



Guilt by Association: The Culture of Accusation and the American Anthropological Association's Investigation of *Darkness in El Dorado*

ABSTRACT The American Anthropological Association's investigation of the charges in *Darkness in El Dorado* (Tierney 2000) found that the late James Neel and Napoleon Chagnon harmed the Yanomami in the course of their research in Venezuela and Brazil, and that Chagnon had violated the ethics code of the association. The association's inquiry contravened its own policy prohibiting ethics adjudications and was structured not by the standards of an objective investigation but by aspects of contemporary anthropology. Moralized approaches to information and postmodern rejection of objectivity mark the language and methods of the inquiry. The investigating task force did not observe reasonable standards of evidence, the targets of the investigation were not represented, and task force members were compromised by conflicts of interest. The investigation and its collateral activities reflect a culture of accusation and an anthropology uncertain of its ethical or scientific stature. [Keywords: ethics, theory, postmodernism, American Anthropological Association, Yanomami]

IN MAY 2002, the American Anthropological Association (hereafter, AAA; 2002a, 2002b) issued a formal report, *El Dorado Task Force Papers: Submitted to the Executive Board as a Final Report* (2 vols.; hereafter, *Report*), on its investigation of the charges associated with Patrick Tierney's book, *Darkness in El Dorado* (2000). Tierney, and others who amplified his claims, charged James Neel and Napoleon Chagnon with professional misconduct during fieldwork in the 1960s among the Yanomami Indians of Venezuela and Brazil—including accusations that Neel and Chagnon had started a measles epidemic, falsified data, and incited the villagers to make war.¹ The allegations made international headlines and precipitated investigations by other academic societies. The AAA report represented a major investment of resources. A specially commissioned task force, with a budget of \$25,000 (AAA 2001a), spent more than a year on the project, traveled to Venezuela and Brazil to interview the Yanomami, and eventually published a two-volume report in May of 2002.

The *Report* was a watershed event in the history of U.S. anthropology, with implications for the discipline and the conduct of fieldwork. It was, in its authors' words, "unprecedented" (AAA 2002a:8–9). Our examination of the investigation is an effort to understand what happened and to sit-

uate it within the context of contemporary anthropology. We argue that the investigation emerged from a long tradition of moral concern in anthropology, which, with the advent of critical theory, has in recent decades become increasingly self-absorbed and, at its most extreme, self-accusatory. The investigation and its associated activities are rooted in the contemporary issues of values, activism, and postmodernism. We seek not to determine guilt or innocence but to place the investigation within a coherent framework and to explain why it took the form it did. We begin with the nature of the *Report*.

THE REPORT AND ITS FINDINGS

The *Report* concluded that Neel and Chagnon misused their subjects in the course of ethnographic and biological research, that they failed to obtain adequate informed consent for their work, and that their research left the Yanomami psychologically damaged. Chagnon was also found guilty of depicting the Yanomami in a harmful way in his publications and of consorting with corrupt politicians in Venezuela, thereby violating the association's code of professional ethics. This fact-finding and judicial role of the task force investigation needs to be established at the

outset, because it is prohibited by the ethics code: "The American Anthropological Association (AAA) does not adjudicate claims for unethical behavior" (AAA 1998). This policy was adopted, in part, because of the association's self-acknowledged "inability... to carry out a fair and legally defensible adjudication" (AAA 1995).

The executive board, AAA President Louise Lamphere, and the task force were aware of association policy. Lamphere later confirmed that the task force could not conduct "a formal investigation" because of its ethics code and so had to conduct an "inquiry" (Lamphere 2003:166). The task force wrote that the inquiry would be "addressed to the future of anthropology, not to its past... to look forward, directing our reflections on past practice toward establishing new dialogues in the profession about the refinement of anthropological practice" (AAA 2001b). But the task force could hardly look to the future without drawing judgments about the past and, inevitably, identifying perceived wrongs of specific individuals who were the targets of their investigation. Caught on the horns of a nearly impossible dilemma, the authors of the *Report* were alternately future oriented and judgmental. But whatever their uncertainties and the association's policies, their resulting *Report* includes the verdicts normally associated with ethics investigations. Consider the *Report's* finding regarding Chagnon's relationship to a Venezuelan foundation:

Chagnon's involvement in FUNDAFACI was unacceptable on both ethical and professional grounds... the Task Force believes that a charge of breach of ethics is proper under the AAA Principles of Professional Responsibility, the code of ethics then in effect... It would also constitute a breach of the current Code of Ethics, which states that "anthropologists must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they work." [AAA 2002a:44]

These and other judgments are strong, unqualified, and professionally damaging verdicts. They mark the point at which the task force crossed a Rubicon and conducted a proscribed ethics adjudication that was incorrectly represented as an "inquiry." But the adjudication, even if without a legal mandate, could still have been conducted with reasonable safeguards in place, by ensuring that (1) the members of the task force were unbiased in fact and appearance, (2) the association separated the roles of those who brought charges from finders of fact, (3) the interests of the accused were represented, (4) there was ethical and legal supervision of the process, (5) the task force defined standards of evidence by which information was evaluated, and (6) the association built a firewall between the investigatory process and the sometimes defamatory discussion that ran parallel to the investigation in the discipline, the press, and the public at large.

However, these conditions were not present. The panelists were chosen in spite of conflicts of interest; they compromised their impartiality by disseminating prejudicial statements in the midst of the investigation; some of

those who brought the charges also served as investigators and as authors of the *Report*; Neel and Chagnon were unrepresented; there was no visible supervision of the ethical integrity or legality of the process; there were no defined standards of evidence; and the association created public venues on the Internet and at its Annual Meeting for new and unsubstantiated accusations, including murder-by-hire.

How could all of this have occurred? How could the association sponsor and then embrace proceedings that had no legal authorization and lacked due process? This is the central question of our article.

THE MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE OF THE INVESTIGATION

Values, Morality, and Judgment

The investigation of *Darkness in El Dorado*, and the judgment of Neel and Chagnon, presupposed a moral community of anthropologists who were in accord on fundamental ethical issues. In fact, since its inception, anthropology has been intertwined with liberal social values and moral agendas. Among the more enduring trends are a rejection of racism, respect and support for indigenous peoples, cultural relativism, and social justice. These commitments, all of which are invoked in the *Report*, have been with us at least since the 19th century and remain with us today.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the moral engagement of the discipline intensified and took a surprising turn. Until this period, the ethical valence of U.S. anthropology inclined toward exposing the failings of the wider society: "its" racism, "its" ethnocentrism, and "its" oppression of class, race, and indigenous peoples. But now anthropology turned inward and began an extended self-critique whose dimensions were initially "primarily political in nature" (Marcus 2001:12878). Dell Hymes's 1972 edited book, *Reinventing Anthropology* (1999), was an early example of this genre. "The book," Hymes wrote, "is about a discipline open to ethical concern, human relevance, a clear connection between what is to be done and the interests of mankind" (1999:7). With chapters entitled "The Malaise of Anthropology," "Anthropology in Question," and "This is the Time for Radical Anthropology," *Reinventing Anthropology* underscored the purported ethical lapses and delicts of the discipline as traditionally practiced. In this and subsequent works (e.g., Weaver 1974), anthropology was seen to facilitate colonialism and other oppressive relationships (Asad 1973), to contribute to the abuse of indigenous peoples by romanticized descriptions of their cultures that failed to take account of their threatened status, and to permit racially and culturally alien outsiders to produce and market false, misleading, and even exploitative caricatures of other societies. James Clifford and George Marcus's influential volume, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), suggests that all ethnographies have a hidden moral dimension. Clifford notes that anthropologists' descriptions are, in an important sense, "coherent ethnographic fictions" (Clifford 1986:6). They are based on

inequality, made possible by “powerful ‘lies’ of exclusion and rhetoric,” and, in the process, they impose their authority on their subjects (Clifford 1986:7; for related claims, see Fabian 1983).

The self-examination suggested by these and other authors struck a resonant cord among anthropologists and continues to do so today. There are some virtues to self-scrutiny, because it highlights the moral risks inherent in describing the lifeways of other peoples. Still, the criticism partly delegitimized the discipline and formed an enabling environment for ever less-nuanced judgments. Hence, for some, the practice of anthropology and its most fundamental concepts are dubious. Doing ethnography is morally suspect (Dwyer 1982). Apparently disinterested accounts are held not only to obscure their subjects but to have “constituted anyone who is not Western, white, male and middle class among the subordinate Others,” thereby contributing to the “scientific creation, appropriation and exploitation of the peoples studied” (Downey and Rogers 1995:269–270). The concept of “culture” is suspect, in that it “makes these others seem simultaneously more coherent, self-contained and different from ourselves than they might be” (Abu-Lughod 1993:7), thereby making it possible to stereotype, denigrate, and oppress them. Generalizing is morally tainted, in that “as part of professional discourse of ‘objectivity’ and expertise, it is inevitably a language of power” (Abu-Lughod 1991:150–151). Anthropologists typically misuse this power “in their unconscious collusions with hegemonic interpretations of social reality fostered by powerful local interests” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:230). In “The Primacy of the Ethical,” Nancy Scheper-Hughes offers a way out of the anthropologist’s complicity: Become a “negative worker,” practice “barefoot anthropology,” and “disrupt expected academic roles and statuses” (1995:420).

No field of study has drawn more morally charged criticism than the area of work represented by Chagnon and Neel: sociobiology and evolutionary approaches to human behavior. In 1976, a motion introduced at the Annual Meeting called on the members to “condemn the ‘new synthesis’ of sociobiology as an attempt to justify genetically the sexist, racist and elitist status quo in human society” (Anthropology Newsletter 1976:7). After an impassioned debate, the motion was defeated. In 1983, the impulse to censor emerged victorious in another AAA resolution attacking *Science* 83 (1983:114) for recommending Derek Freeman’s *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (1983), a book that supported biological interpretations of behavior. The motion expressed “surprise” and “dismay” that *Science* 83 would recommend a book “which has been consistently denounced by knowledgeable scholars as being poorly written, unscientific, irresponsible and misleading” (Anthropology Newsletter 1984:4–5). This resolution passed, and the association conveyed the motion in a formal letter of censure to *Science* 83.

The issues that underlie the more radical attacks have not been so much scientific disagreement but “moral readings” of what had previously been regarded as reasonable

fieldwork, data, or just language. Ullica Segerstrale’s analysis of the sociobiology debate describes the technique:

In their analysis of their targets’ texts, the critics used a method I call moral reading. The basic idea behind moral reading was to imagine the worst possible political consequences of a scientific claim. In this way, maximum moral guilt might be attributed to the perpetrator. [2000:206]

In the case at hand, for example, the *Report* (AAA 2002a:33) takes Chagnon to task for an article in *Science* on revenge warfare, in which he reports that “Approximately 30% of Yanomami adult male deaths are due to violence” (Chagnon 1988:985). Chagnon also states that Yanomami men who had taken part in violent acts fathered more children than those who had not. Such facts could, if construed in their worst possible light, be read as suggesting that the Yanomami are violent by nature and, therefore, undeserving of protection. This reading could give aid and comfort to the opponents of creating a Yanomami reservation. The *Report*, therefore, criticizes Chagnon for having jeopardized Yanomami land rights by publishing the *Science* article, although his research played no demonstrable role in the demarcation of Yanomami reservations in Venezuela and Brazil (see below and n. 12). As we examine the *Report*, we will find similar chains of logic by which anthropological research becomes, at the end of an associative thread, an act of misconduct.

Roy D’Andrade (1995), in a major position statement, “Moral Models in Anthropology,” observes that moral criticism of anthropology and anthropologists, often intemperate and intolerant, is now commonplace, and the authors are not “some fringe group” but “established anthropologists” (D’Andrade 1995:399). The “moral correctives” they offer, although perhaps not as radical as those suggested by Scheper-Hughes, are often to denounce colleagues and their ideas.² “The true enemy of society,” writes D’Andrade, “turns out to be that guy in the office down the hall” (1995:408). Accusations are intimidating and have an influence disproportionate to their numbers. One measure of their impact is that they are no longer alien to us. They do not attract exceptional notice, they pass editors’ scrutiny, and they appear in major journals. They form a climate of “denunciation and rage” (D’Andrade 1995:407 and a culture of accusation.

Before we move to the *Report* and its accusations, we must examine another intellectual trend within anthropology that had a significant role in structuring the investigation: the questioning of knowledge and objective truth.

Objectivity, Truth, and Postmodernism

During the 1950s and 1960s, anthropology seemed poised to carry the scientific paradigm of the discipline forward, producing empirical models of the development of society. With the emergence of critical theory in the 1970s, this consensus changed, especially in social and cultural anthropology, in which the impact of this new perspective was perhaps greater than other social sciences

(Marcus 2001:12877). Often referred to as “postmodernism,” the movement affected anthropology and other disciplines and, as we shall show, framed the investigation of *Darkness in El Dorado*.

It is difficult to generalize about the postmodern movement, because it is such a diverse area of scholarship. The term itself is “unstable” and “defies definition” (Patton 2002). In general, *postmodernism* tends to reject objective modes of inquiry and to challenge foundational principles and ways of acquiring knowledge (Rorty 1979). It is especially critical of “modern” approaches, which legitimize knowledge by casting it within a “grand narrative” such as “science.” Thus, science is not a universal narrative but, according to some scholars, a particularly Western one, with false claims to universality and objectivity: “The objectivity of science and medicine is always a phantom objectivity, a mask that conceals more than it reveals” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:29). Ethnology is particularly culpable in its claims to approach objective truth in that the ethnographic encounter is purportedly subjective. Following Stephen Tyler (1986:130), “‘objects,’ ‘facts,’ ‘descriptions,’ ‘inductions,’ ‘generalizations,’ ‘verification,’ ‘experiment,’ ‘truth,’ and like concepts” are unattainable in anthropological accounts.

According to Pauline Rosenau, postmodern approaches “all challenge the methodological assumptions associated with rigorous, modern social science inquiry” and they require new standards for evaluating knowledge. These are “likely to be subjective in nature, including, for example, flexibility, sensitivity . . . beauty, strength or force” (2001). Often, the key standard for evaluating knowledge is moral judgment, including the “negation of oppression, exploitation and domination” (Rosenau 2001). From this perspective, science, as the Western “grand narrative,” may embody these harmful qualities. Hence, following the logic of the argument to its extreme, it is the “apologists for science” who have, in the main, brought with them suffering and oppression (Downey and Rogers 1995:269).

One may reach moral and aesthetic evaluations of knowledge through “reflection.” Thus, “critical theories assert the subjectivity of knowable phenomena and propose ‘reflection’ as a valid category and method of discovery” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:229). “Reflection” and “reflexivity” variously refer to introspection and other forms of self-examination. Like all forms of postmodern interpretation, it is “introspective, intersubjective and anti-objectivist, a form of individualized understanding” (Rosenau 2001).

Engaged Anthropology

If one accepts the logic of these critiques, what is left for anthropology as a scientific discipline? The answer is anthropology must be favored less as a theoretical science and more as a mode of social engagement and advocacy. Lamphere, who initiated the investigation as president of the AAA, illustrates this point in a recent retrospective re-

view. She argues for “the vital importance and urgent need for an engaged anthropology” (2003:153) and suggests that the impersonal agenda of science should take second place to moral commitment. She notes that this has already occurred in the course of an “enormous transformation” as anthropology has moved away from the pursuit of exotica. Hence, “Those working with small indigenous populations are concerned with issues of land rights, health and education, rather than the finer points of kinship terminology or ritual behavior” (2003:157).

The members of the El Dorado Task Force were even more emphatic about engagement and advocacy, to the point that anthropologists who work in indigenous communities should no longer be the arbiters of what they investigate. When they do so on their own, they are “colonial” researchers. Even if the study population understands and consents to that research, it is still ethically insufficient. The *Report* is uncompromising on this point: “The El Dorado Task Force *insists* that the anthropology of indigenous peoples and related communities must move toward ‘collaborative’ models, in which anthropological research is not merely combined with advocacy, but inherently advocative” (AAA 2002a:45, emphasis added). Moreover, “All parties are equal partners in the enterprise, participating in the development of research design” (AAA 2002a:45–46). For the task force, anthropology must serve a moral agenda, and its position is that of advocacy.³

Our summary of moral engagement and postmodernism in contemporary anthropology leaves little space for their accomplishments. But whatever the merits of recent trends in anthropology, they incline the discipline toward subjectivity, moral judgment, and skepticism about the search for truth that, if left unfettered, can blur the line between the subject and object. These intellectual trends and the values they presuppose are debatable within civil academic discourse. But they conflict with a professional association’s investigation of misconduct, which must invoke objectivity. Yet, as we shall show, the task force adopted both the language and methods of a moralized and postmodern anthropology as a blueprint for their inquiry.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE INVESTIGATION

The Turner-Sponsel Memo

In August of 2000, Terence Turner (Cornell University) and Leslie Sponsel (University of Hawai’i) sent an e-mail to the leadership of the AAA that became the catalyzing event for its investigation. The memo rapidly disseminated through the Internet and was reported in the world press. It informed the recipients of the imminent publication of Patrick Tierney’s *Darkness in El Dorado* (2000) and warned of “an impending scandal that . . . in its scale, ramifications, and sheer criminality and corruption . . . is unparalleled in the history of Anthropology” (Turner and Sponsel 2000). According to Turner and Sponsel’s account of Tierney’s book, Neel and Chagnon used a “virulent vaccine” among the Yanomami that “greatly exacerbated, and probably

started, the epidemic of measles that killed hundreds, perhaps thousands” (2000). Moreover, Turner and Sponsel indicated that they had done so as part of an experiment in sociobiology.

There are surely occasions when academic associations must police themselves and investigations are essential. Had the Tierney-Turner-Sponsel claims of murderous acts and atrocities withstood initial scrutiny, an investigation would have been essential, because the allegations struck at the ethical bedrock of the discipline. However, the claims of mass murder were quickly shown to be baseless (AAA 2002b:53). Far from starting a lethal epidemic, Neel and Chagnon struggled to control an outbreak of measles that had begun before they arrived in Venezuela, and they successfully vaccinated the villagers against the disease. The quick collapse of the allegations of genocidal acts, and the open participation of Turner and Sponsel in the controversy (both of whom had been in a long-standing feud with Chagnon and whose assistance Tierney acknowledges) suggested that *Darkness in El Dorado* was a suspect document. Given the prohibition against ethics adjudications, the association might well have decided not to conduct an investigation.

The Investigations of other Academic Societies into the Allegations

Well before the AAA produced its report, other academic societies completed their own investigation of the charges. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the International Genetic Epidemiology Society (IGES), the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG), and the Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA) all made inquiries and issued reports. Their inquiries were conducted with dispatch and they were focused on a limited number of significant issues. Each of these academic societies found the charges they examined to be without merit: “The ASHG inquiry finds these allegations to be gross misrepresentations and basically false” (ASHG 2001); the SVA concluded that it had “examined all of the Yanomamö films made by Asch and Chagnon and considers them to represent high ethical and professional standards” (2000); and the NAS determined that Tierney’s book was “a grave disservice . . . to science itself” (2001). The IGES investigation was of special importance. It dealt directly with the issues connected with Neel and Chagnon’s work in obtaining blood samples, which the task force would subsequently claim were ethically improper and harmed the Yanomami psychologically. The IGES concluded that the research was conducted with sensitivity to the Yanomami who were beneficiaries of the research, and that the society does “not find any evidence in support of the charge that Neel and his team had abused the then existing ethical guidelines during their conduct of research on the Yanomamö” (IGES 2001:23). We shall show that the AAA investigation was organized from different premises and produced different results.

THE INVESTIGATION AND THE REPORT

The Moral Mission, “Reflections,” and the Rejection of “Evidence”

The primary charge to the task force by the executive board was to conduct an inquiry into the allegations contained in *Darkness in El Dorado* (AAA 2002a:1.1). The task force, however, saw its investigation in broader moral terms:

Darkness in El Dorado has served anthropology well in that it has opened a space for reflection. . . . Both historically and today anthropology retains a central location in those relatively enduring regimes of knowledge and power which we can refer to in shorthand as the confrontation of Western elites with “others” whose presence requires classification, explanation, and incorporation into the systems of knowledge through which that power is in part constituted. . . . These regimes do more than merely shape anthropological practice; they make it possible. However, at the same time, it is possible to use anthropology to interrupt these very regimes, to expose their contradictions, and to open within them spaces within which new voices can be heard. By locating the work of our Task Force partly in the space of reflection, we hope to accomplish such an interruption. [AAA 2002a:9]

This guiding perspective fits the philosophical and social-activist aims of a morally engaged and radical postmodern agenda, in which science, in general, and anthropology, in particular, are delegitimized and identified with oppressive power structures (Downey and Rogers 1995:269). The activist mission, together with the association’s prohibition of the appearance of an adjudication, moved the task force to state: “*In no sense did we consider our work to be an ‘investigation’*” (AAA 2002a:9, emphasis added). In its view, the task force conducted an “inquiry,” which it defined as “reflection on the truth or falsity of allegations—and also of reflection of a moral and theoretical kind as well” (AAA 2002a:9). The task force regarded this distinction as crucial and did not use the word *investigation* to apply to task force activities throughout the hundreds of pages of materials (however, we refer to it as such).

Consistent with not conducting an investigation, the task force asserts that neither “*did we consider the materials that we developed to be ‘evidence’* [rather] . . . we present the various points of view that our interlocutors shared with us as important in their own right, as worthy of attention and reflection, *but not as ‘evidence’ revealing that some event did or did not occur*” (AAA 2002a:9, emphasis added). This perspective reflects a philosophical stance of postmodern scholarship, in which objective truth may be seen as unattainable and contingent. Thus, in presenting the crucial interviews with the Yanomami, the task force asserts that “we have accompanied all transcriptions with relevant contextual information, to ensure that the interviews are not considered ‘evidentiary’ of ‘events’ but rather of a ‘point of view’” (AAA 2002a:12).

The association follows the implications of not having conducted an investigation or collected evidence to conclude that it did not intend to charge anyone with

wrongdoing. According to Donald Brenneis, the AAA president who accepted and issued the *Report*,

Nowhere within any of the charges to the... Task Force is explicit reference made to specific anthropologists. The AAA is not investigating Napoleon Chagnon, *sensu stricto*, but rather certain aspects of fieldwork carried out by anthropologists and scientists among indigenous populations in South America beginning in the 1960s and extending on through the 1980s and 1990s. [Brenneis, unpublished communication to William Irons, August 5, 2002]⁴

For its part, the task force also promised "to inspire a movement in anthropological exchange... beyond individuals and personalities" (AAA 2002a:9–10). However, Brenneis's disclaimer is incorrect, and the task force's promise was not fulfilled. The heart of the task force inquiry consists of an examination of the ad hominem allegations in the Tierney book. It is built around accusatory chapters naming specific individuals ("Some Major Allegations against Napoleon Chagnon"; "Informed Consent and the Work of James V. Neel"). It includes anecdotal and accusatory testimony of witnesses and conclusions about the culpability of Neel and Chagnon. Far from comparatively and broadly reviewing the research of various scientists in South America as Brenneis suggests,⁵ the task force report focuses on the work of James Neel and Napoleon Chagnon. It cites their names 939 times and reaches a verdict of guilty.

The Structure of the Investigation

Constrained by its code of ethics but freed from the requirements of a genuine investigation, the inquiry and the subsequent *Report* lacked clear structure. An initial work group, the so-called Peacock Committee, produced a list of claims, which moved forward to the five-member task force. The deliberations of the Peacock Committee were secret, but two members (Janet Chernela and Joe Watkins) were members of both the committee and the task force to maintain "continuity" (AAA 2002a:16). That is, the committee charged with producing a list of potential allegations included some of the same individuals who would assess the evidence and determine the verdict.

Unlike the Peacock Committee, the task force deliberations became part of the public record. Absent the procedures of a formal investigation, their *Report* appears amorphous. Less than 15 percent of its contents was signed by all members of the task force. In this decisive portion of the work (which receives the bulk of our attention), the task force reached a consensus regarding the culpability of Neel and Chagnon. The remainder of the *Report* consists of individual or coauthored articles, "case studies," and "essays" presenting the individual committee members' points of view, which range from balanced and serious research efforts to the philosophical and to the accusatory.⁶ Although there is value in such individual contributions, their compilation is a surprising response on the part of an academic society to the circumstances of an investigation that requires a unified verdict, and it is inconsistent with the other profes-

sional associations that reviewed the matter. In this, the task force reflects a consciously postmodern perspective. As one of the panelists stated in a personal communication, "We are not one voice, we were a plurality of voices and [chose] to remain that way, as opposed to falsely presenting one point. All of this [was] carefully discussed with both the Executive Board and the staff of the AAA" (personal communication, April 26, 2002). Brenneis, to whom we spoke shortly after the executive board accepted the *Report*, explained that the task force was "multivocalic." The *Report*, like ethnographic truth from a postmodern perspective, is fragmentary, incomplete, and emerges from multiple sources as a kind of narrative or "story." The *Report* uses such language, referring to the "dialogic character of our work," of having the "benefits of... multiple perspectives," and that "this 'final' report is simply one contribution to an ongoing dialogue that the AAA will facilitate" (AAA 2002a:6, 8, 21).

What is apparent is that the task force framed its "inquiry" within a broad moral mission that extended well beyond the issue of Neel and Chagnon's culpability. But in the process it found them guilty of violating the association's ethics code as well as of other misconduct. Further, as we shall now show, it did so with little attention to due process.

OBJECTIVITY AND EVIDENCE

Conflicts of Interest and Prejudgments

Fernando Coronil (University of Michigan) was appointed to the task force despite the fact that his friend and thesis adviser, Terence Turner, has aggressively pursued Chagnon and Neel. "In ways that can not be appreciated enough," Coronil wrote in his doctoral dissertation, Turner assisted me as my "teacher, chairman of my committee and friend" (1987:v). Beyond his association with Turner, Coronil publicly prejudged the central allegations. A year prior to the publication of the final *Report*, he participated in a *Current Anthropology* forum on *Darkness in El Dorado* in which he concluded that "the work of these and other scientists [Neel and Chagnon] brought the Yanomami neither empowerment or well being but fragmentation and destruction" (Coronil 2001, emphasis added). This accusation was one of those that Coronil was charged with impartially investigating.

A second panelist, Janet Chernela (University of Maryland), also prejudged the case. Months before the final report was issued, she posted a paper on the AAA site summarizing the evidence against Chagnon and called for "collective responsibility and reparations" to the Yanomami. She wrote: "With the passage of time thoughtful anthropologists and the Association itself have come to view [Chagnon and Neel's] actions (including methods of collecting information) as reprehensible and unjustifiable" (reproduced in AAA 2002b:147). In fact, the association had not taken any stand with respect to these issues at the time Chernela wrote these words.

A third panelist with a potential conflict of interest was Raymond Hames, the only task force member with

direct knowledge of Yanomami language and culture but whose work was associated with Chagnon's. Hames' inclusion was an afterthought, in response to complaints that the task force was biased against Neel and Chagnon. Hames had no doubt he could be objective, but he ultimately resigned from the task force because "my association with Chagnon presents the appearance of bias" (Hames n.d.; see also Hames in press).

The Yanomami Interviews

Chernela conducted interviews in the field with three Yanomami informants. These were supplemented by Yanomami statements recorded in Ithaca, New York, at a conference organized by Turner, and at a meeting in Washington, D.C. These materials became the task force's primary basis for making factual claims about the villagers' response to Neel and Chagnon's research. Chernela acknowledged, however, that her interviews had no value as "evidence" (AAA 2002b:69). Her informants were children in the 1960s during Chagnon and Neel's research and none of them had reliable firsthand knowledge of the events described by Tierney. Moreover, Chernela writes: "The people I interviewed were chosen for their availability and communicative abilities [i.e., they spoke Spanish or Portuguese] rather than through any rigorous procedures or attempts to meet standards of representivity" (AAA 2002b:68).

The informants were also tainted by their close prior association with Tierney, Turner, and Salesian missionaries who have publicly attacked Chagnon.⁷ Turner was present and publicly introduced himself in the Yanomami village of Shakita as, in Chernela's words, an "independent visitor" while she was in the midst of recruiting potential interviewees at a meeting (AAA 2002a:14). The most extended and hostile interview of those she conducted was with Davi Kopenawa, who has visited international destinations with Turner. In addition, a "close friend of Patrick Tierney," who was also Turner's student, actively participated in Kopenawa's interview (AAA 2002b:30).

Considering the context, it is not surprising that the interviewees were antagonistic toward Chagnon and Neel. Their statements, however, are often improbable. Hence, Chernela uncritically elicits what she describes as "new allegations" in which Kopenawa accused Chagnon of murder by hiring contract killers who were paid according to the number of their homicides:

He ordered the Yanomami to fight among themselves. He paid with pans, machetes, knives, fishhooks. . . . [He said] "If you kill ten more people I will pay more. If you kill only two I will pay less." [AAA 2002b:35]

Julio Wichato, in another interview, goes beyond Kopenawa in remarks that echo the Turner-Sponsel memo of deadly experiments disguised as immunizations:

They say that Chagnon took blood. I heard this. The same day I think that Chagnon vaccinated these people to see if they would die. . . . People started to die and Chagnon left. And they died—all of them! (AAA 2002b:49).⁸

The Crucial Issue of the Benefits of the Chagnon-Neel Research

Chernela framed her interviews around the claim that Neel and Chagnon had not obtained informed consent from the Yanomami in the collection of blood samples in the 1960s and, according to the *Report*, thereby caused them to suffer psychologically. However, not once in the transcribed interviews or statements is there discussion of the historical context of Neel and Chagnon's work. On the basis of blood samples analyzed after his expedition in 1966 and 1967, Neel learned that the Yanomami had no immunity to measles. That finding led him to provide two thousand doses of vaccine to the Yanomami in 1968, and by vaccinating the villagers in the midst of a measles epidemic, he and Chagnon indisputably saved many lives.⁹ This was not brought to the attention of the informants, even when their comments seemed to demand an explanation. For example, one of the villagers, Jose Seripino recalls the research:

What are the bad things that happened? Taking blood. Taking skin [gestures]. I saw this. I was only ten years old. I thought, "OK. This will help us. But what happened? We haven't seen the outcome." [AAA 2002b:42]

Although the *Report* acknowledges that Neel and his team of physicians provided health care in all villages they visited, it nevertheless insists that the Yanomami expected immediate health benefits from Neel's biological work. The task force states that these efforts, and Neel's continuing medical assistance to the Yanomami through the early 1970s, were "beside the point" (AAA 2002a:22). One is led to wonder, however, if the interviewees, some of whom may actually owe their lives to the vaccination campaign, would have made the same statements had they known that the blood sampling was the essential antecedent to the immunizations.

Positive Yanomami Views of Chagnon

On the basis of admittedly unrepresentative interviews and statements, the *Report* portrays the Yanomami as hostile to Chagnon and Neel. Many of the Yanomami, however, would not speak with Chernela even after they were invited to do so. She writes, "My explanation that I represented the North American association of anthropologists, and would be happy to transmit any comments to them, drew no would-be interviewees" (AAA 2002a:14). One reason the villagers may not have been forthcoming is that they were not as hostile as the panel believes. In fact, there is evidence that some Yanomami are appreciative of Chagnon and Neel's work, as in this statement of solidarity written by a group of Yanomami and Ye'kwana, all of whom are elected representatives of their communities:

We have read the grave statements made by the journalist Patrick Tierney. . . . concerning Dr. Napoleon Chagnon.

We strongly reject these statements because they are lies. The fact was that a severe epidemic of measles struck communities on the Padamo, Ocamo, Mavaca and Alto Orinoco rivers during 1967. Dr. Chagnon—known

among us as Shaki—came to our communities with some physicians and he vaccinated us against the epidemic disease, which was killing us. Thanks to this, hundreds of us survived and we are very thankful to Dr. Chagnon and his collaborators for their help.

We demand that our national government investigate the false statements of Tierney, which taint the humanitarian mission carried out by Shaki [Chagnon] with much tenderness and respect for our communities. [Yanomami and Ye'kwana Statement 2000]¹⁰

The task force never discussed the implications of this statement in the *Report*, even though it was on their website.

Chagnon has further support from Jaime Turon, the current Yanomami and Ye'kwana elected leader,¹¹ who wrote to the association and the *New Yorker* (which had printed the excerpts from Tierney's book). He credits Chagnon and Neel for saving "thousands" of villagers during the 1968 epidemic, and he takes issue with Chernela's selective interviews:

The conversations that took place in Mavaca, attended by members of the American Anthropological Association, did not include the democratically elected representatives of the Yanomamo and Yekwana... Tierney is a coward and liar who in 1998 was traveling around the Upper Orinoco... making promises to the Indians in exchange for testifying against Napoleon Chagnon. [Turon 2003a]

Chernela did not interview the authors of the above statements that were made by formal, elected representatives of Yanomami communities. The task force thereby failed to examine disconfirming and conflicting information.

THE REPORT'S FINDINGS AND ITS INTERNAL LOGIC

We do not judge the allegations against Chagnon and Neel, but we do call into question the basis for the *Report's* findings. Among these were that Chagnon and Neel seriously damaged the Yanomami in the course of their research, and that Chagnon harmed them in his publications.

The Finding of "Long-Term Psychological Suffering"

Basing its conclusions on the Yanomami interviews and statements, the *Report* concluded:

There has been long-term social and psychological suffering among the Yanomami as a result of the 1968 Neel expedition... there was consensus that the Yanomami were misled by the promise of health benefits in the "consent procedure" of the Neel expeditions and this promise was not fulfilled... Obviously many Yanomami who report feeling betrayed by this unfulfilled promise were barely touched by the expedition or were not even alive when it occurred. However, the sense of having suffered an injustice is no less real among them... It cannot be denied or minimized. [AAA 2002a:29]

The logic and facts supporting this statement are problematic, in that the task force cannot draw meaningful con-

clusions from a few admittedly unrepresentative villagers. Further, the interviews do not present evidence of psychological damage or even "suffering." The interviewees appear to be simply offended at Chagnon and Neel for having collected and stored Yanomami blood samples.

The claim that the villagers' "suffering" is "long term," beginning with the unredeemed promises of immediate health benefits in the 1960s, is also questionable, in that the Yanomami were unaware of the status of the blood sampling until they were recently told about it by Tierney and others. Antonio Kelly, a public health worker among the Yanomami states: "The Yanomami that have expressed their opinions on this matter did not know these samples still existed and were 'operational' until the Tierney controversy reached them" (AAA 2002a:48). We again cite the Yanomami and Ye'kwana mayor Jaime Turon, who does not see the villagers as suffering from the stored blood:

Regarding the question of the blood and other samples collected during the expeditions undertaken by Drs. Neel and Roche, we think it is better to keep them than destroy them. At the very least there would still exist the possibility that new medical discoveries might be made that will improve our health and well being. If the samples are destroyed, this possibility does not exist (Turon 2003b).

We suggest that the "psychological suffering" detected by the task force, to the extent that it existed, might have been provoked by the accusations and the inquiry itself. As for Neel's consent procedure, the IGES investigation found that, as stated above, it met "existing ethical guidelines." The task force believed otherwise. But in her own comments, task force member Trudy Turner notes that in terms of the practices of 1968 it was "appropriate and even advanced" (AAA 2002a:67).

Findings Regarding Chagnon's Publications

The task force claims that Chagnon's publications and public statements about the Yanomami were harmful to them and that he "has not adequately addressed his responsibility to try to undo this damage" (AAA 2002a:33). It cites his article in *Science* (Chagnon 1988) on revenge warfare: "Of special importance for many of Chagnon's critics is an article he published in 1988 in *Science*, where he attempts to show that Yanomami men who have killed an enemy enjoy higher rates of reproductive success" (2002a:32). The task force does not claim this article or any other of Chagnon's publications were false. On the contrary, they acknowledge its members' lack of expertise on the Yanomami and abstained from evaluating whether his data were correct. This is an important point in the investigation. It is hard to imagine a scientific association formally holding a colleague accountable for publishing valid data in a scholarly journal. But a moralized anthropology association in an accusatory culture might do just that. The task force explains why the *Science* article concerned them:

First, its publication coincided with a disastrous moment in the long history of the struggle for Yanomami

land rights in Brazil, the reduction and division of Yanomami lands into a set of Bantustan-like island reserves by Brazilian President Sarney. . . . Second, the article received extensive coverage in the popular press. [AAA 2002a:32]

Evoking powerful images of apartheid in South Africa, the task force suggests that Chagnon's published works threatened to dispossess the Yanomami of their land. But the *Report* presents no compelling evidence that either this article or anything Chagnon wrote or said materially affected their land claims.¹² In fact, in 1992, four years after Chagnon's *Science* article was published, the governments of Venezuela and Brazil set aside a total of 41 million acres as reserves for the Yanomami.

The task force also suggests, but does not demonstrate, that Chagnon's work created stereotypes that harmed the Yanomami. The evidence rests primarily on "the published record of the many editions of his books, and those public statements by Chagnon about the Yanomami that we have seen" (AAA 2002a:32). The *Report* meticulously documents the changes Chagnon made in the five editions of his major ethnography, *Yanomamö* (1968), and shows that, in successive editions, he muted his discussions of violence and increased his examination of other topics (2002a:32–36). The task force takes this as a tacit acknowledgement by Chagnon of the "damaging character" of the earlier editions (AAA 2002a:34). But, the task force provides no significant evidence of damage beyond the fact that he made changes in his book. The *Report* states, "Anthropologists are accountable for what they write, and we must acknowledge the effects of our words" (AAA 2002a:40). However, the *Report* does not establish a plausible connection between Chagnon's words and their specific harmful effect.

Chagnon's Suspect Associates

The AAA *Report* found Chagnon guilty of having violated its ethics code by collaborating with self-interested Venezuelan politicians and a suspect foundation, Fundación para la Ayuda de la Familia Campesina e Indígena (FUNDAFACI), with whom his association is said to have been illegal. Thus, the *Report* notes, "It was widely believed that the foundation was merely a smokescreen" (AAA 2002a:41) for concealing corrupt business activities. Moreover, one of Chagnon's associates, Charles Brewer Carías, "was a controversial but influential public figure who had been denounced numerous times for his participation in illegal mining activities in Venezuela" (AAA 2002a:41). It was "through his association with Brewer Carías in FUNDAFACI" and others who were "widely known to have been involved in illegal and corrupt activities" that Chagnon managed to gain access to the Yanomami (AAA 2002a:44). Yet, the *Report* acknowledges, his permissions were "technically" legal (AAA 2002a:42).

We cannot affirm that Chagnon was innocent in his dealings with FUNDAFACI. Nor can we reach any firm judgment from the partial evidence the *Report* presents

with respect to all the other allegations. In the instance of FUNDAFACI, the *Report* cites "dangers to anthropology and to the Yanomami" (AAA 2002a:41) but a verdict of violating the ethics code is a serious matter. The association lacked a legal mandate for an adjudication and provided neither impartial finders of fact nor the rudiments of due process. As such, the task force's finding is improper.

A CULTURE OF ACCUSATION

We have argued that the El Dorado investigation exemplifies a tendency within the discipline to attack its own methods and practitioners. In the case at hand, Chagnon and Neel have been held up to public opprobrium in a way unequaled in the history of the discipline. Although the galleys of Tierney's book initiated the process, it was our colleagues and, ultimately, the association itself that conducted the public disgracing of Chagnon and Neel. The Turner-Sponsel memo compared Neel and Chagnon to Josef Mengele and referred to Neel's "fascistic eugenics" and his "perverted work" (Turner and Sponsel 2000). It quotes an unnamed colleague who claimed that Tierney's exposé would "cause the field to understand how the corrupt and depraved protagonists could have spread their poison for so long while they were accorded great respect throughout the Western World and generations of undergraduates received their lies as the introductory substance of anthropology" (Turner and Sponsel 2000).

The authors of the *Report* were generally restrained in their language, and even balanced in their discussion of at least some of the allegations. But the very existence of their heavily publicized ad hominem investigation, bearing the imprimatur of the AAA, was unprecedented and damaging. Moreover, their criticism was personal in nature. They claimed that "Many other anthropologists working among the Yanomami have argued that Chagnon's characterization [of the Yanomami] . . . reflected preoccupations with violence and aggression emanating from [his] own personality and background" (AAA 2002a:33). The *Report* does not separate itself from these remarks, nor does it name the "many other" anthropologists who have impugned Chagnon's character. Moreover, the task force published Kopenawa's accusation that Chagnon hired Yanomami on a sliding scale of payments to commit multiple murders. This allegation remains in the published report, available on the Internet, untested by cross-questioning and factually unevaluated by the task force.

The demeaning of Chagnon also took place in association-sponsored venues that embodied the culture of accusation that fostered the investigation. The association used the occasion of the November 2000 Annual Meetings to hold an "open microphone" in which the moderator urged those present in the packed ballroom to say whatever they wished about the controversy and then stepped back to allow them to do so. What followed was a succession of speakers, many with evident hostility toward

Chagnon. Virtually every aspect of his behavior, relevant or otherwise, was open for public dissection. One participant took the microphone and claimed that Chagnon had treated her rudely in the field during the 1960s. A colleague from Uganda praised Tierney's book and alleged that Westerners manufactured the Ebola virus and disseminated it in his country, just as Chagnon and Neel had started the measles epidemic. Members of the audience applauded both speakers.

The association replicated the spirit of the November forum on its website, in which anyone, including students and the general public, were encouraged to "join the dialogue" and to post their opinions, some of which were incorporated in the final report. Many comments were thoughtful. But the site was also an unsupervised sink of allegations, new charges of criminal acts, and name calling. Chagnon was accused of being drunk in the field, of demonstrating the use of an attack dog on student "volunteers," and of illegally taking "law-enforcement grade chemical mace," a "commando knife," and an "electric stun gun" into the field to potentially use on the Yanomami. By far the most damaging charge was an allegation that Neel deliberately excluded a Yanomami community from immunization so that he could observe a natural measles epidemic in an unprotected population.¹³ As of this writing, these allegations, all of which have since been challenged, remain on the association's website. The task force refers to the commentaries as "the remarkable dialogue that took place during the period when comments were posted" (AAA 2002a:6).

Denunciation of colleagues by colleagues is a prominent theme in the events that surround *Darkness in El Dorado*. From the publication of the Tierney book through the Turner-Sponsel memo, with its claims of mass murder and genocide, to the *Report* and its collateral venues, the accusations are unremitting, in some cases fabricated, and in others unsubstantiated. From the perspective of an ethics investigation, this hail of accusations should, in and of itself, be a central issue. And, yet, to the task force and the association leadership that formulated the charges, it was all but imperceptible. The Turner-Sponsel memo, which could have been an exhibit in their ethical deliberations, is not even referenced in the *Report's* extensive bibliography. There was no expressed concern for the harm done to individuals and to the profession by publishing defamatory statements in the *Report* or on the Internet. To the contrary, far from attending to the ethics of denunciation, the association and the *Report* generated more of it.¹⁴

Like the air we breathe, the accusatory atmosphere and its ethical implications were nearly invisible. In the preface to the report, we read that "the AAA believes that the greatest value of this report is not to find fault with or to defend the past actions of specific anthropologists" (AAA 2002c). Rather, "The key finding of the Task Force that dwarfs all others relates to the devastating health conditions of the Yanomami Indians" (AAA 2002d). However, the entire 300-page *Report* has less than a page de-

voted to the present health status of the villagers, aside from when the topic happens to overlap with the personal charges against Neel and Chagnon. The core of the *Report*, signed by all members of the Task Force, is about "finding fault." The investigation was not about the health of the Yanomami. It was about anthropologists and accusations.

What claims our attention is that in the midst of the culture of accusation, no one stopped to notice how wrong matters had gone. Hence, the AAA violated its own policies against ad hominem investigations. It appointed a committee with clear conflicts of interest. It tolerated and published prejudicial public statements by task force members—even as they were acting as finders of fact. It merged an adjudication with a "reflection." It denied that it had charged particular individuals, carried out an "investigation," or even collected "evidence," yet it found a colleague guilty of violating its ethics code. It failed to examine why some Yanomami were reluctant to provide testimony, and it did not properly consider the interviewees' associations with Tierney, Turner, and the Salesian missionaries. It disregarded statements supportive of Chagnon and Neel, and it failed to take into account the life-saving benefits of Neel and Chagnon's work. The interviews, which were the linchpin of many of the accusations, failed as social science, and they failed as evidence. And, yet, two executive boards and two presidents signed off on the investigation and the subsequent *Report*.

We conclude that the investigation fits comfortably within what has been a slowly developing culture of self-accusation and self-doubt. It reflected postmodern approaches, which question empirical evidence, and it eschewed due process, which demands it. It substituted a grand moral mission (such as "interrupting regimes of power") for a focused investigation. And it employed subjective approaches ("reflection") in a situation for which objectivity was essential. Yet we, as a profession, hardly took note because the structure and style of the association's investigation was all too familiar. It was written in a language to which we had gradually become accustomed, a language that we no longer perceive as alien, and a language to which we have grown numb.

The targets of the investigation, like biblical scapegoats, were expelled into the wilderness of anthropology. But this does not end the matter. As anthropologists, we cannot so easily separate ourselves from the burden of the serious ethical issues and moral ambiguities of the profession: How can we simultaneously be objective and concerned about the people we study? How can we engage with moral issues yet be respectful of anthropology as a science and anthropologists, with whom we may disagree, as colleagues worthy of basic decency? Unless we confront these issues directly, with a measure of civility and personal humility, and in an atmosphere free from personal allegations, there will be neither solutions nor even questions worth pursuing. Instead, as the *Report* urges (AAA 2002a:10), there will be yet more task forces and yet more "inquiries."

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NOTES

1. Napoleon Chagnon is Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the author of *Yanomamö* (1968), the best selling ethnography ever written. James Neel—who died in February, 2000—was an eminent geneticist, a member of the NAS, and winner of the Albert Lasker award.
2. See discussions by Gellner (1992), Lindholm (1997), and Reyna (1994) regarding the moral and logical status of postmodern claims.
3. See Gross and Plattner (2002) for an analysis of the implications of this stance for anthropology as a discipline.
4. The original was a letter (August 5, 2002) sent to William Irons by Brenneis, writing in his capacity as president of the AAA, formally reporting the reaction of the Committee on Ethics to Irons's query regarding the investigation of Chagnon.
5. The report never engages with the ethical implications of the work of the many other investigators who have carried out biomedical studies among indigenous people of South America during the years cited by Brenneis. These include anthropologists who shared research designs, funding sources, and even personnel with Chagnon and Neel (see especially Salzano et al. 1967).
6. The title of the *Report*—the “El Dorado Task Force Papers”—reflects its ambiguity, suggesting a scholarly collection. However, that title is followed by the phrase “Submitted to the Executive Board as a Final Report.”
7. Chernela notes: “Each person interviewed had been affected by the debate generated by Tierney's book and had been drawn into the dialogue before our meeting” (AAA 2002b:68).
8. These claims demonstrate that the Turner-Sponsel-Tierney charges had returned to Venezuela and that some of the villagers believed them, to the possible detriment of future immunization campaigns.
9. These points regarding the history of the immunizations and their appropriateness are acknowledged in the *Report* (AAA 2002a:25, 27).
10. The statement and the ones below by Jaime Turon come from Chagnon's website, <http://www.anth.ucsb.edu/discus/html/messages/62/63.html>, in which they are available with original signatures in a scanned document. We do not doubt their authenticity, but we alert the reader to this source.
11. Turon is the elected leader of the Alcaldía del Alto Orinoco (roughly, a county). He is a Ye'kwana Indian but has lived among the Yanomami, speaks a Yanomami language, and the Yanomami are his constituents. He governs a territory including the majority of the Yanomami population. Per the previous note, we remind the reader that this statement appears on Chagnon's website, in the form of a scanned version of the original.
12. See Hames (2001) and Martins (2001) for varying perspectives. We have spoken with prominent Brazilian public officials close to the issue in the State Government of Roraima; in the Roraima office of Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (IBAMA), the Brazilian Federal Environmental Agency; and in Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI), the Indian Service. They identified the obstacles to the creation of the reserves as gold miners, politicians who wanted to keep Roraima open for investment, and concerns about federal control over state territory. None believed Chagnon's portrayals of the Yanomami affected the decision to demarcate a reservation.
13. Dr. Ryk Ward, an authoritative eyewitness, responds to the allegations regarding immunization, which are presented by Frechione and Good (Ward 2002). For discussion of the other charges, see comments by Chagnon, Good, Hagen, Irons, and Sponsel (AAA 2002e).

14. A prominent exception is Trudy Turner and Jeffery Nelson's “Turner Point by Point” (AAA 2002b:107–122), in which they systematically and directly address Terence Turner's allegations. The ethical implications of this work, however, never became a focus for the task force as a whole.

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