

ANTHROPOLOGY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY:
SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC COMPLICITY IN THE WARFARE STATE*

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Understanding the structure of the social order and its several processes on the level of primitive and peasant societies has been the traditional province of anthropology. To date, however, this understanding has largely consisted of descriptions, not true explanations of the many categories of human culture, e.g., religion, kinship, myth, and economic behavior. Little effort has been made to explore the dynamics and inherent conflict of a given social situation; rather, in the main the emphasis has been on the integration, equilibrium, continuity and consensus of a particular society. Only recently have anthropologists turned away from the "anthropology of consensus," based on how men ought to behave, and have sought to understand how and why men behave as they do.

Accompanying this veritable revolution in anthropological inquiry has been a healthy interest in social tensions, schisms and conflicts--their nature, sources and distribution in any given context and on many levels, e.g., tribal, rural sector and nation state. At last anthropology has begun to include conflict along with consensus, recognizing their mutual interaction, a dialectic of sorts, on the operational levels of anthropological analysis--moral, social and symbolic. The result has been that anthropology today is both more realistic about human

* EDITORIAL NOTE: This paper is presented in order to encourage healthy debate over what has become a controversial issue within the discipline. So that all sides may be heard, we shall accept "Letters to the Editors" on this topic for publication next fall. In accord with custom, Mr. Robinson will be offered an opportunity to make rebuttal at that time as well. Although the Kroeber Anthropological Society has taken no official stand on the issues raised in this paper, we feel it is important to provide an open forum for discussion of this, and any other, controversy relevant to anthropologists.

behavior and more relevant to those institutions which somehow seek to influence and change that behavior. In short, anthropology has developed a conceptual sophistication that lends itself to the many practical problems of political control.

Any COunterINSurgency (COIN, the military acronym with obvious symbolic value) program is just such a problem of political control requiring manipulation of social factors by political and military means. With increasing frequency government agencies have become clients to professional consultants, anthropologists for example, who are hired to advise the particular agency on how it may best realize its political objectives. Accordingly, the terms of counterinsurgency research proposals betray an investigative bias, placing the same undue emphasis on stability, order and continuity as did many of the earlier anthropologists. Note what is implied in the Statement of Purpose introducing Project Camelot, a proposed, massive, well-financed social scientific study of insurgency potential abroad, known to us all:

Project Camelot is a study whose objective is to determine the feasibility of developing a general social systems model which would make it possible to predict and influence politically significant aspects of social change in the developing nations of the world.

This Statement, quoted in two new books discussing the issues generated by social science cooperation with public policy, The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot, ed. I. L. Horowitz and Gregorio Selser's Espionaje en America Latina, goes on to list the research objectives of Project Camelot, for anthropologists the prototypical COIN project:

- 1) to devise procedures for assessing the potential for internal war within national societies
- 2) to identify with increased degrees of confidence, those actions which a government might take to relieve conditions which are assessed as giving rise to a potential for internal war
- 3) to assess the feasibility of prescribing the characteristics of a system for obtaining and using the essential information needed for doing the above two things

Clearly, government-sponsored counterinsurgency projects are often by their very nature normative, although this need not be so; all too often, however, the political ends to a large extent presuppose a biased research process, while the methods employed may be legitimate and scientifically trustworthy. Counterinsurgency programs, then, are non-objective in their intent and consequently biased in their conclusions. They are intrinsically political schemes requiring detailed information about conflict and potential conflict situations among peasants, even primitive tribesmen (witness, for example, anthropologists such as Gerald Hickey, author of Village in Vietnam and a onetime Pentagon consultant arranging "working relationships" between U.S. Army Special Forces personnel and the Montagnards of the Vietnamese Central Highlands). Anthropologists, of course, because of their intellectual, even esthetic interest in these peoples are eminently qualified to provide relevant information when it exists or seek it by means of field research when it is absent. It is only natural, then, that anthropology and anthropologists should play a prominent role in COIN research.

The substance of actual counterinsurgency programs may vary from liberal allotments of funds (usually loans) for economic and social development programs such as the Alliance for Progress to outright military maneuvers designed to curtail the inputs and check the output of an insurgent movement. Regardless of the particular approach used, the anthropologist simply satisfies the demand for explicit information that can lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency of the political control process. Anthropologists are specially equipped to furnish data about food production, marketing and supply, means of transportation, recruitment of leadership and existing social strata and political tensions in societies where an insurgency movement might occur. Anthropologists proudly boast of their ability to approximate the complete picture of traditional societies--their organization, institutions and individual personality constituents. Indeed, it can be understood why members of the Project Agile Thailand project enthusiastically hail the contribution

of anthropologists, stating that the latter should be counterposed to guerrillas (insurgents) on the now standard order of ten to one (New York Times, March 20, 1967). Thus anthropology is guilty of complicity in violent political acts merely because it is doing its task as a social science. For that reason anthropologists and social scientists in general are being exploited by the warfare state.

Few anthropologists actually design counterinsurgency research, not because they do not want to or fail to gain the opportunity, but because, I think, the relative virtue and value of every culture and society is paramount in the professional anthropological ethos. The blatant arrogance of U.S. government-sponsored counterinsurgency programs, the not-so-implicit assumption that our government can intervene where and when we see fit to modify, if not radically alter, another society is repulsive to most anthropologists. However, this repulsion may not be the result of a pristine social concern for the welfare of the traditional objects of anthropological concern. Rather, the anthropologist is worried lest in the future he be denied access to these societies, his raw material, by increasingly nationalistic governments justifiably suspicious of and hostile to foreign researchers. Too, the anthropologist does not want social science research, in which he has a minority voice, discredited by repugnant policies that incorporate his data to destroy the integrity of his own constituency, namely, primitive and peasant societies. For this latter reason anthropologists tend to be morally correct, I think, in their opposition to uncontrolled use of their information for purposes of political manipulation and subjugation. However, it appears that concern for the state of the profession too often overwhelms concern for social integrity. In that case those anthropologists who oppose COIN are right for what I believe to be the wrong reasons.

Seldom, if ever, does the research of counterinsurgency question the legitimacy of the political objectives of such research. To do so, of course, would be counterproductive and self-defeating. But what consulting anthropologists and social scientists really do when cooperating in COIN

investigations is to contribute to the political legitimacy of such research and programs here at home. A patina of "scientific respectability" glosses over and detracts from more sincere efforts to develop an autonomous social science free from ideological constraint. This in turn reinforces the criticisms of those who feel social science has never been value free, theoretically neutral and unwilling to sacrifice itself to political ends. This suggests that anthropologists and social scientists have persistently failed to distinguish the different criteria employed for friends and enemies by policy-makers sponsoring their research. Anthropologists are now relevant to the political process, but in a manner unforeseen and misunderstood by many. Members of the discipline and their colleagues in cognate disciplines have been and remain unprepared to analyze critically their seemingly innocent complicity in what some consider more and more absolutely heinous policies of political control, the war in Southeast Asia being only one concrete example.

Counterinsurgency programs subtly attract the unsuspecting social scientist seeking data on primitive and peasant peoples for purposes of testing hypotheses and incrementing the stock of reliable anthropological knowledge. If the overwhelming concern is for data and theory construction, the alternative use of the information may be considered irrelevant and the social and political consequences of research consequently ignored. But the very design of counterinsurgency research denies the possibility of asking and answering equally legitimate and perhaps more fascinating, relevant questions. Namely, how can revolution be encouraged? What is the desirability of it succeeding, and in turn what does it need in order to succeed? Of course, revolutions have a structure and a dynamic of their own, the study of which can be as scientifically fruitful as exploring the potential for COIN. A client system with its built-in objectives (viz. the Project Camelot research proposal), however, militates against such questions ever being asked. Or if asked, it is done in the context of seeking a more profound understanding of the revolutionary process in order to control it or prevent it ever occurring at all.

A growing awareness of the threat of COIN research programs to the future of anthropology, as noted above, may transform itself into a generalized and, hopefully, radical critique of anthropology's contribution to what has been often termed an imperialist foreign policy. As a corollary to this, it is not premature to predict that a younger generation of anthropologists, well versed in both the traditional and newly emerging theoretical and methodological approaches, will lend their talents to the forces of movement rather than those of stability. They will decide that inaction is useless, and acquiescence to government policy antithetical to the welfare, nay very existence, of many primitive and peasant societies. Of course, such an act would be wholly political. It would reflect a political and social commitment that many social scientists eschew, and it would entail an abandonment of the myth of value-free social science. In this fashion the anthropology of conflict will create conflict within anthropology itself. And at this juncture it is safe to presume that this tension will doubtlessly grow.

Objections to anthropological collaboration with COIN are varied. Most often mentioned is the prostitution of anthropologists and their social science colleagues to the political requirements of a State apparently embarked upon a systematic policy to deny the legitimate aspirations of those who constitute the object of anthropological concern. It must not be forgotten that anthropology is itself the stepchild of colonialism. It was the British who until quite recently contributed to the discipline on the strength of both their easy access to societies in the Empire as well as practical experience in the administration of that control. Early American anthropologists working for the Department of the Interior to a great extent have paralleled the British example. Malinowski, a founding father of modern anthropology, wrote that "social engineering is simply the empirical aspect of social theory." But social theory in the service of the State is no doubt a greater vice today than just plain description and armchair theorizing for intellectual profit. Contemporary social theory is now employed to predict and overcome popular resistance to

unjust social situations, instead of serving the needs of the constituency which is the anthropologist's own. Preserving the cultural integrity of that constituency has for too long been a rationale for maintaining the status quo. There are even those who would intervene violently to maintain that "integrity" (i.e., equilibrium) in a traditional society, e.g., in Vietnam.

Moreover, revolt and revolution may prove to be endemic to societies emerging from what has come to be called a system of international as well as internal colonialism. Injustice, a differential and inequitable access to power by competing groups, is now perceived and understood by both rulers and ruled. Those who would labor to preserve the situation might be labelled reactionary, whereas those who leave it alone become accomplices to revolution by default. But there is nothing wrong morally or socially with that, I think, because after all revolution may be viewed as a natural social process, a fact we tend to ignore or suppress. This latter point suggests that in the future anthropologists' data may have to be withheld from those institutions which would employ it to destroy the integrity of these traditional societies as well as their desire to change. It may be that anthropologists may choose to be either morally neutral or morally concerned. If concerned, then only a superficial analysis is required to convince humanistic anthropologists that revolutionary change, preferably of a non-violent kind, is in order. Indeed, the universality and open character of the scientific ethos is now being openly compromised by the increasing polarization and schisms generated by the process of national political development in which the United States has demonstrated an active interest.

That anthropology is a part of and reinforces "scientific Colonialism" or the academic imperialism of the developed nations, democratic and socialist, is becoming clear. The very professionalization of the discipline requires that reputations be established at the expense of poor societies and/or nations where anthropologists normally work. Publication of research results is usually in English, in scholarly journals

unavailable in the area where the data are gathered, although token efforts to contribute to the local situation whether in print or in policy-making are sometimes made. On balance, however, the research conducted is not related to the improvement of the subject's welfare. Instead, the creative and analytic processes involving these data take place abroad and without the subject's participation in those procedures which can later be applied to more relevant problems. This is exploitation, I think, in a most insidious form. And typically, only in the aftermath of Project Camelot, have anthropologists begun to seriously question their traditional techniques and behavior abroad.

Anthropological collaboration with COIN projects does little for anthropology itself--a point to be stressed among the self-conscious social scientists more concerned with the feasibility rather than with the credibility of their work. Merely providing descriptive categories containing information about primitives and peasants is a long way from explaining the why and the whither of human society--an enunciated goal of social anthropology. To work systematically to destroy or manage any given society can only be considered anathema to this goal. Still, the anthropologist cannot escape the dilemma of guilt by association with programs such as COIN merely because he makes his information and analyses public. It is now unfortunate but nevertheless true that anthropologists comply with government policy by adhering to the established canons of the research and publication process, as noted above. Note the statement included in a special appendix to a recent National Academy of Sciences document titled "Report of the Panel on Defense Social and Behavioral Sciences," for which anthropologist A. Kimball Romney shares some responsibility (see *Science*, 17 November 1967, pp. 886-888):

To maintain an adequate base for planning and for the conduct of military operations when and where they may occur, the U.S. military establishment must have access to a steady flow of knowledge that originates in social science studies conducted by U.S. and foreign scientists engaged in unclassified research tasks overseas.

Too often we underestimate government's awesome power to manipulate the product of its citizenry and scientists but this is happening to anthropologists and their work.

Nevertheless, some anthropologists and social scientists insist that "reforming" and "sensitizing" from within those agencies and institutions directing counterinsurgency programs, for example, may be effective. But this is, I submit, nothing but a compromise of principle in the face of greater financial gain (coin, if you will) and self-inflated prestige. It seems naive to think that the power of the client will somehow be responsive to the desires and caprice of its consultants. There is no political reason for this to be so. What is evident, however, is that dissenting anthropologists within the discipline are of little relevance to policies increasingly military in character, global in scope and disdainful of the traditional and indigenous techniques of manipulating political symbols and structures. By working from within, whether the tactics be military or political, the anthropologist and other social scientists become coerced into playing a prominent and contributing role in United States' manipulation of political processes abroad.

