CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Colloquy

(RE)WRITING ANTHROPOLOGY AND RAISING OUR VOICES FROM THE ACADEMIC MARGINS

KIMBERLEY D. MCKINSON
Vanderbilt University
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5720-8441

What would it mean to rewrite anthropology from the academic margins, that is, from Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and other traditionally under-resourced institutions that nurture primarily underserved undergraduate populations? This question, which animates the essays that form this Colloquy, is undergirded by two critical provocations. First, the question positions anthropology as an incomplete epistemological project whose normative notions can be intentionally disrupted and intervened upon (Harrison 1991)—and thus rewritten. Second, the question does the important work of naming the academic margins and situating them as a problem for thought. For, indeed, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (2016) has rightly argued, "if there's no name for a problem, you can't see it. If you can't see it, you can't solve it." In the spirit of any true intellectual provocation, this question hopes to disorient and with that, compel an examination of the taken-for-granted. Yet it also means to prove generative and, in so doing, create a space for reorientation. In this way, the authors of this Colloquy have asked, "What would it mean to rewrite anthropology from the academic margins?" as a call to imagine anew the ontological possibilities of the academic margins to raise the voices of the so-called non-elite, predominantly minority, and low-income students—those

"outsiders within" (Harrison 2008) who have traditionally been taken to have less of a stake in anthropology's existential debates.

The distinction between center and margin is a defining master contrast that has long proved central to anthropology's cosmological framing. The margins are where anthropologists have been trained to *do* anthropology. Existing in contradistinction to the idea of the margin is home—that place rooted at the center of the anthropological universe where knowledge is produced. And yet, the margins remain central to how anthropology makes itself legible to the world. A significant number of anthropologists have theorized the positionality of the margins in relation to state power (Das and Poole 2004). Anthropologists have written about the politics of doing ethnography at the margins (Herzfeld 1987; Bošković 2008). Scholars have also sought to shed light on the marginalization and contributions of minority and women scholars in the discipline (Harrison and Harrison 1999; Harrison, Johnson-Simon, and Williams 2018; Lamphere 2004). This scholarship, produced in the wake of anthropology's reflexive turn, is informed by a self-conscious confrontation of anthropological subjectivity and a deep interrogation of the center and the margin in relation to structures of power as well as anthropology's own ties to systems of colonialism and imperialism. Virginia Dominguez (2012, 395), in her 2012 American Anthropological Association (AAA) presidential address, also points to another compelling rationale for this disciplinary preoccupation with margins, suggesting that "a persistent concern with marginalization, fragmentation, and even alienation constitutes [a] peculiar but powerful anthropological 'comfort zone.'" In light of this, she questions what it would mean for anthropologists to move beyond zones of comfort to instead dwell in zones of discomfort—and not just those "in the field."

The failure of anthropologists to effectively consider the institutional and pedagogical operationalization of the margin within the center represents a noteworthy blind spot and disciplinary zone of discomfort. That is, anthropologists have neglected to come to terms with the reinscription of the center/margin dichotomy at home, specifically, at the very places—universities and colleges—where academic anthropologists write anthropology and where, with their students, they perform the sacred and foundational acts of teaching and learning anthropology. In speaking to the localization of the margin at home, this Colloquy offers a view from the academic margins, a zone of discomfort. The essays respond to the call for anthropology to face up to the habitus of privilege and position and grapple with the social locations of students and professors (Waterston 2018). The authors offer MSIs as a critical point of departure to consider the myriad episte-

mological, ontological, and pedagogical possibilities that emerge when we center minority and low-income students and their scholarly engagement with anthropology at the academic margins.

In the United States, MSIs came into existence in response to historical inequities in minority access to higher education. The eight federally designated postsecondary MSIs include Alaska Native–Serving Institutions; Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs); Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs); Native American–Serving Non-Tribal Institutions; Native Hawaiian–Serving Institutions; Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs); and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs).[1] Each serves a critical role in the U.S. higher education landscape. They all provide tertiary education opportunities to primarily low-income and underrepresented students of color neglected by an American higher education system that has traditionally privileged Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). We cannot overstate the critical importance of MSIs to minority student academic success. For example, while HBCUs represent just 3 percent of all colleges and universities, they enroll 11 percent of African American students; while TCUs represent less than 1 percent of higher education institutions, they enroll 9 percent of Native American students; while HSIs represent only 4 percent of tertiary institutions, they enroll 50 percent of all Latino students; and while AANAPISIs represent less than 1 percent of all colleges and universities, they enroll 20 percent of all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. These institutions also provide intellectual homes for many low-income students whose lives intersect with deep histories of racism and poverty. Notably, 98 percent of African Americans and Native Americans who attend HBCUs or TCUs qualify for federal need-based aid. In addition, more than half of all students enrolled at MSIs receive Pell Grants, compared with only 31 percent of all college students (Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions 2014).

Put simply, MSIs enroll a significant number of students for whom higher education might otherwise have remained a foreclosed dream (Gasman and Conrad 2013). Though progress has been made in the name of making anthropology more racially inclusive, the discipline—at the undergraduate, doctoral, and professional levels—continues to exist as a white public space (Brodkin, Morgan, and Hutchinson 2011). This means that anthropologists who work at MSIs have a unique opportunity to expose minority students to the discipline and offer to them a critical anthropological lens through which to understand their own experiences, as well as the world around them.

The essays in this Colloquy build on a conversation that emerged during a roundtable session hosted during the AAA's 2020 Raising Our Voices virtual series that featured anthropologists working and teaching at four-year MSIs designated as AANAPISIs, HBCUs, and HSIs. Absent from the Colloquy are essays that showcase the experiences of scholars and students affiliated with two-year (community college)[2] or four-year Alaska Native–Serving Institutions, Native American-Serving Non–Tribal Institutions, Native Hawaiian–Serving Institutions, PBIs, and TCUs. Though these institutions and their students are not present in this collection, they undoubtedly also sit at the academic margins. Thus, these essays, even as they highlight critical voices from the academic margins, also illuminate the need for greater recognition of and scholarly engagement with an important number of minority-serving institutions that reside at the academic margins—yet face a double marginalization. That is, they are marginalized within the larger academic sphere as well as within conversations about MSIs.

In no uncertain terms, the killing of George Floyd in 2020, as well as the global protests against police brutality and white supremacy that followed, served as the backdrop for the earliest conversations motivating this Colloquy. In the wake of these events, many anthropologists called for a confrontation of the discipline's participation in epistemic violence and a shift in practice (McKinson 2020). In this spirit, the authors of the essays grapple with the decolonial (Harrison 1991), Black feminist (Bolles 2013), and liberatory (hooks 1994) possibilities of an anthropological shift in practice and whether or not this could only have implications for what has traditionally been understood as the anthropological margins, the premier locale of field work. The essays demand attention to another critical geography of anthropological practice—the classroom, the primary field site where anthropology is taught and learned at home. The authors fundamentally recognize that the post–George Floyd world that we now inhabit demands a willingness to seriously look to the MSI classroom as a space generative of the critical anthropological pedagogy and knowledge that the present moment demands. In therefore extending the collective thinking that originated during 2020, the essays in this collection have unapologetically centered the learning experiences of low-income minority students who make their intellectual homes at the academic margins.

In arguing for the transgressive potential of anthropological pedagogy, Angela C. Jenks draws attention to the radical possibilities of archival practice in the minority classroom. Through an elucidation of her students' engagement with Black archival materials concerning health social movements, she shows how fugitive archival practice can allow for a reconceptualization of anthropological

knowledge and link students' social action to collective liberation. Kimberley D. McKinson's essay positions auto-ethnography and photovoice as embodied pedagogical practices that enable minority students to take their own bodies and experiences as constitutive of evidence, analysis, and knowledge. Drawing on and analyzing her students' writing and photography, she demonstrates how attention to embodied knowledge can allow students to produce counterhegemonic knowledge in the classroom and agentively construct their own realities. Erica Lorraine Williams's essay brings the reader into the HBCU classroom and centers anthropological citation praxis. She shows how citing Black women, centering Black women's subjugated knowledges, and embracing interdisciplinarity in rewriting the anthropological canon can open up new epistemological possibilities. The final essay further extends the Colloquy's interrogation of the poetics and politics of language practice in the MSI classroom. In this essay, Shonna Trinch and Barbara Cassidy, writing alongside two of their students, Bianca Suazo and Jadeline Mallol Nunez, provide a portrait of *Seeing Rape*, a course and student-faculty collaborative theater project meant to eradicate sexual violence on campus. Their essay sheds light on the ways in which linguistic varieties and codes other than standard American (and academic) English in academia—often spoken by minority students—can dismantle patriarchy and disrupt hegemonic language practices often adhered to by faculty. While all the authors reveal practices employed in the teaching of specific cultural anthropology courses, we must understand their interventions more broadly, that is, in relation to the potential for these innovative pedagogical strategies to disrupt the hegemony of cultural anthropology and be put into practice across anthropology's subfields.

More than as a geographical location, this Colloquy reads the margin as an analytical placement, one that makes evident both "the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group's existence" (Tsing 1994, 279). Such a reading highlights the margin as not just a site of exclusion but also as one of empowerment. Moreover, if, as Anna L. Tsing argues, it is margins that highlight the instability of social categories, then we must also recognize the margin for its potential to disrupt and transform the oppressive social categories that operate as intersecting systems of power (Crenshaw 1991). Still, the work of disrupting and transforming anthropology is not easy. As the authors of this collection of essays show, it requires openness to being challenged by, collaborating with, learning alongside, and even being taught by one's own students. In pushing us toward an understanding of the transformative power of the

margins, the authors therefore ask us to celebrate the emancipatory and abolition-ist possibilities—for both students, teachers, and anthropology—that thrive at the margins. They ask us to see their students for what they already are—whole.

This Colloquy takes seriously Louise Lamphere's (2004, 137) call at the dawn of the AAA's second century for anthropology to "nurture those on the margins and find ways in which they can be fully incorporated into the ever-changing defi-nition of what anthropology is." The essays demonstrate that the MSI academic margin in fact constitutes a productive space from which to rewrite anthropology. Here, the project of rewriting anthropology from the academic margins is taken to be more than just a scholarly endeavor. It is a political act rooted in pedagog-ical praxis that necessarily engages anthropology as an incomplete epistemologi-cal project and as unsettled terrain. Such a philosophy highlights anthropology as always plural and fractured—despite historical tendencies to suggest otherwise. Such a reorientation recognizes anthropology as always in the process of becoming. Altogether, in seeking to raise the voice of anthropology at MSIs, this collection crafts a vision for an equitable anthropology of the now and the future and situates the academic margins as an important space from which the discipline must be reimagined in the current political moment.

ABSTRACT

In reframing the ontological limits and possibilities of the academic margin, this Col-loquy situates the Minority Serving Institution (MSI) classroom as a critical (field) site in which anthropological knowledge is innovated, produced, and contested. The essays, written by anthropologists who work in and represent "non-hegemonic" insti-tutions, speak to decolonial, Black feminist, and liberatory projects and pedagogy that challenge what anthropology can look like, how anthropology can be practiced, how it can be taught, and what it can contribute to a more just world. This col-lection crafts a vision for an equitable anthropology of the now and the future and situates the academic margins as an important space from which the discipline must be reimagined in the current political moment. [margins; Minority Serving Insti-tutions; pedagogy; anthropological knowledge]

NOTES

1. At Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, undergraduate students who identify as Alaska Native make up at least 20 percent of total enrollment. At Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), undergraduate students that identify as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander make up at least 10 percent of total enrollment. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded before 1964 and intended to provide higher education to African Ameri-can communities. At Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), undergraduate students who identify as Hispanic make up at least 25 percent of total enrollment. Native Ameri-

can–Serving Non-Tribal Institutions are not affiliated with American Indian and Native Alaskan tribes, though they serve Native American students. At these institutions, undergraduate students who identify as Native American make up at least 10 percent of total enrollment. At Native Hawaiian–Serving Institutions, undergraduate students who identify as Native Hawaiian make up at least 10 percent of total enrollment. A Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) is a postsecondary institution that receives funding to improve and expand its capacity to serve Black students as well as low-income and first-generation college students. At PBIs, undergraduate students who identify as Black make up at least 40 percent of total enrollment, and students who identify as low-income and/or first-generation college students make up at least 30 percent of total enrollment. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are colleges and universities associated with American Indian and Native Alaskan tribes (Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions 2022).

2. Community colleges continue to be vital pathways to educational attainment in the United States for minority and low-income students. However, as is the case at many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (see Erica Lorraine Williams's essay in this Colloquy), at community colleges across the United States, anthropology degree programs are disappearing. For recent scholarship on this subject, see Brown 2022.

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