

## Feminist Theory, Anthropology and Engagement<sup>1</sup>

In an introduction to a recent special issue of *Current Anthropology* Setha Low and Sally Engle Merry observe the currently growing presence of American cultural, social and practicing anthropology in public life<sup>2</sup>. They ascribe the discipline's increased public visibility to anthropology's growing focus on engagement, which they distinguish as: "(1) sharing and support, (2) teaching and public education, (3) social critique, (4) collaboration, (5) advocacy, and (6) activism"<sup>3</sup>. It is these forms of engagements and interest in social issues, the authors say, that allow anthropology enter the public domain through such avenues as "(1) locating anthropology at the center of the public policy-making process, (2) connecting the academic part of the discipline with the wider world of social problems, (3) bringing anthropological knowledge to the media's attention, (4) becoming activists concerned with witnessing violence and social change, (5) sharing knowledge production and power with community members, (6) providing empirical approaches to social assessment and ethical practice, and (7) linking anthropological theory and practice to create new solutions"<sup>4</sup>. Low and Merry provide a very useful historical overview, reminding the readers that public engagement has been at the roots of American anthropology since its inception in the form of professional studies during the Reconstruction in

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the paper entitled, *Feminist Theory and the Problem of Anthropological Objectivity and Engagement*, prepared for the 2nd Academic Feminist Congress (Kraków, September 26–28, 2011), Session "Ethnography's Gender – Feminist Anthropology in Poland", Grażyna Kubica (Chair). Its writing was made possible thanks to the support of Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v.v.i. – RVO 68378076.

<sup>2</sup> S. Low, S. Merry, *Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas*, "Current Anthropology" 2010, nr 51 (Supplement 2), s. 203–214. While most of my comments in this paper draw on the American tradition, the currently growing interest in engaged anthropologies in Poland or the Czech Republic seem to indicate that we may be witnessing concurrent trends that may help open anthropology to the public sphere and *vice versa*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 204.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

the second half of the 19th century with the anti-discriminatory activities of the Bureau of Ethnology and the Geological Survey. But anthropology's political and public aspects became especially pronounced during the interwar period with the anti-racist and anti-fascist involvement of Boasian anthropologists, the research activities of the Works Project Administration, or public actions of anthropologists who criticized the effect of governmental policies on Native American nations. It was at this time that Margaret Mead became active in translating ethnographic findings from other cultures into the critique of American society and publicly commented on such pressing social and political problems as housing, urban development, education or racism. During WWII, most US anthropologists were involved in the country's war efforts. In the 1950s and 1960s, public engagement of anthropologists subsided, which Low and Merry attribute to three factors, that include 1) increased academic hiring of (predominantly male) anthropologists due to post-WWII governmental funding and their correspondingly diminishing involvement in activism and public life; 2) criticism of unethical war-time practices of anthropologists in military services; 3) stigmatization and persecution of anthropologists who worked for social equity and justice during the McCarthy era. Despite these negative developments, however, critical engaged anthropology survived the difficult post-war era in different settings, including for example: 1) the action anthropology practices of Sol Tax who advocated voluntary activities of academic anthropologists on behalf of the people with whom they studied<sup>5</sup>; 2) Vietnam "teach-ins" of Marshall Sahllins, Stanley Diamond, Eric Wolf, Marvin Harris, Constance Sutton, Kathleen Gough or David Aberle; 3) feminist anthropologies whose practitioners promoted inclusive methodology and who organized such actions as the International Women's Anthropology Caucus that connected with scholars in 3rd world countries through the United Nations (led by Eleanor Leacock, Constance Sutton, Johnetta Colea and Linda Basch).

Since the 1970s, we have seen a resurgence of engagement as a result of various forms of disciplinary criticisms. Following William Roseberry, Low and Merry identify three critiques of anthropological practices that emerged from WWII and that contributed to the currently observed resurgence of engaged anthropology. These include 1) 1940s–1950s critique of anthropology's exclusive focus on "primitive" cultures instead of focusing on complex so-

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<sup>5</sup> S. Tax, *The Fox Project*, "Human Organization" 1958, nr 1(17), s. 17–22. Published in the Polish language as: S. Tax, *Projekt Lisy*, tł. A. Kościńska, M. Petryk, [w:] *Badania w działaniu. Pedagogika i antropologia zaangażowane*, red. H. Cervinkova, B.D. Golebniak, Wrocław 2010, s. 19–25.

cieties and new social groups<sup>6</sup>; 2) 1960s–1970s critique of anthropologists’ “imperialisms” – their cooperation with colonial powers in the past and their failure to focus on gender, class and ethnic discrimination in their accounts of other cultures and societies<sup>7</sup>; 3) critique of anthropological representations and call for more reflexive forms of ethnographic practice<sup>8</sup>.

This self-criticism within anthropology peaked with the disciplinary crisis in the 1980s and led to a variety of experiments in the areas of representation and research practices in which anthropologists actively and reflexively grappled with issues of power and knowledge production<sup>9</sup>. But this post-modern search for more ethical anthropology focused primarily on the deconstruction of anthropological authorship and politics of representation and it was not until the 1990s that more anthropologists began to approach the question of ethics as a field-based practice of values for the emancipation of research subjects<sup>10</sup>. In a recent volume on anthropological ethics and engagement, Heidi Armbruster makes an inspiring suggestion that the politically and socially committed efforts of contemporary anthropologists, many of whom work as activists, are informed by similar radical motivations that characterized critical anthropology in the 1960s. Similarly, Ida Susser argues that the “activist perspective, with the an emphasis on community partnerships, was reinvented in the 1970s by scholars who were involved in the transformative arenas of the late 1960s... The Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War together precipitated a generation of scholars who turned to the social sciences with the aim of understanding the possibilities and potential for transformative social change”<sup>11</sup>. Armbruster’s and Susser’s observations resonate with my own experience in practicing and

<sup>6</sup> W. Roseberry, *Political Economy in the United States*, [w:] *Culture/Economy/Power: Anthropology as Critique/Anthropology as Praxis*, red. W. Lem, B. Leach, Albany 2002, s. 59–72.

<sup>7</sup> E. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, New York 1969; *Reinventing Anthropology*, red. D. Hymes, New York 1969.

<sup>8</sup> G. Marcus, M. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, Chicago 1986. Published in the Polish language as: G. Marcus, M. Fischer, *Repatriacja antropologii jako krytyki kulturowej*, tł. I. Kolbon, [w:] *Badania w działaniu...*, s. 339–366.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*; P. Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, Berkeley 1977, 2007; *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, red. J. Clifford, G. Marcus, Los Angeles 1986.

<sup>10</sup> H. Armbruster, *The Ethics of Taking Sides*, [w:] *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, red. H. Armbruster, A. Laerke, Oxford–New York 2008, s. 1–22.

<sup>11</sup> I. Susser, *The Anthropologist as Social Critic. Working toward a More Engaged Anthropology*, “Current Anthropology” 2010, nr 41 (Supplement 2), s. 227–233.

theorizing action-oriented anthropology in the post-socialist context<sup>12</sup>. In my search for theoretical inspirations, I was struck by the continued relevance of the questions asked by our precursors such as those whose texts were compiled by Dell Hymes in his 1969 classic, *Reinventing Anthropology* or by Sol Tax in his post-WWII program for action anthropology. Short of saying “nothing is new”, I would like to join Armbruster, Susser and other anthropologists<sup>13</sup> in saying that similarly to the other moments in our disciplinary history, we are once again asking critical questions concerning disciplinary and methodological ethics, and argue for a politically and socially committed anthropological theory and practice for the emancipation of peoples with whom we work in the field. Different forms of anthropological engagement have by now taken a hold within our discipline, including collaborative, activist, action or even militant anthropologies. But in this text I would like to pay hold to what I believe has been a crucial contribution of feminist theory to the current resurgence of engagement in anthropological theory and practice, and by extension, to the increased public role of anthropology signaled by Low and Merry.

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During most of our disciplinary history, feminist scholarship was an important source of the critical perspective, because of its practical concern with the effects of discrimination based on gender, sex or sexuality. In other words, because of feminism’s commitment to expose and fight gender-based injustice, engagement has been inscribed in much feminist anthropological scholarship, its forms ranging from activism or advocacy, social and cultural critique to research

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<sup>12</sup> H. Cervinkova, *International Learning Communities for Local and Global Citizenship*, “European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults” 2011, nr 2, s. 181–192; H. Cervinkova, *Nauczanie do zmiany społecznej. Uczestniczące badania w działaniu ludzi młodych i zaangażowane badania etnograficzne: studium przypadku*, “Forum Oświatowe” 2012, nr 1(46), s. 267–283; *Animatorzy społeczni na rzecz osób niepełnosprawnych. Animacja środowiska na pograniczu*, red. H. Cervinkova, Wrocław 2008.

<sup>13</sup> P. Bourgois, V. Sanford, A. Angel-Ajani, *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism*, Rutgers 2006; *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, red. C. Hale, Berkeley 2008; N. Scheper-Hughes, *The Primacy of the Ethical. Propositions for a Militant Anthropology*, “Current Anthropology” 1995, nr 3(36), s. 409–440. Published in the Polish language as: N. Scheper-Hughes, *Prymat etyki. Perspektywa walczącej antropologii*, tł. K. Liszka, [w:] *Badania w działaniu...*, s. 403–428; *Transforming Academia: Challenges and Opportunities for an Engaged Anthropology*, red. L. Basch, L. Saunders, J.S. Wojcicka, J. Peacock, Arlington, VA 1999.

ethics defined by solidarity, sharing and cooperation. Following Ida Susser, we could say that “personal and political engagement was also a tenet of feminist ethnography”<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, following a well-known principle of feminist scholarship and action – *the personal is political* – feminist researchers have challenged the objectification processes inherent in the research of male-dominated science. When a woman scientist studies women, “she is apt to feel a different relationship with her subjects, because she is subject to finding herself mirrored in them, a fact with revolutionary implications for the relationships among observer and observed, theory and experience, science, politics, race, and class”<sup>15</sup>.

The practical (personal, social and political) commitment was antithetical to the accepted paradigms of positivist epistemology which prevailed in the social sciences until well into the second half of the 20th century. But researchers’ practical commitment was also marginalized later during anthropology’s post-modern phase, when many anthropologists focused primarily on the ethnographic writing as the most important area of anthropological practice. Feminist scholars criticized this postmodern exclusive textual focus for its detachment from practical conditions of people’s lives: “The new ethnography draws on postmodernist epistemology to accomplish its political ends, but much feminism derives its theory from a practice based in the material conditions of women’s lives”<sup>16</sup>. In accordance with this historical and traditional paradigm of feminist scholarship, Elizabeth Enslin warns other feminist anthropologists against limiting feminist praxis within anthropology to textual innovations or redefinitions: “Feminists researchers, including myself, have largely believed that women writing and publishing women’s words was in and of itself politically empowering. If, however, feminism like postmodernism in ethnography becomes more of a textual style than a political challenge, then it has little hope of transforming the politics of research”<sup>17</sup>. Instead, she suggests working toward “a notion of praxis which would be more committed to empowerment than ideas of development or interpretation, and would be more in tune with grassroots struggles

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<sup>14</sup> I. Susser, *The Anthropologist as Social Critic. Working toward a More Engaged Anthropology*, “Current Anthropology” 2010, nr 51 (Supplement 2), s. 227–233, tu: s. 230.

<sup>15</sup> S. Gorelick, *Contradictions of Feminist Methodology*, “Gender and Society” 1991, nr 4(5), s. 459–477, tu: s. 460.

<sup>16</sup> F.E. Masci-Lees, P. Sharpe, C.B. Cohen, *The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective*, “Signs” 1989, nr 1(15), s. 7–33, tu: s. 23.

<sup>17</sup> E. Enslin, *Beyond Writing: Feminist Practice and the Limitations of Ethnography*. “Cultural Anthropology” 1994, nr 4(9), s. 537–568, tu: s. 545.

for social change than with either bureaucratic attempts at social engineering or textual strategies of representation”<sup>18</sup>.

Because of feminism’s insistence on the key role of gender and sex in the construction and production of knowledge, feminist scholars in all fields and academic disciplines have been dismantling the predominant epistemological paradigms of western sciences. The most important of these from the perspective of the validation of both feminist epistemology and anthropological engagement has been the paradigm of scientific objectivity. Sherry Gorelick argues that feminist methodological critiques have been on three interrelated levels – philosophical, moral and practical<sup>19</sup>. On the *philosophical* level, they focused on the critique of positivism – “the pretense of value-free science and the presumption of objectivity conceived of as a set of procedures or an achievement, rather than a process”<sup>20</sup>. The *moral* level, according to Gorelick, involved feminists’ critique of the “objectification of subjects and their exploitation by researchers using the dominant methods”. Objectification of people studied (and thus, their turning into things to be studied) by dominant methods rested on the divide between the researcher and the researched. Instead, feminist methodology “emphasizes the human agency and subjectivity of the people studied” and treats the production of science not as an operation, but as a relationship<sup>21</sup>. Gorelick argues that this moral critique is directly related to what she calls the *practical* critique of dominant methodologies, which focuses on the lack of veracity of research results obtained in the research process permeated by the fundamentally false hierarchical relationships between researchers and people whom they research: “A subject population does not tell the truth to those in power”<sup>22</sup>.

Feminist scholars have shown that this simple insight has far-reaching implications for research methodology. On the one hand, feminists focused on giving voice to the oppressed populations of women that they researched, and some have gone so far as to argue for complete equality between the researcher and the researched. However, these efforts also affirmed a fundamental Marxist insight that the underlying structures of oppression are hidden from the social actors, who participate in the system of their own oppression. More often than not, women cannot identify and articulate the sources of their own oppression,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 540.

<sup>19</sup> S. Gorelick, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 460.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 461.

which are masked by one of capitalism's basic duplicities – the appearance of local events are being determined by intangible distant forces (e.g. “money makes the world go round”; “the invisible hand of the market”). “In short, although oppression can *only* be understood from the standpoint and experience of the oppressed, the very organization of the everyday world of oppression in modern capitalism obscures the structure of oppression”<sup>23</sup>. In this context, many third-wave feminists have argued against the erasure of differences<sup>24</sup> and for the view of the research process as a relationship whose imbedded inequities, including those between the researched and the researcher, should be acknowledged and made subject of a dialogue that makes progressive change possible. In other words, in the research process, the hidden structures of both oppression and privilege should be brought out, articulated and lead to practical change and transformation.

Lynn Walter affirms this practice-oriented and dialogical aspect of feminist anthropology in her analysis of what she considers to be two existing approaches to feminist anthropology: on the one hand, feminist anthropology is seen as an approach, while on the other hand, it is often described as a field of study. Walter brings these perspectives together and argues: “To address the question of feminist anthropology as a field of study, we need an approach that conceptualizes culture as contested, emergent, and practical. In this regard, a *practice* approach to the study of gender and power is most useful, because it recognizes that all human activity and meaning are oriented by time and that meaning is practical. Within a practice approach, culture is understood as *communicative practice* or communication inherent in practice and the practice inherent in communication”<sup>25</sup>. Walter argues that feminist anthropology seen as a study of communicative practice runs counter to one of the fundamental assumption of traditional anthropology, namely that anthropologists can authoritatively represent the other culture, because as outsiders they have no interest in the communicative practice of the community they study. “Feminist anthropology violates this principle”, Walter argues, “because it has an interest in overcoming gender struggles”<sup>26</sup>. Walter also argues for the inherently intersubjective nature of feminist anthropological practice and urges anthropologists to recognize this

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 464.

<sup>24</sup> See historical overview of feminist ethnography: K. Visweswaran, *Histories of Feminist Ethnography*, “Annual Review of Anthropology” 1997, nr 26, s. 261–621.

<sup>25</sup> L. Walter, *Feminist Anthropology?*, “Gender and Society” 1995, nr 3(9), s. 272–288, tu: s. 277.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 278.

aspect by being willing to be changed by the research experience. In conclusion, Walter argues that the authority of feminist anthropology rests on: “(1) locating the project with respect to the politics of the questions asked and the cultures studied, (2) taking responsibility for its practices, (3) practicing anthropology’s ethic of intellectual honesty and open communication and its project of a meta-communicative practice, (4) drawing anthropological questions, concepts, and theories from others’ knowledge of power, (5) participating and communicating with the other over time, and (6) using its work to overcome gendered and other oppressions”<sup>27</sup>.

Feminist methodology argues against value-free research as well as against research that focuses on the gathering of data divorced from implicating change: “Feminism is a vision of freedom as future intention and this vision must indicate which facts from the present are necessary knowledge for liberation. Description without an eye for transformation is inherently conservative and portrays the subject as acted-upon rather than as an actor or potential actor”<sup>28</sup>. Such engaged feminist methodology runs counter to the notion of cultural relativism, which has been one of the leading paradigms of traditional anthropology. On the one hand, feminists criticize the notion of cultural relativism for its false presumption of the possibility of separate cultures of the researcher and the researched and of cultural purity: “To maintain the cultural relativism of its object, anthropology must necessarily presume a preexisting world of different cultures separated in geographic space. We contrast the «other» to «ourselves»; use insights gained «abroad» for a project of cultural critique at «home»; or ... use an encounter with «them» as therapy for «us», the Western writer and reader. This assumes that «us» and «them», «we» and «they», and «home» and «abroad» are isolated in space”<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand, feminist anthropologists challenge cultural relativism on the grounds of its negative implications for anthropological ethics. In a widely discussed article published in “Current Anthropology”, Nancy Scheper-Hughes proposed that contemporary anthropologists should question the historically established idea of cultural relativism which has contributed to their image as neutral, dispassionate, cool and rational, and therefore objective observers of the human condition. Instead, Scheper-Hughes argues that cultural relativ-

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 284.

<sup>28</sup> J.A.Cook, M.M. Fonnrow, *Knowledge and women’s interests: Issues of epistemology and methodology in feminist sociological research*, “Sociological Inquiry” 1986, nr 56, s. 2–29, tu: s. 12.

<sup>29</sup> E. Enslin, *op. cit.*, s. 548.

ism is a moral relativism, which should be replaced by politically and morally engaged anthropological practice if anthropology is “to be worth anything at all”<sup>30</sup>. Scheper-Hughes recalls two ethnographic moments from her own field research, which have had a decisive influence on her own ethical turn. The first incident occurred when she was conducting her repeated fieldwork among the women living in a shantytown of Alto do Cruzeiro of Northeast Brazil in the 1980s. Scheper-Hughes remembers how she was confronted by local women toward the end of her fieldwork which had led to the publication of her acclaimed book, *Death Without Weeping*<sup>31</sup>. The women questioned Scheper-Hughes’ anthropological neutral stance toward them and asked why she had changed from an activist who fought together with them twenty years earlier, organizing Paulo Freirean literacy groups and squatters’ associations that had helped them fight for clean water, garbage cleaning and dignified burials. Faced with women’s questions which they posed in the context of real human suffering, Scheper-Hughes found herself unable to defend her detached scientific stance, which she adopted as an anthropologist whose goal was to describe the nature of their suffering instead of helping to alleviate it in practice. She remembers saying to the women: “This work is cut out for you. My work is different now. I cannot be an anthropologist and a *companheira* at the same time”<sup>32</sup>. Her argument fell on deaf ears with the angry women, who replied: “What is this anthropology to us anyway?”<sup>33</sup>.

After this incident and the ensuing process of self-questioning and doubt, Scheper-Hughes changed her stance and on her following fieldtrips, she started trying to reconcile her position as an anthropologist and that of a *companheira*, dividing her time and loyalties between her anthropological and political work. Interestingly, she describes, the more time she spent with the women on community and political work, which involved visits to police stations, courts, mills, public morgue, hospitals and community meetings, not only was her understanding of the people and their situation deepened, but expanded was also her theoretical grasp of the subject. She also describes the second ethnographic situation which has led to her further explorations of how to place ethics at the forefront of her anthropological work. While conducting fieldwork at the African migrants’ settlers’ camp in South Africa, she was a witness to an

<sup>30</sup> N. Scheper-Hughes, *The Primacy of the Ethical...*, s. 409.

<sup>31</sup> *Eadem*, *Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Berkeley 1992.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 410.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 411.

incident in which three young thieves were to be hanged by a mob of settlers who were implementing community self-justice, ensuring thus a degree of independence from “white” justice of the society at large. The young boys’ deaths were prevented by a group of youth, but they were given a severe penalty of 100 strokes instead, which resulted in injuries and a kidney infection of the youngest of the boys. Scheper-Hughes describes how she eventually decided to break the rule of scientific anthropological non-involvement and took the dying boy to the hospital, subjecting herself to negative reactions from the community and questionings, which eventually led to a community-wide discussion on the future of self-policing and community justice. The described incidents were turning points in the anthropologist’s career and have led her to propose a new model of practicing anthropology, one based on an explicitly ethical orientation toward the Other. In this model, anthropology in addition to existing as a field of knowledge would also become a field of action, a discipline no longer tied only to natural sciences, but also to moral philosophy. In Scheper-Hughes’ propositions for a politically committed “militant” and “barefoot” anthropology that places ethics at the forefront, anthropologists would turn from mere disengaged spectators to witnesses and from patrons to concerned *companheiras*.

Hughes’s article is presented in the journal, “Current Anthropology”, in a juxtaposition to a paper by Roy D’Andrade, who sees anthropologists’ moral engagement as threatening to scientific objectivity guaranteed by detachment and separation of morality from science. In D’Andrade’s account, engagement means a radical and unwanted transformation of anthropology as a discipline based on the objective model of the world into a discipline based on the “moral model” of the world<sup>34</sup>. The mutual exclusivity of objectivity and morality in D’Andrade’s critique is an illustrative example of the common attack on anthropological engagement and also on feminist methodologies. In her thoughts on objectivity and feminist epistemologies, philosopher Elisabeth Lloyd argues: “I believe that philosophical and scientific views regarding ‘objectivity’ are the source of the fiercest and most powerful intellectual and rhetorical weapons deployed against feminist critiques of epistemology and of the sciences”<sup>35</sup>. But in the face of these attacks feminism has developed a highly illuminating and critical treatment of objectivity that I believe has been very helpful in promoting and defending anthropological engagement. Those of us who can now enjoy the

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<sup>34</sup> R. D’Andrade, *Moral Models in Anthropology*, “Current Anthropology” 1995, nr 3(36), s. 399–408, tu: s. 399.

<sup>35</sup> E. Lloyd, *Objectivity and the Double Standard for Feminist Epistemologies*, “Synthese” 1995, nr 104, s. 351–381, tu: s. 351.

right to conduct engaged forms of anthropological inquiry and who are able to defend its scientific validity in the academic discourse owe a great deal to those feminist scholars who have deconstructed the “philosophical folk story about objectivity” which (wrongly) defines the objective as detached (disinterested, unbiased, impersonal, not having a point of view), public (publicly available, observable, accessible), existing independently (separately) from us, and really existing (Really Real – the way things really are)<sup>36</sup>.

I would like to close this article with a reference to the inspirational work of Donna Haraway who makes the critique of traditionally conceived objectivity the core of her well-known essay on the situatedness of knowledge. Haraway suggests turning to “vision”, usually conceptualized highly critically in post-modern feminist discourse as the source of male (Western) gaze and hegemony, and reclaim it as an embodied means of feminist objectivity. While the eyes have been used to distance the knowing subject from everything in the interest of power (science, militarism, colonialism) perfected by means of visualizing technology, Haraway turns our attention to the embodiment of all vision as a potential source of a new doctrine of objectivity. If we reclaim vision from the myth of its distancing effects, we can gain new insight into the nature of objectivity. Like all vision is embodied and always situated, so is knowledge and objectivity, which “turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision”<sup>37</sup>. Feminist objectivity relies on limited location and situated knowledge, not on transcendence. Moreover, no scientific knowledge is unmediated, even a photograph is made and reflects a specific situated point of view. The situatedness of vision and knowledge, however, does not imply a lack of objectivity. On the contrary, the more situated, located (and locatable), the more partial and specific a particular knowledge is, the more it is responsible and objective. Objectivity in science, according to Haraway is produced by the process of engaged accountable positioning, a key practice in grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 353.

<sup>37</sup> D. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, “Feminist Studies” 1998, nr 3(14), s. 575–599, tu: s. 582–583. Published in the Polish language as: D. Haraway, *Wiedze umiejscowione. Zagadnienie nauki w feminizmie i przywilej stronniczej perspektywy*, tł. M. Głowania, D. Ferens, [w:] *Badania w działaniu...*, s. 379–402.

In addition, situated knowledges treat the object of knowledge as an active agent – a lesson learnt by anthropologists, but equally important to sciences outside of the humanities and socio-cultural disciplines. Against the imagery of the world as a passive entity to be discovered by a master decoder adopted by most traditional Western science, situated science approaches the world as an active agent with whom we must learn to “converse” in search for objectivity in science, which is consequently “not about disengagement, but about mutual *and* usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where «we» are permanently mortal, that is, not in «final» control”<sup>38</sup>.

Through the critique of the established forms of objectivity in scientific discourse, Haraway proposes “a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*”<sup>39</sup>. This feminist insight, I believe, not only helps position the uniqueness of anthropological knowledge, but provides fruitful theoretical grounding for engaged anthropological research. It is a powerful ammunition against traditional critiques of anthropological engagement, which so often focus on the latter’s alleged lack of objectivity due to the lack of dispassionate distance from the object of scientific interest. Feminist theory, which argues for the positioning of knowledge as a condition of scientific objectivity shows otherwise and is of key importance for the construction of the epistemology of engaged anthropological methodology.

## **Streszczenie**

### ***Teoria feministyczna, antropologia i zaangażowanie***

Autorka rozpoczyna artykuł krótkim omówieniem historycznych okoliczności, które doprowadziły do obecnego odrodzenia zainteresowań zaangażowanymi praktykami i dyskursem w amerykańskiej antropologii kulturowo-społecznej. W dalszej części dowodzi, że istotny wkład w tę sytuację wniosła teoria feministyczna, i omawia metodologicznie oraz praktycznie zorientowane nurty krytyki feministycznej, które wsparły żądania współczesnych antropologów, aby zaangażowanie pojmować jako pełnoprawną formę praktyki naukowej.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 595–596.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 581.