

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

For people around the world, 2020 was a year of unprecedented disruption. In January, whispers of a potentially deadly novel coronavirus (COVID-19) originating in the city of Wuhan, in the Chinese province of Hebei, began infiltrating international news headlines. Ease of travel and global networks of exchange enabled the virus to spread quickly across borders, and what was once regarded a distant threat became an imminent crisis and concern for populations, governments, and healthcare institutions around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020—a designation that would empower governing bodies to implement and more strictly enforce public health protocols and social gathering restrictions intended to slow the spread of illness. Words and phrases such as “social distance,” “isolation,” and “quarantine”—all *antonyms* of connection—became commonplace in our everyday vocabulary. And yet, in what has often felt like a long and lonely year, alternative and innovative ways to connect have emerged and been increasingly normalized. On the one hand, we may find the most familiar spaces and faces of our closest companions to be distant, inaccessible, and beyond reach. On the other hand, we find ourselves facing similar circumstances and searching for solutions to the same problems as people we may have never felt we had much in common with before (culturally, geographically, or otherwise). On a daily basis, individuals are encouraged to consider how their choices and agency impact a larger societal whole. We are routinely asked to act in the interest of a “greater good” in order to ensure the health and safety of those most vulnerable, marginalized, and predisposed to illness in our communities. And so, while some ways of being connected are profoundly disrupted, others are illuminated.

2020 also gave rise to thriving ecological and social justice movements in Canada that constituted their own forms of connectedness. We witnessed thousands of participants from across the nation come together to take part in peaceful protests and occupations in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en land defenders and leaders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Such events demanded the attention and engagement of both citizens and people in positions of political authority alike. These demonstrations—and the important discussions they inspired both on and offline—made visible the kinds of present-day connections that are reified through expressions of allyship, while also centering peoples' connectedness to ancestral lands and cultural teachings. In order to effectively address contemporary concerns (eg., discriminatory present-day policies, laws, and policing practices) and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future, it must first be understood how specific histories of oppression, displacement, and dispossession have enabled ongoing systematic violence perpetrated against Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) by the settler-colonial state. In reflecting on various events of the past year, it becomes pertinent how the connections and relationships that fundamentally form people's individual and shared cultural worldviews extend across both spatial and temporal dimensions.

## AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONNECTIONS

The connections we make with various people, objects, places, and other living and non-living beings critically shape our view and understanding of the world, as well as inform our sense of identity, purpose, and belonging within it. In anthropology, one is inspired to explore the relations between various facets of a culture, as no one phenomena exists within a vacuum, nor can it be understood devoid of context; everything anthropologists study is part of a larger conversation, one that evokes both past and present understandings, particular histories, as well as shared attitudes and beliefs. Archaeologically, we can unearth material remains that depict a point of articulation between the past and present or consider how our visions of the past affect the views of ourselves and our place in the world today. Biologically, we can determine how our actions affect our musculo-skeletal system, or how strongly human DNA connects us to one another despite the wide variety of phenotypes we see globally. Socio-cultural anthropology can examine how historical

processes and thoughts affect the present and how we connect with one another or other non-human entities in modern times. Recalling the focus of anthropological inquiry, the editors of PlatForum's 18th edition invited a range of creative and critical submissions engaging the theme of "human connections." In particular, we encouraged contributions that took an *applied* approach as a way of emphasizing how anthropological knowledge can be shared beyond academia and implemented into practice to transform everyday lives, challenge dominant narratives, and broaden perspectives in the public sphere.

## SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS

In her article "*Through a Lens of Connection*," Chelsea Klinker critically examines the ontological turn in anthropology in which scholars shifted from doing "objective" research "of" a certain culture to doing public anthropology, where scholars actually connect and collaborate with research participants for the benefit of the community rather than the scholar's career. Chelsea pays particular attention to how visual anthropology is aptly suited to bridge the epistemological gap between academia and the public, while at the same time challenging the hegemonic power dynamics in dominant discourse.

In her paper, "*In The Absence of Blood: Forming Kinship Ties Through Religious Belief*" Hilary Ho weaves together both personal and theoretical insights to explore the emotional bond shared between blood and non-blood relatives. Using the example of the relationship between her own mother and her biological and foster grandmothers, Hilary examines the role of religious belief and cultural expectations of filial piety as a means of honouring and reifying kinship ties.

In his auto-ethnographic paper entitled, "*Enhancing the Call of Place and Entangling Identities: A Braiding of Materials, Media, and Infrastructures to Place and Being*," Kikila Perrin reflects on his own experiences and positionality as a settler-activist of predominantly European descent engaging in environmental and land-based decolonial movements in both Canada and Aotearoa (New Zealand). He discusses the role that particular materials (a lava rock), media (a song), and infrastructures (ceremony) play in sustaining his connection to places he may be geographically distanced from.

Rae Dias' "*Tree Climbing and the Locomotive Connection Between Past and Present Hominins*" critically examines scholarly discussions of locomotion among our hominin ancestors. Specifically, Rae argues that the scholarly focus on bipedalism disconnects modern humans from previous hominins while suggesting that humans have somehow been "released" from nature due to their ability to walk on two legs. In reality, the hominin proclivity for arborality remains to this day, cementing anatomically modern humans' connections with nature and past hominins.

Drawing on ethnographic interviews conducted at a shelter in Ontario, Kate Elliot highlights the connections made between women who experience homelessness in her article entitled "*Using Sociality to Manage Health Amongst Women Experiencing Homelessness.*" In the everyday conversations these women share, they contest dominant neoliberal narratives that would have others believe they are responsible for their own plight while perpetuating cycles of structural violence that prevent them from escaping it.

Carole Therrien shares with our readers her interpretation and critique of Welborne et al.'s (2018) book, *The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States*. Her book review dives into Welborne et al.'s assessment of immigrant and refugee Muslim-American women's personal, social, religious, and political identities, highlighting the challenges of cultural citizenship and "belonging" in a globalized world. The hijab is cited as the means by which Muslim-American women create these varied identities and show their connection to both American values and their faith.

Moustapha Faye evaluates the humanitarian response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in his paper "*Ebola Virus Epidemic in West Africa in 2014: Senegal Standing the Test of Global Health Diplomacy.*" He pays particular attention to how the neocolonial nature of the relationship between humanitarian organizations and those affected by the epidemic impacted virus response and treatment afforded to those afflicted. In this sense, Moustapha is engaging with connections between the past and present and the connections between various countries in this globalized world.

## CONCLUSION

The 2019-2020 PlatForum editorial team welcomes you to the 18th edition of our publication. As the longest running student-organized Anthropology publication in Canada, we strive to create an accessible and open platform providing all Canadian anthropology graduate students the opportunity to contribute. In volume 18, we continue the tradition of featuring the works of students from a cross-section of Canadian universities.

The editors extend thanks to all those who contributed to the making of this issue –in particular, we would like to recognize our authors, cover illustrator, and team of peer reviewers, who through this difficult year continued to put in the hard work involved in bringing this journal to fruition. We are grateful for the new connections and relationships we have built along the way.

We invite our readers to read, reflect, and connect.

Sincerely,

Jenna Hendrick & Rebecca Duerksen

*The PlatForum Editorial Team, Vol. 18*