

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AS SPIES: A response to 'CIA seeks anthropologists', news Item in AT 20[4]

In the best British tradition I expected AT to have had more intelligence: I have been for more than 44 years a professor of anthropology at the University of *Kansas* (not Kentucky).

11 September 2001 changed our lives – surely for a long time, if not for ever. These attacks within the United States clearly demand new approaches to any US preparedness. The wars at the beginning of the 21st century will not be of short duration, nor are they confined to one particular culture or one geographical setting. The multiple challenges to the United States are, and will be, global.

We live today in an ever more crowded, complex and definitely more dangerous, often violent world. Traditional norms of deterrence and traditionally structured armed forces and intelligence services are no longer effective against enemies, and in circumstances, that increasingly no longer represent nation states. The former global symmetry of inter-nation conflict has become the asymmetry of terrorism and insurgency.

Gone for ever are the days when compartmentalization in, and between, academe, the military and the intelligence communities was useful or desirable. Gone are the days when academic anthropology might occasionally be applied to tourism and gender studies but not to area and language studies with a direct, practical use in national defence. The United States is at war, and thus, to put it simply, the existing cultural divide between academe and the intelligence community has become a critical, dangerous and very real detriment to our national security at home and abroad.

A new, mutually acceptable *modus operandi* among and between academe, the military and the intelligence community must be found and should be legitimized by an invigorated, effective cooperation. A real dialogue between these different cultures must begin today. All of us

have to re-examine our perceptions of each other, rather than simply claiming that the CIA in the United States, if not worldwide, now threatens the fundamental principles of academic transparency – or worse, jeopardizes the purity of our discipline.

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Professor Moos takes the opportunity of correcting his university affiliation to issue a general appeal to the readers of *Anthropology Today* to join an inclusive 'we' prepared to rally to a United States he declares 'at war'. We might attribute the incongruity of his invitation to forgetfulness that *Anthropology Today* is a house journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, a British and Irish learned society. Yet Moos is surely correct to believe that developments in the American academy should concern an international 'we', even if the grounds for concern are not those he might wish to cultivate.

As outgoing Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists, I hardly need remark that Commonwealth, as well as British and Irish, anthropologists are intimately linked to their US-based colleagues: we accept US students, hire US-trained staff, publish in the same journals, on occasion collaborate in research, attend many of the same conferences... and so forth. US colleagues would say the same of us. Universities are hubs in networks of international collegiality. Thus the covert placing of CIA trainees in anthropology undergraduate programmes which is being piloted under the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) has implications for those of us not working in the US. As a professional association, the Association of Social Anthropologists is ethically committed to dissemination of the results of research

undertaken transparently – a commitment tempered only by the protection of research subjects. Surely Professor Moos’ own commitment to better knowledge of our complex world cannot be promoted by fostering suspicion between colleagues based inside and outside the US that their research goals may not coincide. Close association between US anthropology and the CIA will rub off on our discipline more generally, potentially persuading those outside the US to distance themselves in order to retain research access and control over sensitive research materials, and more generally to continue to promote the scholarly and collaborative understanding between peoples which will be fundamental to 21st-century world anthropology.

Like the American Anthropological Association, the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth is a founder member of the World Council of Anthropological Associations, which has recently grown to 15 members. Fourteen of these are not US-based, so if Professor Moos really is committed to raising the general level of US understanding of the rest of the globe he might like to consider whether jeopardizing these links is the best way to navigate today’s world that he assures us is ‘ever more crowded, complex and definitely more dangerous, often violent’ (though, than what is not made clear). In such a world I would have thought that international networks were vital, and their promotion relies upon trust that we all enjoy some distance from our home states. The consequences of an expanded PRISP would in all likelihood be opposite to those he claims to seek.

The incoming Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists, Professor John Gledhill, will be joining the ASA’s Ethics Officer, Dr Ian Harper, to continue our current review of the ASA’s widely-used Ethical Guidelines. Whereas such codes typically concentrated on the protection of relatively weak subjects of research in the past, it is becoming clear to us that they will need in future to be equally attentive to relations between anthropological research and the powerful interests seeking to influence it.

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Felix Moos says the ‘divide between academe and the intelligence community has become a critical, dangerous and very real detriment to our national security at home and abroad’, and appeals for anthropologists to work with the CIA and other US intelligence agencies. To this end, he has successfully lobbied the government for a new \$4 million programme (the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program, or PRISP) that funds students through university provided they work for US intelligence when they graduate. The students, who also attend US intelligence summer camp, are not allowed to disclose the source of their funding on campus (Glenn 2005; Price 2005; Kurtz 2005). (Presumably, they will be issued cover stories with which to deceive faculty and fellow students.)

Many anthropologists will disagree with Moos on political grounds, saying that anthropologists should not work for organizations such as the CIA, which have a history of destabilizing democratic governments (Hitchins 2002, Kornbluh 2003), committing human rights abuses (Marks 1991, Harbury 2005), and suppressing popular movements for social justice in Third World countries (Stockwell 1978, Agee 1975). I want to make the more politically neutral argument that we should not buy what Moos is selling because it violates the institutional norms of both the academy and the anthropological community. One might, in other words, decide that the CIA is a necessary evil, but that for professional reasons anthropologists should keep a healthy distance from it.

First, there is the issue of academic openness. It is troubling that the CIA does not want us to know about their activities on our campuses. ‘Secrecy is not compatible with science,’ said Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb and one of the great American conservatives of the last century (Vest 2002).¹ Most American universities decided to banish classified research from campus in the 1960s and 1970s because it conflicted with academic norms of openness. My own university, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reaffirmed this stance after 9/11, in a

committee report written by MIT faculty member Sheila Widnall, a former Secretary of the US Air Force. Her report states: 'education and scholarship are best served through the unconstrained sharing of information and by creating the opportunities for free and open communication' (MIT 2002:ii). One kind of information we expect to see disclosed concerns funding sources, since we want to know how outside institutions are colouring academic discussions. The problem with the PRISP programme Moos helped establish is that it subverts the open university by creating a beachhead of government secrecy – a secret college – within. Moos would take us back in the direction of the bad old days of the 1950s and 1960s when academics spoke at conferences or accepted funding from foundations without knowing that they were being covertly funded by the CIA (Marks 1991).

The second problem with Moos' call for 'invigorated, effective cooperation' between anthropologists and the US national security state is that anthropologists who heed it will almost certainly find themselves in conflict with the American Anthropological Association's ethics code. This code states that 'anthropological researchers must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, persons studied or providing information, and with relevant parties affected by the research.' It also says that anthropologists 'must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work,' and that anthropologists 'should do all they can to preserve opportunities for future fieldworkers to follow them to the field' (AAA 1998). I try to imagine an anthropologist whose research is funded by the CIA explaining to research subjects who are, say, Islamic activists in Egypt, factory workers in the Philippines, or peasants in the shadow of the insurgency in Nepal that one of his or her purposes is to understand how to neutralize opposition to neo-liberalism or to US-backed regimes in the Third World. The likelihood that our hypothetical ethnographer would find many interlocutors is minimal which is, of course, why the CIA wants its researchers to keep their affiliations secret. Anthropologists who wanted to work with the CIA would, almost certainly, have to violate the informed consent provisions of the AAA ethics code and, as Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban has pointed out, such covert affiliations 'make it difficult for the genuine researcher[...] because people don't know how to distinguish one from the other' (Glenn 2005).

Moos has accused his opponents of representing a politically correct professorate implacably opposed to the US national security state. It is undeniable that anthropologists, especially in the US, are a left-leaning community, and it may be that we would benefit from more conservative voices challenging received wisdom in our disciplinary debates. But that is quite different from developing covert institutional ties to the intelligence community that would conflict with our ethical norms for informed consent, cast a mantle of suspicion on all anthropologists whether they work with the CIA or not, and turn back the clock on hard-won victories for openness on campus.

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