

# The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties

by Jafari Sinclair Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson

In the wake of anthropology's much storied crisis of representation; attempted corrections following movements of "Third World" peoples, women, and queer folks; the recent disavowal of 1980s and 1990s reflexivity and experimentation; and what George Marcus has recently termed a "crisis of reception," this essay seeks to critically reassess and reanimate the formative interventions of anthropologists of the African diaspora (including Africa itself)—foregrounding work that lends new insights into anthropological theory, method, and pedagogy. The intention here is not to merely redeem the pioneering insights of African diaspora anthropologists as unsung forerunners of contemporary anthropological theories (though this is a worthwhile endeavor in itself) but rather to illuminate continued and prospective contributions of this mode of knowledge production.

In the wake of anthropology's much storied crisis of representation; attempted corrections following movements of "Third World" peoples, women, and queer folks; the recent disavowal of 1980s and 1990s reflexivity and experimentation; and what George Marcus has recently termed a "crisis of reception,"<sup>1</sup> this essay seeks to critically reanimate the formative interventions of anthropologists of the African Diaspora, foregrounding work that lends new insights into anthropological theory, method, and pedagogy. The intention here is not to merely redeem the pioneering insights of African Diaspora anthropologists as unsung forerunners of contemporary anthropology theories but to illuminate continued and prospective contributions of this mode of knowledge production.

The launch of the public initiative "Race: Are We So Different?" by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 2007 reinvigorated long-standing critiques of biological racism popularized by Franz Boas in the first decades of the twentieth century (Goodman et al. 2012). But not unlike its predecessors, this resurgent anthropological interest in race risks succumbing to a glib deconstructionism in lieu of an engagement with sustained expressions of racism within the guild and its analytical procedures. The renaissance of Boasian antiracism has been well received, prompting renewed dialogue concerning the role of anthropology in evolving public debates concerning race and global white supremacy.<sup>2</sup> Still, scant published work has sought to critically assess and distill the theoretical,

methodological, and professional inroads forged by members of what we detail in this essay as the *decolonizing generation*—the cohort of Black, allied antiracist, feminist, and political economy-oriented scholars that gave rise to the landmark volume *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Harrison 1997c).

This article centers on the volume but also engages the individual writings of its participants and other anthropologists, such as the late Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who did not formally contribute to the collection but remain theoretically and politically aligned with this assemblage of intellectuals in their critiques of anthropology and its allegiance to ra-

1. To this end, though ethnography has experienced a renaissance of sorts as it is increasingly adopted as a method of inquiry by fields outside of anthropology (including, but not limited to, American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Communications, and Geography), ethnographic texts tend to be engaged "as mere case studies" measured by their ability to speak to the interests of corporate and government projects and programs (Marcus 2002:198). Accordingly, an undercurrent of this essay holds that the traditional form of ethnographic research and writing must be revisited, per Marcus, but the legacy of decolonial anthropologists provides one potential alternative to the dominant Malinowskian paradigm that persists in graduate anthropology training today.

2. A cardinal example of such renewed debates in the field of anthropology is AAA President Leith Mullings's (2013) *Anthropology News* brief, "Trayvon Martin, Race, and Anthropology," released on the heels of the not guilty verdict rendered in the trial of George Zimmerman, who was charged with the murder of African American teenager Trayvon Martin. Drawing on sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's framework of "colorblind racism," Mullings refers to the murder of Martin as potent reminder that while anthropology has "made a major contribution to addressing the racial ideologies of the world that anthropologists helped to make, what we have not always done so well is to demonstrate that though race is socially constructed, racism is a lethal social reality, constraining the potential, if not threatening the lives, of millions of people."

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cialist discourses of civilization and barbarism. To invoke the language of generations—as opposed to that of schools, groups, or approaches, for example—is to indulge the “structures of the conjuncture” that frame knowledge production itself as a temporal experience that reflects the societal exigencies of a particular moment (Sahlins 1981). As David Scott (2014a) reminds us in his recent appraisal of generational epistemologies, “Each succeeding generation constructs anew out of its inheritance and its own experience the relation to the formative events of the past that have organized the imagination of the future” (120). By periodizing this generation—probing the intellectual and professional dilemmas posed and confronted by this group of scholar-activists—we chart an alternative genealogy of anthropological theory that locates its intervention centrally to the development of the discipline over the past three decades. Understanding decolonization as an ongoing project that seeks to apprehend and, ultimately, displace a “logic of coloniality” that undergirds the experiment of Western modernity (Mignolo 2011; see also Quijano 2000), we caution against an approach that circumscribes what a decolonized anthropology can be.<sup>3</sup> Our aim is not to canonize or ossify a singular genealogy of the anthropology of race and post/colonialism but to reflect on the significance of unheralded contributions. The designation of “the decolonizing generation” is as yet unauthorized by those to whom we assign membership in this stream of work and is only one of a number of ways to organize this diverse group of scholars and scholar-activists. To invoke the idea of generations is to suggest that *Decolonizing Anthropology* belongs irreducibly to its time as a product of the recently postsocialist milieu of the early 1990s<sup>4</sup> but exceeds this temporality by anticipating the dilemma brought on by neoliberal reforms that have dramatically impacted the ways academe does business.

It is in this spirit that this essay interrogates the following: What toolkit does *Decolonizing* offer, and how is it relevant

3. A slippage between the practice of decolonizing anthropology, the project of decolonial anthropology, and the projected futurity of a decolonized anthropology is maintained intentionally throughout this essay. Our aim is to foreground the distinct registers that each descriptor enables, while also indicating the scholarly and political genealogies from which the decolonizing generation draws its inspiration or locates its interlocutors. Again, the decolonizing generation discussed here represents merely one strand of more than five centuries of decolonial thought. While it is not the subject of this essay, a review of what might be called the decolonial turn (as opposed to its counterpart, the postcolonial turn) could examine the various approaches that have emerged under the organizing frame of decolonial theory to include the decolonizing generation as well as the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Group (see Escobar 2010).

4. By invoking the words of Frantz Fanon (1967)—drawn from the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*—we emphasize here that the project of decolonizing anthropology is one that must continually be refashioned and reinterpreted in accordance with the exigencies of the present. It is in this spirit that we revisit the critical interventions of the decolonizing generation and pose the questions they raise anew for an anthropology of the contemporary.

to an anthropology of the contemporary in which its signature objects (“culture” and “society”) and methods (“ethnography” and “fieldwork”) are “not what they used to be,” as James Faubion and George Marcus (2009) suggest? How can it be mobilized in critical discourse and in practical application? In what ways does the project of decolonizing anthropology ground and respond to perennial anthropological questions regarding the proper relationship between the internal logics and ethics of the discipline, the people who are studied, and those who are studying; the tension between particularity and similarity (or, e.g., nation and diaspora.); and the challenges of representation and textuality?

Though questions of power, writing, and representation that gained popular currency among anthropologists in the 1980s were anticipated by an earlier generation of Black scholars reflecting on the nascent interdisciplinary project of Black Studies, anthropology remains largely unremarked on in considerations of a Black-activist-intellectual praxis (see Harney and Moten 2013). Anthropologists of race and racialization are situated within a discipline that still closely guards its borders and an interdiscipline of Black Studies that—as if other disciplines have been any less complicit in imperial projects—is suspicious of what many of our colleagues understand as anthropology’s colonial past and its bias toward work outside of the United States (see Asante 1990). The decolonizing generation is, therefore, a pivotal one. Its members troubled the conceptual and methodological precepts of anthropological discourse while adopting the mantle of ethnographic and ethnological inquiry in service to the imperatives of political and epistemic decolonization. Although the progenitors of African diaspora anthropology rarely had access to elite academe (see Baber 1990; Bolles 1989; Gershenson 2004; Harrison 1987; Harrison and Harrison 1999; Price and Price 2003), members of this generation find themselves largely within the American professorate—at predominantly white public and private research-intensive institutions, community colleges, and liberal arts colleges (with, notably, only a few at historically Black colleges and universities). Close analysis of this generation, therefore, provides important perspectives not only on the position and contributions of a radical Black intellectual tradition but also on the contemporary demands of neoliberal academic labor, or as Trouillot (1991) termed it, the “electoral politics” of the university and its disciplinary conventions.

To periodize the decolonizing generation requires that we situate our own points of entry in their historical and discursive context. The inspiration for this essay emerged from a roundtable session organized by Jafari Allen for the Annual Meeting of the AAA in 2010. The program committee, inspired by the meeting’s location in postflood New Orleans, invited participants to “think about what happens when movement is the organizing trope of our questions, methodologies, analyses and accounts” (Heller 2009). Here we argue that it was *movement* that necessitated, inspired, and nurtured the Black, “Third World,” and radical white ally anthropologists

who constitute the decolonizing generation. For anthropologists of Black diaspora and their conceptual forebears, this movement—invoked in a twofold manner—provides new optics to combat an ossifying ethnographic gaze through renewed attention to centuries-long processes of global interconnection glossed over by facile invocations of globalization in the late twentieth century.

An eye toward movement effectively unsettles the calcified representations of anthropology's other as the "savage slot" from which the West conjured itself as the singular arbiter of what we have come to describe as modernity (Trouillot 1991). In one respect, *movement* describes the transit of bodies, capital, and goods—a form of movement that is constitutive of the *longue durée* of human sociobiological history. This assumes a new and particular form with the advent of Western capitalist modernity—namely, the genocide and displacement of the indigenous Americans, the forcible enslavement of Africans, the indenture of East and South Asians, and the complex amalgam of labor migrations, diasporic assemblages, and neocolonial spheres of ecclesiastical, corporate, and military influence forged in their wake. And this necessarily impels other movement(s). *Movement* also denotes a decidedly "political" meaning: movements toward/of decolonization, gender and sexual liberation, Third World solidarity, and Black Power, for example. Taken together, these senses of movement have conditioned the repertoires of thought and action mobilized by this group of anthropologists.

It is movement in both senses that catalyzes our discussion. In turn, we organize this essay as follows. We open with a brief review of the signal thinkers who gave rise to the intellectual enterprise of "Afro-American Anthropology" and, later, the decolonizing generation. In the subsequent section, we turn to the decolonizing generation itself, in an effort to spell out the conceptual frameworks and theoretical orientations that characterize the careers of its contributors, and gesture toward particular inroads that have taken on a renewed significance or that warrant further reflection and elaboration. Finally, we turn to questions of pedagogy, academic bureaucracy, and the neoliberal university in a discussion of the relationship between anthropology and various interdisciplinary units and programs where anthropology continues to be utilized and practiced. Here, the location of anthropology's decolonization remains an open question to be resolved through and against the emerging institutional arrangements and neoliberal policies of contemporary academe.

### Before *Decolonizing*: Decolonial Assemblages and a Hermeneutic of Movement

From its beginnings, anthropology has been confounded by the problem of the Negro.<sup>5</sup> Anthropological engagements

5. See Nahum Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

with the figure designated in various terms as the "New World Negro," "Afro-American," and "Black," in turn, have troubled a baseline conceptual orientation toward the proverbial native's point of view, highlighting instead the afterlives of centuries of colonial domination and global capitalist proliferation. While extant accounts of modern anthropology approach the New World Negro as a peripheral figure that bears little consequence to the field at large, what might we glean from a genealogy that places her at the center of its theoretical concerns rather than at its distant margins? The "Negro problem," in essence, is a problem for anthropological theory. In its search for an unblemished object of study—a pristine native crafted in accordance with the discursive project of Western modernity—anthropological discourse has been structured upon silences that conveniently obscure the conditions of intellectual production from which a taxonomy of enlightenment Man qua human was birthed and sustained (see Baker 1998).

Among these silences, we include Caribbean anthropologists Fernando Ortiz's and Jean Price-Mars's largely uncredited contributions to Herskovitsian theories of acculturation and syncretism (see Allen 2011; Apter 2004; Coronil 1995; Yelvington 2001), the writings of nineteenth-century Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin (see Fluehr-Lobban 2000), and the exclusion of key anthropological critics such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Fredrick Douglass, and Zora Neale Hurston, who located themselves in a variety of positions within and outside of the academy (Baker 1998; Blakey 1998; Harrison 1992; Mikell 1999). Among others, these absences and erasures demonstrate the ways in which anthropology has been, and remains, invested in a positivist telos of social scientific knowledge as a linear accumulation of advances and innovations. The suppression of Firmin and his signature monograph, conversely, demonstrates the omissions and occlusions required to preserve a Eurocentric canon of hallmark thinkers (e.g., Malinowski, Boas, Evans-Pritchard, and Levi-Strauss) and their respective streams of thought (functionalism, historical particularism, structural functionalism, structuralism). How would an anthropology that upholds Firmin's *De l'égalité des races humaines* as an anthropological urtext in the same breath as Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, and Boas's *Mind of Primitive Man* impact disciplinary conventions of theory, method, and practice that are institutionalized in undergraduate and graduate curricula?

Born in 1850 to a working-class family in Cap-Haitien, Firmin was educated in Haiti and embarked on a career in local politics before relocating to Paris and attaining admission to the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris in 1883. While he later returned to assume a ministerial position in the Haitian government, it was his years in the Parisian metropole that permitted his provisional entrance into a field of study not yet institutionalized in the Western academy. Embracing the revolutionary legacy of his Haitian birthplace as the first Black republic in the Western hemisphere, Firmin

plumbed the history of Haiti and the Caribbean in an effort to make theoretical inroads into a scholarly corpus in which this history remained “unthinkable” (see Trouillot 1995), dedicating his monograph to Haiti and “all the children of the Black race . . . the downtrodden of today and the giants of tomorrow” (Firmin 2002:li). In this respect, his critique is addressed specifically to the emergent field of anthropology but further inaugurates a commentary on the epistemology of the social sciences writ large. Without due diligence to Haiti and the descendants of African peoples in the Americas, he argues, the consummation of a philosophy of human society remains futile.

In his magnum opus, Firmin discredits the racialist theory of evolutionary polygenesis advanced by Arthur de Gobineau and puts forth an alternative vision for the nascent “human science” informed by a region comprised of overlapping diasporas forged within the crucible of plantation slavery. Writing from the vantage of the Caribbean, Firmin proposes an anthropology distinct from the prevailing pseudoscience of the day championed by his contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> Although he provisionally endorses an essentialist view of race in his extended meditations on *métissage* (miscegenation) and a celebratory recitation of the Black African character of Ancient Egypt, his ultimate claim extends beyond the mere assertion of the equality of races and their respective contributions to human civilization. For Firmin, the radical potential of anthropology as a human science is to be found in what he suggestively christens an *anthropologie positive* (positivist anthropology). While contemporary critical anthropologists may initially bristle at his chosen designation, his aim is to challenge the partiality of a science configured without empirical reference to the full physiognomic range or cultural diversity of Black peoples. But how does one attend to the fictive character of race as a “floating signifier” as well as its material salience?

For Firmin, race operates as a Trojan horse. His critics must either accept it, acknowledging the contributions of the arbitrary ethnological type they deem the “Negro” to ancient and modern civilization, or reject “race” by condemning the dogmatic methods of enquiry on which the newfangled so-

cial science (and attendant formations of race and the human) rested. To realize the promise of anthropology, then, is to apply robust empirical observation and historical depth to the question of human variation and inequality. This double gesture, in which Firmin strategically occupies the racial taxonomy of Western modernity while denouncing the very existence of race as a biological type, can be understood as the foundational maneuver of a decolonial anthropology.

This perspective is anticipated by Frederick Douglass (1854), who indicted his ethnological contemporaries for “invariably present[ing] the *highest* type of European, and the *lowest* type of the negro” (20), and echoed by W. E. B. Du Bois (2000), who sardonically accused early twentieth-century sociologists of “metaphysical wanderings—studying not the Things themselves but the mystical whole” (39), chastising the incomplete, or perhaps unattainable, ideal of holism in the social sciences. In other words, a true science of society requires that one consider it in its full range of diversity and variation. The decolonial intellectual seeks to expose the partiality of an anthropology that masquerades as objective science while employing its methods of study and analysis toward an ever more robust consideration of our social world.

Although Boas sustained a discursive critique of race as a social category, proposing a relativism by which each distinct cultural group would be studied on its own terms, this approach paradoxically constrained an anthropological critique of racism against the political backdrop of the long twentieth century. To the extent that he and his students were able to define culture, they did so through a process of negation. As Kamala Visweswaran (1998) reminds us, under the purview of cultural relativism, “Culture became everything race was not, and race was seen to be what culture was not: given, unchangeable, biology” (72). Today, race continues to be viewed outside the purview of culture and, in turn, peripheral to the concerns of anthropologists as an imprecise measure of social differentiation. Once a context-rich understanding of heterogeneous Black cultures and social life is absented or evacuated, what is left too often glosses Blackness as unreal, peculiarly “uncultural,” and constructed solely through US political projects. Through a convenient and self-serving conceptual sleight of hand, it is “ethnicity” that now inhabits the category of social differentiation and enjoys an essentialist conceptual purchase. While race appears intangible and indeterminate, ethnicity appears all too real in the eyes of anthropologists. What remains unstated in each instance are the “power relations inherent in structures of domination” from which conceptions of race and ethnicity are equally derived (Pierre 2004:162).

Whereas Firmin and the early Du Bois are accused of upholding a crude essentialism in contrast with the ardent deconstructionism of Boas, it is precisely this discrepancy that hinders the latter’s critique of the race concept. By contrast, the development of an anthropological approach to race requires an attention not only to its construction as a discursive category but also to its lasting consequences

6. Following in Firmin’s tradition is bio-archeologist Michael Blakey’s (1998) thoroughgoing examination of the history of concepts of race and “the social and biological costs of racism” in his “Beyond European Enlightenment: Toward a Critical and Humanistic Human Biology.” By enumerating the biases present in the foundational methods of modern social science, Firmin argues convincingly for the equality of human races on the basis of their indeterminacy and manipulation by scientific analysts. As he opines: “When anthropologists study the shape and volume of the skull, they first arbitrarily assign to each race a certain cranial shape and cranial capacity, then they set out to discover the differences that exist among the various human races. Later, some would use these same specifications to proclaim the superiority or inferiority of one race over another. Their conclusions, however, while having as little validity as those of the phrenologists, would be covered with a scientific veneer” (Firmin 2002:90).

within the discipline and across broader political economic and social milieu. For Boas's student Melville Herskovits, for instance, a preoccupation with the cultures of the New World Negro and their conscription into a linear acculturative telos prevented a political economic analysis of the US military occupation of Haiti and the burgeoning anticolonial movements of the British West Indies that were in full view at the time of his field research in the Caribbean (see Scott 2014b). We might extend Visweswaran's acute observation to say that culture became everything politics were not, as midcentury American anthropology distanced itself from urgent questions of power, sovereignty, and geopolitics.

The generations that followed Herskovits would partially attend to this troubling dichotomy, as a burgeoning field of Afro-American Anthropology sought to inflect his framework of African cultural survivals with greater nuance through an attention to histories of colonization (see Mintz and Price 1992; Whitten and Szwed 1970). Still, their interventions were waged from within the ideological confines of anthropology. While these scholars responded admirably to the call initiated by Firmin to study Black life across a far-reaching geography of the Americas, they stopped short of transforming the field itself, to include its methods, analytical registers, and professionalization practices.

A decolonial anthropology pushes significantly further, by troubling the location of anthropology as both a mode of knowledge production and an assembly of knowledge producers. It challenges us to consider how anthropology has maintained itself as a closed system of scholarly inquiry that legitimates its own procedures of investigation as a means of subjecting the native Other to its North Atlantic theoretic. It initiated and supports a reverse interrogation by "native" anthropologists who continue in "gazing and talking back" from their tenuous, or at least contradictory, positions within the Western academy (Jacobs-Huey 2002:789). As the Martiniquais poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant (1989) reminds us, the West is a "project, not a place" (2). It warrants emphasis, too, that efforts to "anthropologize the West" have existed as long as the West itself (Rabinow 1986:241). It is through a hermeneutic of movement, then, that the West and its self-assured modes of comprehending the world are thrown into productive disarray. As Firmin writes, "the inventors of systems and creators of doctrines should remember this. *The world does not stand still*. Nations and races interact on the stage of history, exit, and return in different roles" (2002:445). Our social milieus, not unlike the researchers who seek to understand them, remain in constant flux and can be rendered concretely only as a structure "always past" and divorced from the contingencies of the present (Williams 1977:128). It is in the ideal realm of the anthropological, not the material realm of the social, that they assume a definite form. To anthropologize the West, then, is at once to anthropologize anthropology itself.

Anthropology is joined in fragile unity. In the words of Michel Foucault (1972), "Disciplines constitute a system of

control in the production of discourse" (224). As should be clear, decolonial critics have long evaluated anthropology along similar lines, seeking to open the discipline to a wider discursive field and an ever more complete apprehension of our social world. In this regard, decolonizing anthropology should not be understood as a closing off of anthropology or the shrinking of its intellectual purchase but rather as an opening of its inquiry beyond the constrained limits into which it had been disciplined. It is with this in mind that we turn to the decolonizing generation and its enduring contributions to an anthropology of the contemporary.

### (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the "Eighties"

*Decolonizing Anthropology* is, to quote Harrison, "a product of the late 1980s and 1990s."<sup>7</sup> It is a project, then, that straddles two decades often associated with divergent geopolitical orientations and theoretical valences in the discipline. In the guild of anthropology, "the eighties" evokes a moment of heightened attention to textuality and the politics of representation and the emergence of critiques inaugurated by the rise of postmodern theory and deconstructionism. Equally, however, the early eighties indexes the neoliberal economic reforms of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, the challenges to Third World sovereignty in the form of structural adjustment and US military intervention, and the rise of a liberal capitalist multiculturalism in the United States.

The 1980s were a key turning point in anthropology, and the world more broadly, as growing disenchantment with structural Marxism and Soviet state capitalism lent itself to a reorientation of social theory and praxis. Thus, the decolonizing generation entered the field of anthropology at a moment when the insights of earlier streams of decolonial and other critical scholarship and activism reemerged under the signs of Foucauldian poststructuralism, women-of-color feminism, British cultural studies, and postmodernism. *Decolonizing* was not alone in tracking changes and raising cautions as anthropology attempted to come to grips with what we now know was the dawning of the neoliberal moment in the 1980s, on the heels of movements toward Women's Liberation, Black Power, and international decolonization. The renewed attention to textuality and representation spurred by *Writing Culture* (James and Marcus 1986), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986), and the feminist clarion call of *Women Writing Culture* (Behar and Gordon 1995)—a subsequent collection necessitated by the near exclusion of women from the former volume—and

7. As the dedication page of *Decolonizing Anthropology* recalls, the conversations later archived in the 1991 volume began in the form of an Association of Black Anthropologists invited session convened by Faye Harrison and Angela Gilliam for the 1987 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, Illinois.

the indigenous critiques of “native” anthropologists in Oceania and the Americas (Medicine 2001; Minh-ha 1989) represent varied attempts to challenge the dominant epistemic procedures of the discipline. But the decolonizing generation departed noticeably from the predominant register of postmodern style and analysis. Instead, its contributors held up an uncredited genealogy of subaltern writings that resist a flippant assertion of postmodernity in favor of a critique of modernity and its enduring significance. As Faye Harrison (1997a) details in her introduction to *Decolonizing*, postmodernism attained “academic popularity just when women and Third World theorists [were] challenging the universality and hegemony of Western and androcentric views” (5). For their part, despite admirable consideration of questions of power, authority, and writing, the *Writing Culture* critiques by their own admission awarded “little attention to new ethnographic possibilities emerging from non-Western experiences and from feminist theory and politics” (Clifford 1986:19; see also Abu-Lughod 1991; hooks 1990). And as Harrison avers, this omission did not merely silence “new ethnographic possibilities” but also cast people of color and feminist ethnographers as engaged in an essentialist production of sameness.

The decolonizing generation entered these debates as a cohort of anthropologists conducting research in the aftermath of the revolutionary socialist projects and in the throes of revolutionary projects forced to contend with economic sanctions and imperial containment. The fall of the Soviet Union was of interest—and destabilizing—to anthropologists and their interlocutors dispersed across a previously tripartite political geography. For scholars who had been intellectually animated by decolonization movements and the state socialist projects that emerged in their wake, this event signaled the foreclosure of a moment of revolutionary optimism and an entrance into an ambiguous temporality no longer bound by the prescriptions of a Marxist-Hegelian historical determinism.

It is unsurprising, then, that the prevailing mood of *Decolonizing Anthropology* is one of yearning for liberatory potential in a political and intellectual field seemingly bereft of potent challenges to Euro-American capitalist democracy after the fall of the Soviet bloc. Still, there is also an optimism of the will at work in the volume. Resisting the halting disenchantment that is associated with this conjuncture, decolonial anthropology offers a tool kit for scholar-activist work in what the late Richard Iton (2013) deems “post-89/90 life” (38). That is, while political alternatives appeared less evident in this moment, they are also less dogmatic in their allegiance to Marxist orthodoxy and its teleological rendering of revolutionary upheaval.

The 1990s were characterized by a resurgent positivism that oriented academic knowledge production toward quantifiable data and measurable outcomes. In a Thatcherian milieu in which “there is no alternative,” the nineties marked the apparent decisive victory of Western capitalist democ-

racy and its economic doctrine of neoliberalism. The decolonizing generation came into being amid this move from anticolonial romance into postcolonial melancholia and prepared to leap into the depths of its uncertainty.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War and its political aftermath remained a tacit undercurrent throughout the volume. In the penultimate chapter by Angela Gilliam (1997), it receives its due treatment. She writes:

To those who saw self-determination and the defeat of colonialism as signifying the directionality of cultural evolution, the unipolar world is a retreat from the principle of equality. Classic colonialism represented the appropriation of natural resources and a people’s labor for the economic benefits of another nation. Decolonization, above all, meant participation in the disposition of the resources in one’s country and some control over the price of one’s labor. With the Gulf War, the principle that oil-producing countries had the right to determine the price of the resources within their boundaries came to an end. The Gulf War was thus as much a message to the Third World . . . as it was a signal by the elites in the Western alliance for social control within their borders. (184)

The extension of metropolitan and elite postcolonial interests persists into the present. Thus, the archive and repertoire provided by the decolonizing generation remains as pertinent as it was at the time of its publication. In light of the uprisings that spread across North Africa, Western Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the urban centers of the “West” itself in 2011, as well as the subsequent dissolution of the scattered “occupations” they sparked, we must newly consider what anthropology can contribute to an insurgent scholar-activist praxis (see Al-Bulushi 2014). By outlining the key methodological and theoretical contributions made by members of the decolonizing generation, we may better apprehend what comprises an anthropology for liberation in the twenty-first century.

#### *Race and Diaspora*

Anticipating what Paul Gilroy (1993) would memorably pronounce as an “anti-anti-essentialist” posture (102), the decolonizing project stands as a poignant exemplar of the post-Black Power, post-Third World liberation, postsocialist Black political zeitgeist. As noted above, the decolonizing generation endorsed an affirmation of a Du Boisian double consciousness that destabilized the analytical presumptions on which anthropology is based—distinctions between self and other, center and periphery, sites of data collection and knowledge production—while strategically adopting its signature methods. Evidenced by a general disillusionment with

8. The tragic and the melancholic are offered up by David Scott (2004) and Paul Gilroy (2004), respectively, as the prevailing moods of the postcolonial present.

the postmodern turn and the attendant shift from discussions of lived racism to facile dismissals of race as a social fiction, anthropologists of this variety continued to speak forthrightly about the effects of race and anti-Black racism in a capitalist world system. Fueled by the exigencies of the contexts in which they found themselves, these scholars devised a reconfigured politics to sustain deterritorialized networks of solidarity rather than subservience to the nation-state as a paramount mode of affiliation.

As one of the distinguishing keywords of the past two decades in anthropological theory, the concept of diaspora provides us with a viable alternative to national parochialism and a formative challenge to the prescriptions of area studies that have long guided the sensibilities of anthropologists. Diaspora is duly invoked alongside discussions of a late modern globality ushered in by the northward migrations of formerly colonized subjects from the newly independent nations of the global south (see Clifford 1988, 1994). To this end, African diaspora scholars have consistently challenged this periodization of the global by paying heed to the earlier circuits of transoceanic movement and displacement from which the epoch of the modern was inaugurated (see Clarke and Thomas 2006; Gilroy 1993; Harris 1993; Skinner 1982; Trouillot 2003).

By anticipating and later responding to Gilroy's entreaty to attend equally to the "roots" and "routes" of diasporic formations, the decolonizing generation endeavored to ground his Black Atlantic frame in particular spatial and temporal contexts. Diaspora emerged in this body of work not as a unified conceptual category with generalizable attributes but as an orientation toward a transnational Black politics that traces its formal origin to the First Pan-African Conference of 1900. Returning to an earlier articulation of diaspora initially proposed by St. Clair Drake, which spurned the detached objectivity of his contemporaries in Afro-American Anthropology in favor of a distinctly "anticolonialist and antiracist praxis" (Harrison 2008:287), this approach brought anthropological methods to bear on the uses of African diasporic consciousness in the resistance of economic imperialism fronted by the United States (see Drake 1975). As Ted Gordon and Mark Anderson (1999) detail in their treatment of *The Black Atlantic*, an anthropological lens demands "not simply . . . the ethnography of various communities of African descent but . . . an ethnography of various forms of diasporic politics and identification" (289; see also Clarke and Thomas 2006, 2013). Diaspora cannot be reduced to a set of scientifically verifiable properties, per Herskovits, or to an ontology of diasporic belonging founded in the history of Atlantic slavery, per Gilroy.<sup>9</sup> The question, instead, is one of

how, when, and to what ends the language of diaspora is politically mobilized, either alongside or against competing formations such as the nation-state or regional trading blocs and networks of economic affiliation such as the African Union, Caribbean Community and Common Market, and Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (see Clarke 2010).<sup>10</sup>

The decolonizing generation, therefore, pushed diaspora theorists toward a more substantive engagement with millennial geopolitics and the expanding reach of US Empire. Fundamentally, this demonstrates that anthropologists cannot isolate discourses of race and diaspora from the contexts and conjunctures in which they are mobilized. In contrast with Herskovits, who sought to scientifically measure diasporic retentions along a prescribed scale of Africanisms, in this instance, the political or ideological import of "Africa" or "slavery" came to be understood as the object of anthropological analysis in and of itself (see Scott 1991). By exploding a dualistic notion of diasporic roots and routes, we arrive at a more dynamic notion of diaspora not only as the *product* of movement of involuntary and semivoluntary migrations (and emplacement in a locality constitutive of circulating ideas, cultural objects, and capital) but as a *source* of Movement as well. Decolonial anthropology's attention to movement was cultivated through the scholars' own fraught peregrinations through African diasporic formations on both sides of the Atlantic.

### Epistemologies

The archive, as we now know so well, is an index of structures of power and domination (see Derrida 1998; Foucault 1972; Stoler 2009; Trouillot 1995). But even as anthropologists rehearse this poststructuralist mantra, scant efforts have been made to turn this insight back toward the archive of anthropology itself. How have chronicles of the emergence of anthropology as an area of study effectively circumscribed the limits of what is sufficiently anthropological? While the stakes of this question are clearly articulated in the preceding section, of interest here are the strategies by which scholars of the decolonizing generation sought to push beyond the ordinary boundaries of the discipline.

Efforts to historicize the anthropology of the African diaspora, which include the indispensable collections *African American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Harrison and Harrison 1999) and *Black Feminist Anthropology* (McClaurin 2001), represent one vigorous stream of this work. *Decolonizing* embarks on a more ambitious undertaking "to encourage more anthropologists to accept the challenge of working to free the study of humankind from the prevailing forces of global in-

9. Michelle Wright has keenly termed the approach attributed to Gilroy as a "Middle Passage Epistemology" while proposing alternative formulations of African Diaspora Studies in which "the Middle Passage is not a constant for all Black communities, even for (or perhaps especially) those located in Africa" (2010:71).

10. On another scale, Jafari Sinclair Allen (in *Black/Queer Here and There*, forthcoming) tracks the language of diaspora in Eurocentric normative gender and sexual normativity posed as pan-African "tradition."

equality and dehumanization” (Harrison 1997a:10). This requires an anthropology that resists adopting an object—that is, “culture” or “society”—in favor of diffuse and creative approaches to social problems and structures of dominance. To this end, it matters little where the domain of anthropology ends and that of sociology, history, economics, or literary criticism begins. Uniquely situated as the axiomatically “most humanistic” of the sciences, an anthropology of the contemporary must draw from a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches if it is to link its corpus of theory and criticism to a liberatory praxis.

In a moment in which long-standing features of graduate training in anthropology are being actively reconsidered, the ardent calls of the decolonizing generation and the Association of Black Anthropologists can be ignored only at the peril of the discipline. The sustained absence of Black thinkers from graduate syllabi on history and theory in anthropology demands that we question the measures by which the boundaries of anthropology are drawn. To speak of a “Du Boisian legacy in anthropology” is not merely to situate Du Bois as an anthropologist but to suggest that the development of the discipline cannot be limited to those who were educated by, or identified exclusively as, anthropologists (see Harrison 1992). To revisit our prior discussion of early anthropological critics of African diaspora letters, a decolonial anthropology embraces a broader discursive matrix that includes “a field of significance that precedes its formalization” (Trouillot 1991: 18) as well as unheralded figures that conveniently slip through the proverbial cracks of the prevailing historiography of the discipline.

The university and its bureaucratic divisions are the last frontier of anthropology. Even in diatribes against the neoliberalization of higher education, anthropologists too often resort to a utopian vision of the university as an uninhibited space of intellectual production. Our efforts to combat these adverse forces cannot rest on a romantic view of the university that we must salvage, in Boasian fashion, before its untimely extinction. Instead, we must open the university, and ourselves, by corollary, to the empirical scrutiny of ethnography. While it has become popular of late to denounce the reflexive turn as a passing experiment from which anthropology has triumphantly returned, we argue that the reflexive project was not capacious enough—that is, it was limited to the fieldwork encounter between the anthropologist and her informants. To insist that “everything is ethnography,” as John Jackson (2013:53) has, requires an openness not simply to questions of identity and positionality vis-à-vis research sites and subjects but to a political economy of knowledge production and the relationships therein between academics, administrators, editors, and publishers (see also Jackson 2015). This includes a reflexive attention to “the ways in which the [ethnographic] text is constituted in and constitutive of larger relationships of power” (Jordan 1997:57). A scholarly text, after all, is a commodity like any other. Its subversive potential cannot be taken for granted.

### *Engaged Anthropology and Scholar-Activism*

*Decolonizing Anthropology* involved both an intellectual and activist dimension out of necessity. As we reference earlier, the leadership of St. Clair Drake linked the intellectual enterprise of Afro-American Anthropology to a resurgent Pan-Africanism and diasporic politic that exceeded the imposed borders of the nation-state. Not unlike his forebears, Drake held that scholarly discourse could not be isolated from the political imperatives of antiracist and anti-imperialist movements. This was evinced by his decision to withhold publishing his doctoral dissertation on anticolonial dissidents residing in Wales, thereby protecting his interlocutors from state surveillance and discipline (see Harrison 2008:287). For Drake, all knowledge circulated within a larger sociopolitical arena and, in turn, was to be crafted, published, and referenced with these concerns in mind.

It is in this respect that we return to the second notion of movement introduced at the outset of this essay. The decolonizing generation was swept up, along with their contemporaries and fellow travellers, by and into activist currents. Their intellectual forays became further enmeshed within the social movements materializing in their respective field sites and university campuses. Following Drake, the research conducted by Faye Harrison during the “socialist experiment” in Jamaica under Michael Manley (see also Bolles 1996), Philippe Bourgois’s (1997) reflection on fieldwork ethics during CIA counterinsurgency efforts in Central America, Charles Hale’s (1997) empirical consideration of indigenous Miskitu politics in Nicaragua and Honduras in tandem with US incursions into the region, and Ted Gordon’s (1997, 1998) research on Afro-Caribbean ethnic populism on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua in that same moment exemplify this activist habit of mind in *Decolonizing Anthropology*. Interrogating their own subjectivity as field-workers conducting research in hotbeds of American political and military hegemony, the authors of these chapters sketch outlines of practice and models for a decolonial anthropology as practical and self-reflexive. A reflexivity of this sort requires that we not only continue to conduct ethnography on sensitive topics and in times and spaces of political volatility but also that we assume responsibility for the representations we produce as activist ethnographers and intellectuals. And, as was true for Drake and various members of the decolonial generation who follow him, this may often place our own career trajectories and professional reputations at risk.

### *Decolonizing Pedagogies: Teaching, Training, Working, and “Getting Out”*

Is a project of decolonizing anthropology sufficiently *fugitive*? In their treatise on fugitivity and the modern university, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney implicitly raise a question largely unremarked on by the decolonizing generation. Not unlike the productive suspicion toward the university that



they advocate, we must consider what our own relationship to anthropology will be as we advance in our efforts to decolonize it. Can a decolonized anthropology and the neoliberal university coexist? It is with this in mind that Harney and Moten (2013) query, “What is that work and what is its social capacity for both reproducing the university and producing fugitivity?” (26). This work of decolonizing anthropology remains indebted to the university as a condition of possibility. But if the only possible relationship to the university today is “a criminal one” (Harney and Moten 2013: 26), then this work necessarily entails shirking its neoliberal mission and the comforts it accords by seeking refuge among deterritorialized networks of decolonial intellectuals. While the 1980s sparked a flurry of postmodern “reflections on fieldwork,” a scarce number of corresponding reflections on the academy have followed suit. To this end, we might consider how anthropology has constituted itself not simply as a scholarly discourse but as a professional community (see Basch and Craven 1999).

In this essay, we stop short of calling for the wholesale dissolution of anthropology in our efforts to decolonize it. While remaining cautiously optimistic about the radical potential of *doing* anthropology, we understand that the field will not passively transform itself in accordance with the well-reasoned proposals of its decolonial critics. How, then, can our practices of scholarship, undergraduate and graduate teaching, and administrative work serve the project of decolonization? What are the benefits and drawbacks of teaching at a research-intensive university in which more attention is often paid to training graduate students than to teaching or cultivating undergraduates? Does decolonizing anthropology require institutional locations in which we may meet and engage in dialogue with more Black, brown, and working-class students? For many Black scholars who hold doctoral degrees in anthropology, entrée into the professorate has involved “getting out,” that is, leaving the field of anthropology as a professional site or primary department, to establish homes in interdisciplinary programs and research units. While many continue to identify as anthropologists, attend professional meetings, and publish in anthropology journals, this partial exodus has nonetheless altered the terrain on which the decolonization of anthropology will be carried out. And, as Lynn Bolles notes, even for those formally attached to anthropology departments, their innovations remain unacknowledged—evinced by their absence from course syllabi and infrequent citation by fellow anthropologists, a stark reality that is only compounded for Black women in the discipline (Bolles 2013).

The departmentalization of Black Studies programs is a welcome and necessary development that, as Robin D. G. Kelley (2014) argues, permits greater intellectual autonomy to “control faculty lines and [the capacity to] make faculty appointments.” This development may support efforts to decolonize anthropology. Our work in this moment must then be to do anthropology and train anthropologists wherever

we find ourselves. If one of the aims of decolonizing anthropology is to explode prior efforts to secularize and compartmentalize scientific knowledge in the eighteenth century (see Wallerstein 1996), then the freedom that such newfound departments accord remains critical to the transformation of traditional disciplines. We might recall here the proposal crafted by Trouillot and his collaborators on the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences. They advocated the compulsory joint appointment of professors “in which everyone was appointed to two departments, the one in which he/she had his degree and a second one in which he/she had shown interest or done relevant work” (Wallerstein 1996:104). The intellectual rationale of this proposal is far from the corporate university’s practice of joint-appointment for economic expediency. The social sciences remain more obstinate in their partition than Trouillot likely anticipated. The growing institutional potency of Black Studies, however, may provide the grounds for the revitalization of his proposal.

As Black Studies programs increasingly become recognized as departments and form independent doctoral programs, do we continue in our efforts to transform anthropology or abandon traditional unidisciplinarity? While we raise this question in the interest of provocation, since finding and retaining employment in a given department is not often a choice, this question is nonetheless salient as departments of Black Studies have recently been approved by the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Texas-Austin. The latter is an especially noteworthy example. The recently initiated UT-Austin doctoral program in African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS) is in many ways the successor to the African Diaspora Graduate Program in Anthropology at Austin—the foremost training ground of Black PhDs in anthropology since its formation in 1992 and the one with an explicit *decolonizing* bent (see Gordon 2007). We can draw important lessons from the hard-won success and current challenges of the African diaspora program, which had the support of a Texas legislature-funded Center for African and African American Studies that ensured a measure of autonomy not usually afforded within a program. Of more than 20 Anthropology PhD recipients in the past 18 years, only four—three of them archeologists—have primary appointments in anthropology departments, and nearly all are jointly appointed. Furthermore, the number of core faculty of the UT-Austin African Diaspora Anthropology program has fallen as members have migrated to the new AADS department or to other institutions. Given this example, what should the relationship between Black Studies and Anthropology become as the two are encouraged to compete for resources against a sustained challenge to the liberal arts? In the current moment, it is not the intellectual vibrancy and political import of interdisciplinary projects in which many of us locate our intellectual homes, at least part of the time, that threatens the deconstruction of anthropology. The real threat is twenty-first-century neoliberal

policies in the academy that seek to consolidate or discontinue programs and departments like widgets (Ferguson 2012). How does one effectively decolonize the humanities and humanistic social sciences when such disciplines find themselves at risk of institutional extinction?

Fears that the practice of anthropology outside of formal graduate programs and departments will mean “that there’ll be no anthropology—or only a crude and trite anthropology—left” (Rabinow et al. 2008:107) are predicated on fidelity to a reconstructed canonical anthropology that decolonial anthropologists have already roundly critiqued. We might ask, more generatively, what are the core salient features of the discipline that we must retain in any institutional site or under any sign or category?

This bears emphasis and repetition: the decolonization of anthropology will not arise from inside the field. It will require that we dismantle the arbitrary distinctions between the social sciences that each advance their own respective claims to universalism that “feed on each other and are . . . enhanced by the institutional reproduction of the discipline or division” (Wallerstein 1996:49). In other words, we must abandon a conception of anthropology that centers on what it offers that sociology, history, economics, or political science does *not* in favor of one that details what it specifically can offer to a broader and collaborative repertoire. Black Studies departments that often boast faculty and affiliates from a broad swath of the social sciences could conceivably lead this effort. The shared affinity for Du Bois by social scientists of this ilk, a reverence irrespective of discipline, we might add, speaks to the ways in which Black Studies and its “prehistory” hold the keys to unlock the social sciences from a strict allegiance to their exceptionality (Alexander 2011). The social science of Du Bois is one forged out of political expediency rather than the insularity of individual disciplines. In the spirit of his Atlanta University Sociological Laboratory, Black Studies departments may draw from their intellectual wealth in the social sciences to develop transnational and transdisciplinary research initiatives and graduate programs that are intentionally promiscuous in their theory, methodology, and poetics. The circumstances of neoliberal governance—the diminishing of tenure-track university appointments in the humanities and social sciences and the intensification of international loan agreements and the spiral of debt throughout the global south—demand creative efforts of this sort.

To paraphrase Harney and Moten (2013:26), it cannot be denied that anthropology is a source of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that anthropology is a singular source of enlightenment. Many of us have attempted to make our homes in anthropology despite its attempts to spurn or ignore our contributions. As Audre Lorde (1978) would tell us, “there is no place/that cannot be/home/nor is” (55). *Moving* still, many of us will continue to occupy anthropology as forgotten or unwanted mortgagors, even as we build new places of residence.

### Conclusion: On Generations and the Process of Becoming

At present, the interventions of the decolonizing generation appear even more tenuous than in the 1990s amid the institutional erosion of the humanities in tertiary education. Yet, as Faye Harrison (1997*b*) reminds us in her preface to the revised edition of *Decolonizing*, to decolonize anthropology involves an ongoing enterprise that “must continue to be tested and developed” (viii), not a completed project after which the discipline may resume business as usual. In keeping with the spirit of the original collection, we revisit the models provided by the decolonizing generation as a means of parsing contemporary theoretical currents in the field.

One recent and encouraging stream of thought has emerged under the guise of the newly christened ontological turn in anthropological theory, drawing principally on the theoretical offerings of French social scientists Bruno Latour and Philippe Descola and Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. de Castro demonstrates the potential vitality of this approach to stir interest in questions of ethnographic authority and inaugurate a renewed critique of Eurocentrism by complicating an ethnological department that seeks to explain the irrational components of “native” discourse through appeals to the absolute rationality of Western science and its analytical repertoires. He cogently proposes an alternative model for anthropological investigation, one predicated on “an idea of anthropological knowledge that is founded on the basic premise that the procedures involved in anthropological investigation are of the same conceptual order as the procedures being investigated” (de Castro 2013:477). Yet, what remains understated here are the ways in which such “North Atlantic universals” are made manifest, not only concocting ways of seeing the world but creating worlds unto themselves (Trouillot 2002*a*; see also Bessire and Bond 2014).<sup>11</sup> This, in essence, is the problem of modernity as a fictive ideal that nonetheless engenders the uneven development and productive relations of global capital. While the full range of approaches to research and writing that will emerge from the ontological turn remains to be seen, the problems it poses suggest the time is ripe to revisit the critiques and strategies offered up by the decolonizing generation and its progenitors.

For instance, Pem Buck’s treatment of cargo cult discourse in Papua New Guinea as an index of a pervasive orientalism

11. Jobson specifically conceived this nascent critique of the ontological turn in an effort to draw a rapprochement between anthropological considerations of ontology and decolonial theory. One point in need of further consideration concerns itself with the Latourian proposal for an “anthropology of the moderns.” How does one carry out this project without reifying the modern as a specific geography disjointed from its colonial underside? And furthermore, how would this differ from the anthropological approaches to world systems theory that have long upheld a critique of modernity and the narratives of Western supremacy that it engenders?

in anthropology appears especially prescient in light of these recent debates (1997). Like de Castro, Buck troubles Western analytic categories and their explanatory limits but is further perturbed by the propensity of these categories to fuel a colonial paternalism and the economic imperatives of modernization and development. Here, the cargo cult does not merely demonstrate the provincialism of Western social scientific discourse but raises a series of questions concerning the production of said discourse by anthropologists and their interlocutors:

Why did Europeans condemn certain “cargo cults” that accomplished what they had been trying in vain to effect for years? What sense can be made of European ridicule of “cargo cults” that included drilling with useless wooden sticks for rifles, when that practice had been instituted by European missionaries? . . . And why did “cargo cults” suddenly blossom in the early 1950s as a subject for serious anthropological and sociological discourse, often treated retrospectively, when European observers had described cultic activities as early as the nineteenth century? (Buck 1989:157)

The final provocation is especially potent as a rejoinder to the later ontological turn. While the ontological turn contents itself with the assertion of multiple ontologies as a corrective to enduring North Atlantic universals (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007), the decolonizing project insists that even in the recognition of multiple ontologies, the work of dismantling a hegemonic Western ontology—and its adjunct systems of colonialism and racial capitalism—remains.

Buck and the decolonizing generation not only anticipate the critiques brought about by ontological turn but invite us to extend its reach beyond the realm of scholarly discourse to the social project of an anthropology for liberation. We underscore here that the analytical procedures of anthropology rest on a decidedly material foundation.<sup>12</sup> In other words, it is one thing to destabilize a crude opposition between non-Western cosmologies and Western rationalism but another entirely to interrogate the practices of graduate training, professional advancement, publishing, and knowledge dissemination that tacitly enforce this division. As Ted Gordon (1997) has it, “Anthropology’s position as an ac-

cepted discipline in academia depends upon the continued economic and political support of the Western elites. . . . They have a vested interest in keeping anthropology oriented to their needs: ‘objective’ (mystifying), ‘non-political’ (non-subversive) and ‘academic’ (elitist)” (153). The possibility of an anthropology for liberation requires that the discipline attend equally to its conceptual registers and professional codes in its advance toward the ideal of decolonization.

David Graeber concurs in his recent indictment of the postmodern turn in anthropology. Graeber reasons that the unmitigated rejection of truth-claims robbed anthropology of its critical tool kit amid the neoliberal consolidation of financial and corporate power, structural adjustment programs, and the reinvention of the university as an incubator of the managerial classes (2014). In many respects, Graeber follows Faye Harrison (1997a), who memorably denounced postmodernism as a movement that rose “in academic popularity when women and Third World theorists [were] challenging the universality and hegemony of Western and androcentric views” (5). It is all the more disconcerting, then, that Graeber repackages this critique with no mention of the decolonizing generation or its chief interventions. Another version of his essay would concern itself not with the absence of anthropological writings on neoliberalism and structural adjustment in the twilight of the 1980s but with the fatal error in which anthropology failed to heed the warnings of those doing this work. That Graeber wholeheartedly accepts the narrative that anthropology tells for itself, as an uncomplicated progression of theoretical trends and innovations, buoys our assertion that the decolonization of anthropology will not come from within its established professional fraternity. While correct in his identification of the symptoms afflicting anthropology, he is mistaken in his diagnosis. Only by opening anthropology to streams of thought coolly elided by the postmodern turn can his vision of a vigilant and politicized anthropology be realized.

By definition, all generations eventually meet their end and yield to those that inevitably follow them. This is not to say that the project of the decolonizing generation is a failed one but to acknowledge the impossibility of the success or completion of decolonization. It is with this in mind that we have sought to give name to this generation of scholars that continue to be productive members of a global community of anthropologists. As a school of thought that was not previously named or fully acknowledged on its own terms, the aim of this article has been to affirm the diagnostic import of an essential critique of the discipline as the rise of the neoliberal university threatens its very existence. In our efforts to continue practicing anthropology through this crisis, we cannot revert back to an embrace of a quixotic positivism in an effort to attune the field to the corporate logics of contemporary higher education.

As Delmos Jones (1997) insists in the epilogue to *Decolonizing Anthropology*, “the just society is never achieved; instead it is a continual process of becoming, and this always

12. Charles Hale’s juxtaposition of the “cultural critique” paradigm with his preferred mode of “activist research” proves especially relevant to this discussion. As he writes, “Cultural critique embodies familiar progressive desires to champion subaltern peoples and to deconstruct the powerful; yet it neither proposes nor requires substantive transformation in conventional research methods to achieve these goals. Paradoxically, cultural critique has helped create the supporting rationale for activist research while also constituting a barrier, making it harder for activist research, as a distinctive methodological approach, to grow and prosper” (Hale 2006:98). Similarly, there is much to be gained from the interventions of the ontological turn, but its potential may ultimately rest on the extent to which it considers and accommodates the potent critiques of *Decolonizing* and its antecedents.

involves struggles" (198). Where these struggles are carried out may not always be clear, given the precarious state of anthropology departments and programs. Wherever we find ourselves located within the compartmentalized units of the academy, however, we must continue to *do* anthropology for it to be decolonized. An anthropology of this sort will necessarily reach beyond the prescribed limits of the discipline we have inherited—beyond the provincialism of its canon and the professional conventions through which it is reproduced.

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## Comments

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This is a strongly worded and powerful article bringing forth some key issues on rethinking the epistemological and theoretical concerns of the discipline of anthropology. The author's evocation of African American and diasporic voices from the history and periphery of social scientific writings frames the powerful arguments in favor of a politically informed approach where theory should move away from abstract generalizations to root itself in the hard realities of everyday life—realities of discrimination, violence and injustice meted out to racially and physically marginalized people. Correctly, the article turns a critical eye on the abstract, literal lyricism of postmodern writings that sometimes involves transporting the reader to worlds that bear little resemblance to the blood and gore of real life. The necessity of bringing in history and geopolitical realism to trace the processes that inform rather than focusing on the end products of social situations is inclusive of some of the methodological suggestions advocated. The review of literature, however, seems focused on a particular set of writings, primarily originating from the exclusive academic institutions of the West, whose hegemony has been criticized in this very essay. Even if the focus is on African American scholarship, which means originating from the United States, there would be some literature from the African continent nurtured away from Western patronage that would have been worth citing. Any interrogation of the African American "past" that went into the creation of this African diaspora, which must have had bearing on this particular mode of intellectual stream, would have added depth to this essay.

The abstract of the essay mentions the Third World, yet this world is intellectually absent from this work. References to Western-trained and probably -born anthropologists such as Kamala Visweswaran do not add to the diversity of intellectual material from which this essay is derived. Of course, it is not possible in the course of one essay to refer to many

scholars, and rightfully, the paper is focusing on the African American diaspora; meanwhile, the discussion of the work of Haiti-born and -educated Firmin can be appreciated for laying a foundation for what the author refers to as a "decolonized" anthropology. Yet the very processes of the formation of an intellectual tradition are somehow missing. The author mentions that little heed has been paid to earlier circuits of transoceanic movement and displacement and refers to the pioneering work of St. Clair Drake in extending the African American beyond America to include Pan-Africa, yet this very Pan-Africanism is missing. It would have enriched this essay to know how the works of African-origin and Africa-based scholars have influenced the identity as well as the intellectualism of the African American scholars. How does their own sense of history and their "past" influence them?

The criticism of racist capitalist expansion, the emergence of power nexuses based on monetary conditions, and even environmental "racism" are today the global experience of all Third World people. In this sense, the African American consciousness, in Du Bois's terms, has a wider referent and draws on a wide field of experience. History and cultural geography have contributed to these perspectives, as have the works of many Third World scholars. A degree of acknowledgment of the wider range of scholarship for the emergence of a "decolonized anthropology" would have been appreciated.

This is a well-argued and important paper. I personally support many of the arguments raised and am in congruence with the lack of visibility of racially marginalized people in academia; I also agree with the author that the university is not a pristine environment that fosters untrammled growth of unbiased vision. Yet the growth of a critical vision, an emergence of "decolonization," is rooted in an experiential reality, and maybe a few lines about the author's own personal growth would have added a "subjective" depth to the article.

"African American," too, is not a given condition; a probe into the geopolitical and historical conditions of its emergence, even if briefly, would enhance the intellectual depth of this otherwise commendable work.

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## Conjectures about Conjunctures, Decolonization, and the Ontological Turn

In their timely article, "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology Since the Eighties," Jafari Sinclair Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson "invoke the language of generations" to conceptually situate the text *Decolonizing Anthropology* (Harrison 1997c) and the cohort of scholars whose

sensibilities and positioned critiques produced that project. In a bold analytical move, they choose to once again foreground the historical conjunctures “that frame knowledge production itself as a temporal experience that reflects the societal exigencies of a particular moment.” The concept of conjuncture enables scholars to examine the twists and turns of academic as well as related popular and political discourses and note the ways in which scholars reflect as well as contribute to the historical moment in which their work is produced.

Allen and Jobson are clear that in the previous historical conjuncture, the postmodern stance ultimately overwhelmed the decolonizing project of the 1990s generation. Postmodernism’s claim to challenge fixed truths by eliminating comparative historical analyses of differential power left no space for an analysis of global conjunctures or room for the concept of the human that is foundational for struggles against all forms of oppression. Yet Allen and Jobson say too little about the production of academic fads within the current moment. Noting the claims of radical ontologists to move beyond a Eurocentric anthropology (de Castro 2013), they place this trend within the trajectory of the decolonizing project. Yet radical ontology fails to provide an analytic framework with which to access the continuing centrality of race to “power relations inherent in structures of domination” (Pierre 2004:162). Instead, it is proving to be one face of the contemporary rise of narratives of essentialized difference that are central to the dispossessions and displacements of the contemporary conjuncture.

It can be argued that dispossession is at the heart of the constitution of capital but takes different forms in different historical conjunctures (Luxemburg 1951 [1913]). Capital is approached here in its Marxist sense as a set of unequal social relations organized for the appropriation of surplus value, which is directly accumulated from labor but also indirectly through the transfer of stored value in the form of resources, land and interest, and other instruments of financialization. The broad dissemination and varying forms of the implementation of the neoliberal agenda and the struggles against it that extended around the world in waves of restructuring from the 1970s to the global economic crisis of 2008 are now producing a somewhat different conjuncture. Neoliberal seizures of all aspects of public goods are not over but are transforming. We face a historical moment in which processes of dispossession have become more globally visible, and in relationship to these processes, we find ourselves enmeshed in and confronting new contradictions as well as multiple conflicting narratives.

It is only by reconstituting a decolonization project within an understanding of the current historical conjuncture that we can link the continuing “expulsions” (Sassen 2014), the increasing denial to migrant and racialized populations of the right to have rights, the global securitization and prison-industrial–detention center industry, the corporate financialization of loans to the poor and the debt-collection industry, the ongoing seizure of rural lands and the housing of the

urban poor, and the multiple additional forms of accumulation through dispossession that lead to economic and social displacements. Displacement takes the form of the development of renewed forms of precarity and downward social mobility as well as migrations precipitated by war, so-called development, structural adjustment, and impoverishment. The very people from whom wealth is extracted are increasingly cast out or cast as worthless, whether or not they are legal citizens of the country in which they live. While the extraction of value is maintained ultimately by force, narratives of national, racialized, and gendered difference that devalue personhood are central to the process. In developing this point, it is useful to read David Harvey (2003) through the work of Quijano’s (2000) “coloniality of power.” The global constitution of naturalized racialized differentiations generates the disciplining effects of the continuing criminalization of “Blackness” as well as the contemporary “ungrievability” (Butler 2004) of migrants, Muslims, refugees, and asylum seekers.

These global processes have their own particular local configurations as multiscale networks of differential power reconstitute local histories, confront particular struggles, and are narrated within specific religious, cultural, and national traditions. It is incumbent on social theorists whose orientation is to contribute to struggles for social justice to ask when as well as why certain issues become timely and whose understandings are being referenced at any particular time. The ontological turn in anthropology, which reduces these struggles to accounts of the timeless radical alterity of alternative cosmologies, contributes to the narratives of essentialized difference that not only mask but are central to the extraction of value within processes of dispossession.

Our intellectual concepts, paradigms, and debates reflect the contemporary conjuncture as we experience and contribute to its ongoing transformations. As Allen and Jobson indicate, to recover and regenerate a decolonizing project means not only to critique the continuing coloniality of power but also to build an engaged anthropology. Within the contesting visions of anthropology emerging at this moment, decolonizing anthropology requires us not to be intoxicated by the wordsmiths of the ontological turn but to craft an anthropology empowered by domains of commonality that emerge within just struggles to save the planet. Gilroy (2004) boldly calls these emerging struggles “planetary humanism.”

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I am perhaps too close to various dimensions of this article to provide the kind of comment that *Current Anthropology*

generally receives. Allen was an esteemed colleague at University of Texas and formed part of an extraordinary moment in our anthropology department: a convergence of six black scholars and three or four others, all of whom incorporated into our work and teaching the core principles of what Allen and Jobson call the “decolonizing generation.” Some in the department considered this critical mass to constitute a threat and openly expressed relief when the moment passed. I view that passing with a great sense of loss, even while affirming, with the authors, that such projects will continue in different spaces and in different ways.

Allen and Jobson argue that the decolonizing generation crafted a series of interventions, crucial for addressing key challenges and deficits in the discipline (and in social sciences more generally), interventions at first generally ignored by the mainstream, though at times “discovered” later and repackaged as novel. This sounds good to me, but since I took part in the AAA panel that gave rise to *Decolonizing Anthropology*, this argument is better left to others to assess.

My reflections focus instead on the principal theoretical move that Allen and Jobson attribute to this loosely associated group of scholar-activists. Using Firmin as an example and echoing Du Bois, they call attention to a “double gesture” whereby one “strategically occupies the racial taxonomy of Western modernity while denouncing the very existence of race as a biological type.” They skillfully weave through the text a series of iterative examples of this move, which they present as the “foundational maneuver of a decolonial anthropology.” Just as race is both occupied and critiqued, so goes it for anthropology, for the “neoliberal academy,” and for the social justice movements with which we as scholar-activists are aligned.

I find this series of arguments fascinating, convincing to a point, but also mildly disconcerting. This “double gesture” in my theoretical lexicon, stands as a succinct summary of Gramscian counterhegemonic politics (Hall 1996b; Roseberry 1994). The tools of social struggle come in large part from a resignification of the hegemonic; therein lies their great power but also their inherent limitations and the seeds of doubt that they will never be creative or potent enough to dismantle the Master’s house. This, in turn, leaves me wondering about the contextual reference in the book’s keyword, *decolonizing*. Fully acknowledging the prescience of editor and organizer Faye Harrison, I suppose it could have been—as Allen and Jobson seem to suggest—an anticipatory reference to what we now know as the “decolonial turn” in social theory. But I always took it mainly as an effort to recapture the (waning?) energy of decolonial and revolutionary movements of the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s. This latter interpretation would associate the “decolonizing generation” more with Gramsci than with latter-day decolonial theorists, with the Gilroy of *Ain’t no Black* (Gilroy 1987) up through anti-anti-essentialism before *Against Race* (Gilroy 2000).

The clarification acquires importance in light of Allen and Jobson’s conclusion, where they turn a hopeful eye to the

“ontological turn.” Their intention here is laudably consistent: in the fine tradition of the “decolonizing generation,” they suggest that we both occupy this “turn” and critique its shortcomings. I am not so sure. Take for example, the black diaspora theorists who engage seriously with the precepts of “Afro-pessimism” (following Sexton 2010; Wilderson 2010). They argue explicitly that to speak of black ontology is nonsensical in a world defined by the structural antagonism of antiblackness. For these theorists, Gramscian theory—again quite explicitly—far from offering tools to address current political predicaments, forms part of the problem (Wilderson 2003). The same goes for proponents of the “ontological turn,” closely linked to the latter-day “decolonial” theorists (e.g., Blaser 2013; de la Cadena 2010; Escobar 2013). Despite references to “partial connections” and the like, these theorists propose a radical break with Western modernity in favor of a politics from within alternative ontologies. For them, also, the Gramscian double gesture concedes too much, perpetuating the ills of modernist politics, albeit in the name of radical social change.

In sum, while I agree with Allen and Jobson that the decolonizing generation-generated principles and practice are underappreciated and could offer creative solutions to current political/anthropological predicaments, I think their argument would grow stronger with a greater recognition of its own limits. That is, “our” dialogue with proponents of both Afro-pessimism and the ontological turn would be most productive if we acknowledge the epistemic break and seek critical mutual understanding across the divide. This gives the “decolonizing generation” its due while clearing the way for what could become radically new perspectives on race, activist research, and social struggle, with hopes that the new “generation” will build on, rather than disregard, whatever its predecessors managed to learn.

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The paper by Allen and Jobson raises questions on the future of anthropology. Of particular importance is the role of mobility in anthropological knowledge production. Mobility—across multiple spheres and worldviews—and lack thereof shall determine whose versions of what encounters are recounted and shared in marketplaces of ideas and shape the discipline of anthropology.

The paper, focusing on the United States, speaks to the decolonization of anthropology by apprehending and displacing the “logic of coloniality” that underpins Western modernity. It dwells on Black American and Afro-Caribbean anthropologists as an African diaspora—as the “outsiders

within” the community of anthropologists at the center (Harrison 2008)—many of whom have attempted to make their homes in anthropology despite its attempts to spurn or ignore their contributions. The authors do not cast their net wider for comparative empirical substantiation of the colonial anthropology they critique from the equally colonial experiences of Black anthropologists elsewhere. In Africa especially, these anthropologists are doubly outsiders by virtue of the hierarchies of unequal encounters and exchange between Africa and the West and between the “native” or “insider” anthropologist, on the one hand, and the “Western” or “outsider” anthropologist, on the other.

An inclusive reconstruction of anthropology after decolonization is essential, if the authors’ ambition of building a new anthropology around the core value of a shared humanity and away from “a Eurocentric canon of hallmark thinkers” is to escape the pitfalls of what it seeks to replace. The indignities and inequalities suffered by the Black diaspora are indeed reason enough “to challenge the partiality of a science configured without empirical reference to the full physiognomic range or cultural diversity.” However, there is need to compare notes with Black experiences and ongoing clamors for decolonization of the university and the disciplines on the African continent. This is especially important if going native is not to be mistaken for decolonization, in a world where the dominant forces of global inequalities and dehumanization are all too keen to divide and rule (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:27).

In South Africa, for example, where the resident white population is significant and the majority of anthropologists teaching at universities are white, the overwhelming tendency is to study down. Ethnographic representations of Blacks, Coloreds, Indians, and Poor Whites are often crafted without rigorous systematic dialogue with the people studied. Competing perspectives and epistemologies within and beyond the discipline are often ignored. There is little anthropological coproduction with local intermediaries. The tendency is to justify studying down with untested claims of solidarity and compassion and unsubstantiated emancipatory commitments (Nyamnjoh 2015). This is the subject of an ongoing debate on the resilience of colonial education in Africa (Nyamnjoh 2012*b*) to which I contributed a paper on the future of anthropology in Africa and commented reactions to it (Gordon 2013; Hartnack 2013; Niehaus 2013; Nyamnjoh 2012*a*, 2013; Osha 2013; Teppo 2013; Warnier 2013). Even as I write, the debate rages on. Since March 2015, it has been taken up by students across universities in South Africa, seeking the decolonization of the university through symbolic protests such as “The Rhodes Must Fall” movement that led to the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town campus.

In terms of theory building, methods, and practice within the discipline (Nyamnjoh 2015:54–57), Allen and Jobson in their paper do not provide much of a way forward for a new anthropology beyond the categorical emphasis that “the de-

colonization of anthropology will not arise from inside the field.” This begs the question: How does one ensure that the call for decolonization—for example, through the “departmentalization of Black Studies programs,” greater presence of Black scholars in course syllabi, and their frequent citation by fellow anthropologists—is not read by those faithful to a provincial and conventional, albeit “reconstructed canonical anthropology,” of which the authors are rightly critical, as a call for mediocrization of knowledge production and the creation of ghettos for Black anthropologists?

I could not agree more with the authors’ suggestion that “the development of the discipline [of anthropology] cannot be limited to those who were educated by, or identified exclusively as, anthropologists” and that practising anthropologists must deemphasize the exceptionalism of their discipline in favor of a conception that “details what it specifically can offer to a broader and collaborative repertoire.” I also agree with them that for an effective decolonization of anthropology, anthropologists must learn to look beyond the narrow confines of their discipline and their own circles. Indeed, the future of anthropology lies not only in increased cross- and transdisciplinary conversations within the university but also, and more importantly, in shopping for interlocutors further afield, among writers of fiction, for example. As one such writer observed, “The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place” (Achebe 1974 [1964]:46).

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## Reply

We thank Channa, Hale, Nyamnjoh, and Glick Schiller for their timely and insightful invitations to meditate on the question of twenty-first century decolonization. As regimes of dispossession and austerity are increasingly turned back on the global north—as the recent saga in Greece demonstrates—it is clear that the theoretical and methodological contributions of the decolonizing generation remain startlingly prescient to “the problems that confront us all” (Boas 1969 [1945]:1). Their work does not signal the end of decolonization as a useful frame of reference. Of course, this means that we must at once rethink a facile definition of the West and attend with new lenses to the world-making of complex *insider-outsiders* and their strategies of producing knowledge and reproducing effective resistance (see Harrison 2008).

Decolonization is not what it used to be. While the decolonizing generation forged its critique in the wake of national liberation movements and state socialist projects, the contemporary political landscape appears increasingly bleak and bereft of alternatives to liberal capitalist democracy. As the Arab Spring, Occupy, and antiausterity movements of

Europe and Latin America disintegrate into debt crises, dependent states, and renewed structural adjustment policies, the once potent register of the decolonial finds less conceptual purchase amid increasingly deterritorialized networks of political and economic power. Our efforts to critically reassess and celebrate the project of decolonizing anthropology thus require that we apprehend the differences between the contemporary global landscape and that which gave rise to the initial volume.

The West cannot be reduced to what it claims to be. Operating from the vantage of the “otherwise modern”—the obscured theaters of colonial violence and plantation labor on which the West was proverbially won—yields a generative skepticism toward the narratives the West crafts for itself (Trouillot 2002*b*). Our efforts to chart the *longue durée* of decolonial thinking in anthropology demonstrates a parallel critique to the ontological turn advanced by those “in, but not of, the West” (James cited in Hall 1996*a*:246). It seems that for Channa, scholars *in* the West—or trained in its bourgeois institutions—are irreducibly *of* the West. However, she would likely agree with us that while the geography of the West (and, by extension, the non-West) had been assumed and unchanging, the overlapping (but not necessarily coterminous) geographies of the postcolonial, Third World, and global south are unevenly mobilized. Our contribution to this discussion in “The Decolonizing Generation” advances a view drawn from our readings of recent theoretical developments in anthropology and a longer interdisciplinary radical political tradition of decolonial thought. Beyond the nettlesome issue of citation—that is, the discursive silencing of contributions of scholars outside the West who are often referenced only in passing and too often rendered “intellectually absent” from the scholarly record—lie larger questions. Regrettably, we could index only a few in our article: Where is the locus of decolonization and its relationship to the imprecise geography that is regarded as the West? What are some of the unexpected and unaccounted routes of decolonial thinking in the guild of sociocultural anthropology?

The West is an ideal *and* a material enterprise. Spurred by neoliberal globalization and attendant south-north migratory routes, anthropologists have questioned the enduring value of the West as a descriptive geography (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2011; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). To wit, long before this turn in anthropology, scholars of African diaspora letters consistently critiqued the idealist projection of the West since its inception at the conjunctures of 1492 (Césaire 2000 [1955]; Cugoana 1999 [1787]; Du Bois 1979 [1946]; Firmin 2002 [1885]; Glissant 1989; Mignolo 2000; Trouillot 1991; Wynter 1995). From this perspective, “the creation of the Negro, the fiction of a dumb beast of burden fit only for slavery, was closely associated with the economic, technical and financial requirements of Western Development from the sixteenth century on” (Robinson 2000 [1983]:81). As practitioners of anthropology—a discipline conceived in the West—

this is not a legacy from which we can passively or innocently exit. It is, however, one with which we generatively “dis-identify” (Muñoz 1999). The registers of polemic and retort are necessary to this “double gesture” by which decolonial anthropologists deploy the theory and methods of the Western social sciences in order to dismantle the West as a descriptive geography and metaphysical comportment. Decolonization, in other words, is borne from the crucible of “the West” as a limiting structure and a condition of possibility. The decolonial tradition we discuss here emanates from the African diaspora as an unresolved and unsettled demographic within the borders of what we otherwise understand to be the West.

To be sure, we do not argue that this double gesture is wholly adequate to the task of true decolonization of the globe (or of the academy, for that matter!). As Hale points out, scholars associated with the Afro-pessimist turn in Black Studies have adroitly theorized the irreconcilability of Black ontology. Still, anthropologists committed to the contemporary survival of their living and breathing research collaborators and subjects push against this rigid understanding of Orlando Patterson’s theory of social death.<sup>13</sup> Our critical engagement with the ontological turn in anthropology, therefore, should not be understood merely as an effort to “occupy this ‘turn’ and critique its shortcomings,” as our friend Hale suggests. We do, however, share a concern for the broader crisis from which it draws its theoretical armature and political potency. Fueled by the imminent dangers of climate change and global ecological collapse, the “multinaturalist” critique of ontological anthropology seeks to provincialize the Nature-Culture dichotomy of a distinctly Western metaphysics through an embrace of multiple ontologies and attendant constructions of nature (Kohn 2015). We are sympathetic to this entreaty to unsettle the philosophical assumptions of the modern human sciences. Still, we are less convinced that ontological anthropology is sufficient to the task it assigns itself. Even as it resolves one conceptual problematic—namely, the adoption of nature as an abstract universal in Western philosophy—the ontological turn enforces a false opposition between the West (or “modern”) and non-West (or “nonmodern”). In other words, while ontological anthropology identifies a universal nature as the foundational postulate of modernity, a wholesale Latourian opposition between the moderns and nonmoderns serves as the foundational, but equally inaccurate, postulate of ontological anthropology. The West emerges in this literature as the straw man against which an oppositional indigenous perspectivism is launched. Drawing lessons from an expansive bibliography of critical anthropologies of the African diaspora, however, we are also very skeptical of efforts to bracket out the West as an uncomplicated metaphysical comportment divorced from material regimes of dispossession and primitive accumulation.

13. For example, Allen (2011:82).



In its efforts to provincialize the West from the outside looking in, ontological anthropology reinscribes the foundational alterity on which the project of the West is built. The approach advocated by ontological anthropology can exist only so long as the West remains unfettered by the disturbances of transatlantic slavery and its afterlives. But the social worlds and theoretical perspectives of Black folk, as *outsiders within*, provide a rich conceptual tool kit to apprehend the present epoch of capitalist proliferation and ecological crisis. In this view, the present crisis is not merely the result of one metaphysical comportment (what de Castro terms “multiculturalism”) unduly supplanting another (“multinationalism”) but of the capitalist imperative of limitless growth and extractive imperialism that emanates from the plantation complex of the Americas (see Moore 2015).

Ontological anthropology perpetuates the dangerous and by now unsupportable myth that anthropology can save itself from its own methodological shortcomings and conceptual blind spots by conflating an idealist projection of the West with the material conditions of its development. Even if we accept that the West is not an absolute geography but a mode of apprehending reality espoused by only a segment of the North Atlantic, this projected reality is nonetheless dependent on a sturdy and intransigent “savage slot” that conveniently elides the brutal histories of plantation slavery and colonization (Trouillot 1991).

As the specter haunting anthropology, decolonial thought is consistently relegated to the margins of the discipline. And decolonial thinking is by no means limited to anthropology. For this reason, we continue to advocate for the “opening” of anthropology theory to a broader field of inquiry. As Nyamnjoh reminds us, this act of opening cannot be limited to a cosmetic multidisciplinary that allows long-standing conventions of anthropological research, publishing, and citation to remain intact. As anthropologists, we must reach beyond closely related fields such as history, sociology, and geography to heed the unheralded contributions of literary criticism and fiction that have been in the business of producing anthropological theory for quite some time. Voices from within the proverbial savage slot have long unsettled the conceptual assumptions on which anthropology is based. These keen critical voices have often taken the form of creative prose and poetry and should not be overlooked by anthropological critics.

If anthropology has been structured upon a notion of absolute alterity, then the decolonization of anthropology cannot be achieved with recourse to a contrived figure of the “pristine primitive” (Wolf 1982). Instead, decolonizing anthropology requires redoubled efforts to chart the material effects of the Nature-Culture divide as a foundational premise of modern capitalism.

While the ontological turn retains the West as the crucible of a pure metaphysics that we must think ourselves out of through an appreciation of multiple ontologies and alternative conceptions of the relationship between nature and

culture, Schiller rightfully points us back to the modes of dispossession that the ontological turn conveniently elides. Following a Marxian critique of Hegelian idealism, decolonial anthropology returns this ideological skirmish to the material struggle for liberation, for which the stakes are higher than ever before. While we may seek rapprochement with emergent streams of anthropological theory, Schiller is right to caution against academic fads that may or may not realize the potential we wishfully ascribe to them. The viability of the ontological turn as an agent of liberation depends on the extent to which it engages with and responds to this neglected body of criticism.

Black Studies instructs us to treat anthropological theory as a series of revisions and erasures. Thus, alongside innovative ethnographic research, the charge of successive generations of decolonizing anthropologists must be—*plus ça change*—to revive neglected streams of thought for subsequent generations of anthropologists that may too easily be swept up by the latest theoretical proposal to repackage the foundational anthropological mythos of radical alterity. If anthropological theory were a neutral ground of intellectual exchange, there would be little reason to revisit the contributions of the decolonizing generation. Ideally, an essay of this sort would not have to be written. In the months since we penned our original essay, for instance, David Graeber has joined the chorus of critics denouncing the ontological turn. We find his work encouraging insofar as it questions not simply the theoretical salience of the ontological turn but also why the ontological turn appears so compelling to a specific cohort of contemporary anthropologists. When Graeber (2015) describes the ontological turn as an effort to preserve science as “the special property of ‘Westerners’ or ‘Euro-Americans,’” we eagerly join him (21). Still, how does the anthropological theorist arrive at a conclusion of this sort? Put differently, what disciplinary erasures and “electoral politics” occasion Graeber to rehearse the uncredited interventions of his decolonial antecedents? Why do movements such as the ontological turn—like the postmodern turn before it—strive to enforce the prescribed limits of Western science precisely at moments in which it appears threatened by insurgent decolonial practitioners? We are grateful for this engagement and opportunity to contribute our analyses to this conversation. In the end, to riff on Frederick Maitland’s familiar adage, anthropology will be decolonized or it will be nothing at all.

—Jafari Sinclair Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson

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