

Advocacy Anthropology: History and Concepts

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Resumo

Este artigo mostra como antropólogos de todas as épocas têm se preocupado com o destino dos 'estudados'. Esta postura de advocacia antropológica transformou-se de engajamentos ocasionais e bastante espontâneos em favor de povos sem poder em uma abordagem metodológica com um conjunto definido de suposições teóricas e estratégias concretas. A *advocacy anthropology* é apresentada como uma abordagem de pesquisa com valores explícitos, comprometida com grupos social e politicamente desfavorecidos; ela usa métodos participativos e colaborativos e pode ser caracterizada como intervencionista, ativista e transformativa. Seus objetivos são a auto-advocacia e o empoderamento de grupos e povos minoritários e marginalizados. O argumento é que a *advocacy anthropology* oferece uma forma valiosa e válida para adquirir e aplicar saberes antropológicos e que ela merece ser reconhecida e praticada muito mais do que é atualmente.

Palavras-chave: *action anthropology*, antropologia comprometida, métodos participativos, história da antropologia aplicada, prática social.

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Abstract

This paper shows how anthropologists of all times have been concerned with the fate of 'those studied'. This anthropological advocacy stance developed from occasional and rather spontaneous engagements on the side of powerless people to a methodological approach with a definable set of theoretical assumptions and practical strategies. Advocacy anthropology is presented here as a value-explicit research approach, committed to disadvantaged groups; it uses participatory and collaborative methods and may be characterized as interventionist, action-oriented and transformative. It aims at the self-advocacy and empowerment of minority groups and other marginalized people. It is argued, that advocacy anthropology offers a valuable and valid form of acquiring and applying anthropological knowledge and deserves to be recognized and practiced much more than it actually is.

Key words: action anthropology, *antropología comprometida*, participatory methods, history of applied anthropology, social practice.

Introduction

Those were miserable days for the *Tonawanda Seneca* as was the case for most other native nations of the North American continent in the middle of the 19th century: they were forced to transfer their home territory to the state of New York for a disproportionately small compensation and then had to move to the state of Kansas. Very few of the non-native settlers were at all concerned about the fate of these people. However, there were exceptions, among them a committed anthropologist who initiated a public campaign of protest letters and petitions, and supported the Seneca in drawing up a letter to the U.S. President; he then represented them during the hearings in the Senate Committee for

Indian Affairs. He also tried (unsuccessfully) to obtain the position of a Commissioner of Indian Affairs and introduced draft bills concerning the rights of indigenous peoples and their careful integration into the new society (Frisch 1971). This early advocacy anthropologist was none other than the 'father' of North American anthropology: Lewis H. Morgan.

As in the time of Morgan, anthropologists have at all times stood up and taken sides with those people among whom they had conducted research which were usually colonized nations, minority groups or marginalized people. Only few anthropologists today would deny that they feel more for the poor and underprivileged than for those in wealth and power. This moral stance of anthropologists in favor of their 'objects' of research seems to represent a specific professional ethic inherent in the subject and the methodology of the discipline. Living among 'those studied' and becoming friends or at least somehow close to them, anthropologists feel the natural human desire to return something to their hosts for their hospitality and their sharing of knowledge. They offer(ed) small presents and money, transportation and medical assistance, support in the household and on the fields or helping the community against discrimination or political forces (e.g. Paine 1985). Generally, most anthropologists hope that their research will be of some benefit to 'their' people, e.g. by helping to reevaluate cultural traditions, preserving vanishing cultures or correcting cultural stereotypes prevailing within the dominant society (Harries-Jones 1985:224-226). This general advocacy attitude is not understood as a conceptual part of scientific research methodology, but is rather seen as a subjective stance grounded in inter-human relationships, or is a spontaneous reaction to experiences of emergency, unfairness or injustice.

This paper, however, will address advocacy as a valid form of anthropological research methodology with its own scientific history and concepts.

Advocacy: What does it mean?

The term *advocacy* originated in the juridical field and is today commonly used to designate various forms of social and scientific action strategies². Socio-political advocacy activities fall within the tradition of the social reform movements of the 19th century, which aimed at the establishment of a more just society and a decrease in human suffering (Morris 1978:6). Advocacy today is a well-recognized component of the work of social workers, city planners, health and education experts, political activists, ecologists and other practitioners. Depending on the subject and field of involvement, the term is defined in various ways (Cohen et alii 2001, Harries-Jones 1991a, Weber/McCall 1978).

The most common definition of advocacy is “to plead the cause of another” (Hastrup/ Elsass 1990:302, Schensul/Schensul 1978:122). According to this, an advocate represents the interests, rights or goals of another person or a group within the legal and political limits of a social system. A further meaning is “to argue for, defend, maintain, or recommend a cause or proposal” (Kutchins/Kutchins 1978:21). According to this definition, an advocate is concerned with ensuring the provision of acknowledgement and recognition for an affair of general public interest.

These general definitions do not connect advocacy to any specific political, social or ethical objective. According to such definitions, advo-

² An advocate (lat. *advocare*) is – literally translated – somebody who is ‘called for’ or ‘called in’.

cacy may be used for disadvantaged peoples as well as for socially privileged groups. Furthermore, both definitions describe an 'advocacy *for*': The advocate represents and defends the interests *for* a client.³ This implies that the client cannot speak for him/herself – concerning the subject in question – and that the advocate as an expert possesses more – or more specified – knowledge and authority. Thus the client surrenders (in the specific case) part of his personal autonomy to his advocate, who determines – at least partially – the discourse between his client and the opposing person/institution. Even if the advocate identifies as far as possible with the goals and interests of his client, there is always the risk of paternalism, projections and manipulation inherent the very structure of this conventional advocate-client-relationship.

Advocates of indigenous groups, for instance, may unintentionally uphold or even strengthen (neo-)colonial structures by taking important decisions and political actions away from the people concerned.⁴ Thus, their services may lead to further political incapacitating of indigenous communities as long as a division is maintained in a giving (knowing, competent) and a taking (ignorant, incompetent) side (Wright 1988:366). Advocacy that is not to lead to further incapacitation, but to the empowerment of its clients therefore calls for new and different social relationships:

Social empowerment does not take place when those who have always been givers simply continue to give in different and bigger ways. Empowerment

³ A client in the most general sense is the employer or customer of an advocate, i.e. a person or group, for whose interests the anthropologist becomes active.

⁴ Canadian anthropologists, for instance, who were engaged as advocates and negotiators for the Cree Communities against the hydro-electrical James Bay Project, were accused of having made the Cree even more dependent on external advisors and experts than they already were before on the Department of Indian Affairs (Hedican 1995:55-57).

requires a fundamental change of relationships. However powerless, community groups are never merely empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Empowerment must be a relationship of equality, based on an understanding of reciprocal ties of different strength. (Heyworth 1991:107)

This kind of advocacy, which aims at assistance for self-help and empowerment, requires the active engagement and participation of academics in social processes, and a pronounced ethical and political commitment. It is confrontational in that it challenges dominant values, standards, social orders and power structures, and is directed towards a fundamental change in those societal conditions, which create or promote inequalities and injustice. Through advocacy as empowerment people are increasingly enabled to take up responsibility for their own lives and act accordingly. This ability is not delivered to them by external experts but arises from within the group due to such changes as receiving new and different information, gaining access to financial and political resources or the setting up of new organizational structures. Advocates may initiate, support and accompany these processes; however they should not take over or control them. Rather than being advocates in the conventional sense of the word they should act as catalysts, supporters, advisors and/or resource persons.

Such a form of advocacy is an 'advocacy *with*': it is accomplished not *for*, but *together with* the people concerned. This form of advocacy positions itself politically and morally on the side of powerless people, and questions even generally accepted scientific assumptions:

Governments, together with dominant political elites, like to convince the public that 'objective knowledge' is on their side and that evidence to the contrary is worthless. The fiction of certainty is always attached to 'objective

knowledge' as if it were authoritative and as if it could not be controverted. It is the task of the advocate to ensure that such knowledge is put to the test of alternative interpretation. The advocate has to show that the supposed 'commonly shared assumptions' (...) have in fact been constructed by social processes of selection and interpretation. In that process, political and bureaucratic interests intervene at every point. An essential part of advocacy is to make the public understand the worth of an alternative framework of argument. (Harries-Jones 1991b:10-11)

The knowledge that is needed for social change and empowerment usually does not exist beforehand as 'objective knowledge' in the hands of external experts = advocates. Rather it has to be produced together with the people concerned, depending on context, situation and aspired goals. The relevance and validity of such knowledge is evaluated in the light of tangible needs and planned actions, and it must be produced in ways that are themselves empowering. This is why the methods and techniques of knowledge acquisition play a most important role within the field of advocacy research.

This kind of advocacy is underpinned by a view of scientific research as a process of conversing, 'engaging' and interacting with the social phenomenon being investigated. It is assumed that scientific discoveries are inseparably connected to the values, viewpoints and assumptions of the researcher. Knowledge is seen as pluralistic, relativistic and partially socially constructed, depending ultimately on the stance of the scientist. By doing away with the notion of an independent external world that can be investigated objectively, advocacy research evolves as a valid approach to anthropological inquiry with its own methods, concepts and theoretical contributions.

We will now take a look at the development and main concepts of this kind of advocacy anthropology, in doing so noting how scientific and political developments are mutually influenced and connected.

Early advocacy anthropology: From its beginnings to the 1950s

In the middle of the 19th century anthropology was institutionalized as a scientific discipline. The dominant research paradigm was a unilinear evolutionism that believed in the psychic unity of mankind and in the survival of the fittest. The 'successes' of industrialization and colonialism seemed to be clear indicators of the superiority of the European cultures. Thus, the colonial subjugation of native peoples was scientifically justified as a kind of 'natural law', and was considered to be indispensable to the progress of mankind in its entirety. With the development of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, however, social and economic inequalities began to evolve more clearly, and various humanitarian, social reform and socialist movements have their roots in this period.

When anthropology was established as the study of primitive peoples, the belief in the practical usefulness of scientific insights for the progress of mankind was still unshaken. Studying primitive cultures as earlier stages of the human evolutionary process could serve to help mankind towards a faster and smoother transition to a 'higher level' of evolution, thereby promoting the development of the whole of mankind to an ever more perfect human society. The combination of theoretical research interests with a general commitment to human progress was particularly evident among British and North American anthropologists at this time. However, their principal purpose of research was not to en-

gage in practical problem solving but to gain theoretical knowledge. Most of them were so-called 'arm chair anthropologists', who formulated their theories on the basis of reports of travelers, traders and missionaries without ever seeking contact with the people studied. A remarkable exception was found in L. H. Morgan, who was mentioned earlier. He conducted intensive fieldwork which led him – characteristically – to be one of the first advocates for indigenous rights. With the increasing need for more empirical data, anthropologists finally began to conduct longer field trips and larger research expeditions. These prolonged personal contacts between anthropologists and the people they researched resulted in certain sporadic humanitarian and political engagements on the part of some researchers. They tried to protect the people with whom they had become friends against the worst consequences of colonialism, while the colonial system itself was understood to be an evolutionary necessity and was never questioned.

Among those anthropologists who engaged themselves in advocacy activities at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in the U.S.A. were Frank Hamilton Cushing, James Mooney and John Collier. As employees in government service they were actively engaged in fighting for the cultural and religious rights and the self-determination of indigenous peoples (Kemnis 1990, Stewart 1973). In the following decades there were also various public statements made against racism, nationalism, cultural discrimination or social injustice by prominent cultural anthropologists of the time (e.g. Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Julian Steward a. o.). However, these anthropologists could not be called proponents of a politically committed anthropology. Their public statements were merely an expression of a humanistic attitude shared with other colleagues while pursuing mainly theoretical research.

In the British colonial empire in the 19th century, public discussions arose around the question as to the ways in which the colonized native

races could be best protected. These discussions led to the establishment of the first anthropological associations of Great Britain. It is easy to identify an early advocacy attitude in some of the founding fathers of British social anthropology, who made on several occasions humanistic and moral statements on the side of the colonized populations (Firth 1981, Hedican 1995:45-4, Reining 1970). Malinowski is a well known example: He was not only an emphatic advocate of practical anthropology (1929), but also a violent critic of the colonial system and the destructive activities of missionaries on the Trobriand Islands (1979:502-6).

The use of social and cultural research for the killing of millions of human beings during the Second World War was clearly a shock to many academics: They lost their belief in the objectivity of scientific research and understood the danger of unwillingly providing information which might subsequently be subverted for political purposes. The awareness of such terrible events together with the beginning of the de-colonization period made some cultural and social scientists begin to think about the democratization of research and their own political responsibilities. Topics such as racism, prejudices, political authoritarianism, group processes and inter-ethnic relations became the focus of research, frequently among those very scientists who had had to escape the National Socialist regime because they were Jewish or a member of another pursued minority (Kemmis 1990:31-33).

In the 40's and 50's, two methodical concepts evolved from the fields of education, social work and social psychology that were important for the future development of advocacy anthropology: *action research* and *community development*.

The social psychologist Kurt Lewin is considered to be the founding father of *action research*. Lewin, who emigrated as a Jew from National Socialist Germany to the U.S.A. in the 1930s, conducted research with Margaret Mead and other anthropologists about food habits of the U.S.

Americans during the war years. This research stimulated his interest in making scientific research useful for social change and the improvement of group relations.

For Lewin, scientific research and social practice were not to be separated: “Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice” (Lewin 1948:203). In his opinion, research advanced in ‘spirals’ through a three-step-process of “planning, implementation and fact finding about the results of action” (1953: 284). He formulated no concrete political or social objective for this action research and was therefore criticized for having drafted another form of social engineering, which was applicable for minorities as well as for power elites. Nevertheless, Lewin’s special contribution to research methodology was that he used real social problems as starting point for his research, which was not usual at that time. By connecting scientific theory to social practice in an ongoing process he acknowledged social practice as an important source of new scientific findings. He also stressed the point that the people researched should participate as far as possible in the research and evaluation processes, thus pointing the way forward towards a discursive concept of scientific knowledge acquisition.

Lewin’s ideas found their way into a few anthropological research projects (e.g. the Indian Personality and Administration Research Project; Thompson 1950) and, partially, also into Federal Indian policies (e.g. the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934; Thompson 1956). Sol Tax, too, took them, up during the conception of his action anthropology.

The other important concept of the 1950s was *community development*. This developed within the context of British colonial administration and the following development projects in Africa and India.⁵ Starting with

⁵ According to Doughty (1987a:438), Mexican anthropologists had already carried out pioneering work in community development in the 1920s.

the 'felt needs' of a group, community developers wanted to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people through common actions. They tried to initiate a 'development from below', which aimed at increasing the ability and empowerment of the community to manage and control the political and economic conditions of their lives. The social scientists accompanied and supported these processes through research and theory development. Community development was mainly based on (self)organization, improved information and better access to resources. Underlying this concept were fundamental values such as self-determination, democracy, participation, co-operation and self-realization, as well as the belief in research, information and education as important tools for the development of human potential and the empowerment of disadvantaged communities (van Willigen 1993). This approach was quite popular during the post war years (e.g. in adult education, social work, anthropology and sociology), but was then almost forgotten again – just like early action research. Both approaches supplied important methodological, ethical and theoretical contributions to applied and advocacy anthropology.⁶

Action anthropology and research-through-development

Probably the best-known concept of committed anthropology is *action anthropology*. This was developed during the course of a field-training program of the University of Chicago (1948-58) which became known as the Fox project.⁷ Anthropology students who took classes on

⁶ See Seithel (2000:182-194) for other early advocacy approaches.

⁷ For the history of the Fox project: Tax 1970, 1975, Schlesier 1980, Gearing *et alii* 1960, Seithel 2000:194 ff.

research methods were sent to the community of the Mesquakie (Fox) to learn about the questions and problems resulting from living with people of another culture. The director of the program was Sol Tax.

Tax, the son of German immigrants, was confronted with the ideas of populist and reforming socialism while still a child in his parents' house (Bennett 1996:34-35). In the 1940s, he experienced the development of applied anthropology in the U.S. and was convinced – as were most anthropologists of his time – of the practical value of anthropological research. The terrible experiences of the Second World War and his concerns with participatory methods – which he tried out during his field research in Central America – led him to the conclusion that anthropologists (like other scientists) were not to hand over their responsibility for the use of their research results to the 'practical men'. Instead they have to actively make their own contribution to the improvement of social conditions. Against this personal background, Tax gave the students questions about the needs and hopes of the Fox to take with them into the field – a quite unusual subject for anthropological field research at that time. When the students began to be concerned about the current social problems of the Fox and expressed their need “to help the Indians somehow” (Gearing *et alii* 1960:30-33), Tax encouraged them, and proposed that they should do something which “has sometimes been called action research” (ibid. 1960:33)⁸. This advice to the students marked the birth of action anthropology.

⁸ It is likely that Tax is here referring to the concept of Lewin (1948), without ever mentioning his influence in his publications on action anthropology (e.g. Tax 1956, 1970, 1975, 1988). That Tax was getting crucial theoretical inputs from Lewin is highly certain because during Tax's work as a research assistant and associate professor at the Chicago Department of Anthropology, the same University carried out the Indian Personality and Administration Research Project with Lewin being a member of the consulting committee.

Tax (1975) describes his new approach as a kind of practical anthropology, which rejects the use of its 'objects of study' for the sole purpose of extending scientific knowledge. Rather action anthropology is intended to actively contribute to the finding of solutions to practical problems, as well as to the improvement of the living conditions of 'those studied', while gaining new scientific insights during this process.

A major characteristic of the action anthropology (...) is, that we have adopted what might be called a clinical or experimental method of study. We do not conceive of ourselves as simply observing what would happen 'naturally'; we are willing to make things happen or help them along or at least to be catalysers. We believe we can learn many things in this way that we could not learn in any other way. So we are anthropologists interested in anthropological problems, but we pursue them in a context of action. Hence the phrase action anthropology. (ibid. 515)

According to Tax, action anthropologists want to learn and to help at the same time. They do not want to apply already existing theoretical findings to social problems – in the way that 'classical' applied anthropologists do – but to acquire and evaluate new knowledge through social practice. In addition, action anthropologists should work as “independent members of the academic community”, that means they should be as independent as possible of powerful clients (ibid.). Finally, an action anthropologist should become aware of his values and attitudes and use them explicitly as an important part of his research. According to Tax, one fundamental value of action anthropology is the right to freedom and self-determination: each human being must have the opportunity to freely select the group with which he / she wants to identify, and each group must have the right to determine its own way of life. The right of self-determination therefore is inseparably connected with eve-

ryone's personal responsibility for his own decisions and actions and with "the freedom to make mistakes" (Tax 1956).

In practice, action anthropologists may only offer alternatives for different courses of action, and act in the least restrictive manner possible, while at the same time trying to eliminate or reduce conditions that restrict the free choice of the community in question. Furthermore, action anthropologists should exercise a kind of *non-directive counseling*⁹, which Peattie (1960:300-304) describes as an "interacting with in place of an acting on people". Through education and discussion, information and reflection, the scientist supports the community in defining its relevant values and aspired goals, working out different alternatives for action, clarifying their consequences, finding adequate methods and, finally, evaluating the results. Once specific goals have been achieved they are the starting points for further action. The guiding principles for the activities of an action anthropologist are "as far as possible" the needs, wants and interests of those concerned (Tax in Gearing *et alii* 1960:94). Thus, the anthropologist explicitly takes the side of the community he or she is working with. Their members are no longer objects of externally controlled research and development measures, but are, rather, self-determined subjects of a research and action process directed at improving their living conditions and supported by anthropologists and other external resource persons.

Action anthropology is distinguished from conventional applied anthropology through the "the failure of the means-ends scheme" (Peattie 1960):

⁹ The term *non-directive counseling* originates from psychology. It refers to a procedure during which the therapist affects or guides his client by freely talking and associating with him, initiating reflections and looking together for solutions, but not giving him advice nor making value statements.

When the action anthropologist states his goals or 'ends' they tend to be open-ended objectives like growth in understanding clarification of values, and the like, rather than fixed goals like the quotas in a five-year-plan. They are not properly speaking 'ends' at all, for they can never be said to have been reached. They are more properly modes of valuing – modes of valuing all stages in a continuous and infinite process. (ibid. 301)

Tax's concept of action anthropology was not altogether new, but it was his achievement to pick up some of the important topics and ideas of his time and link them to a comprehensive concept of research and social practice. The main features of his action anthropology were: value explicitness and a clear ethical positioning of the scientist, participatory research methods, the establishment of a subject-subject relationship between researcher and those researched, the separation of the scientist from powerful institutions and the dissolution of a mechanical means-ends-scheme. This early action anthropology, however, remained a predominantly theoretical construct in its time, where it was discussed in classrooms and scientific journals without being really implemented. It is not known whether anything was initiated by the Fox Project, which contributed substantially to the improvement of the living conditions of the community, or even if the Fox were aware of the project at all. There has never been a thorough evaluation of the project.

In many ways related to action anthropology, the *participant intervention* or *research-and-development-approach* likewise regarded anthropological research and application (i.e. social intervention) as inseparably connected. General human values such as “power, wealth, enlightenment, respect, well-being, skill, affection, and rectitude” (Holmberg 1970a:85) were taken as universal, and were considered to be the guiding principles for the social intervention of the scientist. This intervention was to assist

the spreading of the mentioned values in their specific context and to advance the development goals derived from them. At the same time, the researchers would be studying the development processes and evaluating scientific hypotheses. The best-known project of this kind was the *Vicos* or *Cornell Peru Project (CPP)* carried out by the U.S. American Cornell University. This project was accomplished under the direction of the anthropologist Alan Holmberg in the Peruvian highlands during the years 1952-1957 (Dobyns *et alii* 1971, Doughty 1987a, 1987b, Holmberg 1955, 1970a, 1970b). Its primary goal was:

[...] of transforming one of Peru's most unproductive, highly dependent manor systems into a productive, independent, self governing community adapted to the reality of the modern Peruvian state (Holmberg 1970b:95)

Other aims were the promotion of economic development, the improvement of the general living conditions of the community and the altering of the local power structure. This was to be achieved mainly by the abolition of serfdom, the introduction of new forms of agricultural production, the takeover of land ownership by the *Vicosinos* and measures for better health care. In order to be able to better steer the development and to study the process of modernization at the same time, the anthropologist Holmberg at first took over the role of the *patron*. In the course of the project his powerful position was gradually to be surrendered to a committee selected by the *Vicosinos*. This procedure has sometimes been criticized as the “benevolent dictatorship of anthropology” (Naylor 1973:366). The CCP was pointing the way for other development projects in the highlands of Peru – the evaluation of its successes and failures were varied (Doughty 1987a, 1987b).

Both the Fox and Vicos projects were significant to anthropology because they promoted concepts of research that regarded social intervention and political taking of sides as important parts of the inquiry process and focused on self-determination and the participation of the research subjects. In both projects, the social scientists started their research with the concrete daily problems of the indigenous communities and acted on the assumption that only the people themselves could in the long term solve the vital questions of their lives. This was a really fresh view of indigenous communities: while early structural-functionalist approaches left little leeway for a self-determined cultural change of native peoples, the acculturation studies of the 50's regarded the integration and assimilation of indigenous peoples as an inevitable process. Conventional applied anthropology usually meant activities of anthropologists who supplied data for pre-defined goals on behalf of dominant and powerful institutions. The action approach presented an alternative model to these traditional concepts by focusing on the rights and interests of the research subjects, thus changing the perspectives in the relationship between researchers, research subjects and clients. 'Those studied' were now regarded as valuable partners in research and social change.

Furthermore, both concepts sketched new roles for anthropologists as change agents, thus enhancing the status of 'practice' within anthropology. This practice did not exist in the instrumental application of pre-produced theoretical knowledge, but instead itself produced new scientific insights into social processes as a basis for further social action. Both concepts took crucial steps away from a scientific thinking that had strictly separated theory from practice and subject from object; in doing so these concepts moved towards a dialectic understanding of research as a continuing exchange between theory/practice and object/subject. However, the anthropologists' demands for the participation of the

research subjects remained largely programmatic. Thus, many practical problems connected with participatory methods could not be experienced and handled at this early stage.

Radical anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s

The de-colonizing processes together with the political activities of various liberation, emancipation and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s created a general public awareness for the needs and rights of discriminated and disadvantaged populations. At the same time, the successes of such movements and processes clearly showed that minority groups were well able to organize and speak for themselves. The obvious failures of many development, modernization and social programs, rapid social change, the sometimes drastic decrease in the basic living conditions of the anthropological 'research objects', their increasing resistance against their use as pure objects of study, the harsh internal and external criticism of anthropology as being the 'child of colonialism' and the accusation that the discipline had no social and political relevance – all these factors led to fundamental discussions, in the U.S. as elsewhere, about the necessity of "reinventing anthropology" (Hymes 1974). The participation of social and cultural scientists in so-called *counterinsurgency research* as, for example in the cases of Project Camelot, the Vietnam war and Thailand, encouraged discussions on the political role and the social responsibility of anthropologists (e.g. Beals 1969, Huizer/Mannheim 1979, Jones 1971, Social Responsibility Symposium 1968, further references: Seithel 2000).

Within this intellectual climate, new theoretical concepts and practical approaches for a critical anthropology developed. Various positions

and postulates were adopted from contemporary social movements, political theories and neighboring disciplines (e.g. Neo-Marxism, critical theory, dependency theories, participatory action research, and feministic research).¹⁰ It was expected that anthropologists should place themselves both in theory and in practice at the side of the suppressed and poor, working together with them against colonialism, racism, sexism, exploitation and discrimination (e.g. Huizer 1979, Schlesier 1980). New concepts developed who were called *radical anthropology*, *partisan anthropology*, *revolutionary anthropology*, *partisan participation*, *guerilla research*, *committed* or *critical anthropology*. Conventional applied anthropology was condemned as an instrument of colonial and imperial interests and each form of pure research was rejected as irrelevant. The radical anthropologists demanded explicit ethical and political statements from their colleagues, as well as the willingness to bring about a radical transformation of existing power structures. Since most of the representatives of radical anthropology held teaching positions at universities, their radical attitude was limited predominantly to academic discussions and to attempts to politicize the academy (Polgar 1979:415). Conceptual thoughts about the development of appropriate research methods or new theories of action were as rarely found, as were epistemological reflections. Their programmatic publications were usually confined to more or less general descriptions of the practical political tasks of a 'radical anthropologist'. Questions about how to proceed in the concrete situation and solve problems in the daily work of an action engagement were hardly ever addressed.

One substantial contribution made by these radical approaches consisted of embedding anthropological research into larger political and historical contexts, reevaluating it through critical socio-political analyses

¹⁰ For references, see Seithel 2000 as well as pt. 6 below.

and deriving from this new topics and fresh theoretical perspectives of research. The radical anthropologists were concerned with aspects of 'resistance', 'structural violence' or 'suppression'. They focused their research on peasant organizations, liberation movements, the social position of women or the discrimination against minorities (Hymes 1974, Polgar 1979:413). They questioned the postulate of scientific objectivity, illuminated the role of subjective values and interests in the research process and discussed the relationship of power and anthropological knowledge acquisition (Wolf 1974). All this led to profound arguments about the ethical and political bases of anthropological work and to substantial innovations within the discipline (e.g. the formulation of new codes of ethics).

Aside from these programmatic publications of radical anthropologists, various forms of practical cooperation between anthropologists and the researched groups developed in the 60's and 70's in the U.S.A. Working as intercultural translators and mediators, researchers and consultants, legal and organizational advisors, secretaries and office clerks, project managers, evaluators and resource persons, negotiators and public relations experts, these new practicing anthropologists applied many of the principles and concepts developed earlier in action anthropology. They worked not only for indigenous communities but also for groups of immigrants, ethnic minorities, clients of psychiatric hospitals, neighborhood groups a. o.¹¹

Most of these 'new' action anthropologists formulated explicit value positions and embedded their work into specific socio-political perspectives, thus politicizing Tax's concept considerably (e.g. Schlesier 1980, Sevilla-Casas 1978). They called for 'studying up' (Nader 1974), i.e. for

¹¹ Paine 1985, Schensul/Schensul 1978, Schlesier 1980, Stull/Schensul 1987, for further references Seithel 2000.

the investigation of power elites and dominance structures, and for a change of the customer from 'those in power' to the 'underdogs'. They also did not shrink from taking on influential roles by filling leading positions as project coordinators or managers within indigenous communities. They strove for a consistent application of the right of self-determination for 'those studied' in the whole process of research and action, elevating 'participation' and 'dialogue' to the main principles of their actions.

But even in these 'rebellious' times, the number of anthropologists who were actually engaged in practical action and advocacy anthropology remained relatively small – both in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. Action/advocacy anthropology never developed its own school with a continuous theoretical debate, nor did it become firmly established as part of university curricula. There are many reasons for this: in general, applied or practical anthropology was much less appreciated than was pure research within university circles. This remained the case until very recently or in part even today. Another strong counter-argument against the action/advocacy approach was brought forward by supporters of the traditional conception of science as an objective and value-free enterprise: the deliberate inclusion of values as well as the purposeful change of the research situation were rejected as violations of the demand for academic neutrality. Furthermore, the advocacy approach was criticized for the absence of a coherent theory, and was classified as mere social work or even as missionary activities. Tax's philosophy of "the freedom to make mistakes" and his so-called Parsimonian law was partly made responsible for the fact that his colleagues and pupils did not strive for the development of a profound theoretical and methodical founding for their work (Rubinstein 1986:275). In addition, radical leftist anthropologists suspected action anthropology to be a more subtle form of paternalism and domination and accused its practitioners of abusing their

work as social technologists in order to better adjust marginalized or rebellious communities to the dominant society (e.g. Sevilla-Casas 1978:142-145; for a summary: Bennett 1996).

Thus action/advocacy anthropology never attained the “critical mass” (Rubinstein 1986:276) within university circles in Europe or North America which would have been necessary for it to establish its own research tradition. Despite this, it did, however, influence the debates about the methodical, ethical and epistemological foundations of the discipline in a crucial manner, (Bennett 1996, Schlesier 1980) and is at least discussed in almost every undergraduate course in applied anthropology today.

Antropología crítica and nuevo indigenismo

Starting from the 1970s, action/advocacy anthropology received crucial impulses from related disciplines as well as from the work of colleagues from the South. The development of the social and cultural sciences in Latin America, Asia and Africa was closely connected with the national de-colonization and nation-building processes and led almost inevitably to the social and political involvement of the social and cultural scientists.

In the late 1960s in South America, a new generation of anthropologists and sociologists began to oppose their utilization by national power elites. The continuation of ethnocidal and genocidal crimes against indigenous populations in Brazil, Paraguay, Colombia and other countries pressurized anthropologists to take a more definitive political stand. They criticized the continuation of structures of colonial dominance under the cover of national integration, and characterized the political

situation of indigenous peoples as that of *internal colonies* (Frank 1969, González Casanova 1963, Stavenhagen 1968). The concept of indigenous peoples being colonized nations was an important foundation of the developing *nuevo indigenismo* (Aguirre Beltrán 1984, Franch 1990, Maihold 1986). It led to new definitions of the tasks of anthropology during the 70's and 80's and to varying drafts of an *antropología de liberación*, *antropología crítica*, *antropología de acción*, *antropología de apoyo* or *antropología comprometida* (Barre 1985, Bonfil Batalla 1970, 1973, Aguirre Beltrán 1975, Cardoso de Oliveira 1977, Clarac 1974, Colombres 1982, Serbin/Gonzales 1980, Sevilla Casas 1978). If indigenous peoples were colonized nations then this meant that they could only reach self-determination by destroying the dominant society and reorganizing existing power structures. Accordingly, there was a strong demand for "de-colonizing applied social sciences" (Stavenhagen 1971) and a clear political taking of sides for marginalized and suppressed groups. Critical anthropologists from Central and South America outlined political strategies for the 'liberation of the Indians'. Those oriented towards Marxist or socialist programs regarded indigenous communities as exploited social classes (e.g. Cazes 1966, Pozas/Pozas 1971), which, through 'proletarianization' or *campesinización*, should be integrated into the socialist society aspired to (Maihold 1986:182-5). Their main action strategy was the political mobilization of the indigenous population through trade unions and farmers' associations.

Others placed the concept of *etnodesarrollo* against the strategy of proletarianization / *campesinización*. They assumed that indigenous peoples possessed their own ethnically determined consciousness which was grounded in a specific history and culture, and which equipped them with the ability to develop their own "civilization project" (e.g. Bonfil Batalla 1970, 1972, 1981, 1987, 1990). The main political strategy of *etnodesarrollo* consisted in strengthening indigenous peoples' ability and

opportunities for autonomous decision-making, so that they could select freely between different alternatives of action and implement their self-defined goals according to their own cultural values and rules, thus attaining more and more control over the political, economic and cultural organization of their lives. The task of anthropologists and *indigenistas* consisted in supporting (but not controlling) this *etnodesarollo* through empirical research, theoretical analyses and appropriate concepts. The theoretical focus of this *antropología crítica* centered on concepts of ethnicity. One milestone in the relationship between anthropologists and indigenous communities was reached with the holding of the Barbados Symposium (1971), where anthropologists and indigenous representatives gathered for the first time to discuss different strategies for the liberation of the indigenous peoples (Declaration of Barbados 1971).

Simultaneously to these developments in anthropology, various new indigenous movements and organizations were gradually developing in South America, each with its own political agenda, structures and leadership. They were supported both in terms of argumentation and practical action by quite a few anthropologists (e.g. Chase Sardi/Rehnfeldt 1977, Grünberg 1977, Indianidad 1988, Junqueira/Carvalho 1984, Por la Liberación del Indígena 1975). The most important contributions made by anthropology consisted in placing theoretical instruments at the disposal of the indigenous movements, e.g. analytical concepts for the comprehension of the socio-economic reality of indigenous peoples, models for socio-cultural change and drafts of alternative “civilization projects” (Varese 1982). Thus they supplied them with facts and arguments to criticize the conventional *indigenismo* and its modernization programs, and offered new perspectives on alternative development processes.

The advocacy involvement of South American anthropologists with indigenous politics brought with it a whole set of new ideas, theories and research topics that grew directly out of their social practice and which enriched the scientific debates substantially.

Participatory action research: An alternative concept of the South or a new instrument for colonial exploitation?

At the end of the 60's a new interest in action research had been awoken in various disciplines, first in North America, Europe and Australia and later in various countries of the South (Convergence 1981, Kassam 1982, Kemmis/McTaggart 1990, Moser 1975, Simposio Mundial 1978). These new approaches gave special priority to participatory methods and were of great importance for the further development of advocacy anthropology. Lewin's action concept became politicized through the integration of neo-Marxist approaches, political economy and the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, in particular the communication theory of Jürgen Habermas. The concept developed further towards a discursive research model in which scientific research and social practice were connected through an emancipatory interest. The theoretical and practical work of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda in the 1970s and 1980s is of special interest in this context (Fals Borda 1970, 1978, 1980-84, 1985; with Bonilla et al. 1972, with Brandão 1986, with Rahman 1991). His concept of an *investigación acción participativa (IAP)* was essentially based on a special appreciation of Historical Materialism¹²

¹² Historical Materialism is the most frequently articulated political position of the early IAP, not, however, by all action researchers (Conchelos/Kassam 1981:55-56, Rahman 1991:13, Vio Grossi 1981:45-46).

and on the notion of an important relationship between knowledge and power. Over the years the IAP detached itself from its close affiliation with (neo-)Marxist theories and picked up other philosophical and socio-political concepts (Fals Borda/Rahman 1991).

The focus of most participatory action research was on the acquisition of a so-called 'organic', 'endogenous' or 'popular' knowledge (*conocimiento popular*). This was seen as being rooted in the everyday life and experiences of 'the common people', and needed to be extracted and taken as the starting point and basis for a collective social practice. It was hoped that through the participation of the 'common people' in the production, spreading and use of organic knowledge hierarchical structures within the process of knowledge acquisition could be avoided or at least diminished, and the handling of information and knowledge thus democratized. Knowledge *was* not power for itself but *needed* power to be effective: thus action researchers placed special emphasis on the formation of autochthonous organizations and the building of "organic leaderships" (Rahman 1991:22). Methodically they tried to reflect the insight that the *ways* through which knowledge was gained, appropriated and implemented were just as crucial as the produced knowledge itself. The key terms of the IAP were: *commitment*, *participation* and *dialogue* (Reason 1994:328). One of the largest participatory action research projects was the *Fundación Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social* which worked with peasants, laborers and indigenous peoples on the Atlantic coast of Colombia (Fals Borda 1978, 1980-84, 1985).

Participatory action research became quite popular and widespread in the 1980s and 1990s, although in varying and frequently moderated forms (Chambers 1996:75-76, Rahman 1991:18-19, Rahman/ Fals Borda 1991). Universities and research groups, churches and other non-governmental organizations, civil initiatives and grass root movements in all continents assumed participatory strategies, as did government agen-

cies, development institutions and international organizations.¹³ Within the area of international development policy, participatory procedures, particularly those known as *Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)* and *Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)*, became indispensable components of project planning (Bliss/ Neumann 1996, Chambers 1980, Honerla/ Schröder 1995, McCracken et al. 1988, Schönhuth/Kievelitz 1994, Scoones/Thompson 1994, Scrimshaw/Hurtado 1987).

With the adoption of participatory and action-oriented methods by dominant and governing institutions these strategies mostly lost their transformatory and emancipatory character. The participation of 'the powerless' in political and decision-making processes no longer represented (and, indeed, no longer represents) any danger to those in power. On the contrary, they proved to be efficient keys to calm down and control social groups (Bachrach/Botwinick 1992). Participation, commitment and empowerment now belong to the standard vocabulary of every development and educational project without that actually political and economic power structures are being questioned:

In its present context (...) participation has come to be 'disembedded' from the socio-cultural roots, which had always kept it alive. It is now simply perceived as one of the many 'resources' needed to keep the economy alive. To participate is thus reduced to the act of partaking in the objectives of the economy, and the societal arrangements related to it. (Rahnema 1992:120)

¹³ In projects with landless farmers, indigenous communities, ethnical minorities, women's groups, unemployed people, youth groups, industrial workers, ghetto peoples or refugees, social scientists and anthropologists co-operated with specialists and practitioners of the most diverse backgrounds, with experts from educational planning, municipality organizations, health care, development policy and administration, integrating social workers, teachers, artists, political activists and trade union leaders (see: Seithel 2000:271-73 for references).

It soon became obvious that new inquiry methods alone were not sufficient to change power relations and establish an emancipatory scientific research practice. What was always required was the political positioning of the researcher and his long-term commitment. Without this commitment participatory research strategies could become even more harmful to the communities concerned because such research methods provide access to internal (and politically sensitive) knowledge and thus could lead to manipulation. In addition, a mere mechanistic application of participatory techniques as taught in the various handbooks ignored the cultural and political context of the setting, so that – in subtle ways – external discourse forms, interpretations and categories are introduced, displacing historically developed cultural forms of expression, resistance, experience and survival of the people concerned. These people are then more easily bound into dominant power structures and Western conceptions of development (Rahnema 1992:123). Accordingly, action research and participatory methods have been called a “new myth for exploitative colonial relations”, and a “dangerous tool for manipulation” by intellectuals from the South, as well as being criticized as “offensive” and “colonizing” in the hands of powerful institutions (Rahnema 1992:126, Reason 1994:328, also: Rahman/Fals Borda 1991:28-30).

On the other hand, the increasing use of participatory methods in the 1970s and 1980s led to a greater appreciation of indigenous or local knowledge (Honerla/ Schröder 1995). It furthered the development of new research strategies by means of which it proved possible to integrate this knowledge into project planning, implementation and evaluation. Concerns for the problems and needs of the studied communities and concrete experiences of social injustice and cultural destruction stimulated the foundation of various advocacy movements and organizations

who monitored human rights violations and the effects of development on indigenous peoples on a worldwide basis (e.g. Cohen et al. 2001). Some were supported or joined by anthropologists (e.g. Cultural Survival, IWGIA), but most of these advocacy activities were ignored by the established anthropology with regard to its possible contributions to method and scientific theory.

The participatory action approaches of the 70's and 80's stimulated the debates about the relationship between researchers and those researched and the conditions of their possible cooperation; it also deepened the methodical and ethical awareness of social scientists. The 'constructivist turn' in epistemological discussions of this period contributed to this notion of research as a cooperative and participatory process.

Collaborative and cooperative research in the 1990s

The employment of anthropologists in non-academic jobs increased due to a scarcity of employment opportunities in academia in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This meant that the practical value of anthropological knowledge for the solution of social problems gained ever more recognition both within and outside the universities (Eddy/Partridge 1987, Stull/ Schensul 1987, Wulff/Fiske 1987). New theoretical findings and research methods resulted from the different practical involvements of anthropologists, thus showing the usefulness of social involvement for the acquisition of scientific knowledge. In this way, interventionist and participatory approaches and a pronounced ethical and political stance of the researcher for 'those studied' became recognized components of scientific work; they were, however, still

components, which were very critically discussed and somewhat rarely practiced.

Among committed anthropologists it was now generally acknowledged that social problems were highly complex, and could not be solved either by political statements or critical theory building alone. It was recognized that such solutions required mediation, co-operation and negotiation of all the parties involved, as well as the involvement of various external specialists, and that each social problem demanded its own specific solution according to context and resources. What was required most of all was a comprehensive 'insider' knowledge of those political influences, social resources and power structures which became effective in the specific social context. Starting from this 'contextual knowledge', it was then thought that appropriate and action-relevant concepts and theories could be developed for each specific case. Their implementation would need a constant 'juggling' of methodological requirements against the demands and constraints of the socio-political context of the problem in question. In the 80's and 90's, these insights led to the development of research strategies, which were called *collaborative, interactive, proactive, cooperative, community-based* or *community-centered* (Schensul/Schensul 1978, Schensul 1987, Schensul/Stern 1985, Stull 1988, Stull/Schensul 1987). Most of them comprised a (more moderate) advocacy stance. The term *collaborative research* became most widely accepted describing a research situation

[...] when practitioners or researchers work jointly with host communities or groups. [...] Collaboration enhances the capability of the community or population to use research as a tool for self-determination and development, to advocate on its own behalf with outside agencies or institutions, and to develop its own research and practice capacities. Members of the host group may work with researchers to identify research questions, operationalize

concepts, design methodologies, and collect, analyze, and utilize data (Schensul 1987:212). They may work with practitioners to formulate, design, implement, and evaluate appropriate policies and programs. (...) In short, collaboration refers to a type of relationship between anthropologists and the groups affected by their research or practice. (Stull 1988:35-40)

With Stull, the term collaborative research refers in particular to co-operation between anthropologists and the host population; others use it for all forms of co-operation between scientists and/or non-scientific partners (e.g. professional colleagues, specialists from different branches, non-governmental organizations, husband and wife etc.; Stull/Schensul 1987).

Collaborative anthropology is understood by its practitioners to be a 'refinement' of the action anthropology of Tax. It strives for the establishment of a 'genuine partnership' and the co-operation of all parties involved (Stull 1988:39, for examples: Stull/Schensul 1987). The research subjects are no longer regarded as persons who are to be liberated or emancipated but are seen as equal partners in research and action for social change. They possess their own, but different, kind of knowledge, capabilities, experiences and interpretations of reality. This requires new definitions of the roles for anthropologists, who are to once again assume a more active and responsible part in planning and decision-making:

By its very nature, collaboration is a partnership that requires a sharing of responsibilities, successes, and failures. Anthropologists who wish to collaborate with host communities in action-oriented projects must be willing to participate in policy decisions and bear the consequences of their decisions [...]. To avoid such a relationship in action research or practice is to shirk

our responsibility to our hosts. To deny that we often play such roles is to be intellectually dishonest. (Stull 1988:39:43)

‘Collaborative researchers’ may strive to contribute to the empowerment of a disadvantaged group, to bring the interests and viewpoints of those concerned to decision-making institutions or just to mediate between different positions and functions. They start by defining a problem, which is temporally and spatially limited, and aim at a goal, which is realistically obtainable: e.g. the improvement of health care for newborn babies in a *barrio* where the majority of the population is Puerto Rican. Or: the creation of improved training possibilities for young people from immigrant families in a rural community (Stull/Schensul 1987). These clearly outlined pragmatic goals are to be achieved in cooperation with the people in need.

The greater the extent that acquisition of data and knowledge is directed and ‘owned’ by the group, the more one speaks of *community-based research/CBR* (Guyette 1983):

The concept of community-based research has its roots in the idea of self-determination. It is research, largely descriptive, that comes from within the community. It may include outsiders but in a cooperative and sharing relationship that is sensitive to the viewpoints of both insiders and outsiders. Community-based research can be an invaluable tool in community development, as a means of documenting needs and testing solutions. (ibid. XV)

With the approach of CBR, conventional methods of empirical research again receive a more important role in the production of useful basic data and action-relevant information. The scientist strives to instruct members of the community in anthropological research methods

(e.g. Guyette 1983), to teach them basic strategies for effective planning and implementation, to procure them access to financial resources and to social contacts, which are needed for effective fundraising, and to support them with the setting-up of their own scientific databanks. In the context of CBR, universities are again ascribed more important roles for the self-determination processes of disadvantaged groups (for examples: *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 1986, Vol. 6, 1-2, Guyette 1983).¹⁴

Advocacy anthropology in times of globalization

The grand political theories of the 1960s and 1970s lost their validity as decision-making aids and explanatory models during the late 1980s and the 1990s. With the end of the 'cold war' and the increasing globalization processes, there is no longer any consent over general criteria for a better society or a more just world order which would bind committed anthropologists to a common objective. The 'post-modern' emphasis on the plurality of voices, the contextualization of experiences and the powerful potential of generalizations have sowed the seeds of skepticism against manuals or general theories for social change, and call for their 'de-construction'. Accordingly, within advocacy anthropology there is a great variety of approaches – strategies rather than coherent theories or methodological concepts – which are used eclectically, depending on the specific situation, and which aim at finding context-bound local solutions. In publications one hardly ever finds the kind of general political perspectives or the articulation of a certain societal 'vision' as was usual

¹⁴ Another variant of CBR is *community-centered praxis* (CCP). This term comprises research that is led and controlled by its own research units of indigenous and other communities (Barger/Reza 1989, Singer 1994). The basic principles of CCP read like a summary of the critical approaches of the last decades.

in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead there are detailed descriptions of ways and strategies to handle a specific practical or ethical problem in the local context.

By breaking with generalizing postulates of emancipation and liberation in the 90's, the research subjects were allocated – at least potentially – a greater degree of ability to act on their own behalf. Today, an advocacy stance is developing within the social sciences (including anthropology), (finally) giving more responsibility for knowing and deciding for themselves to those very people whose lives have been targeted for change. The guiding principle of advocacy anthropologists is still the right of self-determination of all people(s). However, they no longer try to fight as ‘partisans’ on the side of suppressed people, identifying as much as possible with the interests they are advocating. On the contrary, the differences between ‘ordinary life’ and scientific research are recognized, appreciated and used to combine forces in solving a problem. Compared to the often exaggerated political and moral claims of former concepts of ‘praxis’, advocacy anthropology today sees itself in a more modest role, interacting with different social forces which are directed at societal transformation. Underlying is a concept of science which assumes that scientific theories and concepts of social reality can be developed which bring with them catalyzing effects for the transformation of the very same social reality. Within this concept, science is seen not only as a product but also as the producer of social reality, both reflecting *and* constructing social conditions, and changing with them. The theoretical understanding and the methodological access to their research subjects which social scientists use, are promoted, modeled and limited by the historical context with its special experiences and interpretations of reality.

While anthropologists initially tried to separate science from society, theory from practice and subject from object the relationships between

these 'pairs' are now increasingly understood as being dialectically bound up and inseparably connected with one another. This is the starting point of an advocacy anthropology that strives both to change social conditions and to produce relevant knowledge with participation of and in cooperation with the people concerned.

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