EDITORIAL

Open Access
The Cost of Being Free

The *MAT* Editorial Collective

As autumn descends in Scotland, we find it hard to believe that we in Edinburgh have now been editing *MAT* for nearly two years. This has been a busy and productive (as well as difficult) time for us, and we hope you have enjoyed the content of the journal as much as we have. During this period, we have refined and remained committed to our basic principles of open access publishing through upholding structures and ways of working that are accessible, fair, ethical, and sustainable (see *MAT*'s Ethos Statement). Yet what lies behind these fine-sounding words, and what have they meant in practice? What, in short, is the cost of being free? In the spirit of previous iterations of discussions around 'the open question' held by editors at the journal (Grant et al. 2015), we pose this question. In this editorial, we take the opportunity to share with you some of the practical issues that we have faced since taking over the editorship of the journal. We hope that this will also invite discussion with scholars elsewhere who nurture the same aspirations and perhaps face similar challenges, and who may have ideas to share with us.

Maintaining open access to scholarship has significant and hidden costs. It requires commitment and sustained work. In contrast to the profit-generating publishing houses, the funds for basic resources in open access publishing need to come from sources other than income generated by paid-for content. To demonstrate what 'basic resources' in this context actually means, and how they can be maintained, our September issue's editorial opens up our experience of the machine room of open access publishing, breaking it into the categories of infrastructure, people and labour, and money.

Infrastructure

Managing and maintaining our website and our content requires substantial technical infrastructure and effort. When we took over the editorship of *MAT* we had to migrate all of the content to the University of Edinburgh. Managing this migration of content from the former *MAT* website to a new site, which is hosted by the University of Edinburgh Library's [Journal Hosting Service](#), was one of the major challenges of the journal's first year at Edinburgh. The migration meant changes to the way in which we presented ourselves, and in the structure of how you, as readers, interact with and navigate our site. We had not fully anticipated, however, the extent of the impact that the technical and infrastructural challenges we would encounter in this move would have on our readers', reviewers', and authors' experiences.

Our library subscribes to the Open Journal System (OJS) publishing service, provided by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), a well-known open source scholarly software development initiative supported by a global community of universities and academics. OJS is a commendable resource, without which open access publishing would be much more difficult, if not impossible. OJS has much to recommend; it is open source, highly affordable relative to other publishing platforms, and is supported by an active community of open access publishers and programmers. Fully moving to OJS also allowed us to ensure *MAT* publications are indexed by high-profile scholarly databases, including the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which greatly increases visibility for our authors. Nevertheless, the intractability of OJS's plug-in architecture, and the level of technical competence required from us to lay it out and navigate it, has sometimes taken us by surprise. The implementation of seemingly simple editorial decisions around how to structure the journal, such as creating a function to sort website content by type of piece (Research Article, Photo Essay, Review and so on), or, in the back end, revising the options for reviewers to share their recommendations (accept, revise, resubmit or decline) with the Editorial Collective, has turned out to require significant additional labour, and in some cases been technically impossible. The global OJS community is rapidly chasing solutions to nearly all of these problems, as a quick search through OJS online forums shows. Yet OJS does not have the same level of functionality, programmer support, or customer assistance that is offered by big for-profit scholarly publishing firms such as Elsevier. Hence, the technical infrastructure on which the movement of texts, people and interaction relies in the processes of academic publishing both enables and circumscribes how *MAT* is engaging with you all. Without the technical support of staff at the University of Edinburgh Library, and without their OJS subscription, for instance, we would not be able to function at all.

People and labour

Our collective depends on labour that is distributed across multiple academic institutions. We are hugely appreciative of the peer reviewers who commit their time and energy to assisting us in maintaining the scholarly integrity of the journal, and who work with our editors and article authors. The Editorial Collective currently consists of nine permanently employed staff at the University of Edinburgh. In addition, our Managing Editor and Copy Editor are paid positions, in line with our commitment to pay for administrative labour. The section editors—for Position Pieces, Reviews, Field Notes, and Photo Essays—are from institutions outside Edinburgh and contribute their labour for free. For our special sections and special issues, the Editorial Collective provides support to the guest editors. And we continue to work to ensure that our junior colleagues are engaged in ways that support their own intellectual development and that avoid the exploitation of precarious scholars that has become too commonplace in academia. It is for this reason, and in response to the exploitation that has become systematic, that we've developed a policy by which only faculty with tenure-track, tenured, or permanent posts may volunteer their time as part of the Editorial Collective. In the rare instance where a junior colleague does ask to take on an editorial role, other members of the Editorial Collective have volunteered to share some of the burden of the position and to provide further support.

We are also committed to internationalising our authorship and readership. One aspect of this is the imperative to include diverse perspectives in positions of leadership, strategic direction, and journal accountability. To date, the cornerstone of our efforts to foster international collaboration is *MAT*'s International Advisory Board (IAB), first convened in September 2020. Our 18 IAB members hold posts in the UK, the US, Brazil, Australia, Vietnam, Poland, India, South Africa, the Netherlands, Tanzania, Switzerland, Slovenia, France, Denmark, and Germany; most have regional expertise outside their own institutional locations. We bring together this group of scholars to ensure that *MAT* is engaging with issues and concerns around the globe, not just here in the UK, and to decentre the UK-centrism of our Editorial Collective. Our IAB members expand our editorial horizons and the board functions as an instrument of accountability for the Editorial Collective. While we have made strides in internationalising our efforts, there is clearly much work still to be done. Our IAB has identified translation as one means of reaching out to people who may feel less welcome in the (web) pages of our English-language journal. We hope to secure resources to further develop our capacity to assist with translation but, as with our infrastructural and labour challenges, we need financial resources, to which we now turn.

Money

Despite all this invaluable and voluntary labour—which acts as the very grounding for *MAT*'s broad aims—the sustainable financial resourcing of *MAT* remains our biggest challenge. Our continued success, for example being granted open access indexing status, combined with our expansive aims, only further increases our expenses and costs. When *MAT* moved to Edinburgh, we committed to abolishing all article processing charges (which had been previously charged to special issue contributors) so as to make the journal fully open access and compliant with the policies of major research funders. This opened a gaping hole in our finances, which has thankfully been plugged by ongoing support from our university library. We are also dependent on financial resources from the [Edinburgh Centre for Medical Anthropology](#) (which nevertheless cannot be guaranteed year-on-year, as the budget is only agreed on an annual basis); through grants that have been obtained by Editorial Collective members; and continued support from the University of Amsterdam. We know we are not alone in the open access community in facing these financial challenges, and we are excited to have joined the [Libraria 'Cooperate for Open' initiative](#), a forum of small-scale publishing initiatives in anthropology and neighbourly disciplines through which we aim to share common problems and search for collective solutions. Addressing our financial dependence on short-term inputs and how to be sustainable in our neoliberal age, while remaining committed to our principles of open access, is our primary goal for the coming year.

The issue

To turn to the reasons for which we undertake the above, we are pleased to bring to you in this issue a range of contributions. First of all, we are proud to publish the inaugural winner of our MAE-MAT Early Career Paper Award, Laura A. Meek's critical interrogation of the impact and meanings of the 'elimination' of leprosy in the context of Tanzania. The paper makes a vital contribution to critical medical anthropological and STS-oriented research on global health, showing how transnational medical (non-)priorities become embodied in settings like Tanzania.

More broadly, the issue holds globally and topically diverse contributions. Hannah Grace Gibson investigates the multiple ways that surrogacy is undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand, and its implications for kinship. Leo Hopkinson and Lydia House discuss the ways in which a focus on the ambivalence that many faced in pandemic lockdown might better inform our understandings of its impact on wellbeing. Hedva Eyal, researching clinical trials for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis disease in Israel, demonstrates the impact on patients through a focus on value. Pia Juul Bjertrup shows how the emergence of new diagnostic technologies, and

the use of paper associated with them, mediate diagnostic journeys in Burkina Faso. Refugee healthcare in the context of Lebanon, as provided by health workers who are also refugees, is the focus of the article addressing how we understand humanitarianism and care by Diane Duclos, Fouad M. Fouad and Karl Blanchet. In a final research article, Seonsam Na examines how care of elderly people and family relations are changing in the context of South Korea's proliferation of long-term care hospitals.

Anita Chary's contribution, as physician and anthropologist, to the Field Notes section powerfully reflects on racial injustices at the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hope you will read these pieces with the excitement and curiosity that their authors, reviewers, and editors have written, received and revised them.

Finally, we would love to receive more submissions of Field Notes, Position Pieces and Photo Essays. Do drop us a line if you are unsure precisely what is expected for these sections and we can further advise.

References

Grant, Jenna, Emily Yates-Doerr, Emma Kowal, Todd Meyers, Eugene Raikhel, Peter Redfield, Sharon Abramowitz, Barbara Andersen, and Eileen Moyer. 2015. 'The open question: Medical anthropology and open access'. *Medicine Anthropology Theory* 2 (1): 75–94. https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.2.1.216.