



ON ANTHROPOLOGY AND US SECURITY/INTELLIGENCE

Every month, this space features articles related to the work of the AAA Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security & Intelligence Communities. The articles, which may be commentaries on various dimensions of anthropology's interaction with security/intelligence or updates on the commission's progress, are authored by members of the commission and are intended to both stimulate dialogue and keep members informed. Readers wishing to address a particular piece are invited to send their responses to Paul Nuti, the AAA staff liaison to the commission, at pnuti@aaanet.org.

Does Anthropology Need a Hearing Aid?

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So far the departure point in ongoing sharp debate among anthropologists about our discipline's engagement with the security and intelligence communities has been an expressed concern for the status of the individual practitioner or expert, for the specific circumstances of research activities, and for the researcher's relation to a subject largely imagined in classically ethnographic terms. For these reasons, debate is mostly shaping up around the ethics of ethnographic practice, research transparency, obligations of full disclosure and potential harm to "subjects" as protagonists of anthropological study—all issues central to the heart of an anthropological enterprise in its mode as ethnographic practice.

Anthropology, Ethics and Power

And yet an emphasis upon the individual agency of practitioners as a concern for "spies in our midst"—that is, upon the ethics of what particular persons are doing in the name of data collection, participation-observation and with counterparts assumed to be research subjects—can unintentionally reduce appreciation for the wider potential terms of engagement between anthropological knowledge production and diffusion (as distinct from the researcher-subject relationship) and the often overlapping arenas of policy and practice in which these other communities are routinely active. Anthropology also has an obligation—if less often recognized—to situate itself more clearly vis-à-vis the ways its research is reviewed, mined, transformed and applied toward both good and bad policy-making, as part of a constructive interdisciplinary dialogue with non-anthropologists and non-ac-

demics who often assume different means-ends priorities.

A healthy disciplinary ambivalence toward policymakers, along with entrenched distinctions of "academic" and "applied," have helped to insure that so far ours has been a mostly one-sided conversation about ourselves among ourselves. But anthropology has always engaged "the field" in multiple ways, dynamically defined as a relationship of the changing locations of "fieldwork," to the changing interests of a "field of inquiry," within shifting "fields of power." To focus on research practice, as narrowly-defined, is to avoid the encompassing ethical question of our discipline's ongoing relationship to the exercise of power, which includes the circulation and framing of ethnographic data, disciplinary knowledge and theory, as valuable "expertise" or as useful "intelligence" among security professionals both in and out of government. To ignore these multiple fields is to ignore how our work is already in the domain of policy, if in ways we might not immediately recognize.

COMMENTARY

Cultural Dialogues

As part of a self-consciously "public anthropology" that is concerned with extra-disciplinary problems, broad social issues and the facilitation of public dialogues about social change, anthropology is already grappling with such broader terms of engagement in the comparable fields of international development, human rights, corporate and state-driven multicultural policy and practice, among others. This has included close attention to the application of key concepts and tools in which anthropology has itself had a major hand in developing or in which it has been historically invested—most notably a variety of

"cultural claims" and claims about culture, which include: instances where culture is perceived to be an obstacle to a superseding goal, instrumentalist accounts of the culture concept as a value-laden resource for problem-solving in other domains (a concern often in tension with current anthropological approaches), and formulations of specific applied cultural tools such as "cultural mapping" (used as legal evidence to adjudicate indigenous territorial rights) or cultural "smart cards" (part of military intelligence training—see Paul Nuti's column in October's AN). Anthropology is, of course, excellently positioned to speak to the limits and possibilities of the application of the culture concept in other fields.

Recently, anthropology has offered collaboration, critique or rival formulations to fields for which cultural arguments have come to be determinant. This is particularly the case when these address social justice efforts—to the point of expressing dismay at the evident disregard for anthropological insights by non-anthropologist cultural practitioners (as has been the case with academic cultural studies). But little dismay is directed at the security and intelligence communities, a complex institutional domain poorly understood by most anthropologists and in which we have a minimal presence.

The Anthropology of Security

At the same time, a haphazard sample of recent anthropological research reveals a turn to security-related topics and questions, including insightful ethnographic work on such themes as: nuclear weapons scientists, militaries and militarization, citizen security, state terror, structural violence, death squads, policing, public spheres, immigration and diaspora, cyber-communities, gated communities, and expert communities, among others. We might ask, however: In what ways can a burgeoning anthropology of security most constructively engage a broad-

er conversation about security policy instead of remaining piecemeal contributions to anthropology's own reproduction of itself?

A start would be to better grasp the terms of reference of these other communities in relation to our own as a way to widen our conversational frame instead of searching for communities of affinity. As expert interest in the "culture concept" continues to percolate beyond the discipline's own boundaries, we can constructively address: How are cultural matters framed by security and security questions framed by culture? Such questions could help anthropology to engage with security practitioners to productively reconceptualize security policies.

As a step toward more reciprocal terms of recognition between anthropology and the security and intelligence fields, and in ways comparable to recent multi-sited research concerned with the transnational advocacy networks that frame efforts of so-called civil society, we should pay attention to the pragmatics of the knowledge frames operating in the domains of security and intelligence. This might include the circulation and exchange of: resources, training, experts, capital, services, as well as a prevailing lexicon. Of equal importance are the ways "cultural data" come to matter in such policy-driven contexts, as formulated for briefings, rendered in power point format, as incorporated into trend data, assessments, indicators, models, predictive measures, "lessons" to be applied, theory lite and "project deliverables." The AAA's new Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities can help to map out these terms to bring into sharper relief the ethical shape of this, a conversation long overdue. ■

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