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Anthropological Advocacy: A Contradiction in Terms? [and Comments]

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Anthropological Advocacy

A Contradiction in Terms?

by Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Elsass

This paper is an attempt to integrate the discussion of advocacy in anthropology, as recently propounded by Robert Paine and others, with the broader debate on anthropological practice. The point is made that it is impossible to deal with advocacy without considering the nature of anthropological representation in general. On the basis of personal experience with the Arhuacos of Colombia, we argue that the rationale for advocating a particular cause can never be anthropological. Anthropology seeks to comprehend the context of local interests, while advocacy implies the pursuit of one particular interest. We also argue, however, that anthropology may provide an important background for engaging in advocacy, which in some cases may present itself as a moral imperative.

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I am always a little ambivalent about advocacy. I always want to advocate; but I also always think that they (the people I've studied) could speak better for themselves than I could for them. And, further, to make myself an advocate would provide the other side—government, officials, etc.—with an excuse for not talking to the people themselves. . . . I have to distinguish between the local community's need for my advocacy and my emotional and intellectual need/inclination to sympathize with them. I decided long ago that my advocacy—such as it is—had to lie in my ethnography: in presenting them and the complexity of their lives in a way that they would feel did them justice.

ANTHONY COHEN, 1985

Anthropological advocacy is an ambiguous term covering a wide range of practices. Our intention here is to discuss the notion of advocacy with a view to determining whether it can ever be "anthropological" at all. This is a response to the call of Paine (1985a) and others for a professional statement about the kinds of things we do or should do as anthropologists. It is also an attempt to sort out the complex problems raised for us when the Arhuacos of Colombia asked us to promote particular interests. Given our different backgrounds (in anthropology and psychology, respectively), we found ourselves engaged in a lively dialogue on the subject of advocacy, and we realized how important it was to raise the consciousness of the profession with regard to the matter. Consideration of advocacy is the more pertinent for its bearing on the discussion of anthropological practice in general.

A preliminary conclusion of our discussion is that advocacy, as such, is incompatible with anthropology as a distinct kind of scholarship. To be advocates anthropologists have to step outside their profession, because no "cause" can be legitimated in anthropological terms. Ethnographic knowledge may provide an important background for individual advocacy for a particular people, but the rationale for advocacy is never ethnographic; it remains essentially moral in the broadest sense of this term. Even anthropologists have moral responsibilities, however, and a discussion of the relationship between anthropology and advocacy is badly needed.

Through the following exposition of our experience with the Arhuacos we approach this relationship from various angles. At each stage we attempt to show how difficult it is to reconcile the role of advocate with that of anthropologist. Generally, the inherent difficulties often impede action, but it should be stressed that in particular cases advocacy is no option but an implicit requirement of the social relationship established between the anthropologist and the local people.

Anthropology and Application

The concept of advocacy immediately acknowledges the position of the anthropologist as intermediary. While

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this position is now recognized as theoretically inevitable, it used to be reserved for "applied anthropology." Set apart from anthropology in general, applied anthropology had little prestige and was seen as fit work for the second-rate: "Malinowski sent me to study social change because, he said, I didn't know enough anthropology for fieldwork of the standard type" (Mair 1969:8). The implicit message here—that applied anthropology dealt with change while real anthropology dealt with the reproduction of social structure and other sophisticated matters—is not accidental. British anthropology, at least, explicitly linked applied anthropology with studies of social change (Mair 1969:3), especially social change that was externally induced and involved cooperation of the anthropologist with the local government (Grillo 1985b:6). "Application" of course covers much more than this (Gulliver 1985:38), and the distinction between studies of structure and studies of change cannot be maintained. With the general historicization of anthropology has come the insight that even the reproduction of a social system may contain its own transformation (Sahlins 1981). "Social change" is not solely induced from outside but certainly also a consequence of internal relationships and local action.

Furthermore, although the "detached involvement" implied by fieldwork (Agar 1980) may be more or less detached or involved and will often be a matter of both personal choice and circumstance, no anthropologist can escape involvement. The discussion of "application" is therefore pertinent to any kind of anthropology; "theory" provides the anthropologist no protection against the use of his results. The very *presence* of the ethnographer in a world that contains its own problems forces us to rethink the role of the scientist vis-à-vis the people under study, whether the intent is "development" or not (Hastrup, 1990c).

Anthropologists now realize that their subject matter always implies a degree of involvement, which of itself contributes to local change, and we need a renewed theoretical debate on the role of the participant observer in development. There are few canons with regard to the practical role of the anthropologist apart from the old one of remaining objective and staying away from native women (Wallman 1985). Although perhaps ideal in the scientific world, such requirements are impossible to satisfy in the real one; fieldwork is now openly recognized as a personal encounter and ethnography as an intersubjective reality (Hastrup 1987, 1990a, b). From the current perspective on anthropology there is no way in which the anthropologist can claim to be outside the material; subject and object merge in a world of "betweenness" (Tedlock 1983:323–24). This is the source of application and, indeed, the starting point of advocacy.

Just as the maker of anthropological films must admit that even the apparently neutral method of self-presentation to some degree reflects the film maker's presence (Elsass 1989b), no anthropological monograph can hide the fact that cultures are essentially "written" (Clifford and Marcus 1986). But in spite of the fact that the implicit aim of the anthropological endeavour is to make the fieldworker the author of a book (Sansom 1985:6), even the role of the author in the writing of other cultures has been largely ignored until recently. Small wonder, then, that the hidden role as an agent of change—whether intentional or not—has been completely neglected.

Although the intentions of the founding fathers were purely scientific, their effects were certainly "applied" (Whisson 1985:132). If, from the post-modern perspective, theory and application, subject and object merge, we are forced to consider the practical implications. These are the more complicated when the peoples we study are articulate about their own opinions and rightfully expect something in return for their information. What should be the anthropologist's position if "anthropologist" as such no longer suffices? One possible position is that of advocate.

Advocates and Clients

An advocate is one who pleads the cause of another, and the role presupposes active engagement (Henriksen 1985:121). Even this is ambiguous in anthropology, however, because in anthropological discourse there is no sharp division between "self" and "other"; these are categories of thought rather than objective entities. The anthropological advocate therefore cannot claim to plead the cause of "an Other" in any direct manner; we believe that this point is implicit in Cohen's statement (in Paine 1985b) quoted above.

Cohen also implies that there are different *kinds* of advocacy inherent in the anthropological practice known as "speaking for" or "presenting" a people. On first glance these modes of advocacy might be viewed as but different degrees of what is essentially a single practice. There is a continuum of anthropological interest from the countering of Western, colonial ethnocentrism by providing systematic knowledge about other cultures to the active pleading of the cause of a particular ethnic group vis-à-vis a government (Van Esterik 1985). In principle this continuum leaves no anthropologist untouched by the problem of advocacy. Even a purely academic interest in other worlds ultimately leads to a kind of "representation" of others. When representation turns into "speaking for," however, the supposed continuum dissolves. "Representation" presupposes a generalized (and largely absent) Other, while "speaking for" involves particular (and immediately present) individuals. Theoretically, these modes differ radically in their bases of legitimation. Ethnography is legitimated by established canons of scholarship and the *creation* of knowledge, while advocacy rests on moral commitment and the *use* of knowledge.

When anthropologists use their knowledge for a particular cause, they can be charged with furthering "the colonial processes still at work by stealing crucial decisions and political initiatives from indigenous peoples" (Henriksen 1985:124–25). The criticism is based on the

allegation that "speaking for" often involves the creation of "clients" who play a passive role. Passivity need not, however, be the ultimate outcome on the clients' side even when a professional temporarily takes the initiative. It may be part of the professional's strategy to raise the clients' consciousness about the situation so that they can re-assume responsibility for their actions, irrespective of the advocate's opinion. Structurally, the two positions are complementary, but even in a relatively short time perspective the dynamics of the interrelationship may reverse active and passive roles, just as namer and named constantly change places in the fieldwork dialogue (Parkin 1982:xxxiv). Drawing a parallel to psychotherapeutic work, in which a vast number of different therapeutic relationships reflect as many theoretical stands, we can see how advocacy has myriad expressions reflecting a multiplicity of anthropological approaches and local situations. Examination of a particular case of advocacy demonstrates how the complexity of the relationship increases with a deepening understanding of the local—ethnographic and political—situation.

The Arhuaco Case

THE PROPOSAL IN ITS CONTEXT

The Arhuacos, who live in the Sierra Nevada of northern Colombia and number about 5,000, have been able to maintain a fair degree of autonomy based on their own tradition of local organization (Elsass 1987, 1988). They have often expelled foreign visitors from their territory, and it is part of their official opinion that even foreigners who want to help them generally cause a lot of trouble (see *Unidad Indígena*, 1975, no. 1). Our own entry into Arhuaco society was based on long acquaintance; a number of visits by Peter Elsass since 1973 had culminated in a film project in cooperation with the Arhuacos in 1986 (Elsass 1989*b*).

In 1988 we both visited most parts of their reservation, conducted extensive interviews, and recorded their own elaborate views on current problems within the Colombian state. Towards the end of our stay, they asked us to help them promote a particular "development" programme that they felt would increase their autonomy within Colombian society. Very briefly, they suggested a pilot project reintroducing intensive horticulture with irrigation to a fairly well-defined valley area embracing some 80 households. The prime movers were the women of the area, who had recently organized themselves in an attempt to reclaim their position as "defenders of the Earth." The project thus had both "ecological" and "cosmological" overtones, and, further, it would benefit women, who appeared to have been the principal losers in the process of mestization. On these scores, we became convinced of the basic soundness of the project, even though we had little natural-scientific background to evaluate its ecological side.

By asking us to promote this project, the Arhuacos forced us to consider what kind of intermediary position we were supposed to take. They stressed their situation as an ethnic minority suppressed by the state and deprived of political means of defending themselves. We knew, however, that there were many well-educated Arhuacos perfectly capable of formulating applications and making demands of the government. A number of Arhuacos were being trained as lawyers, linguists, and anthropologists, and Arhuacos had managed to acquire influence in some of the semi-private or official bureaus of Indian affairs through lobbying. We wondered why they wanted us to intervene. Did they, in fact, just want us to save them the paperwork and the fighting with the bureaucracy? How would the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs, with which we had good relations, react to our shift from travel and research to direct involvement as advocates for a particular cause? And were we not as ill-equipped as any other social scientists to deal with the bureaucracy (cf. Cheater 1985)? We proceeded hesitantly.

At the Bureau we learned that all economic support from outside had to be channeled through the government or at least that all projects had to be coordinated with its own initiatives. This apparently paternalistic attitude masked a complex reality. On the one hand, the Bureau was interested in our supporting the Arhuacos by means of foreign aid, especially if that would increase its own budget for projects in the area. On the other hand, it was aware that our work for the Arhuacos might eventually turn out to be subversive of it in a complex and volatile political situation. Unless we were allied with the Bureau we might unintentionally jeopardize the necessary continuity in its work for the survival of the Indians. Uncertain whether the Bureau's demand that we subordinate our activities to its initiative was a bid for control of any possible outside funds, we nevertheless recognized that the political situation was too complex for us to handle without local guidance. Apparently all the powerful elements of the Colombian scene—be they Indians, bureaucrats, politicians, or guerrilleros—had a vested interest in funds.

The crucial role of the government bureaucracy in native affairs (La Rusic 1985:25) was part of the historical context, and so were the surrounding peasant populations—most of them as marginalized and dispossessed as the Indians and no less alienated from government. Recognition of this encouraged further reflection about our position.

We knew that there was no simple solution to the Arhuacos' problems, let alone any simple recipe for our intervention, but we also knew that the Arhuacos had one major, unambiguous, and very acute problem—shortage of land. Soil erosion is rapidly reducing the tillable area of the reservation, and "colonists" (*colonos*) are encroaching upon it. For the Arhuacos as for other indigenous groups (Maybury-Lewis 1985, Bodley 1982), land is the key to cultural and even physical survival. The project was a response to land scarcity. Immediately attractive because it would lessen dependence upon outside merchandise and hence upon cash, it had further appeal for other reasons.

The view that native peoples have a dubious claim to land because other groups can make more productive use of it is not uncommon (Maybury-Lewis 1985:139), and it is generally accepted in Colombia, where the various Indian groups are in the minority. The intensification of land use within the Arhuaco area would counterbalance this argument. What is more, it would re-establish the historical link with the ancestral Tairona culture of the area, which was based on terraced fields and irrigation. Under pressure in the first centuries of colonialism, the descendants of the Tairona had changed to more extensive land use. The project was therefore expected to strengthen the "original" Indian identity. As part of a local strategy for organizing women in particular, it would be a clear indication of the "re-Indianization" of a people in the process of being overrun by the state (cf. Varese 1982:36).

This all seemed perfectly sensible at first sight and was probably "right" from all sorts of perspectives; at least it seemed to fit our own ideological scheme of things to support: the minority's right to its own land, re-Indianization, women's liberation, and so forth. On closer inspection, however, it raised a whole range of new questions, suggesting how easy it is to fall victim to stereotypical notions of good and bad and to be seduced by "them" into accepting at face value one-sided and to some extent unqualified views of "us."

First of all, why should we, who claimed to work in support of the suppressed, uncritically accept the Indian view of the *colonos* as enemies? Would this not amount to replacing one kind of ethnocentrism with another (Wallman 1985:18)? Although there is probably some truth to Maybury-Lewis's (1985:146) statement that "settler societies are everywhere unscrupulous about the rights of the autochthonous people whom they dispossess," we should not overrate this point. Obviously, some settlers are unscrupulous, but many are probably poor, alienated peasants trying to survive, and dishonesty is not unheard of in Indian communities either (see Jaramillo 1983). Both groups face problems of extinction generated by a complex society with immense economic problems and a remarkable incapacity for enforcing its own laws—for instance, regarding land protection. It is tempting to succumb to the anthropological gut reaction of wanting to protect the "islands of culture" rather than the apparently cultureless *colonos*, but both groups may be worthy of consideration. Were we, in our first enthusiasm (which we are still prepared to defend), led astray by romantic notions attached to the European vision of the Indian as the ultimate Other? It is worth considering the extent to which such tacit assumptions are actually extensions of the colonial order itself in that they lock the Indians into a set of Western metaphors and prevent us from understanding the particularity of their views (Varese 1982, Taussig 1987).

These questions boiled down to a single one: were we prepared to be advocates for the Arhuacos, and in what sense could we "speak for" them without possibly inflicting romantic post-colonial views upon them to the exclusion of a thorough understanding of the complex Colombian context? This required much more reflection.

REPRESENTATIVENESS

"Speaking for" someone presupposes that one knows who he is. The idea of natives as speaking with one voice, their culture having been reduced to the lowest common denominator, no longer passes for truth in anthropology. Our "objects" are active subjects speaking with as many voices as we. Furthermore, what informants speak is not "cultural truths" but situational responses to the presence of the anthropologist (Clifford 1986:107). The group of Arhuacos pleading for intervention might not have been "representative" of the whole, and its request might have been only a passing attempt to take advantage of our presence. At least, we would have been wrong to assume that our intervention would unquestionably be for the good of the whole group, let alone for Arhuaco "culture" as such.

The problem of intervention is closely linked with the problem of interpretation, which turns out to be "an essential component of what [is] to be interpreted" (Taussig 1987:128). Interpretation, in this sense, is inherently violent because it makes any effective counterrepresentation impossible. Among the Arhuacos, the effect of this has been the adoption of an inverse evolutionist model that is actually a kind of ethnic chauvinism—perhaps a necessary stage in the process of reconstructing indigenous history (see Varese 1982:31–32). The Arhuacos regard their white neighbours as a lower kind of people and speak of them as younger siblings who have to be looked after because they know nothing. (Their neighbours the Kogis also claim that white culture derives from their own, contending, for instance, that the white people stole the local name Xusikungui and transformed it into the name of Jesus Christ [Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985:355].) Thus, the Arhuacos have reversed the Western notion of the cultural hierarchy—and if we really wanted to speak for them we would have to adopt this model, no more satisfactory than its inverse.

The Arhuacos' strategy for survival has largely been one of positioning themselves as a "counter-culture" in relation to the state (Clastres 1976; Elsass 1987, 1989a). In order to survive they have had to resort to social forms that, while we have considered them underdeveloped, are in fact sophisticated forms of adaptation to the post-colonial context. One example is the shift from intensive horticulture to extensive farming. When the Arhuacos' ancestors began to face competition from the conquistadores for land, they adopted a more extensive pattern of agriculture, thus making their need for land more visible. Eventually, this strategy made the Colombian government believe that the Arhuacos were in need of development aid, which the Arhuacos gladly received. (Even that turned against them, however, when the new cattle breeding proved to contribute heavily to soil erosion.)

Arhuaco "culture" was not an unambiguous entity, then, and even if the "counter-culture" could be seen as the effect of a particular power structure it was impossible to overcome the fact that cultures materialize in contrast to one another (Boon 1982)—that "ethnic identity requires socio-cultural contrast for its validation" (Berreman 1983:290). In order to emphasize ethnicity, therefore, contrast sometimes has to be artificially created. Advocating a particular view of the "good" of Arhuaco culture implied a contrast with the Colombian (and Western) notions of the world and the necessary "development." Even more important, it implied a choice between "good" and "bad" Arhuaco visions. We knew that members of the community were divided among themselves on important issues; with simplification one can speak of "traditionalists" and "modernists," although the distinction is far from clear-cut. Briefly, the traditionalists suggested isolation and a return to the exclusive authority of the *mamus*—traditional leaders with both secular and religious functions—as the only strategy for survival. The authority of the *mamus* was not acknowledged as "power," a concept that has always had a Western (normative) bias (Rubinstein and Tax 1985:304). The modernists had largely accepted the normative view of power and adapted to the Western power game. They had also changed their dress, cut their hair, and learned to speak Spanish.

As usual, the traditionalists were the more visible and the modernists the more articulate—at least in Spanish (Bodley 1982). Accordingly, the modernists became our prime informants. Along with other anthropologists (see Maybury-Lewis 1985:143), we had known little about internal politics in advance, and on Elsass's previous visits the Arhuacos (the modernists, as it turned out) had explicitly stressed their unity. As "proof" of it they had often referred to their cooperation with the traditionalists to exile the mission from Arhuaco territory in 1982, following an impressive communal meeting and on the advice of the *mamus* (see Elsass 1987 and 1989*a* for details). Once the declared enemy had left the reservation, however, their unity had seemed to dissolve; the communal meetings once held every year had been abandoned, and strategies for survival had diversified. At least in 1988, there was little consensus, and the "enemy" was creeping back in—sometimes brought by the Arhuacos themselves.

It is common for the new Indian intelligentsia that is acquiring weight in Latin American nationalisms of various kinds to have its origin in what might be termed the Indian petty bourgeoisie—typically teachers educated in missionary schools, in general bilingual and almost bicultural (Varese 1982:38). The Arhuaco spokesmen fit this description; in their jeans and sombreros they were the ones to advocate support of "traditional" Arhuaco values and ask outsiders for help. The traditionalists, in contrast, would have none of this; in their traditional white clothes they looked to the *mamus* for guidance. The authority to manage communal resources had always been in the hands of the older people, and when we began discussing outside economic support with the younger generation it was a breach of the cultural code. Although the modernists verbally supported "tradition" and sometimes claimed to be even more traditional than the traditionalists, the structure of our communication contradicted this claim.

We were forced to recognize that our own work among them might actually split Arhuaco society further. Advocacy was difficult under these circumstances, and *anthropological* advocacy seemed impossible. Which part of the ethnography was more worthy of support?

THE REQUIREMENT OF UNITY

Quite apart from the anthropologist's problem of choosing whom to "speak for" when presentation would reveal at least two antagonistic groups within the community, it seemed to us that both traditionalist and modernist strategies threatened the Arhuacos' cultural survival—survival not in the sense of conservation but in the sense of the community's inherent capacity to determine its future (Maybury-Lewis 1985).

The traditionalist strategy implied isolation. Historically this had proved ineffective against external encroachment not only from *colonos* seeking land and social scientists seeking to expropriate traditional wisdom but also from the state and the bureaucracy. Although anthropologists in general are theoretically ill-equipped with regard to the penetration of the state into the rural periphery, we do know that one aspect of it concerns the symbolic structure of policy formulation (Cheater 1985:68). Isolation and lack of dialogue eventually and inevitably make outside policy making seem necessary. Someone has to make decisions, and the traditional structure of decision making appears powerless. Even to concerned academics, traditional Indian movements often appear vague, romantic, and essentially useless to concrete political discourse on Indian self-determination (Varese 1982).

The modernist strategy of biculturalism, on the other hand, risked making the Indians victims of externally determined development. Having agreed to play the power game, they had been overruled by it. Having accepted a cultural double standard for their own negotiations with the outside world, they had laid the foundations of a hierarchy of culture that might eventually subsume their own. The Arhuaco modernists had tried to convince the government officials of the need to enforce their claims to land and to improve farming conditions, but the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs had declared that it could do little until the Arhuacos had come to a consensus. In principle the Bureau could negotiate only with the traditional leader, the elected spokesmen for all Arhuacos. In practice, this leader was a shadow, and the young educated people were propagating their own views. They were also the ones to ask us to promote their cause elsewhere.

Whom and what interests would be representing if we advocated one particular strategy for cultural survival at the expense of another? Could we undertake a project in collaboration with people while the internal political

situation remained unclear? Cultural Survival, Inc., clearly would say no (Maybury-Lewis 1985:144).

Non-intervention cannot, however, become a matter of principle. To require unity of other peoples is unwarranted when our own society and institutions are fragmented. To demand it as a prerequisite for cooperation can easily become an excuse for doing nothing at all. Indeed, the Arhuacos complained that no one was concerned about their problems and felt that outsiders were splitting them apart. A few years ago they produced a written proclamation that was handed out at one of their communal meetings: "We are going to be divided between government institutions, between religions, between political parties. If it continues we will not have enough people to supply them all" (*Unidad Indígena*, 1973, no. 1). Unintentionally they thereby furnished potential advocates with an excuse for delaying intervention.

The demand that minority groups speak with one voice reflects the general nationalist trend in Latin American societies. "The cry of 'One nation, indivisible' with perhaps added imprecations hurled against tribalists and separatists is all too often used as an ideological weapon against those who wish to alter the status quo and to share fully and equally the privileges of citizenship" (Maybury-Lewis 1985:133). To alter the status quo may initially require a multivocal discourse within which not even minorities need be reduced to a common denominator. Perhaps, as Maybury-Lewis suggests, this is where the desirability and viability of pluralistic polities could initially be demonstrated.

Representativeness is a problem that is not restricted to advocacy. Once the notion that informants speak "cultural truths" has been abandoned, there is always a problem of representativeness. No fieldworker talks extensively with everyone, and no "native" knows everything. Fortunately, we have also abandoned the idea that we should search for the "typical" or the average; each event, whether of speech or action, must be seen as exemplary rather than representative. The problem of representativeness thus changes radically once we realize that culture is not an empirical category but an *analytical implication* (Hastrup 1988, 1990a). The point of doing anthropology is to achieve a level of understanding beyond speech and to identify the context within which even contradictory statements gain meaning. Therefore, anthropological "speaking for" must be a presentation of the entire context rather than the "texts" of a selected group. If it is a matter of presenting specific views, the anthropologist may temporarily step out of his scholarly role when his moral commitment bids him do so. What is required of the anthropologist as scholar, however, is to raise the context awareness of the people themselves so that they may eventually become better equipped to plead their own cause.

Culture and Change

Whatever else it implies, advocacy entails active inducement of change. In the era of "applied anthropology" change was generally conceived of as externally induced, and anthropologists who engaged in this were less respectable than the rest. It is a general feature of the history of anthropology that "culture" has been defined as inherently antagonistic to change in general and to development in particular.

As experts in culture and cultural difference, anthropologists have often resisted development, at least in the sense advocated by development experts, among "their" peoples. Development experts, in their turn, have regarded culture as a hindrance to development. In these circumstances development on the culture's own premises has been regarded as a contradiction in terms, and cultural dissolution has been seen as the "price of progress" (Bodley 1982). The argument has been made that "development" inevitably leads to the destruction of the "weaker" culture (Maybury-Lewis 1985:131–32). Sadly enough, history has to a large extent made this argument a self-fulfilling prophecy, but there are alternatives to destruction (Bodley 1977:34–36).

In our view, the relationship between culture and development is not inherently antagonistic (cf. Dahl 1986:14–15). The two concepts necessarily inform each other, because the concept of culture in modern anthropology implies change, just as the notion of development implies a theory of the world (Hastrup 1990c). "Development" itself is a cultural concept, masking a particular ideology (Dahl and Hjort 1984). The main question, therefore, is not whether culture and development conflict but how they can be combined to the satisfaction of a particular people—on the assumption that development is always cultural.

In present-day anthropology there is no logical contradiction between structure and change or between system and event; they constitute simultaneities (Ardener 1978). In other words, there is no culture outside the living reality of thought and action. In the social space people are both definers and defined (Ardener 1987:39; Hastrup 1987). This means that human beings themselves are the agents of the social system and of history (Hollis 1985:232). Cultural survival therefore implies not the conservation of a preconceived identity anchored once and for all in an objectively existing (reified) culture but continuing control by the agents of a particular culture of the shaping of local history.

The continuity of system and event also dissolves the opposition between stability and change in anthropological theory, which may serve as an analytical tool but does not represent reality. Every event is simultaneously a realization and a change of the system (Sahlins 1985). No social event is ever an exact replica of a previous one (Ardener 1970). "Structure" is always at risk from action, and the concept of the "timeless" society or the society without history is untenable. Change or development is inherent in culture.

At particular points of time, local processes of change may be triggered by a return to earlier images of history, like the Arhuacos' return to Tairona ways of agriculture and organization or their turning to the *mamus* to oppose the mission. These returns are perhaps instances of

"nonsynchronous contradiction" in a situation in which "qualitative changes in a society's mode of production animate images of the past in the hope of a better future" (Taussig 1987:166). But they are certainly also instances of simultaneity of culture and event, structure and change.

This implies that "development" must be rethought in terms of local history rather than in terms of abstract economics. To engage in a local development project therefore requires that the local historical potential be analyzed. This may be read as yet another attempt to conserve local cultures as "living museums" (Bodley 1977), but it is nothing of the sort. It is an acknowledgement of people's right to determine their own future (Maybury-Lewis 1985:135). Development without local participation is meaningless and will disrupt the continuity of system and event (see Hastrup 1990c). The idea of the "inevitable" destruction of indigenous culture by development projects can and must now be replaced by the recognition of various possible futures for indigenous peoples.

The inherent connection between culture and development rephrases the problem of representativeness. There is no objectively identifiable culture to represent, and any Arhuaco vision of history and society may generate a future. Thus, confronted with the two (or more) versions of the history of the Arhuacos, the anthropologist has no choice but to acknowledge them both. It is not possible by means of anthropological analysis to determine which is right and which wrong, although we may identify their different possible consequences. In anthropological terms they are equal. The "cultural context" established by implication must contain both, and ideas of development must accommodate the local division. The advocate cannot take an internal stance—at least not on anthropological grounds.

The Concept of Advocacy Reconsidered

As will be apparent, consideration of advocacy rapidly leads to consideration of common anthropological problems. "Although work on behalf of tribal peoples and ethnic groups may be a peculiar form of advocacy it is not a very strange kind of anthropology" (Maybury-Lewis 1985:146–47). Anthropology is, so to speak, born of the cultural encounter, and anthropological practice always involves some kind of representation of "others."

There is, however, an inherent dilemma in *anthropological* advocacy. Anthropology is concerned with context rather than interest, while advocacy means making a choice among interests within the context. When some Arhuacos asked us to plead their particular cause to government and funding agencies, they immediately had our sympathy as well as our professional interest. They still have it; but before we can go on we must talk with them about the complexity of the social reality. They are not unaware of the conflicting interests, of course, but it appears that in their relation to the outside world (including ourselves) they still want to

present themselves as a united community and therefore tend to be silent on issues of local conflict. We cannot take this self-presentation at face value; it masks a divided truth. Ultimately, our uncovering this "truth" may enable the Arhuacos to speak much more convincingly for themselves.

What had seemed to be a straightforward case of speaking for a suppressed minority became increasingly complicated once we began to unearth the hidden values. As Van Esterik (1985:81) has suggested, it may be important to understand advocacy as a mode of communication that is likely to be "over-emotional, over-simplified, rhetorical, over-dramatic, exaggerated, single-minded, without footnotes: in short the exact opposite of our academic writing." Particular circumstances may warrant such emotional stands, but the credibility of anthropology should not be jeopardized. Conversely, the sound anthropological principle of suspending judgement until the complex patterns have been uncovered may pave the way for vital instances of advocacy. Also, we should never forget that a commitment to improving the world is no substitute for understanding it (Baer 1986:10).

Advocacy in this last sense grows out of anthropology in general, but it cannot of itself be "anthropological." It is a position in which anthropologists may find themselves more by circumstance than by scholarly plan. The involvement may be a simple corollary to engagement in the fieldwork dialogue, which leaves none of the interlocutors unchanged and makes some degree of advocacy almost inevitable. Active advocacy is also, of course, a consequence of work among deprived populations and of having to "represent" them to others. Perhaps the main issue in the discussion of advocacy in relation to anthropology is not whom we are speaking *for* but whom we are speaking *to*. The conventions of representation may differ vastly in the two instances, neither of which can be deemed superior in any absolute way.

Presenting indigenous problems in well-established anthropological terms in academic monographs is important even if they only speak to the academic community. Academic discourse provides a necessarily well-informed point of departure for presenting the reality and the hopes of indigenous peoples both to themselves and to their governments. Advocacy, on the other hand, has its own discourse, because it is directed towards specific goals (Harries-Jones 1986). The pursuit of these goals cannot be legitimated in terms of anthropology, although it can certainly be informed by it.

As individuals and as a collectivity, even anthropologists must sometimes depart from the canons to maintain their "professional" integrity. Advocacy may become a personal obligation in the local social context even if it does not arise from the anthropological analysis as such. The question of timing is important; the requirements of a particular situation may demand immediate action if a particular local community and mode of shaping a particular history are not to succumb to external accidents and encroachments. In some acute situations, anthropologists cannot suspend judgement

too long if they want to invoke anthropology against the argument that development inevitably destroys local cultures. It is the duty of anthropology to show that other futures are possible, and it is with a view to this duty that advocacy may sometimes be seen as an acute implication of anthropology for any practitioner. The anthropological interpretation cannot always be reserved for the scholarly community, important though this remains, but must be given voice and presented to others with the power to heed it.

While anthropological advocacy seems precluded, anthropologists' advocacy may sometimes prove vital. Anthropology cannot furnish us with any rules for pleading. In the case of advocacy as in the case of ethnography, anthropologists must establish their own authority. In neither case should the anthropologist be left alone, however; he should be backed by a discipline that cannot afford to neglect "the burden of being civilized" as it has been imposed upon our traditional subject of study (Baer 1986). The lesson of anthropological involvement in a multivocal discourse is ultimately moral.

Comments

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Hastrup and Elsass's account of the dilemma they faced in working with the Arhuaco is, first, a fine contribution to the ethnography of the kind of complex situation that is frequently encountered by those working in or on the fringes of "development." Second, it is an excellent illustration of the way in which contemporary fieldworkers become ethically and politically embroiled in the complexity.

The more general issue raised in the paper is whether advocacy is incompatible with anthropology. Hastrup and Elsass argue that it is, anthropology being a "distinct kind of scholarship" whereas advocacy is "essentially moral." However, "even anthropologists have moral responsibilities," and anthropologists (*qua* moral persons) may be obliged to become advocates. Their case is a reasonable one, and enticing, though that "even" worries me (unless it is intended to be read as ironic). But it relies on an austere, persuasive definition of anthropology and a rather narrow view of the principles on which the subject and its practice are based and of what they can and should comprise. In fact, Hastrup and Elsass want to say that anthropology (as they define it) has *no* moral principles other than those that regulate its own "internal," professional, activities. Instead, they assume for anthropology an amoral relativism. "No 'cause' can be legitimated in anthropological terms. . . . It is not possible in anthropological terms to determine which is right and which is wrong. . . . In anthropological terms they are equal."

The point has, of course, been around for some time, though this does not mean that further consideration is unnecessary. I for one would like to see a detailed exposition of the possibility that some "external" moral stance could in fact be generated from within the framework of the ideas and practices that currently constitute "anthropology." Could it not be shown, for example, that certain things—racism would be the obvious example—infringe upon the basic principles and premises to which anthropologists *qua* anthropologists must subscribe?

However, there is a considerable difference between having principles—any principles, derived from whatever source—and applying them in practice, in the murky, grey worlds in which most of us do fieldwork. And Hastrup and Elsass are right when they point to the traps ready and set for the politically naive (postmodernist) anthropologist.

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During his opening speech at the inauguration of the Centre for Development Studies in Bergen, Fredrik Barth is reported to have said that the significant difference between basic anthropological research and applied anthropology is that basic research is the more applicable. Hastrup and Elsass have clearly made the same observation but refuse to admit it in this otherwise interesting and important attempt at distinguishing advocacy from anthropology. In pointing to the way in which, in their Arhuaco case, "the complexity of the relationship increase[d] with a deepening understanding of the local—ethnographic and political—situation," what they are saying is that not only did the relationship become more complicated but as they employed their anthropological tools to sort out their strategies within that relationship they began to grasp the considerable complexity of the context within which the people (and consequently the advocates themselves) lived and worked. As it turned out, however, it was primarily their academic skills that set them on to a viable solution: "We cannot take this self-presentation at face value; it masks a divided truth. Ultimately, our uncovering this 'truth' may enable the Arhuacos to speak much more convincingly for themselves."

In the light of this and other instances in which the insight provided by their trade resolved their dilemmas, I have some difficulty in accepting their insistence on a fundamental difference between advocacy and conventional anthropology ("Anthropology is concerned with context rather than interest, while advocacy means making a choice among interests within the context"). Advocacy is primarily a question of establishing a context for understanding analogous to that of the "clients." If the anthropologists are making significant choices, on what basis other than anthropology are they making these choices within "the complexity of the social reality"? Clearly a "commitment to improve the world" is

no "substitute for understanding it," if for no other reason than that the latter can very well be accomplished without the former. That improvement can be achieved without understanding is less likely.

Over the last 20 years I have been involved in a handful of attempts at applying anthropology for the purpose of attaining political/economical/social (but not—by intention, that is—"cultural") change with reference to the Sami of Norway. The experience gained from that work will constitute the background for the following rather normative comments.

Every instance of applied/development/advocacy anthropology has its unique features, just as does any social phenomenon normally studied by anthropologists. It is only with reference to the *specific context of the individual case* that the important issues raised by Hastrup and Elsass—ways of channelling resources, considerations of equally deserving local competitors, representativeness, maintenance of cultural specificity, unity/factionalism, cultural change/development, speaking for/to, how to and whether to report back and in what sort of vernacular—can be dealt with. I have difficulty seeing how the results of this kind of analysis could lead to codifications, strategies, or actions alien to the essence of anthropology even though advocacy as such is "directed towards specific goals."

Clearly, to involve oneself in trying to induce specific change in systems that are neither causally linked circuits nor ecologically determined chains but social and somewhat entropic in nature (Bateson 1979:241–42) is from the outset extremely demanding. Eventually such work will pose the most difficult question of all, that of *assessing the results.* What really happened, and why? Answering such questions requires extensive funds and almost unlimited time. If anthropological research cannot be the basis for this effort I cannot see how advocacy alone can.

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I recognize three principal questions:

1. Is advocacy compatible with anthropology? I believe that it is. Hastrup and Elsass waver, but their "preliminary conclusion" (preliminary to what?) is that it is not, because "no 'cause' can be legitimated in anthropological terms," because advocacy is "never ethnographic" and is "essentially moral in the broadest sense." But surely it is the "legitimation" (i.e., understanding and/or representation) of others' causes that anthropology does better than any other discipline, this is only possible on account of ethnographic work, and therein lies the morality of anthropology? I believe that these claims are true without appealing to the outer reaches of cultural relativism.

Here, subsidiary questions circle around the issue of circumstances that may lead anthropologists to *refuse* to undertake advocacy. The case under discussion is richly suggestive. The Arhuacos' request "to promote a project" could be construed as a plea for altruistic entrepreneurship, and one senses Hastrup and Elsass's doubts about this. One reason for refusing such an entrepreneurial role is the recognition of the need to work with (and through?) the Colombian Bureau of Indigenous Affairs lest one unintentionally jeopardize the Bureau's "work for the survival of the Indians." This kind of consideration is common enough. However, it concerns not *anthropological* advocacy but the costs to the subjects of *any* advocacy (outside the Bureau) on their behalf. Where Hastrup and Elsass raise the question of their accepting the Arhuacos' world view and query the representativeness of anthropological data, they are addressing the nature of anthropological enquiry and, perhaps, the nature of anthropological advocacy (below), not the compatibility of advocacy with anthropology. Then there is the issue of a factionalized community (again, a common occurrence). I agree that their work among the Arhuacos might actually split have the society further but *not* that under the circumstances "*anthropological* advocacy seemed impossible." If any advocacy was possible, it would have to have been the anthropologists'.

2. What is the nature of anthropological advocacy? Hastrup and Elsass recognize that "the concept of advocacy immediately acknowledges the position of the anthropologist as intermediary." Probably much of the future of anthropology will be in intermediary relations. In the case before us, it would be between the traditionalists and modernists and the Bureau. Maybe I am discounting the degree of difficulty that would be encountered, but Hastrup and Elsass appear to waver here too. They even sketch a scenario in which to demand local unity "can easily become an excuse for doing nothing at all." Rather than *demanding* unity, the task of anthropological advocacy is, of course, to persuade the parties to reflect upon (1) the contexts of their disunity and (2) the contexts in which a front of unity is mutually advantageous. It is an extended fieldwork project. This is in fact not far from the authors' own position that the anthropological task is "to raise the context awareness of the people themselves so that they may eventually become better equipped to plead their own cause."

I do not pretend that this would remove the difficulty concerning people's own disparate visions of their history and society; my point is that by acknowledging that it is not for us to determine which vision is right and which is wrong—"the anthropologist has no choice but to acknowledge them both"—Hastrup and Elsass highlight another distinction of anthropological advocacy. What economist would forbear from "choosing" between anti-development "traditionalists" and pro-development "modernists"? Nevertheless, we ourselves must always be careful lest our advocacy fall into the trap of "making an effective counter-representation impossible."

3. What people should be "targeted," and in what manner and at what stage in an unfolding advocacy? These are probably especially important considerations for an-

thropological advocacy in view of its attention to context and the social construction of knowledge. The citation from Anthony Cohen, for example, to the effect that the people could speak better for themselves than he could conflates the whole matter of audiences. It is exactly this that Elsass (1989*b*) discusses in a paper comparing "cinema vérité" and "cinema direct": each presents a distinctive advocacy strategy, and both kinds of films have been made of the Arhuacos. In "cinema vérité" the message is ideally unmediated, supposedly coming direct from the subjects. In "cinema direct" (a misnomer!), the film maker deliberately and openly intervenes to present the "appropriate" message. The Arhuacos themselves liked the "cinema vérité" film, Western audiences liked the other. Anthropological advocacy is not, then, all of a piece; it encompasses different modes and domains of interlocution.

Two final points: Hastrup and Elsass wish to distinguish between anthropological advocacy and anthropologists' advocacy: I believe this is more likely to obfuscate than to illuminate the issues. Referring to the opening citation (from a letter to me), Cohen also said: "But I agree with you: the issue for us is how to translate concern into action; and an anthropologist without concern is no anthropologist at all" (Paine 1985*a*:v).

[Hastrup and Elsass's reply had not arrived by press time and will therefore appear in the next issue.— EDITOR.]

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