

# Anthropology's Terms of Engagement With Security

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The AAA established a commission in response to concerns about CIA advertising to members and other post-9/11 security-driven efforts and programs. As Paul Nuti reported last month, this Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security & Intelligence Communities is expected to offer its conclusions in late 2007.

As part of this climate, several panels at November's annual meeting in San José addressed how anthropology should situate itself vis-à-vis the US security establishment. These included a double panel organized by Laura Graham and Kathryn Libal, "Debating Anthropological Practice and National Security," which featured 13 academic anthropologists, including discussants. This was followed by a special event panel, "Practicing Anthropology in the National Security and Intelligence Communities," featuring four anthropologists working within or in conjunction with these communities.

## Secrecy and Public Anthropology

As part one of the double panel, David Price addressed the implications of ethnographic data collection as secret research, making a clear case that the costs of secrecy outweigh benefits and undermine academic freedom, amounting to a betrayal of the trust that is essential to the reciprocal obligations of ethnographic relationships with research counterparts. Anthropology can, and should, inform government practice, argued Price, but only in ways both transparent and public. To do otherwise, Price noted in a follow-up article about these AAA events in *CounterPunch*, would be to lose "democratic control" over the discipline's knowledge production in ways that might lead to the "weaponizing" of anthropology to the ends of social control.

Kimberly Theidon offered an object lesson of how this works when social scientists are called to interpret contested history as part of state practice. She explored the legacies of Peru's anti-terror law as a limiting condition upon the public debate of its 2003 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, concerned as it was with "perpetrators" and "victims" while failing to come to terms with the political agency and popularity of the Shining Path itself, however deplorable.

If one accepts that anthropology should include public engagement and that anthropologists are both professionals and citizens, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban posed the question of whether secret research is anthropological since it is not publicly disseminated. On a different but parallel note, Fadwa El Guindi emphasized how anthropology, intentionally or unintentionally, has participated in the imperial designs on the Arab and Muslim world through a complicity based in part on silences and poses of neutrality. This, in turn, suggests deep connections between silence and secrecy.

Both Price and Fluehr-Lobban understood participation in the double panel in terms of a call to revisit and to clarify such a "deep and muddy" history of anthropological ethics, with particular emphasis on locating responsibility for anthropological accountability and for restoring clear guidance about the harm of secret research in the current AAA Code of Ethics (adopted by the membership in 1998).

But Andrew Shryock articulated the challenge of any straightforward application of ethics with his description of the "upside down world" of Detroit's Arab-American community. Shryock showed how multicultural citizenship is a discourse of "disciplinary inclusion" that also doubles as a discourse of national security defining Arab-American identity. Cultural identity and national security are tightly woven as a part of the effort to render the Arab community more subject to US sovereignty. This case complicates the ethical picture for researchers, since public interventions like human research legislation guiding IRBs also risk increasing peoples' vulnerability by exposing them to scrutiny.

## Histories of Empire and Social Science

Other panelists in the double session contributed by providing a historical context to help enable the present disciplinary discussion. Discussant Leslie Gill recalled anthropology's long term relationship to state power, and warned against our becoming new kinds of expert "foot soldiers in the War on Terror" when engaging national security. Based on his three decades of work in Afghanistan, David Edwards in turn emphasized that provisioning governments with information gleaned from ethnographic counterparts is a piecemeal choice.

Edwards allowed that anthropologists can work with governments, but only if for any given case we can distinguish between desirable sociocultural "insight" of a general sort and specific "information" about particular people and their circumstances that could be used against them. Ultimately, there are no guarantees that information will be used appropriately, he argued, but anthropological expertise should be employed in public interventions to change unconstructive policies and perceptions.

Laura Nader compared contemporary Iraq to the history of the anthropology of Native Americans so as to highlight colonial and neo-colonial practices of anthropology "in the service of empire" and to ask if a "culturally intelligent military" should be a goal of anthropology. Nader thus distinguished "empire" from "republic," in differentiating the two distinct modalities of US behavior in the world, and called anthropology to resist complicity with "the empire in us."

As a discussant and a panelist, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro used a detour through Brazil to remind us that this is a dialogue on the relation between

scholarship and citizenship. It is impossible, he noted, to separate power and politics from the production of anthropological knowledge. This, Lins Ribeiro pointed out, includes the ways that anthropology overlaps with elite projects and is conducted in state institutions like universities, where "nation-building" is easily mixed up with "empire-building." Contributing to empire is harder to avoid than we typically recognize.

## Culture and US Security

Historical crises of social scientific ethics and theory about culture also informed these panels. By way of a comparison with the Project Camelot flap of the mid-1960s, Robert Albro, during the double session, traced out the historical and disciplinary sources of the military's current interest in the culture concept to anthropology's own mid-20th century "culture and personality" synergies with psychology, but now provided to the military by new "diversity consultants" who address cultural questions of marketing and management in the business world.

Hugh Gusterson's complementary contribution examined the "cultural turn" in the War on Terror. If culture is a source of "friction," he explored how the military hopes to incorporate it into "expert systems" that "weaponize culture"—such as through computational cultural modeling—as a way to produce frictionless interactions among occupiers and occupied. For Gusterson, this relies upon a dumbed-down disciplinary expertise which at its worst threatens to evolve into an ethically indefensible "hit man anthropology."

Anthropologists who work within the arenas of US security and intelligence emphasized how hard they are to define, in part as they are highly internally variegated with a wide diversity of objectives. Practitioners during the special event panel shared a concern for addressing the changing priorities and "values" of post-9/11 military and security institutions and for ways the military is ill-equipped to handle the "human terrain" of operations other than war, such as nation-building. Particular attention was given to the trial and error of access to data and to the poor data quality in these milieus, to the need to define what "models" cannot achieve, and to the "huge knowledge gap" regarding the cultural consequences of specific actions taken on the ground. Eschewing an "allergic reaction" to working within policy arenas, these anthropologists stressed the potential of disciplinary "expertise" in addressing these problems from the inside out both to improve policy and military performance in culturally complex tasks.

Dan Henk, from the US Air Force's Air University Culture & Language Center, underscored the importance of going beyond simple foreign language fluency to move toward a more thorough and teachable skill set of "cross-cultural competence." For Jessica Turnley, president of the Galisteo Consulting Group, this included "institutional biases" characteristic of the military and security domain itself. Laura McNamara, as a working anthropologist at Sandia National Laboratories, focused in particular on some of the fallacies of "modeling and simulation for

national security decision-making." For her, the expansion of the "predictive enterprise" of modeling at Sandia and elsewhere, as this is applied to "culture," is ethically troubling.

McNamara viewed her role as maintaining an ongoing dialogue with modelers to get them to "think critically" about what they think they are doing. This could also involve acting as "an advo-

cate," in the words of military anthropologist Montgomery McFate, for this kind of information and method in military circles, which could include participating in the writing of military "doctrine."

In short, a concern for how culture matters to the military is one concern shared across these several panels. This, at least, suggests the fruitful potential of further dialogue and engagement

across academic and institutional divides about the ethics and application of anthropological expertise in military and security contexts. ■

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## Anthropologists and Policy Innovators Interface

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The 2006 AAA Annual Meeting presented a unique opportunity for anthropologists to learn first-hand how innovative environmental policy is being implemented in San Francisco. In 2003, the City and County of San Francisco became the first government body in the US to make the Precautionary Principle the basis for all its environmental policy. Kelly Alley and Melissa Checker took advantage of San José's proximity to San Francisco and invited local policymakers and activists on the forefront of crafting and implementing the principle to participate in a forum. Taking a break from hearing scholarly papers to listen to the experiences of policy innovators proved invaluable and inspiring.

### Communities Taking Precaution

Basically, under the principle, if a practice poses threats to human health or serious environmental damage, policymakers use the best available science to identify cost-effective measures that would prevent harm. In other words, rather than waiting to discover direct proof that a particular product is bad for the environment, a precautionary approach asks whether a given product or practice is safe, whether it is really necessary, and whether products or practices with less environmental impact would perform just as well.

Debbie Raphael, the program manager for the City & County of San Francisco's Toxics Reduction and Green Building Programs explained that one precept of San Francisco's environmental policy mandates the in-depth exploration of alternatives to materials that may be toxic. For example, if arsenic-treated wood is proposed for a playground, city officials must explore all other options for playground materials and if cost-effective alternatives exist, they must choose them. The city and county also models consumer behavior by employing less toxic pest management and purchasing policies.

Joan Reinhardt Reiss of the Breast Cancer Fund, one of the organizations that spearheaded the effort to pass this landmark legislation, described the successful grassroots actions that led to its approval, and she discussed the various forms that precaution takes in the field of public health. For example, in conjunction with Commonweal, the Breast Cancer Fund recently worked to establish a statewide bio-monitoring program in California, making it the first state in the nation to institute such a plan. Davis Baltz of Commonweal presented the importance of bio monitoring, or measuring individual bodies' toxic burdens to illustrate the failures of current chemical regulations and the dire need for improvements in standards.

Community participation in environmental decision-making is another key component of the principle's implementation in the Bay Area. Marc Tognotti and Kenoli Oleari, co-directors of the Neighborhood Assemblies Network focused on this aspect of the principle, explaining some of the inventive processes they use to create, implement

and ensure that environmental decision-making maximizes its democratic possibilities.

### Further Policy Opportunities

Notably, Debbie Raphael expressed her desire to learn why anthropologists were interested in environmental policy in the first place, and in the second, how policymakers can partner with anthropologists. For those of us who want to use our research to influence public policy, Raphael's enthusiastic questions about, and interest in, anthropology were particularly instructive. In other words, she underscored the need for anthropologists to make their work known to policymakers at all levels of government.

To that end, the Committee on Public Policy (COPP), which sponsors public policy forums each year at the AAA meeting, is expanding its efforts to facilitate connections between anthropologists and policymakers. The 2007 meeting's Washington DC location presents a unique chance to reach out to federal policymakers and introduce them to the ways that anthropological research informs their policy decisions. Capitalizing on this opportunity, the COPP will hold a reception for Capitol Hill staff members, agency officials and other bureaucrats during the 2007 Washington DC meeting. The reception will present an informal occasion for AAA members to meet with policymakers and share with them our expertise.

For those interested in participating in the reception and disseminating their work, COPP members are seeking brief, two-page summaries of how various research topics and findings relate to public policy. More details will follow in a formal call for papers. COPP also welcomes public policy forum proposals for next year's meetings. Guidelines can be found on either the COPP or the AAA website, or by contacting COPP Chair David Hess at [hessd@rpi.edu](mailto:hessd@rpi.edu). ■

## RACE Project Visible at San José

MARY MARGARET OVERBEY  
RACE PROJECT DIRECTOR

With the world premiere of the RACE Project public education program around the corner, the AAA Annual Meeting provided an opportunity to give members and other meeting participants a taste of what's to come. The RACE Project was among the activities highlighted at the AAA exhibit booth in the exhibit hall.

A special booth incorporating the project brand of morphed face photographs was designed for the project by Sarah Walker, Carla Fernandez,

Carlo Simpao, Amy Beckrich and Mary Margaret Overbey. A laptop computer provided visitors a glimpse of the project website with its interactive history timelines, human variation exercises, and lived experience games and blog. An exhibit brochure presented some of the content and visuals that will appear in the exhibit.

Yolanda Moses, chair of the RACE Project, and advisors Michael Blakey, Alan Goodman, Robert Hahn, Faye Harrison, Janis Hutchinson, Carol Mukhopadhyay and Arlene Torres were on hand



**Arlene Torres (L), Advisory Board member, discusses the RACE exhibit with visitors at the RACE Project reception.** Photo courtesy of Gretchen Bakke

See *RACE Project* on page 22