Landscapes of Otherwise: Anthropological Critique in Want of "Better" Worlds

Cultural anthropology's abandonment of value-natural "scientific" pretensions and its adoption of an explicitly political stance towards its inquiry lends itself to "epistemological certitude" (see Firoz, this issue): an orientation in which scholars try to make the moral coordinates of their arguments explicit and unambiguous. This collection unsettles this moral certitude through a conversation about the "otherwise," a heuristic we use to explore moral questions that do not have clear or unambiguous answers. In their different ways, the pieces reflect upon what it means to give up the certitude of what constitutes a "better world" and instead to explore this question through a reflexive journey of constant questioning, presented here in *Directions* as conversation among scholars. The conversation is an unfolding journey that leads us through the intricacies of the familiar spaces of our discipline—the classroom, the field, the printed pages of our journals—in an intriguing odyssey, offering three distinct perspectives that shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of imagining and inhabiting better worlds.

In their essay, Amy J. Cohen and Ilana Gershon guide us into the heart of reflexivity in anthropological inquiry. They underscore the importance of examining how fieldwork interlocutors engage in reflexive social analysis, shaping both their strategies and the responses they elicit. The authors advocate for a move away from the potential pitfalls of hegemony and resistance encouraging anthropologists and socio-legal scholars to explore the innovative techniques people employ to reimagine social orders. In doing so, they delve into the ways in which different social orders (coders, coding, and law) enable distinct forms of reflexivity and analysis, ultimately influencing the possibilities of "otherwise." They challenge us to ponder how attempts to create a better world can arise from the connections and actions individuals form in

the present, even though they anticipate an uncertain future that may be influenced by unpredictable events.

Ridhima Sharma transports us into the dynamic world of a graduate seminar—an "otherwise classroom" masterfully curated by Dr. Naisargi Dave. Here, the author embarks on an intellectual and deeply personal journey of reckoning a treasured friend's mental illness. Through the lens of this seminar, the author intertwines classroom pedagogy and an academic voyage with a deeply personal narrative of an encounter with a loved one's first manic episode. The intersection of these two narratives compels us to reflect on the ethics and politics of caregiving and living alongside, near, and far from someone undergoing a mental health crisis. As the author grapples with the limitations of language and the centrality of conversation in the face of exhaustion, we are prompted to consider alternative forms of connection and support that can thrive in the interstices of uncertainty. The author questions the predominant role of conversation in shaping political discourse, emphasizing the potential richness that lies within pauses, uncertainties, and the acceptance of ambiguity. We are invited to explore an ethics and politics that embrace the "stuttering in one's own language" and the value of speaking with "amateur-ness." Crucially, this article connects these philosophical musings to the practical realm of caregiving within the context of manic depression. The author's experiences with a loved one's diagnosis shed light on the limits of conversation and the need for new modes of engagement. By learning to respect solitude and release the rigid constructs of diagnosis, we glimpse an alternative path to support and connection that transcends the boundaries of conventional discourse.

Malay Firoz underlining the importance of "indeterminative critique" as opposed to a determinative one explores a paradigmatic shift in the moral tenets of humanitarianism in the

context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and Lebanon. While resilience humanitarianism calls for channeling large-scale developmental assistance toward public sector institutions in asylum countries, bolstering the social services and safety nets on which both refugees and vulnerable citizens depend, this approach has generated a complex interplay of cooperation and conflict between aid organizations and asylum states, giving rise to what the author terms the "resilience paradox." Inviting us to be attuned to the complexities and contradictions of the "resilience turn" a nondeterminative critique proposed by Firoz acknowledges that being resilient can be seen as a political expression of vitality, resistance, and survival and serves as a powerful critique of the legal systems that lead to situations where such acts become necessary due to neglect and abandonment.

Taken together, the articles in this collection traverse the landscapes of "otherwise" worlds—real and imagined, academic and personal. As we navigate this labyrinth of otherwise, we are challenged to rethink the foundations of our sociocultural analyses, our pedagogical approaches, and our ethical and political responsibilities to one another. The authors of these contributions illuminate the myriad ways in which "otherwise" can be conceived, inhabited, and nurtured. Through their collective insights, we embark on a journey that leads us toward a more profound understanding of the human capacity to envision and enact better worlds, both within and beyond the confines of academia.