Applied anthropology

Lecturer: Elias A.

Session: 3

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- **Outline**:
- Background
- Emergence & definition of applied anthropology
- Applied anthropology: history & critiques
- Ethics in applied anthropology

Background

- To begin with, all four sub-fields of anthropology have an applied and/or practical dimension.
- E.g. Medical anthropology & forensic anthropology
- **Medical anthropology** is concerned with concepts of health, illness & disease in a given cultural context.
- Whereas, **forensic anthropologists** could be of help to an ongoing legal investigation by generating accurate evidence about scenarios surrounding criminal activity.
- You can add a list of examples about practical matters based on the four sub-fields of anthropolgoy.
- However, contrary to the aforementioned examples, nowadays **applied anthropolgoy** is considered a distinct sub-field witihn the discipline.

Applied anthropology: emergence & definition

If applied anthropology is a distinct sub-field, how does it evolve over time?

- The genesis & concerns of applied anthropology can be traced back to the anthropological writings & traditions of the 20th c.
- Both 'applied anthropology' & 'practical anthropology' have been in use since the beginning of the 20th c.
- The term 'applied anthropology' was coined by Radcliffe-Brown (1930)
- Malinowski (1939), on the other hand, used the word 'practical anthropology'.

Cntd…

- Notwithstanding their earlier appearance in anthropological texts, a comprehensive definition & explanation of the method, realm, & *ethics* of applied anthropology emerged lately.
- Chambers, for example, defines applied anthropology:

  "as a field of inquiry concerned with the *relationships* between *anthropological knowledge and the uses of that knowledge in the world beyond anthropology"(*1987: 309).

- Chambers also claimed ***applied anthropology is a sub-field in its own right*** & should be:

  "expressed as a ***scholarly, critical & reasonably objective concern*** for what happens when our knowledge enters the realm of practice" (ibid.: 309-310).

Cntd…

- ***An applied anthropologist*** or a ***'practitioner'*** of anthropology therefore:

  ranges from (a) anyone with a degree in anthropology who is not employed in academia; through (b) an anthropologist who "practices" rather than does research; to (c) an anthropologist who has a primary concern with the mediation of anthropology and its uses, regardless of where she or he is employed (Chambers 1987: 326).

Cntd…

Pure/Academic Anthropology:

It is concerned with the ***advancement of the discipline*** in terms of ***refining methods and theories*** and providing increasingly more reliable anthropological data.

E.g.- Introduction: Making Sense of Violence. In Scheper-Hughes, N. and Bourgois, P. (Eds.), *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*.

Scheper-Hughes's (2004) comment on Alfred Kroeber's culture area theory as reaction against academic/theoretical anthropology.

Cntd…

- Applied anthropology primarily aimed at changing human behaviour for the sake of improving contemporary problems.
- **Role of Applied Anthropologists:**

Applied anthropologists work in a wide rage of settings:

1. Policy Researcher
2. Impact Assessor
3. Planner
4. Need Assessor
5. Trainer
6. Cultural Broker (the role involves serving as liaison…)

Applied anthropology: history & Critique

- Currently, for many anthropologists, the dichotomy between applied & academic/pure anthropology is blurred; both are supportive to each other.
- But the history of applied anthropology depicts another picture.
- In relatives terms, applied anthropolgoy had negative image, because of its early association with colonialism:
- Applied anthropology was first associated with British colonialism
- In the 19th c., for example, Britain employed anthropologist to help into the administrations of colonies
- They administered subjugated people and local populations.

Cntd…

- These anthropologists were meeting the needs of colonizer/s but not the local people.
- Late on, in the 1930s, anthropologists continued to assist colonial administration in Africa & elsewhere.
- E.g Evans-Pritchard in the Sudan (The Nuer and their seminary lineage system)
- He fed the Anglo-Egyptian colonial administration of the Sudan with up-to-date information about the political organization of the Nuer.
- Evan’s Pritchard’s portrayed the segmentary lineage system & everyday life of Nuer for colonial consumption.

Cntd…

- **Applied Anthropology During WWII**
- In the 1940's applied anthropology took off again.
- The war provided vast ***opportunities*** for anthropologists to turn their efforts to ***applied projects*** relating to war.
- WWW II generated so much interest in the practical use of anthropology.
- In 1941 "**The Society For Applied Anthropology**" was founded at Harvard University.
- **During war time, anthropologist:**
  - Helped in establishing government policy on wartime food rationing
  - They provided cultural data on allies and adversaries

Cntd…

Post-war period (1950's & 60's)

- After WWII, most anthropologists were employed by Universities;
- They were engaged in teaching & basic research as opposed to working for governments.

New Applied Anthropology:

- Increase in applied types of employment
- Characterized by ***contract work for public service agencies*** accomplished ***away from universities***
- Applied Anthropology ***no longer dominated by university***, doing short-term applied work, but anthropologists became ***full time employees under various agencies.***

Critique of applied anthropology

- Some of the critique toward applied anthropology are:
- Lack of theoretical rigour
- Limited/little use to the advancement of the discipline
- Harming and/or not being able to protect local people
- Serving as spy (colonial and wartime legacies)

Ethical Issues

Q- Can you be certain that presenting your data will help and won't eventually hurt the people you studied?

- Anthropologists have an ethical responsibility:

✓ To avoid employment/receipt of funds from any organ to support policies that are inhuman/potentially hurt the research subject.

Q- How much do you get personally involved?

- Franz Boas was the first anthropologists (1919) who spoke against using science as a cover for spying.

Anthropologists major areas of responsibility

- The codes of professional ethics adopted by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) & by Society of Applied Anthropology, include the following:

1. Responsibility to the people studied (Informing the purpose of our research)
2. Responsibility to the public (Dissemination of our research result)
3. Responsibility to the sponsors
4. Responsibility to the discipline **(*not to engage as spy*)**
5. Responsibility to the government (being clear to own & host governments)

(Source: http:www.aaanet.org/profdev/ethics/upload/Statement-on Ethics-Princoples-of- Professionaal-Responsblity.pdf)

Applied anthropology & development

- Today, applied anthropology generally means the use of anthropological methodology (methods & perspectives) in social & economic development projects in areas such as health, education, agriculture, & human rights.
- Remember that development consists of projects, policies and plans that are usually internationally-funded & ideally meant to improve peoples' lives, thus ensuring more equitable social relations within states and across states.
- Since the discipline of anthropology usually studies the common man so to speak, there is a lively debate among anthropologists for and against anthropological interventions in development projects, particularly about ethics, just as there was a lot of debate in the early 20th century about applied anthropology versus theoretical anthropology.