

YEAR IN REVIEW

Public Anthropology

Where It Hurts: 2014 Year in Review

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ABSTRACT Anthropologists have increasingly used the term *public anthropology* to refer to a model of research and practice dedicated to bringing anthropological knowledge into public discourse to affect tangible social change (Low 2011). The increased visibility of what is variously referred to as public, engaged, activist, action, or applied anthropology challenges anthropologists to circulate their insights more widely and effectively in the public sphere. The question, however, is not merely whether anthropologists should participate in the public sphere but also how anthropologists should intervene. In this article, I examine the interventions that anthropologists made in debates on the Ebola epidemic, state violence and civil discourse, and the need for cultural change in the face of climate change. Using these cases as a theoretical point of departure, I question what would happen if we imagined our work as a practice of freedom, an act of imagination, a tool for transforming an unequal world? What if we did the work of anthropology as though our lives and the lives of others depended on it? [*public anthropology, Ebola, Israel-Palestine, Ferguson, climate change, year in review*]

RESUMEN Antropólogos han usado crecientemente el término *antropología pública* para referirse a un modelo de investigación y práctica dedicados a traer el conocimiento antropológico al discurso público para afectar el cambio social tangible (Low, 2011). La visibilidad incrementada de lo que se refiere de varias maneras como público, comprometido, activista, acción o antropología aplicada reta a los antropólogos a circular su conocimiento más amplia y efectivamente dentro de la esfera pública. La pregunta, sin embargo, no es meramente si los antropólogos deben participar en la esfera pública sino también cómo los antropólogos deben intervenir. En este artículo examino las intervenciones que antropólogos hicieron en debates sobre la epidemia del virus ébola, violencia de estado, y discurso civil, y la necesidad de cambio cultural ante el cambio climático. Usando estos casos como un punto de partida teórico pregunto, ¿qué sucedería si imaginamos nuestro trabajo como una práctica de libertad, un acto de imaginación, una herramienta para transformar un mundo desigual? ¿Qué tal si hiciéramos el trabajo de antropología como si nuestras vidas y las vidas de otros dependieran de él? [*antropología pública, ébola, Israel-Palestina, Ferguson, cambio climático, año en revisión*]

later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere

—Warsan Shire, “What They Did Yesterday Afternoon” [2014]

INTRODUCTION

Before I tell you what it was, let me tell you how it felt: it seemed like a world on fire with war and rumors of war. People clinging to the shaking earth as it churned from the inside out. Mornings thick with death and suffering. Two thousand dead in Palestine after seven weeks of war. Ebola leaping from host to host, 7,000 dead and counting. Two hundred Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram. Numbers on television screens abstracted from the living people they were intended to represent. Revolution in Kiev. ISIS and civil

war in Iraq and Syria. Downed planes and air strikes. Invasions of surveillance. A lifeless black body on the concrete, anger running through the streets of Ferguson, protestors with their hands stretched up to the sky. Mourning portraits of dead children, their still faces peaceful and condemning. Pakistan. Libya. Sierra Leone. Ayotzinapa.

The chaos did not just happen somewhere out there; rather, it found its way to the doorstep of the United States. While Republicans continued to grumble about Obamacare and used the pen and the gavel to whittle away at women's reproductive rights, thousands of children from Central America, haunting the United States like ghosts from the Cold War, stumbled across the U.S.–Mexico border, fleeing new terrors in their home countries. One could point a finger at an atlas and anywhere find profound human suffering as the result of corporate malfeasance, natural disaster, militarism, and state violence.

The calls for a critically engaged, public anthropology that can address the problems of the 21st century are louder than ever before, as social life becomes more harried, vulnerable, and complex. Over the last 40 years, following the interventions of feminist, critical race, and queer ethnography, the discipline has provided just such a theoretical engagement. Scholars have increasingly used the term *public anthropology* to refer to a model of research and practice dedicated to bringing anthropological knowledge into public discourse to affect tangible social change (Low 2011). The increased visibility of what is variously referred to as public, engaged, activist, action, or applied anthropology challenges anthropologists to circulate their insights more widely and effectively in the public sphere. Public anthropology wears many faces (Low and Merry 2010). From Beijing to Washington, DC, anthropologists are utilizing forms of public engagement such as blogging, providing expert analysis in the media, participating in community-based struggles for social change, and branching out through social and digital media to get their message across to audiences inside and outside of the academy. The methodologies that scholars deploy in engaged research are varied, diverse, and context specific. But what links all of these practices is the investment in promoting an anthropology that illuminates the workings of power, helps transform unequal social arrangements of power, and uses the ethnographic perspective to cultivate critical cross-cultural understanding and respect in the public sphere.

The question, however, is not merely whether anthropologists should participate in the public sphere but also how anthropologists should intervene. It has become widely accepted that anthropology has a responsibility to participate in the broader culture; nevertheless, the practice of public anthropology, while necessary, is fraught with a number of challenges that should be taken seriously. In addition to recognizing the critical work that anthropologists around the world have engaged in over the past year, participating in debates and struggles from Palestine to Ferguson, I here attempt to think through how we do the messy work of public

anthropology. Specifically, I examine the interventions that anthropologists made over the last year in debates on the Ebola epidemic, state violence and the boundaries of civil academic discourse, and the need for cultural change in the face of climate change. These were among the most salient political debates of 2014 and, as such, provide useful starting point for theorizing more emancipatory models of public anthropology. How does our public engagement—not merely as engaged intellectuals but also as global citizens whose lives are directly (and indirectly) affected by the issues we study—affect claims to expertise, intellectual authority, and civility? What does an ethical, socially engaged anthropological practice look like at this moment of profound global crisis? These questions speak directly to the ways that anthropologists are reimagining the scope and possibilities of anthropology today.

EBOLA, HYSTERIA, AND THE (MIS)USES OF CULTURE

On August 8, 2014, the World Health Organization declared the Ebola outbreak sweeping through West Africa a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The crisis had been mounting since December 2013, when a two-year-old boy died in Guinea four days after displaying symptoms. Within four weeks of his death, his mother, his sister, and his grandmother had succumbed to the virus. The disease spread from there, eventually crossing the porous borders between Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone by March 2014 (Quammen 2014). The effects of the epidemic were immediate and devastating. Overworked and overwhelmed, health workers in the affected countries struggled to treat the exponential number of patients. In August 2014, the United Nations reported that more than 240 health care workers had contracted the disease in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria and that some 120 died (Democracy Now! 2014).

Alongside doctors, nurses, epidemiologists, and other health care workers, medical anthropologists were among the first to respond to the crisis, bringing their expertise to the front lines of the epidemic (NPR 2014a, 2014b; Reardon 2014). Dr. Jim Yong Kim, a medical doctor, anthropologist, and current president of the World Bank, committed \$400 million to combat the outbreak. According to the *New York Times*, the first \$125 million arrived to the affected countries nine days after Kim announced the aid program (Tavernise 2014). Kim is cofounder, along with the noted medical anthropologist Paul Farmer, of Partners in Health, which provides high-quality health care to poor people in developing nations.

In an interview with *Democracy Now!* (2014), Farmer, recently returned from Liberia, expressed his concern over practices like state-enforced quarantines in countries that were especially hard hit. While, in theory, these were designed to contain the virus and slow its transmission, in practice, those infected with Ebola were left to die in communities lacking adequate resources to treat the sick. Riots began as food, water, and medical supplies dwindled

in the quarantined areas. Poor communities were effectively “quarantined without care,” creating conditions ripe for Ebola transmission. Ebola, he said, “isn’t a natural disaster”; rather, it revealed what he called “the terrorism of poverty” (Democracy Now! 2014). While the Western media stoked public fear of a global Ebola pandemic, anthropologists pointed out that such a pandemic was highly unlikely, not only given the fact that Ebola is only transmissible by coming into direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected subject but also because, unlike West Africa, which has been ravaged by colonialism, endemic state corruption, and neoliberal economic experimentation, developed countries have what Farmer calls the “4 Ss”: the stuff, staff, space, and systems to combat an epidemic (Achenbach 2014).

These structural and historical inequalities have real implications that medical workers must consider in their efforts to treat affected populations. In an interview on *National Public Radio* (NPR), Barry Hewlett (Washington State University), a leading expert on the cultural and political implications of Ebola, stated that anthropologists’ expertise can help health workers understand how local populations perceive disease in both spiritual and material terms. While health care workers often assume that local residents resist medical treatment out of superstition and an entrenched belief in “sorcery,” Hewlett stated that their concerns are often informed by the long history of inequality and abuse under the auspices of international aid that makes local communities suspicious of the medical establishment and international health care workers in particular (Golub 2014; NPR 2014b). Citing his experience working in Uganda during the 2000 outbreak, he observed, “Local people thought that the Europeans in control of the isolation units were in a body parts business. Their loved ones would go into the isolation units, and they would never see them come out” (NPR 2014b). This fear was exacerbated by grieving families not being allowed to perform burial rites for their loved ones. Failing to provide culturally competent care compromises efforts to contain the disease, deepens suspicions of local populations toward health workers, and ultimately results in “people . . . running away from actual care that is intended to help them” (NPR 2014b).

Ironically, while anthropologists introduced “culture” into the public debate over managing the Ebola crisis to change medical practice, the mainstream media often tended to use “culture” in ways that represented those communities as the West’s quintessential, abject Other. This was particularly evident in the way that some media reports focused on allegedly “anti-modern” West African cultural practices, particularly the consumption of wild meats, an investment in “sorcery” as both an explanation and a cure for Ebola infection, and a refusal to submit to state-led quarantine measures to explain the spread of the virus throughout the region. On August 21, *Newsweek* ran a cover story with the headline, “Smuggled Bush Meat Is Ebola’s Back Door to America,” alleging that the black market in undomesticated meats might

facilitate the spread of the disease on U.S. soil. The article described wild meat as an “ethnic delicacy . . . beloved by many African-born Americans” and stated that the consumption of bush meat is a “cultural touchstone” highly prized by West Africans for its “magical and medicinal properties.” The article concluded that efforts to contain Ebola would remain ineffective as long as the U.S. and West African governments are unable to curb the cultural investment in the consumption and traffic of bushmeat in the United States (Flynn and Scutti 2014).

The article revealed a disturbingly familiar discourse of African cultures as homogenous, irrational, and pathologically controlled by cultural imperatives. In an interview in *Scientific American*, Theresa MacPhail (Stevens Institute of Technology), a former journalist, criticized the mainstream media for reproducing the discourse of pathological African cultures as vectors of disease and stoking public hysteria about Ebola by overstating the spread of the disease while ignoring the structural inequalities that produced the current outbreak. She was particularly critical of the culturally coded, “racist rhetoric” that allowed journalists to deploy culture as a “cudgel . . . to blame the victims of Ebola for their own suffering,” writing:

Burial practices, wild meat consumption, and local reactions to quarantine and isolation have all been described as “cultural” problems that promote the spread of Ebola . . . *Culture is not an explanation. It’s something that needs further examination . . .* Sadly, I think that Ebola has created another venue for Western journalists to promote Africa as a “backwards” or “dirty” and diseased place—and not only is that not true, that type of racist rhetoric doesn’t do anyone any good. [Horgan 2014, emphasis added]

Public anthropology played an important role in de-escalating public hysteria around the disease in the West by offering sound approaches to understanding Ebola and the communities most directly affected by it. Anthropologists have long theorized the ways in which the West utilizes cultural discourses that mark nonwhite, non-Western populations as dirty, diseased, pathological, and antimodern subjects. These discourses are closely linked to common-sense understandings of race and place that powerfully shape official and popular narratives of these communities. While anthropologists were forced to confront the discipline’s historic supporting role in producing this discourse, that intellectual change of heart has often not been mirrored in the public sphere. As MacPhail’s critique demonstrates, popular appropriations of the culture concept are often used in ways that run counter to our efforts to complicate and disrupt problematic representations of the marginalized communities with whom we work. What are we to make of how one of the discipline’s central analytical tools, culture, is mobilized in the public sphere not as a dynamic, temporal process rooted in social relations of power but, rather, as an essentialized, ahistorical object that explains and naturalizes the racial Other?

UNRULY ACTS: ACTIVIST ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF CIVILITY

On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers—Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah—were abducted and later murdered in the West Bank. The Israeli state and the media pointed to Hamas being behind the teens' disappearance, and conflicting reports from the leadership of Hamas further complicated the situation. The wave of public anger over their deaths resulted in anti-Arab riots during one of which a Palestinian teenager, Mohammed Abu Khedir, was abducted, beaten, and his body burned in retaliation. Although Israel and Gaza had already reignited armed conflict prior to the deaths of the four teens, tensions escalated as militants launched rockets from Gaza into Israel, and Israel responded with devastating airstrikes (Erlanger and Kershner 2014).

On July 8, Israel launched "Operation Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip, beginning a series of airstrikes aimed at stopping militant rocket fire into southern Israel. Approximately 1.8 million people call the Gaza Strip home, with more than 43 percent under 14 years old. It is a densely populated area that is 25 miles long by 7.5 miles wide. Military checkpoints have restricted Palestinian mobility in and out of Gaza and made fleeing the area during the airstrikes nearly impossible for civilians. The scale of death, injury, and displacement was astonishing: 110,000 displaced persons and 2,192 people killed, most of them unarmed civilians. Children accounted for 519 of the civilian deaths (Amnesty International 2014). More than 18,000 homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Schools, universities, hospitals, and bomb shelters were routinely targeted and destroyed during the attacks. By comparison, despite the relatively high volume of rockets launched into Israel by Hamas, the Israeli government recorded six civilian deaths, including one child, and 66 deaths of members of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Many international human rights organizations and political institutions denounced the disproportionate rates of civilian death and the destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza. Throughout the siege, organizations including the United Nations, the International Red Cross, Amnesty International, and others condemned Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians. Within the discipline, anthropologists began a more public conversation about how to respond to the Israeli–Palestinian crisis. Specifically, they debated whether the American Anthropological Association should adopt a more explicit position on the question of Israel and Palestine and what form that position should take. In the April 30, 2014, edition of *Anthropology News*, the leadership of the American Anthropological Association published "Towards an Informed AAA Position on Israel-Palestine," demonstrating the increased salience of this issue among anthropologists. The association's administration stated that "the debate over Israel/Palestine is historically important and anthropologically relevant" and that anthropologists "can provide a diverse set of lenses through which to explore and under-

stand these questions" and to decide upon an appropriate course of action for the AAA (Heller et al. 2014). Toward that end, they outlined the range of possible positions that the organization might take, including economic boycotts, collaborations with Palestinian universities, or pressuring U.S. companies with ties to Israel and the Occupied Territories to divest. At this time, the AAA portfolio has no funds invested in companies based in Israel or the West Bank or with U.S. corporations with those links. While they recognized that this is a highly controversial and contentious topic, they also stressed the importance of maintaining a respectful dialogue that can facilitate robust intellectual exchange alongside the recognition that this has become an issue with which the discipline as a whole must contend.

On October 1, 2014, a group calling itself "Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions" released a public statement urging anthropologists to support an academic boycott (Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions 2014). Since 2011, responding to the call from the Palestinian Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE) for an academic boycott, a number of academic associations including the American Studies Association, the Association for Asian American Studies, the African Literature Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, and the Critical Ethnic Studies Association have passed resolutions expressing their support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. In the month following the AAA statement's release, more than 900 anthropologists from 35 countries signed on, including several Israeli anthropologists. *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Washington Post*, and *Haaretz*, Israel's oldest daily newspaper, reported on the boycott campaign and the tensions between anthropologists on the merits and potential problems of a boycott (Haaretz 2014b; *Inside Higher Ed* 2014; Strauss 2014). In calling on the AAA to consider endorsing the boycott, Farha Ghannam and Jessica Winegar (2014) point out that the United States plays a central role in the occupation:

Because most AAA members are citizens of or teach in the U.S., they have a stake in U.S. policy. The U.S. supplies more military aid to Israel than to any other country. Israel receives the lion's share of its military aid (over \$233 billion since 1948) from the U.S. The U.S. government systematically supports Israel's use of that military aid to displace, oppress, or kill thousands of people. As an American association, the AAA has discussed and/or taken stances on forms of state violence of much smaller magnitudes and in cases where the U.S. plays little role . . . Why should Palestinians not be given the same consideration?

The BDS campaign calls for individual scholars and academic associations to boycott those academic institutions that support, participate in, or benefit from settlement in the Occupied Territories. Under the terms of the boycott, those scholars and organizations that support the boycott would refrain from entering into collaborative relationships with Israeli universities in an effort to pressure the state of Israel

to reverse its policies on Palestine and recognize the civil and human rights of Palestinians; it should be noted, however, that the boycott does not preclude working with individual Israeli scholars. In making this call, the group rooted its actions in the history of anthropologists taking controversial positions in political situations in which the human rights of vulnerable communities are threatened or violated. The Israel–Palestine question was discussed at length at the AAA’s annual meeting in more than a half-dozen panels.

The boycott campaign, however, met with considerable resistance, particularly among anthropologists who felt that academic boycotts by their very nature threaten academic freedom. In an article published in *Anthropology News*, “Why a Boycott Is a Bad Idea,” Paula G. Rubel (Barnard College and Columbia University) opposed the boycott on the grounds that it would do little to achieve the goals of advancing the peace process and would stifle free academic exchange with Israeli scholars. She suggested that it would be more effective to support a “positive resolution” supporting peace negotiations as the United Nations has attempted to do rather than endorsing a negative resolution for a boycott. A boycott, she argued, “will not influence the Israel government to change its policies in regard to Palestine, and the Palestinians, but only infringe on the freedom of Israeli academics” (Rubel 2014). Others seemed to share this position (Haaretz 2014a). Prior to the AAA’s annual meeting, the president of the Israeli Anthropological Association (IAA), Harvey Goldberg, condemned the calls for an academic boycott in an open letter, arguing that “punishing scholars in Israel for the acts of their government is not only meaningless, ineffectual and counterproductive, it is first and foremost a breach of academic freedom and freedom of speech” (Goldberg 2014). During the AAA annual meeting, a group of members sponsored a resolution opposing a boycott of Israeli institutions. More than 700 members voted on the resolution, which was defeated by a wide margin with only 52 votes in support of the measure (Haaretz 2014c; Redden 2014a, 2014b).

In response to the IAA’s open letter, 41 Israeli academics signed a counterstatement challenging the IAA’s claims and insisting on the need for a meaningful dialogue among AAA members on the question of Israel–Palestine. While they acknowledged that “what is true of Israeli anthropology as a whole is not true of all Israeli anthropologists as individuals,” many of whom have critiqued the occupation and offered support to the BDS campaign, as a whole, the IAA, in particular, has “never as a body declared their opposition to the occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people . . . the Israeli academy is a central pillar of the state, playing a key part in its repressive policies,” including excluding Palestinians and other ethnic minority groups from higher education as well as participating directly in the occupation through intelligence, security, and defense research (*Anthropology News* 2014). They also noted that IAA has not, in its 26-year history, publicly criticized the state of Israel for its actions in the Occupied Territories and that the calls for “balance”

and “civility” seem to be a response to the growing pressure of the BDS campaign.

In recent years, the question of civility and academic freedom has arisen in political debates that involve complex and violent processes of state control, dispossession, and the violation of human rights (Allen and Subramanian 2014; Balibar 2009; Nader 2001; Phillips 2011; Reichman 2014; Shapiro 2014). Specifically, these anthropologists have suggested that what constitutes civil discourse and appropriate forms of political engagement and public anthropology are deeply political and cultural questions determined by the power dynamics that shape the societies in which we live. They have discussed how civility can be mobilized in ways that, instead of cultivating spaces for convivial and respectful political dialogue, suppress some forms of political speech and action more actively than others. This raised particular interest among anthropologists in civility discourse as a cultural formation that disciplines social behavior. The discourse of civility, particularly as it related to questions of academic freedom and political dissent, pervaded the debate among anthropologists about whether to support an academic boycott.

This was especially true among some anthropologists who argued that publicly criticizing the state of Israel is an unpopular political position that can adversely affect one’s professional life. The boycott campaign organizers reported that of the more than 900 anthropologists who signed the call for an academic boycott, approximately 130 of the signatories opted to sign the statement anonymously out of fear that there would be reprisals at their home institutions or that their job prospects would be harmed if their support of the campaign became public (Allen and Subramanian 2014). Following the release of the boycott statement, the AMCHA Initiative, a U.S.-based nonprofit “dedicated to investigating, documenting, educating about, and combating anti-Semitism at institutions of higher education in America,” posted a list of the anthropologists who had signed onto what it dubbed an “anti-Semitic boycott” (AMCHA 2014).¹

While debates over Operation Protective Edge and the value of Palestinian life intensified in the human rights public sphere (Mikdashi 2014), many anthropologists and human rights advocates also turned their attention to human rights abuses and the question of the value of human life in the United States. They focused specifically on the case of Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teenager shot by a white police officer, Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri. His death was one in a string of police killings of unarmed African American men around the country. For many (Buck 2014; Gregory 2014; Smith 2013), these deaths reflected what they regard as the racist underpinnings of modern policing and exposed police abuse as an ongoing, national problem. Brown’s death sparked a series of protests on the streets of Ferguson that would continue throughout the summer, spilling over into the fall when a St. Louis grand jury chose not to indict Wilson for Brown’s death. The protests resonated throughout the country; the

hashtags “#HandsUpDontShoot and #Blacklivesmatter encapsulated the rage and frustration that many felt not simply about Brown’s death but about the killings of many others: Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; John Crawford III in Beavercreek, Ohio; Aiyana Stanley Jones in Detroit, Michigan; and Ezell Ford in Los Angeles, California.

The protests garnered international media coverage as local authorities cracked down on the community, arresting protestors and journalists and actively repressing local mobilization with a highly militarized police response. As Lydia Brassard (Graduate Center of the City University of New York) and Michael Partis (Borough of Manhattan Community College) note, protestors “utilized social media and grassroots media producers to bring immediate disruption to traditional media’s attempts to organize social comprehension of these events through the tropes of wantonness, criminality, and pathology.” Their digital activism demonstrated not only “how we see examples of racism and racialized injustice, but also [publicized] how the narrative of racial inequality in contemporary society is produced and transmitted” (Brassard and Partis 2014).

Interestingly, the protests also prompted a global conversation between activists around the world on the challenge and contours of state violence in diverse locations. Activists took to social media to show their solidarity for the Ferguson protests; images began to circulate on Twitter, for example, of Palestinian civilians tweeting advice to Ferguson protestors about how to handle being tear gassed by the police. Another image showed a young girl holding up a small placard that simply read:

From Gaza to Ferguson

Love,

Palestine

While some spectators watched the events unfolding in Ferguson in shock, anthropologists suggested that they reveal how state violence against black and brown people remains normalized. As Pem Buck (Elizabethtown Community and Technical College) observed in *Anthropology News*, anthropology has a special role to play in exposing “the violence of the status quo” and helping others to “connect the dots between past violence and present violence” in ways that illuminate popular understanding of the roots of racism, structural violence, and police abuse (Buck 2014). Moreover, as Steven Gregory (2014) noted, anthropologists can also play a critical role in unpacking the tropes of criminality, violence, and incivility that accompanied most mainstream media representations of the protests. These reports, Gregory says, had the effect of indiscriminately marking young black activists as either respectable, nonviolent, peaceful protestors worthy of attention or unworthy, dehumanized violent protestors or looters whose breach of law and order placed their actions and demands outside of the realm of the appropriately political. Buck and Gregory argue that this retreat to the values of the status quo was simply another way

to dismiss the anger and frustration that poor communities of color expressed about the culture of impunity that surrounds police killings of unarmed young people of color. As Gregory notes, the protestors were engaged in oppositional political practices that in theory are enshrined within and protected by the law but in practice are rendered illegible when black and brown people deploy them.

By December 2014, the tenor of the protests shifted from a moment of outrage and began to take on the appearance of a broad-based social movement. Protests unfolded throughout the country in the days following the nonindictment of a NYPD police officer in the strangling death of Eric Garner. Outraged citizens took to the streets, disrupting business as usual by holding die-ins at Penn Station in New York City; the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA) and a number of allies held a die-in in the lobby of the Marriott Hotel during the AAA annual meeting. The ABA also released a statement calling on the AAA to pass a resolution condemning the systematic pattern of civilian deaths at the hands of the police:

As members of an academic discipline with the distinctive history of establishing the language and “science” of race, which has been used to justify settler colonialism and slavery, we understand the roots of this state violence. While U.S. ideologies hold that we are all equal under the law, this has never been the case, and in fact inequality has been structured into the justice system from the start, and is currently escalating via the militarization of local police forces.

For many, the demonstration at the AAA meeting was a key moment for linking the discipline to contemporary struggles for racial equality and demonstrating how anthropology can be brought to bear on questions of racialized state violence. For Aries de la Cruz, an anthropology student at Rutgers University who was attending the annual meeting for the first time, the die-in taught her that

our discipline can be most effective and affective when we respond to a political moment. The public takes us seriously when we speak in a language that’s relevant to them, understands their grammar and modes of being . . . All over the world, people can now see anthropologists as a resource they might be able to access in their local communities as allies, as people who can train them to conduct ethnographies of police departments to be able to be used in civil rights lawsuits. [McGranahan 2014]

Several anthropologists, including Lee Baker (Duke University) and Lynn Bolles (University of Maryland, College Park), offered their thoughts on anti-black racism, police brutality, and state violence on the popular anthropology blog *Savage Minds*, as well as via other publications. Their essays were often deeply personal and painful, the kind of anthropology that “breaks your heart” (Behar 1996). In her essay, Whitney Battle (University of Massachusetts Amherst), an archaeologist and black feminist scholar, wrote candidly about her fear and uncertainty following the St. Louis County grand jury’s decision not to indict Darren Wilson: “The prosecutor, Robert McCulloch, started to talk and talk. I felt as if I could not understand his words. No indictment. I felt

trauma. I felt more tears. I held my two sons extra tight that night, for I was so unsure of this country I call home” (Battle 2014).

Battle’s comments echoed an essay by Christen Smith (University of Texas at Austin), published in late 2013 at *The Feminist Wire*, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. In an open letter to her son, Smith reflected on the politics of black motherhood and the terror that accompanies mothering black boys in a hostile culture. Connecting anti-black racism in Brazil and the United States, Smith states, “After spending years personally and politically speaking out against police violence (and its close relative vigilantism) against Black people in the United States and Brazil, and tracing the genealogy of the torture and death of Black people from hemispheric American slavery to lynching, death squads, and policing in both nations, I had come to accept that the world takes black boys from their mothers, often right in front of their eyes, without rhyme or reason, at random, and yet with cruel intent” (Smith 2013). While the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has reported the deaths of 76 unarmed black civilians (including children) by the police in the United States from 1999–2014, according to *The Guardian*, Brazilian police forces kill approximately 2,000 civilians annually, the vast majority of them poor black and brown people (Barker et al. 2014; Juzwiak and Chan 2014; Watts 2014).

In his post “On Disconnections Post-Ferguson,” Alvaro Jarrín (College of the Holy Cross) pondered the difficulty of engaging friends and colleagues on social media who simply did not see the racial politics at the heart of the debate and, perhaps more importantly, considered how best to talk about Ferguson in the classroom (Jarrín 2014). While social media provides an imperfect and limited space for discussing these issues, the space of the classroom is no less challenging. He stated

When I taught about Ferguson in class, I had a similar feeling: that most students were receptive to the critical analysis of racism in the U.S., but others were more interested in who was ‘correct’: Wilson or Brown. They wanted simpler answers, and when in doubt they prefer to side with the cops, with the rule of law, and with order. Our polarized political landscape certainly contributes to that divide. [Jarrín 2014]

While Jarrín did not offer easy answers for how to decrease this divide, he suggested that anthropologists might consider what tools the discipline offers for doing this work: “I do not know how the reality of black experience can be ‘felt’ by those outside of it. But I think noticing this crippling divide is a step to try to bridge it, in order to find creative ways to generate empathy for those who have led different lives from us. Is that not anthropology’s most important contribution? Can anthropology go beyond critique and build bridges once again?”

Of course, not everyone agreed with the explicitly activist tenor of this particular form of public anthropology. *Anthropology News* reprinted an essay by Peter Wood,

president of the National Association of Scholars, entitled, “Ferguson and the Decline of Anthropology,” in which he criticized many of the anthropologists who responded to Michael Brown’s shooting for “misappropriating” anthropology for their own ideological ends. Specifically, Wood claimed that these scholars distorted the facts of the Brown shooting to serve their own political agenda, which was to reproduce the myth of state violence while obscuring the set of individual choices that led to Michael Brown’s death: namely, that he attacked Darren Wilson and Wilson was compelled to act in self-defense.

The article set off an intense debate among anthropologists about the way that some forms of public anthropology that are explicitly political are often dismissed as lacking in rigor and compromising the intellectual foundations of the discipline. Alex Golub (University of Hawai‘i) responded to Wood’s essay on the *Savage Minds* blog by challenging the idea that a preoccupation with questions of race and inequality is simply the province of biased “activists” distorting the facts to suit their political interests. Rather, he suggested that it is an ethical responsibility for the discipline: “I don’t think that every anthropologist should be an activist—I’m not an activist. I don’t think we should all study racism and inequality—I don’t. My point is that caring about structural violence and racism is not activism. It’s a normative commitment that all anthropologists working in our country should think is important” (Golub 2015).

The year 2014 represents a moment when anthropologists confronted a number of thorny questions about state violence, the defense of human rights, and the role of the discipline in these debates. Some anthropologists took “rude” positions, protesting in public space and advancing controversial forms of intervention and debate. These debates revealed that we must consider what is actually at stake when anthropologists ask the very difficult questions and where those lines of inquiry will lead. How is what is considered civil discourse defined, and who determines those parameters? In the deeply polarized political culture in which we live, how can anthropology be mobilized to contextualize and expand what can be said about state violence? In short, when is it time to become uncivil about a matter? Finally, how do anthropologists as an intellectual community decide what forms these “unruly” political practices might take?

THE WILL TO CHANGE: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

All that you touch

You change

All that you change

Changes you.

—Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* [1993]

The human causes of climate change have been a growing source of concern and anxiety for natural and social scientists over the last 30 years (Baer and Singer 2014; Moore 2013). In 2014, the issue of climate change entered public consciousness with a force that significantly shifted the terms of public debate. While climate change deniers, particularly those linked to the natural gas, coal, and oil industries, spent millions of dollars attempting to refute the scientific evidence that the CO₂ emissions have risen radically over the last 100 years, it became increasingly clear to the general public that climate change is real, it is already happening, and critical steps must be taken to alleviate this global crisis.

On September 21, 2014, nearly 400,000 people converged in New York City to participate in the People's Climate March, a historic event that was accompanied by similar protests around the world from Rio de Janeiro to Paris. Contingents of youth, indigenous groups, anarchists, anti-fracking advocates, Buddhists, Quakers, immigrants, and queer activists filed through midtown Manhattan demonstrating for a change in global climate policy. The march coincided with the gathering of world leaders at the UN Summit for Climate Change on September 23, 2014. The noted British primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall was spotted participating in the People's Climate March holding a small stuffed toy cow and monkey and walking arm-in-arm with French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, former vice president Al Gore, New York mayor Bill de Blasio, and UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon (Dobnik and Sisak 2014). A longtime conservationist, Goodall has emerged in recent years as one of the leading voices in the global struggle for environmental justice (Democracy Now! 2013).

In 2011, the American Anthropological Association formed the Global Climate Change Task Force (GCCTF) in response to the growing demand among its members that the association play a more active role in addressing "environmental shifts linked to climate change" (Fiske 2011). Before concluding their committee in May 2014, the task force's members intervened in a number of critical locations to demonstrate what an anthropology of climate change can bring to debates over the future of the planet. One of the key insights that anthropologists offer is the recognition that addressing climate change will require a shift in the cultural practices and values of consumption that have become an entrenched part of social life in the developed world (Fiske et al. 2014).

In two articles in the *Huffington Post*, Richard Wilk (Indiana University, GCCTF) critiqued the growing popularity of green consumerism, arguing that it promises "the eternal lie of the huckster—that we can have our cake and eat it, too, that we can change the world without sacrifice, or any more effort than smarter shopping" (Wilk 2013a, 2013b). Indeed, if reports from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2015) are to be believed, it is going to take quite a bit more than ecofriendly dishwashing liquid to solve the crisis facing humanity. Rather than taking such

piecemeal approaches to the crisis at hand, Wilk suggests that we must confront the contradictions of consumer culture in the Global North as impediments to confronting and, to the extent possible, reversing climate change.

While the challenge of transforming our cultural values may appear insurmountable, one of the most important insights that anthropology provides in the climate change crisis is the recognition that cultures (and people) can and do change—sometimes slowly and painfully, sometimes in a sudden frenzy. In a *Huffington Post* article, "An Arid World? Can We Learn from Other Nations?," Kathleen Galvin (Colorado State University, GCCTF; 2013) draws from her experience working in the drylands of Kenya and Mongolia to demonstrate how vulnerable populations are adapting and responding to the deleterious effects of climate change. Facing a period of prolonged drought, dying livestock, and unpredictable weather patterns, livestock herders in both locations have begun to actively support reforestation and water conservation efforts and to reduce their livestock in an attempt to "re-align their livelihoods to a changing climate."

Ironically, while impoverished populations in developing nations are the most vulnerable to climate change, they are marginal contributors to the causes of climate change. Galvin states, "We [the U.S.] are the nation that has contributed the most carbon dioxide per capita to climate change and we must adapt to it. Unfortunately, we are in a political gridlock and most importantly we are buffered by our wealth and prosperity, our denial, and technical-engineering hubris" (Galvin 2013). But the buffer will not last long. While populations in places like Kenya and Mongolia currently face severe drought and desertification of arable land, or countries such as the Maldives run the risk of simply disappearing into the oceans as the result of rising sea levels, it is only a matter of time before those problems intensify in the developed world. Adapting to this reality will require not only refashioning our cultural practices but also transforming the economic and political systems that produced the crisis.

The People's Climate March spurred a flurry of related actions in the city, including Flood Wall Street, a demonstration led by a coalition of many of the activist groups who had participated in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement. Alongside such notable public intellectuals as Naomi Klein, the event featured speakers from communities living on the frontlines of the climate crisis, communities where anthropologists are also engaged in these struggles. One of the speakers was Miriam Miranda, a Garifuna activist from the north Atlantic coast of Honduras. Over the last 25 years, the Garifuna have come increasingly under attack by the state of Honduras, multinational corporations, and narcotraffickers attempting to usurp their lands for tourist development, drug trafficking, and monocrop cultivation of Palma Africana for biofuel production.

Miranda's presence at the gathering was revealing because just three months earlier, the Garifuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz appeared before the Inter-American

Court of Human Rights in San José, Costa Rica, in its case against the Honduran government for violating their collective land rights. Anthropologist Christopher Loperena (University of San Francisco) was present at the trial and served as expert witness for Triunfo de la Cruz. As Loperena and others have noted (Anderson 2009; Brondo 2013), environmental justice has long been a central value of Garifuna politics, and these communities have vigorously protested the hierarchical system of economic exploitation in which impoverished developing nations are called upon to sacrifice their natural resources to fill the consumption needs of the developed world. Miranda summarized the problem on the blog *truthout*:

If the problem is global, we have to have a global response. It's time for every human being in the global North to take up his or her responsibility in respect to the use of resources, responsibility relative to waste and to consumption . . . We are trying to resist and find every solution we can, but we ask ourselves: Hmm, are we the ones consuming all this energy? If those in the North are the consumers, why are we in Honduras paying? What are we supposed to do? Leave the planet to destruct, or make a change for future generations? They won't have land or water or air. That's not pessimism, it's reality. [Field and Bell 2013]

As Richard Wilk rightly observes, “consumer culture is really what is killing the planet before our eyes” (Wilk 2013a). Addressing the cultural roots of climate change is a prolonged project that will require the knowledge and insights of scholars across disciplines. Our intellectual tradition has taught us that culture is malleable, dynamic, and adaptive; our ability to change our habits—to choose—is what fundamentally makes us human. As Octavia Butler (1993) notes, change is inexorable; survival requires that we tap into our deep capacity for adaptability and transformation. The future of the planet and human life itself depends on whether we will embrace the call to change. Our history as a species demonstrates that we can; the scientific data on the terrifying consequences of climate change insists that we must. Anthropology can, perhaps, help to show us how.

CONCLUSIONS

come. i say come, and return to the fight.

this fight for the earth

this fight for our children

this fight for our life

we need your hurricane voices

Comecomecomecome to this battlefield

called life. . . .

—Sonia Sanchez, “For Sweet Honey in the Rock” [1999]

In this article, I have highlighted examples of public anthropology by scholars whose engagements in the public sphere offer a way of rethinking the scope and possibilities of contemporary anthropology. The work cited here suggests both

the deepening of public practice in anthropology and a radical reimagining of the intellectual practice of anthropology—an anthropology that can confront the complexities and the dilemmas of struggle and social change and that is fully embedded in the public sphere. While some anthropologists engaged in public anthropology with editorials or through policy work, others took a more direct and disruptive approach by laying their bodies on the ground and demanding a more political response to address contemporary inequalities. These debates reveal that there is no consensus over what constitutes an ethical public anthropology and that it is likely that there never will be. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that many anthropologists feel the necessity to do the work of public anthropology and to continue refashioning anthropology to serve the needs of the public sphere. These debates also reflected the increased sense of urgency that seems to animate the practice of public anthropology—the sense that the world simply cannot wait for our contributions while we work our tactical or ideological disagreements out in private.

In the experimental ethnographic film *Black Is, Black Ain't* (Riggs 1995), the queer black filmmaker Marlon Riggs defines anthropology as “the search for that which is utterly precious.” This is a provocative definition, one that takes anthropology out of the realm of disengaged, disembodied research practice and brings it into the realm of desire, imagination, and the transformative. As anthropologists we write, research, teach, and advocate because we are working to protect and affirm those things that are utterly precious to us and the communities in which we work and live: the dignity and value of all human life, the communal ties that connect us across our many differences, our capacity to empathize, to share common space, to change, to remember. What if we were to build on these capacities to cultivate a kind of public anthropology that intervenes at the level of the heart as well as the head? What if we imagined our work as a practice of freedom, an act of imagination, a tool for healing a traumatized, highly unequal world? Simply put, what if we did the work of anthropology as though our lives and the lives of others depended on it? What would that kind of anthropology look like? Because there is so much at stake in the struggles in which anthropologists are engaged, the question of how we do public anthropology and the ethical imperatives that shape such work are critical.

It is difficult not to feel like the entire world is a battlefield. We rouse ourselves each day uncertain of our ability to make any meaningful contribution to the work that must be done—as we teach, write, mentor students, tend gardens, care for children or aging parents, be present for partners, and try, sometimes, to remember to care for ourselves. Yet we must do the work. While the world calls on academia to engage more actively in the public sphere, scholars struggle to offer responses that seem adequate to the enormity of the problems confronting society (Kristof 2014). Often the practice of public anthropology produces more questions than answers. There are no uniform strategies for how to

approach this work, only models of how we might do it. But even in the chaos that seems to define social life in every corner of the planet, there remains something precious and worth holding on to. We do the work because we know we must, because the problems confronting the communities with whom we work and the planet on which we live require all of our voices and contributions.

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NOTES

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1. *Amcha* is a Yiddish term commonly used in North America to describe the “the every-man, everyday people, or the ‘folk.’”

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