

ETHNOGRAPHIC FRONTIERS:
PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

The articles in this special issue of *SITES* grew out of presentations at the fortieth annual meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Aotearoa/New Zealand, held at Massey University in Palmerston North in November 2015.

Ethnography, writes Carole McGranahan in her introductory essay, ‘is a commitment to interpersonal relations as the base of knowledge’ (page ref.), defined more by a ‘sensibility’ than any particular method or mode of research. The articles presented here all consider how the ethnographer acquires and enacts such a sensibility, especially in situations that challenge the researcher’s ability to do the kind of engaged, long-term, ‘deep hanging-out’ expected by the discipline.

For example: how can an ethnographer ‘follow the thing’ – trace the circulation of commodities and material culture – when the thing in question is ephemeral (like the many-lived, slippery crocodile skins described by Claire Langsford) or deadly (like the Colombian mercury tracked by Thomas Robertson and Trisia Farrelly)? How do we, as researchers more accustomed to ‘wordy’ forms of representation, collaborate with participants who prefer non-verbal, multi-sensory modes of expression (Ruth Gibbons)? Can experiences that are haptic, auditory, and embodied be translated into visual and textual representations (Sebastian Lowe and Peter Crawford)? What can the ethnographer learn about her subjects by taking selfies with them (Jessica Halley)?

The authors of the following articles show us how they created different kinds of intersubjective relationships – not just with people, but with substances, objects, images, and sounds – under often tricky circumstances, through creative and experimental play with the ethnographic form.

Ethnographic forms and sensibilities are also the purview of the review essays and reviews included in this special issue, extending the contexts, modes of engagement and arguments presented to reconfigure ethnographic practice. They are discussed here in terms of their thematic linkages rather than the order in which they appear. Chris Howard’s review essay aptly titled *Collabo-*

ration and Contamination reels together recent yet distinctly different books and sets of ethnographers. Including Anna Tsing's extraordinary 'magnum opus' *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, as a testament to the long durée of a slow anthropology as well as the advocacy oriented manifesto emerging from EASA' 14, as the assorted collection titled *Anthropology and Futures*, the books under review engage with the contingent or speculative to straddle the duration of entangled pasts-presents-futures through specifically constituted 'world-making' endeavours. Each one, in turn, presents conceptual and/or methodological opportunities and challenges for anthropologies in the making.

Marking a shift from reviewer to the one reviewed, Ariadne Menzel reviews Chris Howard's *Mobile Lifeworlds* about the 'imaginaries, ideals and practices of Himalayan travel in late modernity'. Based on Howard's PhD thesis and fieldwork on tourism and pilgrimage in the Himalayas, the book concludes that 'Himalayan pilgrimages are symptomatic of global and cosmopolitan late modernity and of late modern personhood with its ideal of self-improvement'.

Keeping the past firmly in their sights to navigate the present and future are the review and review essay by Saenong and Eleanor Rimoldi respectively, each casting the spotlight on different regions and traditions of anthropology. Saenong reviews a *Festschrift* for Heidelberg University based German anthropologist of the Pacific, Jürg Wassman by his students and colleagues. The collection mirrors their experiences of 'listen[ing] to fieldwork experiences shared by fellow ethnographers' at Wassman's home, and 'teaches anthropologists how to become a dedicated life-long fieldworker' like him.

Honouring the lifework of two stalwarts of British anthropology, Mary Douglas and Marilyn Strathern in the 2017 Berg publications is Eleanor Rimoldi's final review essay. Rimoldi imagines them as 'Boudicca warriors – originally competitors for that grand title, but finally as first among equals.'

As a special issue, *Ethnographic Frontiers*, 'talks back' to the 2006 SITES special issue *Beyond Ethnography*. This collection of articles and reviews reasserts the significance of new and unfolding ethnographic forms and processes, as material for 'higher level' interpretations, explanations and comparisons, thereby confidently joining global conversations exploring new domains for ethnographic sensibilities at play.

Sita Venkateswar & Barbara Andersen (Guest Editors)