

Research Article

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**Pictures and Politics:  
Using Co-Creative Portraits to Explore the Social Dynamics of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo**

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# ABSTRACT

The method of '*co-creative portraits*' opens space to explore the interaction of photographic subjects and photographers as they collaborate to create intentional images. This still photographic method explores how the space of photographic creation and the resulting photographs not only respond to, but also engage and reflect the immediate inter-subjective and broader regional politics. Particularly, I examine this method and the photographs it produces in the context of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo - one of the densest spaces of humanitarian intervention in the world. In North Kivu province, photography is produced daily for the purposes of fundraising, advocacy, and accountability. Aid agencies rely on the notion of photographs and their ability to 'witness' through portrayals of 'documentary reality.' However, the visual *imagescape* of the eastern DRC is not bound by humanitarian imagery alone. In fact it is home to a thriving local photographic enterprise. Through co-creative portraits I examine the overlapping fields of 'vernacular' and 'humanitarian' photography, focusing on how individuals tack back and forth across these types of representation in front of the camera, particularly in response to dialectic social factors including space, time, and expectation. This article makes a two-pronged argument: 1), I argue that co-creative portraits contribute to the production of experiential anthropological knowledge through photography. 2), By paying close attention to the explanations, movements, and negotiations that produce the material photographs, I argue that this method shows the constructed, subjective nature of photography, even in spaces of humanitarian aid.

*Keywords:* Photography, Visual, Knowledge, Anthropology, Africa, Development, Humanitarian Aid, Methodology, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Reflexivity.

## Introduction

In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) the precise process of constructing a *picha mzuri* [good photo] takes time. Kanyamohoro, *chef du bloc* 16 [chief of section] in Mugunga III Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camp dove into the photographic process for the second time in two weeks. He whisked his youngest child inside his tarp-covered home to change his clothes, and he sent another of his children to find and shine tiny patent leather shoes. At the same time, his cousin dashed back to their small house to dress their own infant in their best clothes. A search then commenced for a pair of socks, so back inside the home went Kanyamohoro, digging until he found two that matched perfectly. Fifteen minutes later, the children were dressed and ready to be photographed. Carefully Kanyamohoro placed the children on the ground. “Tst tst tst - alo bebé – alo alo alo,” he cooed, encouraging them to look up and engage with the camera; in the 30 seconds before they began to cry, I composed three photographs.

Kanyamohoro was one of over a hundred different individuals who took part in my *co-creative portrait* sessions. The week before, when we had sat discussing his story of displacement and leadership in the camp, he had asked for a portrait in his home and one with the members of *bloc* [section] 16 surrounding him. The following week, before we began the baby portraits, I had returned those images.<sup>1</sup> The residents of the bloc eagerly grabbed and passed the photographs among themselves as they traced the people in the images and pointed to those they knew. Kanyamohoro was enthusiastic to take advantage of free photographs and had innumerable ideas for additional poses. With the screaming children sufficiently comforted on the backs of their older siblings, he pulled me aside. “Now, lets go see my machine and take a picture.” After a short walk, he settled behind his sewing machine and laid his hand on top of it, creating a *mise-en-scène* of his daily work. Flanked by two of his older children he grinned at the camera. I arranged the focus and framing, placed him in the center- as was the Congolese studio photo norm- and manually adjusted the f-stop and shutter speed. As I depressed the shutter, I froze a collaborative image. The photographic representation developed somewhere in the intersection of Kanyamohoro’s self-illustrative desires and my compositional eye-somewhere between his expectations of my photography and my anticipations of his role in the camp.

*Co-creative portraits* (such as the images of Kanyamohoro) are distinctively positioned; they enable researchers to engage the interactions and social nuance of photographic production, which rarely leaves visible traces on the material image. In contrast to this method, much research on photography begins from the surface content of the photograph. Working back in time, many of these studies then strive to understand the situation surrounding the image’s creation. Through discussion, participant observation, and the photograph itself, co-creative portraits provide space to see how images are layered with meaning as they are actively produced. By valuing the space and subtle actions, conversations, and negotiations that happen in front of, to the sides, behind, and across the camera, this participatory method affords means to both experience and read the power embodied in the image.



Figure 1. Kanyamohoro inside his home in Mugunga III Camp, DRC.



Figure 2. Kanyamohoro surrounded by residents of *Bloc 16* in Mugunga III Camp, DRC.



Figure 3. Portrait “with my drill” in ETN’s (Equipe d’Education et d’Encadrement des Traumatisés de Nyiragongo) auto mechanic school in Goma, DRC.

Relying on my eight-month case study of co-creative portraits in Mugunga III IDP camp, this article explores two simultaneous avenues: 1) it analyzes the ethnographic process and findings facilitated by this method during my 2013-2014 anthropology research of the politics and implications of humanitarian photography,<sup>2,3</sup> and 2) it addresses the methodological value of still photography in visual anthropology. In relation to ethnographic content, I argue that the agency of the photographic subjects in the construction of their image problematizes the goal of visual ‘witnessing’ within humanitarian photography. Relating to the visual methodology, I argue that the still photograph is an effective means of producing anthropological knowledge. In so doing I call for a renewed examination of the role of photography in relation to anthropological practice and analysis. This argument builds from Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz’s call to engage “a genuinely visual anthropology that is not about the pictorial representation of anthropology. [But which] instead is a process of inquiry in which knowledge is not prior, but emerges and takes distinctive shape through the very grain of the filmmaking [or in this case, photography]” (MacDougall, 1998, 76 in *ibid*, 2005: 3). Through co-creative portraits, I engage the dialogic knowledge produced across the lens and show how this practice and analysis provides insights into the local politics of humanitarian photography.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 4. Mai Mai soldier in Muhanga, DRC. Photo by Carlo Ontal 2011.

Both arguments rely on the notion that photographs are active constructions. In both my roles as a professional photographer and as a researcher, I conceptualize images to be built of any number of micro-decisions and interactions of the photographer and subject. While some decisions are more subtle and unconscious than others, they are nonetheless important in regards to both the knowledge they produce and the politics they signal. David Campbell explains this well: "Given its manner of production and distribution, all photography is unavoidably and inherently a construction, an interpretation, a claim or a statement" (ibid, 2015). This holds true for both local, studio-like photography and documentary-like humanitarian image making in the eastern DRC. In this particular research, in order to understand the nuanced dynamics and politics surrounding how the Congolese of the eastern DRC engage aid photography, I contextualize their humanitarian camera-based interactions within common, local photographic traditions. As will be discussed below, in vernacular, studio-like photography, as in humanitarian images, subjects and photographers collaborate on pose, props, backgrounds, and photographic framing in order to create an image that depicts the subject's physical self, while visually narrating their desired story.

#### **A Note To The Reader:**

In line with the arguments made here, photographs included in this article are not simply illustrations of the text. Each image was produced through the process of co-creative portraiture, and with the exception of one example, all photos are the work of the author. My hope is that each reader will engage with them directly— 'read' them with the same critical eye that one reads the text. They should examine the roles and decisions that it appears the photographer and subject made. I encourage readers to look at the images, their subject, form, excesses, and tensions both as independent objects and as a collection of portraits that speak to the personal and collective politics of the eastern DRC. Finally, all images are placed in order to both play off of, and play with, the text. I encourage readers to engage their rhythm, and the visual and sensory knowledge and ambiguities that they convey, both independently and in partnership with the written word.

## **Co-Creative Portraits: The Improvised Evolution**

The intentional act of co-creating photographic portraits came crashing into my anthropological research 40 kilometers into rebel territory in North Kivu, DRC. Despite my range of training in photography, this experience in 2011 opened my eyes to the research potential of portrait sessions.<sup>5</sup> Through a chain of coincidences and luck, I had been asked to contribute to a film and photo series, of which one aim was to artistically up-end standard photojournalistic depictions of conflict. As I helped artist Carlo Ontal set up a Hollywood-esque photo studio- complete with high-end lighting, flashes, and a green screen backdrop- on an Italian missionary's back porch, the wonderful absurdity of the project became apparent. In this ad hoc studio, Carlo and his assistant Horeb Bulambo Shinadano, would ask Mai Mai soldiers and local townspeople about their

dreams, hopes, and wishes. After photographing them in front of the green-screen, Carlo edited their imagined dreams in behind them.<sup>6</sup> What I first understood as a mini theatre of the absurd became a place of collaborative self-visualization.

This project provoked my ability to see the anthropological potential of the photographic portrait. While Carlo adamantly claims to have only engaged art for art's sake, I watched the playful studio space provide room for collaboratively constructed imagining. This process made me look more closely at the back-and-forth interaction between photographers and subjects in everyday photography. Since I had begun combining my photography and anthropological research in the eastern DRC, photographic subjects had been subtly pushing for more interactive image making.<sup>7</sup> Previously, in front of my camera individuals had insisted on posing for what I thought at the time should have been candid photographs. But little by little the power of such negotiated images became clear. Such portraits came to showcase the dialogically produced representation of the "pas de deux between concepts of the 'individual' and the 'social'" (Peffer, 2013, 6). By paying attention to these photographic interactions, it became possible to see the way in which individuals engaged and embodied the politics and social dynamics of the particular milieu.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, much of this information is not new. Portrait photography has a long history in Africa. In fact, photography studios appeared on the continent not long after the invention of the daguerreotype in 1837. As early as the 1870's studios, run by Africans appeared along the west coast (Schneider, 2013). Photo studios enjoyed steady growth over the following century and a particular flourishing after the wave of independence swept the continent (Braelmaier, 2013, 274). In front of backdrops, in small sets, and in tidied up outdoor spaces, the photographic subject and their photographer collaboratively created photographs which engaged notions of individualization (Werner, 2010), cosmopolitanism (Behrend, 1998), and modernity (Buckley, 2000, Behrend, 2005). In each studio, the agency of subject was placed in "continual debate" with the technology and decisions of the photographer (Behrend, 1998, 141). In the eastern DRC, the provincial capital of Goma hosts not just a striking density of humanitarian agencies and their image makers, but also anywhere up to two thousand photographers as well as innumerable citizens who now own cameras and smartphones. The photographs that they create within their 'studio' and 'studio-like' settings share these broader African studio photography tendencies. While 'studio' photography refers to images created in photo studios or by their professional photographers, I use the idea of 'studio-like' photography to refer to the strikingly similar images (in form and content) created by casual enthusiasts and non-studio photographers across the region.<sup>9</sup> Together these categories of photography shape part of the vernacular visual field in the eastern DRC.

Relying on studio (and studio-like) photography as a commonly accepted form of image making, Carlo's Hollywood-like set enabled play and negotiated engagement between

photographer and subject. Ultimately, in that charged environment the portrait worked to diffuse the potential tensions of photographing by introducing play and emphasizing the subject's agency in controlling their image. Carlo's discussions with the subjects, as well as the negotiated process of creating the portrait image, encouraged me to explore how this space provided room to view how subjects discuss and perform particular versions of themselves in relation to situational politics and social pressures. Particularly, I was interested in how subjects' expectations merged with, were challenged by, or changed through their interaction with the photographer. This became particularly salient in relation to the category of 'foreign' photographer, a label that relays specific expectations of the photographs' potential circulation and power to catalyze action, especially in regions with a high density of humanitarian actors.

However, to effectively engage these dynamics I needed to be more mobile than Carlo's elaborate studio. Instead, I modeled the structure of co-creative portraits off of the local studio-like photographers who create improvisational portraits in any given space around Goma. By freeing this photographic portrait methodology of its stationary, built environment, I was able to carry the imaginative and playful notion of studio photography into a variety of locations and contexts. This then provided a means to engage the social politics and subject-photographer interaction across rural-urban divides, economic class, gender, and access to humanitarian aid.

Being highly mobile and needing only a camera, notepad, and my (at home) photo-printer, I created co-creative portraits in spaces that included, but were not limited to, IDP camps, law offices, aid project sites, the streets of the region's cities, small shops, photo studios, humanitarian-supported hospitals, basketball courts, and local medical offices. In each space, in advance of even removing my camera from my bag, I would conduct informal interviews with subjects about their lives, their families, their work, their previous photographic experiences, and their preferences about how they wished to be photographed. Ethics were of an utmost importance here; in each case I clearly detailed who I was, what type of research and publications these images and interviews would be used for, and perhaps most important for that social milieu, I made it specifically clear that I was not a humanitarian photographer or a journalist. After raising questions about their previous photographic experience, I would ask individuals to comment on how they would like to be photographed. After individuals described what they wanted to show, I would ask them where, with whom, and how they would like me to take their photograph. We would then actually create that image, and I would later (within a week's time) print and return their picture for them to keep. Part of this interaction often looked / sounded something like this:

Aubrey: What do you want to show in the picture we're going to create?

Furaha: I want to show that I am happy.

A: OK. How would you show that? And where would you like me to take your photograph?



Figure 5. Furaha – inside her home in Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 6. Furaha standing with her family and friends outside her home in Mugunga III, DRC.

F: Like this [crosses arms and looks evenly at the camera]. Even here is good.  
 A: Would you like it inside your house or next to it?  
 F: Can I have two- one photograph inside, one outside?  
 A: Sure. Do you want anyone in the picture with you?  
 F: Inside, only me – take it *mnene* [close up]. Outside, I'll call my children – I want a *mrefu* photo too [a vertical photo which shows one's whole body].  
 A: OK, ready? [I go to pull the camera out of my bag].  
 F: Wait. Let me change my clothes. [F disappears into a backroom of their home, then returns with a fresh shirt, neatly tied headscarf and her son]  
 A: OK... ready?  
 F: Yes [F picks up an armband showing she works for Médecins Sans Frontières – holds that in the image. Outside, she shoos away a crowd of neighborhood children and brings her own family and friends close, looking directly at the camera].

Through this interaction, I was both able to engage with Furaha's discussion of her representational desires and watch her subtle inclusions and exclusions within the photographs. As will be shown below, these portrait-based interactions between a subject and a photographer carry significance for both the practice of photography in anthropology and in relation to their multiple layers of ethnographic meaning, especially when contextualized within spaces of humanitarian aid.

## Photography as Anthropological Knowledge: A Revival

The strength of these co-creative portraits is found in more than just the ethnographic information included in the final image, or how the subject speaks about what they wanted to show. In addition, critical research arises through the combination of the action, image, and discourse born of the interaction around the camera. In other words the act of photography itself becomes central in the role of knowledge production and transference.

Within anthropology, photography was once valued for the knowledge it both produced and efficiently transported. However, over the last century, photography as method, and photography as epistemology lost value within the discipline and lost prestige in relation to the reign of the textual ethnographic account. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropological projects of cultural evolution, anthropometric,<sup>10</sup> and *sui genesis* 'salvage' ethnography relied on the paradigm of photographic realism and documentary mimesis to convey ethnographic knowledge in the form of visual data (Edwards and Morton, 2009; Banks and Ruby, 2011). They ferried 'incontrovertible' documentary evidence of what Roland Barthes calls the photo's surface ability to both show "there-then" and "here-now" (1977, 44).

However, as the discipline shifted its focus from material, displayable objects and exotic people, to more "invisible connections and abstract relations," including kinship or political structure, photography became incidental to the collection and display of data and knowledge (MacDougal, 2009, 57). Further, the growing critique of photography as a popular

technology, (a non-'expert' means of engaging with the world) denigrated its position within the ethnographic tool-kit. The very body and experience of the fieldworker- and the associated single-author textual monograph- subsumed the need for photographic evidence (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005, 5).

By the second half of the century, photography had become an anthropological aside. No longer seen to expose unquestionable evidence and knowledge, photographs instead fell to the position of being occasionally employed to create rapport with subjects, provoke in-depth interview data (photo elicitation), and capture fieldwork details (Colliers, 1986; Harper, 2002). In post-production use photographs came to occupy "merely ancillary [positions], illustrative rather than constitutive of anthropological knowledge" (Taylor, 1996, 66), as they were paired with text to establish claims to ethnographic legitimacy (Wolbert, 2000; Morton, 2005). And while photography as an anthropological subject, particularly in relation to examining the social biographies and agency (Edwards, 2012) of images, has received renewed ethnographic attention (e.g. Vokes, 2008; Campt, 2012), the use of the camera in the field remains a predominantly technical exercise. Ultimately, the inter-subjective and dialogic aspect of photography has been obscured by the discipline's reliance on photography's perceived one-trick-pony ability to mechanically reproduce (Benjamin, 1968) 'realistic' content in the field.



Figure 7. "Show that I'm sick here. I sleep hungry." Emmanuelle- Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 8. “Take the photograph like this – *kitoko!* [beautiful / cool]” Heal Africa Hospital, Goma DRC.



Figure 9. “I’m proud of my work. Take a picture that shows the films and CD’s I make” – Goma, DRC.

Co-creative portraits engage anthropology’s lopsided relationship with photography by bringing visual knowledge production and the camera back into the field. In the dialogic space of photographic creation, experiential knowledge is produced between at least two individuals as they collaborate (to varying degrees of equality and awareness) in the creation of a single image (Graham in Piauxt et al., 2015, 176-180). This space of interaction and collaboration engages the photographer’s desires—composition, lighting, and skill—as well as the enacted representational aspirations of the subject—how they desire to be seen, who they think the photographer is, who they think will see the image, and what role they imagine this photograph may play within their lives. Throughout the process of subtle negotiations, research ensues and experiential knowledge is produced through and around the camera.

## Navigating the Eastern DRC’s Imagescape

In the eastern DRC, intersecting ‘semi-autonomous’ photographic fields compose a regionally-specific *imagescape*.<sup>11,12</sup> This imagescape is composed of the material environment (billboards, advertisements publications, printed images), flows of image production and dissemination, as well as the subjects’ and photographers’ imagination of the roles, value (Poole, 1997), and social lives of photographs (Pinney, 1997). Drawing on Appadurai’s (1990) notion of *mediascape*, this imagescape provides means to engage the power-laden interactions, global flows, and influences that shape the politics and meaning produced through photographic interaction. While the eastern DRC hosts multiple visual fields, for this article, the intersecting fields of humanitarian and vernacular, studio-like photography are of particular interest.<sup>13</sup>

Vernacular photography in the eastern DRC is commonly defined by photographs of advertising, personal portraits, and *photographes de circonstance* [ceremony-based photographs]. The overarching goal of a *picha mzuri* [good picture] is to celebrate the subject by both focusing on their bodies and creating narratives that relate them to the things they include in the image – the other people, props, and background. As such, these mostly-portrait images can be found on billboards, reproduced in painted advertisements, printed and hung in homes, or memorialized in albums. Despite the myriad forms of publication, certain ‘studio-like’ poses and tropes remain continuous across the material forms of the vernacular photograph. Unifying these forms are two primary edicts that shape the construction of a *picha mzuri*: 1) The subject is aware of the camera, and 2) the subject and photographer mold the image’s narrative through their inclusion of props, backgrounds, and specific poses within the frame.

First, in the vast majority of vernacular photography, the subject (or subjects) follow typical portrait rules, “willingly submit[ting] to the creation of their likeness” (Palmer, 2011). More often than not, they actively perform a version of self in front of the lens. Candid photographs, in which the subject is expected to have “no control over their





Figure 10. “This is the poster I want. Take it here” – Renard, a photographer, Goma, DRC.

image, being unable to determine its composition or context or mode of distribution [...]” (ibid, 2011), are neither common, nor generally desired by the local Congolese working and middle class populations.<sup>14</sup> As such, vernacular photographs usually include a form of posing in which the subject’s agency is plain. Generally, they will face the camera and perform either a poster or *mise-en-scène* for the camera. Poster is an engagement with the camera that prioritizes its subject’s pose, showing off the individual or group featured. One might crouch, lean, or sit in a way that faces the camera, ultimately ‘striking a pose.’ Within the poster photograph, representational trends range from *mrefu* (“tall” photographs shot vertically to show one’s full body) to *kati-kati* (“half way” images cropped at the waist) to *mnene* (“fat” photographs in which an individual’s face, neck, and shoulders fill the frame).<sup>15</sup> Generally individuals desire poster images when they feel good about themselves, when they are dressed exceptionally well, or when its time to celebrate a success. Fabrice, an employee for the national park service explained, “Normal [vernacular] photos are good for moments and time of joy – sometimes for sad moments too – but this one [he pointed at the photograph on his computer] – it was the first time I wore a white suit, so I took a picture to show it. You rarely just wake up and take pictures- there needs to be some reason.”<sup>16</sup> *Mise-en-scène* photographs, literally indicating the ‘put in place’ or staged nature of the photograph, are similar to poster images. In a performance for the camera, individuals use stop-motion movements to seem as if they are actively ‘doing’ something – be it type on a computer, take a picture, talk on a cell phone, or shoot a basketball. The emphasis on posed moments that appear like action further depicts the way in which the candid, found photograph is rarely applied within local photography.

Further, when creating portraits with more than one individual, these poster images often translate into the common *photo famille*, where a set of individuals will cluster together in a group for the camera. In such an image, individuals stand close together and usually stare straight at the camera, commonly laying a hand on a close friend or family member and connecting him or herself with the others through their physical location and touch. These images are employed as much for family events and weddings as they are for business trips and work functions. Further, *photo famille* images are usually set near a notable marker of their location – using the background of the photograph to signify the place in which the group has come together. For instance backgrounds might include a signpost, a church, a statue, a recognizable landscape, or an airplane. Pose, as well as one’s awareness of the camera and their physical and social location, in part shape the subject-photographer interaction that results in vernacular photographs.

Whether *poster*, *mise-en-scène*, or *photo famille*, in most vernacular photography the person in the image is the most important feature – and therefore generally centered.<sup>17</sup> However, when background and props do make it into the image, associations with the items and individual(s) featured works to signify desired social positions and craft an imaginative narrative about the individual featured. Buckley (2000) summarizes this well as he argues, “The magic of the camera has nothing to do with the capacity to conjure up

some imagined interior. Instead, the wonder of photography is the way it explores, ‘the mysteries of exterior appearance’ (Wendl 1999, 154)... the place where we are just little more than what we really are” (ibid, 2001, 71).

In the eastern DRC, individuals imagine themselves positively into their environment, frequently emphasizing urban ideas of modernity. These narratives that they craft by situating themselves in front of other’s homes or with borrowed props playfully associate them with situations that may stretch beyond their own material circumstances. Subjects stand in front of televisions or nice cars, borrow their neighbor’s cell phone, or direct the photographer to take their image by the hotel pool or the verdant garden. By linking themselves with backgrounds and props, individuals actively connect themselves with versions of modernity or of newness as they complete ideas of themselves (Behrend, 1998; Buckley, 2001, Behrend 2005).<sup>18</sup> In the eastern DRC, beautiful background walls, cell phones, money, bibles, sports equipment, lush gardens, swanky hotel balustrades, and individuals of importance can signify associations with prestige and a sense of wellness.

Within the eastern DRC’s *imagescape*, the field of humanitarian photography falls on the other end of spectrum. Since the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, the DRC, and particularly its eastern provinces, has experienced conflict, international war, displacement, volcanic eruption, a rise in poverty and disease epidemics, and the erosion of the power of the state and its associated infrastructure. Based on this history, it is unsurprising that in 2013, the DRC tied for last place in United Nations Human Development Index Ratings (UN, 2013), based on indicators that measure life expectancy, education, health, and economics. As a result of these crises and their associated humanitarian challenges the city of Goma, provincial capital of North Kivu, has come to both support the world’s largest United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), and to host to over 100 international agencies and 300 local aid agencies. With this density of aid comes a density of photography as nearly all agencies create photographs for fundraising, reporting, and internal auditing. Within the field of humanitarian photography, Congolese and international workers produce a diversity of images for the range of specific uses within humanitarian agencies. Categorizing the images by their purported use, they include: *plaidoyer* (which translates to ‘pleading’ and indicates images directly associated with fundraising or advocacy), context images (which show the broader landscape and scope of the situation), and activity images (which provide proof of programs and more specifically depict their progress and success) (Graham, 2014). While agencies emphasize the protection of the dignity of their photographic subjects, their image content ranges anywhere from cliché images of generic suffering African (Moeller, 1999; Cohen & Manspeizer 2009), to landscape photography often featuring bad roads or beautiful rolling hills, all the way to the smiling, hope-filled beneficiary.<sup>19</sup>

On one end (the so called ‘negative’) of the humanitarian photographic spectrum, agencies work to tug at a viewer’s compassion by depicting the ‘need’ of the situation.<sup>20</sup> According to communications officers within the Goma-based agencies, these types of



Figure 11. “Take my photo by the Ihusi pool!” Grace – Promo Jeune Basket player – Goma, DRC.



Figure 12. “Take this – I want to show prestige” – Japan in Beni, DRC.



Figure 13. After being photographed by an aid agency, this photo famille picture was what Jacques wished to have printed and returned to him – Beni, DRC.



Figure 15. “Show the fish! Show that I am cooking” – Clarice – HOLD International aid agency, Goma – DRC.



Figure 14. Emmanuel in his travel agency – “Take the photo with me at my computer, working.” – Goma, DRC.



Figure 16. “Show how I suffer. I have not had a new tent in two years.” – Nahedi, Mugunga III IDP camp, DRC.

images were described as those “which hit” or “which shock” the viewer – provoking them to pay attention, think, and hopefully act or donate. Such images, for instance of women who have experienced sexual violence, indicate the negativity of their situation through the position of their hands, their downcast eyes, and their isolation in the frame (Graham, 2014, 147-148). Other ‘negative’ type images tend to depict the ‘before’ type of images – before aid has arrived, that is. These might include wider-angled scenes that show fleeing refugees – lines of humanity walking towards an IDP camp. They might show the hardship of poverty through the hard labor of individuals featured under a dramatic, dark sky, or dirt-covered children playing in front of a particularly poorly constructed tarpaulin hut. The goal of these images is to represent the severity of the situation and appeal to a western audience in order to catalyze compassion, (potentially political) action, and monetary donations (Dyck and Coldevin, 1992; Benthall 1993; Moeller 1999; Manzo 2008).

In contrast to the creation of negative images, the other end of the humanitarian photography spectrum is full of ‘positive’ depictions. The majority of aid images today endeavor to show the success of their programs through activity photographs. These images portray agency effectiveness, often employing image content acts as proof that the school was built, the goods were distributed, the community was sensitized, or that the workshop was conducted. The aid agency-desired activity photographs show some form of action, while signifying the hope and dignity of the featured subjects. For instance, communications manager L. of a large international NGO explained the vague nature of the photographic guidelines and the importance of action images in relation to images in their health centers:

L: Our beneficiaries- i.e. people who *need* health care- are very important, and there are very careful ethical procedures [surrounding photography]. For instance when trying to show [photograph] health care workers with their patients, we have to invoke the guidelines; We have to show what is being actively done not just ‘need’ [emphasis original]... We need to preserve dignity.

A: What does dignity mean here?

L: Never take a picture of a motherless child, or make sure that a child is with a parent when consulted for permission ... We prefer pictures that show action. If we’re doing sensitization we’d rather not see pictures of people just standing around. But we also try to never force a photo – we want the photo to show what we are doing – so the best things are coherent case studies on the work we are doing. Its good to have an image to accompany and to show what we say we are doing. In this we want everyone to be aware that with these photos we can raise awareness, and this provides transparency to what we’re doing. (Interview Oct. 9, 2013).

Dignified action images might thereby show individuals or groups happily engaging with workshops, applying new skills, and making use of the handouts that have been provided to them. In these images candid, caught-in-the-moment interaction is valued over posed portraiture.

Poignantly, photographs continue to play important roles in the humanitarian agencies’ advocacy and fundraising campaigns, as agencies visually cast “suffering as a preventable tragedy demanding a direct response” (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, 16). The capacity of photographs to provide a visual *temoignage* [witnessing] through their ‘collage of truths’ (Redfield, 2008,12) is critical. In the space of the photograph, one articulates the depicted problem or success with a sense of morality bound to the need to help or to continue to drive change. Therein, through the photograph the agencies become the active agent – the ones providing ‘proof’ of the situation through witnessing. Fassin argues:

The witness becomes a spokesperson for the victim [...] humanitarian workers [and their photographs] speak in the name of those who are assumed not to have access to the public arena. In so doing they illuminate, transform, simplify, and dramatize the words [and images] of those they represent, in line with their ultimate objective, which is not so much to reconstitute an experience as to construct a cause” (2011, 221).

Unlike the imaginative nature of the vernacular photograph in which the agency of the subject is prioritized, humanitarian images prioritize the skill and agency of the photographer as they create documentary-style photography that represents the subject(s) without appearing to have involved them in the process of photographic creation. These aid images are valued for their ability to provide visual evidence as truth claims, be it about the situation, or about the success of the humanitarian organization’s projects. F. a Congolese photographer for a large NGO in Goma explained, “I look for photographs ‘qui parlent’ [that speak]... I want the photos that are proof and that show the situation of the person” (Interview Sept. 11, 2013). Ultimately, the power of these ‘proof’ images relies on their content being ‘found’, not ‘constructed’. On the ground in North Kivu, photographic *temoignage* is encouraged through guidelines and practices that work to efface the staged, participatory nature of photography from view. They rely instead on creating photographic narratives ‘qui parlent’ by showing (inter)action and ‘truthful’ (i.e. seemingly unconstructed) situations in order to depict respective humanitarian need or success.

While both vernacular and humanitarian photography rely on the visibility of narratives within their photographs, each respective field has their own distinct means of writing them into the image. Vernacular photography uses subjects’ intentional association with background, objects, and other individuals to shape the story. In contrast, due to the value of witnessing within humanitarian images, stories are expected to be visible in

the ‘happened-upon’ moment. This emphasis on found images obscures the potential voices, politics, and logistics of the very construction of photography. It ties morality to the image, encourages the assumption that all aid images across the positive- negative spectrum are indeed documentarily candid. Thus, in this notion of witnessing, the final published image erases the ways in which the subject may traverse their particular imagescape, for it ignores the potential of photographic subjects to apply their well-worn vernacular norms of interactive, dialectic photography as they contribute to the construction of a visual humanitarian narrative.

## Co-Creative Portraits: Engaging Politics Through Reflexivity

Co-creative portraits help to open the space around the camera in order to see intentional interaction between subject and photographer. Through this process it becomes possible to understand how the Congolese move through their own *imagescape* – merging, and tacking back and forth across politically and socially imaginative representations within vernacular and humanitarian photographic fields. Moreover, due to local interpretations of my identity and the role of my camera, this method enabled me to directly engage in the local politics and imaginings embodied in the construction of both vernacular and humanitarian photography.<sup>21</sup>

At first glance, the fact that I am a young, *mzungu* [white / foreign] woman who carries a camera placed me within the politically salient assumption of being a humanitarian.<sup>22</sup> While the *mzungu* identity in East Africa is often associated with tourism and handouts, North Kivu assumptions linked this identity to humanitarian aid. Particularly, the *mzungu* label engages both the local frustration with the legacy of ineffective intervention and the hopeful possibilities of access to aid programs, goods distributions, and employment. Further, this assumed humanitarian identity indicates wealth and connections to the West. In so doing it links the presumed-humanitarian to assumptions about their potential to provide not only aid, but social mobility and, indirectly, levels of prestige and power through association and potential employment. This became particularly clear as I conducted fieldwork in Mugunga III IDP camp. While I was not working as a humanitarian, initial reactions to my camera and me at Mugunga III, tended to reflect the anticipations and frustration of humanitarian engagement in a region.<sup>23</sup> For instance, this reaction was not uncommon:

In March 2014, A young mother strode purposively up to me in Mugunga III IDP camp (same space where Kanyamohoro engaged his ‘mzuri’ photography), her child sucking on a stick of sugar cane. “Mzungu! Take a picture!” She pulled the sugar cane from the child’s mouth and placed him on a mat on the ground and took a step back. The child began to wail, reaching up towards his mother. She raised her eyebrows at me – a clear, ‘I told you so’ expression on her face, and pointed at her child, “Take a picture, my child is starving.” “You’re sure this is the picture you want... You know I’m not a humanitarian or



Figure 17. Make sure you can see the shrapnel holes in my roof” – Ignace, Kanyaruchinya, DRC.



Figure 18. “I’m happy to have a picture – show my radio!” Mosa. Photo created in the treatment center of local aid agency, Heal Africa, Goma DRC.

a journalist...” I began to explain my research. She cut me off and indicated that I should take the picture of the crying child. I did. She thanked me “Asanti, Mzungu,” she said, then more calmly, asked for a photo with her friends and siblings in the typical *photo famille* style.

Despite my protests and explanations that “I’m a researcher, not a humanitarian...” My identity and the photography I was to produce frequently articulated with the humanitarian visual field. Looking out from what appeared to be a problematic social position, I engaged with photographic subjects as they choreographed image content to expose their particular concerns. In so doing, the photographic subjects constructed their own intentional version of witnessing for a presumed humanitarian lens, ultimately producing experiential knowledge through the very interaction.

Even with the commonality with which I was associated with humanitarianism, such a categorization was not permanent. In Mugunga III, as in Goma, this label was destabilized by other identifying factors – e.g. I spoke Swahili and French, operated independently, drove my own motorcycle or walked (while most humanitarians travel in their well-secured 4x4 vehicles), and spent significant time with seemingly average Congolese individuals in equally ‘normal’ circumstances – at home, in the office, on the streets. Particularly, it was time and sustained interaction that caused co-creative portraits to shift away from humanitarian tropes towards standard vernacular photographic engagements. As with the introductory example of Kanyamohoro, I was often asked to wait as individuals prepared themselves or their children for vernacular portraits, capitalizing on the situation and potential to receive free photographs. While I had hoped to dodge the personal association of being assumed to be a humanitarian during my research, in the end it was my problematic articulation with the region’s politics and *imagescape* that made co-creative portraits so productive.

## Mugunga III: Eager Portraiture and Not So Passive Victims

In Mugunga III IDP camp, just outside of Goma, DRC, I spent eight months making weekly visits in part in order to photograph co-creative portraits with the camp’s residents. This space was particularly well situated to engage this methodology and my problematic identity. IDP camps are both spaces of humanitarian aid handouts and programs, as well as places in which individuals are frequently photographed in relation to that very aid. Equally, these are spaces where individuals live, work, love- where life carries on despite the destruction and disaster that has produced each individual story of displacement. By engaging this space and its residents through co-creative portraits, I gained a means through which to understand how individuals flexibly navigate across the fields of vernacular and humanitarian photography. The resulting Mugunga III portraits convey ethnographic knowledge as both stand-alone material representations and as a set of images that depict differential engagement with the camera over time.<sup>24</sup>

When I first arrived in the camp, I spent the afternoon wandering between the homes in *bloc 1* with the *chef du bloc*, Sebastian.<sup>25</sup> Sebastian led me through the winding paths



Figure 19. “Show suffering. Hunger and sadness have closed my heart” – Marsiane – Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 20. “Show that I have nothing.” Alphonsine Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 21. “I want to show the tent is bad. There have been funerals. There is no food” – Baraka, Mugunga III Camp.

of his section, and introduced me opportunistically to the camp residents who were present – a population that on that day turned out to be represented by mostly aging individuals. I spoke with each person about his or her flight, life in the camp, experience being photographed before, and desire to be photographed now. That day, in front of my camera, many residents opted to express their particular hardship. Specifically, as I asked them how they wished to be photographed for an image they could keep, many echoed the notion that they were happy for the image, but would desire to express their level of *uzuni* [sadness] and *teseka* [suffering]. In the photographs, they positioned their bodies in figurations that showed the negativity of their given situation. One woman placed her hands on her swollen stomach – there was a growing tumor – another two stripped off their headscarves to show their disheveled *mzee* [old white] hair, while others placed their hands on their face in a clear Congolese signal indicating that all is not well. Put simply, individuals chose to portray suffering for my camera.

Caleb Kabanda, a ‘fixer’ who helps journalists and filmmakers complete their work in the DRC, explained his take on this phenomenon. “In my work, I have seen times when they want to exaggerate things – like there is a maman who sees that you’re there with the whites, and she sees money. She needs [humanitarian] assistance – so she wants to show that she will die from hunger – she does it [poses] so that people will help her, aid her. She’ll put her head in her hand for a humanitarian photo ... its harder [to get the photographs humanitarians and journalists want] because they tend not to want

the photographs that are ‘prepared’” (Interview July 10, 2014). Co-creative portraits, in contrast to journalistic or humanitarian images, open that creative space to see the subject’s intentional creation, be it of suffering or success.

Placing these actions in context, it’s necessary to note that this methodology begins from the belief that up to an undefined point of personal distress and disaster, photographic subjects (even those displaying suffering or who have experienced extreme hardship) have agency in front of the camera. They can not only react or refuse the photo, but they also can enact and shape their representation accordingly. The space of image creation is thereby not wholly controlled by the photographer’s predatory appropriation, which media critic Susan Sontag argues, “resembles a rape” (1977, 24). Rather, this method stands in direct challenge to such bombastic claims that, “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed... to photograph some one is sublimated murder – a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time” (Sontag, 1977, 15).

In direct contradiction, my experience photographing in the eastern DRC has shown that while suffering is a very real condition of daily life for many, being photographed as suffering can be a powerful, political, and clearly intentional stance. I find it particularly useful to draw on Saba Mahmood’s discussion of Foucault’s paradox of ‘subjectification’ here, “where the very processes and conditions that secure a subject’s subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent” (ibid, 2005, 17). Power and forms of resistance are embodied in the very act of engaging visual tropes of disempowerment. In Mugunga III for instance, to suffer for the camera was to both memorialize one’s own sentiment, while engaging their (expectations of the) photographer, and the imagined image’s audience. In that act there is on one hand a certain validation of one’s experienced hardship and desire to be seen and remembered, while on the other hand, there exists the hope of political and material gain, including but not limited to potentials of additional aid, better housing, or educational opportunities.

Further, in these intentional, inter-subjective productions of suffering individuals reclaim the idea of photographic witnessing. As Taylor argues, “Every act of documentary can be simulated in fiction – the look, the evidence and the argument” (2000, 131). By shaping the image in front of the camera, subjects engage this documentary notion and use their pose, props, and background to both be seen and to perform a humanitarian-treatable problem. This active shaping of one’s visual narrative shares similarities with the manner in which the Congolese imagine themselves ‘for the better’ through the association with things, spaces, and people in vernacular photographs. This interaction around the camera contrasts with aid agencies’ ideal photographic engagement, which obfuscates any traces of construction and instead relies on the notion of un-posed, ‘found’ image. Through the co-creative portraits, spaces like Mugunga III showed how the interactive photographic construction in spaces of hardship was possible – and even desired.<sup>26</sup> However, it is not only negative-aid-type images that are built in that space. Rather the factors of trust, time, and the awareness that I regularly returned photographs, opened



Figure 22. “Come, take a picture in my home- show my work.” – Aimé – Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 24. “Make sure you see enough of my bike in this one.” Timoté – Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 23. “I want one inside, then one outside – kati-kati – here” Furaha – Mugunga III Camp.



Figure 25. “I live over there – that way – come take the picture in front of my home” – Chance, Mugunga III Camp.



space for alternative photographic figurations. In Mugunga III, after little more than a month of photography, individuals began to show how even in such spaces of hardship, they could navigate through their *imagescape* to craft other representations.

Early in my research in Mugunga III, a conversation with Bernadette (not her real name) brought this maneuverability across the region's *imagescape* to the fore. In her small tarp-covered home, she relayed her experience: Her husband had died in the war. She had experienced violence and rape at the hands of the rebels in 2009 and again in the fields around the camp. Since then, she has made a life for herself brewing and selling beer from her home in the camp. I asked her how she wanted to be represented for a humanitarian audience. She pulled up her shirt and undid the wrap around her waist. Carefully sliding the fabric to the side, she exposed long jagged horizontal scars- the corporeal memory of the attack during her rape. "I want to show that I have suffered, and that I have nothing. I'd like for them [humanitarians] to send me to school," she said.

Bernadette however, was not bound by that singular representation. When I asked how she wanted to be represented in a photograph she could keep, she re-wrapped her cloth skirt. Walking to the back of her small home, she stood tall, and placed a hand on the plastic buckets where the corn fermented into alcohol – making the association of her ownership clear. In a second image, she called her children inside and organized them in front of her. "This will be a memory [*souvenir yangu*] of the camp," she said. "I'm responsible for my family here. That's what I want in a picture."<sup>27</sup>

In the over 100 co-creative portraits that I conducted in the camp, residents overwhelmingly emphasized the difficulty of life in discussions. However, as the months progressed, when it came time for their photographs, what Mugunga III's residents desired to show often fell outside the discursive trend of suffering – outside of showing the need they expected was required within humanitarian-type images. Individuals instead would change their clothes and arrange their children and their belongings. Others, in direct contrast to the images from my first day in the camp, would send their children scurrying to find their nicest headscarf – carefully rewrapping the cloth around their head. Overtime, the co-creative portraits came to echo the navigation of visual fields that Bernadette signaled. As the residents separated me from their *mzungu*-directed humanitarian presumptions and came to associate my camera with the possibility of freely-given portraits, they redesigned how they presented themselves for the lens.

Maska, for instance, wished to be featured with a picture of her sister – "how they were before". The 'old' image of them shows them in their home in Masisi territory before the conflict forced them to flee to Mugunga III. She explained that she wanted to show how full her life had been before and how little she had now. However, as Maska and I continued to interact throughout the months, her photographic desires changed. She wanted photographs showing her looking *mnene* ['fat'] and sitting in a small plot of marigold flowers. Her *uzuni* [sad] photographs over time tacked towards more playful depictions of herself



Figure 26. "I want to show me with my sister – the way it was before." Maska – Mugunga III Camp.

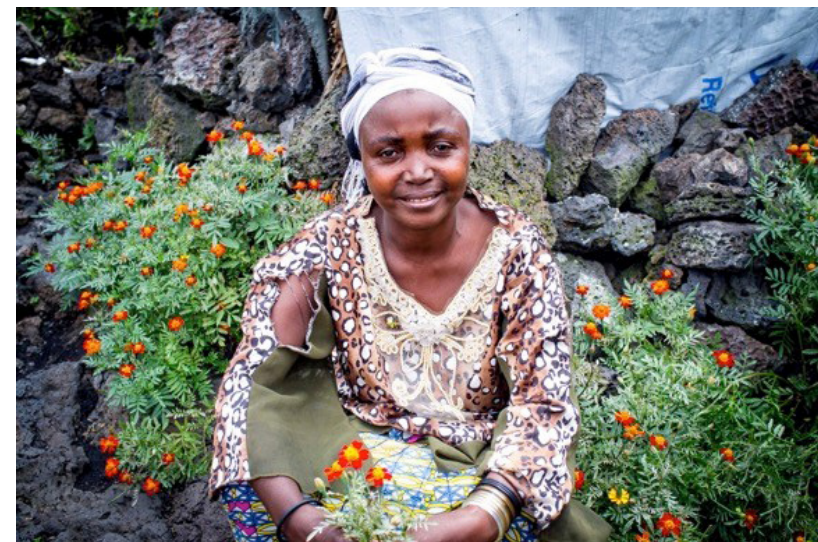


Figure 27. "Aubrey! Take my picture in my flowers!" – Maska- Mugunga III Camp.

and her family.

After eight months of photographing in Mugunga III, co-creative portraits exposed how residents of the camp were able, through interaction with the photographer, to construct a variety of visual representations of self, drawing on tropes and norms from across their imagescape. More specifically, through their interactive process, co-creative portraits provided experiential knowledge of how individuals within a clearly delineated 'aid' space intentionally directed their own depiction. Through the discussion and the photography that shaped the co-creative portraits, residents of Mugunga III showed their ability to subjectively depict themselves as they saw fit – engaging the photographer to create purposeful visuals of humanitarian-angled hardship, or vernacular notions of a *picha mzuri*.

## Conclusion

By examining the ways in which photographic subjects and the photographer interact and bring beliefs, hopes, frustrations, and anticipations into the space of the portrait, one gains both experiential knowledge created through the process, and in this particular case, access to the conscious dynamics of the social politics and economy of representation in the eastern DRC. This became particularly transparent as individuals navigated between deployments of local and humanitarian representational tropes across time and space. Co-creative portraits – the process and the resulting images- enabled me to not only see, but also gain 'fine grained' embodied knowledge of how individuals in North Kivu actively deployed varied depictions of themselves across the overlapping humanitarian and vernacular photographic fields in response to the photographer and situational context. These interactions and negotiated representations challenge the expectation that suffering in aid photographs be both found and passive. Further, they expose photography as a particularly dialogic, inter-subjective engagement that can constitute valuable anthropological knowledge through its very process.

These portraits and their surrounding discussions and actions call for a re-evaluation of both the three-dimensional dialogic interaction unraveling in front of and to the sides of the camera, as well as the two-dimensional 'proof' one encounters on the surface of the photograph. As such, these images should raise questions. Posing questions around the processes and value of humanitarian photography opens space to rethink the roles of humanitarianism and its photography. For instance, one might ask: Are the regularly-published humanitarian photographs similarly constructed? If so, how might we read subject and photographer's intentions? If we understand photographs as constructed, with visual suffering perhaps purposively deployed therein, does this undermine the value and effect of aid photography? Does it have to? And finally, what are the viable alternatives to relying on the problematic notion of photographic witnessing? By engaging these questions, the opportunity to form more creative solutions to the usual type and presentation of humanitarian visual representations also becomes apparent. Ultimately, this anthropological

method that employs the act of photography as a means of knowledge creation encourages a re-engagement with the practice and roles of aid photography so that humanitarian photographs can be at once powerful *and* reflective of a subject's agency.

## Acknowledgements

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#### Endnotes:

- 1 I always printed and returned to the photographic subject at least one photograph of each pose. Before photographing any portrait, I discussed, and obtained verbal consent in regards to, the way in which their photographs would be potentially used in in exhibitions, print and web-based publications. Copyright (and the right to decide how to most ethically publish these images) remains held by the photographer / author.
- 2 This 12-months of anthropological research in North Kivu, DRC was made possible by support from the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship, with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, as well as that from the National Science Foundation DDRIG fellowship (BCS-1260640).
- 3 Dissertation forthcoming – expected August 2016.
- 4 This article builds from the authors' previous short-form exploration of photography, knowledge, and co-creative portraits in Piault, Silverstein, and Graham, 2015.
- 5 A resume of my photographic work includes photojournalism in East and Central Africa, portrait, wedding, and communications photography for organizations in the USA, and photography with non-governmental organizations in Africa, the USA and the Caribbean.
- 6 Rebel soldiers posed with their weapons and asked to be featured with fleets of Mercedes, or well-armed

- battalions and war machines. The region's young women asked to be shown in front of fields of flowers, young boy scouts wanted gorillas and lions, an elderly herdsman wanted his cattle, and an elderly woman asked to be represented with a radio so she could appear to fill the silence in her house now that her husband had passed.
- 7 My academic and photographic engagement with the eastern DRC began during my 2009 fieldwork for a MA in the Anthropology of Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Research focused on the aid agency creation and use of images of women who had experienced sexual violence.
  - 8 See Pinney 1997 for an excellent example of how the portrait merges the individual and the social.
  - 9 This notion of 'studio-like' photography is explored in detail in Chapter 2 of my dissertation: "Take this Picture: Imagination and the politics of photography in the eastern DRC's humanitarian zone" (forthcoming August 2016)
  - 10 Despite the fact that these methods employed the camera for knowledge production and transference, the author does not in any way, shape or form, condone the highly questionable ethics that surround many of these early projects.
  - 11 This research leans on Moore's (1973) notion of semi-autonomous 'field.' Moore notes that these fields, "can be studied in terms of [their] semi-autonomy – the fact that it can generate rules and customs and symbols internally, but that it is also vulnerable to rules and decisions and other forces emanating from the larger world by which it is surrounded". (1973 p. 720)
  - 12 In a similar theoretical point, Schneider (2013) discusses the Atlantic Visualscape, which addresses the power of photographs and visual through "an extended space – geographically, social, politically and economically – [seeing it] as a "contact zone" where a multitude of ideas, artifacts and people circulated." (ibid, 2013, p. 36).
  - 13 Images that constitute the journalistic, political, and conservation fields also shape the eastern DRC imagescape. While these deserve attention, they nonetheless fall outside the scope of this paper.
  - 14 As an exception, within churches, wedding halls, or at sports or other competitions, a photographer is often present and may create semi-candid images that may later be purchased by those featured in them. However, outside of these well-known spaces, the creation and purchase of candid photos is rare.
  - 15 The term "mnene" [fat] is a good thing in the DRC; it tends to act as a marker of physical and financial wellness.
  - 16 Fieldnotes from interview on Jan 31, 2014.
  - 17 Within my own personal photography, I tend to apply the rule of thirds and place the subject off to the either the right or left side. However, in most Congolese images, the subject is usually perfectly centered.
  - 18 Photographers also help shape these images. They sometimes suggest poses and locations for images, or propose props for the subjects to hold. While their roles warrant further, and significantly more detailed attention, for the sake of this paper, the role of the subject in crafting their image takes precedence.
  - 19 A detailed discussion of the role of 'dignity' in humanitarian photography is explored in "A Humanitarian Imaginary" (Graham, under review).
  - 20 In the eastern DRC, photographs are often discussed for their 'positive' or 'negative' traits; images are deemed to fall on one side of the other this over simplified binary. Negative images tend to show suffering, dirt, disaster, and dysfunction, while positive images feature smiles, activity, hope, and productivity. It is an imperfect binary, but it nonetheless discursively labels images and assigns their potential for use within agency publications (see Graham under review) for more information.
  - 21 Within visual culture studies, Elizabeth Cameron has engaged a similar methods as a means of challenging the value of candid fieldwork photographs and exploring informants' desires for specific forms of self-depiction. Of her fieldwork portraits in Zambia, she notes, "I gave the sitter [here referred to as the subject] as complete control of the photograph as possible. They chose who would be in the photo, how they wanted to present themselves in dress and comportment, where the photograph should be taken, etc. My only input was in framing the image within the photograph itself" (Cameron, 2014, p. 142). However, her description leaves out a critical aspect of the interaction and engagement. While at the very end of her chapter she briefly addresses her 'betwixt and between' position as an expatriate who signifies resources and modernity, it is exactly that reflexive identity that contributes to shaping the photographic interaction.
  - 22 I carried a large Nikon D800 or a smaller full frame mirror-less Fuji x100. For most co-creative portraits I employed the Fuji x100 in order to distance the perception of me as a journalist or professional humanitarian photographer - an identity that carrying the huge Nikon D800 tended to produce.
  - 23 In other spaces in North Kivu, I applied the method of "direct photography" where I would photograph for an aid agency in order to learn about their processes and expectations of photography. In order to avoid confusing outcomes, I never conducted direct photography in Mugunga III.
  - 24 These images from Mugunga III have formed an exhibition: *Portraits in Disneyland – Stories from Mugunga III* (Graham, 2015). Each of the 23 individuals featured has two photographs displayed as diptychs – one showing them mrefu and the other in kati-kati styles. This exhibition uses the changes from humanitarian to local portraiture to engage audiences and produce knowledge in the connections and disjunctions among the images of the collection; it asks viewers to look beyond the surface of the single image for information. In so doing, the chronological layout encourages viewers to grapple with the shifting interactions, desires, and expectations of both the photographer and the subjects.
  - 25 Mugunga III at the time had 83 blocs.
  - 26 Researchers and practitioners alike have recognized the notion of intentional suffering. Photographers inside and outside of the region, as well as in pop-culture accounts- including a scene from the film "War Photographer" (2001) address this phenomenon. Nonetheless, addressing the fine-grained interactions that shape these intentional depictions remains under-theorized.
  - 27 No images of Bernadette are shown here in order to protect her identity.