

# Seeking Knowledge in and for Troubled Times

The Edinburgh Centre for Medical Anthropology,  
*MAT*, and a Shared Vision

MAT Editorial Collective

Welcome to our September 2024 *MAT* issue. It is the product of a labour of love by a community of scholars invested in creating and maintaining an open-access space for rigorous thinking and narrative engagement with medicine, anthropology, and theory. We express our gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editors who have produced and fortified this space—particularly in such troubled times. As we approach the grim anniversary of Hamas’ 7 October 2023 attack on Israel and the almost-year of intensified Israeli bombardment of Gaza that has followed, we reflect on doing our quotidian anthropological work—teaching, writing, researching—in the face of such a stark example of the same unequal attention to the loss of some lives over others that we highlighted in our April 2022 editorial, in response to Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus’ call for attention to the Tigray War in Ethiopia in the context of the military invasion of Ukraine (Associated Press 2022).

We have spent the last 12 months witnessing evidence of scholasticide, urbicide, and medicide in Gaza and increasingly in the West Bank, as Israel’s aggression has destroyed much of Gaza’s infrastructure (OHCHR 2024; UNOSAT 2024; Perugini and Gordon 2024), alongside inconceivable numbers of lost Palestinian lives. Yet, here in the UK, our taxes continue to help pay for this bombardment—despite the recent accession of a Labour government, and despite widespread protest and criticism. At the University of Edinburgh, which has hosted *MAT* since 2020, many students and staff have been involved in calls for divestment from companies complicit in occupation, apartheid and genocide, in light of the

University's historical and current complicity with state-sponsored violence in Palestine and elsewhere (Perugini 2022). Across courses, classes, and seminars, difficult discussions have unfolded, forcing us as educators and scholars to confront the painful questions of what witnessing, solidarity and allyship in the face of colonial violence can look like.

As we contemplate what it might take to finally persuade those in power to change course, platforms like *MAT* are a crucial home for the kind of slow, deep research that, for reasons of scientific and global politics, has yet to be accepted as decisive evidence (see the following *MAT* articles: Behrouzan 2015; Das 2015; Dewachi 2015; Fischer 2015; Moghnieh 2021; Rechtman 2020). The ongoing assault of Gaza, and Palestine at large, has posed particularly urgent questions for (medical) anthropologists (Atshan 2021). These include analysing the role of hospitals as military targets and places of sanctuary and how this impacts their ability to provide critical health services (Gordon and Perugini 2019; the gendered impacts of persistent violence (Ihmoud 2018, Segal 2023), in particular on women's reproductive health and choices (Hammami 2023; Kanaanah 2002); the role of health workers as witnesses to human atrocities (Feldman 2018) alongside being providers of medical services; and the short- and long-term mental health impacts of war, which follows years of state violence (Asi et al. 2024; Kienzler and Amro 2020; Kelly 2006). The members of the *MAT* Editorial Collective add our voices to the call for such careful chronicling of the long-term effects of this destruction.

## **This Issue**

Our issue opens with four excellent Research Articles. The first, by Sara Bea, explores the ways that bodies are 'done' and 'undone' by medical professionals in the process of organ donation at a Catalan hospital. Then, Veronica Gomez-Temesio recounts the stories of former female patients at the Wonkifong Ebola treatment unit in Guinea—now immune to the virus themselves—who became 'medical superbodies' and incorporated into the human infrastructure of fighting the virus in Guinea. Next, Merete Tonnesen and Claus Vinther Nielsen discuss their work with Danish rehabilitees with Parkinson's disease, describing the ways that their imaginings of the future bring them hope but also hauntings. In our last standalone Research Article, Maria Pozzio and Daniela Testa narrate the experience of nurses trained in public universities in Argentina in order to analyse the politicization of nursing personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they strove for professional recognition in the wake of the enormous expectations placed upon them.

Our September 2024 issue also contains two Photo Essays. The first, by Eirini Papadaki and Silas Michalakas, uses visual and textual elements to give form to

the experiences of residents in one of the largest semi-public nursing homes in Athens, Greece. The second, by Susan Wardell, uses the medium of stained glass through a feminist new materialist lens and to interrogate virtual medical crowdfunding platforms in Aotearoa New Zealand. Finally, Claudia Egger, Chiara Carboni, and Rik Wehrens offer a Position Piece arguing that we bring the element of affective labour into STS conversations about the datafication of medical practice.

We would also like to highlight this issue's Special Section, edited by Neil Carrier and Guntars Ermansons, which takes the object of psychoactive substances to explore concepts of morality, responsibility, and agency. In the first article of this section, Neil Carrier, based on his many decades of research in Kenya, reflects on the psycho-social role of khat and how its effects (or 'handas') are understood through the idiom of the 'trickster' for his interlocutors. Next, Imogen Bevan discusses sugar as a kind of psychoactive substance in the context of childhood in Scotland, using it as an object to think about responsibility and irresponsibility for one's actions. Guntars Ermansons then outlines and analyses the ways that khat became a Class C drug in the United Kingdom in 2014, a decision which is in tension with understandings of evidence and harm among Somali communities in north-west London. Finally, Laura Roe discusses her work with heroin users in Southeast Scotland, reflecting on the history of the concept of addiction and highlighting the troubling contradictory elements of agency in the context of addiction.

Each of these pieces, in their own way, addresses (material and ideological) disparities in power relations. Such social commentaries from diverse field sites have been a longstanding feature of scholarship published in MAT. Indeed, thinking deeply about the accrual of evidence needed to document inequity has been central to the journal's collective project. Quite obviously, we work on these questions in our own various field sites; that slow research is offered with the aspiration of contributing footholds to understanding the many injustices and acts of violence around the world, even as the knowledge of and for troubled times feeds its way back into our scholarship.

*MAT* Editorial Collective

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