UCI School of Social Sciences
Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside:
Building Race as an Analytic into Anthropology, Within and Outside the Academy

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Captioned by Joshua B. Edwards, RDR, CRR

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>> BILL MAURER: Good morning folks. We will just take a few moments here while people file in from the waiting room for this next edition of our Wenner-Gren Foundation series, Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside. So we will get started in just a minute as people file in from the waiting area. Thanks for your patience.

And again, for those just joining us, we are just waiting a little bit for people to file in from our little digital waiting room before we get started with today's conversation in this, the fourth of our series or third, fourth or third, in Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside sponsored by Wenner-Gren Foundation and the School of Social Sciences at UC Irvine.

So I think maybe we will get started. This session will be recorded, and will be available on the UCI School of Social Sciences website and also the Wenner-Gren Foundation, later on today or earlier next week. I'm very pleased to welcome you all

here today for this installment of our Wenner-Gren Foundation series of conversations, Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside, organizing otherwise to intervene in anthropology's future.

I'm Bill Maurer, dean of social sciences here at UC Irvine and also professor of anthropology and law. And I'm very pleased to welcome you all here today for our conversation with Sareeta Amrute. Taylor?

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Hi, everyone. I'm Taylor Nelms. I'm the senior director of research at the Filene Research Institute, and as Bill said, we are thrilled to be joined by Sareeta. Sareeta is the director of research at Data and Society and associate professor of anthropology at the University of Washington.

She studies race and class and new technology-focused economies; for example, among Indian immigrant programmers in Germany which is the subject of Sareeta's award winning book, Encoding Race, encoding class, Indian IT Workers in Berlin. Sareeta, thank you so much for joining us for this conversation.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here.

>> BILL MAURER: Yeah, thank you. And later on, we will be joined by three Ph.D. students who are here with us, Kim Fernandes from University of Pennsylvania, Nina Medvedeva from the University of Minnesota, and Nima Yolmo from the University of California at Irvine. And again, I just want to thank and

acknowledge the Wenner-Gren Foundation for anthropological research and the UC Irvine School of Social Sciences

For supporting this event. Now this is a webinar format, so we will be having a conversation among those of us you see on the screen. But you are welcome to join in by posting any questions or comments you have in the Q&A field which is located at the bottom of your Zoom screen. You just click on the little speech bubbles and then you can post your comments.

And Taylor and I and the grad students will do our best to get those in during the Q&A segment. And I think with that, I will hand it back to Taylor to get us going.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thanks, Bill. As Bill mentioned, this is the fourth of the series of webinar conversations. We would love to be doing these in person, but I think we are making due in the virtual format. And we are really excited to welcome Sareeta with us today. Previous conversations have included guests like Joan Donovan from Harvard, and Mary Gray from Microsoft Research and Indiana University.

So we will be building on some of the lessons learned from those conversations previously and exploring new topics today with Sareeta. So maybe we will just start by asking Sareeta to tell us a little bit about what you do, where you do it and how you ended up doing the work that you are doing.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Thank you. Just want to say a quick thanks to Bill and Taylor and Jenny for helping get us organized

and also to Kim, Nina, Nima and Joshua for joining us. Let me start by situating myself a little bit. I'm currently sitting in Brooklyn, the traditional home lands of the Canarsie people. I want to acknowledge the pathways that they laid down all around us.

Some of the major streets here in Brooklyn like Flatbush Avenue were Canarsie paths. They have been used for a very long time. All of the immigrants who came to this country and the slaves and the sons and daughters of slaves who built New York, I want to acknowledge all of them today and honor what they have built, this place that I live in.

I also want to tell a little bit of a different story about how I got here, who I am and where we are today by pounding out that as much as we want this and we want collective the space of anthropology to be a place of criticism, it's still an extremely elite space.

And that elitism is really noticeable in the institutional affiliations that we all have. Taylor you just mentioned Harvard, Microsoft. If you have a glance at the curriculum vitae of all of us, you will see many of the same institutional sites pop up over and over again, Berkeley, Stanford, Chicago, University of San Diego, and the list goes on.

So partly I'm mentioning that to acknowledge the fact that any criticism that we produce, the alternatives that we are drafting are still very much bounded by this longstanding trend

in anthropology that has actually worsened since I joined the discipline in which a few elite institutions, Oxford, also, produce most of the working anthropologists in positions like ours today.

So I'm definitely situated within that stream of elitism. Elite education and training. I was trained at the University of Chicago. But I'm also situated as an immigrant, and my situation as a second-generation immigrant in that country, itself is multistranded and quite complex. I brought some show and tell props to give you a sense of that complexity.

The first is this very delicate cup and saucer from which I'm drinking my coffee. This cup and saucer is my father's. He brought it with him when he immigrated from Bombay in the 1960s. And he came to the United States on a work visa like many people do today.

He came from a middle-class, what then was called upper caste, now we use the term Sonara background. So he came as a fairly privileged immigrant.

But I also brought with me today to show you this map. It's a printout of a map of steam ship lines that traversed the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean early through the Suez Canal earlier in the early part of the 20th century. And this, these steam ship lines were taken by my maternal grandmother and grandfather from India who, they were respectively remarried.

My grandmother remarried to my grandfather which at the

time actually completely defied the convention of her family and her background. She did that because she was widowed at a very young age. And at that time in Western India, the life of a widow was a life of social isolation, in fact, social death.

And she contravened those societal principles as did her family. They wanted her to have a rich life, but they did not agree or consent to her remarriage. She remarried and she and my grandfather immigrated to New York City in the early part of the 20th century where they supported the Indian Independence Movement.

So I come even in my immigration status from this background that is both a background of privilege and a background of dissent, anti-caste thinking and thought and radicalism. And so the reason I'm telling you all of that is the way we have to open social sciences, we have to open it to experience. We have to open it in the ways that we generally think of to Brown voices, Black voices.

I know we have Black scholars coming up in this series. I know we have gender queer scholars coming up in this series, and that's huge. But I think we also have to open the social sciences to experiential knowledge. Even though anthropologists and anthropology really tries to do that in their ethnographic work, we often put that to the side and bracket it out when we do these presentations itself.

So I think some of that needs to be undone. So that's

maybe a long way around to say where I come from is from a place in which as a child I experienced lots of racism growing up. As an adult, I'm ensconced in a world that's elite, that's part of the educational elite. And I carry both of those experiences with me into my work.

What I try to do regardless of my institutional location is track and trace what are the regimes of power at work? What are the contradictions in the way that race or class or technological solutionism is playing out, and where are the moments of dissent at all of those levels?

>> BILL MAURER: Fantastic. Thanks, Sareeta. You know, just jumping right off on that point, we would love to hear you talk a little bit about how you can bridge these sort of challenges having to do with bringing experience forward and also articulate the relationships of power and inequality that we are all concerned with in the work that you do in your day to day now. So we would love to hear about kind of your own research

Agenda as it relates to your work at Data and Society, and speak to some of these issues you just raised. How do you get those things in?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. That's a really good question. So what I would say in terms of how you get those things in is that it's never accomplished by a single individual, ever. So I am the first director of research at Data and Society. I have been there for about two years now. And what I've learned in that time is

that the best way to bring critical perspectives to any organization is through relationship-building and reciprocity.

So some of the things that happen in my day to day is reaching out and figuring out ways to support and work with other organizations, for instance, Data for Black Lives, the Algorithmic Justice League. And again, I'm not doing this alone. The people I work with are building research partnerships and also partnerships in other ways.

One thing we can provide as a small institution, but one that's fairly prominent is a space, okay, now this space is virtual, but before, we had a physical space for convenings. We can provide events resources to support that work. And then finally another big part of my day to day is to try to think about the various audiences that we want to reach with our work and we want to help others reach

And to try to provide some of that iterative translational support through editing. Actually a lot of it is through careful editing to make those ideas travel. So to give you one really concrete example which was so amazing, I recently helped co-edit a special section of the journal catalyst and my coeditor named Louie Philippe has connections in Brazil with Brazil autonomous communities.

And we were able to organize an event through Data and Society that was entirely hosted out of these autonomous communities in Brazil. The name of the group is Rana Macambos

(phonetic). And that was an extremely important event. I think it did an important job of changing the frame through which we think about what we expect of our technologies.

It was hosted through Jitsi which is an independent platform. The event ran longer than it should have. It wasn't very slick. It was beautiful. There was music. And to me, that event was extremely transformative because it made me realize on the question of experiential knowledge how much our institutions increasingly rely on certain model of capitalist time and polish and slickness

To present themselves as professional. And this event was extremely professional. Everything worked. It's not that easy to set up an autonomous network in which everything works. But the general categories of time and the expectations of what a person would encounter in that online event were completely thrown out the window.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Yeah, you made a couple of such incredibly important points already in this conversation from, you know, questioning kind of what constitutes professionalism, the work of small but prominent nonprofits or think tanks whatever you want to call them like Data and Society or Filene in a very different space, financial services rather than technology or, you know, sort of the algorithmic questioning space.

The work that we can do in terms of providing platforms, providing channels, providing editorial support, financial

support often sometimes, and the work that we have to do ourselves and kind of coalescing, coalitions, building relationships that kind of make that work possible.

One thing you mentioned was the ways that we can, you know, work to sort of frame our work for different audiences. So maybe you can talk a little bit about who you imagine your audiences to be. Who are your stakeholder groups in that nonprofit language? And who do you draw on for support in reaching those audiences?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Well, again, I can answer this question in two ways. One, for Data and Society, and then one for me as a scholar. I think the answers are a little bit different. So for Data and Society, our stakeholders are journalists, practicing journalists, technology companies. And there's a kind of asterisk there. And then people who make public policy.

So broadly, the US government, but obviously not at the level of the elections or the presidential issues, but at the level of policy. So to start with the first, for journalists, we are primarily working with journalists to think about how to report on what's often called disinformation. So this is a lot of what Joan does as well. To think about how we can get collectively better at not unwittingly spreading obvious falsehoods online.

And to reach that audience, largely that happens through public report, but then it also very much happens through tip sheets. Journalists need to act really quickly. So this

question of who our audiences are and how we reach them is really a question of genre, ultimately. Tip sheets work for journalists. They need something they can glance at, think through the choices they are making and then react really quickly.

And then in terms of a second set of stakeholders around tech companies, we also produce reports, for instance, about how to take an example, YouTube's algorithm pushes content further to the right when you view things. But the real action there happens in meanings. The report really is a sort of calling card to establish our researchers or a body of literature as worth paying attention to.

Or in the case of much more lengthy pieces like Alex Rosenblatt's book, Uberland, the way to get the attention of those tech companies is through writing a popular book that's read by a lot of people and reported on. So there's a PR function that can work as well. And then we try to influence how decisions are made in those companies by talking to stakeholders within them.

Now, this isn't really the C-suite. It's people who are making decisions about the day-to-day operations of those companies or working in the ethics wings of those organizations. Now, there are so many asterisks there. There's probably at least three. One is the fact that it's not really the report, but as I mentioned, the meeting. The second is the fact that whatever we say is in competition with other interests within the company.

And then the third as I'm sure all of you have followed,

the recent as she called it, resignatedness of Gabrielle Pilgrim, that she was resigned, basically, all of these companies have ethics arms, research arms that actually aren't doing a very good job about enforcing their commitment to ethics. So that is a third asterisk in the way we intersect with companies.

Finally with policymakers, we don't write policy, but what we try to do is provide really the historical analysis that can inform policy going forward. To take a concrete example, one of the things that's probably going to be come up very strongly is the idea of algorithmic audits or impact assessments. And what we try to do is think historically and comparatively, for instance, what's the story of environmental impact assessments?

How do they look the same or different? What can we draw on the history of those that could have informed some of these assessments going forward? And then in terms of my own work, who are the audiences I'm trying to reach with my own work, you know, I think as the way I introduced myself, probably tells you my work is probably a little bit more exploratory than the very directed idea the stakeholder and something that goes to the stakeholder.

But what I am trying to do in my own work at least initially with the book is to simply expand the way we think about race and racial capitalism. I think since my book was published in 2016, there has been a lot of work that's done that. I am also really trying to now expand the way we think about infrastructure and what dissent means. I think we are in a moment where we really

need to think about what infrastructure support dissent

If we think dissent is the foundation of democracy. And I do believe that.

And finally I am trying to reach and think through and learn from a long history of political opposition from within the South Asian diaspora. And so those both move within my institutional home, but also move way outside them. And that's kind of one of the things that I try to keep alive, both of those alive. They feed each other in my work.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thank you for that. I think that that's really helpful framing for us to understand the ways that anthropological professionals, public anthropologists, however you want to figure that relationship and it's really different for each person and from institution to institution, the ways that you have to navigate often professional commitments, professional stakeholder groups

With personal goals and other kinds of professional research goals. So before, I want us to get back into this question of race and work and technology, because I know that that's really central to the way that you, you know, go about your work and the kinds of questions that you ask.

But before we get that, I wanted to give you space to sort of reflect on and maybe push back against, the question about impact and that's a kind of nonprofit language for talking about change in the world. But I wonder if you might reflect a little

bit on, you know, through Data and Society and/or through your own research outside of Data and Society, or alongside Data and Society,

What kind of impact do you hope to have? Or how do you imagine your work entering into the world and changing it in some way?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. I mean, that's very interesting because of course for everybody out there, I got some questions beforehand which had these key words in them like theory of change, which I really, I don't like that term. I don't find it useful at all.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Tell us maybe it doesn't work.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: I had never heard the term before two years ago. And when it was first asked of me what is your theory of change, I immediately thought the question was analytical. Are you a materialist? Do you use science and technology models of how change works? But what the question is actually asking is what are you going to do to change the world?

And I find that so incredibly heuristic and quite frankly anti-anthropological in the sense that as anthropologists, we believe in the unintended consequences of intentional actions. I can have all these intentions about how I am going to I think charge the world, but that doesn't mean doing those will result in the change that I believe I want to see.

At the same time, that doesn't mean that we can't be

strategic. So to be quite honest, I would probably answer it in a framework, what are the steps in your war of maneuver? I think that's a much more realistic on-the-ground question.

And one thing that really transcends whether I'm in a nonprofit space or academic spaces, I just feel this constant need to bring people back to the ground. In academic spaces, the thought is I am going to change the field. Everyone thinks they are going to produce the paradigm shift. And in the nonprofit world, the hubris is often, well, if we pursue this particular line of research, this particular program,

Then necessarily we are going to lift people out of poverty or end bias in algorithmic harms. And that's simply not the case. I think what I would much more subscribe to is this idea of being open to finding counter conduct as the way I often think about it, counter conducts in all of the spaces in which we operate, and asking ourselves what can I do to push this counter conduct forward?

So I don't think I actually have -- I really can't answer your question. I really would have to answer it in terms of a set of strategies that align with a particular set of interests, not with a set of outcomes.

>> BILL MAURER: Can I ask you now to pull that in, into the organization. Because that's another kind of area that we are really interested in talking about. Because so often, the kind of theory of change rhetoric is about, how are you going to change

the world? And not so much, are you going to maintain this institution so it continues to serve its public function or whatever.

How do you kind of bring that way of thinking, you know, how do you bring the critique of the theory of hubris of changes into organizations that say we don't have a hierarchy and don't do things the traditional way even though it's traditional and based on the traditional privileges and networks and structures that we have seen since the 19th century?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. So I really draw hearing I have been increasingly drawing on but also critiquing the work of Jacques Francier who as you know has a theory of democracy not grounded in consent but in dissent. And so my answer to that question, how do you bring that in, is really by producing opportunities for newcomers to enter these spaces and do something different in them.

So he has in his writing on dissent, he really talks quite a bit about the newcomer. And it's almost a litmus test for how your organization is doing. How good is your organization at letting newcomers in and allowing them to shift business as usual?

And I would say organizations are variable good at that, and departments within universities are variably good at that. In my experience, anthropological departments are -- anthropology departments are extremely bad at that, unfortunately.

And I think it has to do with the fact that we often rest on our laurels because when we go do field work we are the newcomers. We go through these fieldwork experiences. We bring our findings "back" from the field. Yet when we go back to our home departments, we act as if just having had that experience is enough to make us, you know, woke or whatever you want to think about for the rest of our careers.

I would say that speaking from my institutional position at Data and Society, a way to make institutions open to newcomers is not necessarily through pretending you have a flat hierarchy when you don't, but being able to react fairly quickly to opportunities as they present themselves, and then, you know, saying over and over again to the people with whom you work that you want them to bring others into the organization.

It's really again, it's back to this relationship-building, and valuing those relationships, particularly valuing relationships that fall outside the normal ambit of doing things. So one example of that to me is thinking about artistic practice not as a happy nice-to-have add on, or representational add-on, but a tool of research.

I'm thinking of the work of Stephanie Dinkins or Shaka who is producing, we are not sure yet what form it will take, but it may be a series of TikTok videos on the intersection of Blackness and AI. It's quite amazing. To think about that or even to think about some of the methods from computer science, some methods

around prediction, not as the outcome, but as a research probe or research tool

That can bring up or surface different kinds of findings about how our social structures work. I think that's incredibly key. We usually call that interdisciplinarity, but really that's such a weak term for what we are describing. It's something else entirely.

I also think it puts a really different spin on how we might start to think about the alternative in phrases like alt-pac. Right. I wonder if you might reflect a little bit on how you think about what alterity means in these kinds of professional settings.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. That's a good question. There's two ways that occur to me to answer that question. The first is one thing I've really learned is that small nonprofit research institutes are more para-academic than they are alt-academic, because we are still existing in an ecosystem in which prestige is very important, and funders are very important.

And even though Data and Society, for instance, has been very good at taking unrestricted funds or fundraising for things that are unrestricted, meaning you can use the money you get for any research you want, in order even to get that kind of funding, funders are still looking for superstars. They still want to fund superstars.

Therefore, there is this incredibly tight relationship between the university system, the nonprofit system, sometimes the

corporate system, again going back to the example of Google Research, that are all converging around a certain idea of who gets to count as an expert. And that is a relationship that's very hard to dislodge, because, in fact, the very, back to Bill's point,

The very maintenance and repair of the organization depends on getting money from this same set of funders. Right. So that's one thing that I think is really, really important to say. The other way to answer the question of alterity is to really go back to some of Beth Povonely's early writings on the difference between difference in alterity, right.

What are the things that fall really neatly into the categories that we already have? For instance, diversity, equity, and inclusion. What are the things that really challenge the boundaries of those distinctions? And that's a question that's a really open one. I think we have a lot of great thinkers help us move beyond difference into alterity. But of course there's only so much alterity that an institution will bear.

You are always looking for that edge where you can push institutions. But there have been times where I have tried to make those moves. And they haven't been as successful because a certain move is just, it's just not legible to the organizational structure and then comes up against this boundary of what an organization needs to actually keep going in the world.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Sareeta, I wonder if we might ask you now to reflect a little bit more on the core of your research work

of your academic work around the intersections of race and work, especially in technology industry and organization. How in your mind is work raced and how does race work? And what does it mean for race to be an analytic either in applied or public facing setting?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: What I've noticed throughout my career, but especially since the, you know, continued uprising, the Movement for Black Lives, is many organizations, I'm not talking about the ones who Black wash, who put up the Black Lives Matter banner on their website and don't do anything. But many organizations, tech-wise or otherwise, have a sort of flatten view of race where they think of race as really only about exclusion.

But, in fact, in my research, I can also draw on a host of other thinkers, Nobel, Mar Hicks, Hector Beltran (names), there's tons of people who make this people that when we think about a term like racial capitalism or the intersection of race and technology, we really need to think about three processes. So there's exclusion. Then there's hierarchy which we could think about is in terms of an international division of labor and how it's stratified across global tech firms.

The way in which certain types of people are considered white collar software engineers and others become service workers in support of those industries. And the third one which is really important but is often left off the table, that grace is productive. It is a productive category for the production of new

technologies that Tressy McMillan calls this predatory inclusion. We can think here very, very concretely about the way that data collected about Black and Brown communities gets used to categorize them in particular ways and gets used then to both provide them services, sell things to them, but also treat them as an experimental market, especially outside the United States

In which new technologies can be tried before they are deployed and rolled out to everywhere else. So those are the three things. And it's really this last one, the productivity of race and how race is productive changes, of course, across time and space that makes it such a sticky category. And it's not enough to read Kendi's book and then put on the little badge that says you are antiracist

And expect everything to just suddenly go away.

It is actually a category that has been extremely productive in the development of technology and the development of capitalism. And so I think one of the things I'm trying to do most clearly in my work and this goes across genres is both in academic publications but also for broader audiences is to get people to think, when they think race, to think about exclusion, hierarchy, and also value at the same time.

That's actually fairly tricky. And then another thing I would say to that which is a new turn in my thinking and an evolution for me, and I will particularly mention (name). Some of the people I have learned from are not necessarily located in

academic institutions. She's the executive director of Equality Labs.

I have also started to think about caste as a concept, and to think as Ruja Benjamin calls for abolitionist anthropology or abolitionist practice, we can also think of cognate terms like annihilation in B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste to try to think about how race, if race is the mode in which class is expressed, as Stewart Hall says in Europe and the U.S., caste is also a major mode of the expression of exclusion, hierarchy, and value.

And it's now transactional. It's a huge issue in the tech industry. So I think this also, it's another way of being open. We have to be open also in our analyses to allowing new concepts and new formations in.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: This is such an amazing point and I want to bring in our colleagues, Nina, Nima, and Kim. I will just note, you know, from the space where I stand inside of financial services rather than in tech and data, although those are, you know, increasingly the same, right, this idea of the productivity of race is so profoundly clear when you look at the history of financial services and the history of financial inclusion efforts in particular

And the predatory inclusion involved in the history of mortgage lending and redlining as Taylor has talked about or the more recent history of student debt as people like (name) have

talked about. That predatory inclusion concept does amazing work in allowing us to see the exploitative productivity of race and, you know, facilitating the generation of new technologies.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. Absolutely.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: So I think that that's, it's a really productive way to think through things and it's been really helpful to me, too. So thank you. Let's turn it over to our colleagues to Kim, Nina, and Nima. I don't know which of you is going to go first. So I will just turn it over to you all and let you take it from there.

>> NINA MEDVEDEVA: Thanks, Taylor. I think I will go first. So this is going to try to, I am going to do my best not to make this a two-part question. But this kind of tries to combine this question from someone in the Q&A with sort of my own interest as someone who is not in anthropology, but in gender studies program.

So I'm ethnographically inclined in anthropology, but I'm n a different discipline. So I am going to do my best to combine these. Someone asks how can we as a field and I guess to broaden it, how can critical fields empower non-elites and marginalized communities who are often the subject of research by determining, analyzing or eco-collaborators in that research?

How do we avoid requiring marginalized individuals to gain a voice in the field only by respect of our institutions? This is a question about marginalized individuals and then are

there any things either other critical disciplines, anthropology itself or nonacademic sites that are doing a good job of making sure they are included without necessarily this elite component of it?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah. That's such a good question. I don't think or I don't believe in a kind of pure politics of the other. I think any time someone's voice is being raised up, there are certain things that are happening. One is tokenization. The other is silencing. There are other voices who are being silenced.

So first let me just say that very clearly. These processes of breaking down elite institutions and their control or hegemony or production have to be ongoing and perpetual. What I would say in terms of how we do this is, number one, I will answer it from my field, asking a very basic question: What counts as a technology? Why do only certain kinds of things seem to count?

One of the writers I really like to read on this is Robin Wall Kimmerer's book Braiding Sweetgrass. That book is elevating all sorts of things to the status of technology. And at the same time, thinking with the author I mentioned last time, they have a very clear definition of what counts for them as a technology which are things that clearly aid the community.

So one thing we have to do is really go back and establish some new definitions or expand our definitions of what counts and who counts. The second thing is to always be aware,

and this is something I learned actually from reading Judith Butler that every social movement we participate in is going to have its own silences and erasures as Michelle Ralph Creo would say.

And thirdly, if we are looking for places and sites who are doing a good job, I think they are kind of all around us. It's hard to notice them because of the way that we ourselves are being professionalized, but to just name a few. The work of Nick Estes on water protectors is really amazing because that book, what it's doing is that he shows, he himself is from a long line of native experts on the question of land that have been written out of the story of expertise.

So I think a lot of what we need to do archival, actually. We also need to draw on sister disciplines like ethnic studies, African-American studies who often do a better job of this, and gender studies. We can also look toward other kinds of collectives such as the Allied Media Collective in Detroit that produces incredible accounts of what's happening with technologies in communities

And is answering what communities need from their own technologies, so actually surfacing and bringing up some of the work that's being done on the ground. So that's where I would begin to think and begin to look. I think there's also super-practical things. So I don't know if people in the audience were at the AAAs that were in, was it San Jose when there were the fires happening? Yeah.

So there was both anthropology burn piece and the discussion of that that was on the Wenner-Gren website which was helpful. But also there was a session about how darn expensive the AAAs are especially for graduate students and why graduate students feel compelled to go to these because that is where they can perhaps get a job.

There are lots of practical interventions we can make to open up this field, and that would be a ground-level one, a place to start.

>> NIMA YOLMO: Thank you, Sareeta. I had a question about newcomers, and if you could elaborate a little more about that, particularly in the context of institutional setups as you mentioned earlier that are bound or older and existing histories, education and training. And I'm also thinking how that relates to alterity and disposition, political commitments of the decision-makers within institutions.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Can you say a little more about the last part of the question?

>> NIMA YOLMO: I was thinking in some ways when we talk about newcomers or I am going to wait for you to tell us a little more about that, but, like, the notion of welcoming them is also tied to the level of autonomy, any decision-maker or political commitments within an institution would have.

I feel like that's also something that needs to be built with the idea of newcomer. Could you talk a little more about

that.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Yeah, thank you. That's a good question. In drawing on the work of Jacques Francier who tells us that the strange thing about democracies if it we understand them correctly, is that they assume each person who is ruling or part of a coalition of rulers should be equally in exchange with any other person. That's the kind of fundamental idea behind democratic institutions.

So therefore, a democratic process would have to be open to any newcomer, anyone who arises on the scene should be able to be substitutable with those who are already empowered. Now, obviously actually existing democracies do not work this way, but that is part of the problem.

So what I have been thinking about is what do we need to do to change the way we perceive of our institutions so that they move away from the policing function of institutions, which is to keep people categorized in particular ways and to predefine for them what their role can be toward a democratic idea of an institution which has as its horizon of possibility the idea that in an organization, any person could do any role.

So that is a very radical idea. There have been times and spaces that have tried to accomplish that. Everyone everywhere from Bauhaus in which if you trained at the Bauhaus, you had to start by learning to hammer stone. You couldn't just go straight to architecture. You started from the foundation, to

some collectivities that are working today.

So in terms of the second question, I believe that's a question more about the actually existing operations of politics on the ground. And so at least for me, I like to keep both things in mind simultaneously, both the horizon of aspiration, and then also the strategic moves that we would have to make to instantiate that. But again, it's something we have to do over and over again.

Another thinker that's been extremely helpful to me is Denise Ferrara de Silva who is really trying to think beyond these pre-given categories of political participation in particular land on the one hand, and labor on the other, to try to think across the divide between indigeneity on one hand and race on the other.

And she grounds much of her thinking in what she calls negative accumulation, that, in fact, what is grounding both the expropriation of land and the expropriation of labor is the accumulation from slaves and indigenous people of labor and wealth, negative accumulation that continues to ground the accumulation of capital over time.

So those are some of the ways that I would start to try to think through that question. Good one.

>> NIMA YOLMO: Thank you.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE:

>> KIM FERNANDES: Thank you so much for this, Sareeta, and everything that's come up today. I think as we were just talking about politics on the ground both within and outside the

academic, I was wondering if we could return a little to the work of broadening our definitions of who and what counts, and tie that to your thinking on practical interventions toward opening up the profession and the community,

And see if there were things that came up for you, both as a response to the AAAs or other moments within anthropology that are both practical interventions and ways to sort of broaden who we consider ourselves in community with to sort of revisit or I guess reframe the canon.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Mm-hmm. So I guess, I'm understanding two different moments in your question. One is a question of exigency. What does anthropology need and need to do now? And the other is the question of canon. How do the exigencies of the current moment change how we should approach constructing our current discipline? Yeah.

So in terms of what anthropology needs to do now, I think the agendas are pretty clear and broad. They are the agendas of climate change, of workers and workers' rights, and the agenda of race and inequality. Those to me are the three big ones. And of course there are tons of overlaps among them, including a big strand that goes throughout which is the strand of health justice. That's in every piece of those.

So some of the big themes there that I think anthropology needs to think through and think on at least when it comes to the anthropology of technology is the question of

surveillance, especially of workers. You know capitalism and what form that's going to take going forward, and finally regulation, the kind of brewing fights between how things are regulated by whom, and whether they are efficacious. Do they have teeth?

So I don't think that's a question -- I really don't like answering questions broadly. What should anthropology do? Again, it seems totally hubristic. We have a different point of view and each of us has a different expertise that intersects with those questions. So the question of course is how to use those. And what I often say to my students is let's say we are talking about algorithmic bias in prison sentencing.

It's a real downer of a class. I just taught that class two weeks ago. At the end of the class I point I make to them is there are so many issues right now in the world around us. You could close your eyes and just touch a map and find one, either an issue map or another map. So we shouldn't be asking ourselves what do we do considering our hands, we should find an issue about which we know something or we want to know something and see how we can help.

Because there are groups all across the world right now who are actively fighting against the regimes in which they are located. So that's number one. The canon question, I think that's already happening, honestly. I think our graduate students at the University of Washington, the undergraduate and

graduate students are absolutely amazing. And I think they've been pushing for many, many years now to change the way we do our graduate and undergraduate education.

I myself have really changed my teaching in the last year and a half to three years in which I am teaching texts that have a larger component of helping us think through how to act and confining it with works that we've always used to teaching us how to think.

So of course there's an issue there, because once again we are told we need to act, we should be alert to the fact we are in a capitalist logic where productivity in which everything including our intellectual production is economized. I don't know if everyone caught the Instagram that's been translated around where Ocean Baum has a great riff on what a metaphor is. It's beautiful. If you haven't caught it, you can bring it up. One of the things he says about metaphor or what writers are, he says they are servants of possibility. And I think to me that is a big canonical, I wouldn't say it's a change because it's always been there.

It's a canonical pillar that we need to kind of strengthen in the way that we train students to think of ourselves as servants of possibility, and to kind of lean into readings that make that way of thinking really strong. And again, there's lots to choose from. Yeah.

>> KIM FERNANDES: This was such a lovely framing. Thank

you for bringing through with all of us what it is that we need to be asking very fundamentally. I wanted to get to one last question if that's okay with you, that came up from Orlando in the chat who was asking about if you could speak to the challenges of doing comparative relational intersectional work in a context where we are also being called to

Reckon with the deep rootedness of anti-Blackness and its challenge to older frameworks of racialization and forms of oppression particularly we need new approaches for this moment.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: I'm not sure, I entirely understand the question. I guess maybe at its heart, the question is asking do we do more work that's about anti-Blackness, or do we do more work that's about intersectionality? I don't necessarily see those as opposed. But I will also say I sometimes find the Afro-pessimist strain of writing correct, but limited in that it definitely identifies and diagnoses the anti-Blackness

That is at heart of so many of the issues that we face and is rampant within immigrant communities. But at the same time, it doesn't necessarily give us a range of tools in which to move from that correct diagnosis to something that looks much more like solidarity. And so therefore I sometimes find the work of especially Black feminist writers much more helpful

Because, in fact, they are very grounded in building solidarity that is beginning from what we call intersectionality. We could also think of it as particulation. How do different

political movements articulate together? When they are compatible, what are the areas of difference within them and how can we continue forward in solidarity without solidifying or simplifying or flattening out those very real differences.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thank you so much, Sareeta, for joining us today. I wonder in some ways I feel like we shouldn't end with a question, but with, you know, a call to action so to speak. And throughout anthropology, especially recently there have been a variety of movements to try to articulate both in the voicing and in the organizing sense what an open anthropology might look like.

And I think in some ways what you have left us with is less the open anthropology question mark, but more of the open anthropology exclamation point, that there's a call that needs to happen first, that must go hand in hand with the kind of training to action, not just the training to thinking.

And that action so often as you've just pointed out is about relationship-building, relationship-building towards solidarity. That's where you started and where you ended. So I think that that's a really fantastic place for us to kind of tie a bow on this conversation. But, you know, want to give you the opportunity, any final thoughts? Any final imperatives for us to take with us or for those in our audience to take with us?

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Read more Black scholars. Read more native scholars. Read more scholars. That's what I would say, and read poetry.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Those are not usually exclusive.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: No, not at all.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thank you so much for joining us today. This has been incredibly productive for me and I know for all of us and we really appreciate the time.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Thank you. This was great.

>> BILL MAURER: This was so fantastic. Thank you so much.

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Thank you for the questions. They were very challenging, and I loved answering them.

>> BILL MAURER: And thanks to everyone who attended today. Again, this will be posted online on the UCI Social Sciences website and also via the Wenner-Gren Foundation. And just a plug for our next event will be January 8th, same time, with Hannah from UCLA, and the title of that conversation is Expanding the Anthropological Imagination, Working in and Against Wall Street. We hope to see you there. And again, thank you, all for being here and happy new year!

>> SAREETA AMRUTE: Thank you.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thanks so much. Bye, everyone.