Brackette F. Williams Biosketch

Brackette F. Williams brings to the School three overlapping areas of expertise critical to modeling the socialization of agents for relations among ethnicity, gender, age, and dark sector economic activities. Her initial research and publications focused on the Caribbean regions, where she conducted research on labor market segmentation, ethnic entitlement, and nationalist ideological precept in Guyanese post-independence state formation (Williams 1991, 1995, 1996). She subsequently researched the impact of variation in ethnic cultural norms on perceptions of appropriate gender and age roles in the authority structures of social movements in the United States, focusing on Black Muslims of the Nation of Islam (Williams 1995, and Pierce and Williams, in Williams (editor) 1995). Awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (1997-2002), she conducted a five-year comparative analysis of the cognitive processes revealed in legal professionals practices that select, adjudicate, sentence, and manage execution protocols in the United States and the informal classifications devised by social justice organizations to support and oppose retention of the death penalty. While researching, writing, lecturing, and teaching on these issues (1998-2008), Williams also served on the Arizona American Friends Prison Concerns Steering Committee, and was elected to the Board of Directors for the Arizona American Civil Liberties Union. In conjunction with these public services, she proposed and was awarded a Soros Justice Senior Advocacy Fellowship, by the Open Society Institute (2007-2009) to investigate the impact of multiple long-term, combined with repeated short-term, solitary confinement in maximum-security facilities. The report (Williams 2012), submitted to Arizona American Friends Committee, details adverse consequences of these practices on post-release household reaggregation, gender and age composition of household authority structures, long-term civic reintegration, and disproportionate inclusion of released persons in the national and international growth of homeless populations.

Continuing her work on identity politics and moral orders in Guyana and other Caribbean societies, since 2008 she has worked with Dr. Christiana Bastos and other scholars researching late-nineteenth through early twentieth-century migration of impoverished Europeans from Portuguese Madeira to labor on plantations in the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean, South America, and Africa, and in the mills of North America. To study the role of labor, class, and race in Lusophone cultural production, collaborators designed first a multi-team field project, then five-year graduate training program for the study of sites in the labor migration. In 2015, the proposal for the graduate program was funded by European Research Council. Members of the board assist Dr. Bastos in selecting graduate students that will conduct field research during the five-year program, and the post-doctoral fellows, and visiting scientists that join the program for one to two years to contribute to and learn from the graduate students’ field project. As a member of the advisor board, Williams joined Warwick Anderson, Michel Cahen, Virgina Dominguez, Ann Laura Stoler, and Peter Wade, and the first class of students and visiting scholar at the inaugural meeting in Lisboa, June 2017. Over the life of the program, Williams will conduct topical workshops when requested by the director, and, in 2018, travel with the director and several students on a scoping trip to Guyana.

Grounding her work on identity politics and moral order in the cognitive anthropology issues that inform all strands of her work, in 2015, Williams joined Lori Labotka, a recent School of Anthropology doctorate, to explore the influence of the least (less) eligibility principle and corrollary permanent inequality for once disdaned, on welfare, penal and corrections policy and practice. The issue involved continue analysis of connects presumptions of moralheritability to social stratification, which George P. Murdock termed the Matthew Effect—those that have shall get, those that have not shall not get because they deserve not to get. Williams and Labotka submitted a proposal for a four-year field project to NSF Law and Social Science division, which included anthropology as discipline. They were not successful despite receiving positive peer reviews for substance and method, because the reviewers thought the proposal should have been submit it under the Anthropology division. Williams and Labotka will resubmit to the Anthropology division, however, while awaiting the outcome of that long process, after submitting an IRB, they will being the project in Arizona and Tennessee (residential location for Labotka), carrying out tasks that are feasible because home is also the field. In connection with the same issues, in collaboration with Dr. Trenholme Junghans, of Cambridge University , Williams take part in a conference on commensurability organized by “The Limits of the Numerical,” the monikers of a faculty group composed of analytic philosophers and cognitive anthropology. To be April 16-17, 2018 at Cambridge, Williams has been asked to present on classification of incommensurate, based, in part, on her work on US death penalty classification schemes and torture as the ordinariness of lineages of disdain.