

**Awareness, Action, Advocacy:  
Mobilizing a Paradigm, Tackling an Issue, Making a Difference<sup>1</sup>  
The Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award of 2002**

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One of the greatest joys of my career has been working with students. Therefore, it is appropriate that the paradigm I have been developing during the past decade has been inspired and improved upon by them. Anna Lisa Montecalvo and Austin Fitzpatrick are among those students at the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies who have helped me wrestle with what I call the "AAA paradigm." By critically assessing the concepts of awareness, action, and advocacy we are attempting to capture not only what it takes to be competent and compelling social scientists but what it takes to truly engage an issue. Stated differently, how can we substantively move from the knowledge associated with awareness, to the behavior associated with action, to the expertise and outreach associated with advocacy? In point, how do we galvanize others and make a difference? In counterpoint, as social scientists, should we be engaging in advocacy?

My overseas work has had three primary thrusts: Human rights (with a special focus on refugees and internally displaced persons); water resources; and community development. My work within the United States also has encompassed refugee issues and human rights while including program evaluation within the public mental health sector. This address broadly draws upon these experiences. In so doing, it is not my intent to recapitulate my career, but rather to share certain observations which hopefully will resonate with others. It also is my intent to demonstrate why I believe that advocacy is essential.

**Applied Anthropologists and "The Other AAA"**

Elements of the awareness, action, advocacy paradigm – what could light-heartedly be called "the other AAA" – have been exemplified over recent years in the writings of our professional colleagues. I have selected three articles from the *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* which have impressed me in this regard.

The need for awareness was explicated by Larry Van Horn in an important article published in 1998. It followed a symposium he had chaired at the 1997 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Entitled "Seeking Indigenous Knowledge

of National Park Neighbors," Van Horn's article stressed the importance of consulting with a park's neighbors – who often are Native Americans – as cultural information is compiled to enhance the park's interpretive value. Reasons for doing so are legal, moral, and professional. As exemplified at the Wounded Knee battle site in South Dakota, historical awareness is enhanced through multiple perspectives offered by diverse types of park consultants, only some of whom are professional staff members.

The need for action was described by Rogelio García-Contreras in an article published in the *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* in 1997. A doctoral student of mine at the University of Denver, his was a critical essay built around themes covered in John Bodley's classic book, *Victims of Progress*. Looking at human rights issues through his own Mexican lens filtered, in turn, by his studies of political and cultural issues while in the U.S., García-Contreras chastised those anthropologists who celebrate the involvement of indigenous peoples in politics "as if they have never done it before and as if it were an inconceivable feat" (1997, 188). He went on to make the controversial statement that "human rights [as promulgated by many in the West] are nothing but a vulgar version of multiculturalism and diversity that attacks modernity with political populist support" (1997, 188). A better perspective, he asserts, is to truly treat indigenous and all other peoples as integral human beings, showing them genuine respect. Action is what counts, he concludes.

The need for advocacy was exemplified in an article co-authored by Arthur Campa and Bitten Skartvedt in 1997. Conducting a rapid appraisal of four low-income Denver neighborhoods, they analyzed and compared community strengths and weaknesses. Methodologically triangulating by using focus groups, key informant interviews, and participant observation, one of their findings was that interactive advocacy is needed by and for residents. That is, researchers and residents must advocate together in participatory fashion. For at-risk residents this works best in concert with family-based interventions that include parental education, mental health services targeting youth, and enhanced emergency health services.

## War and Peace

In March 2001 I had the opportunity to visit Israel and Palestine. This coincided with the early part of the current *intifada* (uprising). I discussed issues of war and peace with Israeli Jews and Arabs and with Palestinian Muslims and Christians. The summer of 2002 will mark my fourth visit to Bosnia. I have been privileged to serve as the University of Denver's faculty advisor for this service learning program since shortly after its inception in 1996. Here, I also have had the opportunity to discuss issues of war and peace, in this case with Bosnian Muslims, Croats, Serbs, and Roma. In 1994 I participated in a water reconnaissance survey and training program in northern Ethiopia. Here, too, I had the opportunity to discuss issues of war and peace with Tigrayan villagers who had served as guerrilla fighters in the recent civil war. My first trip to an active war zone took place in 1984. As Chief-of-Party for a USAID team assigned to assess prospects for water system improvement for small-scale farmers in El Salvador, I took my initial plunge into war and peace discussions. A farmer near the town of San Miguel was the first to get me thinking seriously about this. He said, "There's civil war all around. Guerrilla fighters in the hills, President Duarte's government troops in town. I don't take sides – my family simply needs to eat."

Inspired by this 1984 visit, and by my colleague, George Shepherd, at the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver, I then began to systematically delve into the field of human rights. It has been a rewarding journey in that I have benefited from the scholarship of people like Shepherd (Shepherd and Anikpo 1990), in the work of students like Montecalvo and Fitzpatrick, and in the everyday people I have met on five continents. It has been a frustrating journey in that human rights abuse is a seemingly burgeoning enterprise. To the degree that a liberal perspective can come to complement a realist perspective, strides are being made. To the degree that systems of restorative justice can come to replace systems of retributive justice, strides also are being made. As Kathy Van Arsdale recently noted, "Political will is necessary. Being proactive is critical. Making the most of everyday opportunity is essential."

Closer to home, as I attempt to translate these overseas experiences into useful action and advocacy, this weekend serves as a bold reminder of what we must overcome. On April 19, 1993, the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, burned to the ground. On April 19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was bombed in Oklahoma City. On

April 20, 1999, devastating shootings occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

## Voices

In moving from awareness to action to advocacy, one of the most essential tasks for the practicing anthropologist is to listen – really listen – to the voices of those we encounter in the field. Nowhere was this captured better than in Lawrence Salmen's 1987 book, *Listen to the People*, wherein he advocates not only active listening but active engagement of potential beneficiaries in all phases of project design, implementation, and evaluation. I first began attempting to listen in this way as I was conducting my dissertation fieldwork through the University of Colorado in the 1970s.

*"Could I come to America and be your servant?"*

This was the perplexing question I received from a young Asmat tribesman in Irian Jaya (Indonesian New Guinea) in 1974. Developmentally disabled, he and his mother had become acquaintances of mine as I moved toward completion of my doctoral fieldwork in the village of Ewer. I had been focusing on issues of socioeconomic development and was moving toward integrating various quantitative data sets with the qualitative data reflecting the opinions of villagers. We had had a number of pleasant conversations during the preceding weeks, and he had come to respect my viewpoints, as I had his. When he had asked about life in the United States, I had told him about my home and family. It nonetheless caught me entirely off-guard when, just days before I was to depart, he asked if he could come to America and be my servant. He quickly reminded me that he was a very good cook, something I couldn't dispute. Regaining my composure, I pointed out that my family did not have servants and did not believe in the concept of servants. I pointed out that it would be difficult for him to secure a passport and visa, and that – if he succeeded in his quest – he would not be able to see his Asmat friends and relatives. He paused to think this over, then replied, "You're absolutely right. My flashlight is running low. Could I have a battery, instead?"

Reinforcing my point about awareness, I have used this story many times over the years in classroom lectures. I make the points that expectations can be diverse, that dreams must be respected, but that realities don't necessarily coincide with such dreams.

*"She was blown into the air and landed in a pile of*

*mud and blood.*”

This was the amazing statement I heard from a Bosnian Muslim as he described the tragic day in May 1996 when his wife had inadvertently stepped on a landmine in their backyard. The Bosnian civil war had ended only months before, and the two of them at last had been able to move back into their home, high on Trebovic' Mountain overlooking Sarajevo. As they began the tedious work of clearing the weeds and undergrowth from their garden, she stepped on an anti-tank mine which had been modified by Serb forces through the insertion of an inner explosive device euphemistically known as a “pumpkin.” As I sat with them over tea, in that same backyard three years later, he described how she had been blown ten meters into the air. Initially stunned himself, he gathered her in a blanket and placed her in the backseat of their Volkswagen “bug.” Speeding down the mountain toward Sarajevo’s main hospital, some five kilometers away, he looked at his watch, oddly timing their descent. Seventeen minutes later they arrived at the hospital’s doorstep where doctors and nurses were waiting – not because of a phone call, but because they had heard the distant explosion and knew that inevitably someone would be arriving. After several hours of surgery and the removal of both her legs and one arm, she emerged alive. She remains today the most seriously injured Bosnian woman to have ever survived a landmine.

Reinforcing my point about action, several of us at the University of Denver and abroad have been able to assist this family with certain of their household and appliance needs. A gas line has been repaired. A refrigerator has been installed. A valued friendship has emerged.

*“The Israeli military are shooting at the Nativity Church.”*

This was the e-mail message I received on April 4, 2002, from a young man in Bethlehem. We had met the previous year in that West Bank town. His call for assistance helped re-energize me in my attempt to bring the voices of Khalid Mansour, Mark Levy, and myself together for publication. As a Palestinian-American, Mansour has been working to assist Palestinians in their attempts to secure a homeland and enhance their socio-political opportunities. As a Jewish-American, Levy has been working to assist Israelis in their attempts to secure a homeland and enhance their socioeconomic opportunities. All three of us are working to promote human rights. All three of us are working to bridge

divides. Our voices, and the challenge in our attempt to engage them, were published in the pages of the *Denver Post* on April 7, 2002. Journalist Bruce Finley provided an accurate account of the sometimes collegial, sometimes contentious path that the three of us traversed over a three-month period as we attempted to follow up on my initial idea of a “Denver tri-ologue” to wrestle with the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. One point of contention was the extent to which Middle Eastern history should be examined as contemporary solutions are sought. Mansour was emphatic that post-World War II events should be examined carefully, while Levy was emphatic that current events be emphasized. The three of us concurred on the need to communicate despite the tensions even Denver-based efforts engendered.

Reinforcing my point about advocacy, it is essential to speak out about issues that impact the well-being of others. To be an advocate one must have expertise. This best can be obtained through reading, research, and reflection, the latter built upon experience. The effective advocate must not only know what frames his or her own stance but what frames the stances of those in disagreement. Taking a stand means respecting diversity while not succumbing to extreme cultural relativism. To be an effective advocate it also is essential to be humble. The limelight cannot come to focus on you but must continually be steered toward the issue at hand.

### **The Trouble with Diversity**

The trouble with diversity is that everybody likes to talk about it but few of us are able to engage it thoroughly and multi-dimensionally. There are three areas where I think that applied anthropologists have excelled in this regard: in recognition and respect for gender diversity and sexual orientation; in bridging the gap between rich and poor such that previously marginalized voices can better be heard; and in minimizing the distinction between the skills of “the less highly degreed” and “the highly degreed.” Regarding the latter, the High Plains Society is exemplary in its ability to give equitable voice to the student novice working toward a B.A. degree and the seasoned professional whose Ph.D. was completed decades earlier.

There also are three areas where I think that we have not excelled. These require more explanation. The first is religious diversity within our own ranks. While often among the first professionals to tout the need for recognizing, researching, and respecting the religious

rights and diverse practices of others, we have been among the last professionals to do this among ourselves. For many of us our religious involvements and the values they engender are central to our lives, yet is lively discussion of this encouraged? Rarely. Are we fearful that a colleague will accuse us of proselytizing? Do we dread the possibility that we won't be viewed as "objective?" Do we think that those among our colleagues who do not adhere to a particular religiously informed belief system will think us intellectually inferior? As a Methodist, I find that my life has been enriched by my discussion of contemporary issues such as the nature of goodness and the nature of evil in the context of genocide. Most recently I reflected upon values shaped by religion as I discussed the Palestinian dilemma with *USA Today* (O'Driscoll 2002).

The second area where I think that we have not excelled, again within our own ranks, involves political diversity. While socio-political studies by such scholars as Leopold Pospisil (1963) in Irian Jaya have been among those most praised, we seem ill-at-ease in discussing and supporting political diversity among ourselves. In my experience within the United States, if the topic does come up, the Democrats gain the upper hand. Yet there is no evidence with which I am familiar that Republicans care less about the oppressed or devote less of their time to caring for the marginalized. In my extended family, I am delighted that there are Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Rather than finding how many things we disagree on, I am continually impressed as to how many things we agree on. Where we don't agree, my own thinking has been enriched.

The third area where I think that we have not excelled is in our incorporation of mentally ill persons as professional colleagues and co-researchers. Sue Estroff and Richard Lamb (1985) have written vividly of the problems with labeling, in their book *Making It Crazy*. We could follow the example of a man who, while struggling with schizophrenia, has recently been working as a researcher with the Jefferson County Mental Health Center. In a recent speech, Robert Anand told us of his work as an interviewer with the center's consumer-focused recovery survey. "The interaction with the staff . . . was completely positive," he said. "They valued my contributions and made sure that I was adequately prepared. I felt important and trusted with responsibility for the work ahead." As he conducted the interviews, he also – perhaps ironically, perhaps expectedly – found himself battling stereotypes about mentally ill people. Yet, as the research

progressed, he came to realize that "this was the stereotype I had internalized from the ways in which I had been treated in earlier stages of my life." He concluded his speech by stating, "I believe that the way in which consumers were involved and empowered [as survey researchers] was true to model principles of inclusion, mainstreaming, and normalization. . . ."

In short, practicing anthropologists are like other people. We promulgate, we pronounce, and we procrastinate in tackling the toughest issues and stereotypes – those that feature ourselves. To the degree that we can facilitate the empowerment of others, as I stressed in our book *Refugee Empowerment and Organizational Change* (1993), we will move forward.

### **Facilitative Empowerment**

Svetlana Yamanova, one of my current students at the University of Denver, noted during our class on refugee human rights that we often are working to help the repressed, the oppressed, and the depressed. Indeed this is so. As practicing anthropologists, some would say that it is our option to speak out on behalf of such people – to assist them in their struggles. I would suggest that it is our obligation. However, this must be done in ways that first respect their voices and that facilitate their abilities to act and advocate on their own.

I have been privileged to have to been a co-founder of Hospice of Metro Denver, an organization which has grown in 25 years to become the Rocky Mountain region's largest hospice. I also have been privileged to have been a co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Survivors Center which, in five years, has grown to become the region's most comprehensive agency serving refugee survivors of torture. With Hospice of Metro Denver I can say that I have worked with people who have been repressed. With the Rocky Mountain Survivors Center I can say that I have worked with people who have been oppressed.

Through my work as program evaluator at the Colorado Mental Health Institute in Denver, I have had the opportunity to work with people who are depressed. I engage mentally ill people in a number of ways in that post. Twice annually we conduct a patient satisfaction survey. While it turns out that most clients express overall satisfaction with the services they receive at this public psychiatric hospital, it also is important to note that they continue to stress the need to enhance their own involvement in their treatment planning as well as

the need to enhance the involvement of family members in their treatment. Our clinical staff have attempted to respond. A process of facilitative empowerment is helping bring this about.

### Coming Full Circle

As the tenth recipient of the Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award, it is appropriate that I come full circle. Ten is a magic number, a coalescing number. The magic exemplified in the personalities and work of the previous nine recipients, all of whom I know well, brings me back to each of them, one by one.

Muriel Crespi was the first recipient, in 1993. Her trail-blazing work within the National Park Service has deservedly earned her international recognition. What a pleasure to have had lunch with her this past December in Washington, D.C., as we discussed ways to improve the *American Anthropologist* journal's outreach to practicing anthropologists. Robert Hackenberg was the second recipient, in 1994. I had the opportunity of introducing him that evening in Estes Park, and of light-heartedly reminding him how I used to chase him across the Boulder campus to ask him questions regarding my doctoral classwork. His replies were always crisp and clear. Deward Walker was the third recipient, in 1995. He has remained one of my closest colleagues within anthropology, particularly valued for his intellectual insights, his sense of humor, and his continuing work as editor of the *High Plains Applied Anthropologist*.

The fourth recipient was Darwin Solomon. His award was made posthumously, in recognition of his masterful bridging of sociology and anthropology within the field of international development. His wife, Buzzy, remains a close friend of mine. The fifth recipient was Don Stull, a classmate of mine in the doctoral program at the University of Colorado. We shared an office at the Institute of Behavioral Science. Don is a wonderful writer, as his pioneering work on America's meatpacking industry attests. He currently is serving as editor of the journal, *Human Organization*. The sixth recipient was Gottfried Lang. Friedl served as the primary dissertation adviser for my research among the Asmat of Irian Jaya, having worked in that same region himself. He and his wife Martha remain an inspiring force in my life on both personal and professional levels.

Howard Stein was the seventh recipient. He has been a friend for nearly 20 years and has authored books and articles which have substantively enhanced

my own thinking in such diverse areas as organizational development and psychiatric training. I am now reading his book *Nothing Personal, Just Business*, published last year. Carla Littlefield was the eighth recipient. Creatively spanning the fields of nursing and anthropology, Carla has been a national leader within the Society for Applied Anthropology and a valued friend for over 25 years. Her grantwriting abilities are renowned. Ken Keller was the ninth recipient, last year. Also a valued friend for over 25 years, he conducted research among the Asmat as well. Ever-smiling and ever-thoughtful, Ken exemplifies the best in what the chair of a major department should be.

Omer Stewart himself completes the circle. He symbolizes both one and ten. Prior to his death, I had the opportunity to share the news that I had been appointed to the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs. My work on the commission would put me in regular touch with the Lieutenant Governor and, more importantly, in regular touch with leaders of the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain tribes. Omer wished me well, noting that he himself had worked closely with representatives of these groups in years past. I served ten years on the commission, retiring in 2001 after having had the privilege of assisting with the repatriation of nearly 200 Native American remains in Colorado's mountains.

### Notes

1. High school teachers who made a big difference in my life included Bill Ashton, Brian McGregor, and William White at Arvada West (Colorado) High School. College teachers deserving special mention include Frank Anderson and William Sedlacek (University of Maryland), and Robert Hackenberg, Gottfried Lang, and Deward Walker (University of Colorado).

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