



## Decolonising

This month we present three virtual issues on decolonising. In March 2021 the JRAI put out a general call for proposals for a virtual issue on decolonisation. We received multiple responses, and so in the spirit of multivocality, we chose to include not one but three virtual issues put together by a total of 7 early career researchers. Together the virtual issues offer diverse takes on how coloniality and decolonisation is evidenced in the JRAI's back catalogue with reflections on what this means for the future of anthropology.

This virtual issue is part of our ongoing work to reflect on the structural and epistemological legacies of colonialism within anthropology, outlined in more detail in our [incoming editors statement](#)

Thinking with decoloniality: authorship and collaborations in neoliberal times ▾

Article Selection

Author Bio

Calls to decolonize anthropological knowledge have existed for at least a century, but they have grown louder and gathered renewed strength in recent years (Allen & Jobson 2016; Daswani 2021; Harrison 2011; Kaur & Klinkert 2021; Todd 2018). One central demand is that anthropology needs more collaborative authorship and symmetric engagement with ethnographic interlocutors and minoritized scholars (Kennemore & Postero 2021). Partly as an engagement with these calls, but also due to changing requirements of funders, anthropologists today often participate in large interdisciplinary and transnational research teams. Yet, balanced collaboration and authorship are difficult, especially when pursued with international partners in the Global South and junior postdocs in the Global North. This essay interrogates the anthropological record in the JRAI as a way to contextualize this new push for anthropological collaboration. The selected articles offer comparative and critical lenses on anthropological collaboration by asking how decolonial perspectives fit within market-driven academic spaces, where neoliberal rules have dramatically impacted the ways in which academia operates.

While an earlier generation of anthropologists reflected on power dynamics 'in the field', more recently attention has shifted to consider relations within the academe. An important example is ongoing efforts to 'decolonize' the curriculum (e.g., Sanchez 2018; [decolanth@goldsmiths](mailto:decolanth@goldsmiths)). From fieldwork to publication, anthropology has long been recognised as collaborative by necessity. Yet, in the past, such collaboration was often silenced and invisibilized (Middleton & Cons 2014). Reasons include the geopolitics of resource allocation, the privilege of particular institutions, and the unequal power relations between colleagues and collaborators. Indeed, collaborative anthropology sits awkwardly with other deeply ingrained expectations in the academic field, enshrined for instance in career promotions that place higher value on single-authored research articles rather than on co-authored pieces (El Kotni et al 2020; Liboiron 2019; see also Pandian 2018). At the same time, we see a new trend in the tokenization of collaboration amplified by funding agencies, university guidelines, and the politics of reputation within the discipline

(Kennemore & Postero 2016; Tilche & Astuti 2021).

We bring together articles that question the meaning of collaboration in the spirit of decolonising the very concept of collaborative work. Should we use collaborative forms of writing and authorship to make ethnographic representation as 'open as possible'? (work of Kuwayama, from Japan, discussed by Hendry, p. 591). Perhaps, but if we look closer, many challenges appear: there is the issue of who assumes responsibility for what is written and its changing effects on different audiences (Pelkmans). And as Hendry shows, it is not always easy to 'build bridges'. Then, the way we generate anthropological knowledge is inherently political, and 'we have no neutral expertise to sell' (Fabian, p. 449), as is often required in corporate demands for 'impact evidence'. Such demands do not adequately account for the vocational and deontological reasons anthropologists have for doing anthropology—whether that is to understand more about themselves or to make the world a better place (Stein, p. 4, 8). These quandaries constrain the possibilities for experimentation with anthropological authorship, making it difficult to establish a clear 'checklist' for decolonial collaborations. To truly 'decolonize' collaboration we have to ask about research design *and* about research accountability. The geopolitics of knowledge production and circulation is crucially important here, but equally important are funding distribution and grant management. The intention is to go beyond simplifications of the complex (and often contentious) relationships that take place when collaborations are set up in the hope of producing a more equal playing field for all involved; collaborations that go beyond the needs of academics and accommodate multiple (re)interpretations of possible futures.

Taken together, these articles highlight that intellectual and political responsibility is a matter of care, and this takes time. It is a kind of perception, as Hall and Sanders (p. 448) remind us, 'ordinarily accomplished through professionalization: by joining the long conversation, and through that, slowly, steadily, sometimes painfully, calibrating one's sights and practices with a profession's way of seeing and doing'. In the high-paced academic spaces focused on transforming knowledge into financial value, time—particularly spent in the field and writing up alone or with collaborators—is often at odds with increased production demands. However, time is precisely what is needed to establish forms of 'co-presence', to use Chua's terms, that facilitate dialogical collaboration. Such co-presence requires a commitment to permeability and vulnerability that makes room for conflicting 'interpolations of "native thinkers" and other interlocutors' (Chua, p. 656). A great part of these interpolations exceeds textual production and is therefore illegible to the bureaucratic institution.

In this environment, co-authorship or loose forms of collaboration, often figure as the panacea to the problem of time, and radically distribute the labour and the reward of authorship: for instance, by turning junior scholars into data-gatherers and ghost-writers for established academics or by distributing work along a chain of diverse partners situated in remote locales or centres of expertise. Co-authorship promises a seemingly egalitarian approach to recover some of the integrity and holism of ethnographic labour (where the anthropologist is part of each step of the research process). The problem with such solutions is that they overlook the conditions under which collaborations are possible in the first place, or worse, conceal emerging power dynamics and knowledge gaps. What are the individual expectations and institutional incentives for collaboration? Not everyone aspires to (co-)authorship, not all collaborators are good writing partners; sometimes collaboration becomes an exercise in ticking boxes, or worse, a fig leaf for exploitation. In pointing to these problems we highlight the need for in-depth reflection on what co-writing means, and by no means do we want to exclude the possibility that it can actually be successful, balanced, and rewarding—you are reading the result of co-authorship, after all.

Fieldwork and writing are slow and particularly difficult to collapse through a one-size-fits-all model of collaboration. How to re-bridge (or not) the boundaries between 'field' and 'desk', a separation that can

sometimes make anthropology look anti-social (Mosse), is what needs to be figured out rather than swept under the carpet. Co-authorship will not always guarantee or reflect successful collaboration, particularly if publishing academic *texts* is the only expectation or possibility. Writing is not the only form of contributing to our field. There are multiple forms of co-production —not alien to anthropology— that already sustain these ‘dialogic’ ethnographies (see for instance [PECE](#), [EthnoData](#), [CLEAR](#)). It is also a matter of expanding criteria for resource allocation and evaluation so as to make room for greater experimentation that ‘counts’.

Many decolonial discourses point towards greater openness and recognition for other forms of knowledge production. Yet, our academic institutions seem more content with keeping the demands to decolonize the university as a set of checkboxes of ‘inclusion’ —be these by diversifying syllabi, securing partners in the Global South for collaborative research, or hiring academics of colour (from elite universities). Little is actually done to value different forms and arrangements of knowledge, particularly those that do not respond to current ‘academic accountability’ mechanisms (Stein). This is not a call for banishing the single-authored journal article that has characterized and continues to enrich our discipline, nor is it a call to refrain from diversifying our faculty or syllabus. Rather, it is a call for a de-bureaucratization of knowledge that recognizes ‘the possibilities that lie in being captured by another’s concerns’ (Strathern, p. 203). What this means is an openness to uncertainty, making room for transformative forms of collaboration that unsettle our convictions and allow for competing positions (about collaboration or decoloniality themselves!). In more concrete terms, it also means formally recognizing (in peer reviews, academic training, and promotions) and encouraging (through time and funding) collaborations that transform the ways in which we learn and produce knowledge in our discipline. For instance, we might give greater recognition to collaborations that have built performance capabilities (e.g. through theatre and movie making) in an Amazonian community or through digital platforms. This piece calls for more creative ways of collaborating but also of accounting for our labour. Writing is certainly one avenue, but there are many paths already underway through which we can act on our intentions to decolonize knowledge; perhaps we just need to widen our professional overseeing criteria.

## Troubled landscapes, troubling anthropology: co-presence, necessity, and the making of ethnographic knowledge

Liana Chua

[Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute](#) | [Pages: 641-659](#) | [DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.12254](#)

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## Cultural anthropology and the question of knowledge\*

JOHANNES FABIAN

[Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute](#) | [Pages: 439-453](#) |

[DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01751.x](#)

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## climate change

Elizabeth F. Hall, Todd Sanders

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute | Pages: 438-461 | DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.12162

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## Building bridges, common ground, and the role of the anthropologist

Joy Hendry

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DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00445.x

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## Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities\*

David Mosse

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DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00371.x

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## A wider audience for anthropology? Political dimensions of an important debate

Mathijs Pelkmans

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute | Pages: 398-404 | DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.12041

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## Anthropology's 'impact': a comment on audit and the unmeasurable nature of critique

Felix Stein

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute | Pages: 10-29 | DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.12749

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## A community of critics? Thoughts on new knowledge\*

Marilyn Strathern

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute | Pages: 191-209 |

DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00287.x

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### Contributors:

Natalia Buitron (University of Oxford) is an anthropologist working on political subjectivities and socioeconomic change in Lowland South America.

Grégory Deshoulliere (LSE-EHESS/LAS) is an anthropologist who conducts ethnographic research in Western Amazonia. Gregory is grateful to the European Research Council (grant agreement n°715725) for its contribution to this publication.

Jorge Núñez (IAS-Princeton / Kaleidos - Ecuador) is an anthropologist working on financial speculation in Southern Europe and Latin America and in mass incarceration and extreme visual violence in Ecuador.

Maka Suarez (University of Oslo / Kaleidos-Ecuador / IAS-Princeton) is an anthropologist working across economic, political and medical anthropology.

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