

# Fieldwork at sunset

## Visual representations of anthropology online

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*Abstract:* Most institutional anthropology departments have a website, to tout credentials, attract students, and offer information. These websites also take up the visual task of disciplinary representation, but their images have skipped the scrutiny that is necessary and overdue. This article analyzes online images of sociocultural anthropology across one hundred high-ranking universities worldwide. We show how, online, a discipline defined by diversity becomes readily reducible to “exotic” geographies and objectified “others.” While the urban serves as an unattractive foil, frequent images of children recall charity campaigns. Such visual tropes—which comprise a significant, public interface for anthropology—are not just awkwardly dated but also do disservice to ambitions for public anthropology. Change, we suggest, must begin at (the) home(page).

*Keywords:* photography, public anthropology, visual anthropology, websites

“Exhibitions, whether of objects or people, display the artifacts of our disciplines. They are also exhibits of those who make them.”

— Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

Sunset falls on the Amazon River. Water and sky glow amber as the surrounding forest sinks into shadow. In the middle distance, a boat sets out from shore, a dark silhouette with two dot-like figures—distinct, yet featureless; active, yet anonymous. The camera flashes.

Another scene, another continent. Umbrella thorn trees spread their canopies over a flat African grassland. The people walking toward them, backs to the camera and paths to the horizon, stand out in bright beads and textiles: red, pink, purple. They are distinctively, colorfully other.

Romance, essentialism, exoticism, and nostalgia for a premodern past. This is the promise of tourist guidebooks (Osborne 2000; Urry 2002), and the allure of *National Geographic's* glossy pages (Lutz and Collins 1993). Such themes overshadow colonial archives (e.g., Lydon 2005; Ryan 1997; Thomas 1994) and have haunted museum curators (e.g., Edwards 2001). But the photographs we have just described are neither publishers' pickings nor archival pasts: they are prominently displayed on the homepages of anthropology departments at internationally



high-ranking universities. As we will explore in this article, these images are not anomalies but are typical of the hundreds of photographs that festoon anthropology department websites. They are significant, and troubling.

University websites are ubiquitous contemporary artifacts, touting academic credentials and tempting future students. They are also mundane; as neither academic outputs nor vaunted media platforms, they quickly slip from analytical attention. Thus, it is easy to overlook that, collectively, departmental websites make up what is likely anthropology's most substantial, accessible public interface. On departmental websites, anthropology is (intended to be) made distinctive and attractive; images, which capture attention ahead of text, carry much of this representational labor. So, if, as Susan Sontag ([1973] 2005: 3) observed, photographs "furnish evidence," what do online images evidence of anthropology—and of us, anthropologists?

In this article, we analyze photographic images of sociocultural anthropology on the websites of more than one hundred academic departments worldwide. We read these images cumulatively, looking across and between them for how recurrent themes visually announce the discipline. We will demonstrate how surprisingly *unrepresentative* online images of anthropology are: far from showing the contemporary discipline's breadth and critical contributions, the images rehearse worn stereotypes of faraway fields and exotic "others," readily transformable into objects. Yet, while these are representations—both of "others" and of anthropology—that it is clearly past time to reject, we ponder in conclusion how institutional, rather than disciplinary, imperatives may be helping them endure.

### **The subject, method, and scope of our inquiry**

In both practice and product, anthropology is "highly visualized" (Edwards and Morton 2009: 1). While the distinct subfield of visual anthropology is currently blossoming, the discipline

has long queried visual representations, notably including postcolonial critiques of the ethnographic gaze. Now-classic works such as Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and Talal Asad's (1973) edited *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* have challenged anthropology to confront how representations of others are never innocent. Visual representations of anthropology *itself*, however, have received considerably less critical attention.

The critical scholarship on image making insists that representing something or someone involves choices: What will be revealed? What emphasized? Decisions and desires, even "regimes" (Hall 1997), lie behind which images are made, kept, and displayed; "ways of seeing" are reproduced through such selectivity, leaving their traces in the representations they fashion (Berger 1972). Writing not of images but of museum displays, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 2) terms "ethnographic objects" those "created by ethnographers when they define, segment, detach and carry them away." We suggest that images on anthropology department websites undergo similar processes of fragmentation and objectification. An image on such a website becomes at once *less than* and *more than* itself: less than itself because the entangled relations behind an image—how it was created, contributed, and previously consumed—are often invisible, at least to most audiences; and more than itself because, appearing online, an image is enlisted into the labor of representing a department and, perhaps more significantly, an academic discipline.

To generate a comparative data set, we began with the latest *Times Higher Education* and *QS World University Rankings* lists of the top two hundred universities worldwide. Whittling down to those universities with an anthropology or co-disciplinary department, or offering a major course in sociocultural anthropology, yielded 150 departments. Excluding those websites without photographs (a phenomenon that space does not permit us to explore), our sample covers 123 departments (Figure 1). From each website, we downloaded the photographic im-

**FIGURE 1:** Breakdown of photographs in sample by geographical region of University

Region	Universities in sample	Total # of images	Avg. # images per site
North America	63	613	9.7
UK & Europe	39	468	12
Asia	11	62	5.6
Oceania	7	19	2.7
South America	2	21	10.5
Africa	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1,184</b>	<b>9.6</b>

ages relating to sociocultural anthropology on display from March to April 2016. Since precisely what constitutes an “anthropological” image is contested (Edwards and Morton 2009: 5), we used rules of exclusion rather than inclusion. We excluded generic images of university buildings, textbooks, lectures, and students, which are common across all disciplines. (We did include images of students distinctively “doing anthropology” on campus, such as examining artifacts or conducting participant observation.) When dealing with “four-field” or multidisciplinary departments, we excluded only images that were explicitly *not* of sociocultural anthropology, such as photographs of archaeological digs, bones, and primates.

Our final data set contained more than one thousand images. We used a private account on the image hosting website Flickr to sort and code images by location and content. Through an iterative review process, all the images were analyzed multiple times to achieve consistency. Some motifs, like “textiles” and “religion,” presented themselves immediately, while others, like “happiness” and “hands,” rose to the surface upon reflective comparison. In most cases, location and content were readily discernible from the image itself or an accompanying caption. However, most images were employed as design features and were rarely referred to in the accompanying text; where ambiguity arose (especially regarding location), we left the im-

age uncoded. Due to both copyright restrictions and our desire not to single out specific departments, we neither “name names” nor reproduce images in this article.

Analyzing the textual and webpage context of each image would be a mammoth task and is beyond the scope of this exploratory article. However, recognizing the importance of a performative reading of photography, we chose to undertake an up-close examination of the interaction between images and their context for a random sample (stratified by university location) of 12 institutional webpages. Of this sample, we found that 10 sites used photographs exclusively as design elements, primarily in banner images and headers, and less often as menu items for page navigation. Most images were located exclusively on the department homepage / landing page or carried through the entire site as fixed headers. Most often, the images were only tangentially related to the page content (e.g., hennaed hands for “people,” rolling mountains for “about us,” a person cutting fruit for “research”). On one of these sites, the single image was accompanied by a caption describing the image location, photographer, and copyright information. In another, a Claude Lévi-Strauss quote was superimposed over an image of a cityscape.

Apart from this quote, only one homepage in the sample provided a clear definition of what anthropology is or does that might broadly serve as an interpretative tool. The remaining two websites in the sample deployed photographs in different ways, beyond design elements. One website used descriptive captions of the image content and hyperlinked the images to descriptions of real research projects being undertaken at the institution. This tactic both enables departments to showcase their research and clarifies the image content, which is additionally important for making websites more accessible to people with visual impairments. Another website superimposed text asking anthropology’s “big questions” over a series of images, for example, a busy Colombo streetscape and “What kinds of social relationships and exchanges make the global economy work?” This kind of

juxtaposition is one simple but direct way to engage images in the perspectives that anthropology brings to research. Clearly, there are a range of creative, multimedia possibilities for how photographic images might be used, far beyond university website design. However, this sample demonstrates that most often, anthropology department websites fall back on using photographic images as decorative or design elements, without explicit textual referents.

We do, of course, acknowledge the limitations of our methods. Any sampling process inevitably creates highlights and blind spots. Just as ours may emphasize more “traditional” disciplinary boundaries by neglecting anthropologists based outside anthropology departments, so it skims over the varied purposes of websites in different world regions (recruitment-oriented European websites, for example, are often more visual than in Northeast Asia, where prospective students favor print brochures). There are many potential avenues for further analysis that we—quite pragmatically—do not pursue here. We might analyze images against accompanying text, the themes of discipline-wide conference calls, or AnthroSource trends (although the representativeness of such sources must also be interrogated); we could map the placement of images on the page, interview administrators, or undertake reception studies with website users. Though we do look closer at a small sample and consider conversations with interinstitutional colleagues, further explorations are generally left undone here. This is for clear reasons of space. More importantly, however, our purpose in this article is not to present a definitive “ethnography” of departmental websites but rather to spark conversation about how anthropologists are represented online—and why “we” need to look.

## What does anthropology look like?

### *On distant shores*

“Imagine yourself suddenly set down, surrounded by all of your gear, alone on a tropic beach, close

to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight” (Malinowski 1922: 185). The opening refrain to Bronisław Malinowski’s classic *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* physically locates anthropology as a field discipline and the anthropologist as an intrepid explorer (for classic framings of field entry and exit, see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 12–14). Malinowski’s “gear” included a camera (Wright 1991; Young 1998), already a tool of the trade by Alfred Haddon’s 1898 Torres Strait expedition (Geismar 2006). Despite a wavering course toward photography’s embrace as methodology (Morphy and Banks 1997), the camera remains an essential fieldwork tool, and “the field,” broadly conceived, is the substance of most photographs in our data set. “Seared with reality” (Benjamin 1999: 512), field photographs evidence what Clifford Geertz (1988) called “being there”—the claim to knowledge bestowed by field experience. They evocatively suggest what anthropologists distinctively do. Yet, field photographs on departmental websites often distinguish anthropology through dated tropes of the exotic elsewhere.

Like Malinowski’s lonely beach, online images of fieldwork landscapes (130 images) commonly banish people. Landscapes are regularly represented as seemingly uninhabited, isolated, or sparsely populated. They may reveal traces of human presence, such as roads, rice paddies, or bridges, but rarely active people. Such images are predominantly rural, and frequently romantic: a surprisingly large proportion features a golden-hued sunset, a decoratively lone tree, or an empty boat floating downriver. Lush mountain steppes, arid Central Asian deserts, winding Amazonian rivers, and snowy Siberian plains also resemble the attractive tropes of the travel industry (e.g., Osborne 2000). While, as we will consider later, many people portrayed on websites are associated with poverty, images of landscapes *without* people suggest that much anthropological fieldwork is conducted during a luxury getaway. Similarly enticing imagery also predominates photographs of textiles and foods, which appeal to multiple senses and sig-

nal the waiting pleasures of anthropology's distant shores.

As this suggests, field photographs evoke a dislocation between *here* and *there*. On anthropology websites, locales are almost always foreign, and particular places predominate. The nearly 70 images of signs in non-Latinate scripts—almost entirely untranslated—add to this aesthetic of difference. While most departments we surveyed are in the “West,” most images on their websites are of the “Rest” (Figure 2). This distribution matches Joyce Hammond and colleagues’ (2009: 153) analysis of North American anthropology textbooks: 94.2 percent of textbook images showed subjects located outside North America. We found just one clear exception to this rule of distance: Northeast Asian departments almost exclusively display images of Asia. These images speak to colonial histories *within* Asia; they also represent a long-established tradition of “anthropology at home” in the region (Kuwayama 2004).<sup>1</sup>

Websites show little of anthropology at home in the United Kingdom and Europe, or in North America. We identified fewer than 50 images of each of these two regions. Many were simply set on campus, showing students participating in “anthropological” activities (handling museum

artifacts, trying out bows and arrows), rather than presenting “home” as a viable field. Sometimes, the images presented internal “others,” such as First Nations groups or Irish travelers (see also Hammond et al. 2009). Interestingly, just four out of 58 US universities displayed images of Indigenous peoples, perhaps reflecting the extent that critiques of the anthropological appropriation of indigenous knowledge have entered the disciplinary consciousness.

While only one African university (Cape Town) made our sample, African regions were among the most common photographic locales. Images of Africa, like those of India and South America, are typically in rural settings, recalling an enduring conflation between the rural and colonial (Williams 1973).<sup>2</sup> Cities (42 images) are depicted in hostile ways that reinforce rural romanticism; their “noise, worldliness and ambition” (Williams 1973: 1) are attributed through an imagery of graffitied walls, sprawling slums, and dense traffic jams. Such images are almost exclusively set in Northeast Asia or Europe. The six images of urban America are similarly dystopian: post-Katrina New Orleans, postindustrial Detroit, Occupy Wall Street. Perhaps these images make anthropological escapes to picturesque sunsets all the more alluring.

FIGURE 2: Geographic distribution of images of populations versus university location

University location	Photograph location								TOTAL
	Africa	Asia <sup>2</sup>	UK & Europe	Oceania	N. America	S. America <sup>3</sup>	Middle East	Unclear/Multiple <sup>4</sup>	
Africa	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Asia	2	37	1	0	1	0	0	4	45
UK & Europe	68	70	23	6	9	23	23	56	278
Oceania	1	6	0	3	0	0	0	3	13
North America	82	92	19	16	30	41	15	70	365
South America	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>707</b>

Photographs of the distant and different elsewhere serve as visual devices of “spatial rupture” and, as we will address later, “temporal disjuncture” (Coleman and Collins 2006: 10). They solidify distinctions between home and the field, reinforcing fieldwork’s allure and authority (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 12). They also claim a space for anthropological occupation: the romanticism of departmental website images recalls the colonial construction of the world as *terra nullius*—a land waiting to be discovered and, perhaps, conquered by willing scholars (Coleman and Collins 2006: 10). A visual trope of colonizing adventure explicitly emerges in the few images of an anthropologist alone, which, like Sontag’s ([1963] 2009) “anthropologist as hero,” almost always highlight intrepidity: venturing along a dirt road, hiking through a jungle, or reaching a remote landmark. There are pleasures in romantic representations—yet fraught histories and ongoing power relations seem, like the dinghy bringing the anthropologist to a distant shore, to simply float away.

### *Elsewhere as exotic*

In their classic analysis of *National Geographic* photographs, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins identify the codes of visual exoticism: “The eye of *National Geographic*, like the eye of anthropology, looks for cultural difference. It is continually drawn to people in brightly colored, ‘different’ dress, engaged in initially strange-seeming rituals or inexplicable behavior. This exoticism involves the creation of an other who is strange but—at least as important—beautiful” (1993: 89–90). Both exotic color and strangeness were prevalent in the photographs we analyzed, with distant locales typically correlated with certain visual and affective qualities. Many images grab attention through a hyper-saturated palette, from bright hues, to eye-catching contrasts (322 images). Notably, Africa and South Asia are represented as considerably more colorful than other regions.<sup>3</sup> While these regions have traditions of textile production, complex entwinements appear between vernacular palette and image se-

lection: a pink sari in Bangalore becomes display worthy in a way that a pink T-shirt in Birmingham does not. Through color and light, ethnographic image making thus continues to (re)produce an encounter with the Other as a “wondrous difference” (Griffith 2002: 1).

Close inspection of the 700 images featuring people further reveals that people appear anthropologically interesting in limited ways. More than 250 images—almost a quarter of the sample—showed people wearing “traditional” costume; a further 65 images showed naked, partly naked, or painted bodies. “Different” bodies, colorfully preened and costumed, or stripped bare, may stand in for “an entire alien life-style, locale, or mind-set.” While some subjects pose, most images of people show decidedly “third world exotic” activities (Lutz and Collins 1993: 92, 90). There is an equal mix of candid intimacies, such as childcare and cooking, and bold performances and rituals. The latter offer up the exoticism of both performance and performers: Chinese lion dancers, an Indian fire-breather, or a Spanish flamenco dancer, for example. Ritual and religion (173 images) are similarly cast. Religious difference appears markedly wearable: women wear hijabs, monks wear saffron robes, and shamans wear masks. “Strange” others enter into trance, call spirits, venerate statues, or process bloodied crucifixes; they may light flames and fireworks, throw Holi powder, or dip in the Ganges. Even images of Christianity trend toward the extraordinary: there are no demure Protestant congregations but rather dramatic Pentecostal healings, and processions of hooded penitents. These exotically performing peoples dance and trance out of “our” place and—as we shall shortly argue—out of “our” time.<sup>4</sup>

Our argument is not against the anthropological interest (and classic importance) of themes like performance, ritual, and religion. The good intention of celebrating human diversity doubtless lies behind many of these images. But the exoticized visual representation of these themes eviscerates their contextual complexities and overshadows other topics of equal anthropological engagement. Out of monographs—which

give room to explication—and onto websites—which privilege immediacy—ritual and religion become reduced to the bizarre. Anthropology “makes the strange familiar,” in turn opening critical conversations, but for an audience without the knowledge necessary to interpret an image, the strange is simply strange. Of course, the global audiences that access these websites and the unique positionality and personal histories they bring to the task of interpretation means some images will appear more “familiar” than “strange” to some viewers. However, read cumulatively, the images suggest definite boundaries around what constitutes the anthropological strange to begin with. Further, when people are reduced to a sari or sarong, or defined by holy days or Holi color, they have become objects—and, at that, objects evoking a long history of ogling Others (e.g., Corbey 1993; Said 1978; Qureshi 2011).

### *The squatting people*

Among these exotically evocative images, anthropologists look less attractive. Usually, anthropologists are behind, rather than in front of, the camera; only about 70 images identifiably show an anthropologist at work. These are the most clearly *contributed* images in our data set, furnishing an iconography of the contemporary anthropologist. While, as we noted earlier, a few images show a lone, intrepid anthropologist, most portray fieldwork *with* people. Among these, three framings stand out: the anthropologist taking notes, “squatting,” or posing. Note-taking photographs show the anthropologist with writing pad in hand, next to an interlocutor or two. Though often evoking a dash of Stephen Tyler’s hunch-shouldered antiheroism (Clifford 1986: 1), these images do affirm the labor of anthropology as research.

Despite the centrality of participant observation to anthropology, we were surprised to find fewer than 10 images showing an anthropologist actually participating in an activity beyond note-taking. Instead, anthropologists are typically juxtaposed, “squatting” in front of or

beside other people’s actions, or formally posed amid a group of grinning informants. Many of the photographs we analyze here of course have deep relational dimensions: friendships, long field associations, care, and respect. Indeed, pragmatic-based theories teach us to see photographic meaning as an unfolding process of many entanglements—relational and multiplex (see Thomas 1991). Yet, what becomes of such interconnections when an image is displayed on an anthropology department’s website? To *un*-related viewers, and largely without captions or instruction to explicate these relations, the stories are easily obscured.

We found fewer than 20 identifiable images of nonwhite anthropologists in the field (most of whom, interestingly, were women). How might website viewers receive multiple images of a white, usually male, anthropologist, juxtaposed with nonwhite “Others”? Considering anthropology textbook imagery, Hammond et al. (2009: 168) suggest that, in ethnically diverse classrooms, some students identify more with the ethnographic subjects, while some are enabled to see themselves as the anthropologist. Encountered by diverse audiences, images of anthropologists can thus include and exclude, telling different stories to their makers’ intentions.

### *Objects and/as Others*

So far, the website images we have considered have shown distant elsewheres and contrasted exotic Others with squatting anthropologists. One surprise in our data set was the sheer number of images (more than 450) that, while representing *anthropology*, featured no people at all. Some of these were the picturesque landscapes we have already discussed. Many others—nearly one-third of the full data set—depict artifacts like pottery, textiles, jewelry, dolls, and masks. Certain objects call to mind classic anthropological monographs (e.g., Lévi-Strauss [1972] 1982; Malinowski 1922)—a nod to anthropology’s canon that is likely lost on future students. Other objects reflect the ambiguous fascination with / fear of the Other. Dolls, for example, com-

bine connotations of childhood innocence with uncanny human resemblance. Masks, with their lurid colors and grotesque expressions, appear almost entirely otherworldly. Western-located objects, either historical or contemporary, are largely absent; only “other” cultures’ things are placed on show. Such displays again articulate ethnic, cultural, or religious difference.

Photographs of “stuff” are unsurprising if, following Severin Fowles, we read the material culture turn as partly a response to postcolonial critique. As representing other people has become increasingly problematic, Fowles argues, scholars have retreated into studying objects, which conveniently cannot talk back. Furthermore, “(non-human) objects” have begun to be treated “like (quasi-human) subjects” (2016: 12), their study shoring up “the representational authority of Western scholars” (9). The preponderance of landscapes and objects on departmental websites may thus be a convenient proxy for actual people.

Human bodies—or, rather, their parts—may also be proxies for people, as powerfully demonstrated by abundant photographs of partial bodies: hands, feet, backs, arms. Hands (38 images), on anthropology websites, gesture toward religious texts, reach into communal food bowls, make votive gestures, or clasp together across skin tones. Photographs that “chop off” the subject’s head at the neck or arms offer anonymity (and may circumvent the need to secure the subject’s permission for display). But these framings also prevent subjects from gazing back at photographers and viewers. Body parts further signal an intriguing visual synecdoche. Whereas difference preoccupies many of the images we have discussed, as hands and feet, people are dissected into shared biology, and stripped of many identifiable characteristics. This apparent suggestion of a universalized humanism leads us into motifs of innocence and (pre)industry.

### ***Time and the innocent***

When Alfred Haddon instructed budding fieldworkers to “seize the *first* opportunity for a pho-

tograph” (cited in Geismar 2006: 529), he was motivated by a salvage ethos; in an example of “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989), photographs held still what was feared to swiftly change. Johannes Fabian (1983) has famously referred to anthropology’s “denial of coevalness”: the trapping of ethnographic subjects in a timelessness beyond “our” moving present. Images of nonindustrial material culture and gentle innocence similarly evoke a nostalgically timeless “other” (Griffith 2002).

Though wrapped in a universalized humanism, images of hands at work—bending reeds into baskets, carving wood—evinced the romanticizing of preindustrial artisanship, especially as outside capitalist rewards for labor (e.g., Sennett 2008). Against this, laptops and skyscrapers are markedly here and now. Several photographs (57 images) play on the well-worn contrast between tradition and modernity: an Egyptian pyramid behind a luxury hotel, or a Japanese castle amid office towers. Some societies, even when urban, thus appear continually twined with their essentialized pasts, their modernity made remarkable. Photographs of people can suggest a similar point. One image shows four grubbily dressed Mongolian children crowded around a shiny new laptop. In another, the viewer peers over the photographer’s shoulder to spy three brightly costumed Central Asian women through a digital camera’s screen. Have they garbed themselves in tradition for posterity, or has the camera caught them in everyday exoticism?

While the images in our data set rarely show (whole) people asserting agency, they often present *happy* people, such as smiling portraits of mother and child, or playful schoolchildren. Another—sometimes overlapping—group of images show close-up portraits of individual faces, staring directly into the camera (53 images). Lutz and Collins (1993: 198) suggest photographers distinctively use this wide-eyed approach to the camera to represent “women, children, people of color, the poor, tribal rather than the modern, those without technology.” Viewers, they note, are likely to see women and chil-

dren—and, we would add, elderly people—as nonthreatening, and inviting compassionate connection. The smile, even when the gaze is returned, can also be reassuringly interpreted as assent to being surveyed.

Images of children (114 images) are a sizeable category in our data set and significantly overlap with those of happiness. This is especially interesting, since the anthropology of childhood occupies a disciplinary niche (Hirschfeld 2002), and considerable ethical issues surround photographing children. Curiously, the ethical hurdles that dissuade anthropologists from studying children seem to dissolve when putting a child's image on a public website. In development studies, scholars have critically considered the use of photographs of children in charity campaigns (e.g., Manzo 2008; Wilson 2011). Kate Manzo (2008), for example, unpacks how childhood tropes of innocence and dependence subtly support *and* undermine humanitarian principles yet ultimately reproduce NGO authority. Like NGO campaigns, anthropology websites show a troubling coincidence of photographs of children, happiness, *and* poverty. One representative portrait shows a smiling young child standing on a dirt floor, wearing a plastic bag over their head. This innocent imagery perhaps softens the violent edges of “poverty porn” (Møller 1999).

Such imagery speaks to a wider trend for displaying the other's impoverished or “underdeveloped” material culture. We found ourselves dubbing the common category of vernacular architecture “huts, yurts, and tents” (54 images). Similarly, boats float through our data set (44 images) but rarely with motors or sails. Images of motorcycles, bicycles, and trucks appear with an often-dilapidated appearance, again indexing material poverty. In another category, typical images of hunting-gathering feature spears and archery but rarely guns. Just one photograph shows a Western European rifle hunt—with participants costumed in tweed. Almost all the images of material culture in our data set privilege the preindustrial, indexing temporal, as well as spatial, difference. Elsewhere, these

images suggest, exists materially before “our” now. Indeed, the virtual “walls” of departmental websites recall museum displays that categorize societies from simple to complex and homogeneous to heterogeneous through artifacts that “chart the direction and form of cultural development” (Van Keuren 1989: 36).

Joel Robbins (2013) has observed that contemporary anthropological writing is almost exclusively concerned with the “suffering subject.” On anthropology's departmental websites, however, the subject may suffer materially but is often bearing up cheerfully. In images of happiness, innocence, and material simplicity, we note the near touristic representation of equally happy, innocent, simple times and places as the promised objects of anthropological enquiry. In this, our analysis echoes recent critiques of anthropology textbook covers, which visually show students a discipline seemingly stuck on “colorful people of faraway places” (Hammond et al. 2009: 165; see also Kuwayama 2004; Tunstall and Esperanza 2016). On the sites we surveyed, contemporary trends and topics were rarely profiled: only 2 photographs showed digital ethnography, only 2 finances, fewer than 25 depicted medical anthropology, and just 4 suggested migration or refugees. While the discipline today has been celebrated for diverse engagements with laboratories, corporations, governments, and metropolises (e.g., Hannerz 2010; Haugerud 2016; MacClancy 2002; Strang 2009), dated representations predominate online.

## Anthropology, represented

Existing alongside the complex doings and knowings of the contemporary discipline, representations of anthropology online sometimes overlap, sometimes diverge. Often, they seem to operate within a limited representational lexicon that validates only certain images as “anthropological.” What makes such a limited set of images cohere as representations of anthropology? We began with this question, and a return is now fitting. Another, blunter, question is also neces-

sary: Why, in a discipline with a long history of critical self-reflection and heightened awareness of the power imbalances and colonial legacies enmeshed in images of “otherness,” do anthropology websites continue to trade in what we would argue are dated, sometimes dubious, visual tropes? In part, by lacking an academic publication’s call to account, websites occupy a gray area, which offers little motivation to carefully attend to what is being represented and how (and even the possibility of intentional inattention). As one anthropologist, responding to our request for information on website image choices, circulated via a disciplinary mailing list, wrote: “I think there was a meeting five or six years ago. I wasn’t interested enough to go.” Yet, as we have presented and discussed our research findings with colleagues, two fuller explanations have repeatedly emerged. The first concerns the role of institutional rather than disciplinary structures in deciding “brand anthropology.” The second brings recent visual theory to web design. We consider each in turn.

Increasingly, universities are becoming “bureaucratic institutions organized around the pursuit of profit” (Graeber 2014: 73). In a higher education environment of neoliberal governance and globalized market competition, enrollment numbers matter. Budgetary pressures thus structure the need to attractively sell anthropology to potential students. Departmental websites are directly available as marketing media, where an urge to attract meets a need to distinguish, meets a heightened consciousness of being “anthropological.” Setting out to show what anthropology is and why it merits enrollment, website administrators reach for the “product differentiation” of exotic imagery, and the attractive lifestyle promises of travel vistas and world food. Anthropologists at several universities whom we informally spoke to confirm these institutional effects. For example, one described contacting his institution’s marketing department, which maintained all the university’s websites, to raise concerns about how anthropology was being visually portrayed. When he had suggested an alternative imagery

that, he felt, might better represent the breadth of the department’s research, he was told his images were “too similar to sociology for marketing purposes.” Another interlocutor highlighted the potential for administrative misconceptions of the discipline when he had needed to explain to a departmental secretary that a banner image of “famous anthropologists” had not actually included any anthropologists.

With departmental websites constrained by branding templates and copyright, and presided over by administrators, anthropologists may, ironically, be left with little say about how they themselves are represented. Yet, we need to be careful not to allow identifying institutional blame to become an abdication of anthropologists’ responsibility. After all, while anthropologists may not be the primary creators of web content, they *are* evident contributors: several websites we visited evidenced image contributions from academic staff and graduate students, such as captions identifying named fieldworkers, and even whole galleries from departmental photography contests. The neoliberal university, while guilty of many sins, cannot be made responsible for, among the more concerning images we collected, the homepage-featured anthropologist wearing “ethnic drag” and posing in a comically exaggerated warrior stance. Even from a marketing perspective, students’ (in our experience) interest in contemporary “big issues” surely makes photographs of cattle herding unlikely draw cards. To box the images on anthropology department websites as “simply” marketing simply lets anthropologists off the hook. Let us also be blunt: if anthropologists are unable to positively influence representations of our discipline on our own departments’ websites, then hopes for the resurgent influence of public anthropology are highly misplaced.

In contrast to institutional explanations, applying developments in visual theory suggests a potentially more generous revision of our findings. Several scholars of the visual (e.g., Berger and Mohr [1982] 2016; Pink 2013) have asserted that the dynamic relationship between images and their evolving contexts of produc-

tion and consumption is equally important to understanding the work they do. In anthropology, Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton (2009: 3) have notably analyzed post-colonial visual critiques, which, they consider, presume a simple equation between image and hegemony, becoming in turn “reductive and universalizing.” Instead, Edwards asks us to “address the material and affective dynamics of photographs” (2012: 222) as they move through shifting roles and meanings and are “projected into different spaces to do different things.” For photographs uploaded to departmental websites, part of this social biography is revealed by the global marketplace of the neoliberal university, but the more intimate encounter between online images and diverse audiences, each with their own personal histories and frames, is a task we have left undone in this article.

Going further, Karen Strassler (2010: 27) suggests that the reproducibility of photographs enables them to be “transposed from one realm of signification to another,” which might lend to radically different readings. Context most certainly matters: while the “Igorot man” cover of George Marcus and Michael Fischer’s (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* originates in colonialist objectification, positioned on a critical volume aimed at an internal, knowing audience, Fowles argues that the image instead “confronts and accuses” (2016: 14–15). These shifting semantics exemplify, as John Berger and John Mohr ([1982] 2016: 284) point out, that photography’s multiplicity and ambiguity make it impossible to impose a single frame on photographs. In this regard, our analysis has perhaps relied too heavily on our own concerns as scholars coming of age in anthropology post-Said and post-Asad critiques of representation, such that we presented the meanings of images as more determinate than they may be. We agree that further analysis of the pragmatic meanings of photography on departmental websites is essential to understanding the work they do.

The emergent nature of photographic meaning does not, however, absolve anthropologists of the responsibility to critically reflect on and

refine the images we put forward to do the work of representing the discipline online. If anything, this understanding only increases the difficulty of our task, requiring the imagining of more varied interpretations. At the same time, the small number of existing reception studies of public images of anthropology point to disconcerting patterns of meaning making. For example, in Hammond et al. (2009: 164), North American undergraduate students responding to anthropology textbook covers largely expressed confusion about what the images conveyed about the discipline, or read them as suggesting that anthropology is exclusively about “third-world countries,” “people I have never seen before,” and “the Other.” We are left wanting for studies of the reception of public anthropology materials outside the West. We also must admit to feeling less reassured by the potential for diverse meanings and interpretations by the sheer volume of colorful, costumed performers and picturesque landscapes, and the dearth of supermarkets and laboratories, or nonwhite anthropologists, in our data set. With anthropology still thrust into public consciousness in other media through intrepidity and othering (MacClancy 2005; Weston et al. 2015), we question if the decidedly skewed visual resources that websites furnish encourage complex understandings—or if anthropologists have thought about what semiotic work they do at all.

### **Public anthropology begins at (the) home(page)**

In an era when anthropological contributions are surely so needed, yet acknowledged relevance is hard won, how anthropology is viewed publically matters more than ever. Representations made *within* anthropology especially matter, because popular portrayals of the discipline are rarely accurate or attractive. In his expedition into literary portrayals of anthropology, Jeremy MacClancy (2005) spotted two species: “the anthropologist as hero”—romantic, intrepid travelers who swoop in to save the day

in exotic locales—and, the more common “pathetic anthropologist”—emotionally crippled, bookish intellectuals whose social ineptitude at home leads them to analyze societies abroad. While the former may attract soon-to-be-disappointed students, the latter is no boon for a bureaucratic era of enrolment anxiety. In films, meanwhile, anthropologists enter as experts on alien Others, braving the wild to take on zombies, cannibals, and serial killers (Weston et al. 2015). These depictions foster little connection between anthropological expertise and the real-world issues, from *Charlie Hebdo* to Black Lives Matter, that a reinvigorated public anthropology is eager to address (e.g., Haugerud 2016). Rather than providing redress, however, our analysis shows that departmental websites all too often offer up more worn stereotypes.

Threads in this article indicate further research on representations of anthropology on departmental websites, not least in terms of design context. However, rather than additional anthropologist-driven reflexive studies, we see a more pressing need for reception studies. Directly engaging website audiences in research will illuminate the meanings, both intended and unintended, they construct about anthropology through photographs. Informal, departmental initiatives with students are very possible here. Such “fieldwork” is especially vital for informing renewed marketing strategies. Beyond diversifying image content, possibilities for positively re-representing anthropology include deploying the performative force of images in creative ways, and using textual/design context to challenge potential audience assumption or direct them toward particular readings. Of course, no perfect, “unproblematic” image encompasses the discipline’s breadth or communicates its unique contribution to knowledge. Nor can we ever hope to control photographic meaning in that manner. Instead, we more modestly call on anthropologists to take websites seriously as meaningful spaces. Thus, rather than fall unconsciously into easy anthropological clichés, we can make conscious, collective decisions about how we intend to present the discipline.

We strongly encourage those readers within anthropology departments to follow on from this article by visiting their own departmental homepage. Observations can help open critical conversations at collegial, departmental, and even institutional levels. Institutional imperatives and (mis)understandings, as we highlighted earlier, do loom as barriers here. Because websites speak for not just a single department but anthropology more broadly, disciplinary associations have a potential role to play in assisting departments battling institutional resistance to representational change. Another avenue is to approach the university marketing tribe from the native’s point of view, initiating dialogue on the mutual benefits of “rebranding” anthropology.

Several decades after scholars began writing on anthropology’s popular reception, the discipline could still be described as “sufferer[ing] from acute problems of public image and visibility” (Shore 1996: 171). Beyond simple embarrassment at the persistent colonial tropes our analysis reveals, anthropologists have a real stake in our public image (Weston et al. 2015: 316), which has serious impacts on graduate employment outcomes, research funding, public advocacy, and student recruitment. Departmental websites are neither the textual space of intellectual work nor the media sphere of anthropology’s vaunted public engagement—but they do matter. Critical work on public image might not attract grants or promotions (MacClancy and McDonough 1996) but can no longer be dismissed as a tangential task. We argue this work must begin at home. The good news is, of course, that, unlike popular culture, departmental websites are (largely) within anthropologists’ power to change, and the instantaneous nature of web publication means this work can begin immediately. So let’s start, with a click.

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## Notes

1. As with many geographical categories employed here, "Asia" is incredibly broad.
2. Only when analyzing North American websites did "Central America"—in particular, images of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic—emerge as a salient category. We have collapsed it into "South America" for the purposes of overall comparison.
3. We accept that "colorful," as we have interpreted it, is a subjective quality.
4. This category is overwhelmingly comprised of images of nonwhite people.

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