ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS (COSMOPOLITAN) OBJECT

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After proposing "Anthropology and its Object" as the title for my seminar presentation, I imagined you rolling your eyes—"Anthropology and its object, again!'—with Talal Asad and Johannes Fabian and James Clifford and so many others seated wearily on the dusty shelves behind you. So perhaps I should clarify at the outset that what I'm asking you to think with me about might better be termed: "Anthropology and its Cosmopolitan Object" or perhaps, "My Anthropology and its Shifting Object."

I intend "object" here in a double sense: first, as the objectives anthropologists aim to realize through their work and, second, as the subjects of ethnographic inquiry, the people on whom we rely in our efforts to make sense of the social world, the places whose raw materials we mine for the production of knowledge in our field. And about this "we," let me quickly say that I recognize that anthropologists now, more than at any point in the discipline's history, come in many colors shapes and sizes and occupy a diverse array of social locations: that there are many more of us "halfy" anthropologists around (to borrow Lila Abu Lughod's somewhat infelicitous term) than there once were (Abu Lughod 1991). However, I'm suggesting that anthropology's habitus as well as the hegemonic structures through which the discipline is organized and its practitioners trained, have proven far less malleable than its demographic composition. My presentation points to one implication of these

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institutional rigidities, and aims to further add to the remit of a cosmopolitan anthropology. I begin with a few restatements of understandings now commonplace of our field.

I

Consigned early on in the social science division of labor to the "savage slot" as Michel-Rolph Trouillot memorably tagged it, anthropology developed since the early twentieth century a distinctive tradition of intensive localized field research (Trouillot 1991). The method entailed, in many instances, study of the local language, direct participation in a wide range of activities—from the quotidian to the more arcane—as well as keen observation, recording and analysis of these myriad facets of social life. Ethnographic fieldwork, then, allowed for intimate connection with the everyday lives of people with whom association—on a footing in some respects of equality—might otherwise have been improbable. Some of these associations would invariably develop into close friendships.

Despite the methodological necessity of intimate engagement with the object of study, located oftentimes half a world away, anthropologists nonetheless operated within the confines of political and spatial zones of separation. Along with other humanist and social science colleagues, they labored within the conceptual worldview imposed by the "national order of things" (Handler 1988, Malkki 1992). This conceptual order nurtured what Beck and Sznaider term a "methodological nationalism," in which society was and still is "equated with national society" (Beck & Sznaider 2006:2), and the smaller conglomerations of peoples anthropologists generally studied were regarded, at least heuristically, as similarly territorially confined (Appadurai 1988, Malkki 1992).

So that in the arc of a career, having come to establish close ties with far distant collaborators and to decipher systems of thought, social organization and their histories, academic anthropologists traditionally returned after their rite-of-passage-journeys to settle comfortably back into a chair at home to mull over their treasure trove of data and experiences, paying only sporadic return visits to their field sites. Clifford Geertz famously underscored this bifurcated character of anthropological practice by titling the essays bookending his *Works and Lives*—that

elegantly contrived interpretive analysis of the writing of four towering 20th-century practitioners of the discipline: "Being There: Anthropology and the Scene of Writing," and "Being Here: Whose Life is it Anyway?" (Geertz 1988).

The infrastructure of academic life, its expectation and requirements, have no doubt made it more difficult to break out of this bifurcated enactment of the typical anthropological career. The politically and spatially removed locations of the major universities, journals, book publishers, conferences and funding sources on which anthropologists must rely for sustenance, serve as powerful constraints. So that while we may make efforts to stay connected with some of our closest collaborators from "the field" and even travel back for occasional visits, the obscuring fog of geographic distance and the demanding entanglements of social and professional life inevitably make for waning connections to the site of fieldwork, to people there, and to the on-going problematic of local life.

We are more keenly aware these days of the ways in which our disciplinary tropes and conceptual models have served both to conform and reproduce constructions of place, self, and difference congruent with the prevailing order of political and economic power (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). However, we have reflected rather less, it seems to me, on how these disciplinary tendencies endorse our withdrawal from the life-world of our field sites and diminish the discipline's discursive impact in the very places from which we gather our data.

Anthropologists' writings, then, have largely been addressed to audiences on the "Here" side of the divide: their interventions directed primarily at their peers and/or wider publics in the North Atlantic world. Of the latter, Margaret Mead's *Redbook* magazine articles or her conversations with James Baldwin, and Evans-Pritchard and Edmund Leach's BBC lectures come to mind as outstanding examples of engagements in public discourse from an earlier era in the United States and the UK. More recent efforts like those of *Anthropology Today* to focus critically on issues of wider contemporary relevance have commendably broadened this outreach for the discipline as a whole. Yet the audience of address remains primarily a North Atlantic audience: even in as influential a work as *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, which sought to renew the discipline's critical public role (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Thus, while

conceptually and methodologically anthropology created and has been dependent on a research infrastructure of connectivity, it has just as surely been constrained by equally assertive processes of *interruption*.

In *Works and Lives* of course Geertz draws attention to the bifurcated configuration of anthropology's disciplinary practices only to disturb this binary by underscoring the myriad ways in which the boundaries between "Here" and "There" have become irreversibly blurred, morally and epistemologically, in the decades following the end of colonial rule. What now is the next necessary thing, Geertz asked, and to this he responded that something new having happened in the world, something new must now appear on the page: urging in other words far greater attentiveness to ethnographic writing.

While Geertz, Clifford & Marcus, Fabian, and others led the way in bringing a new self-awareness to the writing of ethnographic texts, many of their critics called them to account for paying insufficient attention to political dimensions of anthropological practice *outside of the text*. (e.g. Fox 1991, Jordan 1991). Emerging from and building on this latter set of critiques, anthropology has been reconstituting itself in response to what has sometimes been described as the "spatial turn" in the human sciences. Indeed, it has been in the forefront of efforts to reimagine, *conceptually and methodologically*, the closely interconnected yet disjunctive social realities of our present. Anthropologists have taken a leading role in forging new discursive registers—borders and borderlands, hybridity, creolization, diaspora, and others—and contributed significantly to the emergence of entirely new interdisciplinary fields—mobilities and cosmopolitanism among others—to respond to the altered relationships "between 'here' and 'there,' center and periphery, colony and metropole" that Geertz and others had earlier alluded to (see Gupta & Ferguson 1997:38).

What hasn't changed much, either from Geertz' account of things almost three decades ago or since, is the stubbornly entrenched positioning of most academic anthropologists in the world and discourses of "Here." Geertz's wry observations that: "There are few more academicized professions, perhaps—paleography and the study of lichens—but not many" (1988:13); and that "However far from the groves of academe anthropologists seek out their subjects…they write their accounts with the world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars

all about them…Being There is a postcard experience…It is being Here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read, …published, reviewed, cited, taught" (1988:129-130)—these appear still to describe the horizon of our endeavors. Indeed, as Thomas Eriksen observes, in recent decades anthropologists have largely retreated from a public presence outside of the academy, have been building even fewer bridges to connect with the concerns of non-specialists than their predecessors in the guild once sought to do, and are having less of an impact as public intellectuals. "Since the Second World War," Eriksen laments, "anthropology has shrunk away from the public eye in almost every country where it has an academic presence" (Eriksen 2006:20).

Surely it stands as an indictment of our profession that its academic isolation—and particularly, as I emphasize here, its relative isolation *from the source fields of its raw materials*—has not significantly changed even with the heterodox mobilities more evident in the world of recent decades.

With the emergence of a cosmopolitan anthropology has come, in one sense, a new recognition of the shared humanity and proximity of peoples more generally regarded and kept in place as "Other" by those Keith Hart baldly described as "a rich, aging white minority" currently presiding over the masses of the world (Hart 2010:445). Yet at the same time we must ask what possibilities are there for participating and intervening more directly than we have been accustomed to doing in the discourse and social problematic of the places and among the peoples with whom we do research? In the following section, first, I discuss one notable example of an anthropologist whose recent work has sought to break out of the confinements of academic anthropology as it's generally practiced; briefly mention two others who have taken a somewhat different route to achieving this break; then go on to describe my own current attempts, under very different circumstances, to do the same.

II

Catherine Besteman's efforts to refocus the objects of her career as an academic anthropologist, to engage in a "strategic" and more "collaborative anthropology," offers a notable example of an orientation that ought to become a defining quality of our field (Besteman 2010: 409,

Besteman 2016). A few years after completing fieldwork in the late 1980s in a farming community in southern Somalia—part of a region that has long served as a cultural crossroads—many of the people Besteman worked with were uprooted by the country's violent civil war: a war whose underlying causes involved a complex interweaving of factors both international and internal. Besteman describes her feelings of frustration, her inability even to get information about the people she'd worked with or to alleviate the turmoil. Noting the sense of relative powerlessness she experienced, she describes the trajectory of her career during this period:

> Because at this time I could not translate my anthropological expertise into something that could immediately save lives, facilitate mediation, or inform diplomatic intervention, I spent the 1990s writing about Somalia—and especially about Somalia's southern minority farmers—in academic venues, battling other academics about the significance of Somali kinship for state collapse, and building my academic dossier towards tenure. Although my publications contributed to a growing ethnographic record of southern Somalia, their impact on United States foreign policy toward Somalia was negligible. My anthropological engagements were academic and seemed to be of limited use in the context of civil war" (2010:410).

Besteman subsequently went on to do fieldwork in South Africa working with activists focused on transforming that country's apartheid structures of inequality. In course of this research, as she describes it, "my role began to shift from academic observer to critical interlocutor and supporter." "Interviews became debates and opportunities for co-theorizing about models of social transformation. In addition to writing fieldnotes, I began writing press releases and publicity brochures…fundraising for project initiatives, building networks among activists, and speaking to local civic groups about the activists' projects. Although my project remained focused on the goal of producing an ethnographic book, my practice in the field and at home increasingly took on an advocacy orientation" (2010:410).

Yet even though Besteman's collaborators found anthropology's critical perspective valuable and appreciated her efforts to share and to work alongside them, they "nevertheless challenged anthropology's lack of an explicit activist agenda as a professional goal and responsibility" ((2010:411). Having earlier been frustrated by her efforts to work against the inertia of US and international agencies dealing with Somalia and Somali refugees, Besteman was now further challenged by these South African activists' perspectives on "the limitations of critical ethnography as a primarily academic pursuit" (2010:411). Being able to reflect on these limitations—the strictures anthropology has placed on its own practice—helped prepare Besteman to begin an entirely new phase of her career.

Astonishingly—though in today's world we shouldn't be quite so surprised—almost two decades after her initial fieldwork, several surviving members of the families Besteman had worked with in Somalia began to be resettled in Lewiston, Maine, a former mill town in one of the whitest states in the United States and an hour's distance from the College at which she teaches. She was quickly drawn into the everyday lives of these survivors of war and displacement. At the urging of and in partnership with her collaborators, Besteman became involved, among other things, in advocacy and public education efforts to help public officials and Maine citizens generally to understand the culture and history of the newly arrived Somali Bantus and to push for institutional and policy reforms that would improve the delivery of services to the refugee population. For Besteman, "Here" and "There" have become densely interwoven: the local sites of fieldwork, scholarship, and personal and civic life have now merged; the once clear lines between academic and policy oriented or "applied" anthropology have blurred, and her academic writing now fully engages these intersectionalities (Besteman 2016).

While Besteman's "There" landed on her doorstep, Richard and Sally Price—the prolific, award-winning Caribbeanists—deliberately moved their primary residence, mid-career, to Martinique: one of the sites of their scholarly research. Residence in Martinique has afforded them distinctive opportunities to become actively involved in local discussions on the politics of culture, and buttressed the authority with which they do so (Price and Price 1997, Price 1998, Carnegie 2001). The Prices have been well attuned to the perspectival shift and responsibility occasioned by

their move to Martinique. In an article critiquing the work of créoliste intellectuals, for example, they noted: "In short, we are not studying people out 'there' from a home back 'here,' but rather engaging the intellectual agenda of people who are very much our peers in terms of their education, publishing involvements, and access to the media. Just as we comment on their work, they comment on ours (Price and Price 1997:4).

In my own case, having grown up and done research in the Caribbean—which like the Horn of Africa forms another conspicuously cosmopolitan world region—I am in process of a partial relocation to "home." My own work in anthropology has been, one might say, cosmopolitan-inflected for some time. In an earlier book, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands*, which ended with a chapter entitled "World Community Imagined," I sought to call attention to some of the deep cosmopolitan veins that course through Caribbean social life, but which went unacknowledged in the era of nationalism Carnegie 2002). However, we must now recognize that it isn't simply that the nation-state order of things failed to give expression and outlet to a broadly cosmopolitan ethos and aspirations in a place like Jamaica—an ethos wonderfully depicted in Huon Wardle's *An Ethnography of Cosmopolitanism in Kingston, Jamaica* (Wardle 2000). Rather, one must also confront the ways in which Kingston's cosmopolitans, for example, have been actively *garrisoned* and *immobilized*—through politically opportunistic housing and other policies, modes of policing, and unrelenting class prejudices—in the decades since independence. These postcolonial effects parallel or correspond in some ways of course to immobilizing practices at the *international scale* that Mimi Sheller and other scholars have been concerned with (Sheller 2011).

It is at this local level that I seek ways of addressing such concerns and their effects in my current work. I'm looking to engage in a multifaceted and urgent set of conversations with Jamaican post-colonial elites about social processes of difference-making in which they have been intimately engaged though remain perhaps scarcely aware. Anchoring the project so far is the collection of essays I'm working on, provisionally entitled, *Kingston Space, Kingston Time.* I'm trying, in part, to defamiliarize for Jamaican readers a home-city and their relationship to it—a city that

they routinely take for granted—by describing freshly, appreciatively, aspects of the urban environment they may treat as a nuisance at best, or regard as unbecoming, backward, or vile. I aim to call their attention to coarsening changes in the habitus of the city in the postcolonial period that they themselves carelessly helped by their withdrawal to bring about; to underscore everyday social practices that disregard and disempower fellow citizens. And I aim to suggest possibilities for new social engagements and for building community across ever-widening social divisions.

Though written in a fairly conventional academic style, I'm also trying to make the book accessible to a broader audience and planning to have it coauthored by a young Jamaican art photographer who will contribute a photo essay and other illustrative pieces. Alongside this manuscript, however, I've been working on several shorter essays more suitable for newspaper or online publication. One thought is to use an initial series of Op Ed newspaper essays as a way of launching a broadly participatory on line forum that would invite and publish contributions from the general public. Moreover, in relation to one of the chapters for the book that came out a little while ago as a separate journal article (Carnegie 2014), I've tried (unsuccessfully so far) to engage students at one of Kingston's elite high schools in doing ethnographic research on patterns of geographic mobility, on how they and their families relate to the city as a physical and social space.

To give you a better feel for the project and its objectives I will share a few excerpts from, and brief summaries of, the four shorter articles that I've written so far. Their titles: "Urban Living, Kingston," "Walk-Foot People Matter," "Walking Kingston," and "Reclaiming Kingston, Reclaiming Self," give a pedestrian or walker's-eye view, and are based on my ambulatory ethnographic routines moving about the city on visits over the past few years.

I'll quote selectively from the first two essays, "Urban Living, Kingston," and "Walk-Foot People Matter," then attempt to summarize the other two more briefly.

"With Kingston now enjoying a certain celebrity, having been named a Creative City of Music by UNESCO, this may be a good time to reflect on how those of us who live in the city experience it. As poet

Derek Walcott observed in his Nobel Lecture some years ago: "A culture…is made by its cities." What then does Kingston represent? Do we who live here see and appreciate it as a whole; or do we only relate to it in parts: in disaggregated, disconnected ways? How do our attitudes and everyday actions help either to cultivate and enhance the city's vibrancy, or contribute (even if unintentionally) to stifling it? How constrained or adventurous are we in exploring and embracing Kingston's textured urbanity?

Of course, there's no undifferentiated "we" here: after all, Kingston is a very diverse place. Responsibility for what happens in the city, for example, is not equally shared: politicians, leading corporations, central government and its statutory agencies, and the Local Authority, the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation, all play a more crucial role in how the city is run as well as in making policy decisions that shape its future than most ordinary citizens. Moreover, differences of class, of neighborhood, of social and recreational interests take us daily in very different directions. But residents of the city are neither incapable nor powerless in shaping the vibe of the city. Indeed, it's the willful and creative energy of the sound system operators, musicians, song writers, record producers, sound engineers and, most importantly, their appreciative audiences going back over six decades that has now earned Kingston its UNESCO rating. Many have commented, rightly, that Kingston is a creative spot not only for music, but as well in other respects. To what extent though do those of us who live here truly appreciate and engage with the many dimensions of the city's vitality?"

The essay goes on to describe, in brief vignettes, aspects of the drama and exuberance of Kingston and the level of interpersonal engagement that's maintained and insisted upon amidst all the bustle; *the refusal of isolation* despite the premium on individual expressiveness.

It continues: "To know and appreciate the city is to discover and to treasure its everyday wonders. Where to find a coconut vendor, for example, for a fresh jelly break? That you can under the mango tree on Melmac Avenue in Cross Roads, or on Barry St. between Pechon and West Streets, or on Grenada Crescent across from Jamaica National in New Kingston. Besides fresh jelly, some of these vendors also carry cut cane and cane juice, like the fruit vendor at the Hope Rd. entrance to Clock

Tower Plaza in Half Way Tree. Or have you noticed the peanut vendors who dispense warm roasted nuts—artfully wrapped in slender brown paper cones of old—to evening commuters, their whistling carts these days deftly perched at the median strip on Trafalgar Road or Garden Boulevard? For an inexpensive hot meal, there are cook shops on Princess Street in the market district where you can buy a cow foot stew or stewed pork for J$250.00 (just over #1.5 pounds or US$2.00). Some of these oases of refreshment are there year in year out, others more like Pop-Ups, appearing when and where you least expect…"

"The city that's alive and pulsing with creativity is one that is lived in, and many of those who make Kingston's downtown market district such a vibrant place, live nearby. Even though upscale retailers all but moved uptown starting in the late 1950s, the Coronation Market has remained the hub of the country's wholesale and retail agricultural food trade, complemented by the district's vital haberdashery trade. However, many of the city's elites no longer experience or participate in the daily life of this dynamic urban center, nor even of the bustle of Half Way Tree, which in the evening hours buzzes like Times Square minus the amenities and the glitz."

"Kingston's charms best reveal themselves when the city is taken as a whole, in the round, and when, as Walcott advises, we don't ask the wrong things of it, or "demand of it an ambition it has no interest in." [...]

The second short essay, "Walk-Foot People Matter"—a slightly expanded version of which has now been published (Carnegie 2016)—is a bit of a polemic. It calls attention to and offers pointed critique of the actions of agencies of the state and of the everyday practices of citizens who disregard and imperil the lives of the vast majority who happen to be pedestrians. For most Jamaicans nowadays, the only grown-up, fully worthwhile citizen is one who is motorized. At least so one must conclude, I argue, from the ways pedestrian citizens are treated. I describe vividly the indignities and risks suffered by pedestrians: from the shrinking of sidewalks to allow for the widening of roadways; dangerous or non-existent sidewalks; the lack of marked crossings and lights; the failure of police enforcement of violations against pedestrians, and more. We pander to those citizens whose practices are most environmentally

destructive, I suggest, and ignore or actively discourage those whose carbon footprint is smallest.

It is motorists who now rule, I argue and, turning more directly to the actions of individuals, I show how, for example, the cutting down of trees one after another has contributed, cumulatively, to making Kingston hotter, the lives of pedestrians more uncomfortable, and despoiled the city's environment.

The essay goes on: "Coupled with this new canopy-mutilated aesthetic, the city's built environment now conveys far greater hostility towards the walk-foot citizen. The construction of higher and higher perimeter walls, often topped by razor wire, has created militant, regimented public spaces and corridors that not only preclude the visual gaze, but cut off the possibility of even passing social contact between those on either side of the barrier. Viewed from the walker's perspective, once pleasant streets like Kingsway, for example, have become walled corridors: bland, forbidding and hostile. So too the way we fashion and use our cars—windows deeply tinted and tightly rolled up--mimics the barriers to social contact we've created with those threatening fence lines" (Carnegie 2016:127).

Bringing the piece to a conclusion, I argue: "The indignities and acts of discrimination faced by the pedestrian citizen constitute forms of what scholars now call structural violence: a concept that refers to the routine, but often unnoticed, ways in which social institutions as well as more powerful minority or majority groups impede and harm others, preventing them from accessing opportunities and from meeting basic human needs. As this brief, pedestrian's-eye survey shows, walk-foot people are constantly disrespected and subjected to structural violence by the state and by their fellow citizens of all ranks and backgrounds…[W]e ought to be…outraged that many of these indignities are imposed…on a majority of under-class Jamaicans…we ought to be sufficiently outraged to *act*" (Carnegie 2016:128).

In the piece, "Walking Kingston," I point to the many ways in which the elites of Uptown Kingston have increased the social distance between themselves and their Downtown fellow citizens over the past sixty years or so: creating an elaborate parallel set of social institutions—schools, hospitals, churches, shopping accommodations, security services, and even

funeral home and burial facilities —moving to more distant suburbs, now increasingly gated and fortified, and shifting almost exclusively to automobile travel. And I argue that this widening distance, though often rationalized as a response to growing crime, serves in actuality to enhance fear. By contrast, walking the sidewalks of our cities, I suggest, we meet in some sense as equals, and that interpersonal distinctions and social divisions are only heightened in the absence of the routine, physicality, and immediacy of face-to-face pedestrian contact. I point to pre-1950s Kingston where walking and cycling were routine, and describe again some of the simple joys that come from walking and taking public transportation in today's Kingston.

The last of the four short essays I've written so far, "Reclaiming Kingston, Reclaiming Self," argues for a shift in focus to the question of how best to reinvigorate and renew the city. Rather than thinking in terms of state and corporate-led block and steel revitalization, I suggest—drawing selectively on the advice of architects and engineers in the field—that a far more decentralized approach, one that encourages greater promotion and use of public transportation and walking, and a shift in urban design priorities to favor efficient mass transit and more mixed use, higher density urban development would be far less costly and, as an added boon, foster human connectivity and democratic values.

These essays, then, represent local interventions, but are woven around cosmopolitan themes: urbanity, citizenship and democratic principles of fair treatment, human engagement, the breakdown of social barriers and the nurturance of a more caring, more ecumenical community. And while I'm seeking to address social potentialities as well as very contemporary concerns regarding the health of the body politic brought to light by my ethnographic scouting, the roots of these concerns stretch deep into the colonial past in a place like Jamaica.

As Orlando Patterson long ago tersely remarked in the Preface to his early work, *The Sociology of Slavery*, after its first few decades of settlement, "…Jamaica developed into what it would remain for the rest of the period of slavery: *a monstrous distortion of human society*" (Patterson 1969: 9, emphasis added). We need constantly to remind ourselves that colonial rule, even as it brought the world ever more closely together, planted and nurtured the roots of many of our most intractable social

divisions. Part of the charge of a cosmopolitan anthropology in this turbulent cosmopolis we occupy together, must be to find ways of addressing these monstrous historical distortions and their contemporary effects in the places where we do fieldwork.

This *local work* is more necessary than ever even as we seek to fix our sights—if I may channel Keith Hart again—on helping to usher in an emergent world society, "the new human universal" that "will not just tolerate cultural particulars, but will be founded on knowing that true human community can only be realized through them" (Hart 2010: 446).

While we can't as easily change the reward system and fundamental structure of the academic workplace—though Besteman (2010) offers some important suggestions—what we do have a bit more control over is the allocation of our time and labor. And there I suggest we as anthropologists, and anthropologists of cosmopolitanism, can seek to find ways of engaging more actively in public discourse both Here and There; using the period of fieldwork itself (as Adom Philogene Heron did in Dominica with his blog, *Fathermen*), the security of tenure, and—if we are so blessed—our years of retirement, to engage more fully in the life and ongoing discourse of the places that have been so formative to our own personal and intellectual development.

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