



Introduction

BECOMING ANTHROPOLOGISTS AMIDST MULTILAYERED PRECARITIES

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Writing an introduction for a dossier whose theme is precarity is precarious itself. Where do we even start with queering precarity, in a personal but also anthropological way, without falling into the trap of over-romanticizing multi-layered personal struggles and writing nothing but pure rants? Does anthropology really acknowledge the fact that doing it, especially these days, has become more precarious with the neoliberalization of the universities, the capitalization of ‘diversity’ in university marketing for monetary gains, and its still far-fetched decolonization? How effective are these decolonization efforts when the initiatives to exert them are supported by Western ‘charity’ that still serves dominant political and ontological interests?

These very same questions, with precarity felt and lived by us in graduate school significantly, sometimes viscerally, are enough to craft a gentle but honest queering and accounts of our own experiences as young anthropologists. Perhaps it is not at all tough to queer precarity when it is so close to our mind, heart, and stomach. It is not so daunting at all to think how hard it is to do ethnographic fieldwork without funding when we ourselves experienced it, spending the weekends working on part-time jobs to gather funds for our research. It is not as laborious to problematize how hard it is to write on something we are new, and with little supervision, because we have been there and done that. Indeed, there is no escaping, no unseeing, and no stopping in thinking through these things.

This has been our prompt to think about a call that would gather a myriad of those experiences, to see what lies before, in the middle, and beyond them. When we wrote what we aimed for this thematic dossier proposal and showed it to the people who organize *Revista Zabelê*, they immediately embraced the idea. We were confident that many people would send us their reflections. Aiming for a wider audience, especially targeting those who come from postcolonial societies, we shared the call everywhere in Portuguese, Spanish, and English as early as January 2024. We did it in forums such as *AnthropologyMatters* — known for being a community of anthropologists around the globe — Facebook groups, Instagram, and Twitter — and we even saw a tweet sharing the call that had more than 100 likes. We were enthusiastic at first, thinking that perhaps our theme did strike many, and there was to be a relatively high number of submissions.

Aside from a visual essay, by June we had no article approved. One submission was rejected, and two works did not enter the dossier theme. We were baffled. We didn’t know what to do. We found it strange, considering that in any conversation with people who are doing anthropology, they always shared the experiences and issues linked to what we expected to see in the dossier. Still, no one was sending anything. We asked ourselves: Is it because it is in a student journal? Is it because it is organized by two students who just finished their masters outside the ‘great centers’ of global academia? Is it because we did not share it enough? Or is it because we do not have the practice, and the means, to turn “scientific” or “ethnographic” our processes of becoming anthropologists, often under precarious circumstances? Or because many people may feel oppressed, discouraged, and vulnerable when they think about reflecting on and making public personal processes that can often be compromising?

In casual conversations about doing research and in academic work, we often discuss the importance of reflexivity, the relentless grip of hierarchies, and issues of colonialism,



racism, sexism, classism, and the many “isms,” because we are often referring to other fields, people, and communities. However, when it comes to situations that concern us — anthropologists in training — and that affects us directly, despite their direct links to our being, it is not as common for us to make such daunting theorizations. If we can deal with dangerous, compromising, vulnerable topics and ethical matters when researching a myriad of themes, with different people and other-than-humans, why can't we do the same thing with ourselves vis-a-vis our training processes in anthropology as to make them anthropological/ethnographic/scientific?

We could ask so many questions about what surrounds our project. And the more we ask, the more entangled things become.

Stuck in the global north: when the organizers meet

In the countless times that we talked about our struggles being graduate students abroad, what we always found fascinating is how our backgrounds and experiences intersect; how we share tons of things in common, considering that we come from opposite sides of the planet: Brazil and the Philippines. One thing is evident: our ‘quest’ for something ‘new,’ irrespective of its nature, led us both to the Global North.

I (Venes) am not homegrown in anthropology. Coming from Philosophy, my main issue with my undergraduate discipline is mainly theoretical: with the ever-growing problems in the Filipino society, how come that Philosophy still mostly thinks things through with books? This may, of course, be disputed, but I think what greatly drew me to anthropology is mainly its method: producing knowledge by being with, and *thinking-with* (Haraway, 1997; 2000; Haraway and Goodeve, 2000) humans and other-than-humans. Far from theorizing like the Medieval thinkers who philosophize while the Holy Spirit hovers over them, anthropologists do it plain and (not-so) simple: participant observation and ethnography. With this, and stumbling upon a foreign scholarship for master's studies abroad, I embarked into this new discipline away from home, in a country I only knew through books. As for Hitalo, it is a different story.

My (Hitalo) bachelor's is in Social Sciences, but I have the feeling that I only got to understand what ‘being with’ and ‘thinking-with’ can mean in knowledge production when I started my master's in anthropology at the Universidade Federal do Piauí in Brazil back in 2020. Through Covid-19's troubling times, I withdrew from my graduate studies in 2021, because many precarities were affecting me, during what was to be my last semester. So I also embarked on this still-new discipline away from home, in a country that had never crossed my mind.

The two of us met through a Master's in Cultural Anthropology program at a Hungarian university. One of us started the program ahead of the other, but that single year that we spent together in the same program, city, and even dormitory, was marked by the never-ending discussions we had about our processes of becoming anthropologists— as non-white, and poor bixas — ‘deviating’ from many things made socially ‘conventional’ in a White and straight society.

Living in Europe seems like a lofty experience, and we are cutting things short, except that it is not. For many of us from the Global South, our career and life prospects seem to be so centered on the idea that “the Global North has it” that despite the uncertainty, we leave

the relative comfort of our countries and dive into uncharted waters. The West, through its colonial-imperial projects, has (and still does) accumulated wealth in its coffers that we long to partake of its richness. “The Global North has it” surely has a grain of truth in it because it does, and we seek after it. Daniel Immerwahr (2019) accurately posits: today, we still have imperialism in our midst. The plight in search of greener pastures, with the Anthropocene and the social transformations that surround it, becomes as tough as ever. We have been thus drawn to the Global North, only to find ourselves stuck in its socio-political circumstances which, most if not all the time, envelops in it foreign nationals, especially those who come from the Global South. For those who are able to strive and survive there, the going just gets tough each day.

Coming from different positionalities, our opinions surely diverged on many issues, but one thing was certain: how we operate under the shadow of colonialism, and we resist it by living in confluent and alternative ways. If how we ‘know’ has been largely shaped by these certain colonial ‘knowledges’ influencing our frameworks in thinking things through, now we argue otherwise. Inspired by Antonio Bispo dos Santos’ (2008: 48) contra-colonial view, we consider our processes of becoming in and outside academia as matters of resistance, to defend and combat our symbols, significations, and ways of living. Experiencing these multi-layered precarities because of the post and neocolonial structures in which we find ourselves as young adults and anthropologists, the only way to better articulate our response to precarities in neoliberal academe — and to better show how while its claws may still be latching our ‘colored’ necks we do not become passive subjects of oppression — is to do something about it; to react. Thus the entire theme of this journal dossier.

7 To react: the stuff for survival

“Don’t we need to locate ourselves and our projects more precisely and consistently?” expressed Lila Abu-Lughod (2000: 261) in *Locating Ethnography*. Don’t we need to practice “writing against culture” (Abu-Lughod, 1996) when thinking about our processes of becoming anthropologists in academic configurations? — a culture that with all the prestige and possibilities has its perils of crystalized and institutionalized bureaucracy, power, and oppression, easily swallowing people’s perceptions of their academic, and sometimes precarious, journeys.

reactions: When a university prides itself on its ‘internationalization’ or ‘integration’ but fails to address the very basic needs of its students — such as with the lack of language-competent health practitioners that can properly communicate with international students; or with racism within universities premises, to name a few — we rise to the situation and bravely deal with bureaucracy and hypocrisy. When we receive little to no supervision, we open the issue up with our professors. When we are financially crippled and sometimes literally starving, we do not hide our conditions and instead make the university know about it. We do so because as anthropologists, we believe that our contribution to knowledge production is largely informed by our more practical and personal experiences. “We locate ourselves and our projects”, Abu-Lughod could not have been any more precise.

Some life themes might really be taboo to be discussed. But if this taboo hinders us from asking for better conditions and perpetrate ‘diversity capitalization’ by academic institutions, then we rather make ourselves vulnerable than be accessories to the cycle of (not



at all) subtle oppression. We follow Laura Nader's (1972) argument on the necessity of "studying up" (and down and sideways) our society, problems, powers, and structures' intricacies. Here, through, in, and with anthropology. We do so to finally describe, analyze, theorize, and act on practices or attitudes — sometimes considered "common" and part of an untouchable bureaucracy of educational institutions and curricula — that rely on colonial traps. To go beyond and through these traps requires us to NOT fall under the numbness of acknowledging the discipline of anthropology as

an intrinsically racist, colonialist enterprise (...) to convince its practitioners that it couldn't possibly be anything else (...) [because, and foremost,] these acts of self-condemnation can be seen as a subtle kind of taking possession; after all treating a body of accumulated knowledge as fundamentally tainted, as your dirty little secret, is still treating it as your dirty little secret (Graeber, 2014: 81)

So we react. With Sarah Ahmed's (2010) work on happiness, we conceptualize precarity as a tool of the oppressor and the motor of compliance. And we vehemently counter these. We echo Gustavo Lins Ribeiro's (2022) view of decolonization as a *longue-durée* process, and we acknowledge that our quest to dissolve the (neo) colonial structures that cause our precarities still necessitates a lot of work. This dossier is a contribution. We put ourselves here and out there, with the trouble.

The dossier

This journal dossier gathers thought-provoking works from fellow anthropologists from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Hungary. In this collection, just like the European priests who came to our lands through the colonial-imperial project, we are bringing our struggles to the altar of academic discourse and incense them with theories that we have painstakingly learned in academically squalid conditions. In response to subtle (and many times not-so-subtle) oppressions, ours is that of Lorgia García Peña (2022): rebellion.

The dossier consists of two articles, three short essays, one visual essay, and one interview. The diversity — not the one marketed in university admissions — of the contributions here, coming from various positionalities and experiences, mostly from South America, reflects the scale to which our theme: *Becoming Anthropologist Amidst Multi-Layered Precarities*, resonates with many. It also reflects precarity as a dynamic concept (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016), considering that ambivalent and multilayered conditions might generate numerous and non-binary configurations.

The first article, *Tornar-se Etnóloga Indigenista: Relato do Primeiro Antropólogo Graduado na UFSC*, written by Jefferson Virgílio, critically exposes the perils of precarious training in anthropology through a reflection based on both the analysis of the introduction of a doctoral thesis in anthropology and on their own experiences during their training in anthropology and Indigenous ethnology. The article presents us with a dense and forceful analysis of anthropology as a discipline in Brazil by considering a series of cases related to its institutionalization — exposing both the lack of effective recognition and the lack of ethical, methodological, empirical, and theoretical depth present in academic training in anthropology; and the influence of non-professional and endogamous relationships in curricula, selection processes, fields of research, and within the Brazilian Anthropology Association itself — and their consequent theoretical, methodological, ethical, and legal

implications. Addressing, for instance, the responsibility and impacts of the work of ethnologists with and about Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, Virgílio informs us of the legal relevance that technical and ethnographic reports have in judicial decisions to warn us about the catastrophic consequences — harming the rights and lives of people and communities — that can be generated by research developed with lack of rigor and methodological, empirical, theoretical and ethical profundity. The article serves as a deep critique of the precarity of the multifaceted nature of doing anthropology inside and from its institutionalized frameworks and spaces. It directs us to rethink the contingencies of our processes of becoming, engagements, and actions.

Hitalo Ricardo Alves Pereira writes the second article in the dossier named *Between worlds and precarities: doing anthropology with microbes*, reflecting on precarities based on their involvement with microbes in Brazil and Hungary, between 2020 and 2024, together with the consequent influences of such relationships on their training in anthropology. Using autoethnography, Pereira retraces some of their experiences: from 2020 to 2021, with their entry and eventual withdrawal from the Master's degree in Anthropology at Universidade Federal do Piauí, Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic — a time when they were affected and influenced by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, molds, and natural yeasts. And from 2022 to 2024, moving to Hungary with the intention of, again, pursuing a master's degree in anthropology, — being caught up with intestinal dysbiosis while, at the same time, developing their master's thesis on the relationships between humans and the fungus *Botrytis Cinerea* in the production of wines in Tokaj, Hungary. Their article, weaving empirical data with a theoretical path on what has been named “anthropology of/with microbes”, shows us how different, dynamic, and complex human-microbe entanglements can point out to larger-scale issues: precarities in government systems, including health and education; and forms of survival with other-than-humans within and outside anthropology based on an “education of attention” (Ingold, 2016).

The three short essays that make up this dossier also offer us beautiful and provocative contributions regarding the precarities that permeate the training of anthropologists, in these cases, in Colombia and Mexico. At a time when social sciences are increasingly seen as less and less contributory to the capitalist machine, **Susana Echeverri Agudelo**, with her essay *En Busca de Experiencia Laboral: La Elección de Realizar Prácticas por Parte de Los Estudiantes de Antropología de la Universidad de Antioquia*, reflects on how anthropology is challenged to continually claim its societal relevance. The author shows us how the training of anthropology students at the Universidad de Antioquia, in Colombia, has been increasingly influenced by market demands and by legal policies that encourage young Colombians to seek work experience during their undergraduate studies. Agudelo presents us with a variety of testimonies from students that point to the need for better strategies to ensure the much-relevant inclusion of work practices in anthropology curricula. The essay discusses how these anthropologists in training, when seeking insertion in the job market, were challenged by curricular inconsistencies and insufficient preparation from the university, department, and companies. These inconsistencies ranged from the lack of theoretical and methodological instructions on the scope of the job market to the lack of supervision in the search for and performance in these spaces.

In their theoretically and poetically moving essay, *Maricx-Afrx Latinoamericana: Unicornios y Otros Demonios Blancos*, **Leiner Navarro Jiménez** takes us on a hypertextual



and sensorial experience by illustrating their paths in anthropology and life as a proud marica negra. In the text, Jiménez argues for an anthropology in other modes, based on black and LGBTQIAP+ experiences and identities — especially those of maricas negras — constructed and moved by different contradictions, intersections, violence, and loving, erotic, and intellectual practices that generatively deconfigure binarisms. A disruptive anthropology that develops theories, methodologies, and advocates for “adopting an epistemological, aesthetic and ethical proposal” centered on creativity and united with art — also coming from the lives of marica negras as part of the LGBTQIAP+ community. While they may be constantly marginalized, violated, and subjected to ridicule, these people brilliantly generate other ways of living, knowing, researching, studying, learning, and loving.

As for the journal’s third short essay *Depresión y ansiedad en crisis: aislamiento y sus repercusiones en la salud mental, vida social y problemáticas culturales en el estudiantado jalisco*, **Vania Dolores Ortiz Ruiz** reflects on her research on the psychosocial effects, generated by and in the Covid-19 pandemic, about the trajectory of social science students at the University of Guadalajara in Jalisco, Mexico. By conducting a digital ethnography during the difficult times of the pandemic, the author shows us how her own inquiry with students — which argues for multidisciplinary dialogues regarding the debate on psychological disorders and criticizes the systemic time of capitalism — provided her hope, engagement, and possibilities of permanence with and in anthropology during the uncertainties and fears that came with the pandemic.

Drawing life alongside precarities, **Ana Clara Damásio**, with her visual essay *Precarities of life: creating drawings*, shows us how her journey researching with and about her family — and their dynamics in seeking better living conditions — made her have deep reflections on how precarious structures have been shaping lifelines, and are involved in the creation of intersecting asymmetries of gender, race, class, and spatial configurations, inside and outside the university.

Lastly, we present an *interview* with the Hungarian anthropologist **Dr. Veronika Lajos**, where she discusses different matters of precarities and how she finds her ways through them. Lajos shares with us her paths in anthropology, as well as her views on Hungarian Anthropology and its institutionalization, the start of English graduate studies in anthropology in the country, and the entrance of international students into such programs.

We hope that this dossier can encourage and inspire more students, professors, and researchers in the field of anthropology to reflect, queer, and investigate further the processes that people get into to become anthropologists. We believe that now, more than ever, anthropology should be concerned about the costs and consequences of remaining passive in the face of multifaceted precarities that confront its practitioners, and at what expense does one become an anthropologist.

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