

The perils and prospects for an engaged anthropology. A view from the United States

In this article I will argue for the vital importance and urgent need for an engaged anthropology. There are a host of critical social issues that anthropologists are currently researching where our qualitative methodologies, in-depth field research, and knowledge of local languages and cultures give us vital insights into the sources of social problems and also potential remedies for some very pressing societal dilemmas.

In the United States we have come to realise that we need to do three things as we become increasingly engaged with the world: first, transform our relations with the public in order to overcome entrenched stereotypes and foster current images that accurately depict anthropology today; second, continue to change our relations with the communities we work with, by attending to their concerns in formulating research questions and by viewing them as equal partners in carrying out research and educational activities; and third, work out effective ways of doing research on critical social issues that will expand the influence of anthropology in political arenas and policy debates.

Engaging with policy experts, the public and the press can have its perilous side since we have to communicate our research findings more effectively and to overcome public perceptions about who anthropologists are and what we do. The public holds stereotypes of cultural anthropology, condensed images that reduce our work to what Micaela di Leonardo has termed 'Halloween costumes' (Di Leonardo 1998: 31). Many of these are images that are based on anthropology's occupation of what Rolph Trouillot calls the 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991), in other words the niche that the discipline long ago carved out for itself as the scientists who study the 'primitives'. In the past we have been complicit in constructing at least one of these costumes: the one di Leonardo labels as 'noble savage/noble anthropologist' (1988: 32–6). In other words, American anthropologists in the past often preferred to portray themselves as studying primitive cultures for what they could learn about their own contrasting customs better to understand or even reform themselves. The prototype of this trope is Margaret Mead's *Coming of age in Samoa* (1928), in which Mead used an analysis of Samoan adolescence to critique American ways of dealing with puberty. But there are other stereotypes that many of us would reject. For example, there is the charge that anthropologists are really 'barbarians at the gate' (Di Leonardo 1988: 40–3). In this stereotype, anthropologists are viewed as those who over-value the practices of other cultures, hawking cultural relativism to naive undergraduates and by implication denigrating the classics and western civilisation. This is a perspective often promulgated

by American conservatives such as Allan Bloom. A less offensive stereotype, but one that considerably simplifies the nature of anthropological research, is the image of the anthropologist as the 'human nature expert' (Di Leonardo 1988: 51–7). In this view, anthropologists are those who can answer questions about human nature or our own behaviour such as 'Why are male/female relationships such a struggle?', 'Why is there so much violence in our society?' or even 'Why do Americans need holidays such as Valentine's Day or Halloween?' None of these 'Halloween costumes' fits the kind of anthropology we do today. But we need to understand that these stereotypes are 'out there' and we need actively to strategise to overcome them.

I want to illustrate the perils of communicating with the public about anthropology by examining the controversy surrounding Patrick Tierney's *Darkness in Eldorado*.

'Darkness' casts a dark shadow over American anthropology

As president of the American Anthropological Association in 2000 and 2001, I had a unique overview of the events that rapidly unfolded after Terry Turner and Les Sponsel emailed me and other AAA officials on Thursday, 31 August 2000. Using highly charged rhetoric, they warned that a forthcoming book by Patrick Tierney would cause an 'impending scandal', particularly because of its allegation that the Neel/Chagnon expedition to the Yanomami in Venezuela in 1968 'greatly exacerbated or probably started' a measles epidemic. As the memo soon began circulating through the internet, it was only a matter of time before journalists received it and sensed that this was a sensational story that would make news.

The first journalistic account came on Friday, 22 September, three weeks after I had received the Turner/Sponsel memo. I received an email and follow-up phone call from Paul Brown of *The Guardian* in London, who was on a tight deadline and wanted a comment on the Turner/Sponsel report on Tierney's allegations. I basically reiterated the official AAA press release that it was too early to make a judgement. Like many anthropologists, I was naive in my approach, preferring to avoid what seemed like a controversial issue.¹ Alternatively we anthropologists often give a long,

1 During the fall of 2002, the American Anthropological Association hired a media relations director who also took this approach, issuing a bland statement taking no position on the controversy and indicating that a forum on the topic would be held at the AAA annual meeting in November. During this controversy, I and the Association learned a great deal about how to handle the press. By working with a media consultant obtained by the AAA, I discovered that it was important to have a more direct and clear response such as 'Tierney presents a caricature of anthropology, but these allegations are serious and everyone needs a chance to defend themselves'. In other words, one needs to provide just a few carefully thought through sentences that use metaphors and capture the essence of an issue in a clear, direct and memorable way (Mathis 2002). The AAA now has a seasoned media relations director who has been very successful in getting our activities into the press; workshops on dealing with the press, led by a media consultant, were held at the 2001 and 2002 annual meetings. My impression is that more anthropologists are beginning to write op-ed pieces for local newspapers, and more American anthropologists are getting national coverage in their areas of expertise. A number of anthropologists with research experience in Afghanistan and the Middle East were able to get their views aired in the national media after the events of 11 September 2001, for example.

complex analysis and end up feeling misquoted when a reporter uses an off-hand comment or a minor point in referring to what we said.²

The next day, September 23, Brown published his article in the *Saturday Guardian*. Although the bland AAA statement was included, it hardly canceled out the headline, which read 'Scientist Killed Amazon Indians to Test Race Theory. Geneticist Accused of Letting Thousands Die in Rainforest.' Over the next few weeks articles appeared in the major American media, and the headlines were equally sensational, many playing on notions of fierceness, and evoking Conradian images of the 'jungle'. The *New Yorker* excerpt on 9 October was called 'The fierce anthropologist', and was accompanied by a picture of Chagnon in full Yanomami feathered regalia. 'What have we done to them?' asked *Time* magazine, while *Newsweek* called the story 'Into the heart of darkness.' Soon articles were focusing on the growing controversy within anthropology between Neel's and Chagnon's supporters and those who thought the Tierney book raised serious issues. *US News* called it 'An ethics firestorm in the Amazon', while the *New York Times* shrieked 'Anthropology enters the age of cannibalism' (meaning that we were 'eating each other alive'). 'The word 'anthropologist' always seemed paired with 'tribe' or some other trope evoking primitiveness.

The maddening part of all this was that both the book and the press coverage subordinated the serious problems faced by the Yanomami to the role of Chagnon, Neel and other anthropologists, who were seen as indirectly – or even directly – responsible for deteriorating Yanomami health, economic vulnerability and subjugation within the Venezuelan state. Chagnon became a symbol for all anthropologists, and the important work of scholars such as Alcida Ramos and Bruce Albert in helping Brazilian Yanomami populations secure a reserve and access to education and health care was relegated to footnotes.

The press coverage in these months illustrates the perils of *Engaging with the world*: a controversial book, unpublished at the time, making allegations about the nature of ethics in anthropological research and giving rise to negative press coverage. The Eldorado controversy mirrored, in many ways, the impact of Derek Freeman's book on Margaret Mead: an unpublished book that set off a controversy calling into question the credibility not just of one anthropologist, but of the whole discipline (Freeman 1983).

The media, of course, was simply doing its job: giving us a story that was, first, 'different' and, second, 'emotional'. And journalists were also taking a very complex set of events and simplifying them. Thus the story had all three important components of a headline-grabbing event; it was different, emotional and simple (Mathis 2002). And, if true, it was also appalling, and therefore definitely 'news.' Members of the media were also dressing anthropologists in another 'Halloween costume' that of 'Good subaltern/evil imperialist anthropologist' (di Leonardo 1998: 43–51). This stereotype draws on the notion that anthropologists, through their prying research, often aid colonial or national governments and certainly do little to help those they study. In the Yanomami case there was even the implication that anthropologists had

2 In talking with colleagues and AAA members about the importance of getting anthropological research into the news media, I have noticed that anthropologists enter into the conversation with a 'horror story' about the time they talked with a journalist or appeared on television. Usually, they report spending a lot of time and effort giving a complex analysis of their subject, only to find that their expertise was reduced to a one-sentence quote or sound bite.

a hand in the deaths of innocent subjects. Over the past thirty years, the discipline in the United States has distanced itself from this stereotype. Within cultural anthropology there has been a great deal of historical research on, and critique of, colonialism and neo-colonialism and on the relationship between anthropologists and the communities they studied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result of the Thailand controversy during the Vietnam war when anthropologists were accused of participating in clandestine, government-sponsored research that endangered the communities they studied, the AAA adopted a code of ethics. These guidelines demand that anthropologists put the interests of their research subjects first and protect the anonymity of their informants. Applied and practicing anthropologists often engage in research that has practical implications that benefit research subjects, and more researchers are involved in the kind of collaborative research I am advocating in this paper. That this stereotype still resonates with American journalists and the public is indicated by the number of times it was embedded in the stories about *Darkness in Eldorado*.

But there is one final stereotype lurking in these press accounts: the simple-minded dichotomy between 'scientists' and 'postmodernists' – a split that was alleged to have divided the discipline into 'warring tribes'. This dichotomy was alive and well 20 years ago, but has since been overridden by a new consensus that values both evidence (part of the scientific stance) and critique and reflexivity (aspects of the post-modernist analysis of scientific knowledge).

In the United States I would argue, there is a continued commitment among the majority of cultural anthropologists to empirical fieldwork and to the careful analysis of evidence, as well as a newly gained understanding of the historical, political and economic setting in which we conduct our research.³ There is also a clear sense of how the investigator's nationality, race, gender and class shape the data he or she collects and how our categories of analysis are culturally constructed (another result of the dis-

3 Some of us, including colleagues who identify as human evolutionary ecologists, felt we were being thrown back into the early 1980s when the debates between sociobiologists and cultural anthropologists were at their most hostile. Those most involved in the El Dorado controversy, those who wrote most of the emails and commentaries, are a handful of people who occupy two ends of a very broad spectrum. Those who were labelled the 'scientists' were a number of human evolutionary ecologists who knew Chagnon and felt his work – particularly during the 1968 measles epidemic – was being unfairly distorted, though many also felt some of his affiliations and activities in the 1990s were questionable. At the other end, were those anthropologists who were not postmodernists, but who were advocates for the Yanomami, some of whom had been active in criticising Venezuelan policy with regard to Yanomami land, the incursion of mining and the declining health of the Yanomami. My impression is that even among these human rights activists there is a commitment to careful research and data collection as well as advocacy. It was very difficult for those at one extreme to 'hear' what those at the other end had to say, and the rising debate seemed to drown out the middle position I describe. My analysis may be wrong, but it is based on countless emails and phone calls with the most vocal in the debate as well as a number of colleagues who took positions somewhere between the extremes. This may be my feminist bias, but many of the most vocal protagonists in the debates surrounding *Darkness in Eldorado* were men who engaged in what Deborah Tannen has called 'the argument culture' (Tannen 1999). In my experience, women were less likely to be dogmatic and were more willing to listen and shift their views in the light of what they heard. Of course, a substantial number of men followed this path as well. The role of the media in the fall of 2000 was to emphasise the two extreme and most newsworthy ends of the continuum without giving much play to those who wanted more evidence or were sceptical of both Chagnon and Tierney.

cipline's encounter with postmodernism). Instead of trying to understand the discipline's complexity and the middle-of-the road position most of us were taking in the controversy, journalists drew on the stereotype of anthropology as a fractious discipline. While anthropology is probably no more divided than other professions such as law, medicine or economics, journalists could not resist resorting to metaphors based on the notion that anthropologists study 'primitives'. Thus we got headlines like 'The fierce anthropologists', and references to 'tribal wars' or even 'cannibalism'.

The *Darkness in Eldorado* press coverage taught us that the stereotype of the 'evil imperialist anthropologist' is out there and that non-anthropologists enjoy taking terms they think apply to our research topics or our subjects and turning them on us. These images distort the discipline and ignore the enormous transformation of North American anthropology over the last twenty years: changes in the way anthropologists conduct field research, in the problems and topics they study and in the types of communities they work with. More American anthropologists now conduct research in our own country on a broad range of contemporary issues – immigration, welfare reform, health care, gated communities and homelessness – to cite only a few topics. Those who work abroad are likely to study Palestinian/Israeli conflicts from the point of view of ordinary villagers (Bornstein 2002), analyse the television programmes watched by Bedouin women (Abu-Lughod 1995) or investigate the impact of a World Bank-funded dam (Johnson and Garcia-Downing 2002). Those working with small indigenous populations are concerned with issues of land rights, health and education, rather than the finer points of kinship terminology or ritual behaviour.

The disjunction between our distorted public image and what we increasingly do as anthropologists sets the stage for outlining the kinds of activities that will be important in dissolving the disjunction and building an engaged anthropology that fits the twenty-first century. These include the three topics I mentioned at the beginning of this paper: first, transforming our relations with the public to reflect the kinds of research we are currently doing; second, continuing to change how we relate to the communities we study; and, third, undertaking research on critical social issues in a way that will impact on public policy. In the pages that follow, I will address each topic using examples from different kinds of institutions: the American Anthropological Association (at the national level), our department and museum at the University of New Mexico (at the local level) and two multi-disciplinary research projects aimed at public policy issues (using local research to address national concerns).

Understanding race. Outreach to the public

In November 2001, with the help of a Ford Foundation grant, the American Anthropological Association launched a project called 'Understanding race and human variation'. This attempts to transform the public's perception of anthropology by taking a topic often thought to be in the province of sociology, political science or history – race and racism – and showcasing anthropological knowledge and research on this critical social issue. The big idea behind the project is to 'create a better understanding that human variation is part of nature but race is not, and that race is a dynamic cultural construct that is often harmful'. The project will develop a travelling museum exhibit, a public website and a publication or 'primer' on the topic. The museum exhibit, anticipated to be 5,000 square feet, is the major product of the project. Through these media, we want the public to understand, first, that humans are

more alike than we are different; and, second, that race is the dividing of human variation into categories for historical, cultural and political reasons. We want visitors and readers to gain new perspectives on their own identities, think critically about race, recognise that racism exists today and draw their own conclusions.

We are working with the Science Museum of Minnesota to develop the exhibit, which will open in early 2005 and begin to travel that same year. Displays and interactive media will explore the history of the construct of race, explain the difference between physical appearance and genetics, and show why the physical characteristics of individuals and populations do not constitute race. Other parts of the exhibit will provide a cross-cultural perspective that illustrates that race is not a universal, but a cultural construct that varies in meaning and interpretation around the world. Finally, the origins and consequences of racism will also be explored, and exhibits will show how discrimination results in disparities and divides populations within and among nations (American Anthropological Association, 2002a:2–4)

The project is directed by Peggy Overbey of the AAA office, and Yolanda Moses, a past president of the AAA, who chairs an advisory board composed of anthropologists from four sub-fields and other experts on race and racism. The project thus draws from the expertise of museum specialists, archaeologists and biological anthropologists as well as cultural anthropologists and linguists. It puts into practice many of the techniques anthropologists working in museums have been developing over the past twenty years, techniques that engage the audience rather than present them with objects on a wall or in a glass case that are only looked at.⁴ The project has already held two planning workshops to help determine the overall objectives of the exhibit, identify theme areas, and develop an initial diagram of the museum exhibit.

Working on this public education project highlights a tremendous shift in focus on the part of anthropologists and particularly the AAA, which has been involved in some public outreach in the past, but nothing as extensive as this package of outcomes: a highly publicised museum exhibit, a website and a publically oriented 'primer'. We are good at writing proposals, holding conferences and writing books or scholarly articles. But reaching out to the public in a different way involves: determining what the public knows and wants to know; defining a set of clearly delineated ideas; and, most importantly, translating anthropological knowledge into language and concepts that will be understandable to a variety of visitors from high school students to senior citizens. Of course, raising the funds to carry out the project has been a crucial activity as well.

The first issue we have tackled is determining what the public knows about race and racism. To do this, we hired a firm to conduct a 'front-end' evaluation that

4 The Counsel of Museum Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association, has a membership of anthropologists who have worked in museums over the past 30 years and have helped develop many of these techniques. The Society of American Archaeology (SAA) also has a public education committee that includes members who have had long experience interacting with the public and presenting archaeological material to a broad audience. In addition, over the last decade, archaeologists have had considerable experience working with Native American communities on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a piece of legislation that is resulting in the repatriation of Native American sacred objects and human remains to tribal groups. The 'Understanding race and human variation' project combines a multidisciplinary anthropological project, a process of construction that involves researching public attitudes and using engaging presentation techniques, and sponsorship by a professional organisation (rather than only by a museum or an individual).

included 76 in-depth interviews with high school students and visitors to museums. The evaluation showed that race is a difficult and contradictory topic for Americans. While participants rejected the notion that 'race is biological', they had a difficult time defining what the word 'race' meant. Participants also acknowledged that 'culture shapes the way we see others', yet were unclear about what 'culture' meant. Culture appeared to be something ingrained or something you grew up with. Some said it was a way of seeing the world from one's own perspective – almost a definition of 'ethnocentrism'. All of these ideas contrast with the anthropological definition of culture as a set of shared meanings that we teach in our introductory classes.

The evaluation firm concluded that 'helping visitors understand that race is socially constructed will be one of the biggest challenges of the project. The idea of social construction is very pedantic. It is not the kind of everyday language that people use.' The closest anyone came to describing race as a social construction were a couple of teenagers and a few museum visitors who said that 'race was created by "people in power" in order to classify others' (Randi Korn & Associates 2002: v–vi). The firm recommended going back to the drawing board in order to design exhibits that would help visitors understand that racial groups of people are arbitrary classifications. This would also involve addressing the concepts of ethnocentrism (which participants had, but could not label as such) and 'political correctness' which cropped up often the interviews. It would also mean providing material that would encourage visitors to see their own culture or ethnic group through the eyes of others.

Thus, translation is clearly the most difficult part of constructing a museum exhibit, a website, and a publication that will present anthropological knowledge in a compelling way. Engaging in successful translation means going beyond the kind of anthropology often featured in museums or the public press: remarkable discoveries like the recent fossil found in Chad or displays featuring exotic cultures such as the Vikings. The point is to guide the public away from associating anthropology with the exotic by taking a topic of current import and providing a learner- focused setting that presents anthropological knowledge in an interactive, hands-on learning format. The pedagogy behind such an approach is 'bottom up' rather than 'top-down', with the learner rather than the teacher influencing the content and format. The museum exhibit will not present anthropological knowledge about race and expect visitors passively to absorb the information. The emphasis will be on interactive engagement. For example, visitors might be asked to categorise individuals into one 'race' first on the basis of skin colour, then into another 'race' on the base of nose shape or body form. Grappling with the arbitrariness of such an exercise will give visitors a better idea of how race is socially constructed.

A museum exhibit is an extraordinary opportunity to present anthropological knowledge in a variety of different levels – through the use of objects, graphics, interactive video and text. Concepts become three-dimensional rather than just linear, and visitors can absorb and interact with the material at their own pace, focusing on the learning style that suits them best. An exhibit can also appeal to a much wider population than college classroom teaching – younger children, high school students, middle-aged adults and older citizens. This is the AAA's first attempt at reaching out to the public in such a multi-layered way and it represents an important prospect for engaging with the world in a positive way.

Changing anthropology's relation to communities we study

The Alfonso Ortiz Center for Intercultural Studies is the joint project of the University of New Mexico anthropology department and the Maxwell Museum. Its goal is to establish ongoing partnerships with communities through, first, public scholarship, second, collaborative stewardship and, third, public education. The Center is named in memory of Alfonso Ortiz, who was from San Juan Pueblo in northern New Mexico and was a professor of anthropology at UNM for over 25 years. His life-long commitment to activism on behalf of Native American populations and his vision that traditional communities are repositories of important knowledge and expertise exemplify the guiding principles of the center.

During the first two years of its existence, the Ortiz Center has been involved in raising funds and initiating several important programmes, helped by a National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant that is allowing it to raise an endowment. The Ortiz Center is focusing on creating partnerships, based on lateral rather than hierarchical relations, that will foreground the perspectives and voices of our collaborators.⁵ We have a commitment to making information accessible to the public and to communities by using a variety of media (public symposia, film and video presentations, and hands-on collaborative projects). The center also has a responsibility to the interests and needs of communities and assumes that members have knowledge and expertise that makes them potential community educators. Finally, we have an interest in public policy and in working with communities to inform and guide policies on critical social issues at the state and local level.

One vivid example of public scholarship was the April 2001 Acequia roundtable that is part of the center's focus on 'on Land and Water'. The *acequias* or local irrigation systems have been a vital part of traditional Hispano communities in northern New Mexico since the 1700s, but they are under threat from declining use, water scarcity, increased population and real estate development. Two of the panellists, both Hispano University of New Mexico professors who have spent years studying Hispano history and culture, sketched out the cultural and religious meaning of the acequias and their role in building supportive social networks within and between villages in northern New Mexico.

Two Hispano community scholars – one, a state legislator, the other a local cultural historian – talked about what the acequias had meant for their own childhoods and family lives. The cultural historian outlined the way oral traditions that centre on the acequias are a storehouse of past knowledge about marriages, conflicts and community relationships. Finally, the state legislator described the current threats to their continued use. Both pleaded for a reinvestment in aspects of Hispano culture that surround the use of acequias and for policies that would counter development and pre-

5 There are two aspects of the Ortiz Center that characterise its uniqueness: first, the equal partnership of a museum and anthropology department and, second, the collaboration of anthropologists and community members on research and educational outreach. Anthropological museums are often quite separate from departments and, with the exception of a few joint appointments or an occasional exhibit curated by a faculty member, there is little interaction between them. In addition, while anthropological museums have always been in the business of reaching out to the public, the Ortiz Center is committed to bringing members of various non-academic communities into the planning and carrying out of research and exhibits.

serve them. The session was attended by 80 people, including state officials involved in water resource management and members of northern New Mexican Hispano communities (Ortiz Center Inaugural Report 2002: 7).

A second programme that focuses on public scholarship is the Desert Rainwater Harvesting Project. The recent drought and two seasons of serious wild fires have emphasised the need for water conservation in New Mexico. The Desert Rainwater Harvesting project includes the cultivation of two demonstration Xeriscape gardens, one on the UNM campus and the other at the Pueblo of Isleta, 20 miles south of Albuquerque. The gardens feature indigenous plants traditionally used by Native American and Hispano peoples that are watered by artfully captured rainwater runoff. Handmade ceramic tiles will list international names for water. Students at UNM can view the gardens in front of the Biology building, while Isleta community grade school students who worked to build the gardens are being encouraged to become 'conservation ambassadors' (Ortiz Center Inaugural Report 2002:8).

Collective stewardship of museum collections will be fostered through a grant to create open study space within the Maxwell Museum. This will give members of Native American and Hispano communities, and the public at large, greater access to the museum's extensive Pueblo pottery and Navajo weaving holdings, its photo archives and collections from Hispanic and Latin American communities. It will also give community members an active role in planning how future collections will be made.

There is an educational side to stewardship activities through the Anthropology Introductory Class, which during the fall of 2001 focused on the topic 'Land and water in New Mexico'. The Ortiz Center sponsored six internships held by class members. Each student initiated a project connected with the land and water theme, using materials from the Maxwell Museum collections; one conducted a study of Hopi pottery examining the incorporation of water symbols into its decoration. Students made presentations to the class and created mini-exhibits, using the cases at the Maxwell Museum.

Finally, two recent film series sponsored by the Ortiz Center exemplify the kind of public outreach that the center is becoming known for. The goal of both series was to showcase films that embody a Native American perspective through the work of Native American film-makers and producers. One example is Lena Carr's film of a young girl's *kinaaldá* or puberty ceremony. Making the film of her niece's ceremony allowed her to return to the Navajo reservation and reclaim her own cultural heritage. A second film, *The Return of Navajo Boy*, directed by Jeff Spitz, an Anglo, and co-produced by Bernie Klain, who is Navajo, explored the history of a young boy who appeared in an early archival film and who was later taken from his family to be raised by Anglos. Through the process of making the film, his family history is unearthed and he is reunited with his kin. Both films were shown to packed lecture halls, and *Navajo Boy* enjoyed a second screening at the Albuquerque Public Library (Ortiz Center Inaugural Report 2002: 7).⁶

6 This description might seem like a 'rosy' account of the ease of creating good relations with ethnic and minority communities in New Mexico. However, the Maxwell Museum has a good track record, not only in terms of the issues surrounding repatriation but of exhibiting the work of Native American artists and producing exhibits involving collaboration with indigenous groups. In addition, the Department of Anthropology has the good fortune to have two Native American faculty (Beverly Singer and Joe Watkins), and a Hispana (Sylvia Rodriguez) who is a native New Mexican and who conducts research in the state. Along with other faculty who are conducting research (archaeological, biological and cultural) with native communities (in California, Canada, Brazil and Paraguay), these three faculty are helping us build good relations with indigenous populations, including those in New Mexico.

The center is only two years old but is already a model for ways in which departments and museums can collaborate with the communities we study. Our efforts can help change the perception of anthropologists from one of outsiders who come and extract knowledge to one of equal partners in research and education.

Policy-oriented research

In American anthropology as a whole there is increasing interest in research that has relevance to public policy, both in our own country and in other countries where the policies of the United States have great impact. Many American anthropologists working outside the States have collaborated with indigenous leaders and NGOs to acquire land rights, education and/or health-care for indigenous communities. My University of New Mexico colleagues Kim Hill and Magdalena Hurtado have been helping the Aché, a part-time foraging population in Paraguay, to learn to manage their reserve using traditional economic activities and have been training Aché health-care workers how to obtain healthcare resources from the Ministry of Health and private hospitals (Hill *et al.* 1997; Hurtado *et al.* in press). Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Ramos, who participated in a plenary session at the 2002 EASA meetings, has headed the Comissão Pró-Yanomami (CCPY), which has brought educational programmes in the Yanomami language to the Brazilian Yanomami and spun off a separate health-care NGO that provides medical care for Yanomami villages.⁷ I could cite many other examples.⁸

But influencing public policy has never been and is not an easy task. The first issue is 'getting to the table' so that we can present an anthropological voice among the many others who claim expertise on a critical social issue. In the United States we have a vast array of experts, ranging from talking heads on television and editorial columnists in the major newspapers to researchers in Washington think tanks. But there are also a large number of schools of public policy and university research centres that deal with policy issues, as well as professional schools (law, medicine, business) that produce their own experts.⁹ This means, first, showcasing existing research and con-

7 CCPY's activities are summarised on their website www.proyanomami.org.br. CCPY also publishes an electronic newsletter with updates on the Yanomami called the *Boletim Yanomami*. It is available through proyanomamidf@proyanomami.org.br. Although Magdalena Hurtado and Kim Hill represent a theoretical stance that is very different than that of Ramos and Albert (and often seen as being in conflict), there are many points of similarity in their activist work on behalf of indigenous peoples. Hurtado has been particularly active in projects that will have a positive impact on health, since Aché are now suffering from tuberculosis, parasites and other serious diseases.

8 The American Anthropological Association Human Rights Committee maintains a page on the AAA website at www.aaanet.org, with information about current cases where anthropologists are involved in aiding local communities with human rights issues. The Kalahari Peoples Fund website (www.kalaharipeoples.org) includes material about the projects anthropologists have been involved in relating to !Kung San education, land rights and health.

9 There are clearly national differences in the relationship between experts and policy makers. In contrast to the United States where policy analysts are a vocal population and have some impact on policy, Adam Kuper (2001) argues that in Britain experts are seen as neutral technicians of power who have limited ability to criticise the government in public. Anthropologists, he feels, have been closed out of topics of public concern such as race relations because they were not conducting active research on the topic when the field was formulated. Instead, anthropologists are largely regarded as experts in archaic and irrational beliefs and practices (ritual child abuse or nepo-

tinuing to conduct credible policy-oriented research that will sell the 'plusses' of ethnography to other researchers; and, second, involving anthropologists in the slow and painful, but ultimately rewarding, process of using that research to influence policy.

I will discuss two research projects: one I participated in on the privatisation of Medicaid healthcare for low income women and children in New Mexico, and Sandra Morgen's study of welfare leavers in Oregon. Both deal with critical social issues in the United States and depend on multidisciplinary research projects that involve other social scientists: sociologists, epidemiologists and economists.

Unlike in most European countries, where national healthcare plans are in place, in the United States government-funded health insurance is available only for the elderly, through Medicare, and for low-income women and children, through Medicaid. In the last seven years federal money for Medicaid has devolved to the states, and states have had more flexibility in designing their own Medicaid programs, including the option of privatising Medicaid through contracts with managed care organisations. Such organisations take the full risk of providing health-care to low-income clients and they, in turn, contract with providers – doctors – who see patients on a capitated (per patient per month) rather than 'fee for service' basis. The idea is that lower capitated fees and providers acting as gatekeepers in the referral process will cut the soaring cost of Medicaid for state budgets. In New Mexico our project studied the impact of privatisation using a multi-method approach. To examine patient access and satisfaction we ran four telephone surveys over a three-year period. To analyse the impact on safety net healthcare institutions, we engaged in ethnographic research in clinics, emergency rooms, welfare offices and a small doctor office. (This was part of the project that involved the participation of anthropologists). To look at population effects, we also studied epidemiological trends using immunisation rates, cancer and morbidity data.

Anthropologist Sandra Morgen was part of a collaborative study of Oregon families who left welfare for jobs between 1998 and 2000 that combined quantitative analysis and in-depth, qualitative interviewing. She worked with sociologists in every phase of the study. Team members conducted field research in welfare offices in order to construct a survey instrument that reflected actual situations. A survey research laboratory completed a phone survey of 970 women who had left welfare and were working. Six months later a second survey was conducted and 757 of these women were re-contacted for a follow-up. Sandra and several other team members, using an open-ended format, interviewed a sample of 78 of the original women surveyed. Then six months later 65 of these women were re-interviewed (Acker and Morgen 2001).

Both these projects help us make the argument that anthropology has important contributions to make to policy-oriented research. First, ethnography is a powerful

tism, for example). On the other hand, many British anthropologists have been active members of *Anthropology in Action*, a organisation interested in policy-oriented topics such as HIV/Aids, education, indigenous rights, health, and ethnicity and violence (see www.angelfire.com/rpg/anthropologyinaction/). Clearly there are anthropologists in Britain who have been conducting policy-relevant research and, as the EASA 2002 programme indicates, interest in many critical social issues exists also among anthropologists in other European countries. To what extent anthropologists are involved in using that research to advocate particular policies and how difficult it is actually to influence decisions is an issue that needs further investigation, both in the United States and in Europe.

tool for understanding processes – interactions and transformations that cannot be detected by more quantitative forms of research. Qualitative methods can reveal the gaps between how new structures should work and how they actually operate and reveal the contradictions and tensions created by a new set of policies.

In the Medicaid managed care project, we uncovered a number of previously unidentified processes. First were the ways in which reform brought increasing bureaucracy: the new system included interactions between many more organisations and units, and was much more complex. New procedures and gatekeeping rules created additional paperwork, faxing and telephoning that fell on clerical staff in health care sites. There was also a great deal of what we call ‘labour shifting’. Tasks previously done by state welfare case workers were shifted on to Medicaid clients themselves, so they needed to undertake the routine tasks of enrolling, finding health care providers and taking on their own ‘case management’. Not all of this work was performed by clients, however: some of it was picked up by nurses, physician assistants and clerical workers. These employees (mainly Hispanic women) engaged in a wide range of practices to ‘buffer’ the client from the system, often ‘going the extra mile’ to drive a patient to a specialist or making several calls to see if a patient’s oxygen had been delivered. ‘Buffering’ strategies were not the only ones we uncovered, but they illustrate the gaps and contradictions introduced by new policies that only ethnographic research can reveal (Waitzkin *et al.* 2002; Horton *et al.* 2001).

A second major plus of ethnography is that it gives voice to people whose opinions and life situations are often invisible. The final report of the Oregon project included fine-grained summaries of each woman’s experiences. Morgen argues that these case studies give qualitatively different results to those one gets from the surveys. For example, the phone survey revealed that one third of the women surveyed had significant problems with childcare. But the interviews demonstrated that even women who did not say they had problems with childcare, endured extraordinarily fragile arrangements. One mishap (a sick child or a automobile breakdown) could unravel the whole set of arrangements. Mothers also had a great deal of anxiety about the quality of the childcare they were able to put together (Sandra Morgen, personal communication, August 2002). Understanding these complexities is crucial for knowing how to fix the problem and strengthening the argument for childcare subsidies for women with children who leave welfare.

In some respects, I am ‘preaching to the choir’. As anthropologists, we are fully aware of the strengths of ethnographic research in uncovering processes and giving voice to our subjects. The real point is to convince other researchers and policymakers. Morgen’s project went much further than ours in trying to influence state and even national policies. Mid-way through the study, it held a welfare conference to strengthen connections with advocates and policy makers, and when it finally released its report, it called a press conference, talked to the media and made the front pages of newspapers in their own city and the state capital. During the state legislature session they prepared two-page briefs on the merits of bills relevant to welfare funding, worked closely with state legislators and testified at committee hearings. Most recently, they prepared a glossy report for members of the United States Congress and publicised this with a short conference (Acker, Morgen and Gonzales 2002). Project members also have key contacts with the advocacy community and work with them to press for legislation that will put more economic resources into the hands of single mothers struggling to raise small children and hold down low-wage jobs.

Of course, as Sandra Morgen reminded me, research is way down the list of factors that influence the legislation that gets passed. Party politics, budgetary constraints and public opinion are much more important. However, research can be an adjunct to the political process and exert real impact on the decisions that get made.

Beyond the *Darkness in El Dorado* controversy

Now let me return to the *Darkness in El Dorado* controversy and the American Anthropological Association's attempt to create a positive scenario out of a controversy that distorted the real life problems of the Yanomami and the role of anthropologists in studying (and often acting as advocates for) indigenous peoples. Ironically, Tierney's book, because it primarily focuses on research 30 years ago, glosses over and footnotes the important research and programmes developed for the Yanomami by anthropologists such as Alcida Ramos and Bruce Albert. The CCPY has already transformed anthropological relations with the Yanomami by means of advocacy and collaboration, though this was scarcely acknowledged in the book. Our goal was to keep the concerns of the Yanomami at the forefront of our discussions, but to address Tierney's allegations seriously, allow for debate and discussion among the various viewpoints in the association, and use this occasion to rethink both the ethics of fieldwork and our relationship with the communities we study.

The AAA has done four things. First, we used the annual meetings in San Francisco in November 2001 to disseminate information and foster debate and discussion among members. Second, on the recommendation of a preliminary task force, we appointed an Eldorado Task Force to enquire into the allegations contained in Tierney's book, paying particular regard to fieldwork practices, representations of the Yanomami that may have had a negative impact and the activities of organisations involving anthropologists that might have undermined Yanomami well being. Third, we charged our ethics committee with developing guidelines relating to anthropologists' responsibilities (i) in medical emergencies; (ii) in offering fair remuneration to communities (and considering the potential impact of that remuneration); (iii) for considering the possible negative consequences of anthropological representations of a study population; and (iv) for determining how informed consent should be obtained.¹⁰ Finally, we established a new three-year task force to investigate 'the status of indigenous peoples in South America'.

In engaging in these activities the AAA has sought to engage in open public dialogue about the issues involved and has worked to consult with Yanomami leaders where possible. To this end, the Eldorado task force sent two members to a meeting in Venezuela in November 2001 attended by Yanomami and Venezuelan officials. On this and other occasions one of the task force members interviewed Yanomami leaders, who expressed their interest in the return of blood samples collected during the 1968 expedition and after. Commission members then contacted biological anthropologists who hold some of these samples, and obtained statements from them about their willingness to work out a solution with the Yanomami that would involve the return of the blood or some other desirable outcome. Because of issues raised over whether the

10 Briefing papers on each of these issues have been created and posted on the AAA website as 'Committee on Ethics briefing papers on common dilemmas faced by anthropologists conducting research in field studies' (www.aaanet.org/committees/ethnics/bp.htm).

samples were gathered with appropriate informed consent, no research is being conducted at Pennsylvania State University using the blood samples collected in 1968.

Also in the spirit of open dialogue, a preliminary task-force report was posted on the AAA website in November 2001 and again in February 2002. Comments by anthropologists and others were extensive, and most were included in the task force's final report, which was accepted by the AAA executive board at its May 2002 meeting (and posted on the AAA website at www.aaanet.org).

The task force's mandate was to conduct an inquiry into the book's allegations rather than a formal investigation (since under its current code of ethics the AAA does not investigate individual cases and has no sanction over its members or other anthropologists). In the spirit of using past experience as a guide to future practice, the task force found that the consent procedures of the Neel expedition were not in compliance with official standards of the time, but that the expedition's vaccination programme during the measles epidemic saved many lives. There is much evidence for Neel's humanitarian goals in treating the Yanomami. It was also agreed that although Chagnon changed his published characterisations of the Yanomami, backing away from the title, *The fierce people*, he 'never spoke out clearly and unequivocally to attack misuses of his work by journalists' (American Anthropological Association 2002b: 32). Chagnon's involvement with FUNDAFACI, a Venezuelan foundation, was found unacceptable on both ethical and professional grounds, as 'it violated Venezuelan laws, associated his research with the activities of corrupt politicians and involved him in activities that endangered the health and well-being of the Yanomami' (American Anthropological Association 2002b: 43).

The task force also used its findings to reflect on anthropologists' responsibility for gaining informed consent and representing in print the people they study. They endorsed a vision of fully collaborative future research with the Yanomami – that is research that addresses issues defined by the Yanomami and elaborated by outside researchers whom the Yanomami invite to act as consultants.

This vision is certainly in concert with the goals of the new task force on 'The status of indigenous peoples in South America'. Its first aim will be to strengthen ties with other anthropological organisations, NGOs and international organisations, and with indigenous communities to develop strategies that will protect the rights of indigenous populations. A second goal will be to help indigenous South American communities to shape the institutions that impact on their lives. The AAA will encourage problem-focused participatory research that provides indigenous community members with the means to take greater advantage of legal, health and educational resources. In other words, the new task force will take up where the El Dorado task force left off, helping to foster collaborative work on issues that impact on the lives of South American indigenous peoples. It is this forward-looking approach that we hope will be the true legacy of the *Darkness in El Dorado* controversy. The task force met in November 2002 at the AAA annual meetings and began to work out a plan to construct a network of anthropologists, NGOs, international organisations and indigenous groups, as well as a list of basic problems and issues relevant to indigenous populations in South America. Members also met with Yanomami and Macuxi spokespersons, who made presentations at one of the AAA scholarly sessions. They spoke to the task force about the serious problems that the Yanomami people are currently facing, and the task force agreed to keep lines of communication open as future developments occur.

Conclusions

Of course, transforming our image with the public, changing our relations with communities that we study and influencing public policy are not easy tasks. In the United States, we feel we are at the beginning of a long process. Over the past two decades, American anthropologists have increasingly turned their attention to research on a number of critical social issues: economic development, race and ethnic relations, welfare and health care, language policy and poverty. European anthropologists are equally interested in pressing public concerns: the papers delivered at the EASA meetings in Copenhagen in August 2002 included research on such subjects as globalisation, unemployment, corruption, squatter settlements and refugee problems, information technologies and violence.

Anthropologists are uniquely suited to addressing these topics from a distinctive angle. Our qualitative methodologies and field research give us 'on the ground insights'. We know local languages and cultures, yet have a grasp of the larger political and economic forces that shape local situations. And we are able to uncover interactional processes within organisations and identify unintended consequences of policies that quantitative research does not reveal.

The major challenge to anthropology is to bring this research beyond the university and the confines of our own discipline. I have suggested that changing our image, translating our concepts for broader audiences, continuing to transform our relations with those we study and influencing public policy are more difficult and longer-term goals that we all share. I therefore hope that American and European anthropologists will continue to exchange information, not only on our research but on the programmes and strategies that prove successful in taking anthropology to the public, getting our voices heard in policy debates, and – as the theme of the 2003 EASA conference suggested – engaging the world.

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