

ETHICS, ADVOCACY AND THE TRUTH A RESPONSE TO KLAUS MÄKELÄ'S "ETHICAL CODES AND ETHICAL CONTROL IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES"

• ANNE MARIE MONCHAMP •

Humanitarianism consists in never sacrificing a human being to a purpose.
Albert Schweitzer

Mäkelä's stimulating and thought provoking report brings up important questions that all anthropologists must face in regards to ethics. This response will focus, for the sake of clarity, on one thread of Mäkelä's argument; that of the ethical relationship between anthropology, anthropologists and advocacy. Mäkelä notes that, unlike earlier codes, missing from the 1998 code of ethics for the American Anthropological Association is any obligation on the part of anthropologists to contribute to public debate or engage in advocacy, leaving the choice of engagement up to the individual anthropologist. According to this code, advocacy is "an individual decision, but not an ethical responsibility" (C.2 in Mäkelä). This stance on advocacy has become common and is reflected in ethical codes and attitudes worldwide. I am reminded, for example, of the GDAT debate (Wade [ed.] 1996) where members generally supported the stance, as evinced in the title of the debate proceedings; *Advocacy is a Personal Commitment for Anthropologists, Not an Institutional Imperative for Anthropology*. In the Australian Anthropological Society 2003 code of ethics Section 8 'Responsibility to the wider public' deals with the dissemination of research results. In this section article 8.4 explicitly states that "anthropological researchers should make the results of their research appropriately available to sponsors, students, decision makers, and other non-anthropologists" (AAS 2003: 8). This article also contains the provisos that such material should be truthful and appropriately contextualized but, along with the rest of the code, places no ethical burden on any anthropologist to engage in public debate or advocacy only to make their result available 'where possible'.

One line of argument against advocacy-driven research follows an Aristotelian logic, arguing that anthropology, along with other forms of research, should be viewed as knowledge for the sake of knowledge, a distinctly academic pursuit that should not be contaminated by questioning the eventual effect of the information produced. Following from this we are warned that "when engaged in advocacy, we are likely to become saturated, however temporarily, in a communicative mode that is over-emotional, over-simplified, rhetorical, over-dramatic, exaggerated, single-minded, without footnotes; in short, the exact opposite of most of our academic writing" (Van Esterik 1985: 81). A warning with as many invocations as this is not lightly ignored; it would seem that the author is passionately opposed to over-emotional writing. But while some see a myriad of problems with advocacy-driven anthropology others take the opposing view. For example those anthropologists

engaged in advocacy-driven research often critique those who eschew such models as being elitist, ensconced in the 'ivory tower', and generally out of touch with those outside of academia. As Eriksen (2003) says, some anthropologists are "only interested in recognition from other intellectuals, not in influencing or changing society" (4).

While anthropologists as academics and intellectuals may be interested in recognition from one another, part of the difficulty for anthropological associations and societies worldwide in enforcing codes of ethics arise from the great diversity of researchers and research environments anthropologists currently engage in; with many anthropologists working for governments, NGO's and in the private sector, not all anthropologists are strictly academics. The most recent and pressing ethical concern in this regard is the utilization of anthropologists in the United States Military under the Human Terrain System to study the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan and report their findings back to military officials. When I first heard about the deployment of anthropologists in the United States military I went back to my well worn copy of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, by Ruth Benedict (1989 [1946]) which has always been influential for me in contemplating the intricate ethical dimensions of anthropology. In the introduction to this book Benedict forthrightly states that; "In June, 1944, I was assigned to the study of Japan. I was asked to use all the techniques I could as a cultural anthropologist to spell out what the Japanese were like" (3). Some of the questions she was asked to answer for the U.S. Department of Defence were "What would the Japanese do? Was capitulation possible without invasion? Should we bomb the Emperor's palace? What could we expect of Japanese prisoners of war? What should we say in our propaganda to Japanese troops?" (ibid.)

In light of the eventual actions taken against Japan at Nagasaki and Hiroshima along with further disillusionment amid war efforts during the Vietnam era, the trend in undertaking anthropological studies expressly to aid in war movements declined (Chambers 1987: 311) until recently. As with Benedict's study, anthropologists and social researchers often cannot control the effects of their research, leading to unpredictable consequences. A contemporary instance of this has occurred in Australia over the last year and a half with the Howard and then Rudd governments implementing interventionist policies in 'Aboriginal communities' in Australia's Northern Territory. The decision to implement these officious strategies was ostensibly based on the report "Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle 'Little children are sacred': Report of the NT Board of Inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse" prepared by Rex Wild and Pat Anderson (2007). This is a sensitive and comprehensive report prepared in collaboration with community members addressing many of the issues these unique communities face and providing ninety-seven recommendations to help protect children from child abuse. None of the recommendations in this report involve, imply or allude in any way to the deployment of Federal Troops. Rex Wild (2007), speaking for himself and his co-author Anderson in a response to the intervention policies, has said that "it seems to us that the government has missed the central point of our recommendations" and points out the first recommendation in the report "was absolutely clear: no solution should be imposed from above". Wild goes on to say that at the time the Prime Minister announced the "emergency response" the authors of the report had not been consulted.

After the implementation of the interventionist policies in the Northern Territory I was asked by the editors of *Australian Quarterly* to write an article about my impressions, as an

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anthropologist and a foreigner, on racism in Australia (see Monchamp 2008). Given that I have done research in the Northern Territory among Aboriginal people I did not feel that I could write such a piece without addressing the issue of the N.T. intervention. In preparing the article I wrote to three other anthropologists¹ who have also worked with Aboriginal peoples around Australia to ask for their impressions of the media's representation of the Australian Government's intervention policy. Of the three two did not reply at all, one responded not as an anthropologist but rather as a friend, only to advise me against writing the article. In the paper for which I solicited comment I propose that reactions might have been different to a headline reading 'Federal Troops Enter Australian Communities' than the reaction found to actual headlines which read 'Federal Troops Enter Aboriginal Communities'. In this situation portraying 'Aboriginal' communities as something *other* than Australian could easily be seen to create a context that allows an 'us and them' mentality to operate, making it possible for the government to invade 'their' communities. This is one of the main issues which has been debated in anthropology, at least since the 'writing culture' debate began. However, it seems that while anthropologists are quite happy to debate cultural boundedness and 'us' and 'them' dichotomies at conferences and other academic venues some, possibly particularly in the Aboriginal Australian context, seem less willing to engage with the same issues in the media or public debate.

Many might argue that advocacy is on the decline in anthropology. I would argue, however, that to see silence as anything other than advocacy is to ignore the real-world situation of in anthropology, namely "that since context (...) or value-free research which is not contaminated by the bias of someone's particular point of view is impossible, and since the sociologist [or anthropologist] has multiple and conflicting loyalties (...) to sponsors and founders and subjects and colleagues and publishers and the state, and so on (...) the only choice concerns whose side to be on" (Rapport 1999: 30). If we take Rapport seriously then we must acknowledge that there is no advocacy-free anthropology; our discourse, or our silence, always speaks; our only choice is in what to say or hold back and hence what side to be on.

NOTES

¹ Along with these three anthropologists I also wrote to two other colleagues who have not worked with Aboriginal people in Australia. I contacted these particular anthropologists because we share the same national background and I wanted to see if their impressions of racism in Australia matched my own; both of these people wrote back immediately and with no qualms about the thrust of the piece.

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ANNE MARIE MONCHAMP, Ph.D. (cand.)
ANTHROPOLOGY
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
shekelde@gmail.com