Qurb\ani

Nearness and Altruism as an Engaged Ethnographic Practice

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Prelude

The Urdu expression '*kisi tareef ka mohtaj na hona*' is often rhetorically employed to articulate how someone does not need an introduction. What I find interesting is not that introduction often ensues this remark but the use of the word *tareef* (praise) instead of *taruf* (introduction). Thus, introducing someone is akin to praising someone, and this is how we often experience and carry out introductions in Pakistan. Often, praise as a practice of introduction is carried out to the point that it might even seem disingenuous to many in Germany. However, such a cynical reading of a Pakistani practice of praise perhaps fails to understand that some of us only introduce certain people and not others for a good reason.

Martin Sökefeld is indeed someone who does not need an introduction (*tareef ke mohtaj nahi*), but some praise is nevertheless in order. In March 2019, Martin welcomed me to the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Munich (LMU). I still remember how he introduced me to my new colleagues and the administrative workings of the institution I would be a part of for the coming years. He did so as the head of the department and, more importantly, as my PhD supervisor, my *Doktorvater* (doctoral father), as this relationship is known in the German-speaking world. In the following weeks and months, he patiently inducted me into my roles as a researcher, public

scholar and engaged anthropologist in my initial field site, the city of Munich. It would not be wrong to say that my subsequent relationship with him is simply captured by the affective split between two terms that signify the same formal role: the English term 'PhD supervisor' and the German equivalent *Doktorvater*. Often delicately but sometimes sharply, he highlighted to me the various aspects and sides of becoming an ethnographer. He nudged me not only to write and present my first conference paper, but also to engage in multiple other activities that were essential to my development as a public anthropologist. For instance, early on, he invited me to join demonstrations advocating for the right to work regardless of people's residence status and to partake in public discussions on so-called 'voluntary returns' organised at Bellevue di Monaco[1] (henceforth Bellevue) – a cultural, political and residential centre in Munich that also serves as an important meeting space for activists. Thus, my initiation into the field of anthropology at the doctoral level was not only about collecting ethnographic data, but also about connecting with my research and field site in varied ways.

Indeed, 'fieldwork' and 'ethnographic' methods are sometimes used to denote the collection of a certain form of qualitative data, particularly by social scientists outside the field of anthropology. Sociopolitical engagement is often discouraged in this form of fieldwork, in order to achieve 'objectivity' in data collection. While there is nothing wrong with this cross-disciplinary methodology and practice, as James MacClancy argues, "it is rather different from (and frequently less than) the anthropological approach of intensive interaction with a particular group of people, including learning their language" (2019: 6). What has come to be known as an *engaged anthropological approach*, however, goes even beyond this and argues for a deeper and multifaceted sociopolitical commitment to one's field and interlocutors (Ortner 2019). Such an approach advocates and practices anthropology that critically and affectively grapples with important issues of our time, often beyond the scope of the re-

1 Located in the heart of the city, it offers its space (three contiguous buildings) and resources for a range of sociopolitical projects and activist efforts geared towards a diverse and inclusive Munich (for refugees, migrants and citizens).

search. In other words, it is a move away from politically and emotionally detached anthropology towards involvement, activism and feeling in the field. The usual critique of this approach and its cognates is the alleged loss of objectivity – and hence not being 'scientific' enough. Sherry Ortner regards such fears as unfounded when she writes:

> To take an engaged stance does not in any way conflict with an adherence to the principles of accuracy, evidentiary support, and truth which are the basis of any kind of scholarly or scientific work. The only difference is that the biases of work that does not define itself as engaged tend to be hidden, while the biases of engaged anthropology are declared upfront. (2019: NP)

Martin and I at a public discussion on the irregularised migration of Pakistanis (Bellevue di Monaco), Munich 2021

Screenshot from the Bellevue di Monaco YouTube channel

At a methodological level, Martin himself once pointed out to me how subjectivity is not the Achilles heel we sometimes portray it to be – in our reflections on 'shortcomings' in the methods section –but a strength we should unabashedly profess as a productive catalyst for any ethnographic endeavour.

Introduction: *Qurb\ani* as a kind of engagement and a side of the ethnographer

While this edited volume highlights many different aspects of being an ethnographer, in this chapter, I discuss the altruistic side of engaged ethnographers. In their 2010 article, Setha Low and Sally Engle Merry take the "Statement to the Profession" that came out of a 1993 AAA panel as a point of departure to discuss 'engagement' in anthropology (cf. Forman 1995). They argue that "anthropologists are engaged in a variety of ways, but, as indicated by the history, they do not necessarily agree about what constitutes engagement much less about the form that it should take" (2010: 207). In their effort to come up with a typology, Low and Merry (2010) first called to attention six different forms of anthropological engagement: sharing and support, teaching and public education, social critique, collaboration, advocacy and activism. They assert that the aim is not to establish "a set of mutually exclusive categories" but "to describe the range" and underscore the diversity and overlapping in engagements (ibid: 204). Keeping this claim in mind, I try to further this diversity of engagement not only conceptually, but also in terms of how I, as a scholar from the so-called 'Global South', practice and affectively experience engagement.

In the remainder of the chapter, I explore and develop a type of anthropological engagement that overlaps and intersects with a few of Low and Merry's categories by building on two personal examples from the field (ibid). I call this fluid type of engagement *qurb\ani* (*qurb* meaning closeness; *qurbani* meaning sacrifice) and do so for a few reasons. Let's start with the most obvious path to understanding a new use of established terms: semantics. In terms of affective terminology, the Urdu word *qurbani* (literally sacrifice; broadly altruistic behaviour informed by locally adapted Muslim practices of charity, but not only) and its cognate *qurb* (meaning nearness; in affective terms, a means of approaching someone) are both important here. Omar Kasmani describes the latter (i.e., *qurb*) as a "feeling of closeness […] always evolving, never stable feeling of being close in terms of time, place, or relation" (2022: 21). He suggests that *qurb*, due to "its visible, interiorized, spatial, and temporal

dimensions" of closeness, also implies being in reach "of understanding and conception" and, in that sense, is fundamentally different from *nazdik* the Urdu word for spatial or physical proximity (ibid).

I conjoin *qurb* and *qurbani* with a reverse slash on purpose, to borrow the simple idea in computer file management systems to indicate the 'path' taken. That is to say, the path to *qurbani* is through *qurb*. Through the concept of *qurb\ani*, a coalescing of *qurb* and *qurbani* in our field/work, I wish to achieve two congruent tasks: namely, dig deeper into specific kinds of affective and altruistic engagement we practice as anthropologists in our nearness to our field and interlocutors whilst simultaneously theorising the broader politics of such engagement. In other words, I wish to advance *qurb\ani* – a mode of affectively engaged altruism – as an ethnographic endeavour (methodology) whilst pitching it as a critical alternative to neoliberal forms of charity, 'sacrificing' one's economic capital or 'doing good' more generally (politics). I see this as a befitting call in an era when (tech) billionaires are fuelling the so-called 'Effective Altruism' movement and other forms of neoliberal fixes to tackle the problems of inequality (Bajekal 2022). Sometimes simply referred to as 'EA', Effective Altruism is a neo-utilitarian social movement that argues for disimpassioned charity. It encourages donating a certain portion of one's income to projects that purportedly make the 'biggest' impact in terms of the value of money, usually in the Global South. In a sense, it is the opposite of *qurb\ani* as I frame it. Quite problematically, EA assumes a data-driven way of 'giving up' a portion of one's income, and 'doing good' can be 'objective' and 'emotionless' when various private interests are involved. My challenge to this assumption rests on the premise that altruism is more than the sacrifice of money for 'benevolence', 'humanitarianism' or 'doing good' and that its often-hidden politics need to be brought to the fore (cf. Fassin 2012). While I throw down the gauntlet below and problematise global 'humanitarian' charities of all kinds trying to be 'effective', in short, my claim is that without *qurb* (nearness), there can be no *qurbani* (altruism; self-sacrifice). This is particularly relevant for movements that claim to have found an 'effective' and 'objective' mode of being altruistic and saving lives (cf. Fassin 2018).

Challenging neoliberal forms of charity that function under the rubric of 'Effective Altruism' is imperative, because not only do such seemingly apolitical approaches to doing good reproduce many of the inequalities they seek to address, but they are also based on a model not very different from the ones racist colonial powers used on their 'civilising' missions. Through their 'effective' approach to the distribution of resources, they justify diverting resources from 'inefficient' local organisations and governments to more 'efficient' international charities that often have their headquarters in the Global North (Acemoglu 2015). In this manner, they slowly chip away not only at a community's capacity and skills to engage with local issues in the Global South, but also the value of public goods more generally. At an abstract political level, the proponents of EA are trying to veil the politics of charity with a facade of objectivism. However, we know that every measurement involves a value judgment, no matter how mathematical the process of measurement may be (ibid). Even an 'objective' number becomes subjective, since the story that we tell about it is just one of many, as a friend working as a biomedical engineer at ETH Zürich pointed out to me recently. As I later thought about this observation about the construction of objectivism, Nikolas Rose's discussion on the notion of "style of thought" (Ludwik 1979) came to mind. Taking the example of biomedicine, Rose points to more fundamental issues of power in truth regimes:

> A style of thought is a particular way of thinking, seeing, and practicing. It involves formulating statements that are only possible and intelligible within that way of thinking. Elements—terms, concepts, assertions, references relations—are organized into configurations of a certain form that counts as arguments and explanations. Phenomena are classified and sorted according to criteria of significance. Certain things are designated as evidence and gathered and used in certain ways. Subjects are chosen and recruited. Model systems are imagined and assembled. Machines are invented and later commodified to make measures and inscriptions such as graphs, charts, and tables […] linked up with complex practical arrangements such as experiments and clinical trials. A style of thought also involves […] intimate knowledge of […] relations of power and status. […] [It] is not just about a

> certain form of explanation, about what *it is* to explain, it is also about what *there is* to explain. (2007: 12)

Such critique seems to miss the wealthy individuals and benevolent 'objective' minds of today who seem to mimic the white civilising mission of their predecessors. Like the previous eras of objectivism since its dark eugenic past, the 'science' of Effective Altruism relies on those with money and power, often rich (white) men in the Global North, to decide what cause is worth fighting for, what is the right mode of addressing the issue and who are the right people to carry out the actions needed (McGoey 2023).

In contrast, I propose a form of altruism steeped heavily in the affective and engaged turns: *qurb\ani*, a sacrifice that intrinsically relies upon nearness. Altruism, I argue (with my reliance on *qurb\ani*), has to be engaged and rely on collaborative forms of giving while tackling the structural causes of inequity, not only its symptoms. As I affectively envision *qurb\ani*, it stands for sacrifices that rely on nearness, which in turn informs our approach to sacrifices. That is to say, altruism should be socially and politically grounded in the contexts in which we seek to do good. Moreover, altruism must be engaged, or it will remain a handmaiden of capitalist extraction or, at best, memetic of mercantile civilisation missions of European colonialists (cf. Dalrymple 2019).

To illustrate my point, I first draw on the example of my participation in The Long Run, a grass-roots initiative that started as a small 'refugee running group' in Munich over a decade ago but has since grown into a community of diverse people who gather around many different activities, from sports to arts and cultural events. Subsequently, I draw on an example of a social entrepreneurship project in Lahore that I support in various ways. Towards the end, I juxtapose the practice and outcome of *qurb\ani* as 'engaged altruism' with 'Effective Altruism'.

My *qurb\ani* model is fundamentally built on practising it. I joined The Long Run soon after beginning my research with irregularised migrants in Munich, with whom I had just started my fieldwork at a return counselling centre and who had an *Ausreisepflicht* (obligation or rather order to leave). A few months prior to my 'following' people who returned

to Pakistan through so-called 'voluntary return' programmes, I saw my participation in the group as an opportunity to understand the pre-return lives of irregularised migrants (see Mahar 2020b, 2023). Engaging with the group, I thought, would allow me to meet them outside the return counselling setting (where I was sometimes seen as a part of the state-sanctioned return mechanism). Moreover, I would get to know migrants from different countries for a comparative understanding of irregularisation and (in)voluntary return (Mahar 2020a). Soon, however, I was engaged beyond that strategic aim for my *multi-sited* ethnographic research (Marcus 1995) with irregularised migrants and discovered my *multi-sidedness* as an ethnographer. Similarly, I got involved in a social entrepreneurship project in Pakistan, initially for the strategic aim of a comparative analysis regarding perceptions and aspirations of local (unskilled) youth in terms of migration and return. However, I soon realised my involvement exceeded methodological strategising, and my commitment to the project was social, political and altruistic in its nature. Upon submitting my PhD and receiving a Swiss salary, I also committed to financial support in both engagements (e.g., a friend and I donated €500 to The Long Run for a speaker system that was needed for our workouts, and a couple of hundred euros for training in Pakistan).

In both of these instances, I discovered that I was not solely engaged in 'giving and sharing', 'collaboration' and 'activism', to re-quote a few forms of engagement identified by Low and Merry, but much more – and affectively so (2010: 204). In addition to collaborative practices through which I provided my expertise to these two projects, there were opportunities to offer different forms of capital I had available, indeed even economic capital[2] (Bourdieu 1986). Since this asynchronous or indirect reciprocity is based on personal relationships built during fieldwork, mutual feelings of support, human intuition, collaborations, myriad sacrifices and long-term social and political engagements in the field, I call it *qurb\ani* (one could say *engaged altruism*) and see it as different from Effective Altruism in the same way as ethnographic description and reflex-

2 Particularly upon the submission of my thesis and having more disposable income.

ive sociological analysis is different from descriptive statistics and objectifying theoretical models (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). However, what does this look like in practice? And, more importantly, in what ways does *qurb\ani* as an ethnographic practice go beyond the usually accepted forms of engaged research? Through my participation in the two aforementioned projects, I discuss *qurb\ani* as an ethnographic exercise more concretely, and I theoretically develop this side aspect of being an engaged ethnographer.

Practicing *qurb\ani* in Germany

The Long Run brings together citizens and non-citizens with diverse experiences and backgrounds around various cultural, social and sports activities. Soon after joining, in cooperation with Paul Huf, a founding member, I initiated a 30-minute workout session, which has now become part of the weekly schedule in addition to the jogs that I am responsible for organising, as well as a range of other activities. As such, the Long Run helps foster connections built upon interactions during sporting and cultural activities, thereby giving equal status to non-citizens, unlike more goal-oriented voluntary work that sees Germans and migrants or refugees enter the unequal power relation between the helper and the helped. These occasions provide opportunities whereby non-citizens are not dependent on citizens and engage in new forms of relationalities that can lead to "de-migranticization" (Dahinden 2016) at the affective level – in some cases, even providing non-citizens with the opportunity to help citizens, thereby reversing the usual roles (Safuta et al. 2022).

Ahmed, for instance, a former competitive martial artist in the Ugandan Tae Kwon Do team, trains those interested in the sport in addition to offering a course for children at Bellevue. This is not to say, however, that practical 'skills' are valued over other forms of participation. Different people find different ways to contribute; for example, Hafez engages the rest of us with poetry and enlightens European citizens about the literature and arts of the Middle East. He bridges affective distances

and differences with verses that connect the Syrian experience to that of German participants on some days and to that of Pakistanis like me on others. Through poetic giving, he often saves an evening that would be otherwise spoiled by the actions of a common antagonist, the *Ausländerbehörde* (Foreigners Office), in Munich. He often lightens the mood at the end of a long run when issues with German authorities are discussed. German citizens like Ursula, a scriptwriter, and long-term Munich residents from other parts of Europe, like Jon, a patent judge, have established friendships with non-citizens like Ahmed and Hafez. Thus, when people like Ursula and Jon support their non-European peers with wearisome issues of bureaucracy, language and the modes and codes particular to 'Bavarian' life, it is not with the aim of helping a 'poor migrant' but a friend, a fellow runner or trainer.

While I participate in many of the activities and invest my time in organising some, I also contribute as an anthropologist by helping group members critically reflect on what they do. I see this as *qurb\ani*. Instead of only contributing to public and academic discourse, I find it valuable and important to engage the communities we do research with epistemologically and to share our knowledge with them. In other words, along with the established paths of disseminating knowledge through academic institutions and public discussion, I use my skills to communicate, transmit and circulate knowledge directly in a relevant community through engaged work – sometimes even at the cost of sacrificing academic knowledge generation (see Stephen Lyon in this volume). In that vein, I often discuss certain actions or 'help' offered by our European friends, at times quotidian modes of interaction that may reproduce unequal power relations. Certainly, it is always the case that based just on my physical appearance, I am assumed to be a refugee/asylum seeker by migrants and citizens alike. Often, new German volunteers or members of the journalistic community lose interest when I don't have a harrowing story to tell, which is often expected of non-white members of the group. Similarly, there are subtle problematic notions about 'the Muslim migrant' that effectively circulate. When possible, I gently take such observations to task and discuss them with the others. In doing so, we try to collaboratively identify ways to

strengthen and highlight the everyday and 'mundane' ways in which The Long Run can challenge the reproduction of unequal citizen-migrant relations.

There is no doubt about the fact that unequal power relations exist between citizens and non-citizens and that the nation-state system affords certain privileges to a group of humans considered to be at 'home' within a certain territory through the category of citizenship (Sharma 2020). However, in addition to struggling against such an exclusionary system in the long run, how can non-citizens (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, etc.) be helped with their immediate needs in the short run? The Long Run, through different activities, tries to help members understand the artificial separation between natives and migrants, citizens and non-citizens at the affective, somatic and political levels while providing non-citizens with immediate and concrete support. Towards both these ends of subjective good, in the short term and the long term, I *spend* the various resources I have at my disposal and sacrifice others. This spending or investment is an important component of my theorisation of *qurb\ani*, as it distinguishes itself from the kind of investment and spending that takes place within EA communities.

Practicing *qurb\ani* in Pakistan

In 2019, during my fieldwork in Pakistan, I met Ali[3], a migrant who had returned from Malaysia. At the time, Ali worked at a café in Lahore. Though not directly related to my research, which focuses on returns from Europe, we talked on several occasions about migration, return and the lack of opportunities for Pakistani youth. His story of migration and returning as a skilled barista were the bases of my interest in his views and opinions. Our love for speciality coffee and my student job as

3 Pseudonym.

a barista in Heidelberg helped strengthen our friendship further. It was a *sonay pe sohaga*, as the Urdu idiom for 'icing on the cake' goes[4].

Ali shared how he had overcome the lack of capabilities as an unskilled youth with a rural peasant upbringing and changed the trajectory of his family. However, this was not enough for him, and he was interested in doing something for others. Thus, when he wanted to start a café with an important social dimension that resonated with me, I decided to help in every way possible. I employed all forms of capital at my disposal, by using my networks amongst privileged Pakistanis to not only collect funds, but also build social bridges for him. Due to our reliance on rent-seeking investors to finance the project, however, our vision of a cooperative had to be strategically – but only temporarily – shelved. We are still adamant about our vision for a cooperative that will give ownership to its employees and restrict the disparity between the maximum and minimum employee pay to a factor of six.

In 2022, just before leaving at the end of my second fieldwork stint there, I aided Ali in opening one of the first cafés of its kind in Lahore. Due to my support in getting the project off the ground, I am an unofficial 'co-founder'. According to Ali, the project is as much mine as his, and while we do not have any legal agreements, I am proud to be a 'co-founder' in the symbolic sense. This perception was important for Ali for practical purposes, too. He felt that when I reached out to certain stakeholders or potential investors (e.g., my class fellows and friends from Aitchison College, a British-era private school), the response was quite different from what he would get (see Armytage 2020; Mahar 2021). Once I got involved, how he was treated within these circles was also quite different. In a sense, I became his gatekeeper to a rather closed fraternity which usually only conducts business within its network and often exploits people like Ali (see Mahar 2021).

4 The expression alludes to pouring a chemical on gold which helps dislodge its impurities and hence makes it shine immaculately but can be translated to English as "the cherry/icing on the cake."

Trainees learning how to taste espresso notes with Ali, Lahore 2022

Photo by Naheen Mahar

The principle of the café is simple. It serves locally roasted speciality coffee and simultaneously runs a barista traineeship programme for unskilled Pakistani youth. In addition to free barista training, covering training material costs (such as milk and coffee) and paying international certification fees, it pays a liveable monthly salary to trainees from the first day, much like an *Ausbildung* or vocational training programme in Germany (unlike in Germany, however, it is sadly a private and not a public endeavour, like many social projects in Pakistan). As the trainees progress out of training, they quickly find jobs in the hospitality market in Pakistan and various Gulf states with Ali's help, who now has several

of his students working there. The project can currently support six trainees at a time who retain employment until they find a job, following which a new trainee is hired. This rotational principle of the project, designed by Ali and me, does not please some of the investors and those providing the physical space for the café in exchange for profits. The rotation of the baristas and the repeated training of new ones impact the(ir) profitability and, in their opinion, should be discarded in favour of a traditional business model. For us, however, it is not a business but a small experiment, a microcosm that strives to garner a capabilities approach, in line with Amartya Sen (1999) and Mahbub ul Haq, the prominent heretic economist who first argued for the Human Development Index rather than national income (GDP) as a measurement of growth and development that was hitherto entrenched in 'western citadels of learning' such as Cambridge and Harvard (Mahbub ul Haq 1998: NP). Like in Germany, in Pakistan, too, I *spend* the various resources I have at my disposal on this subjective good and theorise this as *qurb\ani*.

Practicing *qurb\ani* as an anthropological alternative to Effective Altruism

As alluded to earlier, Effective Altruism (EA) is a philosophical and social movement that sees itself as 'doing good' in what its practitioners and funders consider the most effective and rational manner of spending unequally distributed wealth. The veiled assumption here is that a private model of wealth redistribution is more effective than a public model. According to Peter Singer's (1972) essay on the topic, which is widely considered to be the intellectual seed of the contemporary movement, let us consider the ethical and utilitarian premises of EA. In this seminal work on the ethical dimensions of altruism, he argues his point through an example of a little child drowning in a pond. His starting premise is that it is morally questionable not to help the child, even if that means ruining your clothes. In simple terms, his core thesis is that not sacrificing one's material belonging to save a life is immoral. That is nothing new,

but from here, he extends the argument into a more radical one by stating that the metaphorical 'pond with a drowning child' is the situation of many in the Global South, whilst the 'expensive clothes' are our luxuries in the Global North that we could easily sacrifice: not doing that, according to Singer, would be evil.

Let's, for a moment, not engage with the idea that the supposed bystander with the duty to save is not only that, but also often part of the cause of the kind of suffering and inequality being discussed. Let's also denote the paternalism of rendering people in the Global South as 'drowning children' and discuss Singer's call for 'effective' altruism. The paper clearly outlines his ethical argument, but to understand his utilitarian contention, we must resort to one of his more recent examples, popularised through a TED Talk (Singer 2013). Singer poses a rhetorical moral dilemma for his audience: Assume you have 40,000 dollars that you can either donate to providing one guide dog for a blind person in the Global North or to a charity in the Global South that could cure the blindness of between 400 and 2,000 people with trachoma. In the end, Singer (ibid) concludes that the answer in such a scenario is clear regarding "what's the better thing to do". In his opinion, it would be irrational to help one blind person over hundreds, potentially thousands. In line with that thought, he urges his students to strive for lucrative careers in order to allocate a large portion of their income towards 'effective' altruism (of the EA community), in opposition to what I would call affective altruism.

Examples provided and the arguments put forth by other prominent proponents like Singer make three key assumptions about EA: 1) the irrelevance of nationality, ethnicity, distance, etc., 2) the amount of change or 'good' brought about is pertinent to altruism being effective and 3) consequences, not intentions, matter (cf. MacAskill 2016). Philosophically speaking, who could disagree with such a virtuous disposition towards doing good in the world?

Proponents of EA want to make the world "a better place" through "evidence-based practices" (Pincus-Roth 2020), which, they argue, can be done using data to make decisions rather than intuition and empathy, which they consider biased (cf. Bloom 2018; Alter 2023). However,

in practice, making altruism more effective by using our *heads*, not our *hearts*, and hence deciding how money can do the 'most good', is more complicated. This begs the question, how is the money being made in the first place, and how are the decisions to do the 'most good' doing good to the do-gooders? Let's take a concrete example. The Effective Altruism community offers platforms such as "Give Well" and "80000 Hours" that help people decide how to donate their money and time in the most effective way (Effective Altruism 2022). Upon a closer look at the charities, one notices that many of them operate out of the Global North. In combination with its often young, white and male donation base, this poses pertinent questions about why the white and wealthy should be the ones deciding where and how money should be spent in a crudely unequal world created through their own practices (Ackermann 2022).

Another big EA blind spot is the lack of attention given to the structural causes of inequality that it wishes to address through 'effective' philanthropy or charity based on 'hard science' and data. In fact, many of the actions of 'benevolent' capitalists help perpetuate inequality by addressing symptoms thereof through private and neoliberal mechanisms– and not by addressing the root causes (Acemoglu 2015). Its supporters, often tech billionaires like the now-disgraced cryptocurrency tycoon Sam Bankman-Fried, profess to help suffering subjects worldwide 'effectively' but without questioning the system that enabled their absurd accumulation of wealth. Questioning structural inequality would perhaps be intrinsically problematic for a cause that solely argues for charity as a way to make the world a better place. Imagining a world that does not require the charity of the benevolent capitalist would lead to the redundancy of the movement. As McGoey (2023) argues, at times, the utilitarianism of some proponents goes well beyond sanity and circularly assumes that a rich person's life is worth more simply because it has the potential to save more poor lives. He goes so far as to call EA one of the most problematic ideas of the century.

However, the conceit of the rich, and philanthropy as a way of deflecting criticisms of amassing unimaginable wealth, is not a new idea. A more recent notion is how such neoliberal approaches are being emulated in contemporary forms of 'humanitarian' government. Didier

Fassin (2012) shows through his critique of humanitarian reason that everything, from unwanted migrants to disaster victims and international conflicts to the misery of the poor, is currently managed through humanitarianism. He calls it a "paradigm of politics of compassion" (ibid: 1) and writes further down the monograph:

> The suffering of the unemployed man, the refugee and the disaster victim is not simply the product of misfortune, it is also the manifestation of injustice. Humanitarian reason, by instituting the equivalence of lives and the equivalence of suffering, allows us to continue believing—contrary to the daily evidence of the realities that we encounter—in this concept of humanity which presupposes that all human beings are of equal value because they belong to one moral community. (ibid: 252)

If, as Fassin maintains, through humanitarian reason, injustice is contrived as misfortune at best wilfully ignored and at worst taken advantage of for political purposes, all whilst the benevolent can be relieved of "the burden of this unequal world", then Effective Altruism is its unbridled form (ibid: 252). *Qurb\ani*, instead, relies on a form of giving that involves the recipient as a collaborator – not a recipient object of the benevolent mercy of capitalists (or 'humanitarian' (non)government officials) but an agent in deciding how those helping or giving should do so. Instead of running experiments on people to determine the greatest utility as per the donors, *qurb\ani* values collaboration and small-scale efforts to take immediate ameliorative measures but remain committed to changing the political or social dimensions that lead to the suffering or the issue in the first place. Perhaps in comparison to EA, *qurb\ani* is slow, inefficient, and, as the coffee project with Ali demonstrates, on a small scale. However, as I realised over the course of my engagement with the two projects, what they lack in utilitarian or 'effective' terms, they make up for in affective terms. Furthermore, what such a form of engagement supposedly loses in terms of 'objectivity', one may argue, is epistemologically less valuable compared to the access to complex and affective realities it allows the ethnographer.

On a frosty Thursday evening in January, two Afghan youths joined us on our weekly run, and as can be seen in the photo below, I was clearly happy about them being there. The winter running group shrinks to a fraction of its size in the summer – when the weather is more inviting – so two additional runners joining made me cheery (see photo below). The new runners were also newcomers who had just arrived in Germany about two months previously and were being supported by some of our members with legal and bureaucratic issues and other seemingly mundane but important aspects of adjusting to a new place.

A weekly jog with some Long Run members, Munich 2023

Photo by Paul Huf

Along the River Isar at 3:42 am with The Long Run, Munich 2022

Photo by Usman Mahar

As we started our jog along the River Isar, I asked them if they liked to run. Their innocent answer made my heart sink as the younger of the two answered, "Yes, yes, run, run, from Afghanistan to Iran to Greekistan [sic]", while the older one continued to regale me with the rest of the route of their 'run' to Germany: "Now here, run, run, run", the younger concluded with a joyous and triumphant laugh that made me smile. I often have such encounters while participating in The Long Run activities, and beyond openings into the stories of people, it is the sharing of somatic and affective situations that makes my experiences valuable and allow me to understand people's everyday lives, which not only helps me

comprehend and write about their issues, but also engage with them as part of a community.

Let me explain through another example. Once a year, The Long Run organises a 32 km night walk called "Walk into the Light" to bring together migrants who need jobs and people who can potentially offer work. However, by partaking in this event as an ethnographer, I was not only walking-with, but also sharing and co-creating my affective, theoretical and practical reflections (see Sabine Strasser in this volume). For instance, how this exercise, amongst other activities of The Long Run, acquaints privileged members of society, European citizens and other advantaged members of society like me with somatic, psychological and affective states, which many of our irregularised non-European peers may have experienced on their long and arduous journeys to Europe. At the same time, for the non-Europeans, it symbolises the grit of European peers who are willing to walk along for as long as it takes.

Conclusion

As anthropologists, we often seek to give our interlocutors a voice through our ethnographies. We count this as an important aspect of reciprocating or 'giving back' for their time, patience and support. Engaged anthropologists go a step further and consider their social, political and activist involvement in the field and with their interlocutors as an ethical necessity (cf. Scheper-Hughes 1995). In that vein, I have discussed and theorised more concretely how we, as ethnographers, are uniquely positioned to turn our nearness into altruism when it comes to the communities with whom we work. I propose that we proudly and openly commit to how the many forms of nearness established in the field can be built upon through altruism as ethnographers. I call this process and its practice *qurb\ani*. In addition to being methodologically productive for our fieldwork and our ties in the field, it offers us insights into how to challenge problematic movements such as Effective Altruism that seek to establish what are 'effective' and 'ethical' ways of 'doing good'. Here, I would like to lean on Martin's recent commentary,

in which he unshrinkingly takes a similar approach to pose a challenge to formalisms around ethical clearances, maintaining that ethics in the field are a complex matter and are always "coupled with our political ideas and goals" (Sökefeld 2022: 523). Moreover, he convincingly argues that real ethical issues mostly arise in the field, and a formal ethical clearance meant to safeguard institutions can sometimes curtail the anthropologist's freedom and flexibility to engage in solidarity with our interlocutors.

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