

Introduction to Practice What You Teach: Activist Anthropology at the Sites of Cross-Talk and Cross-Fire

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Constructed as a consciously transnational and interdisciplinary dialogue among eight anthropologists, the following group of essays compares methods, strategies and outcomes of expressly political research, collaborative networks, participatory projects and activist teaching. While only a few of the essays in their current iterations deal explicitly with teaching, our title draws on our ongoing conversation about engaged anthropology that began when most of the contributors were apprentice teachers in graduate school and has continued as we have taught, researched and, alternately, worked in community-based projects. Here, refracted through the lens of the 2007 Society for Applied Anthropology meetings' theme which focused on "Global Insecurities" and for which we initially produced these essays, we explore how in our various positions distributed across and between several disciplines and nonprofit professions in the US and beyond, we employ the tools of anthropology to imagine, construct and inhabit relationships of thinking and learning collectively, across and outside of mainstream political orthodoxies, disciplinary epistemologies, cultural registers, as well as physical, sexual and civil normativities. As we envisioned what publishing our individual essays as a conversation might contribute, we saw our specific navigations of "global uncertainties" as an opportunity to consider whether our current projects and teaching reflected a common school of praxis—that is, a way of engaging anthropology as a tool for more than merely describing the world, but rather for making a positive difference.

Another primary linkage among the contributors is the mentorship we received from Ann E. Kingsolver, whose activist teaching particularly in Wisconsin, California, South Carolina and Sussex modelled how to take a creative, (re)constructive role in refashioning and honing the tools of social analysis and also how to build and sustain engaged, transnational intellectual community and political networks over time. Our intervention, here in a Marxist journal, points up how activist teaching serves as the bridge between our so-called "field" contexts (where we are simultaneously activists and anthropologists navigating such everyday social realities as our local, national and transnational activist commitments, academic institutional constraints and the aggressively, pro-war foreign policy of the United States) and our texts (representations that circulate in transnational flows of power/knowledge). Thus, as a whole, these essays might be construed as a reflexive, group ethnography, which makes the subjects of its explicitly engaged analysis the role of anthropology in constructing knowledge and power; the role of teaching anthropological perspectives in transforming the unequal relations of power/knowledge; and the responsibility of activist anthropologists to challenge the discipline, and Academe in general, to engage the critiques that we encounter and produce as we push the boundaries of the field (and fieldwork) to include our own political networks and activist trajectories.

A majority of the contributors to the current issue were trained in cultural anthropology at UC

Santa Cruz during the mid to late 1990s, a period when US American anthropologists, both new and established, were reexamining the potential of anthropological research to serve as an agent of social transformation (cf. Harrison 1991) and, perhaps even more urgently, were striving to transform the objectivist modes of ethnographic inquiry that feminist, postcolonial and indigenous critiques of the discipline had laid bare (cf., Zavella 1997; Fabian 1983; Said 1993; Abu-Lughod 1998, 1991; Narayan 1993). As apprentice teachers simultaneously charged with reframing and representing the discipline in our classrooms, we found that instructing undergraduates under the rubric of “Culture and Power” (as our program was called) necessitated a deep historical approach that connected internal reflexive critiques of fieldwork to activist confrontations with US American anthropology’s history of complicity in constructing the modes of thought, relations of power, as well as institutions of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and global structural inequality. Thus we invented courses, co-taught, and often subversively retooled syllabi to create co-learning contexts where the confluence of material and ideological conditions that characterized the disciplinary (inward or) down-turn of the 1990s could be related to the rise of neoliberal global capitalism in a post-colonial, post-socialist world, and not, incidentally, could contravene a general mood of defeat among Leftists as social movements turned away from class struggle, classically defined. As we struggled to teach a useful anthropology, we found that we were also gleaning the discipline, its borders and interstices for workable, transparent methods.

To be clear, in our relationships with students many of us understood in a very practical sense that identifying the epistemological, methodological and political conditions for producing anthropological research either could be paralyzing or could be the first step in actualizing a pedagogy of engaged praxis. For many of us this teaching challenge led to our participation in curriculum development projects that, to name a few examples, forced our home institutions to teach Black anthropologists as part of the canon, to include courses about women of colour in ethnic studies requirements, and to create courses on sexu-

ality and gender that acknowledged the intellectual and political contributions of Queer studies scholars and activists. Furthermore, teaching allowed many of us to use the classroom to collaborate with students to co-produce course-related conferences and activism, service-learning and community-based research projects, and to introduce students to non-academic careers. While some of these efforts increasingly have become mainstream in US institutions of higher learning, they were pioneering attempts that were either actively discouraged or largely ignored in our own training. The projects we relate then, and the moments of convergence, overlap and disjuncture among them, offer a broad and strategically optimistic description of an “engaged anthropology” that draws on historical approaches, situated perspectives, decolonizing critiques, and embodied practices that include everything from empathetic listening to social disruption. Here, I suggest that the key contribution that our essays make to decolonizing and repoliticizing anthropological practice is a sampling of ethnographic work that conscientiously, reflexively if you will, confronts and analyzes the broad substrate of relations of power that are inherent in social science research with human interlocutors today. Our work, often positioned outside the discipline and the academy, re-presents—i.e., “causes to reappear” (in the literal, etymological sense)—that which might be overlooked as the possibilities of and challenges to an activist anthropology.

The Courage to Speak a Powerful Critique: Applying Cultural Anthropology

Reverberating throughout this issue is the chord Sawyer strikes when she describes the transformative possibilities she has discovered teaching at the intersection of cultural anthropology and social work studies, both of which she describes as “contested and political” fields of knowledge production with definite and distinct analyses of structural inequality and power. As she recounts an experience during graduate school in the mid 1990s, Sawyer describes the actual dangers she and her allies faced—that is, some students and faculty were “pushed out” for pointing up the often, uninterrogated hierarchies that positioned theories of individual intellectual engagement

over the social relations and products of collective action occurring along with, or outside *Academe*. As a professor of social work in Sweden today, Sawyer introduces her students to activist mentors, such as W.E.B. Dubois, Zora Neale Hurston and Paulo Freire, who demonstrate how to identify, resist and transform relations of power from within an unequal society, classroom or discipline. Sawyer's classroom today then might be seen as a site for the collaborative project she refers to as "indigenizing" social work; for she recognizes that her students are also colleagues who live, work, and belong in the very communities "targeted" by development NGOs, social work agencies and, not inconsequentially, anthropology.

Similarly and urgently, Kalantary's contribution thickly describes the specific "new sets of fears, anxieties and political hurdles" that anthropologists from and/or studying the Middle East must confront as the US government aligns its aggressive and xenophobic, domestic and foreign policies. As an Iranian political exile, US American citizen and teacher in Middle Eastern studies, Kalantary uses what is an increasingly inauspicious kaleidoscope of transposed identities to focus a simultaneously reflexive, historical and ethnographic lens on the university campus classroom as such. So doing, Kalantary analyzes the cultural work of imagining, creating and empowering the new structures, institutions, legalized discourses, and political roles that secure the geographic boundaries and epistemological sutures of the (so-called) U.S. "homeland."

Paradigms of Participation in Question: Defining Community

Both essays that analyze paradigms of participation help to resituate the emancipatory claims that are often attributed to participatory models for research and governance, and so doing they emphasize the importance of the critical interventions that teachers like Sawyer and Kalantary make in the classroom, where we seek to equip students with the analytical tools and historicizing lenses vital to an engaged citizenry. Additionally, Riley provides a perspective from the United Kingdom, where disciplinary boundaries are drawn slightly differently, especially with regard to the proximity of anthropology to

international development studies. In Riley's hands, anthropology serves as a critical and historicizing filter for new participatory paradigms of international development as they travel across applied and theoretical contexts in several disciplines. In the first part of her essay, a brief literature review, she shows that asking anthropological questions can facilitate a reading of participation as more than a neopopulist metaphor or an oversimplified assumption about relationships between "the State" and its opposing entity, which might be cast as the "poor," the community, the village, or civil society. In fact, posing such questions as what does development do and where do the ideas that comprise development come from, resituates the subjects of analysis as well as the positions from which they can be studied. Thus Riley's anthropological critique suggests the need for ethnographies of how such concepts as participation, state, citizen and representation are experienced and produced at the intersections rather than the divisions of institutions and cultural domains. In the conclusion to her essay, she explores her own suggestion by offering a brief series of ethnographic vignettes connecting the multiple roles of several actors across state/civil society divisions to her argument that more nuanced analyses of participatory mechanisms require a focus on the complexity of everyday, lived experiences of political structures, institutions and relationships.

Hudgins positions her critique of participatory approaches more squarely within an applied anthropology framework, yet her contribution also suggests a necessary resituating of the subjects of analysis. As she seeks to identify the groups who might or should benefit from the health pamphlet she was commissioned to create, Hudgins excavates the meanings of farmworker and migrant across various registers and questions who and what makes a community. Thus, on one level her essay describes how her collaboration with a healthcare focused community-based organization was confounded by her desire to make a useful "participatory" contribution to farmworkers as such. On another level, she systematically broadens the scope of her ethnographic study to understand applications and contexts for the notions of participation, collaboration and community. By turning her focus to the key activities of a participatory project

and considering whether a shared problem or need is enough to define or galvanize a community, her work sheds light on the analysis of a politics of stake-holding among government agencies, CBO's and non-profits in South Carolina.

Activist Linkages and Ruptures: Decolonizing Organizing Frameworks

At a moment when notions of so-called global insecurities seemingly pervade every realm of cultural production, the first four essays raise such issues as how teachers and researchers can transgress the recurring social norms of complicity with cultural and political oppression by situating anthropology historiographically. Drawing on the flushing out of the engaged “problematic” of both studying and inhabiting culture and power through the overlapping activities of research and teaching, the final essays by Morgensen, Garriga-López, Anderson-Lazo and the commentary by Kingsolver turn to weaving the specific threads of our communal, story-telling tapestry that analyze the lived and embodied experience of activism as ethnographic practice to which earlier essays also allude. In particular, as ethnographers learn from and within networks of activism and organizing, earlier questions such as whether shared problems define communities and whether spatial understandings of cultural production can enhance equity emerge again to suggest that situated analyses critical of power both point to and often require the so-called, engaged researcher to enact uncomfortable, disharmonious, embodied practices such as deviance, disruption and rupture.

In her research regarding the linkages and disjunctures between Puerto Rican and New York City ACT UP! communities, Garriga-López collects and analyzes histories of Puerto Rican diasporic activism in conversation with long-time HIV/AIDS activists. Her essay also provides a unique examination of ethnographic methods, which is both reflexive and participatory in that she enlists fellow activists. Specifically, she engages her veteran activist interlocutors in assessing the utility of an historical framework for understanding the effectiveness of activist strategies and the long term impact of forms of embodied resistance on the social arena.

In this regard, her interviews reveal that ACT UP! effectively used many forms of embodied deviance (e.g. fake blood, performance, die-ins, kissing, etc.) to congeal and further draw upon a collective understanding of structural violence that described the course of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the island as the layering of the “bio-political effects” of US colonial imperialism, including racism, homophobia, gender inequality, clinical treatment, case management, sex work and poverty. This hard-won view of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Puerto Rico changed the terrain of health equality, setting the “stage” for new transgressive acts, such as needle exchange events, movement recruitment in bars, and other emerging forms of community activism.

In a related sense, Morgensen examines how Indigenous AIDS activists worldwide are producing theory and movements that challenge the colonial conditions of the pandemic. He calls upon anthropologists to learn from their work and to centre decolonization in studies of AIDS and power. More specifically, however, his essay pursues the claim by Indigenous activists that new research must decolonize knowledge, given that the colonial conditions of social life will not shift until methods of producing knowledge *about* that world also transform. Indigenous AIDS activists cite broader Indigenous critiques that defy the power of non-Indigenous scholars to define or control knowledge of Indigenous people. Morgensen's essay situates Indigenous activist claims as discrepant bodies of critical knowledge about AIDS and power to which non-Indigenous scholars must respond. He then asks what is at stake for non-Indigenous anthropologists to engage this knowledge dialogically. He traces how Indigenous activist claims are mirrored in historical critiques of coloniality in anthropological theory, which also provide critical insight for the anthropology of AIDS. Arguing that the accountable scholarship demanded by activists will arise from accountable relationships, Morgensen ultimately centres “the *process* of configuring anthropological research against colonial legacies” as crucial to anthropologists meeting activists in shared challenge to the colonial conditions of health *and* of knowledge about health.

As the initiator of this written collaboration

and its original editor, with my contribution I propose a slight inversion of the final narrative thread, regarding the roles of values, ideology and power in decolonizing ethnographic practice. Here, like the reverse side of our conversational tapestry, my essay seeks to provoke a collective examination and comparison of social change objectives and commitments within the Academy and in the world of faith-based organizing. By making practice, power, research, and action the subjects of my analysis, I employ a post-colonial feminist critique, which interrogates the social location of the researcher, resists binary logics of praxis/theory, and locates the structural-material effects of ethnographic research within a broader field of power. Specifically, I reflect on how the challenges I experienced as a conscientiously, engaged anthropologist in Guatemala articulate with those I encountered employing the methods/processes of social justice organizing in San Diego, California. Introducing the “structural-historical organizing method” adopted by the PICO international network for social justice, which cites well-known organizers and claims victories from the civil rights movement, Latin American social revolutions, and traditional trade organizing in the US, the primary question is whether models drawing on faith-based or inter-faith activism inspired by such social change-seeking institutions as the Black Church or liberation theologians are unseemly to many activist anthropologists simply because they leave unchallenged the ideological belief systems of participants or, rather, because they engage them. Describing power as a cumulative product of a process which begins with research that foregrounds engaged listening, and subsequently building relationships, developing common interests, identifying problems to be addressed, and mobilizing collective action to create change, my comparative approach

aims to produce constructive dialogue among activists and anthropologists who promote progressive social change by contextualizing the PICO model historically and by showing the overlap between people-based organizing and respectfully-conceived social science research.

If we argue that research relationships alternately can naturalize, transgress, transform and wield power, what might a model or process for progressive social change do to mobilize activist researchers in the service of the communities to which they pertain? What if we were to teach a paradigm of social change that recognizes how people experience power differently, along linkages of commonality?

In closing, I suggest that the essays we have written to advance the conversation about teaching and activist anthropology reflect on, re-present and conscientiously re-situate a deep history of political engagements and social commitments that in contemporary context expand rather than contract our responsibilities to produce ethnographic research that serves communities and that confronts the modes of thought as well as institutions, which reproduce hierarchies of domination, oppression and inequality.

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