics who are entrenched in dominant Eurocentric ways of knowing. In other words, native anthropologists have to determine how to make the information accessible and acceptable for both an academic and a lay audience. Jacobs-Huey (2006) describes strong tensions in portraying her African American community for a white academic audience. As she has found, production of a text that uses highly specialized language, or of a text that does not sound “academic” enough, can both be suspicious for a native community.

Native anthropologists have the added concern of disclosing what many in their communities might consider to be the “dirty laundry” or the “family secrets” (Jacobs-Huey 2006; Visweswaran 1994). The pressure to resolve issues of representation is increased for historically marginalized groups who may expect the “native anthropologist” to take particular political stances. Additionally, because of previous membership in the community, the stakes are higher for native anthropologists who may accidentally offend their community of study. While anthropologists working outside of their communities also risk offending research participants, the stakes are particularly high for native anthropologists. As Perley states, “the stakes for the native anthropologist could very well determine whether the native can return home or not” (2011:21).

Key to issues of representation for many native anthropologists is the textual production of ethnography. While this topic has been addressed in previous sections of this article, there are a few points that deserve further elaboration here. Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar summarize changing theories of textual practice in anthropology stating:

Today, this critique could be seen as effecting a set of displacements from cultures-as-text (interpretative turn), to texts-about-culture (writing culture and the politics of representation), ending up with anthropology-as-critical-cultural-critique (critical cultural constructivism) (2005:107).
Restrepo and Escobar remind readers that anthropology as cultural critique situates exoticization of the Other as primarily located in the construction of ethnographies. Reneto Rosaldo (1989) argued that moving away from exoticization requires shifting the ethnographic lens onto ourselves by writing the researcher into the ethnography (also argued by Davies 1999.) This change has been encouraged by native anthropologists who suggest many alternatives to classic ethnography in order to accommodate the voices of native ethnographers (Perley n.d.) One very influential contribution has been bringing greater personal narration into all ethnography, which helps to enact multiple identities and to counter the objectivist tradition (Narayan 1993). Instead of assuming that somehow a native anthropologist can offer an authentic account of community perspectives, Narayan calls for depictions of the ethnographic author as, at the least, bicultural (Narayan 1993).

Native anthropologists living in non-Western countries have the additional complexity of contending with a global political environment that is dominated by Western culture. Takami Kuwayama (2003) describes the tensions, for example, that emerge when a native anthropologist is involved with native rights movements. Increasing opposition to Western political forces can lead to attempts to withdraw from dominant, westernized discourses entirely. The results of this can be detrimental to the interests of movement members; he states, “for people in the non-Western world…categorically refusing Western ideas is tantamount to depriving themselves of any intellectual power” (Kuwayama 2003:13). Since westernized discourses permeate life around the world, Kuwayama argues that involvement in them is necessary for empowerment.

Many native anthropologists approach their work in ways that align with Kuwayama (2003) in the goal of dismantling colonialist discourses and bringing native knowledge into the academic canon. Jacobs-Huey describes this as a “corrective” agenda and delineates three themes: critical examination of historical subjugation, exploitation, and exoticization of people of color worldwide, incorporating research participant voices, and returning something of value to the community (2006:133). Restrepo and Escobar outline a similar agenda including: calls for the de-colonization of anthropological knowledge, the role of anthropologists in the reproduction (or contestation) of the status quo, and the epistemological and political aspects of “native” anthropology (2005:107).

The corrective agenda Jacobs-Huey describes (2006) can take on different forms for native anthropologists working outside of American and British academic systems (the two systems which produce the dominant discourses of the field). The construction of the “expert knowledge” of Eurocentric discourses of anthropology has involved “a double movement: first, and more conventionally, ‘familiarizing’ otherness; second, and more recently, exoticizing sameness” (Restrepo and Escobar 2005:106). Native anthropologists working outside of core academic spheres have to consider the dominant theories, methods, and writing styles in order to be included as legitimate producers of knowledge (Kuwayama 2003). This can create tensions for native anthropologists who have to enter the dominant discourses that historically exploited their communities in order to be heard and bring native voices into the discourse. The risk of doing so, as described previously, is a loss of the sense of self as a true “native.” As increasing numbers of people from historically marginalized communities are employed in higher education, this issue is pressing. At the same time, increasing exposure of native voices is slowly affecting the dominant discourses, especially as the “face” of higher education shifts to be more diverse (e.g. Jacobs-Huey 2006; Medicine 2001; Perley 2011; Visweswaran 1994).

Translation is considered to be at the heart of what anthropologists do (Agar 2011). As has been described in this section, there are several aspects of translation that are particular to the experience of many native anthropologists. From this unique positioning, native
anthropologists have both introduced a correctness agenda and native ways of knowing into anthropology.

Conclusion

Native anthropologists have made numerous contributions to the field of anthropology, and, in many ways, their concerns highlight issues that exist both for both “insider” and “outsider” anthropologists. Further, native anthropology debates demonstrate that increasingly the line between the two is blurred. Positioned at the heart of many important tensions, native anthropology has proven to be an invaluable tool for both understanding social life in general, and working on problems of consequence for marginalized communities. From reviewing several central debates around the methods of native anthropology, two unique contributions to the field that are of interest for a student preparing to do anthropology at home are:

1. Native anthropology opposes the customary position of natives as objects, brings native ways of knowing into academia, and thus counters Eurocentrism in academia. The project of native anthropologists has been part of larger critiques of “expert knowledge” from within anthropology. These critiques can be thought of broadly as epistemological and textual practices (where native anthropologies have been fruitful), and bringing native practices into academic institutions.

2. The ongoing, methodological issues raised by studying one’s own culture highlight the necessity of reflection and careful methodological planning for all fieldwork.

These two contributions from native anthropology remind all of us that academic knowledge is not immune to the social practices, tensions, and power we seek to reveal in all aspects of human life. These debates in native anthropology have laid out a path for all insider anthropologists that allow us to continue to seek “folk knowledge” that offers a critique and an alternative to the dominant “expert knowledge” of academia, and to reflexively consider our own position as insider-outsiders in the fieldwork settings in which we work.

I would like to finish by returning to the story Bernard Perley (who was starkly faced with resistance in his first experience as a native anthropologist, as described in this paper’s opening) told me. After sharing his experience with me, he imparted that I, just like everyone else, would encounter some situations in the field that I was unprepared for. If there is one universal experience of the ethnographer, whether she is the “Lone Ethnographer” setting off into the sunset, or the “insider” anthropologist turning to her own backyard, it may be just what Perley told me: every field experience will present you with circumstances you are not prepared to face, and it is the challenge of the ethnographer to critically and reflexively respond.

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Engaging Students as Critical Storytellers: Classroom Observations from a Boricua Anthropologist

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Abstract
Public and private higher education’s need to recruit “the brightest and most accomplished students” has created social and economic barriers to college admissions and student retention. In contrast, community colleges, due to their open door policies, provide an academic home for students who might otherwise be unable to attend college. However, the community college classroom is a continuum of academic potential and problems requiring innovative teaching to bridge these divides. Storytelling is a teaching tool that I use to unmask social inequalities while helping students with different educational backgrounds understand and personalize the lessons that different anthropological writings strive to teach them. In this commentary, I share some of my own racialized and privileged experiences, the complexities of teaching and learning at a community college, and the experiences and voices of students engaging in their own knowledge building and storytelling.

Keywords: community colleges, storytelling, privilege

Every day I teach, my goal is to engage all of my students as critical thinkers that interrogate the role of education in their lives, but I often wonder whether my students understand the value of a good education. Do they simply hope to get a job, or are they hoping that their education will enrich their lives in other ways? In my classroom I ask students to evaluate why they are in college, why they are taking anthropology, and what they want to take away from the course. By integrating the writings of Paolo Freire (1970) and others into my teaching philosophy, I came to embrace a different model from the “traditional” lecture classroom I experienced as an undergraduate student. This model emphasizes the classroom as a place of dialogue, collaboration, and liberation through the use of innovative teaching tools, including storytelling.

Social reproduction theory suggests that education does not guarantee equal opportunity but instead schools are social structures that reproduce social inequalities (Street 2003; Collins 2009). Traditional classroom settings seem to alienate students of color and lower class students (Street 2003; Collins 2009). The contemporary multicultural classroom requires understanding the complex needs of the local student population. At Holyoke Community College, in Holyoke Massachusetts, I teach classrooms that are mixed both racially, mainly Puerto Rican and white, and economically, between students on government assistance and middle class students. Reaching across the economic and racial divide is both challenging and rewarding.

Over the years, I have found that innovative teaching is necessary to bridge these divides and must include self-reflection and multimedia resources that are both academic and popular to assist students in succeeding in the rapidly changing college classroom. Storytelling is a teaching tool that can meet these needs and help students engage the course material. I use storytelling to unmask social inequalities and help students with different educational backgrounds understand and personalize the lessons that different anthropological writings strive to teach them. Storytelling can reveal hierarchy that may otherwise seem invisible or hidden to some students.
In this commentary, I will share some of my own racialized and privileged experiences, the complexities of teaching and learning at a community college, and the experiences and voices of students engaging in their own knowledge building and storytelling.

From the very beginning of the semester, I use storytelling as a tool for student engagement by first telling my story—the story of my social identity, my dedication to learning and my desire for students to find their passion. I use my identity as a Latina, and more specifically a Puerto Rican, to connect with the students of my community college. Here I share my story, which is part poetry and part prose, in order to bring you into my multicultural classroom:

I am a Boricua, a light skinned, Spanglish speaking Latina from the island of Puerto Rico. My island of enchantment is more home to me than anywhere else; a place, a small house in San Sebastian de Pepino where my great grandmother once lived, the place she died. The house I visited, the constant in my life besides my parents and brother. This place is gone now, a building sold for little money because my parents could no longer keep it.

With this loss, who am I really?

Loss of family and loss of history equals a loss of self. How can I quantify for you the feeling of happiness in learning my cultural roots are mixed: indigenous, African and European? How can I explain the trauma I feel in knowing that our past injustices are replicated in our current social order? That what people see (in my white skin), what people hear (in my perfect English), and what people feel (about the Other) continues today. And yet, I continue to search for the truth of my story.

Tell me my history of the Borikén, Borinquen!

Speak through the silence, so that I may unearth my story. I know my history only through my own inquiries - through the political sounds of the Welfare Poets, whose music has connected me to a living part of my historical memory. Music that has moved me to connect to the truth about Puerto Rico’s fight for colonial independence, Filipberto y El Grito de Lares, a town so close to my own.

Siempre estaré contigo, mi bella isla.¹

Exposing my personal connections shows students that my classroom is a safe space for them to learn about who they are and engage in a serious educational journey. Students have told me that they feel more comfortable sharing their own stories after hearing their professor use personal examples from their own life. In fact, I tell them on the first day that learning is an active process and that you cannot wait for knowledge to be given. You must participate, inquire, dream, question. Education is not staring out a window hoping for class to end. It is not eased with less work and extra time to do it. Education is about inspiration, about challenging yourself, and about exceeding your limitations. This is why I teach. This is my passion.

This method of storytelling is critical to engaging community college students in the learning process because it allows students to create their own personal connection to the social inequities that they will study. In fact, storytelling allows students to frame their own

¹ “I will always be with you, my beautiful island.”
histories as part of a classroom narrative and recognize their college classroom as both a place of social advancement and a space where social hierarchies are reproduced.

The current push for public and private higher education to only accept “the brightest and most accomplished students” has created more exclusive institutions of higher learning. This race for “excellence” has created both social and economic barriers to college admissions and student retention (Roman 2007). In contrast, community colleges, due to their open door policies, provide an academic home for students who might otherwise be unable to attend college. My community college classroom is a continuum of academic potential and problems, including students with serious deficiencies in reading comprehension and writing ability, students with complex learning disabilities that are ill-managed, as well as students whose critical thinking skills surpass the college level material they are studying.

It is a challenge to teach a college-level course that meets the differing needs of students with such diverse educational backgrounds. Storytelling again is one way to address this challenge. I encourage students to read themselves into the material early on by creating a space for them to share their personal identity stories, whether verbally, through written prose or poetry, or even visually through film or photography. For example, in my experience marginalized students usually choose to highlight both how other people see them and how they see themselves with physical social identity markers like “black”, “female”, “young” as well as words that reflect unseen pieces of their personality like “creative”, “hard working” and “conflicted.” Interestingly enough, students from more privileged backgrounds tend to focus on their personalities, rarely acknowledging privilege or physical characteristics as markers for their identity. It is in conversation with their fellow students and myself that the more privileged students gain a level of self-awareness and the ability to see their social advantages. These stories, early on, provide students with a foundation from which to discuss the global world and social inequity.

Students often ask me how anthropology can make a difference in the world. I respond by explaining that anthropology allows one to see both the cultural similarities among geographically diverse groups, and the cultural diversity within demographically similar spaces. An anthropology course is, in fact, the perfect place to discuss difference and hierarchy. While anthropology suffers from its own disciplinary assumptions and norms, it can also provide students with access to a global perspective on the world, and allows students to reflect on what is deemed normal or deviant in their own time and place.

I find that students struggle to place me in comfortable racial, gender, class, and sexuality categories based upon my physical characteristics, even after hearing my heritage story that encompasses indigenous, black, and European roots. One student, after reading “White Privilege” by Peggy McIntosh (1988), asked me why I cared so much about privilege. My response was that as a woman of color who had experienced both racism and white privilege, these issues touch me deeply and inform all of my research and teaching. The student admitted she had been confused by my light skin, my “perfect” English and my seemingly contradictory claim to have had racialized experiences. These incidents of student confusion, frustration and mis-education about oppression and privilege are quite frequent, and require a degree of patience, creativity, and guidance from a professor. I ask students to question the status quo of social inequity and challenge them to become active participants in their communities because I believe that education can help to create a more socially just world.

When introducing students to concepts like oppression and privilege, it becomes critical to use multimedia resources, personal stories, current events and workshop activities in order to connect these larger concepts to the students’ own stories. I have found that students are better able to understand and grapple with the often controversial material when it is connected to their lives in innovative ways. One exercise I do in my Diversity course is an economic
privilege walk (Adams & Griffin 1997) that requires students to physically move forward (upward, hierarchically) or backward (downward) based on their social class and other identity markers. Students react to this exercise in a variety of ways – frustration, anger, disbelief, surprise. It is critical to debrief students about the exercise and to ask them to reflect on their feelings and then connect their experience to the local, national and global contexts discussed in the course readings. I have also found that this activity can engage students in a powerful discussion of education as a system of oppression or a place to gain social mobility.

Knowledge building is only the first step. I encourage my students to take what they have learned in the classroom and apply it to their everyday lives and careers. Students are often surprised that I regard them as conveyors of important and valuable knowledge as well as necessary contributors to dialogues on social issues. For example, one student, Eilianie Marie Alvelo, created a poem to describe herself to the class – performed for the class and in public spoken word venues across Western Massachusetts – here is a portion of the poem she has allowed me to share in this commentary:

I am a woman and I am in love
With every single cell of my self.
I am a proud "Borikua" and I don't fit
In the "cafre-mal hablá" label you/society/media call ghetto...

I am a dreamer and I am willing to work to the limits
Of my powers to make my dreams, my reality.
I am who I am wherever I go,
But, it is through my art that you'll get to know my soul.

I am...
Eilianie Marie Alvelo

As you can see, Eilianie, a young woman of Puerto Rican descent, chose to emphasize both her social markers and her personality traits. Her story highlights not only how she sees herself, but it also shows what she understands about how people impose social labels based on her physical markers. By telling her story, she shares her understanding of how American hierarchy and social pressures impact the individual and it serves as an entryway into a critical engagement with more theoretical course materials for both Eilianie and the classmates she shared her story with. Student stories, like Eilianie’s, show that knowledge production and critical thinking in the classroom is multi-dimensional.

Storytelling is a useful tool which creates opportunities for students to connect to course material in a personal and experiential way. I believe teaching and learning to be about “the practice of freedom”, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire 1970). This teaching technique, along with others, allows me to practice a cyclical, non-hierarchical pedagogy in which information and critical thinking flows in multiple directions, whether it is teacher to student, student to teacher, or student to student.

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Welcome to “Pine Tree Hall”:
An Ethnography of Caregiving for the Elderly in Beijing

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Abstract

Drawing upon ethnographic observations from Songtang Guanhuai Hospital, the first institution to offer hospice care in Beijing, China, this paper is an anthropological examination of caregiving for the elderly within a contemporary, urban Chinese context from the perspectives of patients and both professional and familial caregivers. Taking a phenomenological approach to anthropology, this article explores how Chinese individuals approach the illness experience, the aging process, and the end of life of elderly family members and patients, and aims to understand the particular Chinese cultural ideologies of caregiving for the elderly. By focusing on the notion of “sensibility,” or that which allows each individual to experience in her own way the challenges and realities of moral experience, I argue that not only is the practice of caregiving a fundamentally intersubjective process, but moreover that the experience of giving care in a Chinese setting is intersubjective in culturally specific ways. Through ethnography it is possible to examine how subjectivities are shaped and how intersubjectivity is experienced within the Chinese context. This article demonstrates how the active commitment to and the moral presence of caregiving emerges in the lives of Chinese individuals amidst the confusion, messiness, and deep uncertainty of the aging process and the end of life in China.

Keywords: Aging, caregiving, China

Introduction

The front gate of Songtang Hospital is bright red, daunting in its color of authority, but it opens easily and closes shut again behind me with that distinct creak and clang of old metal. I enter a stone-paved courtyard, surrounded by the inclined roof tiles, the dark grey walls, and the distinct curvature of ancient Chinese architecture. The red and blue paint on the wood pillars supporting the building appears even more intense and more vivid in the gleam of the morning sunlight. It is early morning, and elderly people are sitting in wheelchairs under a large tent, kept warm by the sun and cool by the soft, mid-June breeze.

When I walk through the front entrance, past the group of people watching the daily news on the television, I notice that there is a staff meeting taking place in the lobby. I stand to the side and watch, unnoticed. The staff are most easily identifiable by uniform. I count four or five doctors in white, ten or so nurses in white and blue, and fourteen young-looking nursing assistants in light pink. At the end of the meeting, everyone sings a song that celebrates giving love and care for the elderly, and then each goes her own way, criss-crossing paths with one another in the brisk and busy momentum of Monday morning. I walk up to the front desk and politely ask the woman at the desk to call Head Nurse Zhang who had previously agreed to show me around the hospital today. Hanging up quickly thereafter, she tells me to take a seat and wait, and then she goes back to chatting with the other staff.

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1 For consistency, I use the female pronoun throughout this article.

2 I have used pseudonyms for all the individuals featured in this article.
I pace slowly around the lobby and notice the collage of colorful pictures of elderly people printed on the walls. In these photos, they are smiling, shaking hands with foreign visitors, celebrating birthdays, and holding babies. The smiles in these images are meant to show the happiness and kindness of true guanhuai, or “care,” that is provided for the patients at Songtang. After peering at the pictures for as long as I can bear, I take a seat in a plastic chair near the front desk. At least twenty minutes pass and I wonder how long I will have to wait.

Just as I tell myself to stop glancing restlessly at the clock on the television screen, several doctors and nurses suddenly gather in the main lobby, surrounding a hospital bed. Crowding around the metal rails of the bed, the doctors and nurses speak with one another without showing any signs of distress or pressing urgency. Soon after, the bed is pushed gently to the side, next to one of the walls with the frozen smiling photographs. The staff depart in their own ways, a flurry of blue and white coats criss-crossing each other in all directions again. A stark image: a lone hospital bed against the grey wall, lit dimly in the flickering fluorescence of the lobby. From my seat, I can only see a pair of feet showing underneath a thin, white sheet. I wonder if this person is waiting to be taken to the emergency room or to the intensive care unit. In a few minutes, a man dressed in plain clothes comes and wheels the bed away and out of sight. The staff and the nurses at the front desk are chatting busily. “Who died?” one of them asks, and then the chattering goes on as they try to figure out who it was.

Background

An anthropological inquiry of caregiving at the end of life is the exploration of a universal experience that tells us something profound about what it means to be human—to alleviate suffering and to suffer, to be part of a terminal illness experience, and to discover meaning in the midst of uncertainty. This panhuman condition of giving and receiving care, at the same time, occurs in particular ways at the level of local experience. This article is a critical examination of the particularities of caregiving at the end of life in modern-day, urban China, through an ethnographic lens that looks into the “sensibilities” of distinct individuals involved in the process of caregiving. I define sensibility as the innate aspect of the individual that transforms sensory perceptions of the social world into a kind of experience that both “makes sense” and is imbued with meaning. In this understanding of the term, sensibility is neither the more cognitively based notion of “disposition,” nor is it the externalized sense of “personality”; rather, it constitutes a full, detailed, and intimately meaningful orientation to the world, and allows one to become more attuned and sensitive to the unpredictable phenomena of the world.

In China, caregivers and care receivers approach the practice of guanhuai through both an individual sensibility and a cultural sensibility that is unique to core Chinese values and meanings that have been shaped through historical and social processes. I argue that both these personal and cultural sensibilities interweave in particular ways that are crucial to how care is experienced practically, emotionally, and morally in the lives of various individuals involved in caregiving.

In 2011, as part of the ethnographic research I conducted for my senior thesis project in social anthropology, I had the opportunity to volunteer at Songtang Guanhuai Hospital every other day for four weeks over the course of two months. Songtang Hospital is the first institution of its kind in Beijing to provide hospice and palliative care for its patients. A typical, half-day visit to Songtang Hospital for me included ‘shadowing’ the head nurse on her daily duties throughout the hospital, interacting with staff and visiting family members, and sitting and speaking with elderly patients. Based on this work, in this article I explore the roles and experiences of professional and familial caregivers and elderly patients, as well as the

3 All conversations and interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese without the aid of a translator.
relationships between them, when illness and death occur not at home but in a social, medical institution.

Aging in China Today

The development of elderly and end-of-life care is a crucial concern for China today as it faces a large, rapidly aging population. The National Bureau of Statistics of China shows a population of 184 million that is aged 60 or older, making up 13.7 percent of the total population in mainland China, at the end of 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics 2011). This age cohort is expected to reach 248 million by 2020 (People’s Daily Online 2006), and over 30 percent of the population is projected to be aged 60 or older by 2050 (Banister et al. 2010:1). Furthermore, the 2010 national census shows a population of 19.6 million in Beijing (Xiong 2011), with more than two million aged 60 or older (People’s Daily Online 2006). The aging population in Chaoyang District, where Songtang Caregiving Hospital is located, comprises 17 percent of the city’s total aging population (People’s Daily Online 2006), or approximately 340,000 people aged 60 or older.

Given this very recent and necessary effort to improve the quality of life for the elderly in China, it is surprising to note the considerable absence of anthropological literature that delves into end-of-life caregiving in modern-day China through ethnographic research and writing. This paper aims to open a space for further social, and particularly medical, anthropological discourse on what is at stake in the lives of Chinese individuals at the interface between aging, illness, and caregiving.

Caregiving: An Anthropological Inquiry into Experience

A subdiscipline of social-cultural anthropology, medical anthropology engages with “many of the most vital issues that define what it means to be human” (Good et al. 2010:1), seeking ways to understand the particular modalities of illness, death, suffering, and healing for various groups of individuals situated in socially and culturally specific settings. One trajectory of inquiry within medical anthropology draws upon cultural phenomenology and focuses on embodied illness experience. Emerging from the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as the writings of John Dewey and William James, phenomenological anthropology is “the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011:88). Phenomenological anthropology shifts away from a “classical” analysis of political, kinship, and symbolic structures toward an understanding that “for the most part human beings live their lives independently of the intellectual schemes dreamed up in academe, and that the domain of knowledge is inseparable from the world in which people actually live and act” (Jackson 1996:4). This interpretive or “meaning-centered” approach to anthropology has explored an array of topics especially related to the concerns of medical anthropology that include embodiment and bodiliness, pain and suffering, illness and healing, sensory perception and experience, and subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Desjarlais and Throop 2011).

The notion of subjectivity can be understood as part of the transformative inner life of the person embedded in her social, cultural, historical, and political world that necessarily involves the subjectivities of others around her. Anthropologists Arthur Kleinman and Erin Fitz-Henry argue:

Experience is intersubjective inasmuch as it involves practices, negotiations, and contestations with others with whom we are connected. It is also the medium within which collective and subjective processes, fuse, enter into dialectical relationship, and mutually condition one another... Experience, then, has as much to do with collective realities as it does with individual translations and transformations of those
realities. It is always simultaneously social and subjective, collective, and individual (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007:53).

In this sense of intersubjectivity, experience is about engagement, through the making and remaking of values and meanings, and it becomes moral in its commitment of the self to others. Kleinman writes, “Moral experience is always about practical engagements in a particular local world” (1988:365). It is an uncertain and always shifting terrain on which we both carry out the practices of our daily lives and set out to share, negotiate, and interpret our relationships with others.

The moral experience of caregiving is a daily reality for many families. Caregiving is defined as the practical assistance of providing health or social care for others in need. It is also about concern, support, and presence. Caregiving is a moral commitment, inseparably tied to subjective, social, and cultural values, virtues, and meanings of illness and suffering. Feeding, dressing, changing diapers, toileting, washing, giving medicine, staying awake for whole nights—these are a few of the everyday activities of the caregiver. Being fully present, seeing another human being’s inability to move or to communicate, and experiencing for oneself the closeness of another’s cognitive or physical struggles, pain, and suffering—these are the moral realities in the act of giving care. Kleinman writes, “Caregiving is a practice of empathic imagination, responsibility, witnessing, and solidarity with those in great need” (2009:293).

In the commitment to care for another, the experience of caregiving is fundamentally intersubjective, necessarily going between caregiver and care receiver and having the potential to transform both their experiences. Being able to eat, to move, to relieve oneself, to feel less pain, to feel clean—these are some of the positive, practical realities for the individual receiving care. Feeling connected to another through conversation or physical touch, feeling respected and acknowledged—these are some of the ways in which caregiving morally and emotionally transforms the care receiver’s illness experience.

In China, it is generally considered the responsibility of the family to care for an elderly family member. The Confucian notion of family reverence and filial piety is one of the major traditional values in Chinese culture that holds together the family unit in providing care for an elder (Ikels 2004) and continues to play an important role in maintaining a moral standard for elderly care in China today, although it is expressed in different forms and modes that have resulted from the changing values and experiences of individuals living in modern-day Chinese society. In this ethnography, building upon a phenomenological framework of sensibility, I argue not only that the practice of caregiving is a crucial intersubjective process but also that the experience of giving care in a Chinese setting is intersubjective in specific cultural ways. Through an analysis of Chinese social and moral relationships, including notions of guanxi (“social relations”) and family reverence, it is possible to understand in greater depth the particularities of Chinese cultural ideologies of caregiving for the elderly.

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4 Much of the existing literature on caregiving for the elderly has taken a sociological and health policy-oriented approach that examines caregiving within changing demographic and health care contexts (Liu and Kendig 2000, Szinovacz and Davey 2008, Fleming and Hagan III 2010). More interpretive or meaning-centered studies have employed specific phenomenological research methods (van Manen 1990) to extract the clinical implications of caregiving in the practice of medicine and nursing (Connell 2003, Corker 2010). These research studies make significant contributions to the development of elderly care programs and policies in European, American, and East Asian health care systems. In this article, however, I take an anthropological approach, through the ethnographic interpretation of individual lives, in order to gain insight into the realities of caregiving in China.
Introduction to “Pine Tree Hall”: Life and Death in the Everlasting Home

In terms of its sheer sense of place, as well as its history and its approach to giving care, Songtang Hospital is unlike any other care facility I have ever visited. Upon first glance, it is the old, stone architecture of the building that is most striking. Then, as I walk through the front entrance and into the hospital, my senses struggle to adjust to the dimness of the hallways and the silence of these small rooms that house all together more than three hundred patients.

Founded as a private hospital in 1987 (though some sources say 1990), Songtang is the first end-of-life care institution in Beijing and has become well known for its holistic, patient-oriented care that attends to the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the individual. The character .song in Songtang is that for “pine tree,” signifying long life, and ．tang means “grand hall.” Together, the meaning of these two characters can be interpreted as “the everlasting home.” Located in east Beijing, the hospital provides care to patients of various health conditions and social backgrounds. Some are elderly patients with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, dementia, or cancer; others are in persistent vegetative states. Songtang also provides care for mental health patients who do not meet the strict criteria of mental health institutions, as well as infants who are born with severe disabilities. For some, Songtang is a nursing home (yanglaoyuan); for others, the hospital provides specific care at the end of life, including a vigil service for the actively dying and the deceased. Because the hospital is not government-sponsored and depends on private funding, Songtang is unsurprisingly short-staffed. In each rotation, there are five physicians, ten or so nurses, and fourteen nursing assistants. There is also one personal care attendant (often with very little training) per room, who feeds, washes, and monitors the patients around the clock and maintains the cleanliness of her assigned room.

Through a series of short vignettes based on my interactions with the staff, patients, and family members, my observations at Songtang set out to paint a portrait of the particularities of caregiving in the context of an atypical Chinese hospital as they are viewed from these distinct perspectives.

Nurse Zhang: The Charismatic Presence of Caregiving

Back in the main lobby, I am still waiting for Head Nurse Zhang. None of the staff at the desk seems surprised by the death this morning. I walk out toward the entrance where there is a large television blaring at full volume. Five or six elderly men sit motionlessly around the television in chairs and wheelchairs, watching the news. Some turn to glance at me, then wordlessly turn their attention back to the screen.

I wonder, is this how everyday life is lived among the elderly and the sick in a Chinese care facility? In her compassionate retelling of life at a Jewish Senior Center in America, Barbara Myerhoff (1994) contemplates the sense of invisibility felt by the elderly to the world around them and to themselves. She writes:

Some people in their midst seemed to fade away, as if the color had bled out of their countenance, leaving behind vague forms. These people no one spoke to, no one greeted or touched. Periodically, they came back to life, in a short, sharp outburst of singing, dancing, praying, fighting, or eating, emerging from behind a veil as fully realized presences. [Myerhoff 1994:143-144]

Myerhoff’s vivid and somber reflection of the loss of sentient life among the very elderly resonates with my own observations of many of the patients at Songtang Hospital. I learn quickly, however, that these contrasting moments between vague blankness and lively awakening often occur with a simple greeting, eye contact and a smile, a light touch of the hand.
—gestures we forget to make consciously in our lives that express the necessity of being present with others.

I meander back to the lobby in case I spot Nurse Zhang. A man dressed in plain clothes finally comes to get me, and I follow him to Nurse Zhang’s office. There are wheelchairs in the dark hallway, and we walk past a number of patient rooms that evoke the solemn and heavy feeling of an intensive care unit in their stillness and muted silence.

At the end of the hallway, we arrive not at Nurse Zhang’s office, as I had imagined, but rather at her living quarters—a cramped, concrete space no more than eighty square feet. Dim, small, and messy, filled with the smell of tobacco, this is a room filled to the brim with the presence of a person’s life. Dressed in a white uniform, Nurse Zhang is sitting on a low stool by the computer, smoking, and seeing me, she beckons me in.

Nurse Zhang is fifty-one years old. She is not a nurse, but the director of nurse management and administration at the hospital. She oversees the nurses, nursing assistants, and care attendants, and spends much of her time with the patients and their family members. For four weeks, she is my guide to Songtang Hospital. From day one, she shows me around the hospital, introducing me to the patients and the nurses as “a compassionate child from Canada.” She has worked at Songtang Hospital for nine years, having seen many of the administrative and structural changes the hospital has undergone throughout the years.

Raised by her nainai, or “grandmother,” Nurse Zhang has a special way with the elderly. “I loved my grandma more than anyone. I have a certain kind of yuan with elderly people,” she tells me. The word yuan signifies a notion of fate and connectedness that is tied to Chinese cosmology and Buddhism and poetically used only in the most meaningful circumstances.

Indeed, she is gifted with the elderly patients here. When they sit outside in a circle under the tent in the courtyard in the morning, Nurse Zhang sings and dances along to the music, jokes, and cheerfully addresses each elderly person individually. When she walks into a room, family members, care attendants, and patients alike greet her with pleasure and excitement. For the patients and their family members, whose faces light up with smiles when they see her, Nurse Zhang is the charismatic presence of a professional caregiver. With her sense of humor, straightforwardness, and distinctive low voice, Nurse Zhang’s presence is enlivening and reassuring to patients and family members. Her singing, dancing, bodily contact and gestures animate the hospital’s elderly patients who lie immobile in bed everyday, and offer through active presence and personal engagement the possibility of comfort, security, and hope to families and patients alike.

In comparison to familial caregiving, the practice of professional caregiving often appears to be removed at an emotional, and thus moral, distance. Professional caregivers, in a way, simply and inevitably seem to “care less.” Kleinman writes:

Professionals of all types simply do not have enough at stake in their relations with patients… to invest themselves into their caregiving practices. Moreover, institutional settings further limit the experience of professionals, impairing them from bringing the fullness of their presence into interactions with patients and families. [Kleinman 2010:19]

Nurse Zhang, however, as a professional caregiver in a demanding health care facility, has overcome these seemingly fundamental constraints in her own act of giving care to the patients at Songtang. Her prominent physical presence translates into the moral presence of caregiving for those whose chronic illness experience takes place not at home but in a hospital setting. By enacting the values according to which she is able to make meaning in her own life, Nurse Zhang’s sincere engagement with patients and family members is a moral commitment to recognize the illness experiences of those around her and their need for care.
“It is important to have someone do this kind of difficult job,” she says, acknowledging the challenging nature and the necessity of her position. Nurse Zhang has a professional commitment and moral obligation in her everyday work with the elderly, with those who suffer from long-term illness, and with those who are soon nearing death. Weaving between an individual sensibility that is shaped by personal history and a cultural sensibility that draws upon certain values and meanings, this sense of obligation comes from not only her personal background as a child raised by her grandmother, but also the deeply embedded Chinese tradition of filial piety in caring for one’s elders. Nurse Zhang takes on this practical and moral responsibility for the well-being of others in her role as a professional caregiver by being present in the lives of the patients, family members, and staff who depend on her, with whom she has created significant and meaningful interpersonal bonds. She appears strong, unwavering, authoritative, and faces the daily challenges that await her with an action-oriented, pragmatic sense of duty.

Her work is not without risk, however; there is much at stake for Nurse Zhang in her own health, happiness, and moral well-being. She tells me that sometimes she feels like “collapsing” (bengkui) under the pressure of the painful and difficult situations of patients’ illnesses, suffering, and deaths. With no vacation and very little opportunity to leave the hospital—though she sometimes schedules outdoor weekend trips with friends she made through online groups, showing me pictures and videos on her computer afterward—she wishes she could get away and take a real break. She looks overwhelmed by the immensity of her work when she says this.

Nurse Zhang’s professional responsibility to oversee the quality of life of the hundreds of patients in Songtang brings her close to the lived experience of illness and death. In her daily work, Nurse Zhang is exposed to the immediacy of others’ chronic pain and suffering, placing her in an “experience-near,” intersubjective space that inevitably shapes her personal process of making sense and meaning in life. At the same time that she confronts the solemnity and heaviness of the constant suffering around her, Nurse Zhang experiences moments of light-heartedness and laughter when she jokes with the other staff or when she checks in on patients and their visiting family members. Together, these moments of exhaustion and of joy and lightness in Nurse Zhang’s daily moral experience at Songtang demonstrate the emotional challenges and the ambivalence of caregiving that are not merely professionalized but part of the interpersonal act of giving care.

Carrying One’s Parents: Filial Children as Caregivers

One morning, Nurse Zhang shows me the second floor of the wing on the other side of the hospital building. We stop in every room, Nurse Zhang speaking loudly with her usual strong presence, charming the elderly patients and their family members. We enter one of the largest rooms, which has nine patients. The headboards of four and five narrow beds are stacked closely against each wall. This is a room of women, some quite young and immobile. Walking in, we are warmly greeted by a number of women—daughters feeding lunch to their mothers.

“Children bring their parents here when they themselves become ill or when they no longer have the means to take care of their parents,” Nurse Zhang explains to me. One of the daughters, she says with praise, comes to visit her mother every day, bringing her lunch and fanning away the summer heat, which will soon become intolerable with July’s arrival. “These are our filial sons and daughters,” Nurse Zhang says proudly, referring to those adult children who are committed to the care and well-being of their elderly parents, despite both the challenges they may face in the caregiving process and the concerns they may have in their own lives.
The word *xiao*, which means filial, is one that we hear and see in everyday Chinese life. The terms *xiaojing* (translated as “filial piety” or “family reverence”) and *xiaoshun* (translated as “filial obedience”) represent the virtue of ultimate humaneness toward one’s family in Confucian Chinese culture, which has deep reverence for others—practiced and cultivated with a sincerity and truthfulness of spirit—at the crux of its values for moral experience. The classic notion of filial piety emphasizes loyalty and compliance toward one’s family in both practice and in sentiment, denoting an active commitment to being present with one’s family. A filial child not only performs his obligations but also “finds pleasure in respecting” his parents (Rosemont Jr. and Ames 2009:112). In China, children have historically been socialized within the lived values of filial piety (Whyte 2004:106). Through a lifelong journey of learning and self-cultivation according to classical Confucian principles, the virtues of reverence, loyalty, and deference have become a core part of Chinese intersubjectivities in caregiving for the elderly.

Although it is a necessary responsibility that “should be done” (*yinggai zuode*) (Stafford 1995:82), filial piety is not easy to “carry on one’s shoulders.” At the level of language, the ambiguous modern-day interpretation of the Chinese character *xiao* reflects the ambivalence that exists in the practice of filial reverence in daily life amidst modern-day China’s changing moral landscape. The character is comprised of two separate radicals: “son” on the bottom and “elder” on top. In modern-day China, this character can be interpreted as “child lifting and carrying parent” or, in a more critical reading, as “parent weighing down child.” The modern-day ambivalence toward filial piety both as an uplifting responsibility and a burdensome duty indicates that filial piety can no longer be understood as a set of moral criteria fixed in traditional thought, but rather as malleable and shifting values that are “situationally dependent and shaped by local circumstances of history, economics, social organization, and demography and by personal circumstances of wealth, gender, and family configuration” (Ikels 2004:2). A deeper and more nuanced exploration of the role of filial piety in modern-day China entails a necessary consideration of the particularities of these locally contingent moral worlds at play in the interpersonal relationship between adult child and aging parent. Rather than approaching these long-established ethics—or “moral standards”—as ones that dictate and pre-determine categories of living life, I understand filial piety and family reverence as cultural inflections that enter the discourse and practice of daily life, through which values are identified and meaning is created in individual experience.

At Songtang, familial and professional caregiving intersect in the practice of filial piety toward the elderly. Traditionally, it is considered most filial for adult children to care for their parents at home. However, in modern-day, urban areas like Beijing, the decreasing availability of adult children to provide day-to-day care for their elderly parents due to economic, demographic, and social changes in recent years has led to residential care facilities becoming an increasingly viable—though not necessarily preferred—option for the elderly (Cheng et al. 2010:365). At Songtang, some children never come to see their parents, while others come every day with food and music. For some, Songtang becomes the “everlasting home,” a place where elderly parents feel safe, and their children feel assured about the quality of professional care that is being provided. Despite not providing care for their parents at home for individually specific reasons, these children are still able to act filially as caregivers. In the same way that Nurse Zhang embodies a physical and moral presence of caregiving, the physical proximity of family, especially children, is translated into an actively engaged, moral presence of care.

Making the commitment to care for one’s parents toward the end of life is a moral act that is inseparable from the role of *guanxi* (generally translated as “social relations” or “social networks”) in the formation and preservation of interpersonal relationships in Chinese society. Though used more often to signify interactions with specific social objectives, the word *guanxi*, in its most basic sense, can also be used to refer to a personal relationship between two
individuals. “How is her guanxi with her mother?” one could ask. Chinese sociologist Xiaotong Fei delineates the ties of guanxi as “both normatively defined and strictly personal” (1992:22). Interpersonal relationships in Chinese society are maintained by the fulfillment of personal obligations performed within an “explicit category of social relationship” (Fei 1922:22). Without this crucial interconnectedness between individuals in their moral obligations toward one another, “the entire social system collapses” (Fei 1922:24). This understanding of the term guanxi, localized from its social definition to its more fundamental meaning in the context of elderly caregiving and filial piety, emphasizes the specifically Chinese idea of maintaining interpersonal relationships as the fulfillment of obligatory social roles and, thus, the upholding of one’s social world. It provides a critical lens for understanding in more depth the kinds of bonds that extend beyond conventional kinship ties that are created and sustained in the intersubjective process of caregiving in China. In this final section, I present the ethnographic vignette of one patient in Songtang whose experience poignantly and remarkably illustrates the intersubjectivity of giving and receiving care through the expression of individual sensibility.

“Heart Condition” Laughter and Hope amidst Suffering

In the coming weeks, this large room of nine patients, Room 212, becomes the spirited, busy, often noisy, and unexpectedly light-hearted place in which I spend most of my days at Songtang. Nurse Zhang introduces me to Wang nainai, her neighbor Chen nainai, and Chen nainai’s daughters. By engaging in lively conversation with these women, I am exposed to the patient’s own moral experience within Songtang Hospital. By spending time with Wang nainai in particular, I witness how her individual sensibility allows her to endure her suffering and her aging process within a medical institution through the sustenance of relationships and the crucial presence with which she both experiences her own illness and remains connected to the world around her.

Wang was paralyzed after a spinal cord injury at the age of 18. Now 70 years old, she has spent almost exactly four years at Songtang. She is the most lucid, knowledgeable, and most delightful person to speak with in the entire hospital, according to the staff and family members who trickle in and out of the room. I quickly realize for myself this truth. Every time I visit, Wang welcomes me to sit at her bedside. We talk for one or two hours at a time, both of us asking questions about the other’s life. Her spinal cord injury damaged much of her body’s central nervous system, so that she is able to move only her arms but not bend her fingers. Unable to sweat, she finds the stifling, humid summer heat unbearable. She endures, however, with little complaint, dipping her hands into the lukewarm water of a yellow, plastic washbowl at her side, wetting her face and arms every few seconds.

In the bed next to Wang is Chen nainai, a frail, 96-year-old woman who is unable to move her legs after a bad fall. Every day, one of her four daughters comes to visit. I meet three of them on separate days; each has a distinct personality, a different way of caring for their mother, and a close relationship with Wang. Their mother has been at Songtang for exactly one year. Chen constantly murmurs to her daughters, never eating much and spending most of her time sleeping.

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5 In China today, it is common to use guanxi to refer to specific interactions with individuals of a certain status that work in one’s favor. For example, a sick individual may develop guanxi with a well-known doctor in order to get preferential treatment earlier in his illness. I use the word guanxi to refer more generally to the moral relationships between individuals, including family members.

6 Nainai signifies “grandmother” and is also used as a term of respect to address women who are two or more generations older than the speaker.
“When my brother died, that’s when my mother’s health took a turn for the worse. We tried to hire a caregiver at home for her, but it wasn’t working out, so we decided to put her in Songtang. None of us wants her here,” says Chen’s oldest daughter, a schoolteacher, sitting on a stool between her mother’s and Wang’s beds. “It is such a relief for all of us to know that our mother stays next to Wang, and it makes every visit so enjoyable when we can chat with Wang with such ease and comfort. We have become like family.” This affirmation not only expresses the reassurance Chen’s daughters feel about their elderly mother’s safety and comfort at Songtang in her physical closeness to Wang, but also illustrates the significant relationships, or guanxi, between Chen’s family and Wang that extend beyond what is generally understood as strictly kin relations.

Another day, I meet Chen’s youngest daughter. She has brought two bowls of porridge for the two old ladies to share. She tells me, “Despite Wang having been immobile for so many years, it does not seem at all like she is out of touch with reality or society. She is someone who is cultured. You can talk to her about anything, and she will offer an insightful and interesting opinion.” Indeed, Wang’s connectedness with people, as well as her optimism, her resilience, and her warm sense of humor, seems to be a natural part of her sensibility.

“I am lucky. People have always liked me,” Wang says modestly. Her friends tell her that she has renyuan, which means “fate or destiny to be connected with others.” High school classmates used to say that the teachers liked her the most. During her two-year recovery at the hospital following her injury, the nurses would stay after normal work hours to sing songs and read stories with her. Often, as I am sitting at her bedside, she receives a phone call on a cellphone her siblings bought her—usually from a friend asking how she is and when they can come visit. Here at Songtang, in the words of Nurse Zhang, the room’s personal care attendant, and the family members whose parents live in this room, Wang is well-liked and respected for her kindness and engagement with others.

At the same time, Wang does not disregard the realities of her own situation, nor does she ignore the limitations of available care at Songtang. She lives the moments of every day in this room, unable to move, with only a plastic washbowl to help cool herself down. She cannot go outside in the mornings to sit under the tent and enjoy the sunlight. She awakens and sleeps in the immediate closeness of the suffering of the eight other women in this room. In her bed, she lies between quiet, murmuring Chen and an elderly woman with advanced dementia. For years, she has witnessed the flux of old patients leaving and new patients entering this room—a rotation of sick bodies living their distinct illness experiences that is marked by the temporary emptiness of a bed and the changing of white sheets. These are intersubjective daily realities that can undoubtedly lead one to a psychological self-seclusion and withdrawal of engagement with others.

Yet, surrounded by this constant suffering of others around her, Wang’s xintai is good. Literally “the condition of her heart,” xintai signifies not only emotional well-being or a healthy mentality, but moreover an ethos—“the tone, character and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood… the picture they have of the way things in sheer reality are” (Geertz 1993:89). Wang’s xintai and her renyuan (“fate to be with others”) have facilitated her connectedness with others. In her interactions with Chen’s daughters, with Nurse Zhang, and with me, it is clear that Wang has a special ability to create and uphold social relationships with ease, sincerity, open-mindedness, and kindness. In the moral experience of her daily life at Songtang, Wang draws upon her sensibility to make and maintain guanxi, in terms of the relationships that extend beyond traditional kinship bonds, allowing her to be connected with others, remain present in her daily life, and retain a positive xintai amidst suffering and uncertainty despite her paralysis and her aging experience confined within Songtang Hospital.
Conclusion

At Songtang, these snippets of different lifeworlds are tied together—not neatly, not wholly, but connected nonetheless—by the act of giving care. Caregiving for the elderly and for those at the end of life is an intersubjective experience in its ability to have a positive social, physical, and moral impact on both the care receiver and the caregiver. For hospital staff, family members, and elderly patients all together in the midst of illness, suffering, and death, being sincerely connected with one another allows for true and full guanhuai, or care, to flow between these distinct individuals. Drawing upon specific Chinese notions of guanxi and filial piety, which are not limited to their delineation as philosophical traditions but very much suffuse and shape individual lived experience, it can be argued that the fundamentally intersubjective act of caregiving in China allows for the practice and process of creating and upholding not only interpersonal bonds but also a spirit of presence between caregiver and care receiver.

In the moral worlds of these distinct individuals—patient, professional caregiver, and familial caregiver—and their illness and caregiving experiences, the idea of sensibility, as the combination of that which is personal and that which is social, historical, and cultural, provides a crucial way for each individual to respond to the complex, delicate, demanding, emotionally fraught, and immediate conditions of illness and suffering. In other words, sensibility gives each of us individually what we need in order to tread the uncertain and potentially volatile terrain of moral experience, through which we are then able to reconfigure, repattern, reinterpret, and rediscover meaning in our experience.

Emerging from the expression of sensibility, furthermore, the notion of presence plays a necessary role in the relationship between caregiver and care receiver, which is fundamentally built on concern, support, comfort, and solidarity. Guided by this idea (and ideal) of presence, we are able to better understand what is most at stake for those who give, receive, and need care in China today.

At Songtang Hospital, Nurse Zhang is a figure of authority for the other hospital staff and a figure of reassurance and reaffirmation of care for the patients and their family members. Her charismatic presence as a professional caregiver who overcomes the “moral distance” in order to connect fully with her patients is critical to the hospital’s mission to provide holistic, patient-oriented care. The presence of familial caregiving is also integral to the giving of care at Songtang. In Room 212, the everyday presence of one of Chen’s four daughters upholds more than a cultural standard of filial piety; through the practice of everyday caregiving, this presence keeps alive the relationship between mother and daughter. Moreover, Wang, despite her physical condition, demonstrates the presence of the patient amidst her own illness, aging, and suffering. Unlike many of the other patients at Songtang, for whom, “without natural audiences to be witnesses for their life... the engagement with the present [is] often tenuous” (Myerhoff 1994:143), Wang remains present in her own life, through which she creates and sustains meaningful relationships with those around her. All together, these may only be rare instances of fully present caregiving in modern-day Chinese society, in which many lives are lived in the complete absence of guanhuai, but it is in these particularities that we begin to understand and grapple with the realities of those who share with one another the crucial experience of care.

Anthropologist Michael Jackson writes: “How the particular is related to the universal is one of the most ubiquitous and persistent questions in human life. The question is taken up in different ways in different social contexts and different discursive domains” (1998:2). An anthropological study of elderly and end-of-life caregiving is both the exploration of a universal human experience and an inquiry into particular forms, values, and meanings of care in a specific, historically contingent, social context. These ethnographic vignettes of individual and interrelated lives at Songtang Hospital offer glimpses into the subjectivities and moral realities of caregivers and care receivers and illustrate the ways in which illness, aging, and end-of-life
experiences are transformed by the visible and deeply felt presence of care. Informed by traditional notions of family reverence and interpersonal relationships, as well as shaped by the social realities of available caregiving for the elderly in modern-day, urban China, it is the coming together of active presence, sincere engagement, and moral commitment that gives the practice of caregiving its culturally meaningful Chinese sensibility and tells us something truly fundamental about the condition of being human amidst the confusion, messiness, and deep uncertainty at the end of life.

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The Veiled Periphery: Rural Kurdish Women in Turkey and the Taboo of Sexuality

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Abstract

Sexuality is the most salient taboo informing many practices in Cibo, a Kurdish village located in Erzurum, Turkey. In this article, I explore the manifestations, permutations, and ramifications of sexual shame through gendered practices. My analysis manifests the complex matrices of the deployment of the practices. That is, the modesty code based on sexual shame emerges at once as an index of traditional, ethnic (Turkish vs. Kurdish) and sectarian (Sunni vs. Alevi) identity, a religious observance, an instrument to attain honor and status, an assertion of morality and virtue, and lastly as resistance to Turkish hegemony and the perceived urban objectification of women. I explore the nuanced ways in which rural Kurdish women assert agency and resistance and in doing so I complicate stereotypic images of “subjugated” rural Kurdish women in Turkey. True to a feminist tradition, I locate the expressed problems of these women not in an abstract category of patriarchy, but in the intersectionality of class, ethnicity, state, and discursive Islamic tradition.

Keywords: modesty code, sexual shame, rural Kurdish women

Introduction

Rather than spending our honeymoon in a resort by the Mediterranean Sea, my husband and I decided to visit the village of Cibo in which he grew up near the city of Erzurum, Turkey. Nothing could have sounded more romantic than the image of a pristine village in the middle of a beautiful mountain range, the vision of pastoral life, the idea of organic food, and the image of contented and peaceful villagers happily welcoming us into their cozy cottages. However, once I arrived at this remote village, a deep sorrow immediately haunted me in reaction to the lower status of rural women. I also soon developed somatic reactions such as itchy sores all over my body, diarrhea, nausea, and a migraine. The “honeymoon” eventually ended with my hospitalization in the nearest city. I traveled to the village four more times after my honeymoon to visit my husband’s relatives. A year later I switched my academic field from English to Anthropology and, in the summer of 2010, I traveled to Cibo again to conduct ethnographic fieldwork on gender ideology in the village.

Cibo is a small Kurdish village in eastern Turkey, surrounded by the Erzurum mountain range. The climate is very harsh in the winter; the village remains under snow for six months. The village is connected to the city by 60-70 miles of unpaved gravel road. Transportation from the village happens once a day with an old minivan, if the weather permits. Unfortunately, the gravel road is closed most of the time during winters due to the excessive snowfall. The population is not more than 150 people. Although the majority of the population is Sunni Kurds, there is a small number of Alevi Kurds as well. They mainly speak Kurdish in the village; however, the younger generation can speak Turkish as they learn it at the elementary school. Villagers maintain a subsistence economy, primarily animal husbandry, and have little engagement with the broader cash economy. They sell one or two of their livestock once a year to buy themselves basic food products like flour, sugar, rice and also some animal feed. The livestock is all they have, and it can be easily observed that the entire life in the village revolves around the needs of the livestock. The gendered division of labor is designed accordingly.
Rural Kurdish women in Eastern Turkey are often stereotypically portrayed in Turkish mass media, such as TV series and films, and pictured in the urban Turkish public imagination as submissive, suppressed, and oppressed by a stern village patriarchy. On my first visit in 2004, as I encountered women who were constantly on the run to serve the men, I too erred in viewing women in Cibo as mere victims of their Kurdish patriarchal tradition. At the time I had neither a clear understanding of the Kurdish tradition (that I immediately labeled as patriarchal), nor a sense of the diversity of women’s experiences within that culture. I merely questioned why women in Cibo would live with this oppression with no apparent resistance. I had only one explanation: they must have been so ignorant and uneducated that they did not even realize their oppression. They could not have any agency in this culture, let alone autonomy. As a Turkish urbanite with training in feminist critical theory, I thought the oppressed Other could only be saved through assimilation, and it must be my task to “modernize” and “liberate” them. After I switched my academic field from English to Anthropology, I realized that I was the one who needed to be “liberated” from these preconceived ideas by critically and analytically unpacking the multiple layers of gendered practices.

In daily life in Cibo, one easily discerns many gendered practices like segregation, veiling, homosocial activities, and a sexual division of labor. When asked why they do these things, women say either that it is a sin not to, or that it is ayip. The word ayip in Turkish which is (eyb in Kurdish) means shame, disgrace, or socially inappropriate, and therefore refers directly
to the social norms; whereas “sin” (gune in Kurdish and gūnah in Turkish or haram in Arabic) is a religious term that is based in the Muslim sacred text.\(^1\)

Although most women reported to me that their gendered practices are either God’s will or simply the appropriate form of social conduct—both of which were self-explanatory for them, my observations indicated to me that a deeper structure, sexual shame, underlines the gendered practices in Cibo. Sexuality is the most salient taboo informing most practices in Cibo. In this article, I explore the manifestations, permutations, and ramifications of sexual shame through gendered practices.

**Manifestations of Sexual Shame**

The modesty code, perceived as means of attaining and maintaining honor for women (Abu-Lughod: 2000), largely depends on sexual shame embodied by women in Cibo. Women are careful not to acknowledge their sexuality in their daily lives, even in the domestic sphere. Since extended families live together, there is not much privacy in the domestic sphere unlike what one may find in an urban nuclear family. Thereby, Cibo women internalize their modesty code almost like a second nature which is gradually cultivated in themselves since childhood (Mahmood: 2001). It should be noted that women never use the word ‘sexuality’ or any related term while explaining their modesty code to me. They mostly use phrases like ‘marriage,’ or ‘being husband and wife,’ in order to convey their active sexuality. Pre-marital sex is not an option for any woman in Cibo. There are myths of such “unchaste” women being killed long ago by their fathers or relatives. The women are not necessarily worried about being killed, but they anticipate catastrophic social consequences, such as ostracism, should they engage in inappropriate sexual behavior. Sexuality is perceived as such a threat to society that they do not even talk about it in our interviews without using euphemisms\(^2\).

In Cibo, where social status is neither determined by blood, nor by wealth or power, the social reputation indexed by one’s honor becomes the marker of his standing within the community. The honor code is associated with morality and propriety. Social status is mainly determined by the degree of honor one has cultivated throughout his life. Since honor is not blood-based, it has to be achieved by observing the rules of the honor code. Honor emerges as the main social capital one can earn and maintain to solidify his good status within the community. They often say that one lives only for his honor. Keeping honor intact is a lifetime ongoing process.

The honor code and modesty code are interchangeably used in Cibo with the same term şeref. However, the ways women and men achieve şeref are different, as many traditional

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\(^1\) As women use these two words interchangeably, they do not necessarily distinguish between the will of God and of cultural tradition. My point is by no means to privilege a text-based orthodox or “mainstream” Islam over a local understanding and practice of Islam. Rather, since Islam as an analytical object of anthropology should be treated as a historically situated discursive tradition (Asad:1986), I eschew formulating a dichotomy between Cibo customary tradition and Islam, and I try to account for their interrelated and overlapping nature.

\(^2\) Lila Abu-Lughod (2000) analyzes the taboo of sexuality in the Awlad Ali Bedouin community in Egypt by situating sexual shame in their tribal patrilineal system, in which the bloodline mainly determines the honor of family. One’s “nobility of origin” is directly associated with his social status and moral qualities. Marriage is considered as a potential threat to the ideology of the agnatic affiliation. Hence, there is a constant “competing nature of sexual bonds and kinship bonds” (146). However, in Cibo, there is no hierarchical tribal system that values bloodline as such. While in Awlad Ali society a married woman is still considered to be a part of her natal kin, in Cibo she belongs to her husband’s family. Thereby, marriage and/or sexuality are not taboo due to a conflict within the social structure, as it is in Awlad Ali community.
practices are gendered. I will use the term modesty code when delineating the ways in which Cibo women attain and maintain şeref. The modesty code is mostly shaped by the taboo of sexuality. As such, sexuality becomes a great threat in sustaining honor. Women take every caution to deny their sexuality that is entrenched in the traditional gendered practices, which become more evident during marriage.

Marriage & Post-Marriage Rituals

During the marriage and post-marriage rituals in the Cibo community, it is possible to examine the sexuality taboo. Starting with the marriage arrangements before the wedding, the groom and bride are never brought together. The groom’s family visits the bride’s family without the groom to ask for her parent’s permission, and to negotiate the bride price. Upon mutual agreement, the groom’s family comes a second time with the engagement rings. The groom does not even join the engagement party. The villagers dance for a week at the bride’s house to celebrate the engagement. It is not socially acceptable for the fiancées to meet until the marriage. The potential for sexual attraction or interaction is avoided by preventing fiancées from meeting or highly policing their meetings. Sexuality is seen as a source for instability.

Once the wedding date is set, the groom’s family comes to fetch the bride from her parents’ house. Villagers celebrate and dance for two weeks in and around both houses. The bride’s family serves dinner to the entire village when the groom’s family comes to fetch the bride. The groom does not come to take his bride. He waits for her at his parents’ house. In most cases, the newlyweds are required to live with the groom’s family. If they are to live in a separate house, which rarely happens, the groom’s parents have to stay with them for at least one week.

Once the newlyweds go into the bridal chamber, they cannot step out for a week. It is highly inappropriate for them to be seen even by household members. They have to be very careful not to run into someone even when they need to use the bathroom. The strict avoidance of public, including immediate family, is not interpreted as a romantic escape, but as a requirement of sexual shame. The new couple is ashamed to face other people who evidently know that they have been consummating the marriage. One of my female interlocutors, who had been married for five months at that point, told me that it was not about the authenticity of a real feeling of shame; rather it is the display of shame, as faux as it might be, that matters the most. However, two other married women told me that they had indeed felt deeply ashamed when they left the bridal chamber thinking that everybody had known what they were doing in there.

Since premarital sex is a taboo, as is sex outside the controlled confines of marriage, the bride has to prove her virginity and chastity to the whole village by displaying the sheet that is stained with her virginity blood. Traditionally, she not only presents the sheet to the groom’s family, who will make a public announcement, but she also puts gifts in that sheet such as handmade socks, embroideries, and traditional headscarves for the groom’s family. As such, the virginity blood itself becomes the bride’s gift to the groom’s family, an essential part of her dowry. Her womanhood, and later her motherhood, becomes a property of the patriarchy of her husband. She is no longer considered to be a part of her natal family. She will not visit her family for some years to come. However, her family can visit her at her new home with the groom’s family. Her body and her labor are dedicated to the groom’s family who will protect and shelter her for the rest of her life.

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3 However, modern exceptions do exist; I found that some couples do meet a few times under the supervision of their families.
Female Voice

When the bride is brought to the groom’s house, the groom awaits her on top of the roof. He throws an apple onto her head. The bride is expected not to cry out but to prove her docility and submission to her husband with silence. Also, the voice of a woman, right after her marriage, is subjected to sexual shame, and should be hidden in public.

This taboo of voice of the bride continues after the nuptial night. The bride leaves the bridal chamber after a week with the lower half of her face veiled. From then on, she will remain veiled in this fashion for the rest of her life. She is not only required to veil in the presence of men, but also in the presence of elder women such as her mother-in-law. However, the brides do not simply cover their mouths with their headscarf, but also restrict their voices with this transition. They are literally muted in front of certain types of company for quite a long time. In my interviews, I could not find a consensus on the amount of time women had to restrict speaking. Some of them waited at least until they gave birth to their first child, while others avoided speaking in front of their elders for a lifetime. One of my interlocutors told me that she did not speak to her father-in-law, whom lived under the same roof, for eight years after the marriage. Since a woman’s voice should not be heard once she becomes sexually active, I suggest that the female voice indeed becomes an extension of female physical existence that should be covered as well. In other words, the voices of women become an indispensable part of their sexualized bodies. When sexuality undergoes a taboo, so does a woman’s voice.

One of my interlocutors, Ayfer, shared an experience that exemplifies the relationship between a sexually active woman’s voice and sexual shame in the modesty code. Ayfer used to cover her head loosely. She was dynamic, chatty and cheerful. By my fourth visit to the village in 2008, she had married. She came to visit me in the house I was staying in, along with other village women of varying ages. Her mouth was covered appropriately for a married woman. In contrast to my expectations, she neither revealed her face to me, nor talked to me. I asked her why she was behaving in such a way. She whispered to me that there was an elder woman present in the room. Another woman explained to me that it would be very ayib if she would talk or unveil her face. Ayfer did not eat anything or drink the tea I offered for the same reason. As I argued earlier, the rationale of ayib is directly linked to the public recognition of sexuality. Ayfer became sexually active only after marriage, and she was required to start acting according to the modesty code.

Generational Social Distance

My next encounter with Ayfer revealed another permutation of sexual shame manifested in generational interactions. In 2010, Ayfer welcomed me at the entrance of the village as I stepped out of the minibus. She now had an eight-month-old daughter sleeping in a stroller. When the driver started the engine, Ayfer became terrified. I told her to move her daughter’s stroller out of the way as it was evidently going to be hit. However, Ayfer was staring into the minibus speechless, her eyes wide open. I moved the stroller myself and saved the child. When I reproached her for her lack of action in the face of a potential fatality, she told me that her father-in-law was in the minibus, and could have seen her touching or tending to her child, which would be a great shame for her. I was told later by another woman named Zehra that even if a child falls into a fire, the mother cannot act to save her child, but desperately waits for the elders to notice and help the child.

Young parents, both father and mother, are not supposed to touch their children in front of elder men or women. As the children grow older, parents, especially mothers, do not claim

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4 All the names of my interlocutors are changed in the article.

5 ayb or ayip: disgrace, shame
them in front of the elders and act indifferent to their own children. This formality between children and their parents is very noticeable in everyday life. As a consequence, I observed that children are warmer to their grandparents and distanced with their own parents, who do not touch or even talk to them in the presence of elders. Since villagers maintain a communal life with the extended family, there do not appear to be many cases or moments of privacy available for parents to interact with their children.

They told me over and over again that it was highly inappropriate and ayib to show affection to one's own child in front of the elders. They also frequently used the word hurmet, which means respect, for the elders in this incident of generational distance. I further suggest that the taboo of sexuality also informs this social distance between the parents and their children. That is, children are seen by default as the embodiment of their parent's sexuality. Since they are byproducts of sexuality, they evince the active sexuality of the parents. Besides, as suggested earlier, the body of the woman and thereby her uterus are considered to be the property of the patriarchy. Children are thus seen as belonging to the elder patriarchy of the father. They are also visible evidence of sexual contact.

Labor & Delivery

The taboo of sexuality is also manifested in child-birth. In Cibo, women give birth in the village with the assistance of an elder woman. They do not even think about going to hospitals for the labor and delivery. I asked 50 year-old Sukran the reason they resisted professional help in a medical facility. Her response was poignant:

“When my contractions started for my second child, my mother-in-law's friends were present in the room. They were chatting without noticing that I was in labor. I did not say anything, or moan a bit. I waited for a long time for them to leave. Eventually they left, and I told my mother-in-law that I was about to give birth. She took me to Emos6. I gave birth in half an hour. When the visitors heard what happened right after they left, they said that it was impossible and that I was totally fine with no sign of labor. See, Feyza, that is the way we act. It is ayib to show your labor pain even to elder women, let alone men. I could have never ask my husband to take me to a hospital, as it was out of question for him to let his father know that the baby was due. It is very ayib to go to a hospital. Everybody would hear that. You must be discreet.”

As Sukran describes it, she felt shame in declaring that she was in labor. Interestingly, even the labor pain of women is sexualized and thereby subjected to the modesty code.

People do not display the newborn to outsiders for at least forty days. Ayfer told me that she felt embarrassed to display the baby, the fruit of her sexuality, out of sexual shame. Hence, the baby is symbolically veiled or hidden to cover the sexual shame of the parents. I further argue that, being born through women's vagina, newborns are also treated as an extension of women's sexualized body.

Melike, who was six months pregnant, informed me that she would not show her baby to people for the protection of the baby. I first assumed that she was talking about potential health

6 She is the eldest women who attended all the deliveries in the village although not a certified midwife.
issues related to contamination. She, however, was afraid of the “evil eye” which would cause harm to baby. I asked her how the child was protected from the evil eye after forty days. She said: “Well, there is no special protection when the infant becomes forty days old. I actually think that the babies look even much cuter after the first month, and thereby more vulnerable to the evil eye. But, I don’t know why, we just keep the infant out of public for forty days. It is for her/his good.” In light of the inconsistency of local explanations, I argue the structure of the tradition has a base in the sexuality taboo.

**Female Dress Code**

The modesty code of sexual shame requires hiding eating, sexuality, one’s voice, one’s interaction with one’s children and one’s body. The practice of veiling is particularly significant in covering sexual shame. Lila Abu Lughod has argued that veiling “indicates a woman’s recognition of sexuality’s place in the social system and her wish to distance herself from it” (2000, 162). Veiling among women is the most visibly embodied expression of sexual shame in Cibo. It is considered a prerequisite for a woman to cover her sexualized body and thereby assert her virtue and morality. Since sexual activity begins with marriage, the practice of veiling gains more significance after marriage.

Rural women in Cibo cover their heads with the traditional hijab which they call çit or yemeni. It is a thin square piece of cotton cloth that comes in every pattern and color. What distinguishes them is the handmade embroidery edging or lacework oya. Women wear them so the oya is displayed on their foreheads. Girls start to veil around the age of ten. Unmarried girls loosely cover their hair with a yemeni. They do not necessarily cover their face or neck. Not sexually active yet, they are not required to strictly cover sexual shame. On the other hand, married women tightly secure their yemenis to cover not only their hair, but also their mouth and neck. The transition of the woman’s status through marriage is indexed by the dress code. The veiling style differentiates the virgin from the married.7

Rather than invoking the culture, they typically referred to religion to justify the underlying reason of veiling. Most women told me that they veil because it is prescribed by God. They veil the way they do because “it is sin not to.” The word they used was always “sin” (gune) rather than “ayib.” Most of my married female interlocutors strongly emphasized piety as the main reason of their veiling. For instance, forty-five-year-old Gülten, who had been married for twenty years and had five children, told me earnestly that she veiled for religious reasons:

Gülten: I veil and cover my mouth because it is a sin not to.
Feyza: So, do you consider yourself to be a conservative Muslim?
Gülten: Of course. I have always veiled like this.
Feyza: Do you also pray five times a day?
Gülten: No, I do not know how to pray.
Feyza: Do you occasionally read the Quran?
Gülten: No, I have never read it. I do not know how to read Arabic.
Feyza: Do you recite prayers like al-Fatiha?
Gülten: I have not memorized any prayers. I do not know how to recite them.
Feyza: Do you fast during Ramadan?
Gülten: Of course, I do. We all do. Those Alevi don’t observe it, though.

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7 Similarly, in Awlad Ali society women put on a red belt and a black headcloth after marriage to signify the transition (Abu-Lughod: 2000).
Some women like Gülten do not fully observe mainstream Islamic principles such as the prayer. However, they make statements indicating that it is a grave sin to reveal your face to other men. The religious term “gune” is used instead of traditional term “ayib” in these interviews. Accordingly, although some women may not comply with what is known as the essential pillars of Islam like the requisite daily five prayers, they nonetheless veil conservatively out of their local understanding of piety. At least for some women in Cibo, the practice of veiling is an obligation of Islam, one of the components of piety and a sign of devotion to God.

I inquired about the difference between religion and tradition perceived by these Cibo women. Most of the women believe that their traditional modesty code is prescribed by their religion in the first place, and therefore see no difference between the two. For those women who strongly emphasize their piety as the reason of their veiling the practice at once becomes a way to index and cultivate their piety. However, I argue that the inner working of this piety is still based on sexual shame. In other words, I suggest that whether it is believed to be prescribed by God or the patriarchal tradition, women in Cibo feel a great need to cover their sexual shame out of the prominent taboo of sexuality.

Agency of Sexual Shame

Saba Mahmood, in her study of Egyptian women who participated in the mosque movement, argues that women exhibit agency by achieving a pious selfhood, as a result of “struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement” (2001, 214). I suggest that women in Cibo also assert agency by willingly observing the modesty code of sexual shame. However, what Abu Lughod calls “voluntary deference” is a complicated case of agency, given the scarcity of the women’s options. The ramifications of disobedience should also be acknowledged. Yet, women
in Cibo overtly reveal their agency in some cases, especially when they act as the gatekeepers of their tradition in the face of Turkish hegemony.

Identity and Sexual Shame

As mentioned earlier, acting modestly involves avoiding meeting needs and desires such as eating, drinking, smoking and so forth in the presence of certain company. For instance, women never eat together with men at the same table in Cibo. In my first visit to the village, being unaware of this taboo, I sat together with the men when it was announced that dinner was ready. After a disturbing silence, which made me realize the implications of my action, they had to invite their wives to accompany me at the dinner table. First I felt accomplished, as I thought I had liberated women from a taboo. However, my feeling of triumph of breaking through the gender barriers for women suddenly vanished when the eldest woman Elmas uttered in disappointment that, “we are passing for Turkish for the first time after all those years.”

Kurdish villagers in Cibo do not uphold what they consider to be “Turkish” tradition. Hence, what I presupposed as a Kurdish form of female subordination, namely gender segregation, was also a source of ethnic pride for Cibo women. The fact that they willingly observe their customs such as the modesty code, serves to preserve their collective identity. As
such, it serves as a form of resistance against the hegemony of mainstream Turkish culture. Rather than signaling lack of agency, the women’s observation of the modesty code marks their agency and resistance, which should be translated as their “capacity to action” (Mahmood 210). In other words, the performances of women in Cibo, which consists of a customary conduct of behavior and dress, index their agency to maintain their traditional identity.

It should also be noted that in her ethnography on Egyptian women, Mahmood delineates specific actions that “cultivate” rather than “express” a preexisting self (2010). Mahmood is interested in the link between agency and practices like veiling. She explains how “moral virtues are acquired through a coordination of outward behavior with inward dispositions” (2010: 215). However, in Cibo, not all the women are necessarily worried about such a “program of self-cultivation” (2010: 210). Rather, they take the modesty code as an ideal and indispensable part of their culture. Thereby, they often embody it as an expression of their collective identity. This emerges as a socio-historical response to the hegemonic discourse of Turkish nationalism. In other words, women’s embodiment of the modesty code is a public manifestation of traditional values. As such, it is a means to recuperate a marginalized identity.

**Morality and Sexual Shame**

Elmas’ despair in passing for Turkish was an indication of the loss of not only identity, but also morality. “Turkish culture” has negative connotations because of its perceived treatment of women. Based on their imagining of the lifestyle of a Western Turkish woman, many believe that all Turkish people essentially lack morality and Islamic ethics. In one of my conversations with Elmas, she conveyed to me her feeling that Turkish women had no sexual shame:

> “Turkish people are Westernized, and corrupted. They live like gavurs. They are not afraid of God. They live in sin. Women do not have any shame. They freely mingle with men, even the married ones. They eat at the same table with men. They do not respect their elders. Turkish culture is full of levity, impudence, immorality, and corruption.”

People in Cibo perceive a strict dichotomy between Turkish and Kurdish cultures. They do not acknowledge the diversity that exists within each ethnicity, and that for instance, not all Kurdish

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8 Though it is out of scope of this paper, the backdrop of this Kurdish resistance against Turkish hegemony, which is related to a very long history of ethnic inequality, discrimination, violence, and social insurrection should be mentioned briefly here. It is important to mark its beginning with the construction of Turkish nationalism in 1920s which “aimed to create an ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous nation and nation-state out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, which was a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural entity” (Yuksel 777). In other words, the new monolithic national identity was created “either by suppressing or by ignoring the multiple identities that came to be imprisoned in the periphery” (Kadioglu 191-2). Thereby, rural Kurds were subject to the agenda of the modernization/Westernization project and considered backward and largely unassimilatable due to their rural customary ways of life.

9 Gavur: infidel (in a condescending and condemning tone).

10 Moments like this were a bit awkward for me as a Turkish woman listening to these assumptions on Turkish people. At first I used to get a little offended thinking that they were directing these thoughts to me. Later, I came to understand that because of my husband I was mostly being considered as one of “them.” However, being an insider or outsider was a gray area, and always shifting and contingent upon the context or situation.
people observe the modesty code and not all Turkish people live a Westernized life style. Nevertheless, Cibo residents like Elmas conform to the regulations of the socially constructed modesty code in order to attain and maintain certain valued characteristics of their tradition.

This embodiment of tradition is further reinforced in the context of the Turkish city. Veiling becomes instrumental for women in Cibo to access public spaces in the city. Women in Cibo are not allowed to travel alone. They do not leave the village to venture in the city on their own. They must be accompanied by a male relative. Furthermore, they also need to veil by adopting çarşaf, which literally means ‘sheet’ or ‘linen’ in Turkish. It is a black garment that covers women from head to toe, revealing only their eyes and forehead. Women do not normally wear çarşaf in their daily lives, but only adopt it when they leave the village as an extra layer of covering.

The women believe that çarşaf not only functions to demonstrate their traditional identity outside the village, but also protects them from any potential sexual or verbal abuse. Villagers from Cibo perceive the city as a potentially dangerous area, especially for women, primarily because of assumed Turkish lack of sexual shame. As such, wearing çarşaf in the city emerges as a response to the perceived objectification of women, which, according to people from Cibo, is particular to urban Turkish culture. Through a demarcation of the modesty code as a distinct Kurdish custom, compliance with traditional Cibo dress asserts their membership in the community. As such, they think that their strict modesty code distinguishes them from their Turkish counterparts and asserts their moral superiority over the urban Turkish community.

Ramifications of Sexual Shame

In the previous section, I have discussed Cibo women’s “voluntary deference” to the modesty code. Here, I would like to analyze the potentially unpleasant outcomes of when women observe and do not observe the modesty code of sexual shame.

Reinforcement

In this small society in this little village, people know one another very well. Despite the apparent solidarity among them, there is an unspoken competition, if not an implicit enmity. Gossip is the main social tool to distribute the news about a slight of inappropriate behavior. In order not to be targeted by gossip, people in Cibo, both men and women, are extremely cautious not to deviate in any way from the honor and modesty code. Nonetheless, there are often unavoidable comments made by people about the probability of a misdemeanor in his neighbor’s behavior. There is a constant feeling of being watched in the village because of the social policing that occurs. In the given circumstances, women, as “natural sexual beings,” are more vulnerable for targeting, and are therefore more conscious about observing the modesty code of sexual shame. The fear of ostracism and exclusion is a binding reinforcement, because it will affect the whole family rather than a single individual. I first struggled to understand the harshness of punishment and stigma attached to a simple bit of gossip or a minor misconduct. Saliha told me that it was because of the harm and taint to the family’s name and honor: “Honor is everything we have. We cannot afford to lose it.” It became clear to me that honor is, in Bourdieu’s terms, the main ‘social capital’ and it was essential for survival in this social ‘market.’ Accordingly, honor is the only prestige and worth that a woman can own, and it can be attained through compliance with the modesty code of shame.
Secondly, domestic violence is an undeniable social fact even though it is no longer as rampant as it used to be. Every women I interviewed around or over the age of 40 reported to me her personal story of domestic violence in the early years of their marriage. Elmas, who was an ardent gatekeeper of her tradition, said to me: “I never loved that man [her husband] even one day in my life.” Surprised by her statement, I asked why. She said:

“I remember. I married when I was 14. I had my first child at 15. I started to live with his family of course. It was a tiny house. We were living not only with his parents, but also with his elder brother and his family. She was so jealous of me, his wife. She always found something to complain about me. Each time, my husband beat me, beat me and beat me. It was not important if she was telling the truth. Whenever he was challenged by someone for not keeping his woman in her place, he had to beat me in front of others. But I did not care. I hated him because he was so harsh to my daughters. One day, our neighbor showed up at the door and said that my daughter had passed through his grazing land while she was shepherding the herd. I tried to stop him, my husband. But he went up to the hills, dragged my daughter down the village pulling her hair and beating her madly. Everybody was watching and nodding in agreement. She had to be taught a lesson people thought. She passed out, and I was worried that she was dead. She was not Alhamdulillah, but you see, I don’t forgive him for beating my daughters.”

This poignant narrative exemplifies the severity of the abuse a woman would receive if not in compliance with the appropriate social conduct. In another interview with an elder woman, she
justified the domestic violence as a pedagogical method to teach the essential tenets of the 
honor code which would eventually serve the beaten woman’s prosperity and wellbeing in the 
long run. Domestic violence used to be the way of constructing and asserting one’s masculinity 
in the public realm. Younger women said that physical violence is not common anymore in Cibo, 
but it has not completely vanished. It could still be used as a means to reinforce the honor and 
modesty code. I met Elmas in summer 2012 again and found out that her husband died six 
months earlier. To my surprise, she was devastated from losing her partner. She was blaming 
herself for her misdeeds towards him. She said with tears in her eyes: “I wish I could have been 
a better wife. I mistreated him. I should have been more compassionate and caring and loving.” 
It turned out that Elmas did love her husband after all. She might have come to terms with the 
social functionality of domestic violence, as she said “He loved us so much. He was a great 
father.” In other words, it was not a personal fault that men mistreated their wives and 
daughters. Rather, it was one of the ways to uphold the honor code which was the greatest 
social capital.

Discrimination

Observing the modesty code of sexual shame also might have negative outcomes for 
women in Cibo. I observed that many Turkish urban residents including state officials, medical 
and education staff appear to be prejudiced against these Kurdish rural people, internalizing the 
prevalent stereotypical images of Kurdish peasantry. The most conspicuous index of women 
from Cibo’s rural identity is their peculiar practice of veiling. I observed that, as long as they 
remain in their own rural context, women from Cibo’s “traditional” veiling is not only tolerated by 
the urbanites, but also treated as an authentic indigenous custom that should be preserved, 
albeit in the local context. However, once these women transgress the boundaries of the rural 
into the realm of the urban, their veiling is promptly transformed into an emblem of contested 
ideology. The Kurdish peasant women’s veiling in the Turkish city is seen as a sign of ignorance 
and backwardness that threatens the modernist ideals of the Turkish state. Accordingly, women 
from Cibo, whose “traditional veiling” is perceived as incompatible with the “modern” urban 
setting, are not welcomed graciously in the city of Erzurum by the urbanites.

The discrimination resulting from veiling became apparent to me on my third visit to the 
village in 2006, when I was five months pregnant. Unfortunately, I suffered from food poisoning 
and was hospitalized in Erzurum. I happened to be dressed like a woman from Cibo in her rural 
environment, with a traditional *yemeni* covering my head. The treatment I received was 
traumatizing. After listening to my symptoms without even looking at my face, the female doctor 
talked to me in a condescending manner. She said indifferently: “Lie down by the ultrasound 
machine, and let me see if the baby is still alive in your uterus.” After asserting that the baby 
was alive, she told me to wait outside without explaining anything else. A couple of minutes 
later, I was told by a janitor to follow her upstairs.

In short, the doctor without troubling herself to explain anything to me, had ordered me 
to be hospitalized for a day to receive an IV treatment. When I saw her four hours later in a 
follow-up, I told her that I was not a local woman, but that I was a graduate student in the US. 
Her attitude towards me changed at once, and she began treating me more respectfully. She 
explained to me her diagnosis and treatment. She apologized for her previous demeanor which 
was based on her assumption that I was a peasant woman because of the *yemeni* I was 
wearing. She said that she was sorry for those rural women who did not care about birth control 
and kept having children despite their miserable living conditions. Evidently, the prejudiced 
assumptions surrounding rural women go beyond their practice of veiling, and need to be further 
investigated. This experience hinted to me the ways in which rural women are treated in the city.
Conclusion

I critically observed that the gendered practices in Cibo are informed by a distinctive modesty code that is founded on sexual shame. My analysis of the gendered practices also manifests the complex matrices of the deployment of the practices. That is, the modesty code in Cibo emerges at once as an index of traditional, ethnic (Turkish vs. Kurdish) and sectarian (Sunni vs. Alevi) identity, a religious observance, an instrument to attain honor and status, an assertion of morality and virtue, and lastly as a resistance to Turkish hegemony and the perceived urban objectification of women. My analysis is informed mostly by postmodern feminist theory with its acceptance of multiple truths (Foucault: 1978, 1983, Butler: 1990, 1993, Scott: 1991). As such, in the course of my fieldwork I started to discern the nuanced ways in which rural Kurdish women assert agency and resistance without necessarily revolting against their patriarchal culture. I complicated the stereotypic images of “subjugated” rural Kurdish women in Turkey.

My study, employing a cultural relativist analysis, destabilizes universal concepts of agency, resistance, and gender oppression. I have shown that women in Cibo intentionally internalize the modesty code as a means to preserve their honor and social status. They do not embody sexual shame as a sign of oppression imposed by men; rather, it functions as a sign of integrity, virtue, and dignity. In other words, the modesty code, which requires “masking,” “formality,” “self-effacement,” and occasionally “complete avoidance,” is a central part of their identity and way of life (Abu Lughod 2000: 116).

When I spoke to Ayfer in my last visit to the village in the summer of 2012, she told me that she had finally spoken in front of her father-in-law after eight years of marriage. When I asked her how it felt, assuming that it must have been an exciting breakthrough, she responded: “I don’t know, nothing much changed in my life, it wasn’t a big deal after all.” Like many other gendered practices, most women in Cibo do not resent the voluntary silence of women.

Through a direct examination of the everyday lives of the women in Cibo and a thorough exploration of their desires and motivations, I tried to acknowledge as many factors as possible that may lie beneath their practices, and to understand the meaning of their practices within context. I have critically observed that in order to understand the status of Kurdish rural women, one must have an accurate understanding of the multiple, and even contradictory discourses, that simultaneously inform the women’s situation. Since “power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegaliterian and mobile relations,” pointing to a single discourse to explain these women’s “victimization” fails to account for the complexity of their experience, and their knotty situation that is socio-historically situated (Foucault 1978: 94). True to the feminist tradition, I locate the expressed problems of the women not in an abstract category of patriarchy, but in the intersectionality of class, ethnicity, state, and discursive Islamic tradition.

Any situated knowledge is constructed by a situated knower, so the researcher should transparently situate herself in her research. Sandra Harding, one of the leading figures of standpoint feminist epistemology, argues that there is an obligation of reflexivity in feminist research so that “the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests” (Harding 1987: 9). Similarly, I acknowledge that my positionality undoubtedly informed my research questions and analysis of the collected data. However, it should be noted that we have multiple identities which may sometimes contradict one another. Hence, in this study, not only the sociopolitical context of Turkey, but also my own positionality as a veiled Muslim feminist Turkish scholar is not fixed, but fluid and shifting. I was undeniably perceived as an outsider, belonging to a different ethnicity, culture, class, ideology, and discourse. It was an unspoken gap between us that was not easy to bridge, and I cannot claim that I have completely achieved such a connection. I do not also claim that my work is “the” truth of the...
Cibo culture and practices; rather, it is an informed interpretation of the interpretations of the local people (Geertz: 1973).

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Inside Occupy Ohio State University (OSU): Values, Media, and the Role of Public Universities in the Occupy Movement

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Abstract

During 2011, a group of activists established an Occupy group at The Ohio State University in solidarity with the global movement. Although Occupy Wall Street has been analyzed by many social scientists, its influence on campuses has not been as critically examined. The purpose of this study is to examine how the ideals and tactics of the Occupy movement have impacted student activism. Methods include semi-structured interviews with members of Occupy OSU and participant-observation, which involved attending Occupy OSU events. Interlocutors include students, one faculty member, and community activists from Columbus, Ohio. By examining the impact of the Occupy movement on The Ohio State University’s campus, this study provides an analysis of the effects of social movements on a university community. Observations during meetings, events, and in casual settings uncover a value system which governs Occupy OSU and illustrates how activists use resources and experiment in direct democracy. In this article, I argue that Occupy Wall Street empowered student activists by providing them with some of the tools, networking opportunities, and motivation for a new student movement.

Keywords: Social movement, Occupy, student movement

Introduction

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the rhetoric and tactics of Occupy Wall Street, the movement’s democratic significance cannot be denied. In order to understand youth and university approaches to the OWS movement, I have carried out a case study of Occupy OSU as a subculture with a distinct value system and institutions that reflect those values. I also discuss digital and linguistic communication, which forms an integral part of any social movement, and artistic symbolism particular to Occupy. After an examination of Occupy OSU, its culture, and its actions, I examine the movement’s impact on its members and its influence in creating a new student movement focused on democratizing university institutions and easing the increasing burden of student debt.

Situating Occupy Ohio State

While this study focuses mainly on the organization of Occupy Ohio State (otherwise referred to as Occupy the Oval or Occupy OSU), the global environment in which the movement is situated must be briefly examined to gain greater insight into local offshoots of the Occupy movement.

Occupy Wall Street arose as part of a long-term progressive movement to address systemic economic inequality, but it was a more direct reaction to the recession that began in 2008 and, in public opinion, showed few signs of abating.1 Specifically, many people were angry that bankers had engaged in high-risk behavior (compared to gambling by Comaroff and Comaroff 2011) without legal consequences. Meanwhile, over the course of the summer of 2011, Congress and the President battled over how to control the nation’s ever-increasing debt.

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and Tea Party conservatives protested taxes and fiscal irresponsibility. Additionally, foreign popular uprisings sent shockwaves across the world. Citizens of various Arab nations, as well as Spain, Greece, and other nations poured into the streets to demand democracy and social justice (Cottle 2011; Agrama 2012).

In the United States, residents of individual states were waging their own battles over democratic principles (Collins 2012). In Ohio, an informal coalition of labor activists, public employees, Democrats, students, and moderate Republicans formed to challenge the policies of the new state government. This coalition provided common ground for new activists, some of whom became involved in Occupy groups. Finally, the specific environment of The Ohio State University adds an important dimension to this case study. As one of the largest universities in America, The Ohio State University is a complex organization. The university must be responsive to the needs of its students in order to survive and maintain order, but concern has grown over the increasing privatization of the university as it sells off assets (Bradley 2012) and partners in research with private companies. Although a majority of students are politically apathetic, various self-proclaimed “progressive” groups on campus lead campaigns for environmental, women’s, and workers’ rights.

In October 2011, as hundreds of cities initiated local Occupy groups, confidence in the nascent movement grew and Occupy came to Columbus, Ohio, where a diverse collection of individuals assembled in front of the statehouse to talk politics, share their stories, and raise awareness through signs and chants. Then, on October 24, a group of about two hundred fifty OSU students, faculty, and community members held an event in solidarity with the Occupy movement. University issues joined general demand for economic equality, as demonstrated by a huge sheet of paper on which students wrote messages to the OSU administration about rising tuition costs and the university’s plans to privatize parking and sign an exclusive merchandising contract with a reportedly unethical brand.

After five hours of events on campus at OSU, a few students led a march to the Columbus City Council. For many non-activists who had attended Occupy the Oval, the

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2 We Are Ohio, an organization designed for this purpose, mobilized such groups to effectively repeal Senate Bill 5, which would have restricted collective bargaining rights for public employees. Since that success, We Are Ohio has been less publicly prominent, but it continues to oppose new voter registration restrictions and efforts to make Ohio a “right to work” state.


4 Of particular concern to student activists has been the looming prospect of Ohio’s public land, including Ohio public universities, being opened up to hydraulic fracturing.

5 OSU Free the Planet sent several student activists to Washington, D.C. to protest the Keystone XL pipeline, and OSU Students Against Fracking has lobbied both the university and the Ohio state government to ban hydraulic fracturing until it is more environmentally friendly.

6 The most prominent of these include Women and Allies Rising in Resistance’s efforts to establish a universal, comprehensive sexual violence policy at OSU and the legislative lobbying of Vox (the campus branch of Planned Parenthood) to prevent budget cuts and policies that prohibit abortion and restrict women’s health services.

7 United Students Against Sweatshops have led campaigns against Sodexo, a food distribution company that signed a contract with workers after USAS’ efforts, and Silver Star, a franchise that uses low-wage labor in foreign countries to produce athletic apparel.
experience presented a tipping point for their involvement in non-conventional politics. Vignesh, a graduate student at OSU, had lived most of his life with an aversion to large crowds, afraid of repressive groupthink and pressure to conform. However, after his first demonstration, he felt liberated from his previous reservations about public protest. Nicole, an undergraduate, was also inspired by the action of marching with like-minded demonstrators. “There’s something about standing next to somebody” and participating together that forms a strong bond within the group, she says. After leaving the City Council meeting, the demonstrators marched a few more blocks to join Occupy Columbus. There, the first meeting of Occupy OSU was set for the next day, and the organization was born.

While the strength of any popular movement lies in collective action, the Occupy movement seems to be unique in its emphasis on the individual. Many earlier, well-known social movements, such as the Civil Rights movement, the women’s rights movement, and revolutions in the Middle East, publicly focused more on obtaining benefits for a group than for individuals. While the Occupy movement attempts to gain benefits for middle and lower classes, a focus on individual expression has both helped and hindered the movement. One criticism of the movement has been its lack of clear, formulated demands, but the absence of narrow and specific goals has allowed it to be radical, which may have led to the success of other movements (Piven and Cloward 1977), as well as providing a space where the aspirations of individuals can be identified and addressed. For example, David, a junior Sociology major, has long advocated for environmental issues. He views economic and environmental issues as interconnected and has brought environmental issues to the Occupy OSU agenda. Megan, an active proponent of feminism and women’s reproductive rights, sees women’s rights and economic rights as inexorably linked, since low-income women are often deprived of options available to higher-class women. Members of minorities also find their own struggle for equal rights reflected in Occupy’s message of “We are the 99%,” while other forces, such as churches with a focus on social justice and sociology classes, have instilled a strong sense of justice in individuals who have lived comfortable lives. The majority of Occupy OSU members are social science majors whose experiences in the classroom have made them more acutely aware of global problems. While students in other disciplines can succeed in their studies without an understanding of social and economic inequality, OSU degree programs such as sociology, international studies, and anthropology expose students to these issues in class.

Methodology

First, I read literature from anthropology, sociology, and political science to gain insight into social movements and socioeconomic inequality and their historical context. I discovered that some tactics of the Occupy movement, such as displays of civil disobedience and one-on-one organizing, are remnants of other social movements (Rojekczi 2011; Graeber 2009.) However, reading about more conventional tactics highlights unique qualities of Occupy, such as the “People’s Mic,” a general assembly model of horizontal rather than vertical leadership, and establishing encampments in many cities. Within this theoretical framework, I studied Occupy OSU through participant-observation and semi-structured interviews. By attending Occupy OSU meetings and events, I studied what the group’s goals were, how they attempted to realize these goals, and how members interacted with each other and with others in the university community. General meetings were held weekly and lasted two to three hours. Four committees, including on-campus, off-campus, education, and communications committees, each met once per week. I attended several committee meetings and almost all general

8 All names have been changed.
assemblies from October 2011 through March 2012. Events included four marches, several teach-ins about economic issues, and three major rallies with speakers.

I also asked thirteen Occupiers to share their experiences and personal insights into the movement. These casual interviews were focused on why and how the participant became involved in Occupy OSU, but they were also biographical in nature, since individuals’ decisions are strongly influenced by their personal backgrounds. These interlocutors were chosen primarily because of their active participation in Occupy OSU, but also because they had a comfortable enough rapport with me to disclose personal information. They were divided about equally between men and women and consisted mainly of undergraduates, although one graduate student and a professor were interviewed as well.

Through these discussions, I learned how individual experiences shape each participant’s role in the group. A few questions were standard, such as how the subject became involved in Occupy OSU, why Occupy is important to him/her, and what he/she thinks will come of Occupy Wall Street. The rest of the interview was conversational, as this format encouraged interlocutors to reveal aspects of their personalities that provide insight into their actions. For example, Rachel was raised on a farm and first became involved in activism while campaigning for agricultural issues on the Ohio ballot. Vignesh was born in India but lived in multiple countries and cities throughout his life. This international perspective influences his stances on social issues, especially those concerning poverty. He disapproved of socialism until his friend suggested he read more about it, and now Vignesh considers himself a socialist. Jennifer attended a Catholic school that emphasized social justice, a philosophy which caused her to join USAS and Occupy OSU. These are only a few examples of how participants’ background influenced them to join Occupy OSU. Before using this information for an anthropological analysis of the group, it is necessary to understand how scholars have theorized social movements and the motivations behind them.

**Literature Review: Social Movements and Occupy Wall Street**

As a founding member of Occupy Wall Street, anthropologist David Graeber has written on the issues it presents, such as direct action and economic issues (Graeber 2009, 2011.) The meetings, motivations, and tactics of anti-globalization protesters that anthropologists like Graeber study are similar to those of Occupiers, with focus on direct democracy and free expression but also with established organizing strategies (Juris 2008; Smith 2008; Graeber 2009). Indeed, Graeber (2009: xvii) presents what may be perceived as an accurate prophecy, “There is a broad realization that the age of revolutions is by no means over, but that revolution will, in the twenty-first century, take on increasingly unfamiliar forms.”

This statement is certainly true of Occupy Wall Street. The movement does resemble earlier civil rights and workers’ movements in some tactics of civil disobedience, subversion of authority (Scott 1985) and the organization of marches and traditional protests, (Piven and Cloward 1977; Valocchi 2010) but its goals seem to be aimed more at promoting cultural and social change rather than legislation. Because of this lack of legislative demands, some have denounced the movement as aimless. However, other social movements have achieved some degree of social or cultural change among their constituents (Lauer 1976; Johnston and Klandermans 1995), which has been my observation within Occupy OSU. Additionally, the Occupy movement is more oriented toward individual agency and reclaiming democracy (Frank 2010,) rather than seeking to enfranchise one segment of the population. Finally, Occupy is unique from many past movements in its use of social networking to organize across cities and even countries (Cottle and Lester 2011; Juris 2011).

The motivations behind Occupy protests are many, but they are often responses to a sense of relative deprivation, economic inequality, and the behavior of many executives leading
up to the financial crisis in 2008. Relative deprivation and stagnant social mobility are problems in American society (Geschwender 1968; Gurney and Tierney 1982; Foroohar 2011) that provided motive for more people to become involved in nonconventional politics. Although Americans enjoy a high standard of living compared to people of other nations, a high per-capita GDP may not be the best indicator of a prosperous society (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Many middle and working-class Americans feel deprived compared to the top one percent of wealthiest Americans, who control about forty percent of the nation’s wealth (Domhoff 2010). Problems with corporate fraud and other extreme behavior associated with American-style capitalism (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Sayles and Smith 2006) have produced an extreme level of economic inequality. These factors, combined with high unemployment and increasing cost of education, sparked the inception of Occupy Wall Street. Subgroups of the Occupy Wall Street movement, such as Occupy OSU, then developed within particular kinds of environments.

The Occupy OSU Constituency

The Occupy OSU movement began as a handful of students and faculty from activist organizations such as United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO). Some OSU Occupiers had known each other since high school, while others were recent friends. Many, myself included, became aware of the budding organization through the event Occupy the Oval in October 2011. The organizers of this event, undergraduates Patrick and Paul, became de facto leaders of the group. They set the first meeting time, formed a Facebook group and events, and took the lead in planning direct action. The latter involved setting routes for marches, organizing speakers, and delegating roles to others. Weekly General Assemblies (known as G.A.s) began and continued throughout the academic year. Early G.A.s lasted about three hours because, in the spirit of democracy, every individual was given time to speak about personal feelings and stances on political and economic issues. Specifically, they discussed the extremity of economic inequality in the United States, blamed political and business leaders for the situation, and debated whether capitalism is inherently unjust. As time passed, G.A.s shortened as discussions became more goal-oriented and less philosophical.

A pattern of organization emerged around the education rallies on March 1, 2011 and May 16, 2011. The establishment of such a pattern suggests a move away from the nebulous beginnings of Occupy OSU into a more efficient and organized group. After setting a date (for both events, the date was set approximately one month beforehand), Occupy OSU debated the action’s overall themes during one or two G.A.s. Then demands were written, debated, and revised, and an agenda was organized with speakers for various topics. If a march was planned, the route was laid out, and whether or not the group should encourage illegal activity, such as walking in streets, was discussed.9

9 The latter point has proven to be quite contentious. The group is divided between those who think walking in the street will draw attention and show that the protestors mean business, while others worry that dramatic action will scare off potential members and allies. To resolve the issue, Occupy OSU decided to march in the streets and on the sidewalk, so participants will not be forced into illegal action. Diversifying tactics to allow maximum participation were also utilized in some anti-neoliberalization protests (Graeber, 2009).

10 This qualifies as direct action according to David Wieck, Rob Sparrow, and David Graeber (2009) because it disregards the authority of the state. The protesters walked in the street to assert their own right to the space rather than to explicitly lobby the authority of the city of Columbus.
Like the discussion and ideas, the makeup of G.A.s is moderately diverse. The group is approximately half male and half female and mostly white, with some African and Asian-Americans and several students who had immigrated to the U.S. years ago. Most active members study social sciences, including sociology, political science, economics, anthropology, and international studies, although engineering, physics, and biochemistry majors are also included. Throughout the 2011-2012 academic year, undergraduates constituted the majority of the group, but roughly one-third of active members graduated in 2012. Approximately half a dozen graduate students were active in the group, with studies in economics, comparative studies, and engineering. Although numerous faculty members have expressed written support for Occupy OSU, only one professor was regularly involved. He stated that he sometimes restricts his participation to allow students to lead, since he wants students to develop their own organizing skills. Rounding out the group were an organizer who works with campus workers and a liaison from Occupy Columbus who invites OSU Occupiers to support Occupy Columbus’ activities.

Efforts have been made to maintain and increase the diversity of the group, with varying degrees of success. A student of Egyptian descent tried to bring in Arab-American students by linking Occupy OSU to the revolution in Egypt but confessed that Arab students were not very interested in American nonconventional politics. One point of dissension with the G.A. process is its domination by the males of the group. A recommended solution to the problem was to choose a female facilitator to run the meetings every other week. This proposal met with strong opposition, as many felt that gender is an indistinct criterion. The issue was never completely resolved, but it was improved by emphasizing “step up, stand back,” a philosophy that encouraged quiet people to assert themselves and more forceful members to rein in their egos.

Democratic Values and Occupy OSU: Freedom of Expression, Individual Empowerment, Collectivity, Solidarity, and Community

Before turning to the values I have observed in the OSU movement it is important to examine the symbolic importance of the word “Occupy.” It is a military term that evokes a formidable sense of opposition and territorialism. While this tactic may seem strange for a nonviolent movement, it addresses a cognitive militancy in the group. By occupying a space like Wall Street, the protestors asserted their right to be heard and the idea of public spaces as belonging to the people. After all, protestors assert, if their tax dollars pay for the streets and public buildings of their cities, they have a right to occupy those spaces. This relationship to public space is reflected through the chants and slogans of demonstrators, such as Occupy OSU marchers. In mid-November 2011, Ohio State students marched directly in High Street, one of Columbus’ busiest roads, and chanted, “Whose streets? Our streets!” This central idea of occupation pervades the collective consciousness of the movement’s members and shapes the way they view space and territory. (Graeber 2009)

Although they come from different backgrounds and may focus on different specific issues, members of the Occupy movement in general and Occupy OSU in particular share an overall value system. One component of that system is respect for individuals and individual expression. Most Occupiers are socially libertarian and claim to hold individual liberties in high regard. As such, the Occupy movement functions as a “constituent moment” (Frank 2010) that reinforces democratic values. However, individual liberties are limited by collective values, which shall be discussed below.

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11 Many white members of Occupy OSU frequently address “white privilege,” just as issues of “male privilege” and “class privilege” to mitigate the elitist effects of having an educated, mostly white membership.
The first value I highlight is freedom of expression. For example, perhaps nowhere is Occupy’s effort to appreciate freedom of expression more evident than in the G.A. It is modeled after Occupy Wall Street and operates as an expression of direct democracy. The G.A. is not conducted by an elected leader but by a rotating corps of volunteers who facilitate, record the proceedings, and maintain a speakers’ list to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak. Thus, the structure of the G.A. promotes horizontal leadership and equal opportunity to be heard. Similarly, any member can bring forth a proposal to be voted on by the greater body. Freedom to express dissent with the group’s decisions is another fundamental principle of the G.A. By crossing their arms to “block” a proposal, Occupiers tell their fellows that they absolutely cannot proceed with the action. Even one block in the group has the power to halt procedure because the individual’s concerns must be heard and understood by the group. Because of its revolutionary ideas and grassroots structure, the G.A. has been described as a “transformative experience” by Paul, a senior political science major at OSU. Forms such as the G.A. can empower and inspire individuals to achieve some degree of direct democracy in their regular life. (Graeber 2009; Juris 2008)

In an effort to foster equality in expression, dissent is protected by the format of the G.A. and has never been prohibited by the rules of the group. However, in practice peer pressure to agree with a proposal or to express a certain point of view does influence members. They sometimes refrain from dissent with an accepted plan out of a sense of futility. Furthermore, liberal values strongly dominate the group. Supporters of President Obama’s foreign policy, hydraulic fracturing, free-market enterprise, and curtailment of unions’ powers are socially, if not legally, discouraged from expressing such views during meetings. Consequently, tolerance is promoted within limits, and even though Occupy Wall Street claims to represent “the 99%,” some views are favored over others.

The second value that is important to highlight is the focus on empowerment of individuals, and the G.A. was designed to foster this empowerment. The next example demonstrated that while the value seemed positive to the group and actualized in organizational structures, sometimes even good intentions can lead to controversy. When Occupy OSU was still forming, a small group of three individuals met privately and made decisions about what the organization’s goals should be. After their fellow members expressed frustration with those students, small group meetings became more public, so more members could meet outside of G.A.s. Members with a broader background in sociology and organizing became de facto leaders because of their experience. Therefore, the idea of speaking up and becoming a leader is intimidating to new and less experienced members, although a few freshmen have earned respect and responsibility through frequent engagement and participation in activities. This respect is realized through more invitations to lead discussions and events. Speaking up is encouraged, and members nearly always refrain from personal attacks during debate.

Individual empowerment is also facilitated by the “People’s Mic.” It was first developed in New York City because any electronically amplified sound, even a battery-powered megaphone, was illegal without a permit. To ensure speakers could be heard by large audiences, the people nearest the speaker would repeat every few words, acting as a human amplification system. However, the People’s Mic has much greater repercussions than simply those of sound. As Jennifer, a senior international studies and philosophy major, said, “you have to listen to what

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12 The “block” appears to have originated in other direct action groups, and has been documented in meetings of the New York Direct Action Network (Graeber, 2009.) It is likely that this gesture of Occupy Wall Street was introduced by more seasoned New York activists and modeled after their own meetings.

other people are saying” in order to repeat their words correctly. As a self-described “big fan of conversation,” Jennifer also points out that the People’s Mic facilitates horizontal leadership and understanding. Through the People’s Mic, anyone in the group can make themselves heard. In this respect, Occupy OSU has succeeded in its goal of promoting dialogue – at Occupy OSU events, the audience repeated speakers’ words faithfully, even if they did not completely agree with the statements.14

A third value is collectivity. As with the previous two values, the individual is valued and many organizational structures are designed to empower individuals. However, the group is considered vital as well. Many Occupiers do not simply protest the widening gap between rich and poor but also lament the perceived decline of community values in favor of rugged individualism. Therefore, the very same mechanisms that promote freedom of individual expression can also be used as a source of collective power.

For instance, the General Assembly empowers the group to make decisions that are, on the whole, acceptable to its individual members. Disagreements are resolved through discussion, but ultimately, the success of any G.A. depends upon the level of trust within its membership. In this regard, Occupy OSU maintains a significant advantage over more disparate groups like Occupy Columbus. The latter group fell apart after a few months because members came from varied backgrounds and could not agree on goals or aspirations. Some respectful dissent from within Occupy OSU is tolerated well and even encouraged, as multiple points of view are appreciated.

One example of how dissent is tolerated while still maintaining a value of collectivity comes from Justin, an undergraduate who began attending G.A.s in March. He acts as a devil’s advocate when it comes to issues of dealing with the board of trustees, influencing the university’s policies and budget, and national politics. In my observations, I have never seen his objections treated rudely. Instead, other group members calmly explain their position. Moderate dissent is either resolved through discussion or merely put aside to focus on immediate goals. Moreover, the group is self-selected to have liberal tendencies, so members share similar, if not identical, political and social leanings. This prevents major dissent that could have destroyed the organization early on.

The People’s Mic, when employed in an organized manner, can also act as a unifying collective force. The best examples of this are the staged “Mic Checks” that have proliferated since the advent of the Occupy movement. Although these Mic Checks use the same format as the People’s Mic, both the intent and the outcome of the action are different. The People’s Mic is meant to amplify one individual’s voice to express that individual’s story or opinion, while the Mic Check acts as a show of unity around one central idea. During a Mic Check, one individual presents, line by line, a statement that is endorsed by the other participants in the Mic Check.

One example of this is when a group of Ohio students Mic Checked a presentation by a natural gas industry spokesperson at the Ohio State University. The presentation, designed to promote hydraulic fracturing, or fracking in Ohio, was interrupted about ten minutes in by cries of “Mic check!” Reading a prepared message about the alleged dangers of fracking that had been distributed to participants of the Mic Check, one student shouted each line and was echoed from every corner of the room. After delivering their message to the presenters, the students left the chamber, chanting “We won’t stop until you do!”

The fourth value it is imperative to discuss is solidarity, which is deeply ensconced in Occupy’s organization and ideologies and is similar to historical social movements (Lauer 1976; 14

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14 It is worth noting that in my observations, no vehement opponent of Occupy OSU has attempted to use the People’s Mic to spread dissent within the group, so the extent of Occupy OSU’s commitment to this ideal is still inconclusive.
Other than the message of “We are the 99%” and the “Occupy” brand itself, “solidarity” is the buzzword of the movement. Members sign their emails with “solidarity,” events are called “in solidarity with” other demonstrators, and Occupiers sing “Solidarity Forever” during their marches. John, an undergraduate, asserts that his solidarity fist tattoo is not simply an emblem of radical politics but “a symbol of unity in the face of adversity.” Another student, Patrick, likens a social movement to a “good gang” in which members of the group support each other and face down hardships with unity. Solidarity with union workers and other organizers is most prevalent, but solidarity with the LGBT community, the poor, Planned Parenthood, foreign protestors, and racial minorities is also important, both in rhetoric and in practice.

One of the most dynamic properties of solidarity is its universality. It can unite seemingly disparate groups, because even though individuals may hold different political views (libertarian, liberal, and socialist in this case), a common cause brings them together. Paul’s personal mantra is “people over money,” which reflects a widespread concern amongst Occupiers that human needs and happiness are not adequately valued in the current global socio-political-economic system. Such concern is likely a reflection of Marxist thoughts on the impersonal and exploitative nature of capitalism (Marx 1848) which has been studied directly by at least seven members of the group. Many Occupiers would also agree with Vignesh’s statement that he would like to see people treated as human beings rather than commodities to be bought and sold. This sense of common humanity and alienation allows OSU Occupiers to act and react in strong solidarity with other Occupy groups across the nation and across the world. For example, Ahmed, an OSU student of Egyptian descent, organized a solidarity event on January 25, 2012 to mark the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the Egyptian revolution. Chants such as “From Columbus to Tahrir, we do not have any fear!” and a call-and-response “Hollaback!“ “We got your back!” are significant for the power of solidarity that they expressed.

Another major show of solidarity occurred in response to vandalism on the OSU campus. In March 2012, “Long Live Zimmerman,” presumably in response to the shooting of an African-American teenager in Florida, was spray-painted on the Hale Black Cultural Center. Hundreds of outraged students staged a sit-in in the Union to demand a crime alert system for so-called hate crimes, as well as increased commitment to diversity and tolerance at OSU. A group of graduate students (mostly African-American but some white and Latino students) founded OSU Stand Your Ground, a group that reappropriated the phrase from Florida’s controversial gun law. There is substantial overlap in membership between Occupy OSU and OSU Stand Your Ground, and Occupy OSU has adopted some of SYG’s demands into its own agenda. In addition to SYG, Buckeyes Against Fracking, United Students Against Sweatshops, OSU Free the Planet, and other groups have recruited membership and support from Occupy OSU.

A fifth value and focus is on community. Occupiers often regret the observed decline of community in favor of isolationist individualism. Andre, a member of Occupy Columbus, views the movement as a “renaissance of human consciousness.” He noted how average people do not make eye contact with strangers on the street or reach out to others beyond their own social circles. Megan said of Occupy OSU, “half the reason I go back is because I love these people.” This camaraderie both contributes to and is an effect of open discussion within Occupy.

The power and pervasiveness of solidarity within the Occupy movement lends itself readily to a strong sense of community amongst its members. Through the shared experiences of marches, general assemblies, and other activities, Occupy has created a space in which like-minded individuals can discuss ideas and nurture friendships. Vignesh, who had never been involved in activism before, was “amazed that people think the same way as me.” Several Occupiers hold minority opinions or are constituents of minority groups and are relieved to discuss their ideas freely without fear of reprisal. Zach, another new activist, recognizes the
significance of community within the movement, commenting, “These are people who will care about me.” I met Sarah at Occupy the Oval, and at the time she was not involved in any activism. She later became passionately involved in USAS and developed strong friendships with other Occupiers.

To support this community building, Occupiers do not only engage with each other at formal Occupy events, but also at parties and other social outings, which provide bonding experiences in more casual settings. This social aspect of the movement has had a profound personal impact on members. A few students who are new to the university or who have been more reserved in the past forged a majority of their friendships at OSU with fellow Occupiers. As Paul points out, all of this negates the traditional “binary in capitalism between work and leisure” – the idea that classes and extracurricular activities are work and should not overlap with leisure activities. During marches, drums and music makers take the place of the giant puppets and street theater of modern activist groups, but a joyous, carnival mentality that rejects the austerity of state authority is constant. (Graber 2008; Juris 2011) Political and economic issues blur with more mundane details of everyday life to form a dialogue that is both enlightening and entertaining. At parties, some people discuss politics while others dance and talk about lighter subjects. In this respect, Occupy has grown into the kind of flexible and interactive community it desires to create in American society.

Social Media, Visuality, and the Actualization of Occupy OSU Values

The modes of communication employed by the Occupy movement incorporate the values outlined above into everyday practice. Social media, for instance, has proven extremely effective in mobilizing demonstrations (Cottle and Lester 2011; Juris 2012). Since its inception, Occupy Wall Street has used Facebook to its full advantage. There are hundreds of various Occupy pages on Facebook which range from “Occupy Wall St.” and “Occupy Together” to more targeted groups, such as “Occupy the Hood” and “Occupy Colleges.” These pages constantly post new information, videos, images, and memes on Facebook where fans of their pages can view and share the links. Additionally, Occupy OSU creates Facebook events for every G.A. and Occupy-hosted event. This allows members to invite their friends to join with just a click. Because of social media, much of Occupy OSU’s organizing occurs online rather than mostly in person, as previous movements had done. However, reliance on social media risks excluding people without ready access to online resources as well as potentially exposing plans to authority figures. The latter concern led Occupy OSU to prohibit intraorganization communication through OSU email to prevent alerting campus police to plans for action.

Outreach of the Occupy movement is not limited to words, but involves a wide range of visual aids to raise awareness and disseminate the movement’s message. From banners bearing “People Over Profit” and the image of Brutus the Buckeye with Guy Fawkes’ face to signs demanding the reversal of *Citizens United vs. FEC* and a halt to fracking, visual supplements allow for quick statements. For example, Chris from Occupy OSU drew the design of a one-hundred dollar bill with Benjamin Franklin saying, “I’m just a face on a piece of paper; I shouldn’t matter more than actual people.” Many Occupiers are artistically inclined, including Nicole of Occupy OSU, who says, “what gets me going is the art side of it.” At the January 25 solidarity rally, Nicole carried a colored sign that read “Cairo to Ohio” and bore the image of an upside-down pyramid with “99%” emblazoned on it. Signs can certainly draw attention to larger issues.

While these media are important, Occupy art also takes less conventional forms. For example, one occupier constructed a gingerbread house that bore the phrase “This House Has Been Occupied” in white frosting. Accompanying the house were two smiling gingerbread “Occupiers,” a frowning gingerbread “banker,” and a cardboard sign that said “People Over
Money.” The final form of Occupy art I shall address is digital graphic art that has been widely distributed through social media. From simple images with the date and time of an action to more complex infographics and even videos, online Occupy art combines education with creative expression. It is impossible to summarize all Occupy art here, but its prevalence in the Occupy movement reflects the ideals of Occupiers, such as free expression and diversity.

Public Universities and the Occupy Movement

Values and modes of communication have laid the groundwork for a student social movement. Universities have been prominent breeding grounds for activism throughout many struggles. Students at The Ohio State University may not be as politically polarized as at more liberal institutions, but there are many student activists who have come together through Occupy OSU. As university students and faculty, the constituency of Occupy OSU can unite around university issues such as tuition increases, privatization of assets, and lack of student voice in the board’s decision-making. Additionally, many members of Occupy OSU have been long-term friends or have worked together in other activist student groups. These factors combine to create an environment in which individuals are usually comfortable subjugating their own agendas to the decisions of the group.

Graeber (2009: ix) argues that the 1980’s and 1990’s were “probably the most depressing time to be a revolutionary.” He contends that previously, the radical Left was more concerned with utopian ideals and therefore had greater vision, and that protests against global neoliberalism have returned the radical Left to a sense of militancy. Student movements at The Ohio State University seem to mirror this timeline. OSU students held massive protests against the Vietnam War in the early 1970’s, but student activism seemed to decline thereafter. However, a bad economy and increasing awareness of neoliberalism may be encouraging more student activism since 2011. In an interview, undergraduate Jennifer compared the Occupy movement to WTO protests of the 1990’s, because many Occupiers desire not only to improve the economic situation for Americans, but to overthrow a system which, in their view, oppresses billions of people around the world. The International Socialist Organization draws on opinions from around the world, and some active members of United Students Against Sweatshops have visited sweatshops in central America to conference with the workers for whom they fight.

Public universities, which are partially funded by the state and therefore subject to more public accountability than private universities, have a unique place in the movement. Students have used this momentum to create a forum to protest increasing tuition and privatization of public universities. In 2012, Occupy OSU began to center more around students’ issues and the role of the public university, with a platform that broadly demands recognition of undergraduate education as a right, not a privilege, but also opens up debate on a variety of university issues, such as transparency, student representation on the board of trustees, and student loan debt. Actions included a rally on March 1 to protest tuition hikes, student loan debt, and the university’s parking and merchandising contracts and an event called “Reimagine OSU” on May 16 and 17. At “Reimagine,” half a dozen professors held class outside and students spoke out

15 Currently, there are two student positions on The Ohio State University Board of Trustees, one undergraduate and one graduate. However, these students are appointed by Ohio’s governor, not the student body, and they do not have voting power on board decisions.

16 Many students, particularly in the International Development Studies program at OSU, have discussed problems with global neoliberal policy in their classes.

17 http://reimagineosu.org/
against the Board of Trustees’ monopoly on financial decisions. A suggestion was made to change the group’s name from “Occupy OSU” to “Reimagine OSU” in the future. Future plans also involve using protests and complaints to pressure the administration into allowing students and faculty more power in deciding the budget.

Furthermore, OSU Occupiers have networked with other students to form the Ohio Student Association, which represents diverse environmental, social, and economic activists. This has increased networking between Ohio institutions of higher learning and allowed organizers to plan multiple simultaneous actions. For example, actions against student debt took place on March 1, 2012, at the Ohio State University, Ohio University, Shawnee State, and Kent State University. This cooperation is likely to continue into the future, with an increasingly connected network of student activists.

Following the lead of Occupy Wall Street, a new student movement, albeit a small one presently, has come about to address the economic and personal toll of university decisions that affect the communities within and around college campuses. Tools to promote direct democracy, such as the G.A., the human microphone, and an emphasis on the reclamation of public space are still integrated into the student movement and will likely undergo continued use in the future. Universities have played a role in the past to promote peace and racial equality, but now economic issues are the central focus of the burgeoning student movement, and as tuition increases and employment opportunities decrease, the new generation of student activists will soldier on.

**Conclusion**

Some conclusions about the Occupy movement and its relation to students can be drawn from the above observations. First, the Occupy movement has increased national dialogue about economic inequality. During summer 2011, American media focused on the debate over the national debt, but by mid-October, Occupy’s message of “We Are the 99%” garnered substantial coverage and integrated itself into academic, activist, and even popular culture. Occupy has been referenced in numerous classes and has reached a wide audience due to the above-named communication networks. The Occupy movement has caused a shift in debate, if not yet in legislative policy.

The second impact of the Occupy movement is the personal and cultural change it has achieved among its own supporters. Education about issues of inequality has increased among individual members, and so have leadership skills. During his interview, Zach told me that he learned more from Occupy than from his classes, while David and Chris felt more educated about economic issues. Most members of Occupy OSU have also referenced the personal empowerment and confidence they have gained through their experience in the organization. All the members I spoke to expressed some degree of optimism in the movement, and Jennifer, David, Molly, John, Meredith, Paul, and Vignesh all directly referenced the empowerment they experienced.

Finally, the Occupy movement has provided historical and theoretical context and democratic tactics to a new generation of student activists. Occupy OSU began as a rather disparate group of individuals, but common values and new friendships molded it into a more cohesive unit. Now Occupy OSU is working with other students across Ohio to improve students’ options in a stagnant economy. Even if Occupy Wall Street has faded from the national dialogue, it has left in its shell a new student movement, one which has yet to stand the test of time.

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Predicting the outcome of social movements can be extremely difficult since their patterns fluctuate with contemporary crises and cultural innovations, but although many onlookers have declared the movement to be defunct, at this time many local Occupy branches are still relevant and effecting changes in their communities. Meanwhile, Occupy OSU looks forward to 2012 to start a student movement whose goals range from increased financial transparency in public universities to free access to undergraduate education. As some students have suggested, the movement may not retain “Occupy” as its public face, but Occupy Wall Street and its subsequent local sister movements have changed the lives of many people. By forming a subculture with a value system and various modes of communication, Occupy OSU has opened a new space for activism and united many individuals under a common cause. Its greatest impact has not come in the form of specific gains, but in the personal development of its members such as Vignesh, who stated, “Occupy is an extension of who we are.” Finally, even though Occupy has died down nationally, activism at OSU continues and, as Paul said, “this is only the beginning.”

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Reconstructing the Farm: 
Life Stories of Dutch Female Farmers
Marisa Turesky
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Abstract
My research asks: what are the lived experiences of female farmers in a Dutch agricultural community like the Netherlands? Although popular culture portrays most female farmers as uneducated individuals of lower socioeconomic status, the six women who I interviewed in the Netherlands over the course of a short ethnographic research study present life stories that complicate this stereotype. In my conversations with female farm owners in the Netherlands, it emerged that a patriarchal paradigm appears to persist in industrial, conventional agriculture, seeming to encourage larger numbers of women to own more small-scale farms. While there is substantial existing research on rural women’s historical roles in farming, I add additional layers to this work, through my analysis of the personal experiences of a small sample of women farmers in the contemporary Netherlands. These women, who consider farming their lifestyle, discuss their inspiration, challenges, successes, and passion for their chosen occupation. In attempting to balance traditional roles of labor versus domesticity, these women actively challenge the gender binary through experiences in motherhood and business ownership.

Keywords: Agriculture, Gender, Eco-feminism

Introduction
The role of Dutch women working on farms has shifted through the generations. Historically, Dutch women were key business partners in their husbands’ farming enterprises, but their roles and efforts were largely undervalued and under-recognized. Currently, women engaged in farming have responsibilities ranging from balancing work in the field with domestic duties inside of the home as part of a farming partnership, to complete ownership of the farm. Historically, women who owned farms were typically, although not always, the daughters of farmers and were continuing the tradition of the family farm. Female ownership, however, has never been as common as male ownership because women have often been stifled by economic and political reform that kept them dependent on a male partner. Although both husband and wife often worked on the farm together, the wife’s farm tasks were often undocumented because of the “Breadwinner’s Principle.” This meant that as long as the government had no record of the wife’s hourly contributions, the family only had one spousal income, which allowed them to receive social benefits and tax deductions (Geluk-Geluk 1994: 17).

As gender norms shift to allow for greater autonomy among women on farms, the established division of labor in the agricultural sector is becoming more dynamic and relatively more flexible. With the popularization of the sustainable and local food movement, more young progressives want to grow and, in some cases, distribute, their own food. Women who now work on farms may no longer have a fixed lifestyle based on traditional gender roles, with responsibilities limited to agriculture and domestic duties. They are, moreover, no longer as strongly linked to familial patterns of ownership.

In this article I argue that, in attempting to balance agricultural labor with domestic work, this new generation of female farmers actively challenge the gender binary through their cultivation of alternative roles of motherhood and independent business ownership. In my
fieldwork, conducted in the Fall of 2011 I focused on female farm-owners located in the Netherlands. I conducted research to understand these women's past experiences, their future aspirations, and their current (and increasing) autonomy and prestige within small-scale agriculture. While my analysis is not necessarily generalizable to the experiences of every female farmer in the country, the stories I collected do promote a greater understanding of the women who produce a portion of the nation's food. In so doing, this research can contribute to a greater understanding between producers and consumers. I also hope to contribute to the creation of a community for Dutch female farmers, women who may read these few testimonies and find solace that they are not alone in this kind of lifestyle and work. The six women in my study speak to such diversity within a single niche of society (van der Burg 1994:125). Although most of the women with whom I spoke would not overtly acknowledge their role in pushing feminist political ecology forward, this research strives to illuminate their perceptions of themselves as female farmers in a traditionally masculine field, as well as their implicitly feminist stances towards this structure of power.

The women farmers who I met throughout my research came from different types of farms. The Netherlands has two primary categories of farms: conventional farms and biological farms. A conventional, non-biological farm tends to see rural nature as an obstacle to overcome; utilizing scientific, technological and genetic advancements to maximize profit through continued scale enlargement (Sonnino 2008: 30). Non-biological farmers typically use hormones, antibiotics, pesticides and herbicides on their farms. Biological farms, by contrast, tend to practice a more holistic approach that maximizes farm-derived renewable resources, coordinating with the natural systems that consider the social and ecological impacts of the production cycle (Acs 2004: 2-3). During informal conversations with current and past students of both the conventional and biological farm school, they noted the higher percentage of women attending Warmonderhof, the biological farm school, versus the higher percentage of men attending Dronten University, the neighboring conventional farm school. As I will explore in this article, the motivation for having a certain kind of farm depended on various factors in a farmer’s life experiences.

Through writing about these women’s stories and building relationships with them, I cultivate a greater understanding of cross-cultural femininity in agriculture. This article considers the lived experiences of female farmers within the hegemonic construction of the male Dutch farmer in the Netherlands, also considering the ways in which their roles may have shifted through the years. Janet McIntosh’s definition of hegemony is quite useful here, for she builds on the world of John and Jean Comaroff by arguing that hegemony “consists of the signs and practices that typically serve the interest of the dominant group by reflecting or justifying particular relations of power and that come to be ‘taken-for-granted [by all social groups] as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it”’ (McIntosh 2009: 23). These women reconstruct femininity in relation to hegemonic views of the male Dutch Farmer through their desire to deviate from norms and thus recreate norms of both the female and the farmer. As such, contrary to the stereotypes of female farmers as poor, domestic wives/servants in rural environments, the women who I worked and spoke with tended to be academically, politically, and ecologically informed. They actively, not passively, chose to farm.1

1 The women’s decisions to work on their farms and live rurally on a traditional, family farm should be distinguished from the more American, urban “back to land” movement that builds on an idealistic pastoral life.
Methodology: A Day on the Farm

This article is the result of an intensive one-month ethnographic research study in which I conducted interviews with six female farmers living throughout the Netherlands. These interviews, conducted in English, were semi-structured and open-ended, which allowed me to follow the leads of my interlocutors. They lasted between one and three hours, depending on the interlocutor. My investigation of female farmers is also based on participant observation, from data that I gathered while watching and listening to the women work. Working with the women on the farm gave me the chance to know and learn from them in their homes and work spaces. Spending more time with the interviewees during their work allowed these women to express their lives and opinions to me in a casual setting. My time with the interviewees ranged from two-hour visits to overnight stays. I used the snowball method of recruitment and began my recruitment through local agricultural advocacy organizations.

Meet the Farmers

Anne, 45 & Anouk, 42

Anne and Anouk, life partners who only recently started cohabiting, live on the milk farm they started roughly two years ago along with forty cows, all of whom have names. The two explained that even though they are unique as lesbian farmers, they do not want to be identified only by their sexuality because it is not a defining part of their identity. Anouk has been farming since she was a young child, while Anne is a relative novice. Though both had grandparents

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2 Initially, I traveled to the Netherlands to study gender and sexuality with the School of International Training. Shortly after arriving, I began working with Dutch agricultural advocacy organizations such as ASEED and Farming The City.

3 All the names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.
who were farmers, neither Anne nor Anouk grew up on a farm. In Anouk’s case, however, she always found her way to a farm, even as a young child. They each told me, on separate occasions, that farming is a “way of life” and they truly love farming because “it is in our blood.”

Tjarda, 53
Growing up near her grandfather’s farm, Tjarda has had a long-standing connection to the farmland, which she now owns. The government, however, constantly threatens to take her vegetable and fruit farm to convert it into a concrete park, due to the farm’s proximity to the city. As she and I stood overlooking the land, the farm stood in stark contrast to the highway and industries just behind it. Tjarda runs a care farm – in other words, the government provides her extra funds for taking on individuals who need extra supervision or “care” in their work (this might be due to intellectual impairment, addiction, or other disabilities). Until she took over the farm, Tjarda had various jobs, ranging from social work to viticulture [grape cultivation]. As long as she can protect the farm, Tjarda’s ideal future is to continue farming.

Kim, 37
Kim and her husband have taken over her parents’ conventional dairy farm with 80 cows and 500 goats, typically with only one farm hand’s help. Although we talked at her new house a few kilometers from the farm, Kim gave me a virtual tour with a framed photo of the farm. She told me how much she used to enjoy going to pubs and parties but now her focus is on motherhood and the farm. Kim initially pursued higher education but decided that she wanted to work with her hands. Her family is very important to her and she brought up her sorrow concerning her parents’ recent divorce, her close relationship with her brothers, and her immense admiration for her mother. Her immediate family lives so close together that a few minutes before I left her
house, Kim’s brother came over for a surprise visit. She assured me that this was quite common. Kim has a hard time thinking about the future because her parents are heavily invested in the farm and the effects of their imminent divorce remain unclear. She, however, hopes to remain a farmer until she is either physically or economically restricted from doing so.

_Iris, 34_

Having grown up in both the suburbs and the city, Iris has experienced agriculture from an advocacy and production perspective. She studied environmental studies at university and quickly became enthralled with biological farming. Iris and a friend were spontaneously inspired to start their own farm upon completing an internship. After struggling for support and funds, the two young women started their biological vegetable farm. They work about ten hours per day and have eight volunteers. With a subtly pregnant stomach, Iris told me that the only kind of farm on which she would work is a biological farm because biological farms improve the environment for future generations. As the youngest farmer with whom I spoke, Iris is unsure what the future will bring but knows that it will have something to do with agriculture.

_stephanie, 60_

Stephanie grew up on a farm with her parents and five siblings. She made the conscious decision to attend university and wanted nothing to do with farming. After spending time in Chile for agriculturally based social justice work, she came back to the Netherlands and settled in Amsterdam. She eventually, however, returned to farming after realizing her deep-seated adoration for it. She relies on her customers – school children who tour the farm and consume her products – to garner support in her daily life. When she and her husband were first married, they took over her husband’s parents’ cheese farm. Unfortunately, soon after that, the city took away the land around this 400-year-old farm in order to build a bridge. As a result, Stephanie and her husband were forced to rebuild their business and biological farm elsewhere. Now, they live in a Gaudí-style4 home on their land, along with 65 cows. Stephanie says that she is still looking for her path within her farming life.

First Steps Towards a Farming Lifestyle

Most of the women struggled to maintain social and economic support when they were starting their farms. Because of the rampant stereotypes of gendered agriculture that reinforce the gender binary, each woman worked very hard to achieve recognition and legitimacy from their communities, both personally and agriculturally. For Anouk and Anne, support was particularly difficult to garner since Anouk had recently left her husband to live with Anne. Anouk elaborates:

A lot of people were against us. I left my husband and my children and blah blah blah. I took a lot of money out of that farm. That was the story that was going around. The people you thought were your friends just never showed up again. It made it extra hard. I invested already in [thirty] cows. A long time ago. They were on that farm. They were my cows. So, I just took them.

The reaction of her family and friends was not solely the result of her leaving her husband and his farm to start her own but, also related to the fact that she would start her own farm as a gay woman with her life partner. With little regard for others’ approval, Anouk and Anne started their

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4 Stephanie deliberately modeled her home after the works of Antoni Gaudí because his style reflected the organic shapes of nature.
farm with nothing more than thirty cows, twenty calves, and a goal. Unlike Anne and Anouk who bought their farm, Kim and Tjarda inherited their farms because others in their family did not want it.

When Tjarda took the opportunity to start an alternative agriculture business, her family was adamantly against her decision and even brought the case to court. She recalled the story as we strolled through her land. Like most of her anecdotes, she would begin her story but would often find herself distracted by an aspect of her farm and would excitedly find any excuse to talk about it. I would eventually pull her back to her more personal anecdotes. She would then smile, and poignantly resume her story:

There was this whole battle full of lying. And they said, 'oh you can’t do it! You know nothing about it and you haven’t got money!' And I thought, ‘aw well. I don’t know much about it’ so I went to look for an education. ...Then, there was still lying and they were trying to stop me. In 1996, I had my diploma and I got a tractor for my birthday. So, as I squatted in Amsterdam, I thought, ‘now we must start!’

From this and other anecdotes it was apparent that even once she began working on the farm, Tjarda’s family refused to take her seriously. Her aunt, who was one of the few supportive people in her venture, told her that if she had been a man she would not receive so much criticism and bigotry.

Indeed, farming is an industry that has been historically dominated by men, particularly in the Netherlands. In 2011, The Central Bureau for Statistics in the Netherlands calculated that less than ten years ago, there were well over twice as many men as women working on farms (CBS 2011: 38). Now, women average slightly more than one-third of the farming workforce. Technological developments tend to perpetuate such a gender dichotomy in the agricultural field. The industrial tractor was designed by and for men. It is the tool that re-engineered the way in which farmers conducted work and the levers and pedals are often too far away for most women to be able to adequately maneuver the machine (Stephanie Fisher 2010: 10, originally from Ann Rosenfeld, 1985: 23).

It was difficult enough that Iris’ parents were not initially proud of her decision to start a farm; the agricultural community had its own structural barriers and methods of discrimination, as well:

In the beginning, we were not taken seriously. We said that we wanted to buy a tractor and asked what they could give us with so much horsepower. Some people just didn’t know what to say to us. They just said nothing. Didn’t know how to react to women wanting to buy a tractor. They just didn’t know what to say. After, we laughed about it.

Iris told me this story as we stared out onto her bright red tractor, sitting in the yard. She told me that making jokes was the best way to cope with such gender biases. I had heard this same statement from other women. They explained that this is the key to be not taking yourself or the agricultural field’s hyper-masculinity too seriously.

Iris’ story about prejudice in shopping for tractors has further implications. Every woman mentioned that one of her greatest challenges in farming is driving the tractor. It might seem that the heavy usage of machinery in conventional agriculture is a main reason why women’s farms are typically smaller than that of the average male-owned farm in the Netherlands. According to a 2007 study by the European Commission, Eurostat, regarding the labor force by the size of farms in the Netherlands, women account for 2.4% of the total sole owners of farms larger than 100 hectares versus their 7.5% ownership of farms smaller than twenty hectares.
According to Anouk and Anne, the most frequently asked question posed to them from people in agricultural businesses is, “Who drives the tractor? Do you hire a man for the tractor work?” The only reason why I knew to scoff at this question is because a few hours earlier, I had watched Anouk step into her industrial tractor and flawlessly drive it along the barn to feed their cows. In this instance, the tractor work was clearly failing to keep these women inside of the home.

Similarly to Iris, Anne and Anouk feel that the best way to cope with the conservative mentality is to laugh. Anne described another discriminatory moment:

"I remember there was a knock on the door and the man said, ‘is the farmer home? Where’s the farmer?’ I told him, ‘Here I am!’ And he said ‘I mean the man of the house’. And I said, ‘we don’t have a man here.’ So he turned around and walked away. We never saw him again."

Stephanie told me a very similar story. She did the milking and the cheese-making every day, yet when salesmen came to the farm, they were always looking for “the boss” and they never meant her: “In the beginning, I always had the power to fight but then I got so tired. I tell them that we have the farm together but they don’t care.”

Hegemonic ideas, which could be reified by technological limitations like the tractor design, perpetuate a gender dichotomy in agricultural industrialization. Such a dichotomy often devalues women, giving rise to a larger number of small-scale farms run by women. Although many aspects of farming are becoming more gender-neutral, these women’s experiences show a vivid dichotomy in the endowed power of women and men on farms.
A Gendered Farm
You learned how work in teams. It’s not a competition. You have to work together—Tjarda

The women I spoke with seek to create farms that are undoubtedly gendered but based on their own definitions. I turn to Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede (2005) in their definition of femininity because it helps to contextualize how these women define femininity in a positive and productive fashion in contrast to agriculturally defined feminine roles and spheres in a male-dominated field. Hofstede and Hofstede argue that a feminine culture can be defined as occurring when the values about gender roles overlap, where both men and women are expected to be modest, caring and concerned with the quality of life. Some of the women employ methods on their farm that are particularly feminine in this interpretation. For example, the biggest lesson that Tjarda brought back from grape farming in wine country was the importance of collaboration. She explained that, “You learned how to work in teams. It is not a competition. You have to work together. Lots of people can’t handle it. I like it!”

Iris hesitantly said that:

Maybe women have naturally different priorities than men. It’s just a thought. For men, it’s more about kilos, tons, tractors, and business. For us, we also have to be conscious about economics but we also have the volunteers. That’s much more working together with other people. That we are also socially active, you take care of people. That’s an element on our farm that’s important. I think that factors in to why you see volunteers at our farm.

Like Tjarda, Iris also emphasized collaboration as a key value in her successful farm and both women also saw this as particularly feminine. These women’s priority of collaboration allowed them to differentiate themselves in a man’s world by emphasizing men’s perceived narrow focus on values and themes like competition and material success. Linguistically this gendered focus on group cohesion and collaboration is also marked. For example, Stephanie alluded to normative male/female speech ideologies by saying “when the women speak, they say we do this but when the men speak then they say I do this.” She then continued to say that it is much more effective to speak about tasks and priorities in terms of “we.” In other words, the women concentrate on collectivity in their farm work, achieving this through both words and actions, as a way to define themselves differently from men.

Another distinguishing self-identification of these women, as female farmers, was their ability to multitask. Dutch popular culture and these women’s gender ideologies show that women in agriculture believe they have an advantage over men when it comes to doing more at once. Anne noted “girls are better milkers. [They are] more careful, more patient, and easy with the cows. No shouting, hitting. We can do two things at a time. Three... And a guy just can do one thing at a time.”

This idea was reiterated in a current Dutch television show, Melk en Honing, which broadcasted a preview of their show by presenting stories of young, Dutch women farmers who were taking over their fathers’ farm (van Santen, Marte: 2008). In a short preview of the series, they explain why they, as women, make better farmers than men. They explained that women tend to be more organized and can multi-task better than men. Tjarda independently noted multi-tasking and organization as necessary skills in running a farm because although it might be a lifestyle, farming is also a business. Managing the tasks with the livestock and/or produce is just as important as tending to the bills. Stephanie’s work with the publicity and cheese-making exemplifies how women might carve out desired skills as specifically gendered in order to work successfully in a male-dominated business. Their dispositions and values enable them
to create authentic and deserving roles in which they are distinguished from men and valued as female farmers.

Surprisingly, when I asked the women how they see their jobs as female farmers differing from those of the men, Kim and Tjarda’s verbal responses suggested that they do not claim to see any gendered differences. Kim said, “It’s not that I have to prove myself. No,” while Tjarda retorted my question, “I am a sort of man! I can’t get excited about clothes or anything.” Despite the valorization of femininity as demonstrated above, there remains a value of androgyny in which these women refuse to acknowledge a distinction in their job solely based on their gender. Simultaneously valorizing femininity while also neglecting gendered differences highlights tensions and ambiguities that gendered ideologies play in farm life. In defining femininity in specifically farm-based ways these women still maintain, contradictorily, that women are equal and therefore indistinct from men. This was also true for most of the young agricultural students.

The construction of gendered identities appeared virtually invisible to the women in their first responses to my questions. Upon further probing, a few of my interlocutors became more introspective about it:

I think that there are qualities that women have more than men. When you are a woman and you do this job, you can’t do anything on your own. You have to ask for help. I think a woman asks sooner for help than a man. Male farmers always think that they can do everything on their own. We have to ask for help, you can’t do everything on your own. Things are too heavy or animals are too big.

Iris proved Kim’s candid view about women’s physical limits when she hurt her back while lifting crops during the summer months. Naturally, men are not exempt from injury while laboring on the farm. Kim and Iris note the advantage of being a woman in such a situation because they have no shame in asking for help and, in turn, other farmers enjoy giving assistance. Men might feel that their asking for help runs against acceptable cultural or social norms for farm men. Iris elaborates:

From a man you can ask for help more easily. For a man, he usually wants to help a woman. If I was another man then he would say, ‘just help yourself, you’re a man.’ That’s just what I think. When we say, ‘can you help me with a machine?’ then a lot of people would help us and explain everything to us. But, another group of men just won’t take us seriously.

On the other hand, despite Iris’ injury, it seems she did not ask for help as soon as needed. This instance illustrates the anthropological truism that what we say is not necessarily how we act. Although women might ask for help more readily in some instances, anyone can make the mistake of over-estimating their physical strength. The last part of Iris’ statement subtly points to Anouk’s experience with conservative farmers who feel that farming should remain in men’s hands. They position themselves as different enough to benefit from their perceived feminine traits yet sufficiently similar to male farmers to maintain a commonplace role in the their male-dominated farming community. In other words, female farmers appear to strive to balance their distinction with invisibility.
Gendered Spheres, and Farming
You know, that we are women is not really an issue for us. It’s just part of our identity.—Anne

As agriculture becomes more complex in the face of industrialization, female food producers’ tasks are multi-faceted and connected to the public realm. Their work does not exist in the vacuum of an isolated socio-economic sphere. For example, Anne would milk the cows in the morning and then work for her public relations firm, conducting interviews and writing articles, in the afternoon and evening. Other women harvest crops one moment and deliver them to customers in the next. These women do not isolate themselves on their farm, especially because cars allow the farmers to travel on their own schedules. As such, paradigms like public/private and nature/nurture do not necessarily divide along gender lines on the farm. Moreover, participation in nature is not mutually exclusive with participation in the public sphere and thus both paradigms should be addressed as a spectrum.

These women do not seem to see farming from a mechanical, industrial point of view. Therefore, one might say that they uphold a stereotype, supposedly being closer to nature as women and saying things like, “I just love animals and always wanted to be part of nature.” But, does their love for nature or animals truly relate to their gender? Furthermore, their potentially stereotypical role is complicated because they participate in nature as a way to be in the public sphere.

In previous times, the limits imposed by the stark distinctions between public/private spheres in farming encouraged women to dedicate their time and labor to the domestic sphere. Sherry Ortner’s (1974) seminal work argues that women are closer to nature whereas men are closer to culture and explores the inherent hierarchy of such a dichotomy. She explains that:

The distinctiveness of culture rests precisely on the fact that it can under most circumstances transcend natural conditions and turn them to its purposes. Thus culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform—to “socialize” and “culturalize”—nature (1974: 73).

Ornter’s distinctions are helpful in understanding that although there is currently a merging of home labor and agricultural labor in farming, there remains a clear distinction in gender-based tasks.

For many of my interlocutors, childcare led to shifting gendered roles on the farm. Among the women, reproduction perpetuates dichotomous gendered roles on the farm as women transition from more technical farm work, based in the farm, like milking cows and tilling the land to inter-personal work, based in the house, like publicity and direct communication with customers. In this regard, Kim puts her aspirations second to her brothers’ when she expresses that should her brothers want to take over her parent’s farm, they should have priority:

Because, I know that I can’t do it on my own when you’re a woman. Sometimes, people say, ‘a woman can also do that’ but you see when you’ve got children then you can’t do it on your own.

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5 I would have a more nuanced answer here had I also did research on men, thus revealing a limitation of single gendered research.
While it might be possible to find counter-examples to Kim’s assertion, she is right in terms of her own experience as well as that of Stephanie’s. When she and Stephanie each became mothers, their roles and tasks on the farm changed dramatically. Stephanie said:

> There were many things that I was doing. I was up at four to milk [the cows] in the morning. I made the cheese. I put the shit away. I did all that! That is why I didn’t mind doing less. When my daughter was sick, nothing else interested me.

If a child had to be taken care of, it was the mother who sacrificed her work on the farm. When Kim had her first child, she and her husband took turns working on the farm. Now that she is pregnant again, her physical exhaustion leaves her tied more closely to the home. Fisher explains that:

> on the farm, the line between reproductive and productive work is intrinsically blurred; there is no clear definition of what separates farm work from domestic labor. A woman’s role on the farm often combined both productive and reproductive labor. The valued and recognized cooperation between these two types of labor was rare (Fisher 2010: 10).

In essence, reproduction limits women’s time and physical capabilities with regard to “productive” labor, which can lead to women’s domestication (Nightingale 2006: 171). Such domestication did not happen so drastically in the circumstances of the women with whom I met. Replacing productive labor with domestic labor was not necessarily the “natural” course for the women on the farm but, for those who did have children, like Stephanie, she preferred to work less with the cows and more with the customers. The subsequent distinct gender roles that Stephanie and her husband have do not necessitate a power structure because the farm, as a business, requires inter-personal work as much as technical work.

Stephanie and Kim act as mother – cooking and taking care of the home – while they also milk the cows or make the cheese. They are not stuck in one sphere or the other, but balance between the two (Bock 2001: 80). Through time, both the men and women on the farms I visited are changing their roles to be more independent entrepreneurs. More recent feminist political ecology research like the work of Nightingale (2006) complicates women’s essentialist connection to the agricultural land by addressing the necessity of looking at “political-economic, cultural, and symbolic processes by which gender is produced by environmental issues. ...In short, what is still not sufficiently highlighted is a clear understanding of how gender has come to be relevant in these contexts at all” (169). Taking up this absence in scholarship, I found, as noted earlier, the women in my research often denied seeing their gender as playing a significant part in their life experiences on the farm. However, the women’s identification of gendered labor became more apparent and concrete when they were able to speak in terms of a specific topic (i.e. reproduction or technology). In other words, their connection to one sphere or another was indistinct because it shifted depending upon the lens in which one analyzes their role.

While the above examples addressed motherhood, gendered spheres are also complicated by sexuality. When Anouk decided to live with Anne and start a farm together, Anouk’s isolation from her community was not necessarily because she resisted normative gender roles by starting a farm but more because her sexuality added a further layer of challenge. Thus, the intersection of gender and sexuality has a role in how one experiences work as a farmer. Anne and Anouk’s relationship epitomizes that other factors complicate a strict binary for two reasons. Firstly, Anne has an external job and makes the main income outside of the house. Secondly, Anouk, as the woman, is “the boss” of the farm yet does not go into
“public" life as much as Anne, since her job is at home. Does this make Anouk a player in the "private" world? Michelle Rosaldo proposed that if women do not enter the men’s world, then they should create a public world of their own (1974: 35). Perhaps, this is a reason for women to start their own farms in a time when female subordination in the agriculture field still exists.

Technology also influences gendered spheres in agriculture through its symbolic connection to culture and thus masculinity. A shift in farming techniques toward a greater reliance on technology and innovation might be “a process that becomes significant in contingent and specific ways with variable and unpredictable ecological outcomes [such that] gender relations need to be analyzed as both a fundamental cause and a consequence of environmental issues” (Nightingale 2006: 170). Nightingale’s point illuminates a catch-22 in which gendered labor roles stem from and rely on ecological and technological circumstances. This cycle may lead to women experiencing alienation that might manifest in the socialized gender norms that my interviewees experience.

When talking to these six women, all alluded to their closeness to nature or their animals as reasons for loving their job. Other researchers have noted the alignment of industrial farming with gender dichotomies. For example, Storm-van der Chijs notes that “a transfer of dairying from the farm to the factory implied a shift to the other gender’s domain” (van der Burg 1994: 128). Given this, when the raw product becomes processed by technological innovation and industry, women often become more detached from the agricultural product. In this study, the sample of women, all of whom owned small-scale farms, seemed to indicate a lack of desire to connect with large-scale industry, perhaps because of a perceived alienation. For these six women, nature, the plants or animals, seemed to be the main impetus for farming. Men tend to be associated with industry to the extent that women might be actively pushed away from large-scale agriculture, as farmers invest more in the technological processing of natural products. Rosaldo explains women’s place in the sphere of nature as “an ascribed status; a woman is seen as ‘naturally’ what she is” (1974: 28). Therefore, a woman's ostensibly intrinsic detachment from culture manifests in Anne’s defensive reaction to my suggesting that her farm was industrialized:

I think our dairy farm is not an industry. This is a family farm. And, all animals have a name. This is very different from industry. But, the sound of industry...it doesn’t feel like that. Not for us. It’s a craftsmanship, that’s important. I think that if you produce food and you use animals for that--chickens, pigs, cows--you should start at the bottom. What does a chicken, cow or pig need have a really nice life? Start there. Make sure the animal gets everything he needs and then make the cost price.

Anne shows us that the natural condition of her farm and the animals is most important. Anne and Anouk do not see their femininity as informing their focus on the natural. Thus, these women’s self-identifications with nature might give their roles as farmers normalcy, empower them by carving out a niche sphere or, conversely, disable them by limiting their ability to transcend different spheres on the farm.

The women value farming as a craftsmanship, which is becoming obsolete in the face of industry. In capitalist societies, such craftsmanship in agricultural production seems neither sustainable nor economical when consumers see little more than the price tag of the farmers’ products. The resulting modern production techniques are, in general, easier and more straight-
forward than craftsmanship processes but tend to alienate farmers from their products, as we see in gendered ways. Even though her work might be rooted in industrial production techniques, Anne’s focus on craftsmanship strives to resist industrialization.

Tjarda, however, emphasizes her connection to nature when she explains that she loves working with her hands. Like Iris, she does not look at the economic or cultural benefit until the end. Tjarda’s favorite part of farming, for instance, was harvesting potatoes: working with your hands, she says is “like digging for gold.” Similarly, Stephanie greatly valorizes here holistic cheese-farming practice:

You milk yourself. You have the milk and then you make the product. You do the whole cycle yourself. In this time, in this society, there are such few things that you can do from the beginning to the end yourself. From the start to the selling to the people who eat your product. That’s the special thing for me.

Anouk and Anne cringed when I tried to speak with them about industrial dairy farming. They refused to consider their farm part of an industry simply because they did not have biological certifications nor use particularly ecological practices.8

Anne: We definitely come at it from a very different perspective. Working with the animals, for us, is the first issue in agriculture. Not especially making food. That’s not the main reason why we do this.

Anouk: No, but you’re aware that you’re in the food business so we have to clean and give medication and stuff like that. So, we would never do pigs or poultry because cows... I don’t know.

As Anouk finished this last statement, she seemed at a loss for words and then just smiled broadly at the thought of her forty cows just meters away. While Anne’s most challenging part of farming is the time commitment, for Anouk, the animals are both the challenge and the reward. The difficulties lie in breeding her own cows and, even more testing, “to breed a cow that is going to be a champion of Holland.” Toward the end of my visit, Anne looks me in the eyes and says:

We are very proud to have fulfilled a dream. We said to each other that when you are 80 or 90 years old and you’re in a retirement house, you have to look back on your life and think, ‘okay, I haven’t done everything right but at least I’ve done what I wanted to do. Tried it!’

These women wake up every morning to milk the cows or tend to their crops. Neither the cows nor the crops have holidays, so many of these farmers do not either. As a “way of life,” these farmers dedicate almost 365 days per year to their profession. To reiterate Anouk and Anne’s point: farming must be in your blood. These women seem to find meaning by resisting mainstream life through their participation in a male-dominated profession.

This small group of female farmers illustrates a complex relationship with such dichotomies as public/private spheres and nature/culture identities. To apply these dichotomies specifically to the agriculture sphere: males are to industry as females are to the farm. Ortner reminds us: “the culture/nature distinction is itself a product of culture, culture being minimally defined as the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology of the natural

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8 To their credit, the only noticeable technology on their farm was the milking machines, albeit there certainly was a tractor.
givens of existence” (1974: 84). The mere origin of this distinction creates a power structure in and of itself. Despite my interlocutors sometimes finding themselves in more domestic roles, which scholars deem subordinate, my research reveals that the women themselves do not feel subordinate or undervalued.

Concluding Reflections

The six women I interviewed are all in very different positions vis-à-vis their gendered and agricultural identities. In some cases, the women surprised themselves in their reactions and responses. Our discussions allowed them to express themselves in a thoughtful way that served for both my research and their own insight. Each woman told me that she was not the “typical woman farmer,” as if to warn me against extrapolating from her experiences. This highlights ambiguities and unresolvedness concerning the identities of modern female farmers. Perhaps, an increase in women’s agency on the farm gives rise to the obsolescence of a formulaic lifestyle for women who own farms.

Unlike the female farmers who tend to stay on their own land and rarely interact with other farmers, regardless of gender, I was able to move within these different circles to connect their shared positions. Looking at the greater food system, my main aim was to more closely connect producers and consumers and, after experiencing the minimal connection that women farmers have with one another, to connect these producers with one another even simply on an emotional level. Most of the women’s rejection of industrialization contributes to eco-feminist discussions as a way of playing out a normative femininity, which might be better expressed by their natural farming techniques, their work ethic, and their role in the domestic sphere. Further research might be pursued focusing on how women’s experiences play out in a larger setting because it should not be presumed that each woman exists in a microcosm.

The female farmers I have written about spent hours walking me through their farms, cooking food for me, and playing chess with me. All of these activities helped me to understand

The cows are herded into the barn for their evening milking.
these women in a more intimate way. Their initial struggle to distinguish themselves from men on the farm highlights their introspective learning as our discussions progressed.

My field research allowed me to be seen less as a researcher and more as their student and admirer. Stereotypical views about farmers’ identities range from the “bourgeois middle classes [and] their so-called lack of refinement [as] connected to being not civilized, rough, backward and traditional. In contrast, romanticists describe the same persons as balanced, honest, industrious and reliable” (van der Berg, 1994: 126). I experienced the latter when talking with these motivated women. As my relationship deepened with the farmers, I was able to better understand the personal relationship that the women have with their work. Each of the six women talked with me about and showed me how she lives each day with innate passion and commitment to nurture and sustain her farm.

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Ghodsee examines societal shifts occurring in Post-Soviet Bulgaria, asking the question: How can an Islam, not traditional to Bulgarian Muslims, garner such a central role in two communities in postsocialist Bulgaria, while the rest of the oblast (i.e. state) and nation remain disinterested in religious renewal? (p. 5, 13). This research marks a shift from previous work in the anthropology of religion for the post-Soviet region: Anthropologists researching Islam in the former Soviet Union typically focused on how Islam traditional to the region was maintained in the face of Sovietization and state-imposed atheism. Anthropologists have noted that Islam was a religion of the shrine (Poliakov 1992) or the home (Privratsky 2001) and thus protected from Sovietization through traditional practice. Ghodsee, however, considers how Islam can serve as a totalizing meta-narrative in the face of globalization in a post-socialist context. A meta-narrative that provides alternative perspectives on history, progress, and humanity (p. 201) in order to address issues of social justice (p. 27) and immorality (p. 32) in the communities of Madan and Rudozem.

The author explores the economic, political, and societal factors that have been key to this religious transformation. After the fall of the Soviet state, the system of production, distribution, and sale/barter designed by the state collapsed. For the communities of Madan and Rudozem this meant the eventual demise of the mining industry that had been the source of economic stability and prosperity. Due to corruption and lack of political support for the communities in question, there was no plan for addressing the economic fallout. A similar lack of unity that characterized the traditional Islamic leadership in Bulgaria allowed foreign Islamic religious works to gain considerable influence. Both communities received Islam from outside Bulgaria and Turkey as a resource to address societal ills and reestablish systems of gendered valorization similar to those present during the economically more prosperous Soviet era.

Ghodsee interviews respondents from all walks of life; still, the experience of the miners remains the focal point of the ethnography. The miners of Madan and Rudozem were among the highest paid laborers in Bulgaria during the Soviet period, lifting the economic horizons for their families and communities. In addition, miners were emblematic of the soviet labor force, hailed as heroes of the proletariat. In stark contrast to this, once the mining industry failed the miners had simply become untrained laborers and burdens to their families.

The miners did not allow their industry to be shut down without a fight. They initially sought political attention by means of strikes, and at first, they had the support of the general public and politicians. Still, the lead and zinc mines were no longer profitable in the global market and over seven years both the public and politicians grew tired of the repeated strikes. Steps were taken to salvage the mines, but these agreements only allowed unscrupulous individuals to take ownership of the mining resources and liquidate them. In the end, the miners and their communities did not have the political backing necessary to effectively pursue new business options.

With the demise of the mining industry, the center of the community shifted from the mining headquarters to the newly built mosque (p. 59, 65). Islamic groups from the Middle East became involved in the Smolyan Oblast, establishing NGOs, paying for new Arab-style mosques, and providing scholarships for youth to be trained in Islam. They presented Arab Islam as the more “authentic” and “superior” form of the religion (p. 92). Their influence was
enhanced by the weakness of in-country Islamic officials who were occupied with political
tussles and showed little regard for the well being of local Muslim communities (p. 128). Foreign
Islamic religious workers and youth returning from training presented Q’uranic based Islam as
free of Bulgarian and Turkish cultural accretions. Intergenerational tensions emerged between
traditional Bulgarian Muslims of the older generation and the young people who called for a re-
Islamization of their society. Such tensions have also been researched in other parts of Eurasia
(Kuchumkulova 2007).

In spite of these tensions, an Islam not traditional to Madan or Ruzodem was appealing.
Miners who had enjoyed prosperity and respect now spent their days depressed and often
drunk. The mosque provided a place for men to find community and be valorized in their roles of
leaders of their families. Women in these communities were also willing to stay at home and to
dress modestly in public, wearing Arab-style garb, in the hope of societal renewal.

In her investigation, the author moves from the mines, to the mosques, and finally to the
mothers at home. Ghodsee examines this negotiation of gender relations for the expected
overall societal good and gender stability (pp. 25–26). According to Ghodsee, there was a
nationwide movement to redefine the role of women during the Soviet era (1946–1989) and one
specific to Madan and Rudozem in the post-Soviet era. During the Soviet period, the
government encouraged women to leave their home settings and enter the workplace. Yet when
the seamstresses in Madan were offered high wages, the mayor intervened, asking that
women’s wages be kept down so as not to exceed those of the (predominantly male) miners (p.
184). After the collapse of the mining industry, a significant percentage of women in the two
communities embraced, what they were told by ‘re-Islamisizers’ as being, the proper Islamic role
of staying at home (p. 189). Based on interviews with female respondents, Ghodsee portrays
this as an effort to address their husbands’ drinking (p. 175) and domestic violence (pp. 105–
106). Women made sacrifices to safeguard the male role as “leaders”. In both instances, the
argument was that such changes would benefit the society as a whole. Ghodsee makes a
convincing case through her use throughout the book of case law, historical records, and
statistics to complement extensive ethnographic interviews.

In one of her most significant contributions of the book, Ghodsee argues that the Islam
adopted presents a “third way.” Here she builds on the concept of a second way as presented
by Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 2006). Žižek offers a hopeful picture, the second way illustrating the
potential of combining the best of communism and capitalism. Ghodsee’s concept of the third
way describes how citizens of Madan and Rudozem combined what they liked best from
communism, capitalism, and Islam. Ghodsee points out how Islam and communism share
common ideologies concerning the value of the community over the individual, social justice in
opposition to exploitation, and a posited universal destiny (pp. 200–201). Islam and capitalism
both affirm the importance of private property (p. 199).

The citizens of Madan and Rudozem took their personal narratives, embraced what
Ghodsee terms a “meta-narrative of Islam” (pp. 200–201), and formulated a contextualized third
way. Since we are considering these two communities as distinct from the rest of the nation, the
contextualization process is locally-based. Ghodsee summarizes the process: “… the social
embrace of Islam will be informed by the particular ideological histories of the places wherein it
takes root” (p. 202). Ironically, the Islam that foreign religious workers argued as scriptural, and
thus free of cultural accretions, serves as a cultural resource, according to Ghodsee, for yet
another adaptation.

This is a superb ethnography, combining the stories of individuals, analysis of an array of
historical facts, and knowledge of the social context along with a keen skill of synthetic analysis.
The only shortcoming of the book is the minimal treatment of Central Asian material, since the
author presents Bulgaria as the meeting place between East and West (p. 12). However, given
the length of the book, one cannot expect it to be comprehensive. The book will be of interest to anthropologists specializing in religion, Europe or post-socialist contexts, as well researchers in sociology, area studies, and religious studies. It is most appropriate for graduate level courses and lends itself for use in interdisciplinary seminars.

**Author Biography:** Erik Aasland has defended and completed edits on his dissertation at Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies. He spent five years doing field research on Kazakh proverbs and oral traditions. He is co-founder of the Socialist and Post-Socialist Area Studies Section of the American Folklore Society.

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I remember very well how surprised I was when one of my old friends Chen told me during one of my recent visits to China that if he had money he “wanted to live in a new UK town in a suburb of Shanghai.” As someone who wasn’t well aware of how much the housing situation in China has changed since the reform and opening up in the late 1970s, I thought Chen was just kidding. First and foremost, for various reasons, I didn’t think that a (still) socialist country could have a “UK town.” Second, for middleclass white-collar workers like Chen, I didn’t think it was possible for him to privately own a house in a housing system that for several decades was controlled and therefore provided solely by the state. I later found out that what Chen meant by “UK town” wasn’t really a town for British expatiates, but a new peri-urban gated community that was designed to look “British” to attract new middleclass Chinese residents “with good taste” (as advertised by the salesperson when we visited the showroom). Thanks to my curiosity, I got Chen to go along with me on a ride to do look at some of this new “UK town” along with several other towns named after European cities and countries, such as “German town,” and “the New Venice” (lo and behold, it has many manmade canals). Chen was, in fact, very lively when showing me around. Although, historically, China has been looking to the West as a model despite its effort to eventually overcome the development of the West itself, I still wasn’t sure what to make of the situation: what’s wrong with a Chinese town? Here we see China filling up its urban space with private properties, which neither correspond with its previous housing system nor serve to create a new social safety net for its skyrocketing urban population.

After reading Li Zhang’s *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis*, Chen’s situation became clear to me – in Zhang’s terms, we see in the newly emerging “middle-class,” a phenomenon called the “spatializing of class,” and new sets of subjectivity as a result of the changing forms of urban governance. The emerging middle class is not in China’s mega cities like Shanghai or Shenzhen but in Kunming, a provincial capital in the south of China of which Zhang herself is a native. *In Search of Paradise* discusses the deep contradiction that lies within the new and the old systems of housing provision. After the reform and opening up in the early eighties, many cities were faced with the same problems, namely how to provide housing for the increasing population attracted to urban areas by the employment opportunities granted by Post-Mao China’s paramount leader Deng Xiaoping’s (in)famous economic scheme “let some people get rich first.” Many social scientists (mostly quantitative) have argued that it was natural for China to do what it has been doing since then, which is to let the market take over the responsibility from the state in providing housing to those who need it (e.g., Peng 1986; Wang 1992; Wang and Murie 1999; Wu 2001). The Chinese state sees the market as a solution to the problems of insufficient as well as low-quality housing that existed in the old socialist system. The state is moving toward the direction of privatizing most of its urban housing to correspond with the new market of private housing, such as apartments. Driven by the apparent benefits of letting the private sectors handle the issue, the danwei, or the work-unit, which was once the flagship of equality and social welfare, is slowly dissolving itself by offering its housing to the residents, usually those with close ties to local officials at prices that are below the market value.

To puzzled observers of Chinese society, this was where many problems piled up: Who gets the house? What does it take to qualify for housing subsidies? China has moved from an egalitarian housing system to one now marked by inequality. Whereas in the past housing was
guaranteed and provided by the states, the current system creates disparities not only between the economic haves and have nots but also on the basis of guanxi, or “personal ties.” This is where previous quantitative studies on housing and surveys could only do so much to shed light on the current state of housing in China. *In Search of Paradise* portrays what was going on in the process of negotiation, from the fight for compensation and survival, to struggle to maintain one’s property rights in the quasi-collective system, to the attitudes toward the new “private sphere,” among others.

Chen always wanted a house because in the society he lived in a house means everything. As a man, a house is a prerequisite for marriage. It also means privacy and freedom from what he calls “noisy life” that he had experienced for almost thirty years living in his parents’ house, where everyone knew each other and wanted to know about each other’s affairs. Chen was nagged everyday by his neighbors and sometimes by his parents themselves about the fact that he still had not moved out and did not have his own house. Although it was not uncommon for a son to live with his parents in China in his case, the first generation of singletons under the one-child-policy, Chen felt the pressure from his extended family to be more successful than the previous generations to save the face of the family (*mianzi*).

Zhang’s *In Search for Paradise* helps me to understand his situation. In her study that spanned over seven years in her native hometown where she speaks the local dialect and knows the place and culture very well, Zhang unpacks this phenomenon with energy and wit. Her reading of the situation in China, from both as a native and as an expert anthropologist, takes into account both the changing housing policy and the relationship between state and the society – now with the market mediating between them – and the actuality of the situation, namely how people deal with the change. Zhang uses statistical housing data to shed light on new forms of subjectivity, especially in the emerging process of “class-making.” This is the most exhilarating part of her work. Stories about how residents feel about their living condition and expectation for the future read naturally and livelily in Zhang’s ethnography.

The book begins by outlining the authors position as both native and anthropologist. The ethnography is based in her own hometown and reflexively engages with the data she collects. Most of the theories that she uses are familiar to anthropologists, but some are drawn from other fields of social sciences especially those on space and spatiality such as Henri Lefebvre (1991), David Harvey (1973; 2003), and Manuel Castells (1983). The first chapter “Farewell to Welfare Housing” outlines the change in the system of housing provision from the socialist danwei to the present privatization. It is a thorough and thoughtful review of literature for anyone interested in understanding the housing market in China. Chapters 2-5, “Unlocking the Real Estate Machine,” “Emerging Landscape of Living,” “Spatializing Class,” “Accumulation by Displacement,” take the reader right into several key issues of class-making vis-à-vis private property and urban space, such as compensation for relocation (and therefore the contestable use of eminent domain) and conflicts between the residents and the developers in Kunming. The last three chapters, “Accumulation by Displacement,” “Recasting Self-Worth,” and “Privatizing Community Governing and Its Limit,” Zhang argues that the focus on housing and “regimes of living” brings to the surface many issues in the myriad social changes that undergird China’s political and economic forces.

The area the book does not touch upon very much, ironically, is the area of “space” itself. In her theoretical discussion of the new concept of “spatializing of class,” Zhang goes as far as to underline how urban space is created as a private sanctuary (i.e. gated community) and dwelled in by those who have the means to do so. In other words, her ethnography discusses matters in space, yet it does not really discuss how those matters are related to space. This leads to the question: what is/are the form(s) of individual, social, or collective activities that take place in space because of the space itself? In the entire book, there are
several photographs of her sites, but no single illustrations of the architectural floor plans or the zoning charts of the spaces that she discusses. For instance, some simple site plans of the housing project she discusses would provide the readers with some insights on how buildings are clustered – how segregated they are from each other despite the “green space” in the middle that is supposed to bring people together. In addition, a comparison of floor plans of popular units of the “private oasis” and typical seven-story walk-up danwei housing would tell us more about how the new forms of subjectivity requires the new middle-class’ realm of spatiality to be different from before. For instance, do everyday activities in the space of the new private paradise differ from that of the traditional state-provided housing? In my own research, I have encountered numerous instances where people are practicing the same activities in the new space, which shows not only the flexibility of the residents, but also how the notion of “private paradise” is materialistic (see Arkaraprasertkul 2012).

To summarize, *In Search of Paradise* fulfills the goal that it sets out: the book unpacks many of the crucial concepts of post-socialist China such as class, status, welfare, social space, and collectivity. Unlike Zhang’s previous work that focuses on an enclave of migrant workers in Beijing (Zhang 2001), *In Search of Paradise* examines the situation of the wealthy in the opaque political system of the People’s Republic of China. Zhang leaves the big question of how some people get the opportunity to choose their private paradise while others are still living below the poverty line to others but she signals the problem throughout her ethnography. The book supplements Zhang’s recent pursuits on understanding the effects of neoliberal governmentality and privatization (Zhang and Ong 2008). She makes sure that we know that there is no other place where the effects are more obvious than in China. In addition, like the late pioneering anthropologist G. William Skinner (1964; 1965a; 1965b) who placed great emphasis on physical space, as it is where social activities take place, Zhang’s ethnography allows us to see not only the middle class’ social imagination of private life under unique socio-political circumstances, but also their lived experience in space. This book is a major contribution to the studies of not only, what Michael Herzfeld (2001) calls, “ethnography in urban context” but also housing as a whole. Although housing experts as well as architects will probably not find any major differences in the book from their findings through quantitative research, the main contribution of the book lies in its careful and thoughtful penetration of the actuality of lived experience through ethnography. In other words, *In Search of Paradise* reminds us of what housing studies usually take for granted – that housing is about people, not about simplified statistics. If there is any major criticism of this wonderful work, it would be the cover of the book, which is truly horrifying – Cornell University Press, you can do better than that!

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The alleged sale of yellowcake to Iraq was one of the leading justifications for war, but just four years later, a new market in Uranium futures opened on Wall Street. Is Uranium just another commodity, or is it a nuclear material, subject to exceptional political, regulatory, and environmental considerations and practices? In *Being Nuclear*, Hecht examines this shifting “nuclearity” of Uranium and the controversies that have surrounded it since the mid-20th century.

Nuclearity, according to Hecht, is a technopolitical category “distributed among things,” rather than an essential quality of certain materials, technologies, or processes, and it is often tied to a distinction between natural and technological sources of radiation (italics in the original, p. 14). While radiation is often an important element in establishing nuclearity, it takes a great deal of “work” for a class of radioactive objects or processes to become nuclear. For a Uranium mine to be considered a nuclear workplace, versus an ordinary (if still dangerous) one, it must have an infrastructure that can make the effects of radiation exposure visible and meaningful and is, thus, heavily dependent on socioeconomic, geographic, and historical contexts. Because nuclearity is tied closely to exceptionalism—in terms of security measures, workplace safety protocols, or regulations about waste disposal—controversies about Uranium often revolve around whether it should be regarded as nuclear or banal. Is it an unnatural fuel with the potential to destroy the world, or a just another kind of rock? That depends on who is asked, where it is found, and when the question is posed.

Hecht does a masterful job of outlining many of the major controversies surrounding Uranium by following the different ways in which nuclearity and banality have been constructed, asserted, and contested in Gabon, Madagascar, South Africa, Namibia, and Niger. For example, industries and institutions involved in the Uranium trade often argued for its banality—in the case of South African Chamber of Mines, even going so far as to claim that one could eat a pound of Uranium without falling ill. On the other hand, some critics argued that mines should look much more like other nuclear workplaces by, for instance, closely monitoring the exposures of mineworkers and, when necessary, rotating them through less radioactive workspaces to ensure that they do not receive more than a specified dose. Often the same actors will assert exceptionalism in one context, while dismissing it in another. Claims of the transformative, modernizing potential of nuclear power, for example, often coexist with claims about the banality of the various threats that it poses.

Perhaps most importantly, Hecht is able to point out how the work that goes into creating (or avoiding) nuclearity involves politics of inclusion and exclusion. Nuclearity creates a “regimes perceptibility” that generates absences and invisibilities with wide-ranging effects. Invisibility is often a product of scientific or technological limitations or controversies or limited resources. Hecht points out that overburdened and under-resourced medical infrastructures, along with the notion that cancer is a “first world” affliction, led to a dearth of data on cancer rates in the national population against which the cancer rates of mineworkers, even if collected, could be measured. In many cases, however, invisibility was intentionally created or maintained by states and corporations seeking to avoid controversy, improve international relations, limit liability, or prevent labor unrest. Even where data was collected, invisibility could be easily hidden—intentionally or not—in averages that ignored “hot spots” within the micro-geographies of the mines and mills. These micro-geographies reflected broader inequalities. In South African
mines, for example, neither white nor black miners knew about risks from Radon inhaling Radon particles even into the 80’s. Yet, white miners tended to stand in the cooler “intake” areas of the mine’s ventilation system, which meant that they inhaled much less Radon, while black miners tended to work in the hotter “return airways,” which led to higher exposures.

However created, these absences shaped the possibilities for affected communities to make claims on the state or mining companies. In Gabon, where because Uranium mining continued for decades and relations with French experts and institutions were close, the nuclearity of Uranium mining ultimately served as the basis for something approaching (but still short of) “biological citizenship.” Biological citizenship, a concept developed by Adriana Petryna (2002), describes situations like post-socialist Ukraine where access to and claims for social welfare are based upon biological injuries that can be traced back to the Chernobyl disaster. Compared to Gabon, Hecht argues that Malagasy mineworkers remained disconnected from the scientific, technical, and social resources that could have allowed them to translate various indications of danger into a nuclearity, or biological citizenship, that was politically or medically salient, in part because Uranium mining existed for only a short time on the island.

Hecht also puts the work of Michel Callon (1998) on the performativity of economic knowledge to good use in tracing the creation and contestation of the Uranium market. Markets, here, are not the expression of fundamental economic laws: they are the result of the creation and deployment of “market devices,” which are technologies and knowledge practices that allow for specific entanglements and disentanglements of commodities, particular forms of rationality, and particular modes of sociality. This way of looking at markets and commodities allows Hecht to provide a great deal of insight into how nuclearity and banality have been constructed on an international scale throughout the later half of the 20th century. In the early days of the “nuclear age,” for example, Uranium was thought to be rare, and the United States government believed that it could maintain nuclear superiority by controlling the supply of Uranium. Far from being an ordinary commodity, contracts for Uranium were arranged on a cost-plus basis: there was no “market price” for Uranium, because its role in cold war geopolitics made its exceptional nuclearity self-evident. Later, as more deposits were found in various locations around the world, the list of states developing nuclear weapons and power expanded, and as post-colonial states attempted to take more control over their natural resources, various institutions attempted to make Uranium a banal commodity by, among other things, establishing price indices. This was no easy matter, however, as it involved including and excluding various types of transactions, qualifying what will count as “uranium” for the purposes of the index. There were significant struggles, often between former colonial powers and newly independent states, about what kinds of sales counted as licit and illicit, how the price of Uranium should be determined, and how the Uranium market related to resource sovereignty, among other things.

While this is the work of an historian, Being Nuclear has an ethnographic “feel,” in part because it was based upon a masterful combination of archival and fieldwork. Hecht also draws upon the work of anthropologists like Joe Masco, Hugh Gusterson, Adriana Petryna, and Anna Tsing. Her exploration of nuclearity and banality will be crucial to understanding the new controversies about nuclear power, radioactive wastes, and biological harm in Japan and around the world in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. Despite the fact that the sheer volume of acronyms can get confusing, this text is accessible, including to undergraduates. I recommend using excerpts from this text, including the introduction and the chapters “Borderlands” and “Nuclear Desert(ion)s,” because they would make a compelling introduction to some of the central topics of science and technology studies, environmental (in)justice, and the shifting intersections of the economic, the political, and the technological in undergraduate courses.
Author Biography: Pedro de la Torre III is an incoming doctoral student in science and technology studies at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and plans to work on the politics of nuclear waste disposal. He recently completed a Master’s degree in Anthropology at the New School for Social Research.

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Dreams that Matter by Amira Mittermaier is the 2011 recipient of the Clifford Geertz Book Prize from the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, selected from over 40 submissions. Mittermaier, an anthropologist, is an assistant professor of religion at the University of Toronto. This is her first book.

Dreams that Matter is born from her dissertation research on discourses, interpretations and experiences of dreams in contemporary Egypt. Despite the Revivalist/Islamist/modernist state’s circumscription of popular modes of dream interpretation in canceling television broadcasts on the topic, Mittermaier suggests that concern for understanding dreams has increased in recent years. Dreams matter in a person’s everyday life, “because they insert the dreamer into a wider network of symbolic debts, relationships, and meanings. They place the dreamer in relation to the Divine, offer guidance, and enable a mode of being in the world that disrupts the illusion of the autonomous self-possessed subject” (2011:3). Taking this stance, Mittermaier both dovetails and challenges psychologistic paradigms employed in anthropological and Middle Eastern studies of dreams in her use of barzakh as an heuristic.

Barzakh is an emic Islamic concept connoting: the realm of spirits and dead between this world and Judgment Day; a space between the material and the physical; an in-betweenness; and an analytic “Elsewhere.” Dreams are pre-eminently ethical in that they portend encounters with an “Other,” broadly defined. Others of this world, and her main interlocutors, include dream interpreting shaykhs (spiritual leaders), Sufistic devotional communities, and other living persons who listen to dream re-tellings. Otherworldly “others” are the Prophet Muhammad, saints, and the dead. Including a broader set of encounters with myriad “Others” permits Mittermaier to claim expanded conceptualizations of the imagination, ethics, and agency. Indeed, “it is the dream’s agency that matters, more so than the dreamer’s” (2011:5), pushing the studies of Hirschkind (2006) and Mahmood (2005) on Egyptians’ agency and self-cultivation in a fresh direction.

Following her lucid introduction of theoretical and topical concepts, Mittermaier situates the Egyptian state’s recent reformist projects to bound dream interpretation as superstitious, drawing on Orientalist, sectarian, and political ideologies in its justification. This is difficult, however, as dreamers and dream interpreters draw their own legitimacy from authoritative Qur’anic references (hadith) on the same topic. Chapter 2 colorfully introduces one of the author’s four principal interlocutors, Shaykh Nabil, who tends a saintly shrine and interprets visitors’ dreams; interpretations of which Mittermaier contrasts classificatory and ideal types with her observations of Nabil’s work for the shrine’s mostly middle-aged women visitors. In chapter 3 she expands and questions the very capacity and concept of observation, eschewing an ocular-centric epistemology by recounting the dynamics of the book’s focus on “dream-vision”-ru’yā. Dream-visions are contingent on a “sincere gaze” toward otherworldly “others,” an imaginative attunement to barzakh. Dreamers cultivate this attunement in nonobligatory prayers called istikhāra to overcome indecision about an important choice, the more widespread ritualistic and invocational dhikr prayers conventional in Islamic worship, and manuals describing hadith-based rules of conduct and mannerisms for successful dreaming. However, analytically for Mittermaier and conceptually for her interlocutors, dream-visions “are above all encounters” (2011: 18) with spiritual entities who come upon and visit dreamers, and “rupture the very system of self-discipline that aims at invoking [dream-visions]” (2011:103). Two case
studies follow of unlikely dreamers who come to encounter the divine, but whose observed and reported behaviors and narration of their dream-vision might otherwise lead one to characterize their sincerity as charlatanry. Chapter 4 introduces another principal interlocutor Shaykh Qusi whose popularity derives from poetic writing describing his encounters with the Prophet. His disciples experience dream-visions by way of reading his poetry, and they document these encounters in a “Book of Visions.” The case leads Mittermaier to question what we mean by causality, authorship and creativity, claiming finally, that “a pious dreamer… is both the cause and the outcome of the ‘dream-vision’” (2011:139, emphasis original).

For many Egyptians, dreams are a major conduit for dialogical and experiential relationships with their deceased relatives and friends, which she contrasts to Freud’s argument that dreams of the dead indicate one’s unconscious reflections of oneself. This makes Egyptian, and other culture groups’ dreams, both moral and ethical. The dead, along with saints and the Prophet, are primary figures in “visitation-dreams” described in chapter 5, and they invite dreamers to “counter-visitations” in pilgrimages to ancestral tombs and saints’ shrines and the hajj to Mecca. Mittermaier continues with Freud in the subsequent chapter by detailing the history of psychoanalysis and cognitive-behavioral psychology in Egypt and describing the contemporary interaction of these systems and their concepts like desire, the unconscious, and hallucinations as re-imagined and deployed in dream interpretations. Today, re-imagination and interpretation of dreams are especially contingent on mediation, namely mass-mediation in journals, photographs, television, telephone hotlines, and cyberspace. The final ethnographic chapter on “virtual” and “visionary realities” describes how dreamers and interpreters understand and represent dreams to themselves in these media, renegotiating form and content of the Divine in the process.

Students will find this book particularly appealing. The book concludes with a lengthy glossary of Egyptian and Arabic terms, which is useful for non area-studies specialists. Many will find Mittermaier’s depiction of the ins and outs of dissertation fieldwork experience familiar and assuring: meeting interlocutors to speak over tea or coffee; justifying one’s seemingly esoteric research to interlocutors; getting in from a long and exhausting day’s work only to be called up for a not-to-be-missed event; the troubles of reconciling one’s first impressions of interlocutors with where and how they come to inhabit the greater ethnographic narrative; and calling upon one’s friends and family for moral and practical support, namely that her mother played an important role in fieldwork interlocution. Indeed, Mittermaier consistently traces her subjective position as a researcher and the influence of the project to her family: her mother is an Egyptian Jungian psychoanalyst and her father a psychiatrist. While the initial project motivation then comes off as less than original or serendipitous given these affinities, the monograph is nicely structured, clearly written, and a prime example for students to evidence the transformation of a dissertation into a first book with a rewarding outcome.

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“The U.S. is a nation of immigrants. So if they build a wall, the Mexicans will build a tunnel. Or a higher ladder. [We]’ll always be jumping the border” (Lalo, undocumented immigrant, p.104).

Illegal immigration is a hot button issue that historically has and currently continues to divide the American public. Opponents of illegal immigration argue that undocumented immigrants are an economic and social burden to Americans and should be deported. In contrast, many other Americans believe that illegal workers provide social and economic benefits to the U.S. economy and should be provided a path to legal citizenship. Many of these Americans feel that opposition to undocumented workers stems from historic and contemporary racism.

In response to this controversial topic, Labor and Legality: An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network, Ruth Gomberg-Munoz provides a complex look at the lives of ten male undocumented immigrants, the Lions, who work as restaurant busboys in Chicago, Illinois. Gomberg-Munoz nicknames her informants “The Lions” because they all come from Leon, Mexico; Leon means lion in Spanish. Gomberg-Munoz writes about their daily lives, which personalizes the faces of illegal immigrants. Her writing style and the use of the personal stories of undocumented immigrants at the beginning of each chapter allows her readers to become emotionally invested in the lives of these marginalized men. These personal vignettes are contrasted against typical representations of undocumented immigrants found in mainstream media.

This book originated from Gomberg-Munoz’s dissertation research on undocumented migration and combines participant observation and interviews across two field sites, a Chicago restaurant and the town of Leon, Mexico. Gomberg-Munoz explains in the Introduction that her work experience as a waitress and bartender during college eventually led her to investigate the experience of undocumented immigrants in the food service industry. This research builds on previous research done by many including Leo Chavez’s ethnography titled Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society published in 1992. While his research offers a broad look at the experience of immigrants, Gomberg-Munoz provides a more in depth personal face to immigration by focusing on a few informants’ lives. Gomberg-Munoz uses the methods and writing style of anthropology to challenge her readers to acknowledge and move past any assumptions about the immigrant experience. The broader goal of Gomberg-Munoz's research is to show how individuals create their own stories while being constrained by social structures, and, to illustrate this, I will draw on examples from a few chapters.

In order to understand the daily life of her informants, Gomberg-Munoz contextualizes the complex history of Mexico-United States labor migration in order to demonstrate that “undocumented migration is a logical and predictable result of the confluence of three factors: uneven global economic development, the establishment of transnational social networks over time, and policies that restrict legal entries to unrealistic levels” (38). She uses this social history of illegal immigration in America to place the Lions within a larger global context where economic policies and practices have created a demand for cheap labor sources in areas of production.

Another way Gomberg-Munoz explores undocumented migrants’ constant struggle between expressing their own agency and acting with the constraints of numerous social
structures is by questioning the concept of hard work in the chapter “Echandole Ganas: Working Hard.” Several of the Lions discuss how their illegal status determines their economic opportunities and forces them to have an attitude of compliance. Mexican immigrants’ desirability as a low wage unskilled labor source is determined by social qualities like responsibility, reliability, and attitude. Therefore, in order to be hired and maintain employment, they must show a positive attitude and willingness to do what they are told; this demonstrates that the cultural stereotype of Mexican labor force as obedient hard workers “ignores the role of inequality in structuring work conditions, and diminishes workers’ agency on the job” (83). The central conflict between individual and society is further explored in Chapter 7, where one of the Lions states that “if you are a good worker, nothing – not even being illegal – will ever affect you” (125). Later he shares an experience of being targeted by law enforcement, and in his discussion of this experience he contradicts his earlier statement of infinite opportunities by saying that “...they know we are wetbacks and we can’t do anything about [the police abuses]” (125). The Lions’ own words show that while they do recognize the challenges that arise from being an undocumented worker, they do not believe it hinders them from having a normal life.

This book is a valuable pedagogical tool that can be adapted to address the needs of introductory and upper level anthropology courses. I have taught the text in two introductory anthropology courses. In my experiences, I saw students engage with the text deeply, challenge their own stereotypes of “illegal immigrants,” and speak openly about how the text changed a part of their worldview. Specifically, Gomberg-Munoz’s multi-sited and mixed methods study of 10 male undocumented workers provides a number of entry points for students to address what Chimamanda Adichie calls “the danger of the single story,” a phrase she uses to highlight the critical misunderstandings that can and do occur when we hear or tell only a single story of a person or nation (Adichie 2009). Gomberg-Munoz, like Adichie, directs the reader to question the dominant narrative that promotes a view of undocumented workers as criminals. With this research, Gomberg-Munoz makes a critical contribution to the creation of a new master narrative on immigration that is inclusive, comprehensive and, most importantly, anti-racist. I found her ethnography to be compelling and substantive, yet there is one shortcoming of the book that left me longing for an applied real-world perspective. While Gomberg-Munoz comments that the anti-immigrant movement is racist, she does not discuss this issue in depth. By missing the opportunity to more closely connect the socio-political history of U.S. immigration policy, American racist ideologies, and the contemporary immigrant rights movement, especially given the passage of strict anti-immigration laws in Arizona, Alabama and other states in the last few years, this leaves a gap in her ethnographic analysis. Additionally, in order for this book to have an impact in the politics of immigration there should be a discussion of the actions that can be taken in order to create what she calls "an anti-nativist, anti-racist perspective on immigration” (135). This is an area that, if expanded, could provide American policy makers with some real-world implications for the illegal immigration conflict.

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The edited volume *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, advocacy and activism*, explores war and oppression as central topics of analysis. The volume is a collection of anthropological case studies that focus on survivors’ experiences and the everyday lives of those who witness violence. It is also an invitation, even a pressing one at times, to bring anthropologists who study in war zones or other violent and repressive environments to consider their engagement towards the people they choose to collaborate with. A call to scholars who represent victimized individuals and nations to also become advocates for them, as well as witnesses to the moments and experiences that shape the world of those struck by violence and war.

The book is structured into four broad topics, entitled: ‘The politics of witnessing in war and pain’; ‘Lessons from agents of change’; ‘Trauma, violence, and women’s resistance in everyday life’; and, ‘The engaged observer, inside and outside the academy’. By exploring these topics through case studies, the book propels the reader into the experiences of the ethnographers themselves and their deep engagement within local contexts. The collective work includes chapters exploring war, violence, and oppression in Burma, Palestine, Colombia, Guatemala, Italy, and elsewhere, tackling issues such as AIDS, prison life, paramilitary groups, war and refugee camps.

The editor, Victoria Sanford frames the volume in terms of the distinction between ‘Truth’ and ‘truths’, and the need to accept the fact that: “everyone has a truth [...] that represents] an honest interpretation based on different memory and experience of the same events...” (p. 28). She also introduces the terms “trajectories of meaning” and “structures of understanding” to suggest that different people can foster different truths and live the same event(s) in very distinct ways. Sanford explores how the paths people follow in life can be different according to what the journey means to them, or how they understand and live what has happened to them. Based in the specific contexts of the Vietnam War and of La Violencia in Guatemala, she offers examples of the same events being lived and told in diverging ways by two people who were there. For instance, in the case of the Vietnam War, the testimonies given about the Thanh Phong village massacre by members of the squadron responsible for the attack, as well as by a Vietnamese survivor of her village’s massacre, differed greatly in terms of what was done and seen by the same people, at the same place. Thus memory, guilt, fear, and trauma, namely, can account for the diverging versions of a single event, and the existence of various truths.

In the context of war, violence, and oppression, the difficulties linked to the act of representation and to the validity of interpretations present specific challenges that social scientists should consider when they speak on behalf of others. This volume explores such challenges and shows readers, for example, how survivors, witnesses, and anthropologists can become speechless when presented with the horrors of war, making it difficult to later render these moments in a way that does them justice. Further, many volume contributors explore the difficulties of interpretation and sometimes consider this task impossible because the evidence collected in these circumstances is often difficult to accept or verify. Angel-Asani gives a good example of this in her case study of imprisoned black women in Italy. In her work with incarcerated women, she has often encountered difficulties among her scholarly peers who deemed her results untrustworthy, since her interlocutors were criminals and therefore unreliable people, thus revealing the biases of academia.
The volume as a whole encourages the reader to reflect more critically on the epistemology of anthropological research and the production of knowledge about others. It is in the specifics of each case study, of every contributor’s experience, that we find fresh insight on how to conduct field research and render results. Instead of offering major guidelines and general rules for any methodological and analytical work in the field of anthropology, *Engaged Observer* suggests 12 different ways, each rooted in the specific context of a case study, to enrich our ethnographic work and the way we approach our study material. In order to enrich this exploration, the authors raise questions, including: Is it possible to remain politically, ethically and/or legally neutral while witnessing terror, pain and suffering? Can we as anthropologists, on one hand, choose to work in areas touched by these atrocities, and on the other, willingly stay out of people’s fights for justice and a normal life? Can moral duty and academic interest coexist? These questions demand consideration, according to these authors, for researchers working with marginalized communities.

With these interrogations, *Engaged Observer* encourages readers to consider the contemporary anthropological enterprise and engaged work. This is clearly addressed in Skidmore’s case study on advocacy and the politics of engagement in Burma (Myanmar). She makes a plea for anthropologists to be advocates for their interlocutors. In her case, she presents evidence that this advocacy should assist to break hegemonic readings of people’s stories as created by military regimes and institutions. According to her, it is preferable for researchers to write about events witnessed in violent and oppressive environments from the locals’ perspective. It is particularly important in contexts where regimes seek to control and manipulate narratives of terror and suffering and at times to influence over-zealous scholars to take a pro-military stance.

This volume also points to a need for scholars who work in war-touched and violent contexts to be able to find a balance between the analytical explanations requested by the academic community who fund and read the research, and the perspectives and needs of those studied from an experiential level. One way of doing this is by shifting the anthropological focus away from systems of representation and academic knowledge towards embodied experience. Bosia’s chapter demonstrates this approach by bringing the body to the center of the study in order to infuse a degree of empathy into the work. While working with AIDS patients in a gay community, paying attention to physical experience and agency helped Bosia study and talk more openly about the phenomenon of "barebacking". Exploring barebacking helped not only to highlight this practice as a major cause of infection among gay men, but also served as a way to engage the body in a social statement.

Above all, this book is essential for those developing research projects as it helps anthropologists considering research in violent and conflict-laden environments to design research aims and methods that are suited for this type of context. One contributor, Warren, argues succinctly that it is time for “developing a new self-consciousness about how we do it [field research], and identifying new issues, powerful questions, and innovative framings through which to assert the salience of our well-honed approaches to real-world issues” (p. 223). Finally, the most compelling aspect about this volume is its ability to propel the reader into the experiences of specific local contexts while offering important analytical, theoretical, and methodological tools for the study of the everyday lives of those with whom anthropologists work, whether it be in an intense setting or not.

**Author Biography:** Marie-Claire Voyer-Messier is a master’s student in religious anthropology at Laval University in Québec city, Canada. Her area of interest is the Indonesian island of Java, where she studies a modern ritual feast through the concepts of agency and performance. She intends to go on teaching Anthropology in college after she completes her degree this year.
Call for Papers and Peer Reviewers: Submission Deadline January 14, 2013

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All submissions should include two separate documents:
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2. The manuscript should not have any identifying information; review is double-blind. The document should be: double spaced and adhere to AAA style. Please save the document with your last name as the document name. Please also include:
   1. A 250 word abstract
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Anthropological Fieldwork: Innovative Applications of Methodology and Technology
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We seek scholarly submissions from undergraduate and graduate students worldwide, in particular those emphasizing novel application of methods and technology. Submissions should be based on original research projects or project proposals. Submissions may describe ongoing research or research that has not begun, as long as adequate descriptions of the methodologies and technologies used are included. Submissions accepted include:

- Commentary discussing innovative solutions to classic problems. This can include anecdotal tales from the field, or discussions of impromptu solutions to issues such as gaining the trust of potential informants, overcoming difficulties in procuring samples, systematizing recording methods between team members, etc.
- Descriptions of research based on novel applications of interdisciplinary methodologies. Interdisciplinary methodologies may include the incorporation of methods borrowed from other fields, such as psychology, art history, or biology, as well as the use of archaeological methods in ethnography, ethnographic methods in linguistic research, etc.
- Analyses of the usefulness of the application of a particular method and/or technology to a research project. Submitters should feel free to use this as an avenue for discussion of techniques which proved difficult or unfeasible, or the successful incorporation of new technologies, ranging from the incorporation of iPads to highly technical scientific equipment in research.
- Reviews of books written specifically as guides to methodology or technology.
- Literature reviews of a particular methodology or technology. This must include an extensive history of the technique under discussion as well as recommendations for incorporating the technique into future research.

Submissions should be 4,000-6,000 words in length, and are subject to a peer review process.

Submission Guidelines
Any student currently enrolled in a BA, MA, or PhD program is welcome to submit articles to be considered for publication. While this is an anthropology journal, students do not need to be enrolled in an anthropology program.

All submissions should be sent in a single document as an attachment and saved in Microsoft Office Word (.doc or .docx) or Mac Pages (.pages) format and conform to AAA style (http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style_guide.pdf). Submissions should be double spaced and adhere to the word limits outlined in this CFP. Please remove all identifying information from the manuscript and include a cover page including name, institution, student status, up to five keywords describing the paper, and a 250 word abstract. Please save the document with your last name in the title.

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