

# THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

AN ESSAY ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
FIELD WORK ETHICS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC  
WRITING SINCE THE 1960S

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“Anthropology emerged out of a colonial context and anthropologists have hidden ‘colonial’ assumptions in their reasoning and research as a whole,” said a gentleman in the audience, making the chairman blushed, and leading to scholars almost simultaneously declaring, “No, that’s not true”. As other audience members started to speak up, the chairman intervened saying, “Okay, let’s move on”. The gentleman, however, wanted to continue his tirade, but was swiftly silenced by the chairman and asked to remain quiet. The discussion proceeded, with other audience members embracing the opportunity to interview the scholars after. The incident took place on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, during a discussion about Surinamese history and identity in the city of The Hague. The institute that organized this discussion had invited several scholars to participate in a panel discussion with audience members.

During my years as a research master student in Social Research at the VU University of Amsterdam, I have followed many courses at the Social and Cultural Anthropology Department in the faculty of Social Sciences. I have engaged in many discussions with students and teachers at that department. During these discussions, I have noticed that most anthropology students (and teachers to some extent) are driven by aspirations of changing the

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## Anthropology students are driven by aspirations of changing the world

world, helping people in the Third World and basically thinking that anthropological knowledge is the medicine to cure ethnocentrism and stereotypes about migrants and people from other cultures in Western societies. These assumptions are in sharp contrast with the image that the gentleman at the discussion had about anthropology. The critique that the gentleman expressed about anthropologists and anthropology as a discipline – being complicit of colonial practices – is a critique that has been haunting the discipline and its practitioners since the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropologists like Lucy Mair (1965: 439 - 440) could dismiss this criticism by claiming that “they were defenders of African culture” and that “people should learn from the Industrial Revolution and so spare Africa its worst horrors”. However, since the 1960s and 1970s, anthropologists have been forced to come to terms with the political implications of their work. Most of this criticism has appeared in the United States and has come not only from outsiders but also from anthropologists who argued for a critical reflection on the social and moral responsibilities of anthropologists (Lewis 1973; Gough 1968; Berreman 1970). This is also one of the reasons why The American Anthropological Association (AAA) has established a ‘Committee on Ethics’ that formulated a code to investigate situations of unethical behavior regarding anthropologists.

The debate about colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s and the focus on ethics is one of the reasons that anthropologists in the 1980s started to emphasize reflexivity in their work. However, does this mean that anthropology as a discipline is ‘liberated’ from the colonial assumptions and context from whence it came? I will try to answer this question via an elaboration of the historiography of anthropology as a discipline, its relation to colonialism and, finally, ethics and moral responsibility within anthropology. I am fully aware of the fact that feminist anthropologists have also contributed to the reflexive turn within anthropology and that their work and criticism was instrumental in reforming the

discipline (see Golde 1970; Rosaldo 1974). However, an elaborate discussion of their contribution and the other anthropological contributions besides the work of reflexive anthropologists in the 1980s goes beyond the scope of this essay.

## ANTHROPOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE

When people ask me what I am majoring in, and I reply to them that I am studying anthropology, they then proceed to ask when I am going to the Amazon or the rural areas of Africa. They are all baffled because I do not look like an outdoor type of guy who is ready to go backpacking in Nepal or Australia. In popular culture, the dominant image of an anthropologist is someone who visits foreign tribes, eats and lives with them and records their strange customs and behavior. This lifestyle is adventurous, romantic and often associated with a colonial context; it is the 'white' person describing and trying to understand the 'other' person(s). One of the reasons that popular culture has such images of anthropologists is because, as a discipline, anthropology is closely related to ethnography as a methodology.

Ethnography is basically the written account of a fieldwork experience. It predates anthropology and was mainly used by European travelers, missionaries and colonial officers in describing 'the Other'. European travelers like Marco Polo (1254 - 1323) and Amerigo Vespucci (1454 - 1512) both gave ethnographic descriptions of the people and places they visited. Missionaries recorded the strange customs and religious traditions of people from the 'New' and 'Old' world in order to spread Christianity. Ethnographic studies became a source of knowledge about 'the Other,' and it is therefore no coincidence that the emergence of ethnographic studies went hand in hand with European colonization. The first Governor General of British India, Sir Warren Hastings (1732 - 1818), was one of the first colonial administrators who argued that, in order to establish successful rule in British India, the British Empire needed to 'know' the natives

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that were held in subjection. This meant that the colonial administrators needed to study the Indian languages, cultures and religions and, in a way, become *insiders* of Indian culture (Cohn 1996).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, when European imperialism was at its peak, most of the information about the colonies and their inhabitants came from colonial administrators and missionaries. This information, which included the measuring of skulls and the charting of physical traits, was then brought back to Europe for ‘anthropologists’ to analyze (Banton 1977). Anthropologists at the turn of the twentieth century were mainly engaged in armchair theorizing, and it was not until the publishing of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) by British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski that anthropology as an academic discipline emerged.

Malinowski carried out his research at the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia, located on the north-east coast of Australia. He systematically recorded his findings and spelled out a methodology consisting of describing, showing and reflecting on fieldwork experience that has since dominated the discipline and had a major impact on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. What Malinowski basically did was convey scientific rigor on a methodology that was ‘previously’ used as a tool for colonial domination.

Being a positivist, Malinowski was focused on delivering objective accounts of the people he studied. He argued that this could be done by mimicking the methods of the natural sciences (1922: 20). According to Malinowski, the collection of fieldwork data should be done by separating thoughts and opinions from facts, and the main objective must be to let the facts speak for themselves. For Malinowski, only trained professionals could collect such data and produce such ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ knowledge about ‘the Other’. Thus, anthropologists were not only the armchair specialists that meant to theorize about ‘the Other’, but they also became the specialists that could train students or colonial administrators to conduct fieldwork in the colonies. The professionalization of ethnography as a methodology, and thereby the fusion of theory and data (collection), eventually led to the emergence

of anthropology as an academic discipline. Anthropologists became the scientific specialists behind the desk and on the field and, according to Diana Lewis (1973: 582), “they were called upon to provide information and advice to the West in efforts to manipulate and control the non-Western world”.

## CRITICISM

Looking at the development of ethnography as a scientific method for anthropological research, it is not hard to imagine why certain people have accused anthropologists of being complicit in reproducing colonial images about other people and cultures. The gentleman in the opening vignette who argued that anthropology emerged out of a colonial context is in a sense right that the context in which anthropology and the other social sciences emerged was a nineteenth century colonial phenomenon. However, many anthropologists at that time were critical about the colonial context and saw themselves as spokespersons on behalf of the people they studied. They rejected European domination in the non-West and, like Mair (1965: 439), saw themselves as “defenders” of the customs and cultures against its critics. This, however, did not prevent classical anthropologists and anthropology as a discipline from becoming the focus of critique in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1968, American anthropologist Kathleen Gough published the article *Anthropology and Imperialism* in which she argued that anthropology is a child of Western imperialism. In the article, she emphasized the importance of the colonial context for classical anthropologists to do their work and argued that with the decolonization of former European colonies and the spread of revolution(s) anthropologists were now confronted with a different political context that forced them to reflect on their ethical stance in the field. On the one hand, anthropologists have obligations to the people they study, but on the other hand they also have an obligation to the powers that employ them (Gough 1968: 17). Gough’s article was not the first that was critical of the colonial and imperial relations of anthropology as a discipline (see Maquet 1964; Mair 1965).

What is interesting about Gough's article is that it focuses on the circumstances under which anthropological 'knowledge' was produced and claims that the privileged position of anthropologists significantly impacted their work. Although anthropologists like Raymond Firth (1972) criticized Gough for portraying anthropology as the bastard of colonialism rather than a legitimate child of the Enlightenment. Many anthropologists, like David Goddard (1969), Jairus Banaji (1970), Bernard Magubane (1971), Dell Hymes (1972), Diane Lewis (1973), Talal Asad (1973) and Archie Mafeje (1976), followed and expanded upon Gough's criticism.

The gist of their criticism was that the classical anthropologists had disregarded the relationship between power and knowledge. First, they were not reflexive of their own privileged positions as members of the dominant group and the unequal power relation between anthropologist and informant. As Lewis (1973) argues, anthropologists (un)consciously contributed to the interests of the colonial administration in terms of the concepts and theories they developed which emphasized differences between Europeans and 'the Other'. Second, the claim that the anthropologist is an 'objective' outsider that produces 'objective' scientific accounts of their informants was challenged. Classical anthropologists were also biased by their assumptions about the people they study and their claim of being the 'objective' outsiders mystified this position. Instead of claiming 'objective' accounts these critics argued for the perspectival knowledge. Finally, the universality of the discipline was criticized. One question that was widely debated at this time was whether anthropology was a discipline that addressed universal themes to meet the challenges of oppressed people, or whether it was only useful in providing information about powerless people to those in possession of power (Lewis 1978).

The criticisms these critics leveled against the discipline as such went hand in hand with criticism of British anthropology and its school of functionalism. Functionalism in anthropology is closely linked to Malinowski and is known for its holistic approach regarding ethnographic research. It sees society as a whole unit of analysis with a particular function for its different institutions. The problem with a functionalistic analysis and what also

lies at the heart of the criticism regarding the relationship between classical (British) anthropology and colonialism is that it cannot account for social change and thus perceives colonial societies and its people as static. In this way it failed to account for the rapid political changes that many postcolonial countries faced during the 1960s and 1970s.

## POSTCOLONIAL INFLUENCE

The critique concerning anthropology as a discipline was an expression of the *Zeitgeist* of the late 1960s and 1970s. This era marked a time of bitter rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, when the decolonization of former colonies was in full effect. The Vietnam War and the social situation in the United States and Western-Europe at this time resulted in many anthropologists reflecting on their own work and discipline. What remained central in the debate about classical anthropology's relationship with colonialism was the question of representation and its relation to power and knowledge. This question was not only addressed by anthropologists but was also dominated by the social sciences and trends in Western philosophy during the late 1960s and 1970s and ultimately led to the emergence of post-colonial studies in the 1980s.

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Fanon questions  
the ability of the  
colonizers to rep-  
resent the identity  
of colonized people

One of the pioneers of postcolonial studies was Frantz Fanon. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/1986) Fanon questions the ability of the colonizers to represent the identity of colonized people. Because of the dominant position of the colonizers, the colonized people were placed at the mercy of their representations. Fanon, who was a trained psychologist, attempted to record the psychological damage colonized people suffered by internalizing the mode of representation of the colonizers. For Fanon, the mode of representation of the colonizers positioned the identity of the colonized people in negative terms in relation to themselves. With respect to this view, colonizers are rational, intelligent and civilized in contrast to the colonized people. This interpretation,

according to Fanon, led the colonized people to believe in their own inferiority and revert to embracing the ideals and culture of the colonizers. However, this acquiescence of colonized ideals is merely a 'white mask' covering up the 'black skin'. Thus, for Fanon colonialism not only included the colonization of the land but also the mind of the colonized people. The work of Fanon inspired Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) to promote the decolonization of the mind and to renounce the English language and write in his native languages Swahili and Gikuyu. Although Fanon's work influenced writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it was not until the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 that the postcolonial critique on the representation of 'The Other' reached a broader academic audience.

Said was inspired by Michel Foucault's use of the concept of discourse. Prior to Foucault discourse was mainly used by linguists to refer to a form of speech or a language system. Foucault (1972: 49) introduced this concept to the social sciences and during his academic career defined it in several ways; one way to think of it is as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". Said (1978) used this Foucauldian notion of discourse to analyze the relationship between the West and the Orient. He argued that the West constructed a discourse about the Orient. This discourse was a Western method to rule over, form and control the Orient. This discourse that ran through a variety of texts including academic and literary texts did not refer to the Orient itself, but were in fact a projection of the Western image of the East, of 'the Other'. According to Said, scholars interested in the Orient – anthropologists included – were practicing essentialism. Their image of the Orient was simplistic, generalizing and conceptualizing the Orient as the negation of the West. The textual statements made by Western scholars about the Orient were made true and were a function of adequate scholarship.

Similarly to anthropologists like Gough (1968), Hymes (1972) and Asad (1973), Said criticized the West's ability to represent and study colonized people. However, Said differed from these anthropologists in that his critique focused on the production of texts and the concept of discourse. His specific implementation of



the concept of discourse regarding postcolonial societies influenced other scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1994/2010) and effectually launched the postcolonial movement in the 1980s. However, Said also drew criticism. James Carrier (1995) argued that holding a stereotypical image about ‘the Other’ is not only privileged for the West but applies to the East as well. Bhabha (1994/2010) criticized Said by arguing that the relationship between the colonizers and colonized people is much more complex. According to Bhabha, the colonial discourse is not simply internalized by the colonized people because colonial practices are valued and interpreted by the colonized people by means of their own value systems which eventually causes hybridization of the colonial discourse. What Bhabha emphasizes is that power as a tool not only resides with the colonizers but is relational and diffuse.

## REFLECTION AND ETHICS

Their roles as specialists of the non-Western world incited anthropologists to address both the internal criticism and the crisis of representation sparked by the postcolonial movement. By the 1980s, many anthropologists started to emphasize their own roles in the production of ethnographic texts. This move towards the production of texts and emphasis on reflexivity became known as the reflexive turn in anthropology. The anthropologists that contributed to this reflexive turn took the criticism addressed by anthropologists and postcolonial theorists in the 1960s and 1970s to heart and started to question their own positions vis-à-vis their informants. For them ‘the anthropologist’ did not provide ‘objective’ truths but rather ‘partial’ truths, and their texts did not mirror reality, but was merely one of many representations of their informants influenced by their own frames of reference. Anthropologists that made important contributions to this reflexive turn were Paul Rabinow (1978), Johannes Fabian (1983), James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), Renato Rosaldo (1989), Clifford Geertz (1983), Ruth Behar (1992) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes

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(1995). Although there is abundant diversity in the content and style of critique among these anthropologists, the majority emphasize that the production of ethnographic texts<sup>1</sup> is first and foremost an ethical endeavor.

<sup>1</sup>*Ethics as a concept is derived from the Greek word ethos which means character and refers to a moral reflection on practices and beliefs, whereas morality refers to the distinction between what can be considered 'good' and 'bad'.*

The consequence of the colonial debate in the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of postcolonial studies and the reflexive turn in the 1980s was that anthropologists were more occupied than ever with the question of ethics in relation to conducting fieldwork and producing ethnographic texts. In 1969 the AAA established a 'Committee of Ethics' that would address the ethical dilemmas that anthropologists faced. One of the things they did was to establish an ethical guideline for anthropologists which diverged from the premise that anthropologists can be 'ethically neutral' while conducting fieldwork. This can be seen as marking a break with classical (British) anthropology. Due to the controversy surrounding the Vietnam war in the 1960s (see Nelson 1966) many anthropologists like Gerald Berreman (1968) and Joseph Jorgensen (1971) argued that social sciences were not value-free and that an 'ethical neutral' position is irresponsible. Responsibility is when 'honesty' becomes a prerequisite for good teaching and scholarship instead of 'neutrality'. The question is not whether an anthropologist should become involved but how to immerse oneself in a responsible way (Berreman 1968). In this sense, the legacy of the colonial debate, the postcolonial movement and the reflexive turn was not only that anthropologists produced partial truth, partial representations and that the writing of an ethnography is an ethical endeavor, but that their fieldwork entails a 'moral' responsibility. Anthropological research thus not only involves a descriptive but also subsumes a prescriptive element.

### TROUBLED LEGACY?

By the 1990s, many of the contributions made in the previous decades regarding the colonial debate, the postcolonial movement and the reflexive turn were instilled in the teaching programs of anthropology departments in the United States and Europe. Not only anthropologists but scholars from different disciplines

whom had taken up ethnography as a methodology were discussing ethics in relation to their fieldwork experience and research projects. This resulted in various publications about a range of ethical issues in the field (see Fontes 2004). Many anthropologists not only thought about writing reflexive ethnographies and how they could 'represent' their informants in a responsible way, but also how their ethnographic research could 'help' change and emancipate the informants and the communities they studied. A direct contribution of the reflexive turn and the postcolonial influence of the 1980s was that anthropologists and fieldworkers in general strived for a close relationship with their informants (Finn 1993; Gordon 1995), emphasizing their own subjectivity (Kondo 1990; Denzin 1997) and were experimenting with different writing styles (Clough 1994; Abu-Lughod 1991). There were scholars like Pamela Cotterill (1992), Sherry Gorelick (1991) and Daphne Patai (1991) who criticized these researchers attempts to have a close relationship with their informants. For them it is inauthentic because it hides the true goal of the relationship and that is the objective of collecting data. This critique endured throughout the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1999, sociologist Erich Goode (1999, 2002) caused a controversy in academia when he admitted to having sexual relations with his informants. Different scholars, like Abigail Saguy (2002) Christine Williams (2002) and Susan Bell (2002), have since argued that Goode was misleading his informants and failed to recognize the power imbalances between researcher and subject.

The abandonment of the aim objectivity and the turn towards ethics lead to different kinds of reaction and writing experiments by anthropologists and other scholars interested in ethnography. Anthropologists and ethnographers became more aware of their (power) positions and wrote about it in their ethnographies, which renewed the discussion about ethics in the social sciences. The Goode incident (1999, 2002) in particular sparked a lively debate within the social sciences about research relationships. A contribution of the postmodern and postcolonial movement was that 'power' as such is diffuse and not only privileged to one group, community or individual. However, does this indicate that having an intimate relationship with informants is approved? In countering

the ethnocentrism of colonial anthropology and British functionalism, many anthropologists and ethnographers were at this time retreating to a stance of cultural relativism. This not only led to new incidents and ethical debate within anthropology and the social sciences in general, but it also provoked anthropologists to reflect on the fundamentals and merits of their concepts and discipline as a whole. Many anthropologists revised earlier relativist positions while others were emphasizing their moral responsibility in the field (Irwin 2006).

### WRITING 'AGAINST' CULTURE

The legacy of the colonial debate, the postcolonial movement and the reflexive turn was not without incident and controversy. Although incidents like that of Goode (1999, 2002) were cause for fierce debate among anthropologists and other qualitative social scientists the general idea was that these incidents referred to the individual choices of anthropologists and ethnographers and did not reflect a general tendency within the discipline. Thus, the evaluation of the various debates and focus on reflexivity since the 1960s by the larger proportion of the anthropological community was positive. However, there were anthropologists that still pursued a critique of the discipline and argued for different reasons that anthropologists still demystified the problematic relationship between power and knowledge within anthropology. I will focus on the arguments and contributions of anthropologists Abu-Lughod (1991) and D'Andrade (2008) that, from two entirely different positions, leveled critique against their colleagues and the discipline, despite all the changes that had taken place since the 1960s. I do not suggest that these two anthropologists are solely responsible for changes within the discipline this is because their argument was shared by others, but it does represent the overall criticism of both extreme positions within the anthropological community. Abu-Lughod, inspired by the postcolonial movement and especially Edward Said's *Orientalism*, analyzed the concept of culture and tacit assumptions of anthropologists while D'Andrade stressed the implications of emphasizing subjectivity and moral responsibility.

## *Culture*

Culture comes from the Latin word *cultura* which refers to the cultivation of land. It emerged as a concept in the twentieth century and defined how groups of people occupied a certain territory. Over the years, many anthropologists have had different conceptualizations of culture; however, what remained central was the assumption that people had 'cultures'. The focus on 'Other' people and their culture(s) gave an insight into one's own community, culture(s) and livelihood. Self understanding went hand in hand with understanding and describing these aspects of the 'Other'. The Self and the 'Other' are thus inextricably linked to each other.

One of the criticisms raised during the colonial debate of the 1960s and 1970s was that the emphasis on cultural differences unconsciously supported colonial domination. Within the context of colonialism, the emphasis on how different these people were from an outsider's perspective supported the emphasis on a civilizing mission in the colonial era. The critics were not against the description of cultural differences, but they were instead opposed to this differential description in relation to the colonial context and the attitude of the objective 'outsider'. This position assumes that the problem does not lie with the focus on cultural differences but on the way these differences are portrayed and the context in which they are delineated. In her famous essay entitled *Writing against Culture*, Abu-Lughod (1991: 467) argues that anthropology as a discipline "builds on the historically constructed divide between the West and the non-West". According to Abu-Lughod, anthropologists should not 'Write Culture', but write *against* it because:

*"Culture is the essential tool for making other. As a professional discourse that elaborates on the meaning of culture in order to account for, explain and understand cultural difference, anthropology also helps construct, produce and maintain it"* (p. 470).

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In other words, anthropologists explain the behavior of the people they study via the 'concept' of 'culture'. In doing so, the distinction between 'the Self' and 'the Other' that sprung out of a colonial context are, on a theoretical level, upheld and even academically justified. The contributions made during colonial debate in the 1960s and 1970s and the reflexive turn in the 1980s did not subvert the tacit (empirical) assumption of "the Self and "the Other", but actually reproduced it.

Abu-Lughod (1991) concludes her essay by elaborating on three alternative methods for anthropologists to study people. The first alternative method is the focus on *discourse and practice*. What the concept of 'discourse' does is to emphasize "the possibility of multiple and competing statements with practical effects" (p. 472). The behavior of people is thus not solely structured by their 'culture', but by multiple 'discourses' that not only position 'the Other' but also 'the Self'. So can discourses about the inferiority of traditions and rituals play an important role not only in the way Westerners perceive 'Other' cultures, but also how second-generation migrants perceive their 'own culture'.

The second alternative method is the focus on *connections*. Abu-Lughod (1991: 473) not only elaborates on the historical connections, but also emphasizes other forms of connections, such as national and transnational. The last alternative method that Abu-Lughod discusses is *the ethnography of the particular*. This is not to be mistaken with the focus on micro processes rather than on macro processes, but on how extralocal and long-term processes are manifested in the actions of individuals and influence/structure the local experience (1991: 474).

#### *Objectivity and morality*

The position of the 'objective' outsider was also a point of debate during the 1960s and 1970s. The criticism was that the objective stance of the classical British anthropologist mystified the relation between power and knowledge. The representation of the 'Other' was regarded as scientifically 'objective' and hence served as a legitimization for continuing colonial subjugation. This 'objective'

stance also promoted the exploitation of the people that were studied with disregard for any sense of commitment to the needs of these people. What became clear during the debates in the 1960s and 1970s was that the so called 'objective' stance was biased with assumptions about 'the Other' and that the ethically neutral position of the objective outsider ultimately led to the diffusion of responsibility of the outcomes and consequences of ethnographic research. These assertions were countered by reflexive anthropologists by focusing on the ethical consequences of producing ethnographic texts and taking 'moral' responsibility in the field and beyond.

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'Moral' responsibility implies a prescriptive stance, a stance of how the world should be

It is questionable whether a focus on subjectivity and 'moral' responsibility demystifies the relationship between power and knowledge and leads to a just representation of the people anthropologists study. This is due to the fact that 'moral' responsibility implies a prescriptive stance, a stance of how the world should be, what is 'right' and 'wrong' and how people should be represented. Therefore, anthropologist Roy D'Andrade (2008) argues that moral modes should be kept separate from objective models in anthropology. Objectivity for D'Andrade (2008: 563) refers to the degree in which an account gives information about the object being described, in contrast to moral models which attempt to "identify what is good and bad, to allocate praise and blame, and also explain how things not in themselves good or bad come to be so". According to D'Andrade (2008), the 'moral' responsibilities of these anthropologists do not 'help' the people or cause 'change'; they merely spark debate and discussion within the confines of the university and the academic community.

### *Minority voices?*

Although D'Andrade and Abu-Lughod with their criticism represented minority voices within the anthropological community the influence of their argument is not limited to the margins of the discipline. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century anthropologists like Steven Vertovec (2007) and Nina Glick-Schiller (2004) focused

on the transnational and historical connections rather than the concept of culture, others like Henrietta Moore (2007) was setting a new agenda for gender and feminist anthropology by arguing for the merits of the concept of discourse rather than culture. The critics of the postmodern movement as represented by D'Andrade were also growing. In the 1990s anthropologists like Clifford Geertz (1990), Steve Sangren (1988) and Ernest Gellner (1992) were critical about the reflexive turn. Although their critique differed on many points, what they agreed upon was that the reflexive turn undermined the ability of anthropologists to do fieldwork and make statements about 'The Other'. In 2006 Katherine Irwin published an article called *Into the Dark Heart of Ethnography: The Lived Ethics and Inequality of Intimate Field Relationships* where she argues that the focus on subjectivity is not more or less exploitative than objectivity. Irwin (2006: 170) warns that the emphasis on subjectivity and even reflexivity does not overcome structural inequalities and that intimacy in the field can be more damaging than objectivity. In other words anthropologists might have the best intentions to help the people and take 'moral' responsibility but they too are confined within certain social and political structures. Ethical reflections according to Irwin (2006) should regard the impact of these structures on informants rather than focus on the micro politics of research.

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The legacy of the colonial debate, the postcolonial movement and the reflexive turn is that the discipline of anthropology is fragmented, this is especially clear when looking at the 'minority' voices of Abu-Lughod (1991) and D'Andrade (2006). They both represent two different positions within the discipline but these positions also left a mark on the discipline. As Moore (1999) argues there is no longer anything like a single anthropology. Perhaps this is the greatest change within anthropology since the 1960s.



## PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST LA MÊME CHOSE

The gentleman in the opening vignette had some harsh words for the anthropologists during the discussion. For him, anthropologists were still biased against assumptions derived from the colonial era. The anthropologists in the audience thought otherwise and disregarded this critique. Based on the overview that I have presented here on the developments of anthropology since the 1960s. I argue that contemporary anthropology is not troubled with colonial assumptions. It is very easy to play the 'colonial' card, like the gentleman in the discussion did but after elaborating on the developments since the 1960s, I have to conclude that the situation is far more complex.

It is a fact that anthropology has emerged from a colonial context and that British anthropologist Malinowski professionalized a colonial tool and gave it scientific rigor. However, it is also a fact that classical British anthropologists were heavily criticized during the 1960s and 1970s. The social and political changes which took place during the 1960s and 1970s sparked a lively debate about the role of anthropologists in this changing world in terms of where their responsibilities lay. Due to the general impact of these debates and the publications of postcolonial theorists like Fanon and Said, it became clear that Western scholars were being confronted with a crisis of representation concerning 'the Other'. Anthropologists – especially in the aftermath of the Vietnam War in the 1960s – now faced the political implication of their work and were forced to elaborate on their ethical and 'moral' responsibilities. This ultimately resulted in the reflexive turn, and in the shift in focus to representation, which occurred in the 1980s.

When scholars or others are arguing that anthropology is complicit in reproducing colonial practices or the use of colonial assumptions they primarily refer to British anthropology and the functionalist school. However, the legacy of the colonial debate, the postcolonial movement and the reflexive turn lead to a fragmentation of the discipline. I have focused on two anthropologists that represent the two opposite reactions to these developments. These opposite reactions both influenced the discipline and together

with debates sparked by scandals like the Goode incident lead to a diversification of the discipline.

Anthropologists traditionally explain or understand human beings by analyzing how they make sense of their environment. This also holds true for understanding the discipline and the behavior of anthropologists themselves. The question is therefore not whether one is wrong or right or whether anthropologists are still making use of colonial assumptions, but how and why people like the anthropologists in the initial vignette responded the way that they did during that discussion. Truth be told, the concept of 'culture' reproduces the divide between the 'Self and 'the Other', and the emphasis on 'moral' responsibility maybe ethnocentric. But any alternative method will also become a topic of debate within the community. Perhaps the greatest lesson is that the methods of anthropologists might have changed, but the way they ultimately make sense of their experiences is still the same. It basically comes down to the endless discussion of the universal versus the particular.

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