Facing Racism and the Moral Responsibility of Human Rights Knowledge

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ABSTRACT: Anthropologists working in arenas of human rights advocacy must be prepared to negotiate dilemmas of human responsibility. Those focusing on racial discrimination as a breach of international human rights conventions must contend with trends in social research that feed into politically consequential claims that neither race nor racism exist as significant social facts. An examination of the global sociocultural and geopolitcal landscape, the human rights system, and models of change reveals that contemporary racism in both its marked and unmarked varieties warrants anthropologists' critical scrutiny and, depending on individual epistemological and political inclination, sociopolitical intervention.

KEYWORDS: Racism, persistence of; Human rights knowledge; Moral responsibility; United Nations statements on human rights

ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Paradoxically, on the whole, anthropologists have a mixed record in human rights advocacy. The tendency of many anthropologists to be adamant cultural relativists as well as to support the collective rights of the peoples with whom they work has often positioned them as vocal critics of the universal standards articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a watershed document that is informed, and biased, by Eurocentric notions of individual rights (Messer 1993, Ulrich 1999). Beyond this tendency, there is still another that complicates the relationship anthropology has with human rights. Despite the growth of current trends that underscore dynamics of culture and power (both within the discipline and in the wider world), and those trends that recognize anthropologists' responsibility to face and speak to power, there are still radical objectivists who insist upon pursuing the goal of

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a value-free science in which politics—including the pervasive politics of human rights abuse—has no (publicly acknowledged) place in social inquiry. According to the implications of this positivist model of epistemology and knowledge production, the relationship between the subject and object of the research enterprise are dichotomous and closely regulated to preclude the encroachment of matters of "subjectivity" into a methodologically defensible mode of investigation. Problematic subjective concerns would include sociopolitical objectives (especially when opposed to the status quo) leading the researcher to move beyond her role as merely an observer to that of an active agent of social change. In view of this model's logical conclusions, the researcher breaches conventions of how research "ought" to be done whenever she becomes (too) involved in the personal lives of the people she researches. When this happens, she loses her "objectivity," which depends on maintaining distance and "professionalism." After all, a social scientist is not a social worker or an activist. Views like this, although less dominant today than in the past, still question the scientific value of applied anthropology let alone more radical projects that bring the most progressive elements of anthropology to bear on struggles for social justice. The latter kinds of research presuppose an epistemological and methodological framework in which a partnership and collaboration characterize the researcher–researched relationship, and knowledge is a vehicle for social action and mobilization for positive, ordinary people-centered change. In view of the varied and frequently competing epistemological, theoretical, and political orientations within the social sciences, anthropologists have diverse philosophies of social research which influence their thinking about the best ways to practice ethically sound, socially responsible work.

Although there have been tensions and contests over inter- and cross-culturally appropriate notions of human rights, anthropologists have managed to build up a remarkable track record as advocates, especially for indigenous peoples. The magazine *Cultural Survival Quarterly* documents this accomplishment. However, Bourgois (1997:115–116) has expressed concern over anthropologists' tendency to be preoccupied with the rights of indigenous peoples while neglecting the human rights of other oppressed peoples, such as *mestizo* peasants and plantation workers in Latin America and, I would add, racially subjugated populations in many settings around the world. It is noteworthy that the latter category includes many indigenous peoples whose experience with racial oppression is too often glossed over. Ironically, the "Fourth Worldist" bias of so much of anthropology has limited the field's overall contributions to human rights. Fortunately, this limitation is currently being corrected as the predicaments and struggles of ethnic minorities and diasporic migrants–who are often relegated to racialized social locations—are being addressed (e.g., Basch *et al.* 1994, Cole 1997).

This trend, however, is rather new. For many years considerable numbers of cultural anthropologists assumed a devout "no-race" stance based on their

acceptance of the intellectual bankruptcy of biological concepts of race. A naive no-race position often resulted in a dearth of studies of *racism* and the socially constructed notions and experiences of race that have been an integral part of that system of oppression and domination with its sentiments, ideologies, practices, and material relationships (Harrison 1995). Even more recently, variations of a "no-racism" thesis have been articulated by anthropologists arguing in favor of color-blindness, a declining significance of race, or the rise of cultural fundamentalism (Custred 1998, Stolcke 1995). Some have even gone so far as to claim that "reverse racism" against white Americans is more dangerous and prevalent than conventional forms of racial discrimination which target blacks, natives, and Latinos (e.g., Custred 1998). The political implications and social consequences of legitimating such an argument can be deeply problematic for those who suffer from the injuries—both hidden and not at all hidden—of race. The erasure of race and racism from social analysis—and interrelated *policy* reformulation—presents a serious moral dilemma of which more anthropologists should be acutely cognizant.

Given the kinds of work that anthropologists do, they have helped to expand human rights discourse beyond its earlier emphasis on individual rights, specifically individuals' political and civil rights (Messer 1993:222). To this end, they have helped to clarify ideas about "rights" and to elucidate how the notion of "human" is conceived across a wide range of non-Western sociocultural contexts. Anthropologists have also contributed to human rights thinking and advocacy by providing poignant "ethnographic exposés" (Robotham, personal communication, April 24, 2000) that document the impact of human rights violations, and they assist in monitoring compliance with international standards. Anthropologists' varied involvement in human rights arenas has also had an important effect on the way they have come to re-conceptualize culture, power, development, and social change. It has also had an impact on their thinking about how they ought to exercise social responsibility as researchers and advocates. In other words, they have grown more conscious of the ethical and moral responsibilities they bear, particularly at this turn-of-the millennium juncture of globalization when human anxieties and conflicts over growing wealth disparities, subsistence security, environmental sustainability, and social/cultural/national identity are on the rise (Glick Schiller 1994, Friedman 1994, Nash 1994).

Since 1948 when the United Nations (UN) ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a proliferation of conventions, covenants, and conference reports have elaborated the substance and parameters of human rights standards, making them less Western-centered as human rights thinking has evolved. This evolution has taken place over four major stages or "generations" (Messer 1993). The *first generation of political and civil rights* was represented by the Universal Declaration itself, which was authored mainly by Western nations in the aftermath of World War II. In response to the limi-

tations of this generation of rights came a *second generation of socioeconomic and cultural rights,* largely from inputs from socialist and welfare state nations, which gave higher priority to the right to employment and fair working conditions, good health, and education. The special rights of women and children were also recognized. The *third generation of solidarity and development rights* emerged from the intervention of Third World countries, specifically African nation-states. According to their view, human rights should encompass the rights to peace, a more just socioeconomic system, and a sustainable environment. The addition of African voices to the UN conversation led to a rethinking of rights so that individual and collective rights are conceptualized in mutually reinforcing terms. Most recently a *fourth generation of indigenous rights* is emerging to defend rights to self-determination and control over economic resources and development. These are rights that are typically threatened within the framework of the state.

NEGOTIATING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS WHEN RESEARCHING RACISM

Embedded in the context of this general elaboration of human rights thinking and legal development over the past fifty years has been the specific evolution of thought and advocacy around matters of racial discrimination. In 1965, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Four years later, the Committee to Eliminate Racial Discrimination (CERD) was appointed to monitor and promote compliance with the international treaty. In recent years, British social anthropologist Michael Banton has served on that committee, whose workings and dilemmas he has documented (Banton 1996)**.** Banton's study, as well as other material on the UN's human rights system, indicates that ICERD and CERD have not received the degree of support, neither moral nor material, that they deserve. This is so despite an escalation of human rights offenses that implicate various forms of racial discrimination and violence—including cases in which race is an undercurrent of ethnic and religious conflict as well as those in which it is a visible, dominant current of inter-group tensions. Despite its intensification around the world, racism is still a relatively neglected issue in the UN human rights system when compared to a number of other human rights concerns, particularly gender and "women's rights as human rights." Racism's relatively low human rights profile is also evident in the recent resurgence of anthropological studies of race and racism in which human rights dimensions are not addressed in any explicit manner. Banton's work, which inspired this essay, is a conspicuous exception.

Racism is a global yet not a universal phenomenon. It emerged from historically specific conditions of European colonial expansion and the varying

modes of social/legal differentiation and politico-economic development that formed in that context of empire and its postcolonial legacies. In view of this history, culturally diverse racial orders can be found in varying degrees of crystallization in various parts of the formerly colonial world. Despite the reconstructive effects decolonization may have had, racism's scope remains extensive in part because of the powerful influence of Western—and specifically U.S.—hegemony and the worldwide circulation of meanings and norms anchored in a worldview and foreign policy that white supremacy continues to inform. As Robert Vitalis (2000) suggests, it is imperative that critical analysts of international relations work against the unspoken "norm against noticing" race.

Contemporary forms of racism range from heinous acts of violence and genocide to much more subtle expressions of "neo-racism" and "racism without races." There are also the more established racial orders (touted as "racial democracies"), such as those of Brazil and other parts of Latin America, in which "unmarked" varieties of racial stratification, closely intertwined with and displaced onto class, are reproduced through subtle ideological and cultural mechanisms of denial and social censorship. At least this is what some social scientists are claiming in instances where "race" is barely acknowledged and racism seems to have been reconfigured in new ways no longer reliant on traditional notions of biologized difference. Particularly in the age of new racism or even "post-racism," when broad segments of a society's public may not recognize the salience of race, and when the cultural logic in force erases race, how do anthropologists negotiate the outcome of "taking sides" between the cultures they study (namely the dominant forces within them as well as the common-sense views of research informants) or the international convention against racism that claims this oppression exists even when states and publics claim otherwise? What are the ethical and moral implications, and the social and political consequences, of anthropologists becoming cultural critics of social systems in which race is largely unmarked and ambiguously expressed by people who participate in our studies and unwittingly expose what seems to suggest racially correlated patterns of intense social suffering? At a juncture when racism is widely discredited as a heinous offense perpetrated "somewhere else but not in our country" or "in our home," and race is so often hidden as an undercurrent within complex intersections of culture, class, gender, and nation, how can anthropologists detect racism *per se* and feel any confidence that what they observe is not something else— cultural fundamentalism, ethnic conflict, or class oppression—that may warrant different strategies for dismantling and different terms for analyzing and theorizing? When anthropologists' accounts conflict with the folk theories of the societies and communities in which they do their research, how do they best negotiate that tension in an age in which their responsibility often involves making their results available to those who participated in the research

as well as to an even larger segment of that society's public sphere? How can anthropologists promote public education and consciousness-raising if a pervasive and adamant pattern of denial and cultural censorship is at work? How do they evaluate the outcome of those efforts, documenting both benefits and adverse effects? These questions, or others like them, also apply to anthropologists who take a post-racist rather than an anti-racist position, based on the assumption that racism is a thing of the past and has given way to color-blindness or cultural fundamentalism (Custred 1998). How do they come to assume and "know" this for sure? And what are the consequences of these ideas and ideological vantage if it turns out to be the case that racism is indeed persisting, yet evolving into forms that depend on what, at first glance, appears to be less offensive disguises? These are the sorts of questions, perhaps without any clear-cut answers, that at least some anthropologists may feel they have a moral and intellectual responsibility to ask and to try to answer as they engage in carefully designed and executed research that may have applications for projects of public education, advocacy, and social change.

That contemporary racism—which according to some political perspectives is heightening rather than declining—warrants anthropologists' critical attention and, depending on individual inclination, sociopolitical interventions is a claim that can be substantiated by an examination of the global sociocultural terrain, the human rights system, and models of change that inform advocacy within and beyond the UN. I argue that anthropologists interested in unraveling racism—both conceptually and politically—stand to gain from scrutinizing the human rights system, whose ideational and structural limitations must be understood before they can be overcome. Of potential significance is the contribution that anthropologists can make through their insights into the subtle logics of culture, power, and political economy operative in the local, national, and transnational agents and contexts that constitute the present-day structures of racial domination.

MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF RACIAL CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

A cursory glance at local, national, and international landscapes suggests that W.E.B. Du Bois' 1903 prophetic statement that the color line was the "problem of the 20th century" will also apply to the 21st (Du Bois 1990). Worldwide, flagrant forms of racism appear to be escalating in both Northern and Southern hemispheres. Right here in the United States, human rights media report the growing legitimation of a "racist police state." The acquittal of the four New York City policemen who killed unarmed Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in front of his own home sends the message that police are licensed to kill first and ask questions later if suspects fit the profiles of "dan-

gerous criminals," whose bodies tend to be racially marked. Racially and class-biased punitive policing is being reinforced at the same time that citizen militias and white-identity organizations are growing in force and influence from consolidation and the use of the Internet (Southern Poverty Law Center Report March 2000). Increasingly these hate groups are establishing links with neo-fascist groups in Europe.

Xenophobia and racial discrimination are also a growing problem in Europe. Punitive legislation and an increased incidence of hate crimes and police brutality are commonplace. Euro-racism has become so effectively mainstreamed that the right-wing Freedom Party was able to win enough electoral support to become part of the government coalition in Austria. Despite these troubling trends, Europe's racial climate is variegated. The extent to which immigrants, particularly Southern hemisphere or Third World immigrants, are viewed as menacing racial Others varies by patterns of economic development and political organization as well as by histories of emigration and immigration (e.g., Cole 1997).

Third World immigrants are not the only targets of racism in Europe. European minorities and ethnic contenders in nationalist struggles are also being defined in terms of racial difference. This is especially the case in Eastern Europe, where the level of economic and political insecurity has increased with post-Cold War realignments and restructuring. In the wake of communism's built-in safety nets, rising unemployment and widening disparities of income and wealth have engendered strong resentment against foreign students and estranged minorities such as the Roma, who are also classified as "non-white" (see "The Gypsies of Slovakia: Despised and Despairing," *New York Times*, April 3, 2000:A10). The militarization of nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia has created war zones in which boundaries are being contested through "ethnic cleansing." Differences once viewed as tolerable are now imagined as irreconcilable and threatening. The war over "nations" in Bosnia and Herzegovinia has reached the bodies of women and girls, whose "wombs of nationalist respectability" are violated through mass rape (B. Williams 1996:vii, Kexič 1996:51). Extending Hayden's argument I would say that, in this context, the raped body is a mark of racialization and a means of imposing a permanent partition between territories as well as two previously co-existing and symbiotically related peoples (Hayden 2000). In other words, rape inscribes irreconcilable differences onto human bodies as well as along the violently contested borders of imagined communities.

Campaigns of ethnic cleansing are also being inflicted upon peoples in other parts of the world. In Africa and Asia tensions ostensibly based on "tribalism," religious conflict, and ethnic and language differences have been subjected to racialization, or those social processes that engender racial identities or transform old ones. In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, were constructed around a concept of bi-

ological race, a discursive practice influenced ultimately by a Western world-view. The centrality of that idea, however, declined, and in more recent phases of identity construction religion and language have figured more prominently, with language having the most respectability (Daniel 1996:12). Despite its ambiguity and status as only an undercurrent, race remains part of the "unholy alliance … dividing the nation's citizens" (*ibid.*:15). Particularly among the more educated race has "an ugly face … and is granted open season only when things get really nasty" (*ibid.*), which is not uncommon (e.g., "Sri Lankan rebels claim to have seized base, killed 1,000 government troops," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, April 23, 2000:9).

In the African contexts of Rwanda and neighboring Burundi, inter-ethnic conflict between Tutsi and Hutus has reached genocidal proportions. Ethnic identities there came to be viewed as "opposed and unequal" (Gill 2000) by colonial administrators, who created rigid racial distinctions based on exaggerated phenotypic differences. While social distinctions were rationalized in terms of biology, the actual criterion for racial classification was related to property and mode of subsistence (de Waal 1994). Over time, Hutu resentment grew against the Tutsi, whose monarchy had collaborated with the Belgians during colonial times (Gourevitch 1998, Malkki 1995, de Waal 1994). Tensions between the two groups have heightened over the postcolonial period. The deepening of conflict has taken place in a context shaped by at least three interrelated conditions. First, both groups have invested themselves in the elaboration of mytho-histories in which their ethnic enemies are defined as "racial outsiders" (Malkki 1990). Secondly, civil society has virtually collapsed due, in good measure, to the destabilizing effects of structural adjustment programs and the collapse of the international coffee market. Finally, the globalization of the arms trade has promoted the massive importation of weapons and the consequent militarization of local conflict (Gill 2000:875; Rwanda: Thematic Reports, For the Record 1999, 2 www.hri.ca/fortherecord1999/vol2/rwandatr.htm). While globalization certainly does not nullify the culpability of domestic actors for their crimes against humanity, those actors make choices in historically specific contexts shaped by the vested interests of transnational capital. And as Banton has underscored, in the context of those larger agendas, inter-ethnic "tensions [acquire] additional savagery" (Banton 1996:96).

THE CHALLENGE OF DECODING UNMARKED RACISMS

The world's most heinous expressions of hate and violence co-exist with more subtle discourses and practices that, whether intended or unintended, (re)produce racialized subjects with complicit support from citizenries for whom racism, in the traditional sense, is discredited. In some Western Euro-

pean settings, the existence of "races" is commonly denied and difference is conceptualized in cultural terms (Stolcke 1995). Ahistorical, bounded notions of culture are ideological devices now *en vogue* for essentializing difference without resorting to biology. Some scholars claim that cultural fundamentalism only masks racism (Balibar 1991). Others argue that it represents a fundamental shift in the conceptual structure of difference-making in a post-race age (Stolcke 1995). Under conditions of both neo-racism (e.g., Balibar's [1991] characterization of France) and still-existing unmarked racism (such as many Latin American situations), race-evasiveness and cultural censorship (Sheriff 2000) operate to deny the significance or the existence of racism. Such devices also refract race on other, less objectionable categories of public debate—class, gender, or ethnicity—and hence contain the potential opposition to racial oppression (see also Cowlishaw 2000, Twine 1998). Because of this, a great deal of racial discrimination goes unreported and unpunished in Brazil despite the adoption of legislation outlawing racism (Davis 1999). The rare enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws has grave implications for remedying and preventing human rights violations. The effective censorship of anti-racist critiques, however, may be on the decline. A recent poll indicates that 93% of the people surveyed in Rio de Janeiro acknowledged the existence of racism in Brazil, with 74% of them admitting its pervasiveness (*Washington Post*, "Brazil's Racial Awakening," by Stephen Buckley, June 12, 2000:A12).

United States racism has been "paradigmatic" in the eyes of the most of the world. As Smedley has argued, one of the most rigid, systematic forms of racial stratification developed in this North American context. Today, there appears to be a discursive trend to "unmark" race and place a more visible mark on notions of culture and class. Paradoxically, this is occurring alongside an escalation of hate crimes and a resurgence of arguments—promoted by research sponsored by conservative philanthropy—that biologize intelligence, class mobility, athletic performance, and violent crime (e.g., Herrnstein and Murray 1994). Historically, class has hidden behind race and gender in public discourses that foster a myth of classnessless in which any man (especially any white man) can pull himself up by his bootstraps into the middle class. In the current political climate some neo-conservatives are advancing a language of color-blindness that displaces race upon class. This rhetoric is most vocal in struggles over affirmative action, whose constitutionality has been dismantled in California and Texas—two of the country's most multiracial states in which white demographic predominance and majority status are declining (Harrison 1998a). The de-legitimization of affirmation action opposes the policy of the UN Commission on Human Rights, whose 1995 report on the human rights situation in the U.S. recommended that "affirmative action programs be revitalized" (http://www.hri.ca/uninfo/anchr95/americ_e.shtml).

Ironically, in a society in which an ideology of classnessness and meritocratic individualism has long prevailed, neo-conservative ideologues appro-

priate and "whiten" class in arguing in favor of privileging the frustrated socioeconomic goals of upwardly mobile whites over those of racially oppressed groups in the ways that access to educational and employment opportunities is being restructured. "Deserving individuals" are pitted against undeserving "special interest groups"; and white people's experience of "class" is seen as a fairer criterion for policy-mediated benefits than race or gender, despite the cumulative disadvantages that still accompany these latter social distinctions. Moreover, in this narrow meritocratic perspective, the injuries of class that whites bear are seen to be more significant than the race-specific impediments of class that racial minorities experience in health, education, employment, and the accumulation of net assets or wealth. In other words, the multiplicative effects of race, class, and gender intersections are marginalized on the political landscape despite social scientists' growing awareness of their significance.

The current backlash against race-cognizant policies in the U.S. is taking shape in a context of economic restructuring and political realignment. These processes are extensions of shifts occurring at the global level with the accelerated mobility of capital, labor, and information across national boundaries. As the only surviving superpower in the post–Cold War era, the U.S. has enormous power and influence in the world. Consequently, its culture of race, whether expressed through foreign policy or international communications media, has a global impact. The U.S. also plays a leading role in setting, and limiting, the terms of human rights in accordance with American interests, which are the interests of a capitalist democracy. The United States' human rights record leaves a great deal to be desired. While it signed the United Nation's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1966, its instrument of accession was not submitted until twenty-eight years later, and it has just submitted its first report (http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/cerd_report/cerd_toc.htm) in September 2000. What Michael Banton (1996:247) has characterized as the U.S.'s "grudging attitude towards an international movement against a major evil" is an integral feature of the global racial landscape for which anthropological inquiries and analyses must account.

NEW TRENDS IN CRITICAL STUDIES OF RACE AND RACISM

Interest in contemporary racism has grown in recent years (Harrison 1995). With the publication of Eric Wolf's monumental *Europe and the People without History* came an important elucidation of the difference between ethnicity and race, a difference that had been blurred for many years before then. In his analysis of global capitalism's inherent tendency to differentiate and segment, Wolf noted that ethnicity and race have disparate structural and expe-

riential outcomes, with race being associated with forced exclusion, stigmatized labor, and other types of dehumanization. Since that seminal work, which led the way out of naive "no-race-just-ethnicity" postures, more recent cultural analysis has examined race and ethnicity as distinct but closely interrelated dimensions of identity formation in projects of imagining, building, and contesting nations (Williams 1989). Theoretical innovations crafted largely by black and Latina feminists shed important light on race's embeddedness in a broader matrix of domination in which multiple axes of inequality and power—among them class, gender, ethnicity, and nation—intersect in mutually reinforcing yet contradictory ways (Collins 1990, Mullings 1997, Zavella 1993).

Studies on race as a social construct and material relation have proliferated in response to the escalation of racial identities and tensions around the world. Analyses of the complex dynamics of culture and power suggest that race's increasing volatility is occurring at a moment when the world system has grown more tightly integrated in ways that are producing more flexible capital accumulation, wider social and life expectancy disparities, a reconcentration of wealth in the hands of small numbers of human beings, and a decline in subsistence security and environmental integrity for most of humanity (Friedman 1994, Glick Schiller 1994, Nash 1994). Declining economic security and increased social anxiety, precipitated by unfair market mandates from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO), perhaps provide the widest context for the escalating tensions that are leading to the scapegoating of strangers as racial Others.

Modes of inquiry attentive to both qualitative and quantitative concerns are particularly helpful for shedding light on the contemporary spectrum of racisms, particularly those otherwise hidden from view or socially censored within public discourses. The ability to excavate beneath surface appearances, to discern marked and unmarked varieties of social distinction, to expose what is hidden behind smokescreens, and to unravel complex entanglements of inequality to ascertain *race* is demonstrated in recent studies of racism. This new body of research, much of it ethnographic, accomplishes the following things. It decodes unstable racial meanings, including those within subtexts. It analyzes different kinds of racial discourse, from explicit hate language to covert language whose effectiveness is accomplished by indirect indexes or widely understood but never directly articulated nonreferential meanings. Finally, it sheds light on racializing practices that give rise to new racial identities or reconfigure old ones within historicized contexts of culture, power, and political economy. Wherever there is confusion over what racism is or is not—whether in academic research, public debate within nation-states, or the deliberations within the UN human rights system—that confusion can be reduced by critical social analysis grounded in both advocacy and a concern for the lived experience of everyday racism, including the ambiguous and unmarked varieties.

In view of these accomplishments, anthropologists and other social scientists have at their disposal invaluable tools with which to promote understanding of the racialized lines of conflict and war that can be witnessed across the globe. Moreover, if they are so inclined, they can contribute to the human rights of racially subjugated peoples more directly by supporting the goals and objectives of the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), a treaty implemented by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). CERD is currently organizing the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which will be held in South Africa in 2001. That year the International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance will be observed as part of the UN's effort to build up momentum for combating racism.

ANTI-RACISM IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

According to Messer, human rights can be defined as "the reasonable demands for personal security and basic well-being that all individuals can make on the rest of humanity by virtue of their being members of the species *Homo sapiens*" (Messer 1993: 222; see also Downing and Kushner 1988). The human rights concept that the UN advocates is based on a combination of natural law, political principles, national and international law, and humanitarian accords. This concept "acknowledges that in all times and places, reasonable people, regardless of political affiliation, demand certain minimum standards of behavior by governments toward their citizens" (Messer 1993:222). Generally, the basic idea of human rights is accepted widely; however, there has been a great deal of disagreement over "which rights have universal force and who is protected under them" (Messer 1993:223), and which culprits should be made accountable. Furthermore, Messer notes that "different rights take precedence in different cultures," especially under stressful conditions. An example can be found in the divergent ways that the U.S. and Cuba assess human rights. According to the U.S., Cuba's human rights situation is a major problem because of the absence of political freedom as it is understood in the U.S. However, as a result of the revolution, Cuba has a social system in which employment, education, and health services are widely available to all, which is drastically different from the circumstances of most other countries in the Caribbean region, where some form of democracy may be practiced (e.g., the English-speaking Caribbean), but stark disparities exist and large segments of the population suffer from abject poverty. Universal access to employment, education, and health care is also non-

existent in so-called advanced countries like the U.S., where "savage" inequalities prevail in education, housing, and health.

In the mid-1960s, when anti-colonialist sentiment was strong and international opposition to South African apartheid growing, the UN General Assembly adopted ICERD (1965), a treaty among states which, with the appointment of CERD, took effect in 1969. At the time of its ratification, ICERD was widely accepted as a mandate. That broad-based consensus, however, reflected the ratifying states' limited understanding of racism. As Banton (1996) explains it, that unanimity of support emerged because the Convention was treated as an expression of solidarity and an instrument of foreign rather than domestic policy. For the most part, the signatories understood racial discrimination to be "characteristic of states other than their own" (Banton 1996:vii). In their eyes, the mandate referred to situations like Nazi Germany during World War II or, more immediately, the situation in South Africa. There was confusion about what constituted racial discrimination beyond the paradigmatic cases (e.g., apartheid and Jim Crow), and there was strong resistance to applying the Convention to the predicament of indigenous peoples. Over the past thirty years, CERD's work has shed light on the wide range of contemporary forms of racism around the world and the struggle it has undertaken in promoting ICERD's principles.

CERD's responsibility is to implement ICERD by monitoring states' compliance with the Convention and by deciding on appropriate remedial and preventive measures in those states. Once states commit themselves to the treaty, they are required to submit reports every two years on their implementation of the Convention's provisions. These reports are reviewed by the committee, which consists of 18 individuals elected by the states. After evaluating the reports submitted to it, CERD then issues its own report with recommendations to the UN General Assembly. This report may also include information received from a variety of other sources, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grievances from individuals and groups within those signatory states that have agreed to have the committee review such petitions.

CERD's work is complicated by the fact that states parties do not necessarily live up to their legal obligations. If they are submitted at all, reports are often not submitted on time, and those that are submitted frequently reveal that articles of the Convention have not been met.

As already stated, the U.S. has been one of the uncooperative states. Venezuela has been another difficult case. In its ninth report, submitted in 1989, it claimed it did not need to comply with the Convention's articles, because racial discrimination did not exist there (Banton 1996:2). The Venezuelan representative presenting the report argued that Venezuelans are "egalitarian by nature and [abhor] all forms of discrimination." After this statement was made, there was an extensive discussion on what constituted racial discrimination and the obligations of the state to create and exercise remedies. In the

committee's view, indigenous peoples and migrants in cities were victims of racism. Even though Venezuela claimed to have domestic policies favorable to its indigenous population, CERD raised several issues that pointed to the probable workings of racism. These included the negative effects of oil drilling in one region, reports of torture in a particular locality, a development project's adverse impact on indigenous communities, colonists' expropriation of indigenous land, and the practices of international religious groups that force native Venezuelans to relinquish their traditional culture (*ibid*.). The tendency to erase racism from the domestic landscape has been exhibited in many of the cases CERD has reviewed (*ibid*.:33).

CERD is a part of a wider structure of treaty bodies and charter-based units such as the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), which is a subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council (Banton 1996:142). CERD works especially closely with the CHR's Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Some of the objectives for which CERD has been responsible are now being parceled out to new treaties designed to elaborate the terms of human rights for indigenous peoples and for migrant workers and their families. While the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People is being written and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is being ratified, CERD promotes their objectives and includes them in its plans for the World Conference of 2001.

CERD and the broader structure of UN human rights bodies are embedded in an even wider network of human rights advocacy in which there are government commissions, NGOs, and an extensive range of national and international organizations. Besides the widely known Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Minority Rights Group, which specializes in fighting ethnic/racial discrimination, there are countless grassroots advocacy organizations, research/action centers, and inter-government agencies. A brief look at just a few web sites shows that human rights discourse is multivocal and marked by differences of view over priorities and strategies.

HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES ON RACISM

Whether or not they work within an explicit human rights framework or formal human rights organizations, anthropologists and other social scientists have, nonetheless, contributed useful evidence and perspectives on human rights. Social analysts and critics concerned with unraveling racism would benefit from examining the human rights system and the evidence it provides on racial discrimination. The human rights system generates documentation on a range of contemporary racisms, on means of combating them, and on the anatomy and dynamics of the human rights system itself and its capacity—

and the limits on that capacity—to bring about meaningful change at varying levels. Critically engaging this information can enhance anthropologists' understanding of racism as well as encourage a dialogue that could stimulate the constructive rethinking of strategies and tactics for reducing racism.

In light of the legal status and international legitimacy of the UN's well-meaning instruments, procedures and processes of enforcement need to be critically examined, building on and going beyond the important precedent Banton has set in his work. The reduction of racial discrimination will entail a serious confrontation with the formidable forces that limit the UN's effectiveness—especially at a moment in history when the sovereignty of states, particularly peripheral states, and inter-state bodies is giving way to transnationalism. The larger issues in this struggle need to be illuminated and explicated so that more effective strategies can be devised to unravel and penetrate the broader nexus of structural power within which the UN is contained.

CERD, the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), and other bodies depend on the expertise of activists, lawyers, legal scholars, and social scientists for the descriptive reports and analyses they produce. The contents of the best of these documents may warrant their being exposed to audiences well beyond the UN, including those social scientists whose future research objectives could be richly informed by human rights perspectives. The usefulness of the information produced within the human rights system—both as data and as social analysis—is an indication of the mutual benefits that would accrue from an ongoing dialogue between anthropologists and advocates (who, by the way, are frequently one and the same, rather than distinct categories).

A rich source of information on human rights situations around the world is the UN-based *For the Record 1999*: *The Human Rights System*. This web site (www.hri.ca/fortherecord/) presents thematic reports that include summaries of and links to the complete reports that the Special Rapporteur, working groups, and independent experts have submitted to various human rights bodies. In one interesting report, an independent expert cites "research indicating that the genocide [in Rwanda] was largely attributed by the international media to 'ethnicity,' but part of the blame could be put on the economic policies of the IMF and the World Bank, which removed all official economic safety nets and left the Rwandan economy in shambles after the collapse of the international coffee market in the late 1980s" ("Structural adjustment programmes," E/CN.4/1999/50, paragraph 83, 132). This report obviously draws on, and contributes to, a body of social research on the local impacts of neoliberal policies such as structural adjustment. The report presents a fairly comprehensive view informed by both qualitative and quantitative data, although there is greater emphasis on the latter. The report may be useful for substantiating and extending ethnographic research that has yielded similar results. Ethnography as a mode of inquiry can be an important complement to econometric and sociological studies, which rarely illuminate the lived ex-

periences of ordinary people, whose every day lives are more easily accessible through intensive fieldwork. Perhaps more powerfully than other strategies of investigation, fieldwork can elucidate the structural violence of development and market (de)regulation that make some people more vulnerable to social suffering and human rights abuse than others. Anthropologists are among those producing "ethnographic exposés" that zoom in on how neoliberal policies of global integration are restructuring economies at the cost of social and economic justice (e.g., Deere 1990, Harrison 1997).

An important trend in critical race studies is the analysis of racial inequality's intersections with other stratifications and hierarchies. The dynamics of interlocking inequalities—in which multiple axes of power and discrimination such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and age are complexly entangled—are addressed unevenly across the human rights system. Beyond CERD and the committees and sub-commissions that focus on minorities, the racial dimensions of the human rights plight of women, children, refugees, and indigenous populations are only mentioned in passing. In some literature these connections are altogether denied. In a book on hate crimes, a chapter on street children in a Latin American context broaches the question of "race," but concludes that class is more significant, a view consistent with public discourses of racial democracy and *mestizaje* (Kelly and Maghan 1998). However, according to a Minority Rights International report, most street children, in Brazil at least, are of African descent (Davis 1999). These youngsters are targets of the vicious "social cleansing" that police and mercenaries—often Afro-Brazilians themselves–are openly perpetrating, typically without being disciplined and punished by the state. Not surprisingly, Brazil's report to the UN on children's rights is seven years overdue. A controversial massacre of street children on the streets of Rio de Janeiro in 1993 resulted in the acquittal of the men put on trial (www.cnn.com/WORLD/9612/10/brazil.acquittal/). The intersection of class, race, and age constitutive of this massacre and homeless Afro-Brazilian children's social suffering is frequently missed in reportage and in advocacy.

The interaction between race and gender has received considerably more attention. In a 1999 report of the Special Rapporteur on Racial Discrimination the importance of integrating gender into the entire human rights system, and not segregating it in women-specific bodies, is acknowledged. The rapporteur observes that racially subjugated women bear the brunt of a "double discrimination" and face a gender-specific racism that "prevents [them] from…exercising their fundamental rights" (Racism & Racial Discrimination, *For the Record* 1999 (www.hri.ca/fortherecord1999/vol1/racism.htm).

Feminist analysis, including the work that feminist anthropologists (e.g., Mullings, 1997) have contributed, has yielded an important corpus of research on gender's location within multiple stratifications and a complex matrix of domination. Such work can be a useful source for both advocates and

scholars interested in addressing the cross-cutting of human rights issues and categories of protected populations. Perhaps this objective will more likely be met when advocates and the researchers understand more about how women, particularly in the South or Third World, become "paradigmatic racial subjects" (Ong 1991:289) whose labor and sexuality are exploited in a world system in which females are a new colonial frontier for capital accumulation (Mies 1988).

Another bundle of intersections that human rights documentation illuminates is that among racial formation, indigenous rights, subsistence security, environmental justice, and sustainable development. The conflict between indigenous rights and the development goals of transnational corporations, national elites, and states is being documented in anthropological analysis as well as in accounts exposing human rights offenses. Just a year ago press releases from Human Rights Watch and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People reported that international oil companies such as Shell, along with the Nigerian military regime, are responsible for the persecution, economic deprivation, and ethnoracial "othering" of the Ogoni people. The regional landscape of Ogoniland has been contaminated and denuded by oil spills and petrochemical pollution (mosopgb@hotmail.com communiqué, "Continue the Boycott of Shell Oil, Nov. 12, 1999). According to the MSOP, the government and Shell "declared war" against the Ogoni, whose villages were burnt and people massacred. An international controversy erupted over the execution of writer and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was hanged in spite of international appeals for his life.

In reporting this case, Human Rights Watch emphasized the importance of corporate responsibility in resolving the crisis. This position led Human Rights Watch to go beyond the statist bias of most human rights thinking, which revolves around the responsibility of states in protecting and enforcing citizens' or migrants' rights. A recent UN report on Nigeria continues to focus attention on state responsibility, but government accountability is situated within a more complicated structure of culpability. Hence, the report recommends that Shell along with MSOP be "consulted" by the independent agency appointed to investigate the environmental damage caused by oil exploitation (www.hri.ca/fortherecord1999/vol2/nigeriachr.htm).

Because of cases like this, more advocates are arguing for an "all rights guaranteed, all actors accountable" policy to challenge "the impunity with which many 'inter-state', 'non-state,' and 'other state' actors violate the rights of individuals and peoples worldwide" (Grahame Russell in "Broadening the Definition of Human Rights," http://www.twnside.org.sg/). According to this position, other rights violations warranting investigation include the "systemic and systematic violations of overlapping political, social and economic rights–poverty" (*ibid.*). Poverty is a form of structural violence that kills more people worldwide than "wars, repressive governments and armed movements" (*ibid.*)

This lethal outcome is derived not only from hunger and famine, but also from the political repression with which poverty has an organic relationship. When poor people protest, the state and private actors commonly respond with repression. International economic actors, such as the IMF, the WTO (World Trade Organization), and Northern government aid programs also perpetrate structural violence when they reduce governments' (especially peripheral governments') ability to protect rights to health, education, and basic work standards in their efforts to protect corporate rights. When the latter are elevated above human need, human rights are undermined.

Recent anthropological trends of "studying up" (Nader 1972) and following flows of culture, commodities, and power—particularly structural power (Wolf 1990)—shed useful light on ordinary folk's everyday negotiations of globalization and their exercise of human agency against the grain of dehumanizing discrimination and repression. In building upon these important trends, social scientists should commit themselves to an even closer and more critical scrutiny of international agents and the organizational and structural power they mobilize. As social researchers accomplish this objective, they will shed better light on the sites where constructive, race-cognizant agency might be more effectively mobilized.

Anthropologists constitute one set of voices in a multivocal human rights system. Their contribution to human rights is often informed by the results of their ethnographic projects. However, the "thick description" that ethnography affords is insufficient in making a real difference (Ortner 1998:433). Drawing upon Ortner's argument concerning anthropology's role in the "here and now" world of "public culture," I submit that social research methodologies always interact, either explicitly or implicitly, with theory. Ortner conceptualizes theory as the "competing bigger pictures of how things are 'really' put together (regardless of what the natives say) and why" (Ortner 1998:436). The elements of theory—concepts, metaphors, models, and accounts offering interpretive frames for making sense of evidence— allow social analysts to "map the world in a way that [they] can understand the relationship" among various kinds of claims, from ethnographic to the official reports of governments and UN bodies. When anthropologists and other social researchers understand how different modes of inquiry interact within this larger web of knowledge claims, they are better able to invest their energies in building cooperation and a mutually beneficial coalition among the various knowledges and those who produce them.

It is hoped that this coalition of knowledges and mobilizations will include at least some theorizing bold enough to do more than map the world as it has been and as it is now. There is also a need to imagine a potentially viable alternative to existing social orders. According to anthropologist Donald Robotham, theory should propose an alternative to established political-economic configurations, and that alternative should inspire people to mobi-

lize. Although "ethnographic exposés" offer compelling "opposition and exposition," they rarely provide the substance and promise of theory, conceptualized in this manner (discussant remarks at New York Academy of Sciences lecture, "Confronting Racism as a Human Rights Problem," by Faye V. Harrison, April 24, 2000).

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The UN system is observing its Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination after the principal objectives of the two earlier decades have remained largely unmet. Despite the fact that racism is "showing signs of increase," little support has been shown for the Third Decade (UN General Assembly Resolutions for Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, February 1999). The Trust Fund for the decade's Program of Action is insufficient, due to the lack of success in raising monies and cultivating adequate levels of interest and commitment. The UN General Assembly as well as CERD and other bodies are troubled by this state of affairs and, hence, have intensified their concerted effort to galvanize support for the present decade as well as the international conference being planned to mark it.

Within the UN system, legal and educational measures are the key means of combatting racism and all other human rights problems. CERD's objective, despite its relative lack of success, has been to remedy volatile situations before they escalate to the point where military "peacekeeping" intervention is necessary. The Program of Action for the third decade, consistent with CERD's objectives, has given priority to:

- encouraging governments "to adapt legislative, administrative, and educational and information fields" to the objectives of the Convention;

- encouraging "mass media to promote ideas of non-discrimination, respect, tolerance, and understanding among peoples and between different cultures";

- inviting UNESCO (UN Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization) "to expedite the preparation of teaching materials and teaching aids to promote teaching and educational activities on human rights and racism and racial discrimination, with particular emphasis on activities at the primary and secondary levels of education";

- encouraging the development of human rights education over the Internet to offset the proliferation of cyberacism (hate sites), and encouraging governments "to consider the problems associated with freedom of expression" (www.hri.ca/fortherecord1999/vol1/racism.htm).

Banton concludes his analysis of ICERD and CERD with the following reflection on the prerequisites of change:

> Effective implementation of a human-rights convention like ICERD depends upon a triangular relationship between the states parties, the treaty body, and members of the public within the states parties. In a democratic society the state needs the support of its citizenry to carry through its policies, and the public needs to keep the pressure upon the politicians to see that the state fulfils its obligations. The relationship between the state and the citizenry has to be mediated through the press (Banton :318).

Perhaps consistent with a social—rather than *cultural*—anthropological emphasis, in the manner in which Banton envisions change, there is no explicitly expressed role for culture, and underlying cultural logics or grammars, in mediating the relationship between the state and its publics. An important locus of negotiation and struggle over meanings, feelings, norms, and practices, culture can at once promote and present obstacles to the social process that Banton describes of citizens' holding their state accountable to its laws and legal commitments to UN conventions, such as ICERD. Brazil is a case in point. To its credit, it has a domestic law criminalizing racial discrimination; yet the law is inadequately enforced because "few cases [ever] come to court" (Davis 1999:27). Robin Sheriff's ethnographic research reveals the pervasive pattern of cultural censorship that silences voices which might otherwise speak up against the persistent power of Brazil's racial inequality. She argues that silence does not stem from a lack of knowledge or political consciousness. To the contrary, it is an index of power and a psychological defense especially among the racially oppressed who, she argues, practice silence

> as a form of dissent and defense … against the invasion of deeply wounding ideologies into the private and sequestered spaces of the family and the community. In … "forgetting" about racism, [the *favelados* Sheriff studied] collectively contain the crippling effects that the constant narration of assault and humiliation might very well produce (Sheriff 2000:125).

The double-edged sword of silence, the extermination of children, the routine brutality young black men face in their interactions with the police, and, the classroom indignities school children often experience when they are silenced and disciplined with racist language denigrating blackness and its ideological correlation with intellectual inferiority, are just a few examples of how insidious racism can be in a country where racial democracy and carnival (based on the appropriation of black images and an African-Brazilian aesthetic) have been glorified. Offsetting this problematic picture, however, is the important cultural and political work that anti-racist activists and NGOs are doing against the grain of the established logic of cultural processes. These projects are attempting to create possibilities for substantive change.

The political culture and the cultural politics of citizen participation are usually more complicated than what is suggested by established models of democratization and change, including the model implied in CERD's recommendations. It is important that anthropologists participate in conversations that stretch the limits and expand the terms of those models and the strategies for directed change that derive from them. To stimulate change, activist and activist intellectuals need

> to penetrate beneath the surface of ignorance and knowledge to educate and enculturate against the very cultural logic of the manner in which ordinary people feel, think, speak, and live their everyday lives. …We … need to … develop methodologies for teaching people how to unlearn old lifeways in order to learn—and collaboratively create—a new culture for multiracial democracy. …[We need] to help develop tools for promoting a nonracist society by identifying the often subtle mechanisms through which racial hegemony and privilege can be either perpetuated or broken down in discursive practices, education … labor market dynamics, mortgage lending, patterns of economic development, and many other spheres in which "race" is continuously being made and remade (Harrison 1998:612).

Our discussions on models and strategies should consider the possible effects that unintended consequences, resistance, and backlashes may have on policies and programs for toleration. For example, does the current opposition to affirmative action in the U.S. indicate that policy's ineffectiveness or bankruptcy? Or does it indicate its relative effectiveness and the threat that even modest "racial progress" (e.g., the expansion and consolidation of minority middle classes) can represent to socially frustrated whites? Is political viability, which shifts with social climate and is subject to political orchestration, a criterion that should override that of social and economic justice?

These conversations should also enable activist intellectuals to think through and beyond the limits of triangular models, like Banton's, that erase from the landscape of social change forms of agency that operate above the sovereignty of states. In the age of transnationalism, can anti-racists be effective without overcoming the limitations of statist norms whose expectations of states, particularly weak peripheral states, may no longer be, or have never been, tenable? Currently, some human rights thinking acknowledges the role of corporations and other supra-national institutions in exacerbating the circumstances within which racial conflict is heightened; however, strategies for redressing the transnational character of economic injustice are still undertheorized and underdeveloped. Nonetheless, recent mass demonstrations against the WTO and the IMF signal that social justice activists are experimenting with ways of mobilizing and making strategic links at the local, national, and global levels. At this juncture of global integration—with disjuncture and dysfunction as consequences for many economically precarious communities—politics and social action cannot remain the "same-old

same-old." They must adapt to the historically specific conditions of late- and post-modernity.

Anthropologists interested in working for social change must do both "homework" (Williams 1995) and "fieldwork" for promoting change that contributes to dismantling racism. The collective struggle for this change can and will take place on multiple fronts of action—ranging from the government, the UN, NGOs, grassroots organizations, university campuses, and professional associations. These various sites may not be equivalent in their potential for effecting change, particularly the kind that affects targets of structural power such as transnational corporations and a superpower's domestic and foreign policies. However, more adequate models of and for change should suggest—and if possible explicitly point to—ways to link disparate sites of struggle according to principles of an overarching strategic plan (Roger Sanjek, personal communication, April 24, 2000). A plan of strategic action would, like "theory" in Ortner's and Robotham's visions, map relationships among and across multiple fronts and knowledges. Such a theoretically informed map could lead the way to new possibilities for building coalitions motivated by shared visions of an alternative world. Perhaps in concerted efforts to materialize that imagined human community, the persistent power of racism will eventually subside. At a time when leading social analysts (e.g., Winant 1994) assert that racism is permanent, will at least some anthropologists committed to anti-racist praxis accept the moral responsibility to help work toward making a more optimistic dream come true?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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