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Acting with the Community

Applied Anthropology in a New Perspective

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Zusammenfassung

Die angewandte Anthropologie hat eine lange, umstrittene Geschichte, die in der Regel auf die kolonialistischen und imperialistischen Macht- und Herrschaftsstrukturen zurückgeführt wird. Andererseits hat in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten das Interesse an engagierter Forschung in der Wissenschaft zugenommen. Vor diesem Hintergrund lädt das Papier dazu ein, über das nachzudenken, was man als „anthropologische Schuld" bezeichnen könnte: die Verpflichtung, den menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Wesen, mit denen wir arbeiten, den Gemeinschaften, mit denen wir zusammenarbeiten wollen, und den Orten, in die wir zu Forschungszwecken eindringen, „etwas zurückzugeben". Wie ist es möglich, Forschung mit Parteiergreifen und engagiertem Handeln zu vereinbaren, ohne neue Formen von Asymmetrien zwischen Forschenden und Beforschten zu reproduzieren und zu schaffen? Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Frage erörtert dieser Beitrag die Legitimität und Effektivität der angewandten Anthropologie in der Auseinandersetzung mit der gegenwärtigen gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit, indem er die ethisch-politischen Herausforderungen dieser Teildisziplin hervorhebt und über mögliche Lösungen nachdenkt.

Schlagwörter: angewandte Anthropologie, aktivistische Forschung, Kulturkritik, Engagement

Abstract

Applied anthropology has a long controversial history, usually traced back to the colonialist and imperialist structures of power and domination. On the other hand, over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in community-engaged research in academia. Against this backdrop, the paper invites to reflect on what can be called 'anthropological debt': the obligation of 'giving back' to the human and non-human beings we work on, to the communities we desire to mingle with, to the places we intrude into for research purposes. How is it possible to reconcile research with advocacy and action, without reproducing and creating new forms of asymmetries between the researcher and the researched? With this question in mind, the paper discusses the legitimacy and effectiveness of applied anthropology in engaging with the current social reality, by accentuating the ethico-political issues involved in this sub-discipline and reflecting on probable solutions.

Keywords: applied anthropology, activist research, cultural critique, advocacy

Over the past two decades, there has been an increased interest in community-engaged research[1] in social sciences, particularly in fields such as community archaeology, indigenous geography, studies in social well-being and sustainable development.[2] Concurrently, a growing number of projects in these and cognate fields are carried out by multi-disciplinary teams that often include anthropologists to contribute to the design and implementation of the research. Anthropology, and its ethnographic methods, is being re-discovered in a fresh light and revalued in the broader spectrum of social research that seeks to translate scientific findings into effective and ethical action. This new moment of scholarly reflexivity and participatory activism provides a backdrop against which we can re-consider the significance of applied research in social science disciplines and particularly in anthropology today.

Many critics strictly differentiate applied and non-applied research. As they view it, applied anthropology is 'a stepchild of colonialism, [which] came of age during the Cold War [only] to find itself maturing into a partisan of neoliberal globalization in the name of a kinder, gentler cultural sensitivity and sometimes more openly as cost-effective market-based research' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois 2004: 7–8). As a matter of fact, applied research is coeval with the general discipline:[3] 'Within the history of anthropology, application came first, serving as the impetus for some of the earliest academic departments, which were obviously shaped by colonial imperative but also motivated by a desire for systemic reforms' (Ervin 2000: 14; cited in Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006: 179).

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1 Here is a widely circulated definition: 'Community engaged research (CEnR) is a collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process. Advocates assert that it promotes better research and translation of findings. Other benefits of CEnR include development of research that is responsive to community need, increased capacity built through partnerships, expanded funding opportunities and greater opportunities to translate findings into practice [adapted from the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching and Centers of Disease Control and Prevention].' See https://community.vcu.edu/faculty-support-/cenr-support-at-vcu/what-is-community-engaged-research/ (accessed 10 August 2022).

2 See, for example, Atalay 2007; Derry and Malloy 2003; Hall et al. 2016; Larsen and Johnson 2016; McNaughton and Rock 2004; Merriman 2004; Murton 2012; Watson and Waterton 2008; Rosenzweig and Dissard 2013; Stroulia 2018; Sutter et al. 2016.

3 It is usually argued that applied work climaxed during the moments of crisis and conflict such as World War II or the Vietnam War. Examples include anthropologists' participation in Japanese American relocation camps as 'community analysts' or their involvement in military propaganda work (Price 1998; Wax 1971; cited in Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006: 180).

The relationship between anthropology and advocacy goes back to the early twentieth century. Remember how Franz Boas, who as a German Jewish intellectual had ended up in the U.S. for political reasons, waged war against the scientific racism of Victorian ethnology. Consider how Margaret Mead, following in Boas' footsteps, believed that anthropology should play a part in social change. 'Never doubt,' she asserted, 'that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'[4] There are anthropology departments in the United States today that proudly proclaim this statement of Margaret Mead as their maxim and directly pursue it.[5] Furthermore, as early as the fifties, action-oriented research began to incorporate participatory methods, where the researched individual would change status 'from object to be known to a subject that can control [the research process]' (Van Willigen 2002: 43). This method has been mostly adopted by the proponents of community-directed development and self-determination (Dobyns et al. 1971; Doughty 1987; Holmberg 1958; Tax 1958; 1960).[6]

It is, after all, not a seamless disciplinary history but rather full of tensions and embargoes on certain research activities, especially those engaged with the pressing socio-political issues of their time. Applied social scientists have rarely found their niche in academic institutions, which were organized from 1880s onwards based on a Tayloristic division of labour that imposed hard boundaries between disciplinary areas (Greenwood 2008). Some reformers have been denied tenureship, some expelled from universities, while the rest of the academia has largely internalized 'the lesson that they should focus on building theory, being "objective", writing mainly for each other in a language of their own creation, building professional associations, and staying away from political controversies' (Greenwood 2008: 321). Society for Applied Anthropology was established in 1941 'as a reaction to the disdain for applied anthropology demonstrated by the 'pure' anthropologists who ruled the American Anthropological Association' (ibid.).

While activist research was never warmly welcomed by the North American academia, a somewhat nuanced version of it, referred to as 'action research',[7] managed to find a foothold in the European institutions such as the Tavistock Institute for

4 https://culturalanthropology.duke.edu/about/anthropology-activism (accessed 10 August 2022).

5 See, for example, the website of the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke https://culturalanthropology.duke.edu/about/anthropology-activism (accessed 10 August 2022).

6 There are impressive examples of such research from the fifties onwards, and those interested in this topic can browse through *Human Organization*, the journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology. For examples of collaborative research published in other venues and for related discussions, see Greenwood and Levin 1998; J. Schensul and S. Schensul 1992; Weidman 1976.

7 American anthropology would become familiar with action research largely through Sol Tax's studies about a native American people, the Meskwaki, and particularly through the Fox Project. See Tax 1958; 1960. See also Footnote 13.

Human Relations (1946) based in London. Action research soon became a highly esteemed practice in the United Kingdom as well as in Scandinavia, particularly thanks to studies in organizational development, human resource management, environmental sciences and adult education. Nonetheless, significant researchers like Eric Trist and Einar Thorsrud, who are widely referred to as the leading figures of organizational development, had 'no anchor in the higher education system' (Greenwood 2008: 322).

Despite all the challenges so far posed by the political economy of research in the United States and Europe, applied social science finds its way through the cracks of the higher education system, proving while it *does not have to be* bounded by state- or market-oriented perspectives. As a matter of fact, all the endeavours to combine theory and practise in the reformist fields have confirmed that applied anthropology does not necessarily involve working with power holders at the expense of local stakeholders. Applied anthropology can be redefined as 'anthropology for change' rather than 'anthropology in use' which means we need to dispense with conventional notions of application. Anthropology-in-use entails the application of the disciplinary theories, concepts, and methods 'to confront human problems that often contribute to profound social suffering' (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006: 179). Anthropology-for-change, on the other hand, implies doing research to make a difference, by putting knowledge into the service not only of those who try to cope with difficulties (oppression, social inequality etc.) but also of those who resist and act against whatever causes such difficulties. The issue at stake is whether we can carry out anthropology as a discipline with transformative, if not revolutionary, potential. This leads us to the key questions that underlie the discussion here: How can we reconcile anthropological research with advocacy and action? And, how can we manage to do it without reproducing, and creating new forms of, asymmetries between the researcher and the researched?

Spirit of the Barbados Declaration

> *Anthropology took form within and became an instrument of colonial domination, openly or surreptitiously; it has often rationalised and justified in scientific language the domination of some people by others. The discipline has continued to supply information and methods of action useful for maintaining, reaffirming, and disguising social relations of a colonial nature. Latin America has been and is no exception, and with growing frequency we note nefarious Indian action programmes and the dissemination of stereotypes and myths distorting and masking the Indian situation – all pretending to have their basis in alleged scientific anthropological research.*
> *The Declaration of Barbados: For the Liberation of the Indians (30 January 1971)*

> *The anthropology now required in Latin America is not that which relates to Indians as objects of study, but rather that which perceives the colonial situation and commits itself to the struggle for liberation. In this context we see anthropology providing the colonized people with the data and interpretations both about themselves and their colonizers useful for their own fight for freedom (Dostal 1972: 380; cited in Hale 2006: 99).*

The Declaration of Barbados I quote above appeared at a time when American anthropology had already been engaged in a self-reflexive critique of its colonial roots. It was the time for anthropology to confront with its own complicity in the white man's project to educate and civilize the non-white, and to reflect on the political and ethical consequences of the knowledge it had so far produced about those peoples dehumanised by the colonialist and imperialist structures of power and domination. The last straw for many academics was perhaps Project Camelot in the mid-sixties, where the U.S. Defence Department attempted to commission a group of social scientists to conduct empirical research overseas on the social dynamics of conflict and change. The project had been planned to cover twenty-one countries to give priority to places with a higher risk of insurgency and civil war. Camelot was unearthed while an anthropologist (Hugo Nutini, a naturalised U.S. citizen born in Chile) was planning a preliminary research trip to Chile with the funding granted by the project office. This is how the Chilean left launched a sensationalist media campaign to portray Camelot as part of a larger conspiracy to overthrow the Allende government. The project was halted because of the increasing reactions against aggressive U.S. interventionism and eventually passed into the history of social sciences as an evil plot 'akin to "the Fall of Man" in Christian theology' (Wax 1978: 400).

Once publicly noticed, Camelot was vehemently denounced by many anthropologists from within and outside the United States. There already was growing awareness, and concern, about anthropology's supposed role as a conspirator in imperial projects and its ambiguous position vis-à-vis the state power.[8] It was mainly this concern that paved the way for a more systematic approach to research ethics to be embodied in a statement, entitled 'Principles of Professional Responsibility.'[9] The principles were proclaimed by the Council of American Anthropological Association (AAA) in May 1971 as a statement of professional responsibilities to multiple

8 For a foundational critique of the colonial roots of anthropology, see Asad 1973; Gough 1968; Hymes 1974.

9 For the full text, visit: http://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656 (accessed 10 August 2022).

parties, namely, the people studied, society at large, the discipline of anthropology, students, research sponsors, and governments.[10]

At around the same time, briefly before the AAA's declaration, the World Council of Churches invited a group of academics from the University of Bern (Switzerland) to organize a meeting as part of the Program to Combat Racism.[11] This is how eleven anthropologists of the Americas (one from Europe) came together in Barbados for the Symposium on Inter-Ethnic Conflict in South America (January 25–30, 1971). At the end of the symposium, a declaration was issued, largely informed by the reports of tribal populations' situation in Central America. The statement indicated a call for

> *the termination of colonial relationships, internal and external; the breaking down of the class system of human exploitation and ethnic domination; a displacement of economic and political power from a limited group or an oligarchic minority to the popular majority; the creation of a truly multi-ethnic state in which each ethnic group possesses the right to self-determination and the free selection of available social and cultural alternatives (Current Anthropology, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jun. 1973): 268).*

This was a call on national governments, religious missions, and social scientists, anthropologists in particular, to take actions necessary to 'halt [the colonial] aggression and contribute significantly to the process of Indian liberation' (ibid.). The statement did not have a considerable impact on the mainstream anthropology, largely because of 'poor understanding of the analyses presented, or failure of anthropologists to recognize the historic role of indigenous peoples in the formation of their own future' (Wright 1988: 375). For many, including myself, however, the Declaration of Barbados marks a threshold in self-reflexive anthropology. The statement is particularly relevant to the present discussion as it indicates an attitude change with respect to applied research in anthropology. The very historical context, in which this statement emerged, implies how hollow the idea of value-free social science is, also reminds us how difficult it is to make a sharp distinction between (disengaged) theory and practice.

This was a pivotal moment that changed the course of applied anthropology towards an activist tradition focused on the question of self-determination. Prior to

10 Since its foundation in 1902, the AAA has issued five statements and resolutions other than the one dated 1971 (amended in November 1986): Resolution on Freedom of Publication (December 1948), Statement on Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics (March 1967), Code of Ethics approved in June 1998, Code of Ethics approved in February 2009, Principles of Professional Responsibility updated in November 2012. Statements are available at http://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656 (accessed 10 August 2022).

11 The rest of this section has largely been informed by Wright 1988.

Barbados, applied anthropology had taken several forms: policy-oriented practices where the anthropologist played the role of 'technical specialist in the colonial process'; non-interventionist studies that undertook community-improvement programs; action research such as the Fox Project;[12] ethnohistory that sought to decolonise Native American histories; and 'urgent anthropology' which was concerned more with '"data in the process of extinction" than with the well-being of the people studied' (Wright 1988: 370–371). Interestingly enough, in none of these versions of applied research did anthropologists seriously consider their own commitment to the peoples they worked on and question their privileged positions. While some adamantly maintained neutrality and technical rigour (e.g. Firth 1961; Foster 1969; cited in Wright 1988), those engaged in liberation movements, like the indigenists in Mexico, acted as the 'redeemers' of native peoples, trying to dominate the public sphere at the expense of local voices (Wright 1988: 370).

The Declaration of Barbados was the harbinger of a new era of advocacy for indigenous rights. It inspired a young generation of anthropologists who would establish an organic bond with the rising Indian movement of the Americas, a process that led in the seventies to an unprecedented thriving of indigenous and advocacy organizations across the world. Many indigenous activists found the chance to meet with academics at the Second Barbados Conference held in 1977 and to discuss with them not only their own concerns and ambitions but also broader questions of emancipatory politics, such as 'the possibilities of alliances with other ethnic groups, classes, political organizations, labour unions' in other geographies (Wright 1988: 377).

With its refreshed notions of colonialism and ethnicity,[13] anthropological insight, which had proven to be vital for indigenous movements by the mid-seventies, greatly contributed to public debates on development and dependency, as well. The culturalist theories of the past had sought to explain the 'backwardness' of native peoples in terms of traditionalism or cultural deficiency, masking the history of colonial domination and indigenous subordination. A critical perspective was already

12 The Fox Project was led by Sol Tax in the late 1940's in the United States among the Mesquakies, an indigenous community in Central Iowa commonly known as Fox Indians. The purpose of the project was helping the community make changes that they wished through actions such as the endorsement of local cooperative initiatives and scholarship programs for youngsters. The project is widely appreciated for having inspired many indigenist studies and advocacy campaigns of the seventies (Wright 1988: 370–371).

13 This new perspective was largely shaped by Fredrik Barth's studies that opened a new era in the literature on ethnicity. Barth's research was also essential to the development of critical approaches to the culturalist perspective of classical anthropology, and the idea of acculturation in particular, which had 'directly served the interest of colonial penetration' (Wright 1988: 369).

in place by the late seventies to demonstrate the problematic nature of earlier explanations and to define 'underdevelopment' as a result of relations of dependency between industrial centres (colonising powers) and peripheral areas (colonised peoples). This critique paved the way for the formulation of alternative models of development planning that would prioritise the concerns of native peoples and engage the local stakeholders in the projects.

Critical Theory, Activist Research, and the Question of Representation

Contemporary anthropology has developed its self-reflexive capacity mainly thanks to the critical moves of the seventies and eighties, particularly to the path-breaking interdisciplinary forum known as *cultural critique*.[14] A common issue raised in this genre is 'the crisis of representation' as it is called, which is, anthropology's ability to represent other peoples as the objects of its study. The expression of 'crisis' does not only imply the discipline's capacity for speaking the truth, but also challenges both objectivity and validity of the knowledge produced. It indicates a moment of revelation, so to speak, about the hierarchical relations and power dynamics built into the research process and suggests increased alertness to the tendency of anthropological writing to obscure these relations and to bolster the ethnographer's authority. Furthermore, cultural critique takes issue with power-laden categories widely employed by mainstream anthropology as portraying social and cultural phenomena. Its political thrust resides in its 'enthusiasm for deconstruction of the powerful to find "the fissures" in dominant categories of "knowledge production", and to open space for "self-doubt and uncertainty"' (Hale 2006: 102).

Cultural critics are progressive scholars in multiple senses. They are methodologically innovative in the first place, if we consider George Marcus's proposal for 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995, 1998), or 'collaborative' methods suggested by George Marcus and Michael Fischer for getting informants actively involved in research (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Secondly, they offer to 'repatriate' anthropology to home societies, encouraging it to look back at the West, to explore modernity. They approach topics that are otherwise studied by sociologists, such as mod-

14 Cultural critique was inspired and informed by various theoretical and methodological approaches, including the early Frankfurt school, interpretive anthropology, feminism (e.g. Donna Haraway's idea of 'situated knowledge'), cultural studies, and the epistemological criticisms of analytic reason and science. The most influential figures who almost led the discourse include George Marcus, Michael Fischer, and James Clifford. See Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus 1998; Marcus and Fischer 1986.

ern medicine, technology, urbanization, or kinship in the West (ibid.). And whatever they intend to study, the impression is that they would never lose the claim to produce 'emancipatory' knowledge. Marcus, for example, is particularly sensible to the political implications of cultural critique. As a distinct form of disciplinary criticism, cultural critique 'clears conceptual ground, denaturalizes powerful ideas and institutions, and helps the reader think through the political possibilities and strategies for subordinate actors' (Hale 2006: 103).

Cultural critique indeed stands 'on the verge of activism' as Marcus (1998) has put it. However, we know that it has serious issues with activist research, and perhaps with good reasons. Cultural critics' main objection about activist anthropology is that it tends to prioritise political engagement and advocacy in a way that undermines the research process. While cultural critique strives for complex and sophisticated theory, activist research is often blamed for politically induced analytical closure. The criticism is 'not that activist research lacks objectivity or that it has become politicized but that it is simplistic, unproblematized, and undertheorized' (ibid.: 101). On the other hand, cultural critique is itself being criticized for having failed to pose a serious challenge to 'the material relations of anthropological knowledge production', and to develop new methods that will radically change the unequal relations embedded in the research process (ibid.).

Nonetheless, cultural critique and activist anthropology have lots of theoretical insight and research experience to exchange with each other. In their preface to *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, Marcus and Fischer open their discussion with 'the problem of representing social reality in a *rapidly changing world*' (Marcus and Fischer 1986: vii, my emphasis). The issue here, as I see it, is not only a matter of representation but also of responding to a social event or phenomenon in a timely manner.[15] Activist anthropology today strives to provide lucid accounts of the pressing issues of our time, while responding to these issues as promptly as possible. One good example is Charles Hale's research on indigenous land rights in Nicaragua, during which he personally attended the Awas Tingni trial (November 2000; see Hale 1994; 2002; 2004). It is amazing to see how ethnographers like Hale provide the communities under question with the knowledge that would directly contribute to

15 This was a concern for me especially when I worked in the past on minority politics and diasporic nationalism in the Middle East. Even if we do not remain silent about the unfolding events, I had realized, most of our work respond very slowly to the current developments. The cost of this can be heavier than thought. Other voices fill the void, bringing along with them worn frameworks of understanding that lie near-at-hand. In the absence of anthropological insight, people usually end up with essentialist analyses of social difference, or primordialist understandings of identity that disregard historical processes (Büyüksaraç and Glasser 2017).

their struggles.[16] Hale's testimony, purely based on his own research, served to 'close off the government's objections' to Awas Tingni's claims, by demonstrating that these claims reflected the traditional patterns of indigenous land tenure. I am quoting below Hale's comments on the dual political commitments of activist research (ibid.: 104–105):

> *Activist anthropologists attempt to be loyal both to the space of critical scholarly production and to the principles and practices of people who struggle outside the academic setting. These dual political commitments transform our research methods directly: from the formulation of the research topic to the dissemination of results, they require collaboration, dialogue, and standards of accountability that conventional methods can, and regularly do, leave out of the equation. […] Activist research involves commitments that are not accountable to arbitration, evaluation, or regulation from within academia. Instead, it requires constant mediation between these two spaces, insisting that one need not choose between them nor collapse one into the other.*

When viewed in this way, activist research does not fall too far from critical theory,[17] for the very fact that the latter likewise indicates 'an orientation to the world that combines the effort to understand why it is as it is (the more conventional domain of science) and how it could be otherwise (the more conventional domain of action)' (Calhoun 2008: 25). And activist scholarship necessarily involves critique, because it purports to participate in 'a project of producing new knowledge, of integrating more abstract and universal sorts of knowledge, and of keeping action and its possibilities at the centre of attentions' (ibid.).

What seems to me the most pressing ethico-political issue for activist anthropology, as well as for the critical thought, concerns representation, first, as a matter of making truth claims about social phenomena, and second as a matter of entitlement to speak or act for a social entity (individual or group of persons), especially in an authoritative capacity. I believe taking heed of this issue is also a prerequisite for developing more egalitarian and participatory ethnographic approaches, and at this

16 Hale gives the backdrop of the trial in a more recent piece: 'Broad questions of indigenous land rights lie at the heart of the trial. Since the early 1990s, Awas Tingni community members had experienced increasing incursions into areas they consider to be theirs, most dramatically in the form of a government concession of logging rights to a multinational company. They pursued remedies inside Nicaragua to no avail and eventually turned to the Organization of American States (OAS) Human Rights Commission. After two years of unsuccessful efforts of mediation, the commission filed a petition on behalf of Awas Tingni against the Nicaraguan government in the Inter-American Human Rights Court' (Hale 2006).

17 For a parallel argument, see Hamm 2015.

point we need to think more thoroughly about the idea of engagement in social research.

Participant observers claim to be 'authentically present' in the field, '"engaged" with their subjects' and yet reject 'any formal responsibility for the consequences of their engagement other than following norms of confidentiality and informed consent' (Greenwood 2008: 324). Activist research assigns a totally different role to the ethnographer, as briefly discussed above. However, we cannot always imagine how local people will get actively involved in research carried out about themselves. We lack imagination because we still largely rely on the conventional research schemes that privilege theory over practical knowledge, or scientific expertise over local wisdom. While theory stands for the knowledge of universal truths, practical knowledge implies having a grasp of the particulars. Good examples of action research today teach us how to unlearn the conventional research schemes and how to acknowledge experience-based 'non-expert' knowledge (Eikeland 2006; Greenwood 2008). As Craig Calhoun (2008: 24) notes,

> *To be committed to action is to be committed to acting in a world of particulars. One may learn of these particulars from experience as well as from books or conversations with others. As Bourdieu has emphasized, also drawing on Aristotle, one's knowledge of these particulars and how to act may be tacit rather than explicit, embodied rather than discursive, a matter of habitus rather than propositions. But practical actors may also be articulate. And practical action may be informed by discursive, propositional knowledge as well as experiential learning.*

The most relevant type of knowledge for action research is *phrónêsis,* which is usually translated as 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom', in the sense of 'knowledge and skills that are directed towards understanding and acting in accordance with requirements of the concrete situations we find ourselves in' (Eikeland 2006: 6). *Phrónêsis* is distinct from *epistêmê*, which is scientific knowledge, or disinterested understanding of the generalities that lie beyond the particularities, also from *tékhne*, which is action oriented instrumental knowledge.[18] However, *phrónêsis* is not posited against either of these two types of knowing (see Greenwood 2008). *Phrónêsis*-based research makes use of both *epistêmê* and *tékhne*, but the real trick of the trade lies in collaborating with local stakeholders at every step of the research process, from designing the project to evaluating the effectiveness of actions implemented in the light of the research results.

18 On the Aristotelian distinctions between the three ways of knowing, epistêmê, tékhne, and phrónêsis, see also Eikeland 2006, 2007; Greenwood 2008; Flyvberg 2001; Toulmin and Gustavsen 1994.

Face-to-face conversation is essential to all collaborative action research projects. Conversing with research participants is not merely communicating knowledge (one's expertise or research results) to a non-specialist, and it also exceeds the more-established mode of 'giving voice to' (usually through a spokesperson). Conversation primarily implies a mutual, non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. The action researcher is usually a collective subject instead of an individual researcher, composed of both 'experts' and 'non-experts' (i.e. local stakeholders including activists and laypeople). Greenwood (2008: 330), a leading figure in the field, describes the action researcher as 'a skilled process facilitator capable of assisting in the construction of a democratically functioning group in which differences are treated as assets rather than obstacles to be overcome.' What makes action research distinct from other versions of applied social science is this strong commitment to the virtue of participatory methods, as well as to the idea of fairer and inclusive representation.

Reconciling Research with Action and Advocacy: Challenges and Opportunities

As combining research with action and advocacy, we should be prepared for a great deal of scepticism of our critics, as well as for serious challenges, some of which we might have not factored in. One major problem concerns the paternalism inherent to the activist researcher persona. How do we 'give voice' to the community we align with? Even if the colonized/the indigenous/the subaltern is given chance to speak through our anthropological writings, do we let them use their own words, as Gayatri Spivak (1988) once asked? Or do we rather impose our own concepts and frameworks that are usually branded as 'universal'? This is, again, a question of representation, this time aimed at destabilizing the expertise and authority of the activist researcher.

Although activist research is usually assumed to entail political alignment with a social movement or a group identity, research and action can be imagined together in various other ways. I am currently experimenting with this approach in my own current project, where I am directly engaged with rural communities living in conservation areas in Southwest Turkey. This project aims to contribute to local community development and well-being in three major ways: by raising public awareness about the problems that are of immediate concern to these people, including access to natural resources, land-use, and property rights; acting as a mediator between policy makers and local communities; and giving the people with low education the opportunity to learn more about the conservation policies of the Turkish state, and how to negotiate the related laws and regulations. I am also developing

techniques for involving the local stakeholders in my research, and yet I understand this is not an easy task.

Apart from our own scientific prejudices, we are working within the limits of an academic system that is inimical to action research committed to collaborating with non-academic stakeholders. We feel trapped in university campuses, crushed under teaching loads and administrative duties (faculty meetings, long office hours and so on), which makes it impossible to be flexibly available to our research participants (external stakeholders) and maintain a regular relationship with them (Greenwood 2008: 333–334). But it is again this same system that urges us to demonstrate what we are doing is meaningful to the public, and thus worthy of support. As universities try to survive under heavy fiscal pressures and act like corporates, social scientists are increasingly forced into action research (ibid.). More and more scholars have begun to collaborate with non-academic experts in their projects as a requirement imposed by the funding agency. In international collaborations, external stakeholders usually include the members of a non-governmental organization based in a non-European partner country.

The current system premised on public accountability and quality assurance relentlessly seeks to quantify our academic labour through screening processes like Research Assessment Exercise in the UK institutions or the Bologna Process in continental Europe. Any work that is not quantifiable is discarded as an index of underperformance, as unjustifiable, pointless work. To quote Greenwood (ibid.: 336),

> *[t]his is clearly a neoliberal move in which conservatives demand that all units of public universities justify themselves in terms of the value for educational dollar spent. The accountability scheme sets up the accounting agencies as defenders of the 'public interest' through these coercive schemes.*

Nonetheless, as an activist researcher, Greenwood encourages us to look at the bright side, and I will conclude with his inspiring remarks (ibid.: 337):

> *[T]hese could be interesting times for strategically minded activist researchers. Action research that mobilizes the social science and other expertise of universities collaboratively with external stakeholders for their mutual benefit may as well be a viable response to these accountability pressures. While it is a dangerous game to take reforms created by conservative activism and attempt to turn them into significant support for social reform, it is a game that action researchers could play effectively while subverting the conservative purposes that gave rise to the accountability system in the first place. [P]erhaps the time will be right to attempt again to convert individual activism into institutional activism.*

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