

# Global Bioethics and Cultural Anthropology

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## Abstract

Global bioethics adds challenges to interpretation, procedures and assessment on new technoscientific advances on biomedicine and the unequal distribution of health services around the world. Complexity asks for improve interdisciplinary relationships and in this paper is described how Cultural Anthropology while keeping a critical eye on universal ethics, also attends glocal requirements for sustaining human rights in particular situations and cultures. Fusing anthropological knowledge and aims within Global Bioethics means to stimulate action and contextual viewpoints that are depicted as situated, dialogical and prospective bioethics. Finally, a brief ethnographic exercise shows the interest of foresight and collaborative assessment to connect research and society and to improve public debate.

*Keywords: intercultural relativism, human rights in action, dialogical and prospective bioethics, ethnography for bioethics, observatory and collaborative.*

## Intercultural relativism: Discrepancies and Links

Of all the disciplines found in the interdisciplinary environment of bioethics, the one quoted least is Cultural and Social Anthropology, which is hidden below the expression 'to mention a few'. Yet Bioethics has slowly entered into the field of anthropology, both as the subject of studies in research institutions and hospitals, and the professional environment of bioethics committees and observatories.

These belated inclusions are not only due to the pre-eminence of moral philosophy and law in establishing Bioethics, but also to discrepancies in the content of epistemology. While Bioethics opts for universal ethics, Anthropology is guided by a cultural ethos, i.e., the particular values of cultures. These discrepancies are rooted in the same ones that were defended for many years by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly from the late 1940s, when Anthropology rejected every project of a universal type that applied regulatory judgements to particular cultural practices.

The purpose of traditional studies in Anthropology focused on communities whose cultures had suffered from processes of colonization and those that were forced to accept systems of ethics being forced upon them by hegemonic countries. Whether these were religious, legal or ideological, they served to justify the expropriation of land

and resources, breaking the will of the local population and excluding other systems of values. From this appreciation arose a Statement for Human Rights in Cultural Anthropology, drawn up by Melville Herskovits and made public in 1947, and which was soon adopted by the American Anthropological Association as a framework of ethics to fight against racism and for freedom and dignity of Indian communities and linguistic rights. Coinciding with this, UNESCO consulted with Herskovitz, as an authority on comparative studies of cultures, to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights published in 1948.

In Western thinking, human rights are linked to the learned idea of emancipation, and particularly to the Declaration on the Rights of Men and Citizens (1789). However, the universal and individualistic nature which distinguishes the rational protagonist from these principles, clashes with Anthropology when this is regarded as being a descriptive science on social processes and practices observed empirically and which therefore reveals differences regarding ways of understanding and contextualizing human values and rights. Instead, ethnography, as a support for comparing the rules and values in different cultures, guides anthropological theory construction through cultural relativism.

Cultural Anthropology is keen to ascertain how societies make their norms and values and keep their moral principles and feelings to rationalise and sanction ways of behaviour regarding life and death, order and disorder, what is normal and what is not, health and illness. Whether in the form of ideals or sanctions, or in the form of original myths or moral discourse, all cultures constitute a narrative of what they are and their place in the cosmos. This vision of the cosmos is built upon the pillars of the ego, the other, time, space, causality, and cultural meaning is constructed by using values and rules on behaviour which dictate the actions and attitudes that are compulsory or virtuous, and why they are good or bad as regards reproducing and keeping life. These are principles and arguments which serve to sustain beliefs and simultaneously legitimise moral order and control society.

Anthropology, when referring to these cultural constructions, does not focus on the structure of what must form a universal principle of ethics, but rather the systems of underlying values, the *ethos* of each society. So, while for some societies what is good is that which simply favours long life and leads to happiness, in others prevail the belief that there is nothing good or bad per se, thus values, attitudes and judgements depend on the context of experience, and yet, in others, the moral ideal is the existence of a clearly drafted strict legislation, administered the same for all, though this does not mean that special rules may not be established and applied to certain persons and social groups according to particular situations.

Consequently, cultural relativism recommends not to prejudge the ways of behaviour which describe a society. Therefore rules and values must be understood in terms of relationships established within each culture without imposing interpretations from preconceived and standard analytical frameworks.

When making a comparative analysis of cultures, cultural relativism favours the idea that moral values are not unmovable absolutes, but constitute a set of references from which different societies take ideas, prescriptions and preferences. However issues regarding whether moral values may be validly detached from their cultural context and compared with other cultures and whether these values are related or applicable to one society or another remain open.

In the words of Herskovits (1973) experience in ethnography teaches us that moral and ethical systems vary in their form and content, and the values which back these up stem from plural identities and belongings. And all this requires to regard densely upon description, before passing on to a prescriptive solution as represented by the universality of human rights. Without situated descriptions, Human Rights Declaration' ethics does not exactly reflect a set of universal moral facts. Taken to the extreme, it could even be regarded as a declaration of intentions made by the international community, which could involve –unspecified - interests to reshape societies following preferred rules and lifestyles. And since these concepts come wrapped in such cosy qualities as democracy, liberalism, flexibility, autonomy, privacy, it would not be unusual for these to end up being signed and their use to be limited to a purely rhetorical one. So this would just be a new style of colonialism imposed in other ways since it denies or ignores the ideas and values of other cultures, and thus affects diversity and dignity which they so wish to protect.

And recalcitrant relativism could even state that if the rhetoric of Human Rights advocates defending human diversity and cultural pluralism, it will not easy to reconcile competing arguments regarding the purpose of life, freedom, justice, and equality among others.

Widening ethnographic knowledge on different ethical frameworks and going into greater critical depth, Anthropology has also evolved and raised doubts as to prioritizing the truth of the Other and the ethical properties of ethnography when representing this Other, since cultural essentialization may be turned into anthropological fiction. And this new sensitivity for moral problems led anthropologists in the 1980s not only to find inconveniences in cultural relativism conceptualisation but also carried out systematic criticism (Geertz, 1984; Spiro, 1986).

Now, anthropological interest for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights basic principles focuses particularly on equality before the law and human dignity secularisation in order to promote legal actions and policies of cultural emancipation (Goodale, Cowan, 2006). Throughout the 1990s, the American Anthropological Association called its members to attend annual international seminars and meetings on this theme and created committees to offer advice on the violation of human rights on Indigenous people and marginal poverty. And its journal, *American Anthropologist*, offers a special edition on Human Rights in 2006.

After all, there is academic acceptance of Human Right's principles, applications and effectiveness while keeping in mind contextual distinctions and shifting notions since

violating human rights does not have the same moral, political and legal meaning in all places.

### **The cultural construction of bioethics**

Thinking of bioethics in terms of anthropology stems from the link between nature and culture and centres on the problem of substituting the natural order for artificial quality of human design. This is a problem which raises ethical issues upon the means and the aims of knowledge, relationships of power and their implications for human life, the environment and society.

Having said that, it is not advisable to understand the concept of culture in terms of the old standard and canonical sense since it would then lose the heuristic flexibility which all reasoning and practices need to engage current social problems. So culture is not just a system of knowledge, a set of static norms and shared meanings, a traditional social organization sanctioned by history, but rather an instrument, a practical system of knowledge, used to solve problems and build new realities in accordance with situational demands and interests. Cultural reality is based on changing practices and decisions which, in addition, are of a diverse, reasonable and interested kind; they are guided by several values, both by pressure and obligation, independently or preferentially, apart from the fact that these aims are not always set, but occur randomly.

Likewise it is necessary to overcome certain atavistic conceptions of science seen as a refuge of rationality and capable of providing an answer to all problems. There are additional obstacles coming from that science and technology work at in parts and variables to which they put down to partial definitions of human nature and its problems. And this clashes with the social and cultural appreciation that life and social reality do not work in fragments nor do the problems fit together like in a chain, but rather constitute vital actions which form relationships and responses of great complexity.

And the difficulty of thinking Bioethics in anthropological terms stems from prioritizing the formal aspect of problems and ignoring the cultural and social context. Ethics and Law share the problem of how to apply general rules to particular cases and to this Anthropology questions the application of abstract ethical principles in terms of rigid principles and formal protocols which promote paying less attention to the variability of situations where illness and experimentation are found. Hence the severe criticism, such as Kleinman's (1995), who points out that bioethics adapts to the biomedical model of illness which overlooks the therapeutical triangle along with casting aside the patient who is suffering.

And if, furthermore, Anthropology positions itself to safeguard the plural cultural ethos though this goes against the West's hegemonic truths of science and common sense, it is worrying that universal ethics may follow mainly legal views and fall into bureaucracy thus creating dysfunctions when applying this to social-scientific and biomedical

dilemmas. Taken to an extreme, the formulaic Western style, although in unintended ways, may hide unspecified interests in advanced research and pharmaceutical industry. No wonder that formal bioethics, seen as a discourse embedded in relations of power, as Everett (2006) suggest, adds to distrust new challenges for anthropologists to engage bioethics and find a place in committees and debates on reproductive technologies, health care policy and biomedicine.

However, the complexity and scale of bio-nanosciences and the biologization of politics and private life calls for an approach in both ways. Thus, Bioethics requires to be used attributively in the direction of multicultural interests by including and identifying problems which are relative to diversity and globalization, and Anthropology unfreezes the scepticism when it intervenes in problems where Bioethics contributes with useful guidelines and arguments to serve ethical duties for the public, whether these be threatened lifestyles and/or suffering stemming from illness, poverty or environmental risks.

Bioethics was established to resolve moral dilemmas derived from experiments on humans and animals by appealing to dignity, freedom and protection. Now, in the interest of scientific and technological breakthroughs, such as the Human Genome and nanobiotechnology projects, and after being introduced into more private areas of body and self, with no recognized limits, problem identification and their subsequent principles of caution has began to refine the abstract principles of dignity and freedom towards specific terms such as privacy, consent, confidentiality and biocitizenship. This opens up new ways of understanding health, personal vulnerability and physical integrity in intercultural terms and, in addition, the risky side consequences of these advances modifies the configuration of ethical responsibility from intentional actions of individuals to unintentional collective, expert and systemic ones.

From this cross-cut systems of responsibility stems the clear thought in the recent Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) which recognises cultural diversity as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity. On one side that health does not depend solely on the progress made in scientific and technological research, but on psycho-social and cultural factors and, on the other, that unethical scientific and technological conduct has brought about special repercussions in Indigenous and local communities. This greater sensitivity to non discrimination and non stigmatization of cultural diversity and pluralism is applied to biomedicine and other socio-surgical activities, such as donations and transplants and also the illegal trafficking of organs, tissue, samples, resources and materials related to genetics which affect countries with unlimited poverty and limited hospital services.

Despite Anthropology's traditional distant attitude towards codes of ethics in their most Utopian standard dimension, this new Universal Declaration reconciles differences since it highlights the junction of ethical and moral systems, encourages acceptance of cultural differences while instructing the avoidance of imposing inappropriate practices and experiments since nothing can be invoked and done at the expense of human rights and fundamental freedom.

Nevertheless, it is clearly the globalization of problems which compels an innovative conciliation between Bioethics and Anthropology which can allow all intellectual and humanitarian resources to be used to benefit the common good of humanity, i.e., a global bioethics. Now, what cultural requirements will global bioethics create? How can we work together and promote viable alternatives?

### **Global Bioethics**

Global bioethics is ethics in action, situated, dialogical and prospective. It cannot work with predefined and bureaucratic categories away from historical and particular social discourses and relationships. Neither can Global Bioethics be dealt with the use and abuse of dualisms and dichotomies that fill up metaphors and values, from which follow oppositions and contradictions. Among others, this means to overcome the opposition between what is universal and specific, to use instead principles and situations as a means of dealing with increasingly complex contexts in which human rights, since this will involve international groups, include many types of moral and political projects. Nor does globalisation admit any more the distinction between global-local, but compels to mutual impregnation or *glocality*. Thus cultures make up open systems of high connectivity between persons, goods and services in which not only is the economy interdependent, but also one's quality of life, health and scientific research. This worldwide system of culture which is increasingly more uniform and based on specialization and interdependence brings about conditions and actions which affect some, also affect others albeit in different degrees and time frames. Currently illnesses place everyone at the same level of risk so this raises many questions: Could it be that regrettably the fear of the link between AIDS and immigration raises alarm and lead people and government to take preventive measures as avoidance or restrict borders? Or rather, risks, on a global scale, may compel changes of mentality and think of health as bio-socio-medical networking?

The first lesson of global bioethics is to learn that what really places us all at risk is inequality. This means that defending one's own health cannot exist without sustainable interaction and development with other ecological and cultural systems, nor can illnesses be limited within borders which cannot be conceived on a local health level, but rather in the framework of world poverty and marginalization.

Global bioethics overcomes dichotomies introducing at the same time ambivalence and uncertainty as working criteria thus allowing the idea that where is light and objects, there are also shades. As it is notorious in discourses, articles and exhibits, on one side are set the benefits and on the other risks, as premises for standpoints, arguments and motivations. To mention a few: control versus accidental results, promises versus anxieties, increase good living conditions versus bringing up uncontrollable mechanisms, support versus loss of confidence, poverty eradication and health improvement versus irregular distribution of means and autonomy versus power dependence. Even scientists seem to be trapped between two models of rationality: one search for emergent phenomena and complexity and the other for simplicity, precision and basic control. No doubt that these oppositions and contradictions are classical basics

for epistemological critique and also part and parcel of value construction. But facing complex problems, dualism instigates a restrictive way of identifying problems and responsible self-positioning. Even after a lively debate, this splitting pattern makes people to stick to their ideas and positions, finally leading to irreconcilable outcomes, and somehow blocking dialogue with fatalism and conspiracy. How we might foster a move away from these dichotomous patterns towards a more interactionist and developmental approach? It would be advisable to introduce a more transitive and symmetric epistemology to avoid intellectual closures that rule out uncertainties from beliefs, convictions and opinions, and in so doing diminish the complexity of biosocial processes, power relationships and collective ethical responsibility. Putting together scientific and cultural processes requires to overcome dichotomies such as risk vs. safety to recognize instead the symmetry of substance and accident. To invent a car, a nanorobot equipment, or nanobioimplants is at the same time to invent collisions and to acquire particular risks and side consequences. If each new scientific and technical advance brings with it the accident as a possibility, concealment either in form of avoidance or precautionary rules does not produce automatically safety. Safe and responsible manners require to engage in conceptual and value innovation for substantiating arguments according to complex technological advances such as Nanosciences and Nanotechnology. At nanometric scale, distinction between science and technology are broken and bring together different fields and environments embracing physics, electronics, optics, electrochemistry, science of materials, robotics, medicine, and other, introducing new devices and systems as well as properties, functions and manipulations, so the risky side is not on specific products but on scale and penetration, f.e., nanotoxicity, and also on privacy limitation due to nanochips and camera surveillance. Issues with no frontier which remain ambivalent respect to comparative health enhancement and international social security and that by all means need cultural ethics innovation for the development of new global responsibilities.

### **Situated Bioethics**

The relationship between bioethics and culture is not focused on presenting theoretical or standard issues, but it is useful to understand it as empiria in specific and different contexts: in biomedicine applications when transmitting information and in public debates when involving the experts, media and laypeople in advanced research projects. That is why it is furthermore advisable to base research, arguments and debates on the diversity of situations and contexts as a basis to discuss differences of criteria, encourage the flow of informed opinions and proposals and achieve negotiated and concerted agreements between techno-scientific, cultural and moral communities.

Thus, the general theories on ethics are not starting points which allow to jump from theory to action, but the previous step for establishing identifiable empirical bases to revalidate and outline nuances or reform ideas and standards in the respective ethical and legal frameworks. Therefore, being key principles, regulations and security agreements, these prove to be insufficient, or do not lead anywhere unless the cultural discourse, which is implicit in idealising biotechnology as something good for society,

is not observed and clarified as well as identifying the ideological contexts and interests of science and industrial policies.

In this context, it must bear in mind furthermore which persons and in which institutions the problems are defined and therefore to include those affected by or suffering the problem, the called owners in research action. If it were not so, it would be difficult to give full credit to representatives or its involvement and collaboration, whereby there could be more collateral effects than regulating strategies to develop alternatives to the problems. Hence its importance to establish the parameters of acceptability and redistribution of risks in culturally plural scenarios and, above all, to give some sense to the cooperation which can help to endure what could be otherwise unbearable: the combination of illness and poverty.

In the field of global health it is advisable to insist, even due to economic reasons, on the relevance of traditional medicine. Ethnomedicine not only contributes knowledge to other therapeutic systems by means of ethnobotanical and herbal medicine, but also to the psychological effectiveness of ritual practices, the effect of placebo, which provide assurance to the patient for physical and psychological wellbeing. Nor should we rule out the dynamic nature of traditional practices since, in situations of contact and acculturation, both sorts of medicine are adopted as being useful and prestigious, being needed in that case studies on therapeutic synchronization.

For situated bioethics, ethnography supplies a provision of knowledge placed in the context of social practices facing situations of environmental and health risk. This ethnographic provision is useful to identify problems, to verify comparing ways of promoting equal or unequal access to medical, scientific and technological breakthroughs, to design corrective measures as regard to strategies and rhetorics of wellbeing and quality of life and to facilitate the transfer of this knowledge to other cultures.

### **Dialogical Bioethics**

In society, bioethics should occupy the space of collective thought and dialogue between scientific breakthroughs and cultural ideas.

This means that communities of interdisciplinary co-participation are needed to discuss differences of criteria, encourage the flow of opinions and proposals and achieve negotiated decisions on ways of understanding illness and assessing health, applications of biotechnology and biomedical practices, embryonic stem cells research, development and patenting, among others.

It is long since research institutions have understood the relevance of research ethics for scientists to reflect on technological design, development and patenting, and to understand the social and ethical dimensions of their work and results as well as consequences for humans. On the first point, ethnographic research on laboratories has pinpoint the importance of co-learning among the expert systems: science, ethics and



humanities, so that Bioethics does not come at the end of the research project as Damocles' sword but from the very beginning. Co-learning thus becomes a interdisciplinary knowledge provision to assist dialogue between experts and the public.

Nowadays, public participation in science is promoted as an open door to participatory democracy and a good provision for the kind of knowledge biocitizens need at present. It is stimulated from scientific and research quarters as well as government's policies through recommendations and framework projects. No doubt that Science understanding and literacy are good things in themselves because the chance that citizens will be more effective decision takers increases and probably more wisely. But from a bioethical point of view this raises some premises of doubt, or at least some questions, on why and for whom is relevant to take into account or introduce understanding and public dialogue into scientific matters. For example, who may benefit from the promotion of greater public understanding? Is dialogue a way to give comfort to experts which are highly dependent from public funding and private initiatives and industry? In knowledge society, science has become a commodity, anything with its label is value added. It seems also that knowledge and its developed products are worthwhile to the extent that can be used not only to solve problems but to create a market. Successful marketing and selling comes to depend on familiarity with the products so public concerns needs to be taken seriously if these products are ever to become accepted. So public understanding is crucial for science's funding as well as biotechnological market economies need to activate public dialogue and advertising to sustain consumer demand.

To what extent knowledge got through dialogue facilitates to have a voice in scientific decision-making and when and where lay people can have a direct voice in scientific matters? Scientific knowledge is important to appreciate and to take effective decisions about choices and irrelevant scientific claims. Understanding and dialogue cannot be thought as greater public control of science, but to give some outlooks over who will participate in establishing controls, how controls will be organized, and how much they will influence detailed decisions concerning the nature and procedures of research.

Is invitation to dialogue a way to give confidence to general society that asks for transparency and responsibility? No doubt that strategic dialogue worries because it is not quite clear whether is going to conform approval or manipulate consent. However, a dialogical relationship between expert and lay discourses is needed to produce a conversation not privileging one dimensional goal and allowing for different public viewpoints, so that public concerns may be acknowledge by politicians and translate them into political measures. At this point is significant to quote Barbara Culliton's sentence that goes back to 1979 (Clarke, 1985):

“Public participation is not dangerous for the scientific enterprise. It is time-consuming and it is likely to lead to restraints that previously were not imposed. Nevertheless the restraints that come from ethical considerations cannot be dismissed as inappropriate. In any case, they are part of the social cost of democracy.”

## **Prospective Bioethics**

And lastly it is advisable to regard bioethics in prospective key such as cultural design to specify aims and develop comparative methods to safeguard and promote the interests of present and future generations. Prospective bioethics cares about design anticipation and preventive intervention oriented to sustain and enhance human and environmental nature avoiding thus pollution, degradation and genetic, surgical and chemical manipulations.

Moratoria can be a partial answer but what is needed is to imagine and design a strategic framework to encourage parity between scientific, moral and cultural progress. Comets (CNRS, 2006) and some other institutional documents, propose simulation and fiction as methodological resources to explore possible futures. So it is recommended to give credit to fiction and use its scenarios for comparative assessments of bio and nanotechnology. Certainly, the aura of fiction is so great that is being credited with several functions: epistemological, heuristic and social to clarify principles and regulations and to reorient collective consciousness. No doubt that fiction and scientific data blending brings up wonderful futuristic scenarios and raises much enjoyment among students and lay public, not to mention media adds and programs. However, futurism at discussion level it finally leads to intellectual discomfort, a concern for inconsistencies that it has been raised by prospective analysts on the use of utopia and unrealistic indicators for cultural design making. The link between value making and futuristic workings is the sort of aesthetic discourse that fits well into imagination, but it does not go further into ethical practices to provoke public interest and to bear out political relevance.

Consequently, scenarios are a good methodology to foster discussion and awareness and as a point of departure, but at the same time lacking contextualization, values are incorporated into biomedicine and nanotechnological scenarios as remote moral ideas that prevail at any time and at any reason. This produces misunderstanding based upon differences of orientation, of outlook and aim so there is no way to achieve an argumental form among the participants. And the end result is more often superficial consensus or position confrontation prevailing previous opinions, convictions, preferences and beliefs.

So I would bet for working on futuristic scenarios as point of departure, but what is needed is that these scenarios may finally help to focus the present, precisely where problems lie, values are situated and conversation can be done with partners, be experts, politicians and lay people on real topics and situations. To find ways to negotiate actions and pact goals, the most adequate methodology is action research, which is very cautious about superficial consensus and looks instead for co-generative problem definition and co-learning for strategic goals building between a professional researchers and those affected by the problem arising from tecnoscientific applications (Greenwood and Morten, 1998).

Thus, instead of working with conjectures, it will be more motivating to design alternative models on funding assignment and research priorities, proliferation of biomedical options and choices, unequal benefit distribution and perfectibility and human enhancement. If socio-technological conditions already considered problematic and risky, can be given ethical meaning and cultural alternatives, any technoscientific advance in the future will have better prospects.

### **Making Ethnography from Bioethics**

My activity as an applied anthropologist has been carried out in multidisciplinary research teams, specifically in the Observatory of Bioethics and Law in the Science Park of Barcelona University and as a member of the Committee of Bioethics at Barcelona University. Both of these are interdisciplinary systems of experts where one may solve and follow up problems related to risks of a personal, environmental and biotechnological nature derived from research and experimentation. From the outset, the aim of committees has been to avoid inhumane results in research and experiments, i.e., protecting those subjected to experiments whether human or animal - patients, control groups, or samples and biological agents and GM organisms.

In recent years, committees and commissions have become more popular both nationally and internationally, in hospitals, universities, and even in insurance companies as reference points for scientific credibility and guarantees for public acceptance. This rise has not been caused just because of the concern for risks from biotechnology, but because of acknowledgement of the political and industrial nature of this research, and above all due to the social and economic impact of the human genome project and the development taking place in nanotechnology.

Made up of experts in science, ethics and law to warrant research work and experimental projects, however the proliferation of committees and the use of protocols, sometimes exclusively, has open the way to bureaucratization, and with this abound in the negative view of biotechnology. Hence there is an interest to create other systems of observation within institutional Bioethics to follow up research and to find better ways to transfer scientific understanding to society, from local to global scale.

The Observatory of Bioethics constitute an interdisciplinary research centre focused on ethical problems and events that occur in the world of biotechnology and biomedicine and that are projected socially and publicly. The activity of academics and experts is to reflect on bioethics, on legal, ethical and social problems, to discuss problems by becoming involved in analysis of specific cases, and also to give ethical assessment and advisory services, by interdisciplinary teams which are members: physicians, geneticists, jurists, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, educators and nurses. Forming work groups depends on the problems to be debated or what is to be informed.

Topic selection is based on public demand and risk perception due to the repercussion of research in the media, which is also mediated by the impact in scientific and professional publications.

Occasionally, the need for sensationalism and entertainment makes the media, whether this is the press, television or internet, appeal to anachronistic concepts and to the imaginative power of metaphors referring to prohibitions, such as *tabu in vitro*, and also to put the accent on cloning and the use of embryos for industrial use. Whether in the form of myth or science fiction the different forms of the eternal concerns of humans are updated: immortality, transforming the body to achieve eternal youth, and the nightmares of a future made from cryogenics and cloning. Sensationalism and fallacy engender risks shades, which leads the public to perceive risks they do not face, and to run risks they do not perceive.

In the field of public perception, problems seem to be beyond the experts and politicians as reasons for decisions are not clear neither are solutions. Therefore it is not enough to impose more regulating principles and agreements on security, but it is very much needed to observe and clarify the cultural discourse implicit in idealising biotechnology as something good for society, the presence of ideological contexts of science and industrial policies and the distribution of benefits and risks.

Thus the interest of Observatories is to think research and application as a cooperative undertaking with both scientific and social aims, particularly to overcome the partial and fragmented construction of problems, to promote interdisciplinary conversation between experts and facilitate knowledge understanding and participation in public debates.

### **Collaboratories**

The Observatory of Bioethics and Law is made up of an interdisciplinary team who investigate and draft reports and documents concerning the implication of ethics, law and society on biotechnology and biomedicine with the aim of offering guidance and increase debate among the public and specialists. The services provided for guidance concerning problems in bioethics, whether these are environmental or biomedical ones, are offered to bioethics committees, academia and also to private and public agencies, industries, laboratories and hospitals.

Also, with the aim of creating conditions for diffusing and circulating information, meetings and connections are encouraged between people interested in Bioethics, students, journalists, representatives of institutions and the public in general, through a Master in Bioethics, and also the association of Bioethics and Law whose meetings are organised around conferences, seminars and round tables on selected issues such as, sex selection, organ transplants and donation, blood transfusions and Jehovah's Witnesses, environmental risks, GM products, euthanasia, research on embryonic cell stems, forensic genetic tests and others.

The Observatory's production with the greatest diffusion are the Documents, publications regarding theme units as the ones mention above, which are presented in public, sometimes at a conference or a round table, and are widely distributed among institutions and media. Despite the interest for public understanding and projection, in

this preliminary stage of conversation on bioethics the connection between experts and social agents is not solved and the artificial relationship between technological objects and biotechnological subjects is not clearly faced.

To represent the interest of society, lay members should be involved not only in public debates, but invited into selected seminars and finally be included in ethics committees, either as community representatives or interest groups such as subjects of experimentation. And thus bioethics committees would fulfil their own development from protection to consultation. However, the process is complex and requires the steps and connections to be systemised to create the ways towards conversation and collaboration. Thus, as regards composition, representation, training and functions of participants and their role as persons or groups with a capacity to decide, there should not be a random choice such as one for a public jury, since these are not individual opinions, but representatives. So it is necessary to establish minimum criteria regarding the origin of participating community organizations and interest groups, whether these are consumer groups, opinion groups, university departments, health institutions, and others. It would also be necessary to bear in mind their capacity to create public opinion, the occasional presence of more spontaneous organizations such as anti establishment movements who create opinion platforms against genetic manipulations, web pages and an endless source of bulletins fighting against GM products.

Representatives must know who they represent and that there is not just one single voice, so there may be several competing groups with different opinions. They must have certain qualifications regarding training, reasoning, specific arguments, identifying values which are in dispute, a capacity for making decisions and defining problems. This requires preparation and training to activate understanding and create conditions to convey the information; establish collaborative relationships between teams of experts and public representatives or local representative groups; compare and confront interests, opinions and information from the media, and, lastly, learning substantive themes to define problems and, if possible, to achieve a feedback in processes following implementation. What is really relevant then is to learn how to frame or present the problem: ranging from who, how and where this is formulated, whether this is by theoretical induction, personal observation, opinion groups, public or private institutions or groups. Briefly, the expense of training and participation of representatives from the public sector should be part of research project's funding since they are the first and final contributors.

Bioethics and Anthropology relationship does not focus on principles and standards, images of humanity abstracted from its historicity and specific social relations, but on a framework where to interpret the proliferation of biomedical options and rhetorical choices that raises questions about values and the limits of human design deeply involved in particular discourses, instrumentalities and resources. And, as a consequence, to focus ethnographic and ethical action research onto the vulnerability coming from and the acceptability headed for nature remaking, body enhancement, implants, extension of life, unequal global health distribution, biocitizenship and biopolitics among others.

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