Citizenship and Anthropology:

Perplexities of a Hybrid Social Agent

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Introduction

I am certain that every anthropologist has a tale about how s/he was confronted with an ethical dilemma related to engagement during fieldwork or thereafter. Participant observation and face-to-face encounters in particular make these dilemmas more challenging. This is more acute when research is done about people or populations who are in situations of oppression or disempowerment. But ethical dilemmas occur in areas other than research, areas of the "normal" life in the anthropologist's home society. That is the case with teaching, with civic, social, and political involvement, and with public commentary. When talking about the challenges of engagement, the status of the anthropologist as *citizen* - a social actor in a polity - needs to be considered.

Citizenship, for an anthropologist, is bound to constitute an added responsibility, for the practice of a social science is characterized by two complex features: on the one hand, it is reflexive, i.e., the knowledge produced by social scientists is incorporated by social actors and changes their behaviour, thus starting an endless hermeneutic circle; on the other, the nature of our object of study is part and parcel of our interests and concerns as members of society – as citizens. That is why "the challenge of engagement" is an expression that usually invites a series of different, but enmeshed, epistemological, methodological, ethical, and political issues that should be disentangled, at least for heuristic reasons. These include: the old question about the difference between natural and social sciences; the debate around objectivity versus subjectivity; the ethical and scientific limits of engagement and militancy; the definitions and uses of the anthropologist's authority within the discipline and in society at large.

I see *citizenship* as a process, not a status. Citizenship is a set of rights and obligations in a formally democratic social contract. These rights and obligations tend to expand as societies are challenged with new divisions, including identities, which are of special concern for us. The practice of anthropology is part of the exercise of citizenship, not an isolated activity, because science is a social practice. Furthermore, as a social science/ humanity, anthropology deals with issues that are the very stuff of life in society. This should make us more – not less - demanding regarding methodological criteria for ideal objectivity. If knowledge is seen as a social practice – something produced not only inside the professional corporation of anthropology but between it, subjects of research, and society at large - then the anthropologist's engagement should be seen as a constitutive part of his or her practice. This is a statement that does not involve any ethical or ideological call *for* engagement, much less for militancy. But it does say that even the non-engaged should be aware of the social and political consequences of their share in the social production of knowledge.

Knowledge is a shared, debated, social practice – one which occurs historically and culturally within institutions, among different agents, and in power laden relations with

other actors and institutions in society. And any actor – an anthropologist included – has several situated identities, with different limitations of agency. Any actor is, at any given moment, a hybrid of identities. But the anthropologist, given the nature of his/her object of study, should have the added capacity (and responsibility) to incorporate this awareness into his/her practice – particularly when s/he comes out as an activist or commentator.

The first step in my talk will deal with epistemological and methodological issues of objectivity and militancy. This has been a central issue of debate, but I believe that the debate is somewhat flawed and that my position on citizenship may help set a different path. It is not by chance that I will use an example related to the teaching of anthropology – an activity that helps make citizens. The second step deals with anthropology as a social practice in diverse and contradictory social arenas, mainly through the example of academic and public positioning on multiculturalism. I believe that this example helps show how the way we conceive and convey understandings of what culture is becomes central for understanding our troubles in dealing with informants, party politics or social movements, political power, and the public opinion. The third step is an addendum of sorts: it deals with anthropology as a profession, the exercise of citizenship within the corporation, mainly through the example of the problems felt in the preparation of this plenary, related with the engagement in issues of multiculturalism by some of our colleagues.

1.
One of the main issues raised by discussions about engagement is that of how values and interests are supposedly contradictory with scientific objectivity. This is an issue that concerns us throughout our professional lives. But it is also a source of great anxiety for our students. Most of my working time as an anthropologist is spent teaching and supervising academic work – as I am sure is the case with most of you. Teaching involves two dimensions. The first is the training of future anthropologists (the labour market allowing, of course). It consists in providing the epistemological and methodological skills for research; knowledge of the history of the discipline; and knowledge of the theories and ethnographic data that are thought to be valid in the discipline at a specific historical juncture. The second dimension – and a more diffuse one – consists in instilling a sense of belonging to a professional group identity. This, and the fact that university education occurs during late adolescence and that anthropology is concerned with issues of human life in society, concurs to the fact that we are also making citizens, whether we like it or not. My students have systematically shown a deep concern with the social relevance of their future activity as anthropologists. They have always displayed a certain amount of uneasiness with the fact that the issues they study are so permeated by the same sort of concerns that come up in politics, in the media, in their immediate social relations with colleagues, friends, teachers, or family. In sum, the scope and limitations of the acting out of their social identities as agents – their citizenship – is constantly challenged by what they learn.

For the last few years I have used as reading material for a graduate course on Contemporary Trends in Anthropological Theory the papers published in 1995 in *Current Anthropology* under the heading "Objectivity and Militancy: a debate" (Roy d'Andrade's "Moral Models in Anthropology" and Nancy Scheper-Hughes' "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology"). Students have always responded to this debate in a passionate, yet puzzled way. After all, they seem to ask, are we being trained to be scientists or militants? Are the two opposed? Can the two go together? Is a synthesis possible, or should one look for a third way, beyond the dichotomy?

Roy D' Andrade says that attacks on objectivity in anthropology have led to the proposal of a new agenda, one in which '…anthropology [is to] be transformed from a discipline based upon an *objective* model of the world to a discipline based upon a *moral* model of the world' (1995:399). An objective account, he says, is not necessarily value-free: '…*objectivity* refers just to the degree to which an account gives information about the object being described' (1995:399-400). The attempt to be objective would amount to '…talk about the thing, not oneself…'(1995:400), whereas in a moral model the issue is to identify what is good and bad. For D' Andrade, 'anthropology's claim to moral authority rests on knowing *empirical* truths about the world and that moral models should be kept separate from objective models because moral models are counterproductive in discovering how the world works.' (1995:402). D' Andrade is at odds with the tendency to highlight the secondary sense of the term 'objective' – 'an account given without bias or self-interest' - instead of the primary meaning –'an account which describes the object, not the describer' (1995:404).

He discusses four general problems with the use of moral models as a means of finding out about the world, which he exemplifies thus: 1) in order to understand the world the moral model has to identify when something is or is not oppression; 2) the objective world comes '…in many shades of grey but the moral world tends toward black and white…' (1995:406); 3) the moral model shows a '…tendency to believe that good things produce good results and bad things produce bad results' (1995:406); 4) '…whereas an objective model can – at least sometimes – be changed by new data, new arguments, new theories, moral models are very hard to change.' (1995:406).

He goes on to address the issue of the particular moral model of oppression that he says is current in anthropology today, saying that it is not a very good representation of the way the world is, although, he states, 'The only situation to which the oppression/ mystification / denunciation model seems to have a reasonable degree of fit is to discrimination – racism and sexism' (1995:407). Otherwise, the moral model 'has no theory of *good* power or *good* inequality … and is almost entirely negative in character' (1995:407).

Both my students and I are at first inclined to agree with this. However, gender, sexual and racial discrimination are not only my fields of concentration in anthropology, but also issues of great concern for my students as persons and citizens. The problem with discrimination based on criteria of ascribed or achieved (and, today, also *chosen*) identity is that a distinction needs to be made between equality and difference, on the one hand, and inequality and sameness, on the other – and that is clearly a question of rights of citizenship. This calls for a dialogue between anthropological knowledge *and* political/civic activism. The 'weak' version of this is including activism as an object of inquiry; the 'strong' version is participating in activism. The former does not imply the latter, but the latter should imply the former – that is the condition for objectivity.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes comes second in my students' reading. Her starting question is:

> '…what stake can anthropologists expect to have in current political debates in rapidly "democratising" nations in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa where newly drafted constitutions and bills of rights – and those of Brazil and South Africa are exemplary – speak to a growing global consensus ("Western", "bourgeois", "hegemonic", if you will) defending the rights of women, children, sexual minorities, the accused, and the sick against "traditional and customary law", cultural claims increasingly viewed as hostile, oppressive, and exploitative?' (1995:409-10).

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As Portuguese citizens, both my students and I tend to echo the question: we live in a country that has been a democracy for less than 30 years, after decades of dictatorship, colonialism and a patriarchal, ultra-Catholic culture of traditionalism, now faced with rapid yet unequal development, European integration and globalisation. Scheper-Hughes goes on to describe her transformation from "objective" anthropologist to politically and morally engaged *companheira* during her fieldwork in Brazil, when she realized that she could not '…be an anthropologist and a *companheira* at the same time' (1995:410). She writes: '…in juxtaposing 'militancy' and 'the ethical'… I wish to question two sacred cows…: the proud, even haughty distance from political engagement and its accompanying, indeed, its justifying ethic of moral and cultural relativism." (1995:414).

This seems to be in agreement with my students' concerns. They often ask how can they reconcile the basic anthropological teachings on cultural relativism and their heartfelt revolt with certain practices that seem to go against human rights. I do not seem to have an answer for them. But there seems to be evidence from both ethnography and documentary film that hegemony is never complete. That is, as long as one social agent does not agree with a practice, the way is open for contestation and change. If that agent happens to have been influenced by a "foreign" cultural framework, it is just an example of the fallacy of cultural isolates, not an example of "contamination". What if human rights are to be seen as a specifically "Western", "modern" or "bourgeois" concept, they ask. And the only answer I seem to be able to provide is to ask them to make a distinction between cultural relativism as part of an explanation of the internal consistency of certain social and cultural sets of practices and beliefs, and moral relativism as an untenable position for citizens and practitioners of a social science – indeed, of a *humanity*.

In a growing globalised world of urban multiculturalism, power and oppression have many disguises, according to many crisscrossing social classifications. Certainly an anthropologist cannot pinpoint the power of governments and corporations and dismiss a critical analysis of the consequences of "lower level" hegemonies, such as patriarchy, religious authority, homophobia, and so on. At this juncture, my students tend to feel disheartened, for they start anticipating situations in the field that they feel they are not prepared to deal with. Again, I only have a tentative answer to give them: their first obligation as anthropologists is to convey a sense of what human life is like. That is "talking about the object" - *but that should include* conveying a sense of one's *Weltanschauung,* of how the research was done, and of what kind of ethical and political conflicts the anthropologist was faced with – and how he or she "solved" them as a *legitimate* actor in the social situation of which s/he was a part. The reflexive nature of our social science makes this a methodological must. One cannot pretend not to be *there*; the fly-on-the-wall fantasy is just that - a fantasy.

I like to think that my students understand that *objectivity* and *militancy* are not mutually exclusive options. Militancy is one form of *engagement* among others. Objectivity is a requirement of scientific practice, whereas militancy is a choice. And engagement is an inevitability that can either be kept frozen or be activated in a cognizant way on the basis of the anthropologist's citizenship (his or her ethical and political choices), not on the basis of a diffuse moralism imposed on science or on the profession. But once it is activated, it requires added responsibility: if militancy around a certain issue or cause happens to be their choice, they will have to be prepared to established the *necessary fiction* of separating their social identities according to where, when and with whom they become engaged and what role anthropological knowledge will play in that engagement. They will have to pretend their identities are separate, whereas in fact they are hybrid agents.

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2.

In this section I will deal with anthropology as a social practice that happens in diverse and contradictory social arenas. I will use the example of academic and public positioning on multiculturalism. The way we conceive and convey understandings of what culture is and is not, is central for understanding our troubles in dealing with informants, party politics or social movements, political power, and the public opinion.

If teaching occupies a great deal of an anthropologist's time[2], some of us are also engaged in a cognizant way – either because we want to, were asked to, or cannot avoid to – in several forms of social intervention that go beyond the unavoidable reflexivity of social science. These include writing in newspapers, writing texts that fall under the category of "popularising anthropology", participating in TV or radio shows, or undertaking active roles in civic, social, or political movements.

Anthropologists are today faced with demands from society, political power, and social movements regarding the explanation of processes of ethnic/"racial" identity and conflict, immigration, and multiculturalism. My point is that the knowledge produced by anthropology about what culture is and is not, is at odds with other theories circulating in society. These conflicting views are part of the on-going process of producing social knowledge about culture – a process that is dense with conflicting interests and differential power; a process in which we, anthropologists, are actors and agents.

After fieldwork in Brazil on the emergence of the Black movement in a town of Bahia, I became more active in conveying my perception of issues of ethnic identity and multiculturalism. In very general terms, Brazil is a society where the racial divide largely coincides with a class divide. Representations of national identity are permeated by the ideology of "racial democracy" and miscegenation is seen as the reason why there is supposedly no racism in the country. This notion depends to a great extent on the popularisation of anthropologist Gilberto Freyre's interpretation of the historical formation of colonial Brazil. His theory relies heavily on the notion that Portuguese colonialism was exceptionally pro-miscegenation and non-racist. This interpretation was used by the Portuguese colonial regime in order to justify the occupation of African territories during the late dictatorial period from the late fifties to the early seventies. Actually, an official ideology of "multiracialism and multiculturalism" was promoted – at the same time that clear statutory inequalities (said to be ways of preserving cultural "difference and identity") existed in the colonies.

In today's Brazilian formally democratic society, the concept of enlarged citizenship led to the acknowledgement of racial tensions, and the growth of a Black movement. Portugal, on the other hand, decolonised, became a formally democratic society, and joined the EU. It became a host society for many immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe, Brazil and the ex-colonies in Africa. Official discourse and common sense perceptions in the country still depict Portugal as a cultural exception of tolerance and miscegenation, often using Brazil as the paradigmatic example of that. However, immigrants are faced with almost total exclusion from citizenship, and multicultural policies are weakly expressed. When they are made explicit, the understanding is that multiculturalism is not the way for miscegenation

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[2] I am purposefully avoiding addressing research and fieldwork, in order to concentrate on activities that go beyond the strict requirements of the exercise of the profession. But the challenges and conflicts felt in these activities are undeniably based on the research experience. Also, a parallel could be established between my intervention in the area of ethnicity/race and intervention in the area of gender and sexual orientation issues.

or hybridisation – as it was ideologically perceived to have happened in the colonies. It is rather seen as a form of separatist or "difference multiculturalism", where immigrants are expected to either acculturate into the Portuguese mainstream or to separately reproduce their differences – including the absence of citizenship values. Indeed, their ethnic/"racial" difference is perceived to be the principal source and criterion for the definition of their identity – not citizenship in the wider sense.

This is obviously related with the common sense concept of culture: culture coincides with "population", populations/cultures are isolates, and they are characterized by sets of essentialized characteristics. A similar concept – though coming from the other end of the power spectrum – is conveyed by activists in the Black movement in Brazil, who reify the characteristics that have been attributed to their group. This is, of course, a case of strategic essentialism, a way of doing identity politics with what little symbolic capital one has – although a strong discourse about slavery, oppression and historical plights is also conveyed. In Brazil, Portugal, and elsewhere, ethnic cultural nationalism (as well as consumerist and other forms of identity) is becoming more intense. These developments partake in a conception of culture as the basis '…both of imagined communities and individual identities deemed to be "authentic" in contrast to repressive, alien, or otherwise "inauthentic" normative codes, social institutions and political structures…' (T. Turner, 1993: 424), resulting in an unwedging of culture and society and a reinforcement of idealistic culturalism.

When asked to make a statement or commentary for a TV show or in a newspaper article, I always try to pedagogically explain how passé the concept of absolute cultural relativism is; how history is important to explain power differences and ideological representations about inferiority; how culture should be seen as a dynamic process; how ethnicity is not the only criterion of diversity; how diversity is not tantamount to inequality; how rather than multicultural separatism one should cherish multiculturalism as a transition to increasing hybridisation; but also how, in the present circumstances, strategic essentialism may be acceptable as a form of empowerment. This is the same discourse I use in the political party I belong to, a left wing formation concerned with the rights of immigrants. But my (our) discourse is always weaker than the will of the actors in the social and political movements. The sort of analysis we do seems to be always one step ahead from society at large (which uses concepts we have left behind). This I believe to be a sign of our effort at being objective: what we find is not necessarily what we wished to have found or the way we, as citizens, would like things to become like.

Multiculturalism draws its inspiration from well-established (I would dare say, common sense) notions of cultural relativism. Turner poses a question that relates directly with issues of engagement. He writes that 'one must specify which multiculturalism an anthropologist might want to contribute to (…): *critical multiculturalism* [or…] *difference multiculturalism.*' (1993: 413), i.e., '…cultural diversity as a basis for challenging … basic notions… common to dominant and minority cultures alike (…) [or] … the multiculturalism of the … fetishists of difference (…) [which is] the stereotype … that has been touted by neoconservative critics of "political correctness" in academia' (1993: 413-14).

When commenting multiculturalism or a correlate issue, I try to see anthropology (or any scientific practice) as serving for *understanding* the world; politics is for *transforming* the world; and commentary is for *interpreting* the world on a subjective basis. I am not as naïve or good-hearted as to believe that this separation is total. Indeed, the degree of dialectic or

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productive hybridity is great. But since in each of these activities I am engaged with others in the construction of social meanings and the regulation of social practices, the definition of where I am and with whom I am is crucial for making each of these activities an arena of citizenship. Not only the social composition and the social objectives of these activities are different. Their time frame is different too: whereas understanding is an on-going, slow activity, transformation depends of the medium-range strategies that are proper of political life, and subjective interpretation in commentary has the immediate (indeed ephemeral) characteristic of media time. This implies different degrees of objectivity. But it implies the same degree of ethical engagement. Citizenship involves, on the one hand, the maintenance of a coherent ethical choice and, on the other, abiding to the standards of each social situation and collective – being a good anthropologist, a good militant, and a good commentator.

3.

One last dimension of our (mine) plural identity in different social arenas and practices is that of the profession: academic politics, professional associations like EASA and so on. Let me tell you the story of this very plenary. In June 2001 I was invited by EASA to be the convenor of this plenary session. Besides Alcida Ramos and Don Kulick, I had initially invited Professors Mikel Azurmendi and Emma Martín, both from the Spanish State. I came across Azurmendi's name in a short article in *Anthropology Today*: I was seduced by the description of an anthropologist who had been on the Basque terrorist group ETA's hit list for having cut his ties with that organization and its nationalistic politics. I did not, however, know his work firsthand. Professor Emma Martín's name was suggested by a colleague, but I also had not read her published work, although I was immediately enticed by the fact that she worked on Moroccan immigration in Spain and was involved with anti-racist politics, especially on the aftermath of the anti-immigrant incidents of 2000 in El Ejido, a municipality of the Andalusian region of Almería.

A few weeks after the invitations had been accepted, the EASA Committee and I received an E-mail from a Basque anthropologist who did not agree with the terms in which I described Azurmendi in the plenary abstract and requesting that he be not invited to the EASA conference. After some hesitation, Professor Emma Martín accepted to be in the plenary session side by side with Professor Azurmendi and take the opportunity to exchange their divergent views before the European anthropological community. On last June however, I received an E-mail from her saying that she would not attend the session after all. In an attached letter to the EASA Committee she asked for the invitation to Azurmendi to be withdrawn. Her position is justified in a petition called *A Grave Attack on Anthropological Ethics*, signed by several colleagues of the Spanish State.

The petition expresses the undersigned's outright rejection of Azurmendi's book *Estampas de El Ejido,* the result of research in the above-mentioned region. The book is said to be an attack directed at immigration in general, and against Moroccan immigrants in particular. The petition expresses concern about the repercussions that arguments of that sort may have on the perception of interethnic relationships. This concern is enhanced by the fact that the author was subsequently appointed by central government as President of the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants. Azurmendi's argument is seen as consecrating inequality by means of setting a hierarchy of cultural differences, and to convert certain groups into essentially free and democratic and others into fanatical and authoritarian. The alleged stance is qualified as "cultural racism" or "neo-racism", seen as '… a modified version of the old 19th century brand... replac(ing) the term "race" with that of "culture"'. The petition acknowledges Azurmendi's right to freedom of opinion as a

citizen. However, the undersigned say that as anthropologists they have the duty, 'dictated by the ethical code of our profession to denounce all attempts to attach to the victims the blame for a situation produced by numerous complex factors, none of which is the supposed affiliation to a specific ethnic culture or cultures'. Supposedly, the humiliating living conditions and social segregation in western Almería are attributed to the Maghrebi immigrants' 'capacity for the self-degradation of personal dignity'. Furthermore, it is said that Moroccans are identified in the book as a group of dangerous criminals and that the events of February 2000, which witnessed a series of attacks on immigrants and their property, had no racist basis whatsoever. The petition goes on saying that:

> 'When ideological blinkers – or other more conscious motives - make it impossible to carry out research work with the minimum scientific guarantees demanded by our profession, and above all, when professional ethics are transgressed by using his position as a platform from which to disseminate unscientific, socially dangerous ideas in the interests of the powers that be, as Azurmendi does, it is our obligation to request at the very least that he should not sign books or newspaper articles as an anthropologist. If, as he claims, the concern of all should be how to turn the immigrant into a citizen, the way forward does not lie in the ethnocide he proposes through "dissolving ethnic identities", or in opposition to all positive discrimination, while accepting in reality all the forms of discrimination already in existence… the way forward is to propose an immediate change in immigrants' legal status, with recognition, both at individual and group levels, of the right to enjoy all rights…'

As a concluding remark, the petition says that the author transgressed the moral principles that define the prime responsibility of our discipline, i.e. our responsibility towards the social subjects whose lives and problems are the object of our research.

I was not able yet to read Azurmendi's book, but for the sake of balance I read an article by Azurmendi published in the Spanish daily *El País*. It is not directly related to the petition, but I believe it outlines his beliefs on the issues discussed. The article, called *Inmigrar para vivir en democracia* (22 January 2002) denounces left-wing accusations that are supposedly damaging the social relations in the region. These accusations promote a discourse on "new slavery" and on "slave monger agriculturalists" that the author says is not only intentionally false – fabricated in order to be prejudicial for the local agricultural employers; it also makes the immigrant believe in this message. For Azurmendi, in order for immigrants to become minimally integrated, they must dispel the myth of the El Dorado, of automatic happiness upon arrival in Spain. Usually the immigrant comes from a non-democratic society where neither institutions nor families nor people are structured around the notion of equality between people or the respect for personal autonomy. That is why, he says, 'our practices of personal dignity' may help subvert the immigrants' situation of subjection. Furthermore, racism happens in a democratic society; in a society without democratic values, tolerance and pluralism there is neither racism nor antiracism since both are ideological positions that are built from the point of view of juridical and political equality between people considered as citizens. His definition of racism is not different from that of the petition: 'The belief in biological inequality as the origin of cultural differences'. Racism is qualified as a discourse that emerges essentially within the ideology of egalitarianism in order to make acceptable previous practices of segregation and dominion by means of pseudoscientific reasons. This means that racism is only something to be condemned from the vantage point of democratic and egalitarian positions, not from the vantage point of those who accept such things as subjects and categories of persons. In Spain, as opposed to traditional society, the immigrant supposedly may construct him or herself as a free person.

The 'culture of human rights', as he calls it, is the basis for denying discrimination and, consequently, for avoiding the emergence of racism.

As plenary convenor, I found myself in a delicate ethical situation. I could not have either Martín or Azurmendi and not have the other in the session. I also did not want to simply dismiss the polemic and invite new speakers. I withdrew from convenor and asked EASA to make public the petition and my letter of resignation. Eventually I accepted being a speaker myself, in order to be able to share the events as food for thought regarding issues of engagement. I am not in a position to analyse the opposing arguments or to be judgemental. That would require outright research – not to mention fieldwork – on the events of El Ejido, on anthropological texts produced about it, *and* on the Spanish State's academic politics. But what strikes me in the petition and in Azurmendi's newspaper article are the resemblances. Both see racism as the enemy; both talk about citizenship as the solution for integration problems. The crucial difference comes up when the petition focuses on the power relations between employers and immigrants, whereas Azurmendi's article focuses on the limitations of cultural relativism by accusing 'traditional' society of being outright hierarchical, patriarchal and so forth.

The conflict seems, after all, to revolve around political, ideological, and institutional positions: Azurmendi is blunt in identifying 'leftist' discourses; and the petition focuses on Azurmendi's position as government appointee. The main dispute is, after all, about conceptions of multiculturalism and citizenship, collective and community rights versus individual ones. Both accuse the other of having wrong conceptions of culture. As an outside observer, my inclination is toward fusing two of the underlying assumptions in both the petition and Azurmendi's article: that there is, structurally, an uneven and exploitative power relation between host society and immigrants; *and* that the 'traditional' structures of some immigrants' societies are uneven and exploitative. Certainly citizenship has to account for cultural difference too, but should focus on individual autonomy and the plurality of identities, not on the reification of communitarian cultural 'essences'.

Conclusion
In both positions there is commitment, there is engagement, and even militancy. Anthropologists stand out as agents and actors in the politics of culture. I have tried to convey the notion that there is always engagement by default, due to the nature of our object of research. But engagement may be cognizant too. Some would argue that we should stay away from politics. That, in my opinion, is a political position too, that dangerously allows for the manipulation of the knowledge produced by the anthropologist without any control by him or her. Others would argue that anthropology should be a full-fledged form of political practice. That I think would lead to a form of incommensurability, to the impossibility to describe and compare – because those we sympathize with would be left outside the field of our critical scrutiny.

Imagine for a moment that instead of the liberal or even progressive assumptions that most of us seem to share, a conservative or even reactionary anthropologist would use his/her position for legitimising some sort of intervention or social engineering (as indeed some Portuguese anthropologists did during colonial rule in Africa…). What would our discourse on engagement be like then? The challenge of engagement, therefore, probably boils down to the challenge of finding a common ground of ethical and methodological precepts for positing in a cognizant way our political choices, our situated identities in citizenship.

The issue of rights of citizenship calls, as I said in the beginning, for a dialogue between anthropological knowledge *and* political/civic activism. The 'weak' version of this is including activism as an object of inquiry; the 'strong' version is participating in activism. The former does not imply the latter, but the latter should imply the former – that is the condition for increasing objectivity and increasing capacity to understand the world.

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