

Sounding the alarm

Notes from the Editor-in-Chief Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier

With Associate Editors, Sue Frohlick and Karoline Truchon

In the fall of 2023, we launched a special call for papers titled “Sounding the alarm” for *Anthropologica*’s newest section, “Seedings,” a section dedicated to planting and growing ideas related to current events and debates. Even though we launched our call to “sound the alarm” over a year ago, it is frightening to realize how relevant it is today, perhaps even more so than it was then. Let’s look back. Summer 2023 was officially the hottest on record everywhere in the world. In Canada, the 2023 wildfire season was the most destructive remembered, “like no other year, by a stupendous margin”¹ with more than 6,500 wildfires reported by the beginning of September. But Canada was not the only country with these terrifying figures. Unparalleled wildfires in the northern hemisphere destroyed millions of acres of boreal forests, including in Russia, Greece, Portugal and Maui, Hawaii. As we write these lines, thousands of firefighters are still battling the flames in densely populated Los Angeles County. Wildfires are now anticipated calamitous events that the government, people, and survivors must, sooner or later, prepare to fight. Yet, wildfires are striking evidence—a clear alarm bell—that we are losing ground in this quickly and dramatically changing world.

The fires are among the events that first incited us to launch this call. But they are not the only ones. The coordinated deadly attacks in Israel led by the Islamist militant group Hamas on October 7, 2023, provoked a military riposte in the Gaza Strip. After fifteen months of fighting, a ceasefire and hostage release agreement came into force between Israel and Qatar. As Palestinians begin their return to the north of Gaza, they face ruins and devastated villages, among other painful realities of this genocide. When considering violence and wars in the world, reports² show that we are witnessing a historic rise in global conflict, with

deadly wars, particularly in Ukraine, Sudan and Ethiopia. Those conflicts create ripple effects around the world, and the media relays this information straight into our hands as we scroll through our favourite app. Sounding the alarm further evokes the contemporary moment of misinformation and alarmism. Thus, it calls our attention to the ever-present worry of scaremongering as well as the potentiality of whistle-blowing.

An alarm refers to a noise, a signal, an action that announces the presence of danger and threats or that serves to wake a person up, from slumber or, perhaps, apathy. Alarms act as the impetus for action and movement. Sounding the alarm may encourage people to speak up, take a stance, and also take action. It may force some to escape and find ways to survive, and others to act in solidarity. Sounding the alarm does not usually leave people indifferent, it stimulates reflection and actions and may drive people to care and be empathetic. Sounding the alarm may provoke the emergence of new ways of thinking and being in the world. It may also incite people to become activists and to revolt. What do alarms generate (or not), how do people react, get organized and mobilized? Or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, do alarm messages coerce and paralyze? And how do racial, gender, class and age factors impact how people react and cope with alarms? People of colour are disproportionately affected by climate change, yet some suggest that climate anxiety is overwhelmingly a White phenomenon.³ As Donald Trump's new office targets scientists, migrants, women, transgenders, and vulnerable groups, people rally on social media, in their community, at their public libraries in the hopes of a better, more inclusive and equitable future. As such, alarm sounds abound; they act as continuous "wake up calls," we just need to listen to better react. Sounding the alarm also brings us to ask: Who or what launches the messages of threat? To whom? And for what purpose? Also, which communication strategies and platforms are used to spread the word?

We received six fascinating and diverse submissions in response to our call (three of which are in French). Nakeya Giroux-Works raises the alarm about climatic plantations in Quebec's eastern region, aimed at offsetting the emissions of people in this area. Giroux-Works proposes a critical evaluation of the benefits of carbon offsetting and the trees planted in civilian society. Consuelo Biskupovic, Béatrice Maurines and Mélanie Autin discuss how Chileans are multiplying their actions to respond to the environmental crisis, in what they refer to as "Sounding the alarm quietly." Their manuscript concentrates on seed-saving ancestral knowledge and projects transitioning to

agroecology in the south of Chile. In *Petrophonics*, David Janzen and Reuben Martens dig into what they call the “sonic and vibrational byproducts of fossil fuel.” Their piece, which focuses on traffic noise to articulate the definition of petrophonics, contributes to a gap in sound studies. Snyder's Jessico Betombo, Mitsou Raharivelo and Andrew Walsh look into Madagascar's HIV crisis. Based on the findings of a survey conducted by patients in a clinic, they expand on what we know and do not know about HIV transmission in this particular context. They further explain why the elevated rate of infection is a cause for alarm. In this issue, we publish our first graphic story, a collaborative project between Sandrine Lambert, Lucie Perron and Oriol Blas Guinovart. In this ethnographic-fiction story, an anthropologist engaging with the artefacts of the makerspace in Barcelona reflects on her transformative journey of research fabrication. In their graphic story, it is the artefacts that sound the alarm of ingenuity. To complete our call, we invited Daria Boltokova to look into the future and extrapolate on what Indigenous oral languages could look (or sound) like in fifty years. Boltokova took our invitation seriously and in this highly entertaining text, set in the future, she both playfully and intelligently sounds the alarm: written languages are disappearing at an alarming rate. Without siding with the alarmists of the future, though, Boltokova makes the original argument that oral languages are the most productive way to think about preserving knowledge transmission. A compelling way to think about Indigenous oral languages and how the future may unfold in unpredictable and hopeful ways.

In addition to the six manuscripts published in the “Sounding the Alarm” call, this issue includes an article by Aline Fonseca Iubel about the implications and complexities of the demarcation of the land in the Upper Rio Negro. In our Film and Exhibit Reviews section, Francine Saillant writes about the *Illumina* experiment, which took place in Québec City during the year 2022-2023. Emilie El Khoury's guest-invited reflection piece discusses the concept of terrorism from the discipline of anthropology and provides insights on how the discipline could prevent future violence. In our Ideas section, four colleagues (Alder Keleman Saxena, Noah Pleshet, Toby Leon Moorsom and Jesse Jonkman) respond to a stimulating text written by Daniel Tubb titled “In Praise of Makeshift Finishing,” which invites us to rethink what publishing is in anthropology.

On behalf of Anthropologica's editorial team, I would like to warmly thank Sue Frohlick, who has completed her term as Associate Editor for the journal.

We worked together for more than 4 years on more than eight issues! My heartfelt gratitude to Karoline Truchon, who also completed her mandate as Associate Editor of our journal. Both Sue and Karoline were behind the crafting of this call. As we go through a transition phase with the journal, we would like to thank our guest editors, authors and readers for their patience and for their support as we face some production delays. The new Editor-in-Chief of the journal will be announced in May 2025 at our CASCA annual meeting at McGill University. We hope to see you there!

Notes

- 1 Oliver Milman, “After a record year of wildfires, will Canada ever be the same again?,” *The Guardian* (9 November 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/09/canada-wildfire-record-climate-crisis>
- 2 Reported for instance by Adam Taylor in the *Washington Post*, “A historic rise in global conflict deaths suggests a violent new era,” (29 June 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/29/conflict-war-deaths-global-peace-rise-casualty/>
- 3 Sarah Jaquette Ray, “Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon,” *Scientific American* (21 March 2021), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety/?fbclid=IwAR3sduEUtaryuRmHm-65G2scFnf7lDmL8oi3lQZmFEZqSp29uvBxUKeMijYY>