

ANTHROPOLOGY MATTERS JOURNAL

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Editorial

We applied for our roles as co-editors of *Anthropology Matters* just about two years ago. The former editors, Mary-Anne Decatur and Siobhan Magee, patiently guided us through the editorial process and offered encouragement and support. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to them. Phaedra had published in *Anthropology Matters* previously; Ana had worked in the editorial industry in Romania. None of these former experiences, however, had prepared us for the challenges of this work—nor for its satisfactions. Seasoned editors could claim that two years are hardly enough to form any meaningful impression. But even in this relatively short *durée* in terms of academic publishing, we have had a generous sample of the challenges entailed in academic publishing, ranging from unresponsive or hypercritical reviewers, to distraught authors. At the same time, we have delighted in warm and generous responses from authors, reviewers, copyeditors, and proof-readers. With many of them we forged meaningful conversations. This was particularly reassuring, given that much of the work for this issue took place during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. While our requests for repeated revisions and unpaid work felt audacious in the face of generalised disruption, they were most often met with willingness, solidarity, and even enthusiasm.

In the previous issue of *Anthropology Matters Journal*, editors Mary-Anne Decatur and Siobhan Magee interviewed some of those involved in the student-led seminar *Ethnography at the Third Millennium* that was held in the late 1990s at SOAS and led to the Anthropology Matters mailing list and the open-access online journal. The interviewees look back at their eagerness to create collaborative and horizontal postgraduate spaces; they reflect on the exciting new opportunities for ethnographic research and dissemination afforded by internet at the time; and explain that the decision to go 'Open Access' was motivated both by a desire to reach wider audiences, as well as the initiative's limited funds. In short, for the small collective that founded *Anthropology Matters Journal*, Open Access seemed like the 'natural' thing to do. Twenty years later, there is growing consensus that dominant models of social scientific publishing are fraught with inequality. Yet, the quest of viable alternatives, including open access publishing, is anything but straightforward.

For colleagues based in underfunded institutions, the paywall of academic publishing has obstructed access to contemporary scholarship, intellectual exchange, and vital teaching material. More than an ideological commitment, Open Access has allowed those located at the peripheries of academia to perform their pedagogical duties and to maintain links with the largely Euro-American centres of anthropological knowledge production. Among early-career researchers, Open Access is often portrayed as a double-edged sword. Our sympathy for its causes sometimes clashes with warnings from seniors that experimental (read open-access) journals will benefit neither us, nor the institutions that employ us, and that our path to a strong CV and a secure job cannot bypass the subscription-based publishing industry. At the same time, we come to the grim realisation that publicly accessible knowledge largely remains the privilege of an intellectual elite who often rely on the unpaid labour of students and early-career researchers. We follow these conversations closely, and we believe that the pursuit of publicly available knowledge can only be successful if framed by equity, sustained review, and critical reflection.

EDITORIAL

The prevalence of casual work and unpaid labour in academia has recently come under critical scrutiny. Anthropology has been increasingly recognised as a field fraught with impossible demands and unyielding competition. While we firmly support critiques of casualised labour, we believe that our chance to confront it rest largely on mutual support and horizontal collaboration. This is especially true for the most precarious of us, who also happen to be early career scholars. In recent years, postgraduate students have been put under immense pressure to publish fast and publish more. Yet, the increasingly routinised business of academic publishing is often impenetrable. The most frequent explanation for this is postgraduates' lack of relevant experience. Over the years, *Anthropology Matters Journal* has familiarised many of us with the process of submitting, peer-reviewing, editing, and publishing original research articles. For some authors, it has been a place to try out new ideas and formats, or to get reviews before submitting elsewhere. It has served as a workshop of sorts. More than that, the journal's commitment to publishing young scholars' work has brought to light texts that reflect the ethnographic sharpness of doctoral research. In this regard, rather than approaching 'early career' merely as a necessary step towards academic development and professional evolution, we see it as a time of unconfined creativity and intellectual possibility. We therefore hope that the journal will continue to publish work that is lively, thoroughly ethnographic, and creative with or outright critical of, the dominant conventions of academic publishing.

Lastly, it bears repeating that our field thrives on the kindness of strangers, whether we talk about fieldwork, conferences, or publishing. Being an unpaid editor (or reviewer, or copyeditor) is not a matter of selflessness or piety, as some would see it, but an act of scholarly commitment. It is also a token of our belief that, if anthropology became more of a guild, an association of professionals, or something akin to a trade union, its practitioners would be less exposed to the vicissitudes of the job market, or at least better equipped to face it.

The 20 years of this Journal's history, with its 20 issues, stand as evidence of the possibilities afforded by such an effort. Uncountable editors, visual editors, copyeditors, proof-readers, reviewers, and authors have brought *Anthropology Matters* to where it is now. The collective labor of people whose work we now continue, and whom we've never met, is an inspiration in this solitary, precarious age. We would like to keep this spirit of cooperation alive in *Anthropology Matters Journal* and we invite all-year round submissions for special issues, sections, and any other initiatives our readership and contributors think might benefit them in these times.

Ana Chirițoiu and Phaedra Douzina-Bakalaki, editors