

## Interview with Professor Ronnie Frankenberg on publishing in anthropology and sociology

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It was a hot June day when I went to interview 74-year old Professor Ronnie Frankenberg at his home in Keele. Ronnie is one of the founding forebears of the discipline of medical anthropology and is equally involved and esteemed in the world of sociology. The Festschrift conference held in his honour in 2000 at Brunel University, to celebrate his 50 years of academic endeavour, was marked by the high calibre of participants. Many of these were Ronnie's former students, working across different disciplines: education, sociology and anthropology – evidence of his far-reaching influence across disciplinary boundaries.

I phoned Ronnie the day before our scheduled interview to ask if 10 o'clock in the morning would be too early to arrive. Ronnie told me with boyish enthusiasm that it would be no problem, as he would be up at 6am to watch the transit of Venus across the sun with the aid of his son's telescope. After a lifetime's work in academia Ronnie still flows over with infectious enthusiasm, not only for academic topics but, in polymath style, for cultural events and global happenings. If there is a new art exhibition in town Ronnie will invariably have seen it and incorporated it into his teaching.

### One of the founders of medical anthropology: a brief biography

Ronnie Frankenberg is currently Professor Emeritus of Sociology & Social Anthropology and Fellow of the University at Keele, where he was first made professor in 1969. He graduated in pre-clinical sciences and anthropology from Cambridge in 1950 and gained his PhD from Manchester under the supervision of Max Gluckman. He investigated the impact of social and industrial change in a village in north Wales, and his PhD thesis was subsequently published as *Village on the Border*. He worked as a researcher for six years looking at the impact of industrialisation on rural life, and also held the post of Educational Officer for the National Union of Mineworkers (South Wales Area), before taking up a lectureship at Manchester. Ronnie has had a lifelong interest in Marx and Gramsci.

Ronnie was seconded to the University of Zambia where he first got fully involved in medical anthropology, which at the time was not yet seen as a sub-discipline in its own right. He researched health behaviour in a Lusaka township and adjacent squatter compound, together with his then wife and colleague Joyce Leeson, who worked in the Manchester Department of Social Medicine. Ronnie has been highly involved in the international development of the discipline of medical anthropology, not least in

the US through the Society for Medical Anthropology, and its Critical Medical Anthropology caucus, as well as through the early study of HIV/AIDS. Ronnie was awarded the first ever prize for Critical Medical Anthropology by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 1986, for his paper on 'Sickness as Cultural Performance'.

Ronnie resigned his full-time Chair and Headship of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Keele in 1985 in order to develop medical anthropology there. In 1989 he was invited by Adam Kuper to work half-time as Associate Professor at Brunel University, and to join Ian Robinson in setting up and helping to run the highly successful Masters in Medical Anthropology. More recently, Ian Robinson and Ronnie Frankenberg gained funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to research vulnerability with sick children (with Amber Delahooke), and white ethnicity and the social construction of Englishness in Southall, Middlesex (with Aaron Turner).

Ronnie's career has been characterised by scholarship, collegiality, inspirational teaching, inter-disciplinarity, and the linking of research to everyday practice – all conducted with a sense of playfulness and fun. Of all his academic roles, Ronnie sees teaching as the most important. He defined teaching for me as: 'Finding out what people want to say and helping them to say it.' In this spirit Ronnie was keen to share with the readers of *Anthropology Matters* his experiences of founding and editing journals, and to offer advice to early-career anthropologists on strategies of publishing. 'My ambition,' he told me, 'rather arrogantly, has always been to teach rather than to publish!' He did, however, discuss in the interview how times have changed, and why such career choices might not be so easy in the current era of audit cultures.

Ronnie has played an active role during his career in the life of at least six journals. He founded *African Social Research* in 1966 and ran it for four years. In 1970 he helped to re-launch *The Sociological Review* (<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=0038-0261>) (one of the oldest sociological journals in Europe), which he co-edited, and is now an active life member on the board. As part of this interview he introduced me to Caroline Baggaley, Editorial Manager on *The Sociological Review*, who has been in general charge of all the stages of the editorial process for over 20 years.

Ronnie was invited to be international editor of *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (<http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/3a/maq/>) in 1987. He was a co-founder of *Time & Society* (<http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journal.aspx?pid=105797>) in 1992. He has also been on the editorial boards of *International Journal of Health Services, Health, Anthropology & Medicine*, and *Museum & Society*, and he reviews for many other journals. Together with Alan Harwood, he was one of the foundation editors of the book series *Cambridge Studies in Medical Anthropology* (until its recent transfer to Rutgers University Press).

I asked Ronnie about the history of his involvement with these journals. His trajectory demonstrates the importance of the networking aspect of academic life: being in the right place at the right time. This reminds us all of the need not only to write, but also to 'get out' and present our work, to go to conferences and to network. Our conference buddies of today may become our co-editors of tomorrow.

## Editing and writing

Ronnie started by telling me how he came to found the first journal he was involved in. He had come from a post as Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at Manchester in the 1960s to work on secondment at the University of Zambia.

Ronnie: I actually founded several journals, *African Social Research* being one of them. When I say I founded it, I was there and in charge of The Centre for African Studies when they decided to have this journal. Because the director was going on leave, I had to be in charge of the institute and take charge of the editing. When he came back I never gave it back to him.

My editing of journals actually goes back to when I was 14 or 15. I not only edited the school magazine but also founded the Society of School Magazine Editors, and edited their newsletter. One of the founders of *Granta*, himself an anthropologist, actually went round asking everyone, and found that a very high proportion of anthropologists had edited school magazines, which is quite interesting.

Christy: Several of the people working on *Anthropology Matters* have got professional editing experience so perhaps there is a tie-up. It's a literary subject, in a way, anthropology, isn't it?

Ronnie: Yes it is, I regard it as such, not everybody does. We were discussing this at the editorial board of the *The Sociological Review* yesterday. The main reason papers get rejected is that they don't succeed in saying what they want to say, because they are so badly written. And this is as true of Anglophone submissions as it is of people from Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Christy: So do you mean they don't fulfil the aims they set out with?

Ronnie: They just don't make it clear what they are saying, because they write so badly. Most editors can't be bothered to edit an article to that extent. Sometimes we send it back to people and say as tactfully as we can, if it's in Eastern Europe or South America: 'Can you get a colleague who is more advanced in English – although your English is very good – to look at it?'

Christy: What do you do with English speakers?

Ronnie: Ah, what do I do? Especially these days, providing I've got it online, I correct it with the correction facilities on Microsoft Word, which records them in red. And then I just send it back and say: 'These are some suggestions you might like to consider.'

Christy: What do you mean by 'badly written'? I think it's quite useful for our readers to know...

Ronnie: Written in such a way that you can't understand it, and often very inelegantly as well.

Christy: Is that to do with the structure of the paper or...

Ronnie: Clauses are put in the wrong place. 'Only' is put in the wrong part of the sentence. Words are used to mean things they don't mean, although sometimes they eventually come to mean that thing. Like 'disinterested' for instance means impartial and not uninterested, yet people often use it

instead of ‘uninterested’ – and this is now accepted by the Oxford English Dictionary. There is a whole generation of people from, I suppose, 25 downwards, who have been through the state system and never learned any grammar.

Christy: So this line-by-line editing on the computer sounds quite time consuming?

Ronnie: It *is* quite time consuming. Editors of journals are often in quite demanding positions with other commitments and they don’t always make time to do that.

Christy: So you are doing the editorial work on it.

Ronnie: If I get a paper to referee, I am. This brings us onto the core subject of how journals organise their refereeing...

## Refereeing

Ronnie: Journals vary. This wasn’t my practice when I edited journals, but most editors now send a paper that comes in to the member of the editorial board who seems most likely to know the field. I didn’t usually do this and I think some people follow my method. What I used to do was to send papers to people in the general sociological community that I knew would be interested. We always sent them to at least two people. Then if they disagreed I would pass it to the editorial board. But *The Sociological Review* now sends things to two members of the editorial board.

Christy: First?

Ronnie: Yes, first. Which can be difficult. One of the things we were doing yesterday was looking at the list of potential new board members. Obviously we try and cover areas which we know are going to need covering. With areas we haven’t had much published on so far, we hope that by putting this person on the editorial board it will encourage people [to submit in that area]. For example we haven’t got anybody really on health at the moment. We also try to keep a gender balance and a balance between types of institution and geographical areas.

Christy: So, for example, if a health paper comes in, what do you think? Is it a disadvantage because you don’t have a health member on the board?

Ronnie: Well, we think we ought to have someone on the board who is central to each of the things that people are likely to write about. Another complication, in the past, was that *The Sociological Review* board was appointed more or less for life. Now we have instituted a five-year term.

Christy: Why have you instituted that change?

Ronnie: We just thought it was fairer.

Christy: Was it leading to nepotism?

Ronnie: No, I don’t think so. In fact people on the whole, are more likely to be more conscientious when reviewing a paper that they don’t agree with or by someone that they don’t know, than by someone they know or agree with.

So when I was editing *African Social Research* I accepted a paper saying that all anthropologists were imperialist swine although I didn't agree with it and thought it was badly argued (*laughing*). But I thought it ought to be published to give other people who agreed with the author (and those who didn't) a chance to argue it. One of the problems about dialogue is that journals are so infrequent. The response to a particular article comes so long after the article that nobody remembers what it is about any more.

Christy: Some journals arrange it so that they have them in the same issue. They have a debate about a paper going back and forth with the author and their critics.

Ronnie: That is actually very difficult to do. Even if you write to someone and ask: 'This article has just been published in your field and says exactly the opposite to you. Would you like to write a rejoinder?', their time is probably committed a long time ahead. What I used to do sometimes was to collect a number of articles on the same theme and have a sort of impromptu special issue.

Christy: You have talked about sending things out to members of the board or referees. What about beforehand? What proportion do you turn down before even sending them out? How is that decided?

Ronnie: Very few I think.

Christy: On all journals you've worked on?

Ronnie: Very few. The *British Medical Journal* does it as a matter of course, as you probably know. I was really shocked. I sent in a paper with a medical colleague. And it came back the next day saying: 'We can tell from the title...'

Christy: So they didn't even read it, by the sounds of it.

Ronnie: No, they didn't even read it. They didn't make any claim to have read it.

Christy: What was the title?

Ronnie: I can't remember. It was about ethnic minority Asian women in the health service in an English city. More specifically it was about these women and their relationships to the health service as patients or managers.

Christy: I wonder which aspect of that they took exception to?

Ronnie: I don't know. They gave no explanation. *The Lancet* is exactly the same. And it's worth sending something just to see the replies you get sent! On the other hand the *British Medical Journal* does accept, without refereeing, short email comments on the website. So you have that much of a come back.

## Groups and networking

Ronnie: Where an anthropology paper has been accepted by the *British Medical Journal*, such as the one by Lambert and McKeivitt on 'Anthropology in Health Research', it may have been helped by them belonging to a very successful research network of medical anthropologists.

Christy: The paper on ethnography that Jan Savage published in the *British Medical Journal* emerged out of the Ethnography in Healthcare group. So maybe that says something about groups being a useful way to galvanise publishing opportunities.

Ronnie: Absolutely, absolutely.

Christy: But then you get the problem that actually it's only one author that gets recognised. You don't get the group as an author do you?

Ronnie: That varies actually. It depends whether it's in a medical journal or outside. Because medical journals have these quite well defined rules about the number of authors and who goes first (available from the *British Medical Journal*). So probably the first author didn't even put in a comma, but she or he is there officially as a guarantor. The medical journals are quite open about this and advise you if you submit something.

Christy: Talking about the medical journals: what about *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*? You worked on that for a while didn't you?

Ronnie: I was actually supposed to be the first editor. I was woken up for the purpose at 11 o'clock in the evening in a hotel room, can't remember if it was Washington, Chicago or San Francisco, and asked if I would accept. I was then woken again at 2 o'clock to be told that the Council of the AAA had ruled that the first editor had to be US based.

Christy: How did you come to get nominated in the first place?

Ronnie: By Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock.

Christy: You knew them in person?

Ronnie: Oh yes, I had worked with them both. I'd been for six months at Berkeley. I was invited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and I'd been involved with Margaret Lock in various ways. I had been made an offer to be Assistant to the Director of AIDS research in Quebec, which fell through, but as a result I was very well known. Most of these people had interviewed me for appointments and knew me very well. We all knew each other through Wenner-Gren conferences and a Fulbright Commission seminar at Runnymede on bioethics, organised by Ian Robinson. Anyway it was 2 o'clock in the morning. Margaret and Nancy rang to say that the 'triple A' committee had refused to accept me and the committee had chosen Alan Harwood, whom I didn't know at the time, to be editor. They wanted me to do it jointly with him and I would have the title of 'International Editor' and that's what happened.

Christy: So in terms of advice to PhD students and new career anthropologists: networking seems to be very important. These contacts you make early on may bear fruit ten years down the line when you are getting into editorial activities.

Ronnie: Oh, networking is very important. So too is using your supervisor's good offices...

## Supervisors

Ronnie: If you can, get your supervisor to get you invited to conferences, and to suggest journals that you should submit to. I adapt the saying about the dog at Christmas.

Christy: Being a supervisor isn't just for Christmas, it's for life!

Ronnie: Yes, I think the conscientious supervisor is for life, not just to end at the *viva*. For example a graduate student of mine from way back has just been offered a chair at an American university. Without telling the person in question, the people at the university wrote to me and said: 'If we were considering offering them a suitable post what would your opinion be?' Presumably one of my American colleagues that I worked with in the 1960s suggested me for this.

Christy: So how can one maximise this leverage of one's supervisor?

Ronnie: (*laughing*) I don't know. Usually once asked, supervisors are quite happy to do this. It's good for them.

Christy: To do what exactly?

Ronnie: To go on writing references and to advise you on places to publish. I get quite a lot of emails saying: 'I've written this article, where should I try and publish it?' There are lots of journals that people don't think of like *Health & Society* and *Health*.

Christy: On what basis might you give advice to target particular journals then?

## Finding out about journals

Ronnie: Well, first of all because as a member of editorial boards I know what kind of article they are looking for. Or when I get that question I go to the internet and look at the journal's aims.

Christy: Can't the students do that for themselves? Or read other papers in the journals?

Ronnie: They don't think of it or they don't understand. I mean a lot of students are not dim, but kind of slow.

Christy: Naive, perhaps?

Ronnie: It doesn't occur to them. People still send things to *The Sociological Review* that are totally unsuitable for it. Like they send reports of their own personal social work experience, because they've clearly never looked at a copy, or even at the aims of the journal on the internet. The internet now is really an essential tool.

Christy: So that's kind of at a basic level. Is there any advice you can give to slightly more savvy students and early-career anthropologists about publishing?

Ronnie: Ok, I think you need to know something about how journals work which is not obvious from the internet. Basically there are two kinds of journals: those that are included in the membership of a learned society, and those

that aren't. *The Sociological Review* has always been very open because it's really the only independent sociology journal. The *British Journal of Sociology* belongs to the London School of Economics (LSE) and may, even if unconsciously, favour LSE graduates and members. Just as it is usually LSE graduates who give the Malinowski lecture [which is held at LSE]. It would be unlikely given their size that there wouldn't be a suitable graduate to do it, and they are likely to know their own graduates better anyway. And *Sociology* is responsible to the British Sociological Association. Whereas *The Sociological Review* is not responsible to anyone, except we try not to upset Keele University, where we are based, too much. Now most of those journals which aren't members of learned societies have hardly any individual subscribers at all. *The Sociological Review* is one of those with the largest circulations among the sociological journals, but probably has less than 20 or so individual subscribers! So people don't subscribe. They mostly go to libraries.

And secondly, although this is something neither the publishers nor editorial boards have noticed very much, except in very exceptional circumstances, is that people don't read actual copies of journals, they read papers which they have discovered elsewhere. And they get the copy through their university's arrangements with Athens or Ingenta or whatever. So that while we still do it, producing a special issue of a journal is probably a waste of time, because most of the people who read any article in that journal won't notice that it is a special issue. But if they are savvy they will notice this. If it's a special issue on AIDS in Africa they'll find other articles on AIDS in Africa which they can use and which will have other references. But again students don't always think of doing that. Students and young lecturers – and even old lecturers – are amazingly naive about these things. Some journals like *The Sociological Review* publish an extra issue each year which is themed and has both an ISSN (so it counts as a refereed journal) and ISBN number and is later sold separately as a book. These are usually convened by an editor who knows the system and has submitted it to the board after peer review. Before publication the individual papers are again peer reviewed. If a graduate student hears about one such issue they could try approaching the convenor, or the convenor might ask a post-doc to write a contribution.

Recently I had an email from someone who is an established lecturer but doesn't have a PhD. She was looking for a place to do her PhD and had found the names of two particular people at a university where she would like to do it. But she hadn't apparently looked at the published books of these people. If she had, she would have noticed that one of them was an absolutely super anthropologist and a very nice person, but the kind of work she does is in such a different area that she is very unlikely to accept her. And if she did, she would be pushed into a direction in which she is not really interested or capable of going. Whereas the other one was spot on for her – in the event she went to a different university entirely!

Christy: So there's something about successful publishing being linked to intelligent reading.



Ronnie: Absolutely. But the other thing is that all journals are very anxious to get good papers to publish. No journal these days – because there are so many journals – can get enough *quality* papers. Any journal that's published quarterly wants to be pretty sure what the next two issues are going to have in them. They are often in the position where they have just managed to get the first issue together, and are wondering how they are going to get the last two papers for the next-but-one and whether they ought to fish out some extra reviews to put in to fill out the space!

Christy: Is the problem that everybody has submitted their papers to the top quality journals?

Ronnie: There are two problems actually. One of the reasons is that, for instance, *The Sociological Review* publishes very few American papers. By the time they get to us they are often really dog-eared having been considered by various American journals. Sometimes before computers you could see the other referees' comments rubbed out on them (*laughing*). The other problem is that a lot of people prefer to publish in their own specialist journal. So medical sociologists will tend to try *Sociology of Health and Illness* first and then *Social Science and Medicine* and then start looking around for others.

Christy: What about *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*? Is that the first choice for medical anthropologists?

Ronnie: Yes, it's certainly a first choice for *American* medical anthropologists. And the only paper that any American medical anthropologist ever cites of mine is the one that was published in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. And that's very widely quoted.

## The US market

Christy: Do you think that's an important strategy to try and get into American journals, because otherwise people over there don't know about your work?

Ronnie: It's worth trying, but it's very difficult because they are incredibly insular. I mean they are quite likely to publish articles from Eastern Europe and Latin America as a matter of principle, but unless a paper is by someone very famous from England or France it's not going to be given very top priority.

Christy: So how does that work? Does it mean the editors don't send it out for review or what?

Ronnie: No, no. They will send it out for review but it's like choosing candidates for a job. In the normal course of events you have three or four people who could do it and somehow or other you've got to decide.

Christy: So you mean even if it gets favourable reviews they still might not publish it.

Ronnie: Absolutely. It's the same as having an ESRC grant. You can get all alpha-plus ratings and still not get a grant because they are looking at the balance of different parts of the country and different kinds of work, have limited funds, and so on.

Christy: I've just been invited to write a paper by somebody who is on the board of an American journal, and I looked at the journal and it doesn't look like the kind of journal that publishes my kind of research. It doesn't publish any qualitative or anthropological research. So this colleague wrote to the editor for me and the editor said: 'This sounds like a very interesting topic, get the person to suggest some suitable reviewers.' It opened my eyes to the fact that maybe knowing people on boards might smooth the path to getting published. Although I never got around to writing the paper!

## Boards and publishers

Ronnie: Knowing people on the board does help, if you know them really well.

Christy: If you knew someone on an editorial board would you send the paper to them?

Ronnie: Yes, you could. It would all depend on how well you knew them and what kind of person they were. If somebody asked me that concretely about something they had in mind I would say, well, why don't you write and say: 'I haven't quite finished this paper yet, it needs more work on it, but I was thinking of submitting it to this journal. Do you think there is any point?', or something like that.

Christy: I'm only saying this because until recently I was a bit naive and thought that you just write a good paper, you send it to a journal, and then it gets published. But I'm beginning to see that behind the scenes there is a whole system of 'who knows who'. I don't know how relevant that is? I think therefore that it's useful for new academics to get editorial experience. That's why *Anthropology Matters* is good, as a journal for people to get experience on, at an early stage of their career, to find out about these issues.

Ronnie: That's right. It's chaos theory rather than linear. In my experience I may have somebody I've asked to revise a paper and they've said they will do it by next Tuesday, but may not have done it. So you've got to go back to look at the papers you've held over to see whether one of them will do. Yesterday, at *The Sociological Review*, when we were looking at people to be new members of the board, we were trying to second-guess what were going to be important topics in the next few months, or next couple of years. Then we would have someone to encourage papers in that area. We expect members of the board to encourage people to send in papers, as well as to referee them. But if you were asked to referee a paper which you had already looked at or helped to put in shape, you would say: 'I will referee this, but would you bear in mind that I know this person and that I've already read this and made some suggestions, and if you still want me to...'. If they have very close connections they will withdraw from any discussions that arise. In most cases, of course, boards as a whole only discuss actual papers after they have been accepted or even published.

Reviews contain things about the defects of the paper as well as its merits: 'I think he might have spent more time on this but nevertheless I think in

general it's a very good paper.' But as a member of the board, and not an editor, I don't know how the two editors deal with this situation. We always have two editors – that began by mistake but we now regard it as a good idea. The board is not privy to their decision process. In the case of *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* the last word always went to Alan Harwood, because he was the editor in chief and I was only the international editor. Although he would – not always but often – discuss papers with me by mail or when we met at conferences.

Publishing a paper requires the same kind of research as when you apply for a job actually. Then you would find out about the department, and the other people there, and what their interests are, and what they've done. You stand a much better chance of getting a paper published if you've read at least one issue of the journal, if you've looked at what the editor's interests are, if you've looked on the internet at what the aims are. And also it's worth it when you've got some spare time and you've got nothing else to do, and you're at your computer browsing through the list of journals, to see what kind of peripheral journals there are. Like *Health* and *Health & Society*. They are both very good journals. I'm on the board of *Health*.

Christy: Isn't some of that to do with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)<sup>1</sup> and citation indices?

Ronnie: That's right. I think it has distorted publication altogether. I think two things have happened. First of all, various publishers, or three, have discovered how profitable it was and they...

Christy: Who are the three main publishers?

Ronnie: Taylor & Francis (T&F), Sage, and Blackwells. Nearly all the independent journals are in these three groups. From a publisher's point of view it's really great because there is no risk involved. You get paid in advance for the journal, so you have capital you can use for your book publishing. And it's very profitable. *The Sociological Review* used to be published by Routledge (now incorporated into T&F) and we were rather dissatisfied, so we went round and visited five or six publishers, and picked Blackwells. Since we went to Blackwells – and presumably the British Sociological Association have just discovered the same, because they have just switched to Blackwells – we became quite profitable. We are now able to finance seminars and post-doctoral fellowships.

Christy: It was interesting what you were saying about the distortion that has come from the RAE.

Ronnie: Well the distortion was in the multiplication of the number of journals. It's a double distortion. On the one hand it means that people are reluctant to take the time to write books, because by the time they've written them they've lost their jobs because of the RAE. Secondly there are many more

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<sup>1</sup> The RAE is a national exercise that assesses the quality of research at each university in the UK. The assessment is mainly based on the publications produced by university staff, thus making it very important for university staff to get their work published. The results of the assessment then inform the selective distribution of public funds for research to the universities. The funding is distributed by the four UK higher education funding bodies.

papers than the existing journals can publish. Actually if you multiply the number of journals, in the long run it is kind of self defeating, because libraries are not willing to buy these newer journals unless they've got a really large number of students, and nobody buys them individually.

### Niche journals and specialist publishers

Christy: How does that impact on *Time & Society*, which I would imagine is a journal that would fall into that category? Is it a niche journal?

Ronnie: *Time & Society* is very specialist. It is a niche journal, but there are a lot of different niches because there are not only the social science niches but also natural science. One of the things that comes out of this paper I've just written...

Christy: Which is for what journal?

Ronnie: It's not for a journal at all but a chapter in a book. On the whole these days I only write things which are commissioned (*laughing*). I haven't got a great deal of experience of actually submitting out of the blue to a journal. Most often I have drafted a paper for a meeting or conference and written it up later for publication.

Christy: It hasn't done you any harm has it?

Ronnie: Well, times have changed. I'm not terribly interested in publishing because I know how few people read everything that's published.

Christy: There are specific issues for anthropologists publishing ethnographic work. Do you have any advice?

Ronnie: It's just extremely difficult. There are two small specialist outlets: Berg and Berghahn. The owner of Berghahn originally owned Berg. She has high academic standards but is very friendly towards anthropology and medical anthropology and especially anything with a gender aspect. Print runs are often quite small. Some US university presses are very active, Duke for example. Rutgers is likely to publish more medical anthropology in future, taking the place of other presses who have dropped out. It is worth looking at the lists of publishers exhibiting and advertising at the back of the AAA meetings programme each year. If you can it's worth spending an hour or two in the exhibition, and meeting the editors there, even buying books at 20% discount.

Christy: So how do you get round this problem that nobody reads the journals and nobody reads these very small specialist monographs? Or are we not publishing for people to read what we write!

Ronnie: I don't know. This is nothing new. People do read them but they don't buy them is the answer. When I began in anthropology no one would publish *Village on the Border* – the book of my PhD, which was about a former slate mining community in Wales. No one would publish my colleague Derek Allcorn's fascinating book about the life of young men in a London suburb. Routledge – it was called Routledge and Kegan Paul at the time – was the main publisher of this sort of thing. They just wouldn't look at it.

They asked me to write a book on football and politics in general and they asked Derek Allcorn to write a book on juvenile delinquency, which was terribly insulting since his book was mainly about there not being such a thing as juvenile delinquency (*laughing*). They were working class lads and they were mischievous and so on, but delinquency was not what it was about. So then a fairly well-off man, Mr West, who had met and liked Radcliffe-Brown, and noticed that it was difficult to publish monographs or theoretical works on anthropology, set up a little publishing house called Cohen and West – although there was no Cohen, just him and his daughter who did the secretarial work. He just thought it was good to have a Jewish or foreign name if you were a publisher! There were just two rooms in Bloomsbury, and it was very amateur.

Christy: And he was the one who published your book?

Ronnie: Yes, he was the one who published my book. Then all these small firms got taken over by much larger and expanding conglomerates. Mr West was taken over by Routledge and Kegan Paul. And Norman Franklin who owned Routledge at the time was furious. He told me: ‘I rejected your bloody book and now it’s landed on my doorstep – I’ve got it back!’ So it’s always been very difficult to publish anthropology and it’s just the normal struggle and you have to put up with the book getting around in a small edition.

Christy: It sounds like fashion is important.

Ronnie: Absolutely. Katy Gardner, an absolutely marvellous anthropologist at Sussex, has written two very good anthropology books, one actually set in Bengal and one amongst Bangladeshis in London. Neither of these books is in print, whereas her novels are bestsellers. So anthropologists just have to live with the difficulty of publishing.

## Submissions from PhD students

At this point Ronnie decided to take me to meet Caroline Baggaley in *The Sociological Review* office at Keele. I asked Caroline about the activities of the journal.

Caroline: We have a monograph series and two monographs are published each year – usually on entirely different subjects. We also fund a post-doctoral fellowship each year to help people get their PhDs published.

People have implied in the past that up-and-coming PhD students are not encouraged to submit articles to journals, and don’t have any feedback from them. Well that’s just not true in our case. In general, anything would be considered. If people thought a paper was from a junior person they would try to give even more constructive comments. Sometimes referees will say: ‘I feel as if this is someone who is new to writing.’ They imply that therefore they won’t be as harsh as they might have been.

Christy: Is it worth it for people who are submitting articles to come clean and say: ‘I am a PhD student’ or explain where they are in their career?

Caroline: Not really, no. I think things should be considered as they come in, in the normal way. I don't think papers should get special treatment. However, it would obviously do no harm.

Christy: Well how do you know that they are PhD students? Is it obvious from their writing?

Caroline: Yes! (*Laughing*) Sometimes I think you just know, don't you? Two of our *Sociological Review* fellows have submitted articles. A recent fellow got one published quite quickly and the present fellow has just got a first article in the journal which is being received quite well.

I would also suggest that PhD students should ask their supervisors to suggest them as referees to journals if they can't do a review themselves. Also students could try writing to journals and offering their services as a referee or reviewer.

Christy: Why do people choose to publish in your journal particularly, do you think?

Caroline: There are only really three main journals in sociology to choose from. I would hope that if people look at the contents and see what we publish, they would feel we are a more exciting journal. I think *The Sociological Review* has got a good reputation. Also we are publishing what we accept very quickly. We don't get a big backlog and I believe the other journals have got up to a three-year backlog. If something is accepted now [June] it will be published in November this year, which is great. It means the editors can be quite careful what they select. I really find it hard to see that if a paper is accepted now it is going to be totally relevant in three years' time. And people just starting their career want to get published straight away. *The Sociological Review* has always been very open-minded and happy to consider contributions from other disciplines, like anthropology. Although we have guidelines on length, sort of 7-8,000 words, we are not too strict on that side of things either.

Ronnie: We have published short stories, satirical articles, and responses.

One last thing I didn't get round to saying: it's a very good idea for people in specialist fields to write an article about their specialist field, giving its relevance to general sociology or anthropology, and to publish in a general journal. One of the things I've been most critical of, in this article I've been writing recently, is people who write medical anthropology in such a way that it makes no contribution to anthropology in general. I know this is a mistake in general, but it is also a particular mistake for a student or for a young lecturer to do this, because it means they are likely to be dismissed for jobs because they will be seen as being too specialist.

## Addendum

Ronnie chose to focus in this interview on his role as a teacher, with reflections framed to offer help to colleagues with little experience of publishing. Ronnie makes a number of interesting observations and raises a number of useful pointers for those getting started in their publishing careers.

In terms of the politics of publishing, Ronnie spotlights the power of the editorial board in vetting publications, particularly on journals where the first review is conducted by board members and not by independent reviewers. He also refers to the difficulties of getting published as a British contributor in American journals. This can result in great insularity in academic communities working either side of the Atlantic.

His advice to inexperienced academic writers includes the following: it is useful to join or start networks of anthropologists with similar interests; it is important to make international connections and attend conferences; it is wise to cultivate the services of one's PhD supervisor after the *viva*; it is a good idea to polish up papers initially drafted for a conference and to submit them for publication; it is helpful to ask senior colleagues for advice on draft articles. He reminds us not to overlook the most basic strategies: the need to look at the aims of the journal on the internet, to seek out specialist and new journals, to look at back copies, and to make a note of editors' interests. I would add the advice to cite relevant work on the topic that has been published in that journal.

Caroline makes the useful suggestion that PhD students should ask their supervisors to suggest them as referees to journals, and even to try writing to journals themselves to offer their services as a referee or reviewer. I'm sure that the editors of *www.anthropologymatters.com* would also look on such approaches favourably if accompanied by some details of area of expertise, and level of experience in academia.

Ronnie suggests that getting published requires the same kind of research as when you apply for a job. He also reminds us of the reverse: of the need to think about getting jobs in the future when we plan our publishing. He warns of the risk of being dismissed for academic jobs because you are seen as being too specialist, and the need to balance focused work with papers that relate our research to broader theoretical debates and issues of relevance to the wider discipline. Finally, he shows – by example – the importance of not focusing overly on publication, difficult though that may be in the era of the RAE, but also to pay attention to our capacity to teach, lead and develop the next generation of academics.

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