

COLONIALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Scope for a collective academic response to David H. Price (AT 21[5]) and the PRISP controversy

In his editorial, Price deplores the American Association for Anthropologists' (AAA) running of 'an advertisement for post-doctoral anthropology positions at the Central Intelligence Agency' and the 'weakened ethics codes' which fail to resist the encroachment of covert agendas into our profession. A news item in *Anthropology Today* (AT 20[4]) on the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) triggered a response from Felix Moos, the instigator of the Program, which was followed by Richard Fardon's critique of it (AT 21[3-4]). Gledhill (2005), current Chair of the ASA, has repeatedly decried its detrimental impacts on academic practice and the integrity of social science disciplines in general and anthropology in particular, and officers of other major anthropological membership associations have followed suit, including Kürti of EASA and Nas (AT 21[4]) of the IUAES. Hugh Gusterson (AT 21[3, 5]) stressed that scholars' covert involvement with intelligence services conflicts with ethical research practices and disciplinary values. Following Price's editorial, the AAA set up an Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities.

These are all important efforts, but on their own, do they suffice? An AT news item (AT 22[3]) informs us that the 'CIA is pushing its spooks into the field faster, giving 85 percent overseas assignments within a year after they finish training'. The 'war on terror' takes on global dimensions as communities which are not the object of direct Anglo-American invasion nevertheless feel threatened by it, as Moretti observed in New Guinea (AT 22[3]). Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, even in my research location in Argentina social movement activists echoed the question 'Will we be next?' Direct invasion like that of Iraq or Afghanistan is of course unlikely in this part of South America. However, there is a long history of US involvement in propping up repressive regimes. Argentina's 'Dirty War' (1976-1983) resulted in 30,000 'disappeared', and the mass graves continue to be dug up to this day. US intelligence has consistently lent a helping hand in identifying so-called 'subversives', while training military personnel across Latin America (Gill 2004).

Recent US verbal aggression against democratically elected Venezuelan and Bolivian governments in particular set these populations on high alert. Anti-privatization protests, and unprecedented regional unity behind Chavez and Castro at the Mercosur summit in July this year (Anonymous 2006), have forced US hegemony into retreat. Yet US responses include a notable expansion in military aid and bases across the region (Berrigan and Wingo 2005). In this context, 'will we be next?' displays a disconcertingly rational anxiety. Scholarly collaboration with intelligence services in support of neo-colonial pursuits consequently implicates the entire global research community.

The atrocities being committed in the interests of Anglo-American expansionism in the Middle East, and the growing repression of oppositional voices in the 'democratic' North, testify to the brutalizing and dehumanizing nature of 21st-century neo-colonialism. I consider collegiality and scholarly exchanges crucial for the advancement of scientific knowledge. Conducting research for my PhD in Argentina between 2003 and 2005, I have come across several young scholars, particularly of US origin, seeking to exchange ideas as they develop their research into social movements. The expansion of programmes such as PRISP compels me to be cautiously reluctant in future to participate in such exchanges, in an effort to protect the safety of my research participants, other 'indigenous' scholars and myself in this increasingly unstable and violent world.

In the light of this, how can anthropologists afford a defensive stance? Might our

anthropological critiques of colonialism not provide us with the necessary tools and confidence to campaign overtly and collectively to halt such programmes, presuming that there is consensus amongst most colleagues on these worrying trends? When they signed a petition in 2002 opposing US-backed state terror in Nepal, Harper et al. (AT 20[1]) were accused by some colleagues of infringing the discipline's ethics by involving themselves in internal state affairs. But how ethical is it to potentially contribute (unwittingly given the secrecy concerning these PRISP recruits) to endangering the lives of our research participants, or causing stress and fear that researchers might be the means through which their respective communities become the next target for aggression by existing or future imperialist or repressive regimes? This is not an ethical dilemma; overt opposition to state terror seeks to protect human life, while complicity with violent hegemonic political agendas clearly jeopardizes it. (Incidentally, the political situation in Nepal today bears out the stance of Harper and colleagues.) Violence against civilian populations has to be condemned everywhere. A serious social science debate on ethics, however, cannot ignore existing relations of power.

Writing in defence of PRISP, Bartholomew Dean's call for a 'partisan anthropology' (AT20[4]) advocates solidarity not with 'the wretched of the earth' (Nas 2005), but with the powers that be. Currently a colleague of Felix Moos, Dean was himself for one year an RAI Urgent Anthropology Fellow at Goldsmiths College (RAI). The wider political and professional implications of programmes such as PRISP travel fast along transnational institutional and disciplinary networks. Secrecy in the academy and covert agendas masked as scholarly activity foment suspicion and fragment academic disciplines.

Is it not time to step up a collective scholarly response backing dissenting voices in the US, and to demand the immediate termination of PRISP and similar programmes? Should anthropologists not draw on the plethora of the discipline's studies on repression, violence and war to take a lead in protecting at least our own profession, and with it human life?

This could take the form of widely circulated petitions demanding the immediate cessation of these programmes. We could also commit our respective university authorities right now to never involving themselves with such programmes. Resolutions should be passed by the UCU (formerly AUT/ NATFHE) and professional associations to demand transparency about all sources of research funding in line with our professional ethics and funding agencies' ethical codes of practice (although colleagues ought to consider the consequences of collaborating with implicated individuals, a general boycott against individuals might end up in unwarranted witch-hunts).

Our membership associations need to revise their ethical guidelines to ensure that covert involvement with intelligence services, which conflicts with the 'harm to research participants must be avoided' section of the ESRC Research Ethics framework (ESRC 2006), is explicitly outlawed; the most recent statement on ethics by the ASA Chair goes some way towards addressing the issue, but more colleagues need to follow suit. Moreover, scholars have a responsibility to alert colleagues and communities in the countries where we conduct our research to these developments.

A concerted international campaign now will help prevent the global research community from later serving as pawns in what is an increasingly violent form of neo-colonial expansion, while pre-empting any temptation for our own respective governments to mimic these US trends.

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