‘J’accuse…!’ Crisis in the Reproduction of Anthropological Scholarship

Heike Schaumberg

**Abstract:** The recent wave of important anthropological critiques of the global ‘war on terror’ is in danger of being undermined by a disciplinary vision that disregards challenging an institutional culture of fear and compliance with injustices and inequality, which is more likely to nurture discrimination and professional malpractices than committed scholarship. I am drawing an analogy with Zola’s ‘J’accuse…!’ about how institutional rules of accountability in the tick-box form of neoliberal auditing can serve the purpose of oppressing the rights they are nominally intended to protect. The article argues that debates about disciplinary crisis should be reframed as one about a crisis in the reproduction of scholarship. The discipline needs to employ the anthropological tools of enquiry consistently in its practices and theory, ‘at home’ and in the wider world. Fundamental questions regarding discriminatory practices and professional ethics in the everyday academic workplace need to be addressed not silenced in order to nurture not only critical but also credible anthropological challenges to important contemporary historical processes.

**Keywords:** discrimination, ethics, institutional culture, neoliberalism, public anthropology, scholarship, ‘war on terror’

In response to a recent debate about anthropologists and ‘the war on terror’ on the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) ethics blog (Osella et al. 2008, Sinha 2008), I do not think anthropology is the only discipline in crisis today, nor that anthropology was the only collaborator with colonialism as Subir Sinha (2008) implies; what of the legacies of historical revisionism? It is a mistake not to begin by recognising that all academic disciplines are part and parcel of a structure of domination under capitalism. The nature of the enterprise, however, the production of scholarship, means it is also uniquely positioned to be able to generate critiques of domination. Hence, anthropology also produced some of the key critiques of colonialism quite early on. The work of Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) is perhaps the earliest example that reflects this tension, at once engendered and conditioned by the colonial project and simultaneously critical of it, as Morgan championed the promotion of aboriginal rights in North America. However, I think it is a problem if anthropologists today deny what is essentially a crisis in the reproduction of scholarship.

Osella disagrees with Subir Sinha (2008) on the ASA ethics blog about anthropologists having ‘ceded the field to merely adequate knowledge’ under neoliberalism to inform policy, and feels instead that ‘we [anthropologists] are the most self-aware and critical discipline’ and at a conference she attended she was ‘astounded at the lack of reflexivity in...
some work from the panels on law, politics, economics’ (Osella et al. 2008). She concludes that anthropology today is not in crisis. This is a very reassuring defence of anthropology and, reading through the ASA’s ethical guidelines (ASA 1999) and, at the time of writing, the current chair’s statement on ethics (Gledhill 2007), it seems anthropology is at the forefront of committed scholarship. Commendable are the considerations about the safety of our research participants from powerful threats, a commitment to anti-Eurocentrism and the very important campaign against anthropologists becoming hired mercenaries for the global ‘war on terror’. These debates filled the pages of our disciplinary journals, including *Anthropology in Action*, which dedicated an entire issue (*AiA* December 2005) to a close examination of scholarly collaborations with government and the military throughout the twentieth century; how they have shaped anthropological interpretations of wars (Harper 2005, Price 2005b, Ross 2005, Ross and Price 2005, Schafft 2005, Skinner 2005) and the differing positions being debated in *Anthropology Today* about the ethical and scholarly implications of anthropologists’ involvement with government and military agents in support of ‘The War on Terror’ (Gusterson and Whisson 2005, Kürti et al. 2005, Moos and Gusterson 2005, Price 2005a, Houtman 2006, Moretti 2006, Schaumberg 2006, Sebag-Montefiore and Price 2006, Ellis and Keenan 2007, Gusterson 2007, Keenan 2007, McNamara and Houtman 2007, Wright 2007).

Yet, what does committed scholarship mean? Is it the kind of scholarship that advocates active political engagement with ‘the downtrodden’ in our fieldwork sites, as championed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in her proposition for a ‘militant anthropology’ (Scheper-Hughes 1995)? Or is it about identifying the unequal relations of power we encounter in our research and to express our solidarity with those who struggle against them (in our fieldwork sites)? Or is it about advancing hypercritical theories of the state, power and class, racism, religion and capitalism and the many forms in which they appear: colonialism, the welfare state, imperialism or neoliberalism?

No doubt many will agree that it is all of this and it would be restrictive if not autocratic to attempt to define the role of committed scholarship in the wider world in more precise terms. The statement on the ASA ethics site by its chair explains that the ‘new initiative on ethics that we are now launching aims to promote … case-based, ethnographically grounded, debate that is not simply about our professional practice but about our contributions to public debates about ethical principles and practice in the world’ (Gledhill 2007), clearly in an effort to shift the discipline’s focus outward and enhance its relevance to contemporary events. However, most anthropologists spend most of their professional lives not in distant fieldwork sites but within the specific spaces of the universities and related academic circles; committees, seminar rooms and supervision meetings, where particular forms and qualities of scholarship are nurtured, discouraged or impeded. I contend that by excluding these uncomfortably close-to-home settings from our professional ethics, the ASA’s commendable campaign against scholarly collaboration with military aggressions in distant lands risks being defrauded by an anthropological vision that confines ‘committed scholarship’ and ‘ethical practices’ to geographically or conceptually distant fieldwork sites least subject to public scrutiny. To paraphrase Marx (2006 [1852]), we write and work, but not under self-selected circumstances. However, to struggle against such imposed circumstances also requires us to struggle against the ways in which we are conditioned by them, both within and outside of the academy. Moreover, some scholars are better positioned than others to be making at least some choices.

Almost a decade ago, Shore and Wright (1999) in their critique of the advance of neoliberal policies in Higher Education (HE)
argued convincingly by offering a plethora of examples that the inspections in the form of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) have turned into ritualized performances as the most important events in the academic calendar. Such critiques of disciplining measures that infringe academic freedom and undermine professionalism (Shore and Wright 1999) have failed in this past decade to generate an effective collective opposition and instead there is a widespread, albeit disgruntled, collective acceptance and compliance with these imposed structures. How can we explain this incongruity?

DiGiacomo, in her heartfelt account of her own experiences of academic marginalisation, laments the lack of anger amongst our colleagues ‘at the arbitrary injustice’ of exploitative hiring practices in the discipline that create a ‘growing underclass of underemployed and marginal professionals within its own ranks’ (DiGiacomo 1997: 92, 94). She spells out that the ‘claim that anthropology not only achieves special insight into systems of structural inequality, but has a special mandate to analyze and expose them ... rings hollow indeed when tenured faculty continue to accept what Donald Unger ... has aptly termed “academic apartheid”’ (DiGiacomo 1997: 94). As David Mills notes, discussing how the discipline of anthropology was historically shaped in a way that contributed to its comparatively small size, anthropologists ‘through their own informal networks of supervision and collegiality, sought to keep close control over who was initiated into their nascent discipline’ (Mills 2003: 22). Given the relatively and comparatively young age of the discipline, there is little reason to believe that these historically shaped selection processes no longer continue to exert some influence on contemporary professional practices, in what continues to be a comparatively small discipline.

General critiques of the state of Higher Education note that ‘networks, chains and cliques of human beings sustain the machinations’ and, contrary to auditing bodies’ perceptions, they are not neutral (Purwar 2004: 56). Instead ‘collegiate support and patronage within departments and disciplines is vital for all academics ... if they are to rise in the hierarchy’ (ibid.). Purwar, especially concerned with racial discrimination issues in the academy, insightfully highlights that structures of power ‘are taken for granted and naturalised to the point of being invisible’ (Purwar 2004: 49).

When in this highly hierarchical setting many institutional structures, political and even cultural processes remain unscrutinised, they are left open to manipulation, and in the worst case scenarios, to corruption and even abuse for personal gain. Altbach (2004) observes that corruption in universities is growing in many countries. Increased competition for the few available jobs and career advancement opportunities means that gender, race, class, professional and university statuses become crucial realms through which ‘misbehaviour’ articulate (ASHE 2008) and academic patronage works in the form of personal recommendations (Altbach 2004). Then add harassment and bullying to the explosive mixture.

An AUT report in 2004 identified an increase in bullying in HE to be the result of growing stress in the sector (Kinman and Jones 2004). Incidents of harassment and bullying tend to be confined to undocumented personal encounters, and are often left unchallenged by the wider academic community. University and College Union (UCU) has found a high level of underreporting of such incidents (UCU 2007a). UCU’s ‘Dignity at Work’ report (ibid.) has ‘found that although 45% of incidents took place when targets were alone, a significant proportion of bullying happened in meetings (18%) and communal areas (22%), leading to cultures in which those experiencing bullying felt isolated and unsupported’ and ‘the primary reasons given for not reporting incidents were firstly, a fear that it would make matters worse, and secondly, a belief that any
complaint would not be taken seriously’, as well as long-time scales to resolve complaints (UCU 2007a: 5–6). UCU found that ‘seventeen per cent of respondents had personally experienced some form of harassment at work in the previous 12 months’ and that these incidents included anything from offensive jokes and comments to unwanted sexual physical advances, with most offenders being in management positions (UCU 2007a: 6).

For postgraduate students or junior academic staff (particularly when they are on short-term contracts, as is increasingly the case), there is immediately the threat to career advancement, should they file a complaint against a member of staff, where the complainant is potentially perceived to create problems not just for that ‘esteemed’ member of staff, but for the entire department and the institution, which is accentuated by an HE structure which ties funding to league table results. The target of harassment and bullying might even perceive her/himself to be the cause of generating the problems as a consequence of having been subjected to ongoing implicit or explicit threats by someone in an institutionally more powerful position.

The difficulty with issues relating to gender-based oppression and discrimination such as sexual harassment is that they are silenced. Exposure is strongly discouraged and, fearful of the consequences, those affected impose self-censorship. Even for those with the courage to expose it, there is no impartial place to which they can confidently turn and the first people they are likely to encounter are their colleagues embedded within the patronage system. Based on my own experience and observations, those who are sympathetic might warn against exposure, concerned about protecting the person’s career prospects, while others will refuse support, if they (women and men) do not directly leap to the defence of the existing hierarchies that are by implication challenged. The culture of oppression and accommodation to male chauvinism linked to career advancement is such that female colleagues tend to be in junior positions to the offenders, other male colleagues may protect their own backyard or, if junior, depend on references and recommendations, inclusion in scholastic cliques, important committees, and might be concerned about being published in refereed journals, and so on. As anthropologists we are well aware of the limitations of guarding our fieldwork subjects’ anonymity by changing or withholding their names. There is no reason to believe that such limitations should not also apply to blind peer reviewing especially in a small discipline, where research sites and specialisms are easy identifiers of the author. Silence on discriminatory practices amounts to double oppression, as silencing is itself an oppressive tool of control by the powers that be (there is not a word on the ASA website about confronting discrimination of any kind within our discipline).

Chauvinism embodied in relations of power is not just an abstract question of gender bias. It is about structures of power that are invoked to suppress challenges, political and scholarly disagreements that affect both men and women. While sexual harassment is likely to be more common in its subtle variant forms than most would be inclined to suspect or admit, it is only an extreme expression of discriminatory practices that is prejudicial in particular to committed scholarship generically, implicitly perceived as a threat to the status quo. More subtle forms of chauvinism can equally interfere with the advancement of careers and scholarship by undermining the authority of scholars at all levels based on their gender or social background, albeit that it tends to be concealed as personal criticisms in corridor gossip, where there are ready audiences in search of powerful allies in this competitive climate.

The culture of discrimination, compliance and fear is of course very uneven. Those of us at the lower levels of the scale are most susceptible to becoming the target of malpractices.
An AUT report noted that there are proportionately more women in the more casualised academic employment functions of teaching-only and research-only while in ‘2002–03, 48% of women academics were employed on a fixed-term contract, compared with 38% of men’ (AUT 2003: 6). By implication, these women’s professional development is hampered in contrast to their male counterparts, who appear to advance through the ranks faster, evidenced by the on-average ‘14.1% pay gap in favour of male academics’ (UCU 2007b). However, ‘if lifetime earnings are used as the basis, the figure is more like 30% in HE’ (UCU 2008: 2). Furthermore, the gender pay gap in the Russell Group was 18.5% and in other pre-92 universities was 15.4% (UCU 2007b: 2), higher than the overall average, and where most anthropology departments are based. This is a structural condition, which can only encourage gender-biased patronage.

Yet, examining the disciplinary mechanisms and published documentation on these issues, one might well conclude that UK anthropology is immune from these general trends. At the time of writing, a search on ‘women’ on the ASA site generates 48 results of papers that study the unequal position of women amongst fieldwork subjects elsewhere in the world; none address these issues in our daily institutional working lives. A search for ‘equal opportunities’ produces only one result, the one listing the position of the ‘equal opportunities officer’ on the ASA committee, with a single statement: ‘The purpose of this role is to collect and analyse data concerned with Equal Opportunities on behalf of the ASA Membership and with regard to the profession as a whole’ (ASA 2006). If that information exists, it is not made publicly accessible, which sheds dubious light indeed on the contemporary striving for a ‘public anthropology’.

We have to look to our colleagues in the U.S. for a more advanced discussion on the wider implications of gender inequality within the academy, especially when it articulates through harassment. In the U.S., unlike the U.K., growing concerns about sexual harassment within university departments have been taken up by many professional associations. In the U.S., ‘the incidence of sexual harassment in anthropology departments has been a concern of the Association’s Committee on the Status of Women since at least 1995’, writes Naomi Quinn (2006). Implicit in her description of sexual harassment are the harmful implications for the individuals concerned, but also for developing critical and committed scholarship, because of:

silent complicity of his [the perpetrator’s] colleagues, who all know about his behavior but accept it. ... Perhaps the most ambiguous type of potential harassment arises in consensual relationships between status unequals ... Even when such consensual relationships are excluded from sexual harassment, they remain problematic, because, in them, status or even professional advancement may be traded for sex, ... [they] may also be problematic because of their effect on the wider dynamics of a department; they may cause awkwardness and discomfort, dampen communication and intellectual exchange, or create perceptions of favoritism among colleagues, or actually impede fulfilment of academic responsibilities. (Quinn 2006, online text)

As an advanced PhD student of anthropology in the U.K., I am certain that I am not alone in having observed and suffered the bearings of such discriminatory practices in U.K. anthropology departments. However, unlike our U.S. counterparts, the ASA, that appears to think of itself as sufficiently self-aware to venture out into the big wide world, does not have any committee or network that specifically addresses these serious issues. The intellectual schizophrenia that results from the discrepancy between discourse and practice on such fundamental issues undermines the integrity of anthropology as a discipline, and adversely affects the reproduction of scholarship.

The picture is murky regarding postgraduate training. Postgraduates are at the bottom end of the academic ladder and no strangers
to discrimination. Some 31 accounts of failed PhDs collected by John Wakeford (2001) reveal horror stories of institutional conspiracy with supervisory malpractices that translate into bitter experiences of personal failure. This highly competitive environment of HE by implication teaches fear, personal and institutional insecurity and what is known as ‘networking’: massaging the established scholars’ ego (even the ‘radical’ ones). Besides the often devastating effects of discrimination on individual lives, in the bigger picture, committed scholarship is the immediate victim. In an unequal world, discrimination and malpractices are to be expected. However, it is most worrying when such practices are entertained, nourished and defended by those who claim to champion egalitarianism, radicalism and commitment (elsewhere in the world?), and who set an example to the incoming generation of novice scholars. Those targeted then do not only confront the severe implications of discriminatory practices but also the disguises of carefully crafted images to the contrary, upheld again by complicit accommodation with the status quo to preserve career prospects and a quiet life; but at a price.

Altbach identifies the examination system as ‘a common site for corruption’ (Altbach 2004: 2). A consequence of this is the factory production of PhDs, described by Simon Blackburn (2008) as ‘McDoctorates’ in a THES article, where examiners might not wish to undermine their colleagues’ (and departments’) quota of successfully completed PhDs, and approve or fail according to the needs of individual point scoring, rather than on the basis of the quality of the scholarship produced (Wakeford 2004). Encouraged by funding bodies, declining standards and expectations of PhDs are accompanied by cynical responses such as the ‘Spiral of Decline? Not My Problem. McDoctorates Must Be Better than None’ (Blackburn 2008). Such attitudes nurture complicity with personal career gains at the expense of scholarship and fairness and are ‘mystified by appeals to departmental and institutional loyalty’ (Digiacomo 1997: 92).

Moreover, when there are problems in the supervision or the examination, the student will have an impossible task to challenge ‘misbehaviour’ masquerading as the professor’s ‘academic judgement’, which university administrators and other regulating bodies dare not call into question, as reflected in the accounts collected by Wakeford (2001, 2004). The guidelines of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), an independent body financed by the universities to oversee the implementation of institutional policies, sets out clearly that cases deemed to be about academic judgement fall outside its remit (OIA 2008a: 1, section 3.2). There is no other independent body that looks into such claims, despite the fact that ‘academic judgement’ might conceal discriminatory practices. Universities’ own increasingly elaborate monitoring procedures in this area often operate as little more than tick box exercises to satisfy the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and in practice can do little to challenge departmental power relations that such questions raise, even if the will to do so existed. Yet, the university’s primary product is ‘academic judgement’, while the student, no matter what his or her wider professional experience might be, especially relevant at postgraduate level, is implicitly denied any ability of ‘academic judgement’. The term itself, however, supplants any qualitative notion of developing and nurturing scholarship, as ‘judging’ in order to quantify output is then subject not to critically grounded but hierarchical approval.

Any meaningful sense of accountability then is brushed aside and, just as Émile Zola (1898) had argued about the Dreyfus affair, on the rare occasions the actions of those in positions of power are challenged, they are protected not by reason and critical inquiry but by bluntly invoking existing relations of institutional hierarchical power, while manipulating or ignoring their own legal and regulatory codes. The
case synopses published on the website of the OIA give some insight into such institutional shortcomings regarding university practices in the U.K. (OIA 2008b). Of the 32 case synopses (of undergraduate and postgraduate complaints) published, the OIA found 17 justified or in part justified. These are only those cases that were accepted by the OIA in view of reasonable doubt based on the evidence submitted by the claimant that the university’s own complaints procedures and policies had been fully exhausted and were not adequately followed. Important to note here is that most perpetrators tend to protect themselves, and, as confirmed by the UCU data above, incidents of harassment and bullying tend to be confined to undocumented personal encounters, while most institutional complaints procedures rely on written evidence before the university authorities decide on whether to investigate a claim, which means that such incidents are very rarely dealt with appropriately. For the students concerned, this is a long, arduous, uncertain and nerve-wracking process capable of interrupting and jeopardizing their lives and careers, which means that it can be reasonably assumed that many potentially justified complaints never get reported to the OIA or the university’s complaints procedure.

Problems in supervision were reflected in a recent conference organised by PhD students for students at Hull University, which addressed questions such as ‘managing your supervisor’ in a time-pressured and stress-driven environment, reported in the *Times Higher Education* article ‘Taboo but True: PhD Students “Not up to Scratch”’ (Corbyn 2008). The article sparked a furious online debate in its commentary section on the reasons for apparently lowering standards in PhD qualifications and supervision, which suggests that there is an ample feeling within the academy that things regarding the reproduction of scholarship are anything but well.

When academic convention prescribes closing eyes and ears to discriminatory practices and abuses of power to protect hierarchical impunity, then the culture created can also act as a barrier to overt opposition to neoliberal policies imposed in our universities that are nevertheless widely perceived to have negative impacts for academic activities and nurturing of scholarship. A lack of self-awareness, as noted by John Hutnyk in the online ASA discussion with Osella (Osella et al. 2008), is reproduced through an ‘audit culture’ that subverts any meaningful notions of accountability and transparency and fosters instead a “culture of compliance” and a climate of fear’ (Shore and Wright 1999: 568). As a non-genre specific example of this climate of fear, as the then AUT’s (now UCU) representative for teaching assistants at the University of Manchester between 2005 and 2006, I came across two Teaching Assistants who had not been paid for an entire year for their teaching, but were too afraid to generate further problems for themselves to take the cases to an industrial tribunal, despite the AUT case worker’s advice and reassurances of full union support.

In any case, if it works for gender, it works for other issues too. An entrenched discriminatory culture can only translate into suppressing critical thought generally, and that becomes crystal clear on issues such as the ‘war on terror’. In this regard, Caroline Osella (2008) complained on the ASA ethics blog about some colleagues’ ‘indifference’ to Intelligence personnel appearing in our academic forums, jeopardizing the relative safety of a professional disciplinary environment that potentially could put our research participants at risk.

This inhibiting culture of silence where everyday professional practice is concerned has also contributed to the delay in the ‘war on terror’ and its implications for anthropology becoming a key debate. I cannot say I saw U.K. anthropologists queuing up to practice public anthropology when they had the chance, such as sharing their unique empirically grounded understandings of the issues at stake with the
multitudes that assembled around anti-war platforms in 2003, eagerly seeking knowledge with which to arm their movement (approximately two years before the topic began to be debated at length in our disciplinary journals). Such contributions might have strengthened the anti-war movement and tipped the balance against the invasion of Iraq; or would that have been ethically unsound on the grounds of interfering with the natural development of historical and political processes?

The fear not to upset the status quo of hierarchical relations within the academy opens the doors for polemical endorsements for active ‘partisan’ anthropology with the military invasions of distant lands (Dean 2005, Moos 2005, McFate 2007); more subtle critiques of opposition to this war that insist that professional objectivity must be guarded by an ethical stance of neutrality. They confuse professional ethics and ‘objectivity’ because they blatantly ignore unequal relations of power, as was manifested by many of the 214 comments left by anthropologists on the AAA’s blog about the association’s board’s statement opposing anthropologists’ covert collaboration with the U.S. military Human Terrain System (HTS) project (AAA 2007). Brian Donohue-Lynch, for example, who expresses his opposition to the war, nevertheless muddles matters by conflating ‘neutrality’ with ‘trust’ and ‘confidentiality’.

To dismiss some arguments (for example, about professional standards of trust and neutrality) on the basis of other arguments ... relating to judgements about international law, state oppression of indigenous peoples, US imperialism etc., is to misdirect what might otherwise be productive and intellectually apt exchange. ... I encourage the committee to offer to help formulate a structure in which this work could at least theoretically be carried out with full neutrality. (Donohue-Lynch 2007)

Laying claim to a ‘neutral’ position in fieldwork might in fact generate mistrust on the part of the people we study, who, according to my own varied fieldwork experiences in the U.K. and in Argentina, rarely share a blind belief in the possibility of ‘neutrality’ and disinterested research. Neutrality in research agendas and processes is of course nothing but a lack of transparency in epistemology and ideology: the methods and a set of ideas on the basis of which we construct our frameworks for analysis and approaches to research. This pre-disposition to naively believe that working not only with but for the institutions of the ‘powers that be’ could be carried out on some neutral terrain diverts an important political debate for scholarship into a subservient moralist tirade by arguing that everyone shares responsibility for our governments’ decisions; in other words, by voting for them, we gave them our consent to act upon our behalf. For example, John P. Hawkins responds to the AAA’s resolution to limit military access to anthropological knowledge through scholarly work available through the public arena, rejecting concealed collaboration:

How could we possibly endorse the ‘widest possible circulation of anthropological knowledge’ if we deny it to a military that was sent to a war not of its own choosing and for which it was woefully unprepared culturally? And if we cannot help the military out of that policy/knowledge mess, how can we ethically help the civilian government that sent them there? And if we obstinately refuse to help a culturally naive civil government and our military to deal with cultural issues, because mistakes might get people killed, are we then complicitous in the deaths of the many that will surely be killed in the absence of cultural knowledge? I have never yet met the military person who wanted to pull the trigger. We elected a civilian government that sent culturally untrained military personnel into a situation where, absent cultural [sic] information, they have no choice but to pull the trigger. Then we say, ‘anthropologists shouldn’t help; it is unethical!’ (my fictive quote, not the Board’s). That is a great way to make the discipline both irrelevant and immoral, which is to say, unethical. (Hawkins 2007)

There is a readiness to accept that military and government personnel of the world’s most pow-
erful leading nation are not cynical and sinister in their strategies and tactics but culturally na-
ïve and unprepared because they have finally requested the enlightened anthropologists’ collab-
oration. These scholars thus fail to analyse the objective conditions and the essence of the war and consequently offer utterly un-
scientific justifications for unjustifiable military acts of aggression. What is essentially a political debate, itself embedded in global rela-
tions of power, is then disguised as one about generic principles of scholarship.

Matthew L. Schehl, who prior to his graduate studies in Social Anthropology was by his own admission a U.S. Army military intelligence non-commissioned officer (2003–2005) and ‘ran a Tactical Human Intelligence Team (THT) in Central Iraq’, insightfully clarifies that his objection to Human Terrain System (HTS) is not just about the U.S. government’s ‘systemmatic [sic] inability’ but, importantly, its ‘unwillingness to enact meaningful change in Iraq, despite possessing the power, mandate and responsibility to do so, and despite the efforts of many men and women who (out of personal integrity and at great risk) sought to do so: ‘it hurt me to watch good people unne-
cessarily suffer and die, Americans and Iraqis. I shudder at the thought of anthropologists contributing to this’ (Schehl 2007).

Regarding academic logistical collaboration with the military invasions, because they can ‘educate’ the occupying forces to generate ‘a better understanding’ of the invaded countries (McFate 2007: 21), no doubt to make the invasions more humane (Kilcullen 2007), the rising death tolls in the occupied zones in Iraq and Afghanistan are very objective evidence to the contrary. Schehl’s contribution to the AAA blog debate (Schehl 2007) cited above highlights what seems to escape many readily militarized humanitarian patriotic anthropologists, which is that the military did not seek to engage social scientists in the earlier phases of occupation to minimize harm when they bombed Iraq back into the ‘dark ages’ from on high, but in posterior phases that were about securing the occupation and global U.S. hegemony as well as to generate much-needed ideological justi-
fications for the wars they struggled to win, in which the opposing sides had anything but an equal fire power. Bluntly put, it is about convincing people to allow themselves to be invaded and oppressed by foreign legions, have their futures dictated by Washington and London; it is taking Hannah Arendt’s totalitarianism (Arendt 1994) to the global scene, where enforcing submission to oppression is not understood to be an act of violence but acts of cultural mediation and humanitar-
ianism. These questions should really be ABC for anthropologists, who benefit from a large array of past disciplinary empirical analyses of colonialism and diverse structures of power relations. Thus, it is not merely a question of debating differing ideological stances but one of ignoring the discipline’s own output. In other words, the poorly argued justifications for the Anglo-American war efforts demonstrate a serious lack of scholarship.

Justin Taylor, another graduate student, goes as far as to advocate censorship of opposition to the war, concluding that ‘anybody who is supporting this resolution due to their opposition to the war or to specific policies should be left out of the debate, as they are not neutral observers’ (Taylor 2007). This does not seem to me to be a good example of neutrality. More importantly, it echoes a frequently expressed suggestion that underpins advocacy for col-
laboration with the expansionist e-
fferts that those opposing the wars are a more powerful institution than all the Anglo-American military and government institutions combined.

Such confusions – intentionally or not – rise to prominence when there is li-
J’accuse’, to follow Zola’s format, the anthropological profession for failing to confront discrimina-
tory practices and misconduct in everyday academic life that jeopardises the development of challenging scholarly contributions capable of applying long-established analyses and critiques of domination to important contemporary historical events. A vision that ignores these institutional parameters might be a valid personal academic one, but it is not a vision for the future of a discipline that is part of an institutional structure of capitalism, and is likely to continue to be that for the foreseeable future.

I do not advocate ‘reflexivity’ in anthropology for it has usually meant the exact opposite: an inward-looking intangible debate oblivious to events in the ‘outside world’. However, Sangren has got a point when he concludes that ‘a worthy project for anthropological reflexivity might be to attempt to realise our utopian ideals more thoroughly by harnessing institutional critique more explicitly to that purpose … Bourdieu’s critique of French meritocracy, after all, was not aimed against merit, but against the subversions of merit masquerading in its name’ (Sangren 2007: 18). If committed scholarship is to be meaningful, then there needs to be consistency between theory and practice that entails an ongoing self-critique, as otherwise it will not constitute a critique but a non-accountable self-promoting discourse on ethical goodness in distant places that lie beyond scrutiny, without much substance. Applying the tools of anthropological enquiry to rigorously analyse the world by making consistent connections between different aspects of life, theory and practice can only be accomplished if a disciplinary culture is nurtured that makes accommodation with ill-practice as uncomfortable as can be by ‘speaking truth to power’ in all the fields of anthropological practice and in the world. In the absence of this currently being the case, novice scholars who are able to build an academic career are less likely to enter contentious debates on anthropologists’ collaboration with current Anglo-American expansionist military efforts and in the worst case scenario, they are more susceptible to being drafted as the hegemon’s foot soldiers. It is even less likely that they will challenge discriminatory practices of any sorts within the academy and instead bow to dictates from on high, concerned only about securing their own careers in terms of financial and employment conditions (not in terms of committing to nurturing scholarship, which requires grounded criticality and intellectual vocation). The absence of any serious mechanisms and forums for addressing discrimination within our discipline in this day and age is really quite scary.

I hope that I can regain some confidence in the discipline by the responses to this piece, if they show that there are still anthropologists prepared to make the connections between the issues that so profoundly affect the future and the integrity of anthropological scholarship. By implication that means making every effort to ensure that commitment to critical scholarship, irrespective of gender, social or ethnic background and despite neoliberalism, does still have a place in the discipline. Personally, I will need some convincing.

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