

Colloquy



ANNE-MARIA B. MAKHULU

Duke University

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0289-6950>

CHRISTEN A. SMITH

University of Texas, Austin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0670-7907>

Although the numbers of Black women in anthropology are growing, and our contributions too (e.g., [Fields 1995](#); [McClaurin 2001](#); [Harrison 2008](#); [Bolles 2013](#); [Williams 2018](#)), Black women's scholarship remains relatively invisible in the field as a whole. This holds true despite efforts at recasting the discipline to acknowledge not only its origins in the colonial encounter but also to move beyond such acknowledgments to embrace the possibility of a decolonial discipline. And yet, the dominant voices remain relatively unchanged whether at the highest levels of the American Anthropological Association, on the editorial boards of the discipline's flagship journals, in university and college departments, or among those invited to deliver distinguished talks and conference keynotes (though this past year may have signaled a change).¹ This tension between the diversity of the membership and the prominence of some and not others drills down as deep as who is cited and who is not; who is included in an ever-emergent anthropological canon and who is not; and ultimately who and what is regarded as pathbreaking, ingenious, and dare one say, *theoretical* (i.e., a source of knowledge and abstraction rather than

raw data) (Smith and Garrett-Scott 2021).² Nowhere is this more evident than in the relative absence of Black women's names from the bibliographies and citational rituals of mainstream anthropology. This holds despite the transnational reach and scope of many working across Black Atlantic and diasporic geographies, as well as across extensive historical timelines that in other milieus would be understood as *longue durée* and hence intellectually robust.

Christen A. Smith's November 2017 founding of the #CiteBlackWomen movement, and its subsequent expansion through the Cite Black Women Collective, inaugurated a very public conversation about Black women's intellectual contributions.³ In this present moment of global protests against anti-Black racism, the race-gender project that is #CiteBlackWomen has been joined by #BlackInTheIvory. But as with the Movement for Black Lives, which has severally responded to the call for accountability in the killings of Black men by police or vigilantes—Ahmaud Arbery, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, George Floyd, Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, and Tamir Rice among them—Black women's experiences of police brutality and death have not generally inspired an immediate call to action, with the notable exception of #SayHerName (African American Policy Forum 2015). #BlackInTheIvory has rightfully drawn attention to the experiences of Black colleagues and students in the yet-to-be-fully-decolonized university: a university in which Black scholars confront stolen ideas and work products; reluctant acknowledgment of their insights, intelligence, and legitimacy; as well as the systematic diminution of Black labor and effort. The #CiteBlackWomen colloquy by contrast explicitly engages not only a general set of racial exclusions but also those converging at the intersection of race and gender to bring a renewed balance to conversations about righting historical wrongs that often reproduce gender inequities, even while attempting to correct racial ones (Smith et al. 2021).

Our colloquy takes up the paradox of Black women scholars' limited visibility in anthropology, moving away from directly addressing the methods and means of citation and toward laying out the *logics* of silencing and invisibilization that result as a consequence of Black women's disappearance from the text, parenthesis, footnote, endnote, and bibliography. At the same time, we acknowledge the overlap between the means and methods of citational erasure, and the means and methods of overcoming silencing and invisibilization.

bell hooks (1991, 153) tells us that Black women have been perceived as “all body, no mind,” as “service workers” and never thinkers. For those Black women committed to the intellectual project, the “work is a necessary part of liberation struggle, central to the efforts of all oppressed and/or exploited people who would

move from object to subject, who would decolonize and liberate their minds” (hooks 1991, 150). But, as Sara Ahmed has recently noted, “to pose a problem is to pose a problem.” And pushing conceptual and political boundaries runs the risk of undoing institutional knowledge-power, even as a kind of intellectual “vandalism” or “sabotage” may prove essential to getting a story out “into a wider world.”⁴ This colloquy tries to get those stories out in a double sense: one, because there are stories to tell; and two, because those stories rarely circulate as they should.

Our sistren in this endeavor represent severally and distinctly the challenges of being Black women intellectuals. We span the generations. Faye V. Harrison’s pioneering work as a leading Black anthropologist, prolific author, and advocate opens our colloquy. As editor of the 1997 volume on decolonial thinking in anthropology she anticipated so many others. Savannah Shange represents our greatest hope for a renewed and revitalized discipline attentive to a radical Black feminist methodology, to poesis *and* poiesis—that praxis of bringing something into being—even as she makes libations to our ancestors. Bianca C. Williams works on the Movement for Black Lives as well as in more recent scholarship campus social movements. Her institutional understandings force us to interrogate Black women scholars’ locations—their multiple positionings and corollary burdens, their split tenure lines and numerous loyalties. Christen A. Smith, alongside the Cite Black Women Collective, is the name behind the #CiteBlackWomen Movement from which the colloquy takes its title. Able to think Afro-descended life in the Americas both North and South and always reflecting on the *sequelae* of structural and physical violence, her contribution to this project is immeasurable, focusing on the relays of injury that begin in intellectual theft and conclude in wider citational refusal. Anne-Maria Makhulu is, in many respects, a fervent convert—later to the conversation yet generationally proximate to a time when the politics of recognition could not, as yet, fully encompass “the unthought” (Hartman and Wilderson 2003).

ABSTRACT

Anthropology continues to grapple with pervasive racism and sexism. Although we have made strides to distance ourselves from our colonial roots, our field remains dominated by white men. More pointedly, despite the diversity of our discipline, people of color generally, and Black women particularly, continue to be excluded from the anthropological canon. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relative absence of Black women from the bibliographies and citational rituals of mainstream anthropology. Although Black women have been practicing, theorizing, and revolutionizing North American anthropology since Zora Neale Hurston’s groundbreaking

work in the early twentieth century, they have remained largely excluded from our disciplinary conceptualizations of what constitutes serious anthropological theory. Inspired by the work of *Cite Black Women*, this colloquy critically examines the race and gender politics of citation in anthropology and the urgent need for anthropologists to reimagine “conceptual collaboration” to move our discipline toward justice. The anthropologist Lynn Bolles (2013) notes, “If the citation wars have meaning in the modern academy . . . then in both short and long runs African American scholars are/will be faceless and voiceless.” With the advent of the #MeToo movement and with increasing attention paid to the politics of authorship and representation inside and outside of the academy, this colloquy critically reflects on how anthropologists might re-think approaches to theory, methodology, conceptual framing, and pedagogy to bring Black women to the center of anthropological debates. [anthropology; Black women; citation; racism; sexism]

NOTES

1. In 2021, Faye V. Harrison delivered the opening Distinguished Lecture to the American Anthropological Association, while Akhil Gupta as president of the association delivered the Presidential Address.
2. Christen A. Smith and Dominique Garrett-Scott (2021) recently published a pilot study analyzing the citational rates for Black women in anthropology. This article also explores the very tensions within the discipline that we discuss here.
3. For more information on the Cite Black Women Collective, see Smith et al. 2021 and their website www.citeblackwomencollective.org.
4. Maya Binyam, “You Pose a Problem: A Conversation with Sara Ahmed,” *The Paris Review*, January 14, 2022, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2022/01/14/you-pose-a-problem-a-conversation-with-sara-ahmed/> (accessed January 24, 2022).

REFERENCES

- African American Policy Forum | Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies
 2015 *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women*. New York: African American Policy Forum | Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies.
- Bolles, Lynn
 2013 “Telling the Story Straight: Black Feminist Intellectual Thought in Anthropology.” *Transforming Anthropology* 21, no. 1: 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12000>
- Fields, Karen E., trans.
 1995 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, by Émile Durkheim. New York: Free Press.
- Harrison, Faye V.
 2008 *Outsider Within: Reworking Anthropology in the Global Age*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Harrison, Faye V., ed.
 1997 *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. 3rd edition. Arlington, Va.: American Anthropological Association.
- Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson III
 2003 “The Position of the Unthought.” *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2: 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.183>
- hooks, bell
 1991 “Black Women Intellectuals.” In *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*, edited by bell hooks and Cornel West, 147–64. Boston, Mass.: South End Press.

McClaurin, Irma, ed.

2001 *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Smith, Christen A., and Dominique Garrett-Scott

2021 "'We Are Not Named': Black Women and the Politics of Citation in Anthropology." *Feminist Anthropology* 2, no. 1: 18–37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12038>

Smith, Christen A., Erica L. Williams, Imani A. Wadud, and Whitney N. L. Pirtle

2021 "Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)." *Feminist Anthropology* 2, no. 1: 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12040>

Williams, Bianca C.

2018 *The Pursuit of Happiness: Black Women, Diasporic Dreams, and the Politics of Emotional Transnationalism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.