

2016

## Notes from the Editors

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ASIANetwork Exchange. 23(1), pp.1–8. <http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.179>

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### Recommended Citation

McCarthy, E., Trivedi, L. & Blumenfield, T., (2016). Notes from the Editors. ASIANetwork Exchange. 23(1), pp.1–8. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.179>

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## Editorial

**How to Cite:** McCarthy, E, Trivedi, L and Blumenfield, T 2016 Notes from the Editors. *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 23(1), pp. 1–8, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ane.179>

**Published:** 01 March 2016

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## EDITORIAL

# Notes from the Editors

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It gives us great pleasure to publish our first issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal of Asian Studies for the Liberal Arts* as a part of the Open Library of the Humanities (OLH)!

As a consortium of one hundred and sixty colleges and universities seeking to strengthen the role of Asian Studies within a liberal arts context, ASIANetwork has used its journal as a critical means of promoting new work in the field since December 1992. What we now know as *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* began as a newsletter, originally titled *The Asian Exchange*, and edited by Marianna McJimsey in 1992. A year later the name changed to *The ASIANetwork Exchange*. Past editors of the newsletter include Anne Prescott, Ben Nefzger, Marsha Smith, and co-editors Irving Epstein and Thomas Lutze, all of whom worked to establish the publication as a critical tool for ASIANetwork members. In the spring of 2008, under the editorship of Irv and Tom, the board approved a move from newsletter to journal and named the publication *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*. Tom and Irv, in this second term as editors, also began the practice of soliciting guest editors for the spring issue of the journal, and the *Exchange* became a publication that, in line with the organization's strategic plan, highlights the scholarly work of our members. When we took over as editors in 2011, we had a firm foundation on which to continue developing the journal as a scholarly publication, and in the fall of 2011 the journal became a peer reviewed, Open Access publication.

For some time, ASIANetwork has been mindful of colleagues and students in Asia whose libraries do not consistently possess the resources for them to gain easy access to research and teaching materials. Making sure that our articles can be easily identified, read, and used in Asia, as well as in other parts of the world, has been an important objective. We are pursuing these goals by bringing our society's publication into collaboration with an exciting new Open Access opportunity.

The Open Library of the Humanities (<https://www.openlibhums.org/>) is an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation–funded initiative aimed at engaging the international movement in order to create unrestricted online access to peer-reviewed scholarly research. Materials that are open access are easily searchable and archivable, and promote proper attribution. The move of *ASIANetwork Exchange* to the Open Library of the Humanities allows us to bring the organization and journal in-line with the 2015 goals of the United Nations, which assert that “...universal access to information and knowledge is key to the building of peace, sustainable social and economic development, and intercultural dialogue.”<sup>1</sup> Our partnership with the Open Library of Humanities also enables the digital preservation of our published material along with its integration in the global Digital Object Identifier system (DOI), ensuring that this work remains accessible in perpetuity.

In this inaugural issue with OLH, we feature an article by Brandon Palmer (Coastal Carolina University) and Laura Whitefleet-Smith (University of New England) called “Assimilating Tokto: Islets in Korean Everyday Life,” as well as a special section, “Researching Gender in Asia: Ethnographies and Histories,” consisting of four articles guest edited by Tami Blumenfield (Furman University). Blumenfield provides a detailed discussion of the essays in the special section below.

We are particularly pleased to be able to bring attention to the work of Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith. For some time, ASIANetwork has provided undergraduates

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about UNESCO's position on Open Access and its recommendations for Higher Education please see: *The 2012 Paris Declaration on Open Access* [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/WPFD2009/English\\_Declaration.html](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/WPFD2009/English_Declaration.html) and *Guidelines for Open Educational Resources in Higher Education (For institutions, see pp. 6–12)* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002136/213605e.pdf>

with deep and sustained research experiences with faculty not only on their home campuses, but in Asia as well. Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith's research began with *ASIANetwork's* Student-Faculty Research Program, generously supported by Houghton "Buck" Freeman while he directed the Freeman Foundation. The Freeman Student Faculty Fellows program has enriched faculty research and provided our students with the opportunity to develop the skills they need to pursue graduate work and become global leaders in their fields of choice.

Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith explore the material and mental culture associated with the Tokto Islets. Considering school curriculum, museum exhibitions, and popular songs, the authors explain how compromise with Japan over the status of the Tokto islets diminishes as Korean national identity is increasingly expressed through a variety of everyday life practices associated with the islets.

Erin McCarthy and Lisa Trivedi, Editors

### **Special Section: Researching Gender and Ethnography in Asia**

This special section offers an in-depth look at the personal dynamics of ethnographic research. The authors of these articles—Pamela Runestad, Arianne Gaetano, and Lisa Knight—delve into the complicated, sometimes troubling, situations that arise when research depends on long-term, interpersonal interactions far from home. All three scholars are responding to exhortations that anthropologists interrogate their own positionality as they analyze and interpret what happens in their fieldsites. The authors move beyond a narrow view of fieldsite and fieldwork as they discuss years-long periods spent in many parts of China (Gaetano), Bangladesh and India (Knight), and Japan (Runestad). Gendered dynamics are woven throughout their accounts, foregrounded at times and less overtly discussed at others, but always an important element of the work. Such gender dynamics involve not only the identity and interactions of the researcher, they also encompass broad power relations among people from different places.

Anthropological research depends on an immersive approach called *participant observation*. Often traced back to Polish researcher Bronislaw Malinowski, who

became effectively stranded on the Trobriand Islands for years because of European colonial allegiances in the Pacific during World War I, participant observation typically requires lengthy stays in host communities (Malinowski 1922). According to the classic version of participant observation, staying two seasons is better than staying one, but staying five or more seasons is ideal. The thinking goes that a visitor will only begin to understand what she witnesses and lives through the first time she experiences it. After experiencing it a second time, deeper analysis becomes possible and replaces the conjectures that emerged after the initial encounter. For example, helping with the corn harvest and discussing the process with other harvesters may yield insights about gendered divisions of labor and the mechanics of work. But perhaps the rituals surrounding the harvest, and the dynamics of labor exchanges among households, which allow the harvest to happen quickly, will be missed until the anthropologist participates a second or third time.

Accomplishing foreign stays of over a year requires substantial funding. Long-term stays, now often divided over periods of many years, also present both opportunities for developing relationships and challenges for balancing personal and professional commitments (cf. Cornet and Blumenfield 2015). Many times, these lines become blurred and intertwined, as one might expect from an immersive experience. Ethnographic fieldwork, with its requirement that researchers spend significant time developing rapport and getting to know people in the research site, is a deeply personal endeavor.

Ethnographic research has historically been idealized as an activity to be practiced in a 'blank slate' situation, in a place where few outsiders have gone before, so that something of a hero-narrative can be produced for a rapt audience: "I was the first white person who ever laid eyes upon these people, and now I will tell you all about them" (cf. Malinowski 1922, Levi-Strauss 1974). This rather masculinist practice, linked closely to colonialism and imperialist imaginaries, has mostly faded away, thankfully, and anthropologists nowadays are more likely to discuss the complexities of interacting in a space already populated with other researchers and representers, such as media workers.

In her article in this issue, Knight discusses the challenges of conducting research with a loosely organized group of people, the Bauls, given that previous writing and research had exoticized and sometimes eroticized that group. The Baul people's expectations for the behavior of researchers, in turn, often conflicted with Knight's own ideas for how she wished to proceed. As she discovered in some uncomfortable situations, Baul men and women held different expectations for female researchers. In the end, probing the different effects of these preconceptions on Knight's research led to some intriguing new analyses, presented in this article.

Gaetano likewise offers a fascinating account of how her own personal journey as a white woman in China intersected with her professional research interests on gender, migration, labor, and mobility. Her frank account of a research trajectory punctuated by some dubious advances by senior male colleagues and her own emotional involvements with her students as a university instructor in her pre-anthropologist days highlight the precarity of a profession that requires "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998). Gaetano also points out that her own experiences enhanced her understanding of the situations and challenges faced by young women workers and others who she studied.

Finally, in an auto-ethnographic article, Runestad highlights the influence that one's personal life course can have on seemingly distinct topics. Like many doctoral students, Runestad took advantage of the relatively flexible period following formal dissertation research to have a child. Unlike many students, Runestad decided to remain in Japan during the dissertation-writing period, which coincided with her pregnancy and childbirth. The experience of pregnancy, itself a highly gendered and viscerally embodied process, transformed Runestad from a detached observer to a patient. While her research topic of HIV does not, at first glance, appear closely related to childbirth, Runestad found that the shift in perspective gave her important new insights into the healthcare system she had studied in Japan. She notes that the strategic vulnerability (Behar 1996) this shift engendered through her embodied experiences became important to her analysis and provided the foundations for a future research project.

Taken together, the articles in the special section demonstrate that ethnographic fieldwork is a very particular type of work, and that examining the roles that gender, sexuality, and family play within fieldwork offers critical insights. Ethnographic fieldwork sometimes comes under fire from academics who scorn it as insufficiently objective. Such scholars decry research designs that do not resemble the careful, controlled experimentation of laboratory research, and they question the applicability of ethnographic fieldwork results. But those who embrace ethnography counter that only through a combination of techniques, including subjective, relationship-driven methods, can we learn what happens in the interstices of everyday life, and often discover information that is vitally important to understanding the place itself. For example, what effects are much-vaunted policies actually having? Why does hunger cling so stubbornly to a village despite efforts at state intervention? How can local belief systems be integrated with national curricula, or can they only persist outside the formal school system?

Beyond these applied anthropological instances, through ethnography we can also better understand and compare the fundamentals of human societies, learning what may be innate and what may change from one place to the next. Careful ethnographic research in many parts of the world has helped us understand that spiritual beliefs in some form are universal, that every society has some form of incest taboo—though what that taboo looks like varies—and that most societies assign gender roles to men and women, but that sex-based roles and expectations vary enormously throughout the world (Stone 2014). While findings are often influenced by the anthropologist's own assumptions, and theories supported by one generation of scholars may be rejected by the next, over time we have developed a complex, nuanced understanding of many elements of human society. Including our own narratives, while carefully navigating the boundary between over-sharing and under-analyzing, only deepens this understanding.

That said, it is also necessary to point out that these three articles alone do not represent a comprehensive look at every important dimension of gendered interactions in ethnographic research. That would require additional attention to issues not fully interrogated in these articles, particularly whiteness, queerness, masculinity,

and intersectionality. These topics have been explored elsewhere at length, but as C. Michelle Kleisath has urged, infusing discussions of whiteness into statements of positionality, along with an analysis of the effects of this element of a researcher's interactions in places often glossed as 'non-Western,' is an important corrective (Kleisath 2013). Somehow, and somewhat perplexingly, the increased focus on writing about gender within anthropology has also become a sort of feminized academic labor (cf. McKinney 2014). Thus we close with an entreaty that introspective examinations like those presented by Gaetano, Knight, and Runestad also be offered by a broader cross-section of researchers, so that additional perspectives can strengthen those presented here. One can imagine, for example, a rich discussion by Asia-based anthropologists and gender theorists, especially those operating from within a different set of gender frameworks. Perhaps such conversations can appear in a subsequent issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange*.

### Special Section Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers who provided helpful, thorough feedback on the articles that appear in this special section. I also want to thank *ASIANetwork Exchange* Editors Erin McCarthy and Lisa Trivedi for their patient guidance throughout the editing process. Finally, I thank the contributors for sharing their work and for risking making themselves vulnerable in the process.

Tami Blumenfield, Guest Editor

### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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**How to cite this article:** McCarthy, E, Trivedi, L and Blumenfield, T 2016 Notes from the Editors. *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 23(1), pp. 1–8, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ane.179>

**Published:** 01 March 2016

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