

# **Anthropologists in the Securityscape**

Ethics, Practice, and Professional Identity

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## On the Ethics of Graduated Disclosure in Contexts of War

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*Miller is currently working on a book project that focuses on an audiocassette collection formerly owned by Osama Bin Laden, the same project provoking his discussion of graduated disclosure for his autoethnographic essay in this volume. Currently held at Yale University, the audiocassette collection represents the most important archive for understanding Bin Laden's intellectual formation. His project explores the contents of the collection and its implications for new understandings of Bin Laden's militant movement, but also situates these insights in relation to a broader consideration of the role of Arabic language studies for contemporary Muslim reformers.*

*After the fall of the Taliban in December of 2001, the Cable News Network (CNN) acquired the audiotape collection of Bin Laden from his personal compound in Kandahar, where he lived from 1997 to 2001. The collection contains more than 1,500 recordings of more than 200 leading Islamist preachers from around the world. In the summer of 2007, Miller was invited by Yale to annotate the collection, and has been the sole researcher on the collection to date. An article on the ways speakers in the collection differ over their understanding of the term "al-qa'ida" ("the base") has appeared in the Journal of Language and Communication*

*in 2008 (Miller 2008). Though Albro and Miller participated in an American Anthropological Association (AAA) panel some years ago, Miller's work came across the radar of the volume editors after Albro heard a National Public Radio (NPR) story on Miller's work with the Bin Laden tapes. At the time, Miller was in the middle of a year in residence at the Wilson Center, and Albro quickly got in touch. This essay was the first case we solicited, and its high-quality and thought-provoking discussion of how Miller has handled his research—with its clear implications for the intelligence community, the changing contexts of research in the Middle East in the post-9/11 era, and the close relationship of ethical to research practice—helped to change how we viewed these essays. His case came to serve as a model for others we solicited, epitomizing in our view the virtues of what we now call our “autoethnographic” approach.*

*Miller's essay, along with Rubinstein's, represent the work of scholars who have more traditional academic affiliations but nonetheless are engaging in ethnographic research on subjects of interest to communities in the securityscape. Comparing their research challenges with those experienced by Abramson, Turnley, Holmes-Eber, and McNamara in this volume, all of whom engage in research with different affiliations to the security sector, is an important way these essays engage with each other.*

To varying degrees, anthropologists who work with Muslim communities have long faced challenges in translating the potential benefits of their discipline for Muslims. In the wake of United States–led sanctions and bombings against Iraq in the 1990s, followed by George W. Bush's declaration of a “War on Terror” following the attacks of 9/11, American anthropologists have faced heightened suspicions about the objectives of their research. If war and conflict have always been central to the production of knowledge, anthropologists find themselves newly implicated in global orders. This case examines one aspect of knowledge production that increasingly complicates anthropologists' integrity in Muslim communities: the recourse, directly or indirectly, to declassified information and other documents that are acquired by United States–led global security networks—including American military forces, private contractors, intelligence consulting firms, multinational companies involved in data management, and journalists—and that are increasingly being made available to the public.

The staggering scale and particularity of such material was evident enough in 2006 when roughly 48,000 boxes of Iraqi documents, acquired by American military forces after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, were released publicly on the Internet with Congressional approval. Described by chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Pete Hoekstra as an effort “to unleash the power of the Internet, unleash the power of

the blogosphere, to get through these documents and give us a better understanding of what was going on in Iraq before the war,” the project instantly ratified such an unorthodox range of intelligence analysts that the materials were taken offline eight months later. Although this initiative fizzled, other archival projects of greater complexity, financial backing, and public influence are under way, giving leverage to an array of intelligence analysts whose qualifications have yet to be systematically studied. They include projects by private and nonprofit research firms such as the RAND Corporation, Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE), and the Institute Investigative Project on Terrorism that produce reports, records, databases, and policy recommendations for clients as well as the public at large. They include projects by companies such as the Fortune 500 Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) and IntelCenter that routinely supply government agencies with intelligence data. They include government-funded initiatives such as the Conflict Research Records project at the National Defense University that host and provide access to declassified artifacts that have been transferred to American ownership in countries where U.S. military forces operate. They also include archives assembled by nonprofit research centers and professional bloggers such as the Middle East Media Research Institute, the Northeast Intelligence Network, and Jihadwatch, all of which aim to influence public opinion and policy through the translation, analysis, and publication of documents that bear centrally on intelligence and security issues.

Anthropologists have a responsibility to engage openly in discussions about the nature and credibility of such perspectives, especially as the boundaries of government-managed intelligence initiatives are being rendered more obscure. My own participation in knowledge production of the sort traditionally considered intelligence work began when an anthropologist colleague solicited my assistance in studying a collection of al-Qa'ida documents from Kandahar, Afghanistan, that included 60 videotapes, 2 compact disks, and more than 1,500 audiotapes, the latter of which had been formerly deposited in Osama Bin Laden's personal compound in the center of the city. Bin Laden had lived in Kandahar from 1997 to 2001. And in the months following the Taliban's evacuation from the city in December of 2001, employees with the U.S.-owned CNN had acquired the collection while conducting investigative journalism in the city. Featuring more than 200 speakers from across the Islamic world, including 22 unpublished recordings of Bin Laden himself as well as many other amateur recordings of conversations among top al-Qa'ida leaders, the collection offered an extraordinary record of the kinds of debates and leadership that informed al-Qa'ida's most coherent organizational momentum in the years leading to the attacks of 9/11. Of course, little was known about the content of the tapes at the time that we received two dusty boxes

shipped to us from CNN's main regional office in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 2003. I was informed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had been informed of the collection while it was being held by CNN, and had declined stewardship.

While this puzzled me, I was told that the intelligence agencies had found the tapes to be of historical value only (and thus, presumably, not useful for investigating emerging security threats), an assertion that has been confirmed to date by the fact that I have found no tapes recorded after 2000. As an anthropologist only too aware of the ways such an archive might be selectively mined to confirm preestablished stereotypes, I felt that it was my responsibility to help make the tapes a resource for research collaboration across the widest possible fields of enquiry. First, a catalog was needed to summarize the contents of the tapes. Second, I needed to do what I could to contextualize them. Years of living in the Arab world and speaking Arabic, as well as being nearly finished with a book on audiocassette culture, tribalism, and Islam in Yemen, would certainly help. I would additionally need to conduct interviews and further fieldwork with people familiar with the tapes, preferably those with experience in the Afghan Arab movement, especially its incarnation in Kandahar over the years when the cassette collection was assembled.

I looked forward to bringing my anthropological training to public debates about al-Qa'ida, Bin Laden, and Muslim militants that so often veered into groundless speculation and outright misinformation. During fieldwork in Yemen in the 1990s, I had interviewed militants and Afghan Arab returnees, witnessed a militant attack on villagers with whom I had been working, and written about the ways transnational militant movements struggled to tailor their objectives to local cultural contexts. As I took tapes from the two cardboard boxes that had arrived at Williams College, I was daunted at the prospect of making sense of the tapes. At the same time, I wondered about the provenance of the materials that I was working on, well aware of the tendentious nature of document acquisition in contexts of war, state transformation, and population displacement.

CNN had acquired the tapes as the Taliban, Afghanistan's former state authority, was being driven from its final strongholds in the country's peripheries. Although a former Afghan governor of Kandahar had filled in the power vacuum along with regional tribal leaders, and had given license to CNN to operate in the area, a provisional national government had yet to be established. More broadly, the United States' invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, was announced by the Executive Branch and authorized by Congress, but had not been subject to approval by the institutions and procedures of international law. Although the United Nations (UN) Security Council had passed several resolutions acknowledging the seriousness of the 9/11 attacks and the right of nations to defend themselves,

it made no recourse to sanctioning the use of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (al-Na'im 2002:168). Such unilateral military action was not the first time the United States had ignored judgments of the International Court of Justice in the interests of invading countries and capturing its leaders in pursuit of its own claims to justice (e.g., Panama in the early 1980s). In light of these complicating factors, should I have left the tapes in their boxes and directed my attention to another research project? Given Bin Laden's terrorist record and public demands for 9/11 accountability, I knew that the tapes would not be returned to their former owner, and Williams College's purchase of the collection from CNN assured their long-term status as a credible research archive in the United States. Should I have left the documentation and research to someone else? In the contexts of a global "War on Terror" that is centrally engaged in producing new knowledge and facts, are there safe zones for researchers?

In acknowledging the urgency with which I committed myself to working on the tapes, I find myself implicated in systems of knowledge production that can only be described as nonscholarly, politically motivated, morally ambivalent, and at times illegal. As a result of such implication, I take continuous measures to explain my goals and associations, whether for academic colleagues in my own discipline and others, for my students, or for informants. To preserve my neutrality, as much as possible, I have refused funding from intelligence and security institutions, instead seeking research support from academic and scholarly communities. I welcome these opportunities to preserve a neutral ground for my research, not simply for my own professional objectives but for working collaboratively with others in thinking about complicity in knowledge production whose benefits are unequally distributed.

Devoid of specific case studies, questions of complicity are, of course, extremely abstract. At their broadest level, they involve acknowledging that as a tax-paying citizen, one's labor provides revenues for government expenditures on policies that one may profoundly disagree with. We may be tempted to absolve ourselves of responsibility for such complicity, arguing that we were presented a "forced hand" and cannot choose simply not to pay taxes. However, deferring questions of complicity to matters of choice is hardly more satisfactory, given our status as subjects to culture, ideology, and systems of knowledge production that lie quite beyond our own influence. My own struggle to practice ethical anthropology while remaining alert to hierarchies of knowledge that structure complicity is perhaps best illustrated with regards the issue of "disclosure" that is so central to the ethics of our discipline. First, some fieldwork details are in order.

In seeking to contextualize the audiotapes, I conducted a fieldwork trip to Doha, Qatar, to interview the students of a Muslim jurisprudent named 'Abd al-Rahim al-Tahhan, whose work was well represented in the collection.

By some accounts, the shaikh was a leading thinker for militants interested in combating the West. One prominent al-Qa'ida figure, for example, had recommended to students who were interested in affairs on the Arabian Peninsula and the growing strength of the Afghan Arab movement that they begin "listening to the lectures and recordings of the symbols of the Awakening in the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries [i.e., Saudi Arabia] that were published between 1980 and 1995. They contain outstanding material on creed and legal learning and jihadi movement ideology, especially the tapes of Shaikh 'Abd al-Rahim al-Tahhan ..." (al-Suri 2006). By other accounts, however, the shaikh was a celebrated "quietist" who privileged doctrinal and spiritual issues over political organization and action.

One of the challenges I faced in approaching the shaikh's students was deciding how to present my research in ways that could lead to productive dialogue rather than to immediate suspicion and a foreclosure of exploratory questions by the students as well as myself. I knew that I couldn't simply begin by citing his importance to notorious Muslim militants or by identifying the significance of the shaikh in Osama Bin Laden's former cassette collection. Not only would such an approach likely offend the students, it would also privilege the relevance of extremely marginalized militant voices in ways that could only distort a fuller consideration of the significance of the shaikh's work and life for wider groups of people. The purpose of fieldwork is surely to facilitate such considerations, not foreclose them. While I welcomed the possibility of broaching the Bin Laden connection with the students, and ideally discussing how the shaikh's work might have ended up in the collection, I needed to begin with a less alarmist set of introductions to my broader research goals, my professional qualifications, and my own worldview and background. I needed, in other words, a graduated strategy for "disclosure."

The AAA's Code of Ethics states that "researchers must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, and persons studied or providing information, and with relevant parties affected by the research." Such a statement provided me with important general guidance, and I was ready to discuss matters of potential impact and sources of support with all specified parties. I was less certain, however, about the ethics of my strategy of disclosing the "purpose(s)..." for research projects with... persons studied or providing information." I couldn't deny, for example, that the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), which was funding my fieldwork, had likely sponsored my research because of its "purpose" to help people better understanding terrorism and support efforts to achieve greater security for individuals affected by it, foremost among them American citizens. Wasn't this one of the most important objectives of my research project, both for myself and for my funders? How could I fail to acknowledge this in my opening presentation to potential informants?

I decided that my project needed framing. Although I had received funding from the ACLS for a project titled "The Osama Bin Laden Audiotape Library: Echoes of Legality," this title poorly conveyed the specific reasons that I had decided to study the Qatar-based jurisprudent's works and interview his students. I was specifically interested in the shaikh's lectures on asceticism or self-abnegation (*al-zuhd*), a topic that, according to Internet-based newspapers I had read, seemed to distinguish his work from other jurisprudents. In the many cassettes of his that I had heard, I found his discussions of the topic fascinating primarily because although they delved into themes of worldly renunciation and redemptive suffering that other scholars of religious militancy had found central to militant discourse, he discussed them in ways that greatly cautioned against militancy and outward political action, and instead privileged an inward focus on disciplining the self in ways that could just as easily appeal to pacifists. The shaikh's subtle distinctions in discussions of asceticism led to just the kind of complexities that an anthropologist would find productive for revisiting stereotypes of dogmatic militant ideologues. For this reason, I drafted a new title for my fieldwork project in Doha: "Asceticism (*al-zuhd*) in Muslim Reform through the Works of Shaikh 'Abd al-Rahim al-Tahhan." Furthermore, to solicit support for the ethics of my decision, I submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university, even though the ACLS had not required me to do so. The IRB could help me decide whether or not my project preserved the rights and protection of human subjects who might be involved in my study.

A month later, the IRB gave me clearance for my project. I immediately contacted students of the shaikh by email to set up appointments during my stay in Doha, attaching an Arabic summary of my research project with my email. Several students agreed to meet with me, although they wanted all interview questions written out in advance. I readily obliged, and the theme of asceticism in the shaikh's works seemed amenable. Two weeks later, I found myself walking through a park in Doha with two long-time disciples of the shaikh, introducing myself and discussing my research project with them in ways that I hoped would elicit further discussions and a formal tape-recorded interview, following the procedures outlined in my IRB proposal.

I began introducing my research project to the students by talking about my life history and interests. When focusing on the reasons for my visit to Doha and interest in the shaikh's life, I began with a general observation that, since the earliest days of my youth, I had always sought to understand the perspectives of the weak and oppressed, hoping that by doing so I could help improve their lives. I backed up this assertion with evidence of publications I had written on this topic, all of which focused on Muslims, and with discussions of my goals as a teacher. In moving to a discussion of my interest in the shaikh in particular, I ventured to suggest that, from

what I had heard of the shaikh's sermons, he was an even more committed defender of the rights of the oppressed, though he worked within a tradition of Islam with which I, raised as a Christian, was not as familiar. Hoping to convey my appreciation of the shaikh's relevance to political activists, I added that he often seemed impassionate about corruption and hypocrisy in particular, including in which the ways the West, including the United States, had exacerbated modern Qataris' sense that the world's moral and spiritual orders were capitulating to material and economic power. When the students asked how I had first learned about the shaikh, I explained that I had first encountered his lectures on audiocassettes that had surfaced in the United States, some of which had come from collections of tapes found in Afghanistan (and others I had accessed from the Internet). The students seemed pleased to hear that the shaikh's lectures were circulating widely, and asked no further questions. Our discussion turned to the particulars of asceticism, the details of which occupied us for several hours until my departure. Although we left on amicable terms, they stated that further discussions needed to be conducted via email or phone only. No responses were returned, however, when I tried those channels in subsequent days. No further contact with the students occurred.

Although my interview was short, I gained insight into the broader political and cultural significance of the shaikh's work for the students. When combined with informal interviews I held with others in Doha about the shaikh's work and influence, I was able to assemble a slightly better ethnographic account of the social and cultural contexts that informed the shaikh's work than I had had before my visit. My research in Doha helped me write about the some of the disjunctions between stereotypes of Muslim violence, militancy, and terrorism and lived practice. I wondered about whether slightly *less* disclosure with the students could have resulted in further meetings, discussions, and mutually beneficial dialogue. From discussions I've had with anthropologist colleagues throughout my career, I've heard the refrain "less is more." In the interests of fitting in and more productive participant observation, an anthropologist should disclose information about themselves and their larger research goals only with tact and diplomacy even as ethical standards toward the protection of human subjects are firmly maintained. I have wondered about such reserve, however, when studying people whose work or lives might even loosely be associated with "terrorism" by Western governments, intelligence networks, and media institutions. In recent years, charges of "ideological support" for terrorists bear a heavy burden in the West, especially when combined with "material support," even in the form of monetary contributions to charities which, although originally considered strictly welfare oriented, are later determined to have channeled revenues to terrorist organizations. If one's work suggests any link between given

informants and terrorists or terrorist organizations, even if these links are already known to intelligence agencies, must one "disclose"? If not, just how much, and how quickly, does one "disclose?"

### Editorial Commentary

We were fascinated by the extent of thought and consideration that Miller brought to the seemingly straightforward project of translating and studying a set of audiocassettes. His contribution illustrates the complexity of intersections among anthropologists, our research, policy- and decision-making, and national security concerns. Miller explicitly rejects direct funding from government agencies with a stake in preventing terrorism or countering insurgency. But as he demonstrates, it is impossible to pursue research on the salient topics of Islam, identity, and violence without engaging national security concerns, if obliquely.

Some of this is due to the perceived relevance of social science methodologies for national security decision-making. In this regard, Miller's work reminded us of the wholesale embrace of social network analysis among many national security experts studying, chasing, and prosecuting terrorist groups. Even before the 9/11 attacks, and well before the military's Human Terrain Systems and Minerva initiatives exploded as topics of scholarly political debate, many institutions in the national security community were exploring social network analysis as a practical method for tracing interactions among suspected terrorists. The "network" has emerged as the dominant metaphor for making sense of and even predicting the dynamics of the post-Cold War world, and marks a significant shift away from the nation-state paradigm that structured twentieth-century international relations and political science discourse. As a result, many institutions in the securityscape are recruiting social scientists with expertise in social network analysis to provide methods and computational tools for mapping the interactions among persons and groups who may be active in insurgency or terrorism activities (see Bohannon 2009; Keefe 2006).

Into this space, enter Miller's research, which reveals ideological connections between the al-Qa'ida conversations and a Muslim scholar in Yemen. As he points out at the beginning of the essay, social scientists working with Muslim groups or studying Islam have long struggled to explain the benefits of their work for these communities. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, many anthropologists were frustrated at the stereotypes circulating in public discourse about Islam in general and young Muslim men in particular. Miller perceived an opportunity to challenge some of these stereotypes by studying a collection of al-Qa'ida documents and audio recordings captured in Afghanistan in late 2001 and released to

the media. Not only does he have the linguistic and historical knowledge required to catalog and summarize the tapes, but his previous fieldwork on the culture of audiocassette recordings in Yemen uniquely positions him to contextualize and make sense of the exchanges recorded on the cassettes.

Miller recognizes that he has developed a project with tremendous scholarly, political, and even moral importance. As he points out, a number of well-funded private contractors and semiprivate think tanks, many with no expertise at all in Arab language, culture, or religious history, have begun producing enormous amounts of information about Islam, the Middle East, and terrorism. He sees an opportunity for an experienced researcher to challenge a rapidly crystallizing discourse about the relationship between Islam and the West using primary source material on al-Qa'ida. Indeed, in some ways, Miller's project is similar to Schoch-Spana's: to use research in the spirit of cultural critique, to use alternative narratives to challenge dominant discourse and stereotypes about the social and cultural worlds imagined by decision makers.

Almost immediately, however, the project is fraught: for one thing, Miller is troubled by the fact that the tapes were captured in the invasion of Afghanistan, which despite massive political support was never officially sanctioned by the UN. His research can be set against the background of recent public controversies over the provenance and ownership of potentially valuable research archives composed of information removed from countries during wars, as with the arguments over the legitimacy of the Iraqi Perspectives Project (see Eskander 2008). As with Rush's essay, Miller's project, as an anthropological intervention, is informed by the changing geopolitics of what is permissible and possible, associated with international concepts of ownership and of patrimony.

Moreover, he realizes that fully contextualizing the conversations he is studying will require additional fieldwork in Qatar with Shaikh 'Abd al-Rahim al-Tahhan, whose thinking seems to have influenced the positioning of some al-Qa'ida followers vis-à-vis the West. These challenges lead Miller to reflect on his own position as a taxpaying citizen of the United States, as a political actor, and as a scholar seeking to practice "ethical anthropology" in the most politically, legally, and ethically charged field of knowledge production today. Not only is he nervous about how to present himself and his research objectives to his potential participants so as not to offend them, but he recognizes that the very act of interviewing the shaikh and his students could quite easily reify a connection between the shaikh's students and al-Qa'ida for a national security community driven to discover and mitigate possible terrorist activity by connecting the dots.

Reading Miller's thoughts on his decision-making, we were struck by his careful consideration of the AAA's Code of Ethics and the decision to engage his IRB as sources of guidance for a fraught research project.

Most anthropologists complain vociferously about the poor fit between ethnographic research practice and IRB rules and regulations, which are primarily grounded in biomedical research models. Moreover, the AAA's Code is a constant object of political debate and discussion within the Association, as people argue over whether its guidance is worded strongly enough, whether the AAA should become a sanctioning organization, and how the incorporation of stronger language and/or an AAA sanctioning process might affect the field and the Association. In contrast, in Miller's discussion, we see him as less concerned about the political positioning of the Code and more interested in the guidance it might provide to inform a complicated decision-making process. We had the sense that he found the general guidance about disclosure ethically helpful but methodologically troubling, given the goals of his funding agency and the possible implications of his work for raising the interest of the national security community in the activities of the shaikh he decides to study. Moreover, we were struck that he looked to his IRB for additional guidance and assistance, absent any requirement to do so. We are aware of several anthropologists working in the national security arena who also actively seek IRB assistance as a way of invoking formal institutional and legal protections for their research participants.

In this regard, we wondered how Miller presented the project to his IRB and how its members received this project: were they as aware of, or troubled by, the dynamics that Miller was grappling with? The questions raised by the IRB might indicate the extent to which its members understood the nuances of Miller's project. Moreover, given the complexities of this work, we commented that an IRB would have to be fairly sophisticated to provide guidance that Miller could actually implement. We wondered if they were sympathetic to his concerns. Moreover, it would be interesting to know if his IRB was aware of the ethical codes that govern anthropology in the United States (we are thinking here of the AAA and the Society for Applied Anthropology), and if any of the IRB's guidance was drawn from the ethical code of Miller's core discipline.

In the end, it seems as though the research participants in Doha may have protected themselves, perhaps due to Miller's explanation of his work, but perhaps also because they are aware of the extent of U.S. activities to monitor activities defined in terms of "radicalization" or "terrorism." We were particularly struck by the limitations that the students put on Miller's interactions with them: email or telephone contact only, please; and as the contributor acknowledges, his efforts to interact through those channels were ultimately unsuccessful. We wondered if this signaled that the students were as aware of the fraught context of this research as Miller was, and were exercising their agency to mitigate the consequences of his curiosity for themselves. We also wondered if Miller

had ever been contacted by any government agency as his work has progressed: although the CIA seems to have dismissed the tapes as irrelevant to their current intelligence pursuits, Miller's work with these materials demonstrates their value in ways that might heighten interest among military, intelligence, or criminal justice professionals trying to make sense of the fields of meaning that nascent terrorist or radicalization movements draw upon as they form particular ideologies.

### Miller Response

A discussion of graduated disclosure was not included in my original application for IRB approval largely because I had not yet formalized my thoughts about the concept. As a result, I was unable to assess the extent to which reviewers were aware of the AAA's Code of Ethics. Looking ahead to future interaction with the IRB, I must admit some hesitation at the prospect of introducing the method in my application. As paraphrased by editors of this volume, graduated disclosure opens inquiry into "the ways disclosure is in significant degree a product of the negotiation of the circumstances of research rather than a clearly defined—and separate—ethical responsibility prior to research." Given the IRB's investment in formalizing the parameters of human subject protection in advance of conducting research, I wonder whether the concept of graduated disclosure would be interpreted to license research conducted under false pretenses. I also wonder about the extent to which the concept would be seen as antithetical to an independent ethical review board's commitment to keeping regulation, monitoring, and compliance within its own institutional purview. Would the possibility of contextually negotiated ethical obligations introduce doubts about my "good faith" and my loyalty to the standards of a scientific community?

From IRB responses to my application, I sense that methods approximating "graduated disclosure" raise red flags among reviewers who are trained to remain vigilant in monitoring possible lapses in procedures for selecting, recruiting, and protecting human subjects. Before submitting my IRB application, I had sent an email to the Qatar Foundation, a state institution supervising education, community development, and international scientific collaboration, to inquire whether any contacts might be established with Shaikh al-Tahhan or any of his students. After being sent the names, email addresses, and telephone numbers of individuals, I sent one of them an email in which I attached an Arabic-language description of my research and again asked about the possibility of establishing "contact" (*ittisāl*) with any of al-Tahhan's students. For the sake of discretion, my email did not imply that the recipient might be included among these

"students," leaving open the possibility for a helpful response without self-identification as a potential research subject. Although I had not yet received a reply from the recipient (this came later and only indirectly from the Qatar Foundation, which informed me that the students were interested in hearing more about my research and that I should call them once I arrived in the country), I did mention the email and my hopes for subsequent telephone follow-up in my application. I received the following response from the IRB: "The investigator states that he has begun recruitment through email, although the study has not been reviewed or approved by the IRB. This contact with potential study volunteers should not occur until the IRB approval is obtained. The investigator should provide a statement to the IRB explaining what recruitment activities he has initiated prior to approval." After English and Arabic texts documenting my email exchanges were provided, the IRB concluded that I had not violated procedures for subject recruitment.

The IRB's only other response focused on a section of my Description of Study in which I explained my procedures for protecting subject privacy and confidentiality. Although I had been meticulous, I was asked to include the phrase "there is the possibility, though unlikely, of a breach of confidentiality" just to be sure that all bases were covered. I assume this statement addressed potential incidents involving extraordinary legal or illegal data exposure, whether through human error or unexpected third-party intervention (e.g., computer theft, a court subpoena, and so forth). In sum, the IRB's most significant concern about my application focused on whether my disclosure of research goals had been overly hasty and in violation of their institutional standards. The graduation of disclosure, it seems, struck reviewers as an ambiguous exercise that was best not left to the discretion of researchers themselves.

The central epistemological question that arises in the notion of graduated disclosure seems to be: when does "the study" begin? It is a venerable and challenging question for anthropologists. For the IRB reviewers, my mention of "contact" (*ittisāl*) had precipitated suspicions that I might have already violated procedures for protecting human subjects. The concept of graduated disclosure, however, is premised on histories of contact that far precede the "first encounter" between an abstract researcher and the subject. As discussed in my case study, my identity and goals as an American researcher were heavily mediated before I had even begun my research project on Shaikh al-Tahhan. Implicated in American-led War on Terror discourse that had complex institutional histories in Qatar, I had to begin research inquiries both by acknowledging my implication in these discourses—I was, after all, an American university professor seeking to learn about al-Tahhan's ascetic virtues in a world of clashing ideologies and political projects—and also by signaling my estrangement from the usual procedures of knowledge



production. My initial emails made no mention of the universal legal rights of human subjects or the protections afforded by my selection, recruitment, and data-management procedures. I didn't even mention the word "interview" (*mugabala*), aware that this possibility might elicit anxieties about accountability and a prematurely negative response. These details, I sensed, were best postponed until some measure of trust could be established.

Postponing some of the heavier discourse about legal rights and obligations seemed to me appropriate protocol when introducing oneself in the Arab world. The question again arose, however, about when exactly "the study," as I had conceived it through assistance from an ethical review board, would begin. At what point would I decide that the exigencies of an ethical social science would trump those of cultural decorum? When would I present my carefully drafted Bill of Rights and Consent Form and document informants' signatures? In my application, I had explained that these procedures would take place just before setting up a formal "interview." With the goal of preserving the confidentiality of Shaikh al-Tahhan and his students, I had stated that "I will meet with them in a private location of their choosing and will record their responses to my interview questions." When I ultimately met with the students in Doha, my documents and tape recorder with me in the unlikely event of progressing to a formal interview, I was led not to a "private location" but rather to a very public café in the gardens of the city's busiest shopping mall. Reflecting back on this meeting, I wonder: in a part of the world where boundaries between private and public can be highly contextual and vary depending on who enters the room, could the ideal private setting ever have been realized? At a more general level, might not a tendency toward "compromised" interview conditions justify repeated postponement of awkward discussions about legal rights, obligations and recording procedures? After all, as any ethnographer knows, some of the most valuable insights are gathered before the onset of a formal interview.

My own ethical commitments, formulated in collaboration with the IRB, led me to be wary of excessive postponement, however expedient it might have been. Some measure of postponement, however, seems in retrospect to have been not simply culturally appropriate but ethically responsible. The protection of human subjects in this case arguably required deferring my protocols for sound scientific research in the interests of granting informants the space, time, and flexibility to establish more culturally attuned parameters for enhancing their security. Had I initially approached al-Tahhan's students with a research proposal laden with discourse on legal rights and obligations, they would have been less likely to meet with me given implications that a more advanced level of collaboration was expected. It is to be noted that my email to them, and their own responses to me, were mediated by the Qatar Foundation, a major state institution

that closely monitors the activities and commitments of Qataris. I am quite confident that my research project description signaled well enough that I was trying to grapple with the controversial legacy of the shaikh. By keeping initial formalities to a minimum, I allowed them greater latitude for diplomacy: they could respond in an accommodating way, agreeing simply to hear more about my research project, but could avoid signaling collaboration with foreign researchers in broadcasting the views of a figure whose publications, recordings, and public life have been severely censored. Through this culturally attuned approach, they were able to negotiate a meeting with me, representing their shaikh to an American researcher in the best possible light, while also securing a legitimate exemption from further obligations. In my meeting, I found the students to be extremely cordial and encouraging of my efforts to understand their shaikh's work. In many ways, I sensed that our encounter was nothing new; they had become well versed in publicly managing their shaikh's legacy with eloquence, sincerity, and good humor. For my part, I am now obligated to write, speak, and theorize an encounter with students who valued al-Tahhan's work for promoting virtues of nonviolence and social justice, whatever may be said of his associations with Bin Ladin's former audiocassette collection.

My discussions with other specialists and professionals about "graduated disclosure," while not phrased exactly in this way, have been various. Government intelligence and security agencies have indeed contacted me. The FBI, for example, asked me to collaborate in a diachronic study of statements by Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. In explaining why I had to decline such work, I referred to the AAA's Code of Ethics and elaborated on the importance of full disclosure when building trust among informants in the Arab world. The FBI official whom I spoke with fully appreciated how my efforts in this respect would be compromised by acknowledging collaboration with his own organization. Conferences on intelligence matters involving a range of government and nongovernment participants have been mixed; the most successful of them have been managed by scholars with areal expertise who can help open debates to a wider range of critical and cultural perspectives and resist the drive toward consensus on the merits of Western policy objectives.

My conversations with other anthropologists about graduated disclosure mostly arose when initially inquiring whether I should go through the effort to submit a voluntary application for IRB clearance. Although responses were somewhat predictably bureaucratic, the rationales defending the value of seeking IRB approval were interesting and fall into three types. The first type was the largely self-interested "just to be safe" variety: getting IRB approval is one of the many precautions one should take to prevent one's research from being discredited or its quality compromised. In this response, the safety and protection of informants was implicit while

not foregrounded. The second rationale was of the “pretend to be a good citizen” variety: getting IRB approval is tedious and painful, but once you have it you can do whatever you see fit in the field. Rather than a cynical gesture to anarchy (indeed the person who voiced this rationale was herself profoundly interested in questions of citizenship!), I found this rationale to imply that anthropologists have a higher and more refined set of ethical guidelines when conducting fieldwork that are not addressed in the IRB process. Exactly what these guidelines are was left undiscussed. The final rationale was of the “here’s how to make the application easier” variety, and focused helpfully on how to justify securing oral rather than written consent. This response was from an anthropologist who taught seminars on applying for IRB approval. Ultimately, it seems to me that deeper and more encompassing discussions are needed about the ethics of culturally situated procedures for building trust.

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# 13

## Ethical Considerations from the Study of Peacekeeping

Robert A. Rubinstein

*Robert Rubinstein, a senior figure in anthropology, has developed a reputation for his equanimity and broadmindedness as it bears on the discipline's debates about and engagements with the national security sector. Such a disposition mirrors the work environments and research subjects to which he has dedicated himself. Rubinstein is a Professor of Anthropology and International Relations at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Situated in an interdisciplinary academic setting that values and probes the interconnections among theory, policy, and practice, Rubinstein is skilled at and invested in listening to people who come from diverse perspectives. His work as a political anthropologist has focused on cross-cultural dimensions of conflict and dispute resolution, including negotiation, mediation, and consensus building. Since 1985, Rubinstein has conducted empirical research and policy studies on peacekeeping, examining how the success of peace operations hinges upon cultural considerations, including organizational biases.*

*Rubinstein is enmeshed in the complex relationship between anthropology and the military on a number of fronts. Certainly, military institutions and personnel are key players in his ethnographic inquiries, and he is keenly interested in understanding how these actors work. And, as his essay suggests, he believes that casting an anthropological lens on the armed forces obliges the ethnographer to put aside any preheld essentialist or totalizing assumptions. Rubinstein is a trusted mentor to young anthropologists working in the military, an advocate for anthropologists pursuing nontraditional careers in national security, and a “matchmaker” among anthropologists working at the military-anthropology frontier. His ties to the editors and contributors to this volume are many and varied. Finally, Rubinstein has emerged as an interlocutor not known to be dogmatic in*