ETHIOPIAN COFFEE STORIES: APPLIED RESEARCH WITH SIDAMA COFFEE FARMERS

COMBINING VISUAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

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The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the value of visual research methods to applied anthropology in the context of exploratory research with farmers in Ethiopia. The three methods of photo elicitation, participatory photography, and ethnographic film, enrich and expand ethnographic methods to support the client’s objective of supporting farmers. The applied project constructs a narrative from the local perspective to help consumers learn more about farmer’s lives. The research focuses on specific farmers, and their experiences with direct fair trade and coffee farming. The client sees the application of research produced by ethnographic and visual methods as a good direction not only for his company, but the Fair Trade Industry as a whole.
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To Hugo Ciro, co-founder of Level Ground Trading, I am thankful for his role as my organizational sponsor, and for the use of his photos in my research.

In addition, I am grateful to Awigieh Kebede, for his role as my guide and translator, the staff of Aregash Lodge, for sharing their practice of Ethiopian coffee culture, and to the Hailu family for allowing me to share their photographs with members of the Ethiopian Diaspora Community in Seattle.

This project is dedicated to the coffee farmers and producers of the Fero farming community in Ethiopia. May they prosper and be valued in the marketplace for their hard work and dedication.
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CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTION OF APPLIED THESIS

Introduction

Traditionally, applied anthropological fieldwork has been a predominantly word-driven pursuit. This study, however, is about the ability of photographs and film to complement ethnographic methods by evoking an atmospheric sense of place, and deeper insights into different ways of life. Visual methods engage the senses as well as the intellect to trigger other forms of expression, memory, emotion, and creativity.

The applied focus of this study is exploratory research for a client who builds ongoing trade relationships with Fair Trade coffee producers at origin. The client sees ethnographic and visual methods, in the pursuit of educating consumers, as a good direction for Level Ground Trading, LLC, and for the Fair Trade industry as a whole.

This study argues that the synergy of visual and ethnographic methods paints a more complex and engaging picture of the subject than either of the two approaches could do alone. The thesis of this study is that ethnographic methods combined with photo-elicitation, participatory photography, and ethnographic film (see Figure 1.1) present a dynamic, intermodal research model that enriches and expands ethnographic data.

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1 Fair trade refers to measures taken to improve the livelihoods & well being of coffee farmers by promoting equitable trade with a minimum guaranteed price for their crop (Saito 2012).

2 For this study, ethnographic methods included participant observation, field notes, and interviews.

3 Two or more modes of knowledge production combined to reveal deeper insights (Hsu 2014).
A VISUAL APPROACH:
Visual methods are valuable tools in applied anthropology.

What are these methods and how are they valuable?

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<td>Photo Elicitation</td>
<td>What: Photo elicitation is the method of showing pictures to a research participant in order to elicit discussions that go beyond a linear, question-answer format. How: This method was useful in building a positive rapport with participants in this study. The 30 photos stimulated responses that would not have transpired from interview questions alone. The client’s objective of gathering stories related to the photographs, which depicted coffee farming and trade, was met using elicitation in combination with ethnographic methods, participatory photography and ethnographic film.</td>
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<td>Participatory Photography</td>
<td>What: Participatory photography values research participants as active contributors in the pursuit of making and interpreting photos for research purposes. It is a method that values the input of participants. How: This method was useful in building positive rapport with farmers, and producing images that tell a story from a local perspective. An exhibition of participatory photos was another benefit. The photographs, made by a coffee farming family in Ethiopia, were viewed and enjoyed by members of the Ethiopian Diaspora Community residing in Seattle.</td>
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<td>Ethnographic Film</td>
<td>What: Ethnographic filming is a method with an observational, non-scripted viewpoint. It combines images, sounds, and editing to create a sociological portrait of a people from their perspective. How: This method was useful in gathering the audio/visual data needed to create 3 short films, which were the main deliverables to the client. The editing phase helped shape the ethnographic material into a narrative, constructed jointly by the researcher, her translator, the farmers, their families and the chairman of the local coffee coop.</td>
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Figure 1.1. Visual Methods: Elicitation, Participation and Ethnographic Film
Theory and Practice

Theories in Visual Anthropology tend to be based on particular theoretical approaches to methods, i.e., the practical application of cameras, recorders, and post-process editing (Hockings et al. 2014).

As one of the main deliverables for this study, I created a trilogy of short ethnographic films on coffee farming, culture, and Direct Fair Trade. My theoretical approach for the films, interviews and participatory research, was reciprocity. In addition, the reciprocity of images and words as an “intermodal” (Hsu 2014) research model can be seen as a theoretical basis of this study, to encourage a deeper understanding of the material.

Another fundamental idea to be acknowledged at the outset is that seeing itself, “is a theory-ladened undertaking” (Hanson 1958: 19). In other words, people assess the world according to expectations about what they think it should be, and what should, or should not, happen in it. This idea is fundamentally important and must be considered in visual studies, both from the participant and researcher points of view.

Meinig describes seeing as follows:

It will soon be apparent that even though we gather in the same direction, in the same instant, we will not - we cannot - see the same landscape. Thus we confront the central problem: any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads. (Meinig 1979: 1)

Meinig continues:

For those of us who are convinced that landscapes mirror and landscapes matter, that they tell us much about the values we hold and at the same time affect the quality of

---

4 Direct Fair Trade is Fair Trade with the additional benefits of better traceability, transparency, direct quality control and the sourcing practice of regular farm visits to work directly with farmers. There is no stamp or certification to differentiate Direct Fair Trade (conversation with Hugo Ciro, June 18, 2015).

5 Reciprocity is giving back, i.e., ensuring the research is beneficial and accessible to the host community.
the lives we lead, there is ever the need for wider conversations about ideas and impressions and concerns relating to the landscapes we share.” (Meinig 1979: 8-9)

With respect to the current study, my interpretation of Meinig is that visual methods can help to navigate the inter-cultural landscapes of researchers and participants, and broaden the discussion of how we see each other and our respective environments. Seeing landscapes or social spaces as “ideology” (Meinig 1979) is a fact of seeing that alters relationships and research outcomes. This is why transparency, i.e., awareness and honesty in the relationships between researcher, client, and participants, is so important in fieldwork.

I also found Mjaaland’s fieldwork in Ethiopia (2009) and Mead & Bateson’s Balinese Character (1942) to be instructive with regard to theory and practice, both of which are discussed in Chapter 2.

The Client

The client for this project was Hugo Ciro, co-founder of Level Ground Trading, a company that has been sourcing coffee directly from small-scale farmers in Latin America and Africa for two decades. Personal relationships are key to LGT’s business model, along with fair price, premium quality coffee, environmental sustainability, and transparency.

Client Objectives

The present study was designed to support the client’s objective of collecting coffee stories through visual methods. The client and I connected through my volunteer work at Ten Thousand Villages, the largest Fair Trade retailer in the United States. We met at a conference
sponsored by the Specialty Coffee Association of America, and discussed visual method as a way to share with consumers the values of ecological conservation and a fair price for farmers.

Mr. Ciro had collected thousands of photos over the years from Ethiopia and other coffee growing regions in Africa and S. America. He thought it would be worthwhile to put the images to use, in context with the “stories that go with them,” as he put it. Together we reasoned that a visual approach to applied anthropology could provide a synergy of stories, sounds, and images, and more knowledge about crop to cup linkages, (see Figure 1.2), that might move customers to purchase more direct fair trade, shade grown coffee. The following is a summary of Mr. Ciro’s vision for the project:

There is a symbiotic opportunity in Level Ground Trading’s collaboration with this University of North Texas Master’s thesis project. The author’s visual background and training in ethnographic methods will help us bring the farmers’ coffee stories from origin to consumers. The stories may allow us to develop further tools to assist farming communities with sustainable farming practices; shade, soil, and water management, for example, and better communication with consumers who often do not understand what ‘organic’ or ‘shade-grown’ means. Through shared stories and consumer education, in collaboration with farmers as partners, we may be able to buy and sell more of their coffee. (email from Hugo Ciro, May 14, 2015)
Figure 1.2. Crop to Cup: Source - Level Ground Trading (2015)
Featherstone frames sociological portraiture as “a people’s scholarship” in which “scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people’s experience” (1989: 377). The main idea behind Featherstone’s approach is solidarity in the context of researchers, participants, and audiences coming together to co-produce social research (Featherstone 1989).

Featherstone argues, “methodologies are inseparable from the vision” (Featherstone 1989: 377). I interpret Featherstone’s method as a “visual-narrative,” and his vision as a collaborative investigation and portrayal of the life ways and beliefs of others.

Visual methods are widely used and supported in qualitative research across many disciplines,⁶ but more research is needed on visual methods in terms of which method to use, and why (Pain 2012). Following Pain, I offer examples in this study of specific visual methods.

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⁶ Sociology, psychology, medicine, and geography to name a few (Pain 2012).
and why they were advantageous. The goal of enriching and expanding data with visual methods is balanced with providing a positive experience for participants, to make the process enjoyable for them. Photographs, and the activities of photographing and filming, were a constant source of amusement, throughout the entire study. The good feelings created were like fuel for conversation.

The reciprocity between words and images was key to building rapport in the field and generating interest in the study. A mutually reinforcing dialogue forms between words and images (Carta 2014), and this supports my thesis that visual methods enrich and expand the scope of applied anthropology.

For example, “Asefa called his workers forward to show me the coffee they had been harvesting all afternoon,” was an entry in my field notes, and above, is the corresponding photograph. The photograph enhances the verbal description, and because it was digitally produced, instant sharing and feedback made for a positive exchange with participants.
In *Enhanced Ethnographic Methods*, Nastasi offers two important justifications for the use of visual methods in the field:

The videotape facilitates the creation of a ‘mental picture’ or gestalt of the events. In addition, review of tapes helps the viewer to put critical incidents into context so that they are not interpreted as isolated events. Audiovisual records provide a unique medium for presenting data to participants to enhance the researcher’s analysis and interpretation of data and ensure that the participants’ perspectives are reflected accurately. Similarly, the audiovisual record can be used to foster collaboration between researchers and participants; that is, participants collaborate in data analysis and interpretation and thus become co-researchers. (Nastasi 1999: 41).

I found Nastasi’s first point about context and creating a “mental picture” of events to be true in the editing process of creating the three short films.

Her second point about collaboration and accurate portrayal of perspectives was relevant with regard to building relationships. For instance, the coffee farmers who participated in this study seemed to be moved by my presence as a guest on their farms and expressed hope that my presence was a positive sign. The fact that I was carrying pictures of the client, Hugo Ciro, was meaningful, as 7 out of 10 farmers spoke of a man with a “positive plan for the future” (interview with Rekiba, 2016) when they saw his image.

Finally, Nastasi’s third point about collaboration is demonstrated by the participatory component of this research, as it helped the client, and therefore his customers, understand more clearly the lives of the farmers with whom direct coffee trade is conducted.

**Epistemological Debates**

There are, however, epistemological debates surrounding visual methods. My

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7 Visual documents for the photo-elicited interviews.
interpretation of Mead (1974) is that she worked from the practical premise that there is an indexical relation between the photograph and the photographed reality, the former being a permanent record of the latter. But photography and other forms of visual methods produce and interpret images with as many meanings as there are people. “The answer an image gives is highly dependent on the question being asked,” (Thurnherr 2012: 33), which in turn, relies on researcher and respondent perspectives. “Film has a subject, whereas reality does not” (Hockings 2012: 516), which means there is always something left out of the research.

The second issue is that anthropological portraiture is a practice that has one group collecting accounts and representations of another group to construct a picture of who they are. Because of the intersection of two different cultures, “photos can be viewed as representations of a culture or an ideology,” (Ruby 1996), which can be viewed as problematic in that visual methods have been criticized for objectifying others in research, especially with regard to film (Buckingham 2009).

In this study, these issues were resolved by receiving constant feedback from participants during the process of filming. In addition, I designed the research as a meaning-based exploration of farmers’ reactions to photographs, so that the polysemic\(^8\) nature of photographs became a strength. The deliverables, which are explained in Chapter 3, were designed to portray what was actually said and expressed by farmers.

\(^8\) Polysemic is a variant of polysemous, and is defined as having a multiple meanings (Merriam-Webster 2016).
As Mjaaland notes, a postmodern critique of ethnographic fieldwork is that it is based on a “double illusion,” i.e., researcher as neutral agent, and observed phenomena as set apart from the researcher (Morphy and Banks 1997: 13).

But visual methods that adhere strictly to these empirical standards do not produce the best work because in order to capture the full range of human expression and social dynamics, visual researchers, themselves, need to be highly involved in the process at the data collection stage (Mjaaland 2009). Researchers need to be ‘out there’ shooting, sharing cameras in participatory photography, and sharing the results of the work.

Mjaaland advocates a theoretical paradigm to guide visual fieldwork with the mind and the senses, with words and images, complementing one another under the unified field of applied anthropology. Mjaaland argues that the senses, along with the emotions, impressions, and memories they trigger, are not opposed to logic or reason (Howes 2003). In fact, the senses are just as inclined to produce meaning, as is the rational mind. As Ruby notes, photography is a method that stimulates memory and perception (Milgram 1977).

In the weeks spent filming Strong Beans, the first in a trilogy of short films created for the client, there was a dynamic connection that formed between the daughter of a farmer and myself. Is this connection, or the fact that the researcher appears in the film, unscientific? Was the data collected by way of this film, ethnographic? By De Brigard’s definition, an ethnographic film is

a film that reveals cultural patterning. From this definition, it follows that all films are ethnographic, by reason of their content or form, or both. Some films, however, are clearly more revealing than others. We now turn our cameras on ourselves for a good
hard look at our own societies, thus redressing an imbalance which the ‘native’ subjects of ethnographic films have found highly offensive. (De Brigard 2012:13-14)

Such a broad definition seems to leave ethnographic film open to the imagination, but in truth, ethnographic film is an undertaking that requires skill and anthropological insight. Mjaaland argues that if the researcher enters into the research to engage in the social life of the participants, a possibility opens up for an expanded role of the researcher as co-creator of knowledge in the collection phase of research. Is it knowledge that is created, or just the raw materials for interpretation? In any case, the process of working with others to create a testament of their experience expands ethnographic data. It is a departure from the realist paradigm, which calls for the researcher’s input only in the analysis and communication of data.

In practice, Mjaaland’s paradigm has three implications for method, all of which were applied in the field for this study for the simple reason that they were true and practical in the context of the research:

• The traditional role of participant observer shifts into “social agent” (2009: 394).

• The methods of photography and film used to collect, interpret and share data expand ethnography, drawing upon all the strengths of the researcher, participant, and audience, to evoke and express shared experiences and understandings.

• Texts and images, together, are complementary methodological tools to describe human experience, identity, and transformation (2009).

Mead and Bateson’s Balinese Character

Conversations between Mead and Bateson revealed that most often they placed the camera in one spot and allowed an unscripted, natural flow of social interactions to occur, without interfering (Mead et al. 1976). This was Mead’s preference, but it should be noted that
Bateson’s ideas were different. Bateson wanted to take advantage of different points of view, by moving with the camera in the direction of the flow of events and people of interest to him.

For the present study, videotaped recordings of photo-elicited\textsuperscript{9} farmer interviews followed Mead’s method of keeping the camera still, to ensure an unobtrusive environment for participants to relax and speak openly. However, Bateson’s approach was also adopted in the ethnographic films produced for this study, especially \textit{Strong Beans}.\textsuperscript{10} I followed his preference for a dynamic flow of movement and adaptation to the subject.

Mead was passionate about using film and photography to build a repository of permanent cultural records for posterity that would enable us to go back in time and visually track changes; to keep a record of cultures that were, and still are, disappearing at an alarming rate (Mead 1975). Over forty years ago, Mead reprimanded the discipline of anthropology for its reluctance to support and fund film projects designed to capture and preserve cultural treasures. “Precious, totally irreplaceable, and forever irreproducible behaviors are disappearing, while departments of anthropology continue to send fieldworkers out with no equipment beyond a pencil and a notebook” (Mead 1975).

\textbf{Photo Elicitation}

With regard to the present study, one of the interesting aspects of using elicitation photographs taken years previously, is that people in the community remembered how things

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\textsuperscript{9} Midway through the interviews, 30 photographs from Mr. Ciro’s photo archive depicting the Fero coffee community were presented to participants, for comment and/or description.

\textsuperscript{10} All three short films are available to view in Chapter 4 via hyperlink.
use to be, and how they use to be. Roman Hailu, 18 years old, was photographed by Hugo Ciro on one of his previous trips to Ethiopia. In Plate 2.3, the top image shows her captured among her family’s coffee trees in 2009. The image below, from our interview, captures her expression as she encounters herself in the photo as a young girl. The translator asked her jokingly, “So which version of you is better, now or then?” Roman replied, “Now. You see? Now, I am beautiful!”

As El Guindi notes, photo elicitation as method is traced back to psychological research in 1909 (De Brigard 1995; Prados 1951), and was found useful later in 1925 by Mead, who
applied it in her research interviews of Samoan youth, and finally, in the 1960’s as an adaptation of the “new ethnography” from field linguistics (Krebs 1975: 285).

I was encouraged by reviews of photo elicitation before I tried it in the field.

When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content through interviewing with photographs, the potential range of data enlarges beyond that contained in the photographs themselves. (Collier and Collier 1986:99)

Compared with other forms of interviewing, photo elicitation is “driven” by the respondents; they have the authoritative voice in interpreting the materials before them. In contrast, the turn taking system of asking questions and giving answers organizes a set of hierarchies and asymmetries between the interviewer and interviewees. (Lapenta 2011:206)

Photo elicitation is defined by Harper as a visual method in the social sciences “based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview” (2002:13). He attributes the value of photo-elicitation to the ability of images to evoke memories or impressions that cannot be accessed by verbal questioning alone.

The difference between photo-elicited interviews and strictly verbal interviews is seen in “the ways we respond to the two forms of symbolic representation. This has a physical basis: the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words, exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words” (Harper 2002:13).

Harper has been documenting photo elicitation studies since the mid 1950’s; studies that show a diverse range of application in the areas of social organization, community, identity and culture of the method (Harper 2002). There is a broad spectrum of the types of photos
used in photo elicitation ranging from purely scientific applications of photography, a visual inventory of objects, to “the intimate dimensions” of social phenomena (Harper 2002: 13).

“Unlike many research methods, photo elicitation works or does not work for rather mysterious reasons.” (Harper 2002: 22) According to Harper, applied projects based on empirical objectives rely on photo-elicitation to give the research more validity. Photo-elicitation also has the potential to extract more depth of information by tapping into the human capacity for memory. “Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone, an event past” (Harper 2002: 22).

The sense of retrieving something lost is expressed, gazing into a photograph, as was observed one day in an interview with a participant. Following is a screen shot from a film clip of a farmer who sees a photograph of his deceased brother. My translator put it into his pocket when the farmer asked permission to keep it.

Plate 2.4. Coffee Farmer with Photograph of Deceased Brother
Participatory Photography

Plate 2.5. Wedding Party near Coffee Farms

A participant camera will pass into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then Anthropologists will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be observed and recorded. In this way, ethnographic film will help us ‘share’ anthropology. (Rouch, 1995a: 98)

The above image is a screen shot from a wedding I attended, not far from the coffee farms, in December of 2015. All of a sudden, in the middle of documenting a wedding, I became the research subject of my research subject. Our two cameras also became subjects, as this video link [Wedding in Ethiopia](#) makes plain; this is a 22 second film-clip that visually describes Rouch’s (1995a) description of the anthropologist being recorded.

When I became aware that I was being filmed, filming, I was stunned and slightly uncomfortable, which explains the panning motion at the end of the sequence as I momentarily had to escape the ‘gaze’ of my subject to get my bearings. The end of this clip marks a transition in my stance. Instead of looking through the viewfinder, I lowered the camera from my face and held it waist level in order to make eye contact with my subject’s camera, still filming me. In that moment, the encounter dissolved into shared amusement. If my subject’s clip of me was ‘analyzed’ from his perspective, and offered here in this study, a truly shared anthropology might have been realized.
Table 2.1, outlines the qualitative differences between participatory and non-participatory approaches, which is a useful checklist of important points to remind the researcher of the advantages of participatory studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory Communication Strategies</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>Non-Participatory Communication Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal, lateral communication</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>Vertical, top-down communication from</td>
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<td>between participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process of dialogue and democratic</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>Campaign to mobilize in a short-term</td>
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<td>participation</td>
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<td>Long-term process of sustainable change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective empowerment and decision</td>
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<td>making</td>
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<tr>
<td>With community’s involvement</td>
<td>vs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific in content, language &amp; culture</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>Massive and broad use</td>
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<tr>
<td>People’s needs are the focus</td>
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<td>Donors’ musts are the focus</td>
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<td>Owned by the community</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>Access determined by social, political,</td>
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<td>and economic factors</td>
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<td>Consciousness Raising</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>Persuasion for short-term</td>
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Table 2.1. Participatory vs. Non-Participatory Communication

In the literature review I found support for participatory photography in the following:

Participatory Photography emphasizes the active role of participants in the generation and interpretation of photos and understands it as a research method that hands over the cameras to people – individuals or groups – for the purpose of eliciting information to inform a research project and stimulate self reflection and interactions with others. (Gotschi et al. 2009: 293)

In essence, by placing cameras in the hands of people, a facilitator or researcher can gain insights into the experiences of people, which were previously overlooked, rejected, or silenced. The photograph’s narrative becomes a participatory site for wider storytelling community discussion, and action. (Gotschi et al. 2007: 217)

Gotschi et al. used participatory photography as a qualitative approach to obtain insights into farmer groups. The researchers conducted a visual study, through the participatory collection and discussion of images, on the social capital of farmer groups in Mozambique. The
government of Austria funded the study and its purpose was to inform the policy direction of agencies that coordinate government extension services in rural Africa. These agencies often divide recipients of these services into groups to improve efficiency and facilitate the farmers’ transition from subsistence to cash cropping.

The research revealed insights into the group dynamics of farmers. The process of ‘grouping’ challenged the existing social networks of these communities, but by giving disposable cameras to the groups, and inviting the members to photograph and discuss their respective group dynamics, the study also effectively addressed issues of social capital and cohesion. The findings were useful in revealing the impacts on farmers of the agency’s methods of organizing them into groups (Gotschi et al. 2009).

The main point is that photography was able to turn abstract ideas of social capital and cohesion into concrete examples of how these social phenomena play out among interacting groups of Mozambican farmers. The findings were linked back to the agencies to give them more insight into farmers’ lives, which they needed in order to optimize the process of supporting farmers in their transition from subsistence to cash cropping (Gotschi et al. 2009: 305-306).

In another study, Singhal et al. note that when a question is asked, and the answers come in the form of photographs, the results can be surprising and poignant. The question, “What is exploitation?” elicited a visual response from a child who produced a photograph of a nail in a wall. In the context of being a young boy who worked in the streets shining shoes, the photograph made sense. He explained that his shoeshine box was too heavy to carry home, so he rented a nail on a wall in a nearby shop.
Singhal et al. (2007) recite this story as an example of how photographs can catalyze a dynamic and transformative process within a community, a process that empowers individuals and groups to realize their potential and be engaged in their own welfare.

Participatory photography allows participants ownership of the process and the opportunity to speak directly for themselves. Participatory photography can be a means toward social empowerment and change, or it can be an end unto itself that focuses on the personal and social knowledge gained and shared throughout the journey (Wang and Burris 1997).

Ethnographic Film

Plate 2.6. Still from a Film-clip of a Fero Coffee Producer

In the screenshot above, the viewer can appreciate the joy and emotion that is characteristic of Sidama life. The coffee producer depicted above alternated between washing coffee and joyously singing her praise to Maganu (God)11. Hockings (2014) suggests that ethnographic film contributes to theory building in the process of doing exploratory fieldwork. Exploratory studies increase the quantity and quality of observations for description, as they

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11 Traditional Sidama spirituals were heard from workers on many occasions while visiting the Fero Coop.
build film archives for cross-cultural data comparisons. Ethnographic exploratory film is
designed to record social dynamics in an unrehearsed, natural way. The anthropologist
filmmaker does not direct the flow of social interactions. The construction of reality and
meaning is based on selection, i.e., the specific site, community and activity that the filmmaker
is investigating or exploring, but there is no interference. The goal is to capture the spontaneity
of behavior that will elucidate some aspect of social dynamics (Balikci 2012).

In this way, ethnographic film addresses the problem of theory being too generalized;
removed from the actual lives and experiences of people. One of the strengths of ethnographic
film is its lack of a “systematized, formulaic method” (Hockings et al. 2014: 452). The logistics of
people, time, and location crystallize in shared activities. All means of knowledge gained
through visual media are valid: time, space, color, feeling, sound, and movement. Text has its
own richness of description, and though more static than images, it offers synergy, and the two
modes of description, language and film, enhance one another (Hockings et al. 2014).

One advantage of collecting film footage is that it provides a distinct point of view of
contemporary accounts to balance the historical, written accounts forwarded by previous
researchers (Hockings 2012: 514). Visual deliverables are accessible and engaging as film
reaches a wider audience and contributes to public knowledge on important issues. The
process of communicating and sharing the findings of anthropological research with
participants and stakeholders is fundamental to the discipline, and visual methods and
materials facilitate that process (Lamphere 2003).

Ethnographic film operates subjectively, from a distinct point of view. As Henley (1997)
notes, Jean Rouch, Colin Young, and David MacDougall are three filmmakers who rejected the
notion that film can be objective. These filmmakers have contributed value to the field with their dynamic use of the camera to “generate meaningful events and interpretations” (Henley 1997: 79) (Rouch 1995a; Young 1995; MacDougall 1995).

As El Guindi notes (2004), the primary audience for Rouch was always comprised of the people he filmed. His first rushes were immediately shared with those that he filmed, because without their participation, there would be no film. It was important to him to be clear about the intended audience, and why his films were being created (Rouch 1995a).

Rouch initiated feedback\textsuperscript{12} with the subjects of his films, a form of reciprocity. He relied on feedback as a way to maintain good rapport and ensure dignity (1995a). Feedback was an important vehicle of reciprocity, communication, and rapport building for the present research with the Sidama farming community. At the end of every session, whether film or still photography, my participants and I gathered around to share the results. This shared ritual was enjoyable, and gave me constant, ongoing feedback that they were pleased with what I was doing.

\textsuperscript{12} Feedback was defined by Rouch as the practice of showing footage to the subjects of the film for their reaction and input.
CHAPTER 3
PROJECT DESIGN

In this study, I used the visual methods of photo elicitation, participatory photography, and ethnographic film to enhance data collection, interpretation and presentation. In keeping with the exploratory, meaning-based directive of the client, my main research question was, “What will farmers have to say in photo-elicitation interviews about their lives as coffee farmers?” I also wanted to know how the farmers would respond to the three visual methods, and what meanings would surface as a result of using them.

I designed the research according to the idea that two forms of data on the same subject, one visual and one verbal, complement one another, and give the findings more depth and interest. Writing a field-note on something observed and then photographing it right away, or vice versa, was found to be a useful research practice.

The present study was designed to support the client’s objective of collecting coffee stories through photography, film and conversations. It was a straightforward process to explain the research objectives to the participants, as they already knew the client personally, and supported his efforts to sell more of their coffee. The goal was to construct a local-perspective narrative, and the purpose was to help consumers learn more about farmer’s lives and livelihoods. I focused on specific farmers, and their experiences with coffee and coffee farming.

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13 Photo-elicitation, participatory photography, and ethnographic film.
The client and I decided on a suitable research site, the Fero Cooperative in the coffee growing district of Sidamo, Ethiopia. We made the selection based on Mr. Ciro’s contacts at the site, most notably his translator, Mr. Awgichew Kebede, whose reputation in the Fero community and his knowledge of the customs and language were key to recruiting and maintaining good relations with all participants. He made contact with the coop leaders and arranged for a presentation of my research upon my arrival.

The visual design of the study was aimed at enhancing Level Ground Trading’s marketing plan, which focuses on the well-being of farmers and respect for the environment.

Study Site and Group

This study takes place in the village of Fero (6º45’N 38º25’E) in the Wonsho district of the Sidama Coffee Zone in the State of SNNPR, (Southern Nations Nationalities and People’s Region), Ethiopia. The estimated population of Fero is 6905. The nearest city is Yirgalem, just a few kilometers west of Fero, with a population of 40,702. (Municipal Census Bureau, Yirgalem 2015) I spent four weeks on site, from December 18th of 2015 until January 19th of 2016.

The research participants were ten smallholder coffee farmers, six men and four women, ranging in age from 18-68, who use organic farming methods. They were snowball sampled on site with the following inclusion criteria met, prior to selection:

- All farmers were members of the Fero Coop.

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14 Smallholder farmers do not own land but own the right to farm it from the government of Ethiopia. They are men and women who farm small plots of land, ranging from 0.5 to 4 hectares (interview with Hugo Ciro, 2015).

15 A network, or respondent-driven sampling method, that relies on word-of-mouth to recruit participation in a spread out area (Bernard 2006).
• All farmers owned rights from the government to farm the land and farmed garden or semi-forest coffee.16
• All farmers were smallholders.
• All farmers lived within easy walking distance to Fero Coop.

Socio-Cultural Context

Roughly 95% of the Sidama people live a life based in agriculture (Municipal Census Bureau, Yirgalem 2015). They maintain a close connection to the earth, spiritually, and live in close proximity to their subsistence farms where the major crops of Coffea Arabica and Enset, the main staple of the people, are produced. The patterned practices of Enset and coffee production has significantly shaped Sidama culture with regard to socio-economics, indigenous knowledge, food sovereignty, resiliency and sustainability (Teketay 1991) (Tadesse et al. 2014).

Sidama land supplies over 40% of washed coffee to the centrally organized national market. Coffee is a major cash crop for the Sidama, and is the best source of income for rural households (Municipal Census Bureau, Yirgalem 2015).

Data Collection

In addition to visual methods, I used participant observation, observation of

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16Most coffee production in Ethiopia falls into three categories, i.e., forest coffee, semi-forest coffee, and garden coffee. Forest coffee is a wild coffee grown under the shade of natural forest trees, and it does not have a defined owner. Semi-forest coffee farming is a system where farmers thin and select forest trees to let sufficient sunlight to the coffee trees and to provide adequate shade. A farmer who prunes and weeds the forest area once a year claims to be the owner of the semi-forest coffee. Garden coffee is normally found in the vicinity of a farmer’s residence and fertilized with organic material and usually inter-cropped with other crops (Tadesse et al. 2014).
participation, and semi-structured interviews to gather data. In order to insure the local participants had a clear picture of the study, the informed consent and photo release forms were translated into Amharic by Awgichew Kebede, my translator, and back translated by a professional translator and member of the Ethiopian Diaspora Community in Seattle.

In order to select the elicitation research photographs, I analyzed the archive, “Ethiopia 2009,” on the Level Ground Trading website (Level Ground Trading 2015). I decided on 30 photographs that visually represented a range of people and places related to coffee production. The photographs were sampled from roughly 800, taken at the research site by the client. I showed the photographs to farmers midway through the interview, to see what stories, memories or other information they would elicit.

In addition to farmer interviews, I video recorded interviews with local agronomists and the Chairman of Fero Coop. Subjects under discussion were fair trade, the production of organic, shade grown coffee, and traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Also filmed were daily interactions and walks through some of the coffee farms.

Production of Deliverables

Editing and producing three short documentaries, was a time consuming part of the analysis stage, and necessitated an investment of many hours learning how to use the editing tools, and shaping the footage into a final product. At first, unstructured, open viewing of all visual documents collected was the stage where impressions, memories, and other intangibles

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17 “The observation of participation” is a departure from participant observation, and involves the collaboration of researcher and research participant “within a single narrative ethnography, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue” (Tedlock 1991: 69).
came to the surface. Then, the structured analysis of forming questions about the images brought clarity of direction and purpose. And finally, the micro-analysis stage was a process that answered questions and arrived at more refined insights (Collier and Collier 1986). This was a process I have instinctively used in my conceptual photography work for the last 25 years, and it was also used in this study.

I included as much interview footage as possible to provide a wide range of data. I received professional editing instruction through two courses in documentary filmmaking offered by the Native Voices Program at the University of Washington. These courses, along with a course in Visual Storytelling from The New School in New York, taught me the essentials of film theory and practice, and how to put the project together.

Communicating the Results

I created over 500 still photographs and short films for Level Ground Trading. They will be used in marketing projects that draw attention to issues related to farmer livelihoods and the environment. Forms of communicating the results include exhibitions, presentations, packaging, web based media, or printed marketing materials.

I also organized an exhibition at an Ethiopian restaurant in Seattle, with the photos created by the Hailu family. Results from the exhibition are discussed in Chapter 4.

Finally, I traveled to Victoria in July of 2016 to present the findings to the employees of Level Ground Trading. There was a rich discussion after the presentation about the value of going to the sites where commodities are sourced, in order to speak with and learn from farmers. The employees were positive that applying ethnographic and visual methods to the
pursuit of educating consumers was a good direction for LGT, and for the industry as a whole.

At the meeting, I presented Mr. Ciro with 20 enlargements of participatory photographs to exhibit in their new retail space.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Plate 4.1. Photo-Elicitation Photograph, Credit: Hugo Ciro (2009)

General Findings

Before beginning the fieldwork, I anticipated that visual research methods would be practical for engaging the interest of the local people, and this proved to be the case. The research equipment, e.g., the cameras, recorders and iPhone, fascinated the children who constantly surrounded us to see more. For the adults, the diversion offered an amusing break from their routine. Having interviewed and spent time observing ten farmers and their families, it was clear to me that their feedback regarding the visual component of the research was overwhelmingly positive. This gave me valuable feedback with regard to my research question of how the methods would be received.

When I showed participants photographs of people and places known to them, e.g., of Mr. Ciro from Level Ground Trading, and their coffee community, their faces lit up as they
recounted their memories. The farmers accepted me as an extension of Mr. Ciro’s Direct Fair Trade with them. In addition, farmers shared some concerns about coffee trade, and rich detail about the meaning of coffee and organic growing methods. This information provided valuable text to go with the films and photographs and helped the client discover what was meaningful to farmers.

I learned, through interviews, that direct fair trade is important to every farmer in my study group; that their annual incomes have risen every year since they joined the coop and were able to access Direct Fair Trade. All farmers told me that everything in their lives is connected to coffee, and that they work very hard to cultivate, harvest and process it. For this reason, they felt they should receive a better price. Despite their gratitude for a gradual increase in annual income, they felt the increase was not enough to offset the challenges they face in feeding, clothing, and educating their children.

As one of the farmers said, “We are producing good coffee but we don’t see the benefit. We are working hard, but we are not profitable. Only those who import and export get the
profit” (Interview with Asefa Adola 2015). Plate 4.2, above, is a photograph of the coop workers loading some of the last of 2015’s harvest.

One of our participants, Marta Daniel, frames the issue in this way:

We plant our coffee, but if we don’t find a buyer it’s useless. If we get someone to buy the coffee, the coffee grows and our income increases.

Plate 4.3. Marta Daniel, Farmer

Daniel is optimistic.

If someone gives us a good price we are encouraged to grow more and more. Like our coffee, we farmers grow too, and we feel comfortable with that. In Sidamo our coffee grows, and we hope foreigners will come to pay a good price. In this way we can grow our coffee community.

Plate 4.4. Bajaj Driver, Yirgalem
I observed from daily interactions that the local economy in nearby Yirgalem relies on micro currency, small change and repeated transactions that amount to no more than a few cents or dollars\textsuperscript{18}. Bus, motorbike or bajaj\textsuperscript{19} fare, a shoe shine, a mustache trim, a bundle of fresh herbs for chewing, alms for the needy, a cup of coffee, and a calling card or lottery ticket are all small change enterprises. The economic engine that produces what is required on a daily basis is powered by these repeated, small transactions.

Another observation was that “small talk” is essential to the Sidama social system; a social network based on hearty greetings, embraces, smiles, kindness to strangers, and carefully selected words and gestures.

Gewta’s research, *The Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics of Greetings in Sidama* (2016), was conducted out of Hawassa University in Ethiopia, just a few kilometers from my research site. He found that greetings, as a tool to begin and end a conversation, are used metaphorically or pragmatically to navigate variable degrees of acquaintance and socio-cultural

\textsuperscript{18} 10-100 Ethiopian Birr

\textsuperscript{19} A three wheel scooter with a small engine used to transport people for small change
and power differences among people. Greetings are often accompanied by hugging, kissing or bowing, and are very important to the maintenance of harmonious relationships.

I observed, after Gewta (2016), that one of the most important themes in Sidama greetings is peace, Keere in Sidamo, which is a word used to welcome someone or bid them farewell. I witnessed a poetic use of language among the Sidama people, which expressed a deep connection that people share with each other and with the land they farm.

The first time I visited the Hailu home and participated in their coffee ceremony, Berke Hailu embraced me and said, “Daa-ʔe Bu ŋũ20,” again and again, which literally means, “let soil come onto me.” This is a phrase that conveys a meaning of affection and respect. It implies the speaker would die for the person he or she is welcoming, but the communicative function is just, “Welcome” (Gewta 2016: 30).

Photo Elicitation Findings

Photo elicitation revealed that ten out of ten farmers believe they are better off economically because of Direct Fair Trade and they are optimistic for the future. However, the

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20 Pronounced “Daee Bushu”
farmers also raised dissatisfaction with the condition of the roads and coffee prices being dictated by the global market, which was often referred to as “Addis.”

Photo elicitation also opened up subjects that went beyond the scope of my interview questions. The conversations on traditional coffee culture were animated, which was captured on film. These unplanned conversations, again, were valuable to the client in that they revealed what coffee means to farmers. Farmers described their coffee rituals, and enthusiastically told us how the quality of their compost contributes to excellent coffee quality. They also shared concerns about the education of their children.

Shifting to photo elicitation midway through the interviews allowed me to create a comfortable space for participants. I felt this was an important point because asymmetries of power can be created or reinforced as a result of the linear dynamic of back and forth questions and answers (Lapenta 2011). The following screenshots from video clips illustrate this point:

Plate 4.7. Photo-Elicitation Interview

Addis Ababa, Capital of Ethiopia, is where coffee trade is managed and connected to the global market.
It should be noted that the woman standing at the window, in Plate 4.7, is one of the four women farmers interviewed for this study. She enthusiastically volunteered the use of her home for the interview with the farmer in the foreground.

In my experience, the act of inserting photos midway through the interview accomplished something important and positive. It shifted the focus, and the exchange shifted from a back and forth directive, to a shared activity in which the three of us, my translator, the respondent, and I, focused on the same object with the same goal; that of finding out more about it. The outcome was that it encouraged a more engaged connection to the process of gathering information that afforded my participants more control, and therefore more comfort.

I base my conclusion on the visual evidence of playing back the footage and seeing the respondents relax and enjoy the photo-viewing portion of the interview. In reviewing the footage of the interviews, it was clear to me that by introducing the photographs mid-way through the interview process created a marked change in demeanor; participants went from reserved, before the photo sharing, to relaxed and talkative during and afterwards. When I compared the gestures and expressions before and after photo elicitation, I found increased enjoyment, confidence, openness and eagerness to speak in all ten interviews.

All ten farmers, four women and six men, said they were encouraged by the attention they received while participating and appreciated that someone took time to show them pictures and ask about their lives and concerns as coffee farmers. These findings support the idea that photo elicitation is valuable to build rapport and create a positive experience for participants. In addition, the assertion that photo elicitation “expands the potential range of data” (Collier 1986: 99) proved to be true in this study.
Rose argues that even photos that depict mundane subjects can elicit conversations of depth (2012).

For example, in a photo elicitation interview with Marta Daniel, she looked at a photo of men hauling hulled coffee cherries,\textsuperscript{22} destined for compost, and began to talk about compost and soil fertility. The conversation led to the story of the shock her coffee trees endured when her husband died, five years previously. “They absorbed the shock of his death,” she said, “but I have nursed them back to health with care and compost. Now, glory to God, they are starting to give again!” I learned from her that in Sidama culture, it is believed that when a farmer dies, the fertility of the soil grieves, going deep into the ground. This is why it takes time and commitment for the trees to recover.

\textbf{Plate 4.8. Photo-Elicitation Photograph, Fero Coop}

During my stay in Ethiopia I visited an ancestral burial site set in an old growth forest of African Yellow Wood, Mountain Bamboo and wild \textit{Coffee arabica}. Abo is one of the most

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{22} The coffee cherry is the fruit of the coffee tree, \textit{Coffea Arabica}, and contains seeds (beans) enclosed by pulp and an outer skin (Merriam Webster 2016).
\end{footnote}
religiously revered sites in the region. I was allowed to speak with the elders and take a few pictures, but video recordings were not permitted.

The above photo illustrates the need for verbal context in all research photographs. The information needed to understand the image better is that in spite of the solemn expressions depicted in the photograph, the people were not solemn before or after I took the picture. The man in the yellow shawl politely asked to have his picture taken. Afterwards, when I showed him the photograph, he told me that he liked it very much. I told him that if the technology existed, I would retrieve the photo from the camera and give it to him in that instant. I said that I would like to give him something. I learned through translation that he replied, “It is I who should give to you.” Without this background, one might easily misunderstand the photograph.

The following two photographs, taken at the same site, give more meaning to the text that follows them.
The forest here is wild. Humans did not plant the trees. They were already here, long before memory. It is not allowed to cut the trees. Coffee was brought to this place by the birds in Kaffa\textsuperscript{23}, long before memory. The first memory of coffee, before it was roasted, is that coffee was food and medicine for the people. No coffee trees have been planted here. The coffee in this forest traces back to origin and it is the best coffee in the region, better than the coffee on the farms and the ‘so called’ cultivated coffee, because it is wild. The leaves from the trees fall to feed the soil, which goes back to feed the trees. The trees are sacred and coffee is sacred. (Conversation with Elders, January 15, 2016)

One afternoon, I discovered a form of photo elicitation that I had not intended. I was going through some stills I had taken, with my translator, Awgichew, of people and places in Yirgalem, a town near the Fero Coop. Looking through the photos, he started talking about an idea he called, “Grand Ethiopia” and I took notes on what he was saying:

\textsuperscript{23} A province on the southwestern side of Ethiopia reputed to be the origin of \textit{Coffea arabica}. 

Plate 4.10. The Forest of Abo
Awgichew said, “In modern times, there is pride in Ethiopian heritage, but sometimes pride can stop progress.” He described a hollow pride that lives in the past. In his words, “Ethiopia stopped evolving and became backward.” He went on to list the highlights of Ethiopian heritage as if reciting a lesson, memorized in school; e.g., the Kingdom of Aksum, the birthplace of the human race, the indigenous origin of coffee, and so on. “After all,” he says, “How does this specialness help us now? Without a plan for the future, we are like wahber.”

*Wahber* is an Amharic word meaning empty coffee cherries, with no beans inside, due to disease, or lack of rain.
Following are some of the photos that I was scrolling through my camera as he talked:

Figure 4.1. Elicitation Photos for Awgichew Kebede
What triggered his thoughts and words, I am not sure, but he was satisfied when I wrote it down. Including his thoughts in the research, along with the images, enriches the background and context of this study.

Participatory Photography Findings

Plate 4.12. Roman Hailu in Front of her House

I loaned a camera to Roman Hailu, 18 years of age, in order to visually explore her environment for one week. I told her to photograph anything she wished, and to share the camera with her brother and two sisters, if they wished to participate. The following link is a segment from the short film, Photo Voice: Engaging Visual Methods, that reveals her emotion and enthusiasm. The photographs were printed in Yirgalem and presented to the family at the end of the week as a keepsake of their time spent taking pictures. Figure 4.2 is a collage of photographs made by the family.
The family visually described their community, and afterwards they talked about the experience in a recorded photo-sharing session. I characterize this approach as a modification
of "Photo Voice." The activity was not designed to catalyze social change, but rather, to build rapport with the family, and create an atmosphere of reciprocity in our daily exchanges. It was offered as a way to engage the family’s participation in the research and to share their vision of community. The photos they made were not of landscapes, animals or buildings. They were of people. For this family, the community as a group and its individual members were the most photographed, the “most exciting” as Roman phrased it, and the most meaningful.

To communicate the results of the research, I took advantage of an opportunity to make the images more accessible. In July of 2016, I mounted an exhibition of the participatory photographs in a popular Ethiopian restaurant in downtown Seattle. The photographs are for sale, and proceeds will be donated to a fund for educational scholarships in the Fero community. (See Plate 4.13)


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24 "Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy by which people create and discuss photographs as a means of catalyzing personal and community change" (Wang et al. 1998:369).
In addition, the following screenshots are pages from a book that I created online to commemorate the event and share with the Hailu family:

Plate 4.14. Pages from a Commemorative Book for the Hailu Family

Ethnographic Film Findings

Plate 4.15. Still from Film, Strong Beans

Assembled footage and recordings from interview transcripts gathered from farmers, their families, and agronomists became an ethnographic film trilogy of *Ethiopian Coffee Stories*. The first short film, *Strong Beans: Portrait of a Young Girl Who Picks Wild Coffee* (password strongbeans), is roughly 8 minutes in length, and describes a fair trade connection between Hailu Chuluta’s daughter, Edelawit, and myself. This short film provides an example of how to construct an ethnographic narrative that takes the viewer inside a social circle in order
to understand it better. The film is password protected as music permission is still pending for the use of the song, *Mar Mar Alew*, by Mirtnesh Tilahun.

The second film, *Sidama Coffee Pride: Farmers Discuss Coffee Quality and Culture*, is 20 minutes long and takes the viewer through interviews conducted with farmers to gather data on coffee quality, trade and culture.

The third film, *Photo Voice: Engaging Visual Methods*, is 14 minutes long and documents the photographs made by the Hailu family. In addition to filming a participatory photography sharing session, the film demonstrates the photo elicitation method and shows the difference between talks that are elicited by interview questions and those elicited by the photographs.

I also filmed the traditional Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony, held out of doors under a canopy of tall trees. The following two clips are samples from my footage to illustrate the potential for archival preservation of traditional practices, which is an advantage of visual methods. The first documents a performance of the ceremony and was filmed at Aregash Lodge near the coffee farms. *Coffee Roasting/Traditional*

The second sequence is an example of “the observation of participation,” an ethnographic method in which “ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others’ co-participation within the ethnographic encounter” (Tedlock 1991: 69). Combined with visual methods, this form of narrative ethnography becomes yet more meaningful. This encounter, between the Hailu family and myself, was filmed by my translator to document the preparation and roasting of the wild coffee I purchased, which was picked by the two sisters. *Coffee Roasting/Participant Engagement*
One of the most rewarding aspects of doing this study has been the opportunity to create a portrayal of Sidama coffee farmers which visually *disrupts* (Mjaaland 2009) stereotypical Western notions of Ethiopians as victims of poverty, drought, and famine.

Figure 4.3. Pages from Book for Fero Coop
Coffee and coffee ceremony are ubiquitous in Ethiopia. In just under an hour, my
translator and I counted over a hundred coffee shops in Yirgalem, the nearest city to Fero Coop.
The following three interview clips reinforce the central role coffee plays in the lives of the
locals: Interview with Hailu Interview with Asefa Interview with Mazea

Plate 4.16. Serving Coffee, Yirgalem Coffee Shop

My short ethnographic films are an integral part of the study because in addition to
being a key deliverable to my client, they provided an example, to other researchers and
students of visual methods, of what can be done collaboratively and simply, with an iPhone, a
camera and photo-elicited interviews. It was a participatory research effort that demonstrates
the value of visual methods in building rapport with research participants, and produced
ethnographic material that was shaped into a useful deliverable.

Farmers’ Reactions to the Research

In my follow up interview with farmers, I asked if they had a comment or question about
my research. I was daily collecting a visual narrative of their lives, and I wanted to include their
idea of what I was doing. Following are their comments:
Plate 4.17. Shigute Tafera, Farmer

It’s good because you are researching our country and the problems we are facing. In the future if we receive encouragement we will do more. Coming to see what we are doing is good for us. (Shigute Tefera)

Plate 4.18. Ergo Tona, Farmer

I have nothing to ask her. What would I ask? I have nothing bad to say, only good. There is nothing wrong toward her or toward me, except for my shortage of money. (Ergo Tona)

Plate 4.19. Asfaw Rekiba, Farmer

The research is very good. The support is very good. Your attention to what we are doing, our issues, our concerns, our problems; this is valuable to us. If there is someone
going backward, what you are doing now is like a ladder to go up. I want to say thank you very much for that. (Asfaw Rekiba)

It’s very exciting, because you are appreciating and encouraging us. This encourages us to work even harder, to do as much as we can with coffee. This by itself is appreciation for what you are doing. I would like to say thank you very, very much. (Asrat Aweke)

I am very happy you are here to check on the farmers. Your coming here is encouraging, and more to me than money. Love means more than money, especially for the women farmers like me who lost her husband. The coffee and the food we have that comes from our land, comes with hard work. In order to provide, the land needs daily care. From morning until night I work on the land. Without work, the land gives you nothing. (Marta Daniel)
I don’t want to obligate you, but what I want to know is, are you coming back after you leave? I love you. I respect you. I hope to see you again. Thank you very much for taking the time to come and see us and the farm, for taking an interest in us. (Roman Hailu)

Hailu Chuluta:
Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak. You came to our country and our village and you selected my family. You spent a lot of time here and you have helped my family. You treat me, and the children, in a very good way. What is your reason?.

Researcher:
I care about your family, as I do all of the families. You are an example of a good farming family. I have seen you harvest good coffee. I have seen how well you treat your land, how healthy it is, and how well you treat each other. I want to share that with Hugo so that he can share it with his customers. We will use the photos and your stories to show the world how good the people, the land and the coffee is in Sidamo. Hugo wants to sell more of your coffee.

Hailu Chuluta:
I would like to say thank you very much on behalf of my whole family. God follows you
wherever you go. And God gives to you, Awgichew\textsuperscript{25}, the one who works so hard, and we want to tell you again, thank you. I will pray with my family for you both. Amen.

The above comments are included in the research to underscore that this study is about what is meaningful to farmers. The comments contextualize the photographs and demonstrate the reciprocity of text and images as a dynamic, interconnected research model.

\textsuperscript{25} Awgichew Kebede, my translator, did not know the Hailu family before I arrived in Ethiopia. He continues to keep in touch with them, and advise me regarding their well being.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Plate 5.1. Abstract Image, Downtown Yirgalem

Images are problematic and have a strange status in social science in general and anthropology in particular. They are not so much disregarded, as bracketed off, gestured towards, and yet not taken seriously; visual anthropology remains a subfield, it is not part of the mainstream which is dominated by models derived from linguistics and textual analysis. Yet our language is full of visual metaphor. (Zeitlyn 2010: 400)

I would argue, as Zeitlyn does, that within photography lays opportunity for anthropologists to study, in depth, issues of representation and perception. Rather than marginalizing visual materials and methods, anthropology would do well to include them.

The Challenge to Objectivity

The debate surrounding the visual mandates of selectivity\(^{26}\) and subjectivity\(^{27}\) poses a challenge to anthropology in part because issues of representation are at stake. The main

\(^{26}\) Selectivity refers to the cultural, disciplinary, and theoretical biases of the researcher (Prosser & Schwartz 1998), and the aesthetic proclivities of the photographer.

\(^{27}\) Subjectivity acknowledges that there is no such thing as objectivity in human experience.
problem is that the visual researcher needs to be scrutinized for the “trustworthiness” of the visuals in question because of the disparity between the cultures of the researcher and the researched (Prosser & Schwartz 1998). The scrutiny of methods and their results is welcome. However, theory and practice should not be viewed as dichotomy. There is a mutually supportive relationship between theoretical anthropological knowledge and applied visual practice, which in the final analysis, needs to be championed. The issues could be settled, or at least mediated, by encouraging transparency of cultural and theoretical biases of researchers, and abandoning the premise that the camera could ever truly be objective. Objectivity is impossible in filmmaking, because the eye and the mind of the filmmaker impose a worldview that stems from lived experience, both conscious and unconscious. Therefore, the result is always a filmed construction. “There is no objective human experience, so why pretend there is? All we can do is be transparent” (conversation with Georgia Suter, anthropologist, June 12, 2016).

Photography and film might be appreciated more in anthropology if the point of departure was simply that the collaboration between equipment, photographer, filmmaker, anthropologist, subject, and audience, combine to create “inter-subjective communication to generate understandings of social and cultural phenomena” (Henley 1997: 78). The synergy of combining different viewpoints and methods within the parameters of a specified project is where the potential of film and photography is greatest.

As Rose notes, “Photographs provide a vehicle for invoking and considering situations, events, and issues. The meaning of a photograph is thus more fluid and variable in response to the changing circumstances of the photographer, the viewers, and what is being done in the
interaction between them” (Hodgetts et al. 2007: 266-7). This would suggest that there is no inherent meaning in photographs apart from the meanings attached to them by multiple viewers; meanings that depend on context. I found these observations to be true in the present study, especially in the photo elicited interviews.

Following is a photo, which appears to be a production line of workers sorting coffee, but one of the women participants gazed into it and said, “Only the ones who work will get a full belly” (Interview with Ergo Tona 2015).

Plate 5.2. Elicitation Photo of Fero Workers, Credit: Hugo Ciro, (2009)

What is the value of using photo elicitation, participatory photography, and ethnographic film in anthropological research? From my perspective, part of the value is that they communicate the findings multi-dimensionally, i.e., with more depth than can words alone, to a broader and more diverse audience. Applied anthropology has a better chance of capturing the attention and imagination of its audience, if it engages the senses as well as the intellect. Better yet, if we can engage the consciences of those to whom we reach out, visual anthropology can have impact on the actions of others.
This study contributes to the growing body of research in visual anthropology by demonstrating the value of visual methods and providing examples of how they were used in data collection, data interpretation and communicating the results. It is my hope that other researchers will find it useful in their work. Part of the relevance for applied anthropology is that sharing the benefits of visual methods helps the discipline dispel the “methodological anxiety” (Cassell 2002: 177) induced by the false dichotomy of “hard” and “soft” sciences coming together in one study. Dichotomies can be dispelled by context and complementarity.

Representation and Visual Storytelling

The need for just representation of others points to the use of photography and film as an opportunity for anthropology to communicate its findings in a more reflexive way. Anthropology is about expanding into new dimensions of understanding others and the self. The self can be better understood through the reflections of others, and others better understood through challenging the self. Visual methods provide vehicles for cultivating a deeper awareness of self and others in the pursuit of new knowledge and shared understanding. They gather more than sensory evidence. They generate a multi-layered, context-driven, and localized perspective of people in their environments. This is a powerful application of anthropology, and of the reciprocity of words and images.

Personal Observations and Conclusions

I traveled each day from my lodging to the farms and the coop on foot, in a bajaj, or on the back of a small motorcycle. The people I encountered and waved to along the way,
especially the children, began to know me as a foreigner who gathered stories and took pictures. They undoubtedly had their own running narratives of me, and asked me to share on many occasions, details about my life in the United States.

Because of my foreign appearance, I was a constant attraction. “We are being watched like a television,” my translator often said to me. This is a link to a clip to showing the amused reactions I often received from the local children: Children of Fero Coop. My translator, Awgichew, characterized this behavior as being motivated by fascination and curiosity.

The people, children and adults, men and women, were always looking for something from me; a small gift or some small change. In return, they showered me with hearty greetings, kind words, and pleas for something, anything, from my bag. A pen was especially relished. But a heartfelt greeting, in the native language, a hug, or a handshake seemed to make the people happy. At times, the curiosity at seeing me walking along the rough road was so great that the
children reached out to pinch my arm. The words “contagious magic”\textsuperscript{28} came to mind, recalled from an anthropology course I had taken. Toward the end of my research at Fero, I recognized a young girl from the neighborhood who followed us, Awgichew and myself, for perhaps a quarter of a mile. She said to a passerby, “I am going where they are going, to the place where there is no death.”\textsuperscript{29} Plate 5.4, is a screen shot of her from the above film clip of the children. I include her comment because it is typical of the Sidama way of speaking poetically, which is important to Sidama culture, and may stem from the Abyssinian literary tradition of “Wax and Gold” (Levine 1965, 2014), i.e., a form of expression that alternates between obvious and hidden meanings.

\textbf{Plate 5.4. Child Member of the Fero Community}

This is a link to a clip that sums up my narrative of what I learned from the ten members of the coffee coop interviewed for this study. Coffee Stories: Summary

\textsuperscript{28} Magic based on the idea that once joined, things continue to affect each other when separated (Frazer 1983).

\textsuperscript{29} My translator told me the expression, “the place where there is no death,” is sometimes used by the Sidama to refer to “Heaven,” and at other times, to mean they have no idea about the whereabouts of a thing or person.
There are other themes present in the data, such as the global market system impact on farmer livelihoods and biodiversity conservation through agroforestry practice. But the visual data that I collected was most compelling within the themes of quality and community, so I leaned in that direction for the purposes of this visual analysis.

My vision going forward is to apply visual methods and anthropology to help organizations document and disseminate their media-bound stories with purpose and clarity. Whether a project or narrative is aimed at consumers of coffee or policy decision makers, it should be constructed from a specific point of view and it should render that viewpoint comprehensibly and meaningfully to the intended audience.

Client’s Reaction to Deliverables

Following is the reaction of the client to the three short films:

Just watched the video! Wow! You took me there! Warm feeling seeing Awgichew30, Roman31 and the others…I am so blessed by the kind words said about me when you shared photos. I think, Paula, you did a fantastic job because you captured beautifully the meaning of coffee, of direct fair trade; the people who, with God’s help create the value, initiate the value, which in the end, we enjoy in the cup. (email from Hugo Ciro, Co-Founder, March 24, 2016)

Your research has given LGT a way to give customers (both retailers like Ten Thousand Villages32, and their customers) a glimpse into the lives of the people who produce the products they are consuming; something that many of them would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. It brings them closer together. It is a means of storytelling in the eyes/words of the producers, rather than a researcher who is compiling data and reporting on it. The qualitative aspect is key. It not only impacts sales (as people better understand the importance of Fair Trade), but helps customers understand what life is like in these various countries when they may never have had

30 Awgichew Kebede, translator.
31 Roman Hailu is an 18 year old research participant, and student/farmer in training.
32 The largest Fair Trade retailer in North America (https://www.tenthousandvillages.ca/about)
this opportunity otherwise. Through your research, we learn more about our producers and how we can improve our relationship. While we visit and communicate with farmers on a regular basis, we don’t have a system of gathering, compiling, processing, and evaluating our impact, which could help us to be more effective. (email from Patricia Pearson, Director of Non-Profit Sales/Fundraising, July 18, 2016)

**Recommendations**

I recommend to Level Ground Trading further ethnographic studies applying the present research model, ethnography combined with visual methods, to other sites in Africa and Latin America where it sources fairly traded commodities. Additional studies would build a cross-cultural record of perspectives and meanings associated with social and ecological impacts faced by farmers and producers.

However, impacts of the present study remain to be seen; namely, how ethnographic film applied to marketing affects consumer behavior. Therefore, I also recommend focus groups to evaluate the impact of photography and film on consumer awareness and consumer likelihood to support farmers with more coffee purchases.

To benefit farmer communities, I recommend that LGT sponsor special events such as film screenings or photo exhibitions that engage consumers to “imagine” farmers’ lives at the local level. These events would consolidate support between farmers and consumers and they might even be conveyed back to farmers at origin via Skype or Facebook. I envision this as a demonstration of solidarity between farmers at the source, and global consumers.

**Final Thoughts**

The products of ethnographic and visual research are no more than time capsules or records of a narrow slice of reality. Geertz describes the work of anthropologists as, “ad hoc
and ad interim” (Geertz 1995). When I interviewed or photographed a participant, I had to acknowledge that research questions and the viewfinder of a camera are useful instruments of inquiry, and yet, at best, they can only produce a fleeting glimpse into complex realities. They stage a point of view, select particulars out of the kaleidoscope of life, and bear witness to the confluence of theory and practice, and of us and others.

The challenge lies in keeping up with the pace of change and the complexity of global connections, and in progressing the research and public discourse to reflect them. In this context of profound connection and change, Geertz speaks to what is realistically possible:

What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced together patternings, after the fact... it calls for showing how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going, and are likely to go. (Geertz 1995)

The researcher can appreciate Geertz’s “ad hoc and ad interim” description, and yet, realize that images and accounts of a particular time and place are valuable, especially over the long term, in a multi-sited context. Bearing witness to farmers who are far away, yet connected, seeing their faces and hearing their stories, helps consumers to better appreciate the context and the meaning of agricultural commodities, for those at origin, and for themselves.
APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN PHOTO ELICITATION
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION PROMOTIONAL FLYER
ETHIOPIAN COFFEE STORIES: A qualitative study of Sidama coffee farmers from a visual approach to applied anthropology

In January 2016, I traveled to the coffee growing region of Sidamo, Ethiopia, in order to research shade grown coffee farming, direct fair trade and coffee culture.

As part of my visual research, I loaned a camera to the Hailu Chuluta family, and asked them to take pictures of their environment for one week. The four children, Roman, Melkamu, Millon and Edelawit, were the photographers, and they embraced the experience with great joy. The images you see here were photographed by the children, along with the portraits I made of the Hailu family.

As part of my Master’s project, I am sharing this exhibition with the Ethiopian community in Seattle.

Please consider donating to support the farmers. Even with fair trade premiums, the harvest was relatively small this past year, and they will be struggling to make ends meet.

Paula Suter is a photographer working on a MS in Applied Anthropology at University of North Texas. Questions or comments: paulasuter1960@gmail.com
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHS
REFERENCES


