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Ethical procedures? A critical intervention: The sacred, the profane, and the planet

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Abstract

Issues relating to ethical clearance, how these procedures relate to very different ontologies, ways of making sense, conditions of existence, and the ideological implications thereof are critically discussed. Written as an invited intervention, the author takes readers through a variety of paradigms: indigenous approaches involving the sacred and the profane, instrumentalisation of research; multispeciesism and research as a lived practice. Comments are offered on the nature of science and some questions are posed on the contradictions of ethical practices that readers encounter. The method is eclectic, read through a Peirceian pragmatism, and the outcome proposes relationality rather than the inevitability of discrete findings. Some conclusions are offered on the geographical distribution of populations sampled.

Keywords

Ethical clearance; indigenous methods; multispeciesism; fieldwork, pragmatism

Introduction

In this invited multifaceted intervention, the first section sketches the terrain of the debate. The second section, The Sacred, discusses the kinds of fieldwork scenarios with which many CEAD members are probably already familiar but who are unfamiliar in the dominant positivist paradigm. My method here is Peirceian (1931–1958) semiotics, which I hope to have incorporated accessibly. The third section highlights Multispeciesism and the human enslavement of other animals and the environment as mere commodities, a key factor in human-instigated climate change. Some brief comments comprise the fourth section, The Biomedical Talking Cure, which disaggregates therapy from science. The fifth section, The Profane, highlights the instrumentalisation of research practices and how these contribute to symbolic loss. By this I am referring to the one-size-fits-all ethical clearance template that fails to distinguish the biomedical ethics model from the needs of 'science' (however defined) though the two can be responsibly conjoined (see Macer 2008). The sixth segment, The Disconnect, Research Methods as Lived Practice, asks some questions about which editors, authors and readers of this journal might consider. The conclusion, Implicit Geographies, comments briefly on where and on

whom (psychological) research is done. Readers are then invited to respond and add new avenues of discussion in future numbers of the journal. These can include descriptions of unique experiences not easily dealt with by conventional ethical assumptions and procedures.

This intervention is intentionally episodic, requiring conceptual and experiential leaps, exposing avenues that enable readers to enter and exit in terms of their own sensuous encounters in the field, in the academy and in their own lives. My aim is to interrupt the textbook taken-for-granteds and to deconstruct beguiling institutional review board (IRB[i]) assumptions about the nature of fieldwork. In my own experience, on which I unashamedly draw in responding to my very challenging and perhaps contentious brief, I have concluded that theory is often a culprit in the generation of paradigm fundamentalisms when applied without reference to the evidentiary and the sensory and how these dimensions are accessed through method (see Tomaselli and Shepperson 2003). A common template that incorporates both ethnography and experimental methods (amongst other approaches) cannot be generated. Rather, the journal aims to examine issues, contexts and administrative responses, thereby to generate ongoing critical discussions that might take us here, there and everywhere (see e.g., Descola 2013). Hopefully, we might learn something along the way and to move on together in whichever ways are the most appropriate to our respective research tasks. I hope thus to unsettle discussion as nothing, despite appearances, is ever actually static, especially now that President Donald Trump[ii] is trumpeting a post-truth world while actually returning the globe to older anti-environmentalist, geopolitical and religious boundaries and associated nationalist tensions that pit inward-looking populists against globalising elites.

This intervention does not offer clear solutions, but rather signposts issues that I have myself raised over the course of my documentary filmmaking and research careers—which have been multidisciplinary, both qualitative and quantitative, also involving surveys, action and activist research and auto- and sensuous-ethnographies. Hopefully, readers will be able to negotiate the intervention in terms of their own encounters with economies and bureaucracies of research administration (see, e.g., Dash 2007; Holland 2007). Let me be clear from the outset, I am not hostile to ethical clearance procedures but I do critically engage assumptions that impede the kinds of work done by field researchers and ethnographers.

1.   The issue: Ethics

> Authors must make available all necessary formal and documented ethical approval from an appropriate research ethics committee, including evidence of anonymity and informed consent from the individuals and groups studied, if appropriate.

This was the original draft formulation proposed for the journal, *The Ethnographic Edge,* circulated to Editorial Board members. My immediate response was that not every article will require ethical approval, and not every university has such procedures in place, and not every procedure is, in fact, ethical. Not every group or individual will sign written consent forms, but they may likely consent to research participation via other culturally appropriate mechanisms (on voice recording, writing in the sand, verbally, via communal organisations etc.) Some groups and individuals insist that they are

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[i] IRB is just one description of what are called in the different contexts: i) ethics clearance committees, ii) research ethics committees or panels, and so on.

[ii] See Kurt E. Dongoske, 13 January 2017, http://ethics.americananthro.org/ethical-responsibility-in-the-face-of-the-incoming-administration/ This intervention draws on a number of AAA blogs as these are the sites where day-to-day conditions, concerns and experiences are offered almost-in-the raw, before they are theoretically sanitised for publication in peer-reviewed journals. They thus provide helpful *in situ* ways of dealing with contradictions and ethical and research administration challenges.

properly identified and acknowledged in academic work, that is, they do not necessarily want anonymity or to be considered as mere data fodder. The wishes of those with whom we work should be thus taken into account where possible. The issues are trust, mutual benefit and efficient collaboration.

Problems occur when bio-medical ethical models are imposed on anthropologists and post-positivist scholars working in the field; or when self-appointed gatekeepers opportunistically insert themselves between researchers and research participants; or when organisations claim jurisdiction over the right of adult individuals or researchers to make their own respective choices. There is a growing critique of some ethical clearance assumptions that some of these more instrumentalist models might be disrespectful of research participants and sometimes of the researchers also (see Tomaselli 2016).[iii]

The regulatory impulses are multifaceted, now spanning state, institution, community and individual hurdles. The increasing layers add to the instrumentalisation of research as a process, and the endistancing of researchers from their research participants and from themselves also (see Stanley 2017, 149). This alienation is especially worrisome for researchers doing lived research (see Mboti 2012)

2.   The sacred

Some field anthropologists in Southern Africa are of the opinion that ethnographers are facing an unclear future. As it is, after over a hundred years of intense and often traumatising self-reflexive critique, anthropology is still often unprepared for what is found in the field; for what is found can fail to conform with that for which researchers are intellectually prepared (see Stoller 1984; Stanton 2000). Few disciplines have the capacity to make sense of the scientifically unexplainable, the conceptually unintelligible, or the unimaginable. And byzantine and culturally insensitive ethical procedures are increasingly confining academics to doing sanitised desk research, over-relying on already-published work, written in past when fieldwork was much more flexible and do-able.

Anthropology and cognate disciplines, however, are uniquely placed in making sense of hidden transcripts in respectful and responsible ways. Literature and the study of the uncanny offers another genre, while science fiction portends science fact. One could cite the counter-instantiation of Arthur C Clarke's (1962) Third Law of Science that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic". In this case, the "technology" cannot distinguish between magic and "something else" that (perhaps) gets unlocked in ritual. Consequently, there will be no 'law' in terms of which to 'explain' what happened. Some might question causation, as with the extraordinary events described by some filmmakers who were certainly part of their respective experiences and subsequent interpretations (see, e.g., Stoller 1992; Tomaselli 2014). Descriptive accounts should not be summarily dismissed simply because they sound or look like magic or because they do not fit scientific categories. The question should be rather directed at the inability of academic discourse to explain these events other than in terms of magic, voodoo or the occult, although the occult as an analytical frame is now making a metaphorical comeback thanks to the Comaroffs (1999) and others. Cartesian-derived analytical methods as required by some IRBs cannot *explain*, let alone acknowledge, the scientifically unthinkable or the para-normal or even the unexpected but researchers and film makers can *describe* manifestations of them.

The resulting idea in Jean Rouch's anthropology of the 1920s was that of 'ethnographic surreality' where the observer becomes part of the organic patterns, movements and possessions of rituals and other kinds of ceremonies celebrating the mystical, painting these on film or other media. Or surreality

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[iii] See also Anonymous, http://ethics.americananthro.org/joining-someone-elses-research-project-check-their-ethics-protocol/

might be a response to oppression, colonialism and offer rituals for intercultural ontological negotiation, social curing and group therapy; thereby re-establishing the link between the sacred and the profane. Here, the scholar-interpreter is simultaneously actor/participant/encoder/decoder and is acutely aware of his/her (initial) inability to achieve scientific agreement, or the final interpretant as CS Peirce would say. As Rouch (1995, 222) concludes, after making 50 films on possession, he had no idea "what the techniques of possession are". The NASDAQ stock market opening and closing ceremonies, similarly, are ritualistic forms of possession celebrating the magic of money and its manipulation as a surrealistic life force that few really understand. For the participants, such bizarre performative rituals are normal and natural, but for outsiders, they might be read as manifestations of possession, greed and class oppression.

The phaneroscopic (the apprehension of all that is present to the mind) practice of ethnographic surrealism is related by Dennis Young (1995) to psychoanalytic models of the unconscious (see also Roberts 1996; Clifford 1981; DeBouzek 1989; Conquergood 1986). Young finds correspondences between Peirce's category of firstness (the still pre-digested central idea) and Freud's notion of the unconscious that he equates with a pre-linguistic state that implies a "surrealist longing for a rupture of the symbolic order of Western rationalism and a return to an 'imaginary order'" (1995 191). Money is part of the global imaginary as it is simultaneously virtual, totemistic and fetishised in the fantastic where "the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this" (Marx 1990, 165). The Amazonian penchant, in contrast, is to ascribe environmental elements as persons endowed with cognitive, moral and social qualities analogous to those of humans. This ontology thus incorporates within the category of persons' spirits, plants and animals as part of a cosmology that "does not discriminate between human beings and non-human beings" (Descola 2013: 31; Viveiros de Castro, 1998). It is no different to capital's ascribing the 'markets' ontological qualities (such as in 'market sentiment', and claiming that 'the markets will 'decide' or 'have spoken', or will 'punish' etc.). The markets are nothing but a group fantasy managed by imaginary money whose organisation and regulation of exchange relations is performed by mediatised rituals. What are the implications for ethical clearance of studying 'the markets' or NASDAQ rituals, let alone plants and animals conferred personhood?

Citing Deleuze and Guattari (1977) who evade binary logic, for example, phenomenon/noumenon, signifier/signified, subject-object, conscious/unconscious, and civilization/savagery, the conscious concludes Young, is a schizophrenic phaneron (relationality), a transgressive producer of "group fantasy". The conscious is a collective public memory as participants transgress boundaries and move beyond consciousness (Young 1995: 192) into the phaneron. It is this quality—all that is present to the mind—that ethics committees want to regulate in terms of superficial, observable and testable scientific methods. But that is not always appropriate as such methods can be ignorant of the deeper transcripts and interpretive implications. Kyle Enervoldsen's (2008) analysis of Kulick and Wilson's (1992) interpretations by villagers in Gapun, Papua New Guinea, for example, semiotises their interpretation of a *Rambo* film, revealing the power of the phaneron as an explanatory device. Hegemonic and negotiated discourses did not apply—it was simply a *stori* concerning something that 'really' happened. "'Pictures aren't just invented,' villagers told one another: pictures exist because what they picture exists" (Kulick and Wilson 1992, 10). The Gapuner concept of the iconicity of the film apparatus itself, regardless of the content of the film, was part of the then Gapuner phaneron or symbolic experience, as it also established possibilities for interpretation. In this conception, the screen is less a surface onto which images are projected than it is a barrier blocking entrance to, and direct contact with, the actions and people who are understood to live behind the screen. Within this phaneroscopic ontology, film offered a site of convergence where many of the phenomena that are absolutely essential to village life, such as Christian teachings, ancestral beings, modernity, missionaries, white colonialists and the government, coalesced into commentaries about one another.

The issue of what is encoded in a movie is thus secondary to the interpretants produced in exhibition to audiences (see Shepperson 1994). Film texts in these kinds of interpretive frameworks are not just observable textual phenomena but they are also implicated in ways of making sense, ways of deliberately communicating harm and ways of representing harm done, for example, in the case of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) beheadings.

These kinds of encounters and ways of making sense cannot be predicted where prior research or events have not occurred and been witnessed or participated in by researchers. Positivist ethical clearance assumptions and procedures simply cannot anticipate them. They must, however, make space for such encounters to be identified and studied, where appropriate. Such research would aid in understanding multiplicity and ontologies and paradigms that evade Cartesian rationality and instrumentalist research administration.

Such visual anthropology is no less relevant in the "post-truth era" (see Keyes 2004). The division of Subject from Object misunderstands the nature of non-Western ontologies, culture and ideology, not to mention personal and social experience. There is no single rationality. There is no single normativity or worldview. And, as 9/11, and the years 2007–2017 suggest, what is considered 'harm' by one constituency is practiced as ethical religious absolution for another. The virtual idiosyncrasy that is ISIS wants to destroy all earthly authority and replace it with an eternal supratemporal order that saves souls while killing off corporeal existence (Bhatt 2014). Yet this same group proved itself more than capable of using the new media and technologies of modernity and postmodernity to wreck Enlightenment values and obtain as martyrs the hedonistic behaviour they claim to deny themselves on earth. This discursive structure of a whole new magnitude of order collapses the divide between the living and the dead and any normative ways of making sense. What is ethical for one paradigm is considered genocide by another. Jihad Johnny, for example, grew up in a British society enabled by the European Enlightenment, but he conducted his grizzly executions, the *parole* (accent) for TV in a Roman-like gorefest. For him and his hapless victims, the whole world became a virtual amphitheatre. Videoed clips of beheadings broadcast on TV and Internet enabled this pro-filmic phaneron of horror—what is pictured happened—to directly enter the global consciousness as public signs. The screen, in the Gapun ontology, was no longer a barrier preventing access, and was later given a new lease of life (or semiosis) by President Trump as he sought to demonise all forms of Islam as the same as ISIS.

These kinds of (re-)actions throw into question the whole framework of ethics. 'Do no harm' for one constituency is often interpreted as doing harm to another. It seems to me that the current academic enterprise needs to enable researchers to interview such folks without the need for tedious IRB procedures that can make little sense of ISIS's practice, or those applied in Guantanamo Bay, as just two examples. All the while the earth and its inhabitants are being slaughtered at a faster pace than IRB committee schedules recognise. Their slow schedules reference legal (i.e., ensure no liability) rather than actual ongoing field circumstances (do no harm). As well, under these conditions, ethical procedures in the Humanities tend to be monospecies oriented.

3.   Multispeciesism

Multispecies ethnography centres on how a multitude of organisms' livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. Animal communicators try to cross this divide by engaging in non-verbal communication with non-human animals. Ethnographies of the encounter (Faier and Rofel 2014) investigate such practices as a way of providing an empirical counterpart to theoretical discussions that surround what has been referred to as the "species turn" (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 545). Multispeciesism enables researchers to transgress human exceptionalism and dichotomies of North/South, modern/non-modern, domesticated/wild, Subject/Object.

The species turn, a very recent paradigmatic shift, is evocatively expressed in a Durban billboard that states: "Try to be the person that your dog thinks you are". As anthropomorphic as this injunction is, our dogs put up with their owners, no matter how badly treated. They pine, they get depressed, and often they die when their owners pass on.

The 'dog's-eye' view of us is not new in academic work, though it has been very sparsely studied until recently. Human-animal relations, the relationship between nature and culture and critical approaches to scrutinise scientific and modernist thinking, have been increasing over the years, especially in sensory multispecies ethnography (see, e.g., Wels 2013). Books like Lawrence Anthony's *The Elephant Whisperer* (2009), and novels like *The Horse Whisperer* (Evans 1995) and *Watership Down* (Adams 1972) suggest that we humans are complete anthropocentric amateurs when it comes to communicating with non-human animals.

The ontological distinction between humans and non-humans is being increasingly questioned in what is termed critical animal studies, from anthropology to organisational sciences (Almiron 2017). A social justice perspective on human-animal relations attempts to contribute to an intellectual argument to take non-human animals more seriously as 'co-citizens' in the (organisational) life world. This may have wide ranging implications for lifestyles, ranging from the types of food we eat, to liquids we drink, and to the ways we think about the human superiority in this world, concludes Wels (2015). James Suzman (2014) contends that this is a Neolithic-initiated relationship that divides animals into 'pets' on the one hand and 'livestock' on the other. In contrast, the Ju/'oansi's hunting relationship is based on 'becoming like the animal', which exempts them from caring for domesticated animals, much to the astonishment of Western visitors.

In the modern world, wild animals are confined to reserves and cages. They are hunted and those amenable to animal husbandry like cows and sheep are branded, bought and sold, just like slaves of old and today. Animals are assumed to lack affective capacity—even as our dogs welcome us home, lick us, paw us and lie with us. Anyone who reads Anthony's book (2009) cannot but be astonished at our dualistic human narrow-mindedness that prevents humans from entering into the metaphysical realms of animals, as crazy as this sounds. It is only crazy because contemporary conventional science has no way to explain it, to verify it, or to mathematise it. Also, many who proselytise such encounters are probably a little dotty. But, then, crazy is a relative term, culturally specific and neurologically indeterminate. Hearing 'voices' may be diagnosed as schizophrenia by modern psychiatry, but such voices are interpreted as the ancestors or ghosts speaking by subjects of different ontological (phaneroscopic) frameworks. That is, where psychiatry considers 'hearing voices' an indicator of illness, many traditional healers and African psychologists consider this condition to reveal positive interaction with the ancestors. This was the subject of Jean Rouch's film (1995, *les Mãtres Foux,* [*The Mad Masters*]). This ethnofiction depicts how the Hauka took possession by mimicry and tranced the behaviour of British colonial administrators, extracting their life force, as a kind of psychological exorcism mocking authority that restored cultural balance to the West African Hauka (see Nannicelli 2006).

The inversion of relationships with non-human animals could not be more urgent in the light of current global debates concerning the increasing rapidity of what is known as the sixth mass extinction that started with the spread of mankind 80 000 years go and which reached a tipping point in 2016 (Kolbert 2014). Natural causes are not the sole explanation this time. Solutions that address the natural deficit by working with the 'species turn' by anthropology and organisational studies especially, is way overdue. As the planet faces catastrophe, new paradigms are emerging, but can they travel sufficiently fast and get accepted quickly enough by IRBs, scientists and politicians to make a difference? These include the proposal that it may be fruitful to treat non-human animals as actual agentic stakeholders in research and analysis. How does one request consent from vulnerable animals

if one is not a qualified whisperer? How can ethical procedures speak 'for' and ensure 'no harm' for research subjects or participants of any kind?

How would our pets (or wild animals) qualify us? Problem is, there are no university courses in 'whispering', so only those in the know, know. How would one write up an ethical clearance form that examines why dogs are, in Western terms, 'mistreated' by the Ju/'hoansi, without understanding the Ju//hoansi's point of view?

While the bodies of knowledge and associated bodies of practice relating to multi-species ethnographies are relatively new in the Western academic enterprise, they have, of course, a long history amongst indigenous people who relied on their knowledge of the environment and fauna and flora, the seasons, climate, and astronomy, for their survival and livelihoods. Such individuals are able to engage in contractual relationships with animals, as is evocatively described by Elizabeth Marshall-Thomas (1990, 89), such that the !Kung of the 1950s communicated with lions, who themselves tried to communicate with !Kung people, though their 'Lionese' (see also Guenther 1999, 70–80).

But positivist science delayed the development of this intuitive knowledge in the industrial academy, to the detriment of non-human species and the environment in general. Even so, once hunting communities adopted rifles, the environment and non-human animals often paid the inevitable price.

We have denied animals consciousness-awareness-just-like-us, as Stephen Hawking and others have acknowledged,[iv] though the Great Apes Project, endorsed by Jane Goodall and Richard Dawkins, has resulted in New Zealand enacting some (weak) legal rights to such animals via the Animal Welfare Act 1999, while the Balearic Islands conferred personhood in 2007, thus transgressing the species barrier. In terms of ethics, this involves no experimental testing that does not benefit the apes themselves.[v]

We humans really need to listen to animals more. Wels (2013) calls this "whispering empathy". But the profane predominates through bio-medical discourses.

4   The bio-medical talking cure

In the biomedical model, autoethnography is barely distinguished from the method of the therapeutic 'talking cure'. As such, therefore, critical ethnography—no matter the discipline—needs to obtain more than self-absolution in a form of neo-analytical therapy. In a strictly therapeutic autoethnographic process, the research topic shifts along a chain of more or less elaborated *dialogues* between a researcher and an ever-increasingly abstracted hierarchy of partners in the dialectic. The chain may well begin with a dialogue at the research site with culturally authentic sources. But what happens when the subject matter of the dialogue is taken to the academy, or to the publishing industry, or to the NGO-sector which has assumed so much of the responsibility for development in less developed countries? How does one attribute responsibility to a dialogue, in a way that raises it to the status of a communicable *record?*[vi]

A tradition of confidentiality carries over from medical therapy to autoethnography as 'therapy'. Journals, film makers and others are often looking for personal roots, meaning and explanations (cf. e.g., Isaacson 2001). It is thus hard to decide where along the chain of dialogue such representations

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[iv] Read more on the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness in Non-Human Animals, http://io9.com/5937356/
[v] The Vegetarian, http://www.purifymind.com/HumanMonkeys.htm See also New Zealand's conferral of human status to a river in recognition of Maori claims to being part of the universe rather than masters of it https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being and https://article.wn.com/view/2017/04/02/Court_order_a_legal_followup_of_divine_status_to_rivers_glac/
[vi] This section adapted from Tomaselli (2005).

must become knowledge, or be asserted as truth-claims. Medical (and therapeutic) *practice* is not to be confused with medical and therapeutic *science*. It is at the point we choose to assert something about the subject-matter to the general 'To whom it may concern' of an indefinite scientific future that ethnography must re-present itself as *communication* and no longer as dialogue or diary.

Publication occurs at this stage. The problem is to anticipate *how* any functionary (or activist, or practitioner) at one or more of these stages can appropriate the dialogue to ends not conceived as scientific (assuming the logic of science is itself presupposed by an ethics) (Peirce 1998, 196–-207, 371–97). Practical ends drive NGOs, publishers, and indeed the academy, whereas the claims of science (which should not be confused with the claims *scientists* make in their professional or academic capacities) are potentially directed to ends beyond the immediate accomplishment of urgent matters. Without the normative shift, or better, the *ethical commitment* to do full justice to the reality of the subject-matter (or subject community) of a field of inquiry, *as it presents itself to the inquirer*, science becomes indistinguishable from engineering.

On this basis, the most urgent need in reviewing our research is to establish where dialogues end (or perhaps peter out) and the possibility for a bottom-up record begins. Unless subject communities are informed about what is to be asserted about their reality, they can have no effective say in what subsequent agencies in the dialogue do with their representations. To do this in good faith is not enough: it is decisive that this contact generate a record, and after realising how these questions arose from reading the texts recommended to us, we can consider our writing as *rapportage*—the base data for developing a record that contributes to inquiry and resists its appropriation by vested interests.

5.   The profane

In responding to the start-up discussion on the issue of the journal's ethics statement and research regulation, I pointed out that many African governments actually control research and researchers through national legislation by requiring all researchers, both domestic and international, doing fieldwork in their countries, to secure permits from government—in some cases, from the president's office. These offices sometimes work in concert with university IRBs as their surrogates and do sometimes impose (official) agendas that may differ from those of the researchers or their research participants, the discipline and the international researcher's home institution. Such university committees, treading warily and very carefully, can take years to consider applications, and can put so many obstacles in the way of researchers that they simply go elsewhere. Some governments go further: in Botswana, for example, no less than seven key international development anthropologists have been banned from entry into that country, and Ken Good (2008) was in 2005 deported for publishing work that questioned government motivations in dispossessing (or in its terms, 're-locating') San communities for development purposes from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Good's link to Survival International seems to have been a clincher, as this is reported to have made him a threat to national security.[vii] Researchers in such instances may need to continue working on these topics, and in the field itself, but in terms of ethical codes that work for them and their research participants specifically.

My emailed response drew forth the following from some editorial board members:

> … very glad we're discussing the issues of one-size-fits-all science-based ethics approval. This is an issue I've also dealt with in Country X—long story short, but my

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[vii] Read more at http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-sa-higher-education&month=0506&week=a&msg=fz9kFJjam/GGaSdrp4WPdg&user=&pw=

uni wanted to impose things that the institutions there could not make sense of, and that [the citizens] I interviewed did not approve of, e.g., having their schools anonymised—they wanted to be recognised for the work they are doing. We got there in the end, kind of, by using the real names of the schools where there was nothing critical said about them by any of their students and anonymising the others, but it was a bit fraught for a while. There was also a moment of panic when my uni asked for country X's government approval for the project—ummm, Country X's *universities* don't have an ethics approval process, and the government is famously not exactly approachable/accountable—plus, they're too busy worrying about other, bigger issues (like, you know, being impeached for corruption). But in the end the institutional approval from the schools was enough, phew—although even then I had to explain to the school directors what it all meant as they don't have such a process. So yes to flexibility and respectfulness within contextual appropriateness! (Anonymous, email, 29 Jan 2017)

As international the journal must be sensitive to the diverse ways the ethics is performed through cultures, educational politics, institutional agencies or even governmental interpretations. I think the Editorial Board can define based on freedom, human rights, tolerance and respect what could be ethically accepted to be published with no political responsibility and/or negative effects either to the author or to the journal itself. (César A. Cisneros Puebla, 30 January 2017)

I find it very sobering (and humbling) to see the areas where I have allowed a particular truth to settle and remain untroubled. This despite my own experiences with ethics committees who persist in treating the mental health service user population as incompetent to consent. I think we can make the point about expecting our authors to be sensitive and responsive to ethical issues while removing the bio medical overtone. (Jacqui Kidd, 26 January 2017).

Ethical procedures were originally introduced from the Humanities to humanise medical research. It is thus rather ironical now, is it not, that Humanities researchers are complaining about the lack of the human dimension in the universalising biomedical assumptions that now pertain?

6.   The disconnect with research methods as lived practice

The imposition of a highly technical and instrumentalist biomedical form that cannot adequately address the kinds of lived research (human- and animal-ended rather than 'findings-centred') that is done by, for example, anthropology, oral studies, oral history, indigeneity studies, cultural studies, critical psychology and social work, amongst others, is the issue here. Instrumentalism eliminates the human dimension as experienced by Humanities and indigenous subjects and how they make meaning and how *they* want to be acknowledged in the academic record. I am not criticising the biomedical form when it is applied to medical research, biosciences, or clinical psychology. But it is often inappropriate for humanities and social, cultural and spiritual research.

The institutional assumption is that an instrumentalist form is neutral, universal, uncontested and acceptable to all. This is naïve, especially when the procedure takes on a life of its own as a sterile rubber stamping exercise that forgets the student, the supervisor, the subject community and the reasons for the procedure in the first place. Community benefit, the respect of our subject communities, is often lost in the technicisation of the procedure as a purely administrative requirement. Certainly, the indigenous communities with whom I and my team work in the Kalahari Desert complain endlessly about the objectifying and alienating ways that academics in general are

required by their IRBs to hold them hostage to objectives and interactions not of their own making.[viii] These fields do not deal with 'human subjects' (as alienated, unknown and anonymous 'objects' of study) as do medical researchers, quantitative surveys, possibly some clinical psychologists, and other biomedical scientists. Indeed, to be reduced to a number, a statistical relationship, is itself under some circumstances alienating, dehumanising and objectifying. This would be the cultural studies position as numbers are always crude and cannot account for feelings, meanings and nuanced experiences.

Legalities, procedures and forms that are assumed to offer institutional protection for the academy are sometimes seen to be opportunistic power plays by subject communities. This relates especially to subject communities that lack literacy and who feel exploited by researchers notwithstanding their institutional ethical clearance procedures. Indeed, some universities' interpretation of intellectual property rights is based on the legal claim that the commodification and copyright of indigenous knowledge and information by the University is acceptable, normal and inevitable. The human dimension in this case is assumed to be little more than a scientific experiment that can be patented, repackaged, sold and syndicated as products. How is that ethical in the Kantian (1989) sense, even though it may be legal? Certainly, some Kalahari communities consider this kind of exploitation of what they call their 'indigenous knowledge' to be a form of intellectual theft (Tomaselli 2016).[ix]

Operational, administrative

The disconnects are many at the administrative level. These seriously impede student completion times, third stream income and morale of both supervisors and students. At some South African universities, students qualify for fee waivers if they complete a MA within one year, or a PhD in two. This period includes both the ethical clearance and the examination processes at the start and end of the registered period. Permission to do the research is sandwiched in between these two very time-consuming and exhausting phases. In reality, it is almost impossible for students to complete within the respective fee waiver periods due to the kinds of institutional bottlenecks that occur. While students often do dilly dally while doing their research, the above delays are caused by a lack of institutional capacity, over-complex procedures, too many levels of administration, too many gates to go through and opaque decision-making.

If we are talking about ethics, then the institution needs to consider the ethical implications of lack of capacity, delays resulting from institutional inefficiency and inability to work in terms of the *teaching* year schedule. And, as do anthropologists and field researchers, administrators should try to understand the frustrations and costs as are experienced by students, supervisors, research coordinators, deans and parents. Ethics offices offer a service and they need to realise that what works for them may not necessarily work for students and supervisors. Even subject communities, who expect to benefit in one way or another from investing their time and expertise in cooperating with researchers, get seriously disillusioned with such delays—which often also occur in the writing up and publication of research. For them, researchers often live in a time warp. They see little point in cooperating with them.

The number of gates needs to be reduced, the time taken by offices and committees needs to be slashed, and students (and subject communities) need to be treated with due respect and due diligence by putting the 'humane' back into the procedure. Resources, logistics and administrative justice are always an issue. But then, the resources need to be matched with what simplified procedures can be

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[viii] See Laurie Kroeger, Dec 13, 2016: http://ethics.americananthro.org/how-i-nearly-lost-my-first-staff-position-as-a-practicing-anthropologist-ethical-issues-and-anthropological-practice/

[ix] See also http://trust-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/San-Code-of-RESEARCH-Ethics-Booklet-final.pdf

efficiently implemented. As IRB gates are simplified, however, new gates are imposed, as gatekeepers claiming to be representing their constituencies' best interests require further hoops to be negotiated. Such hoops sometimes insist on right-to-approve write-ups prior to publication—sometimes they try to stop publication—and trying to liaise with such entities can take many months. Often whole projects have to be shelved because of unrealistic expectations and demands that transgress university procedures themselves.

7.　Conclusion: Implicit geographies

The 'implicit geography' that characterises the developed world's academic enterprise is white and often WEIRD (see Tomaselli and Mboti, 2012). WEIRD stands for Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich Democracies (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010). WEIRD global intellectual discourses manifest in received assumptions, whether of the positivist communication science or the critical interpretivist and postmodernist kinds, and are conducted largely in the same places, spaces and with and on the same populations and similar kinds of research regulation. WEIRD intellectual grand narratives tend to assume that the Rest think the same, or should do, that the Rest live the same, or should do, and that the Rest make sense in the way they do, or should do (see also Smith 1999). In psychology, for example, 94% of research is conducted on just 12% of the global population (mainly in the West). The results, based on such implicit narrow geographies, are then ill-advisedly generalised to all populations across the globe (Henrich et al. 2010).

A follow up study from Henrich et al. (2010) reveals that high impact factor developmental psychology journals remain significantly skewed towards publishing studies with data derived from WEIRD populations. Despite calls for change and supposed widespread awareness of such asymmetrical emphasis, a habitual dependence on convenience sampling continues unabated. There is little evidence that this discipline, as one example for which data is available, is making any meaningful movement towards drawing from diverse samples and thereby dealing with the kinds of issues discussed above. Failure to confront the possibility that culturally-specific findings are being misattributed as universal traits has broad implications for the construction of scientifically defensible theories and for the reliable public dissemination of study findings (Nielsen et al, 2017). The flip side is that the Rest will continue to be intellectually othered in some disciplines as 'area studies', of little importance to the West, even as some of these (Middle Eastern) jihad ontologies are leveraging huge military budgets allocated by the West and Russia, in subduing sections of the unauthorised Rest.

The Ethnographic Edge is working largely with and within the Rest, whose scholars are members of this category. This location (geographical, identity, paradigmatic, experience) shapes our positioning, perspectives and intellectual prospects. The issues are big and small, of research regulation and ethical sensitivity, of appropriate administration and intercultural responsibility.

8.　Avenues for discussion

- Research does not presume to know in advance its outcome. Yet researchers are required to compose proposals as if they already had this knowledge (Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006, 73).
- How best to secure 'informed consent', taking into account diverse conditions? And, how best to phrase informed consent?
- Returning to the field to discuss 'results' and thoughts. Communities might refuse publication. How do we deal with this—respecting subject communities but also the principles of academic freedom and the freedom of speech? This links to the concern about gatekeepers behaving unethically.

- Fieldwork often catalyses unanticipated encounters and exposes one to unanticipated experiences. Subsequent ethical issues may arise and the research outcome may differ greatly from the original proposal and consent letter. How does one acknowledge consideration of ethnography's emergent design from within the field of encounters themselves?

- How does one deal with gatekeepers if they behave unethically?

- How does one engage IRBs? Who protects researchers and research participants from IRBs? What rights or access do subjects' communities have to dialogue with such committees?

- Why are only academic researchers subjected to ethical clearance?

- Ethics forms: how can they be redesigned as a field guide for researchers, rather than a policing mechanism for governments?

    More needed …

Acknowledgements

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