

Evidencing in medical anthropology

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The content of this issue of *MAT*, our nineteenth, has as a key theme the question of evidence, which has been central to medical anthropology stretching back at least to the seminal ethnographies of its ancestors, most famously, Evans-Pritchard's *Withcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Zande*. What counts as real and as 'actionable' information? Faced with intractable beliefs, miraculous cures, and improbable attributions, anthropologies of healing have always wrestled with the nature of evidence and their own tenacious commitments to mechanistic orderings of the world. Outcroppings of theoretical work on epistemology, rationality, and belief dot our theoretical landscape. Does proof lie in the world in front of our eyes, or rather elsewhere, in more peripheral forms of experience, such as the ordeal of illness itself? Perhaps the centrality of these concerns are due to what is clearly at stake in illness: life and death itself.

Tanja Ahlin and Fangfang Lin show how the use of social media to conduct remote interviews has more than the apparent benefit of convenience, making possible ethnographies of geographically remote social relations, as in the case of Indian nurses in the Middle East. Virtual interviews offer an unexpected advantage: forms of intimacy and disclosure not otherwise readily accessible. The epistemological issues raised by social media and how they shape ethnographic events beg a more ontological question: what *is* the field? These concerns are echoed by Andrea Ford, this time doing more conventional 'embodied' fieldwork in the San Francisco Bay Area in the United States as a nonmedical birth attendant. Immersed in a medical counterculture, Ford examines the varieties of evidence – ranging from personal experiences to heterodox readings of contemporary biology – used to

challenge hegemonic biomedical understandings and practices around childbirth. Conducting interviews at the heart of biomedical evidence making, with the subjects of an HPV clinical study, Emily Wentzell explores alternative views of biology that emerge. These are not so much counterhegemonic as refigurations of sociality opened up by epidemiological understandings: what she glosses as ‘collective biologies’. Attending to context-specific collective biologies, she argues, can help us understand how health issues are influenced by social relations.

The second part of this issue presents a diversity of think pieces and photo essays that illuminate a range of experiences and unexamined assumptions that collect beneath the surface of fieldwork in medical anthropology. Hannah Gibson examines the challenges, and the insights, afforded by doing ethnography while suffering from a debilitating illness. Alana Glaser reflects on how the rationalized subdivision of labour practices cleaves physical needs from emotional and relational needs. Emmanuelle Roth explores the aftermath of Ebola in Guinea, seeing in the ruins the afterlife of an epidemic that stands as a metonym for transient investments in global health: what remains present is an absence, an epidemic always threatened but readily forgotten. Ye Kyung Song and Jerome Crowder venture into the virtual realm, examining visual media representations offered by medical students to uncover the underlying anxieties around ‘growing up’ into professional authority. Jennifer Syvertsen offers a personal testimonial to a close informant’s troubled life and untimely death.

Our books section includes reviews of two recent and significant edited volumes in medical anthropology: Ruth Prince and Hannah Brown’s *Volunteer economies: The politics and ethics of voluntary labour in Africa* (James Currey, 2016), reviewed by Alice Desclaux, and Helene Basu, Roland Littlewood, and Arne Steinforth’s *Spirit and mind: Mental health at the intersection of religion and psychiatry*, reviewed by Nasima Selim.

Finally, a substantial Interventions section on objects of critique in global health studies, curated by Cal Biruk and Ramah MacKay, is included here.

And a word about a few changes to our editorial team: in August, we said goodbye to Tanja Ahlin, who has so ably coordinated *MAT*’s social media since the beginning, and welcomed Ann Thomson, who is taking over that role. In the Dissertating section, Gabrielle Hertig stepped down after completing her PhD, and the section is now being led by Rose Sims, who has been an intern with the journal for a few years. Thank you, Tanja and Gabrielle, for your thoughtful and committed work in support of the journal!