An editorial and an image: An ode to visual anthropology
by Hande Gür

The following few pages are our journal’s ode to visual anthropology through my description as one of the co-editors of Compass and the image I captured during a fieldwork in Konya, Türkiye in 2022, which was the winner of the Images of Research 2023.

Visual anthropology, a subfield within anthropology, is a discipline that explores the intersection of culture, society, human expression and perception through audiovisual means (Chio 2023). It involves studying and understanding ‘the anthropological’ through the lens of photographs, films, drawings, and other media.

While the fieldwork is often audiovisual for a participant observer (Macfarlane 2010), a researcher’s visual representations can also be part of the narrative, analysis, and interpretation of the field, capturing moments and expressions—that may elude verbal descriptions.

Visual anthropology may be as critical as the study of verbal and written sources as it explores the socio-cultural contexts embedded within these representations, unveiling stories that might otherwise remain hidden (Pinney 2005). It clarifies narratives, humanizes experiences, and can function as a tool to bridge gaps and transcend linguistic barriers.

The Images of Research (IOR) initiative involves graduate students from various disciplines at the University of Alberta communicating and showcasing the core of their research using a single image. Below is my ode to visual anthropology through the image that won the IOR 2023 and its description. We hope that this will be the beginning of our journal’s journey in highlighting various approaches and means within anthropological research.

**An Image Called “A Researcher’s Identity”**

This image is a visualization of my thoughts at the moment as a researcher. My description for the image was as follows:

“In the summer of 2022, I traveled to Türkiye, my country of origin, for a four-month ethnographic research project on the rise of Sufi—mystical Islamic—practices among mainly young, middle-class women of Turkish origin. Throughout my fieldwork, I repeatedly asked my interlocutors the question, “Can you tell me about yourself?” Little did I know that there would come a time when I would need to retreat to a quiet room, retrieve my laptop, and turn the same question inward. Anthropological fieldwork traditionally involved going to a ‘foreign’ place and describing ‘the other’ to academia upon return. However, studying a religion historically constructed as ‘other’ to the West requires self-reflexivity. As a young Turkish woman and daughter of a Sufi practitioner, I found myself questioning my position as an insider or a researcher in the field. With no one else to turn to, I took a seat and asked myself, ‘Can I tell a little bit about myself too, please?’” (Gür 2023).

Hande Gür is a PhD Candidate at the University of Alberta (Department of Anthropology, 13–15 Tory Building, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H4 [gur@ualberta.ca]).
Figure 1. A Researcher’s Identity. The Images of Research, First Place 2023.
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the University of Alberta Library, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta for granting permission to feature this image and its description in our journal.

References Cited