

The Militarization of Social Science

By

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Human Terrain System, a COIN application, was conceived as a means to employ social science as a force multiplier in the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq: embedded with combat patrols, anthropologists would map the human terrain across the full spectrum of conflict, and recommend to commanders methods by which they could more effectively achieve strategic goals by engaging “the people” as “the center of gravity” in their operations. The “social science” evolved into a major focus on “social networks,” which, once described, could be analyzed to reveal such critical features as “key informants,” “influencers,” and “centers of influence,” and how, for example, information may travel among participants in the network. It was believed that such analyses could offer important insights on how insurgent sympathies originate, are diffused, mobilize adherents, and are then translated into the organization and commission of hostile actions that threaten ISAF forces; or conversely, how they could be prevented or stopped. More specifically, individuals could be targeted, and then either rewarded or eliminated.

Pioneered by anthropologists, such as Julian Barnes, Elizabeth Bott, Clyde Mitchell, Jeremy Boissevain, Fredrik Barth, Joan Vincent, and others, who used them to study kinship, ethnic and political organization, and agricultural production, trade, and markets, among other topics, the study of social networks and social networks analysis have become a staple of ethnographic fieldwork. For example, I made extensive use of them studying the production, distribution, use, and misuse of illegal drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, and marijuana, in low-income neighborhoods of New York City and several Caribbean islands, which I reported in The Ganja Complex: Rastafari and Marijuana (Lexington Books 2000). Let me tell you about them, as you may then appreciate how valuable a tool they have been in traditional, or academic, anthropology and social science.

The hub of the social networks I studied was street-corners in low-income, urban neighborhoods, both in the U.S. and the Caribbean, where young males were wont to foregather from time immemorial. A couple of classics about street-corner societies stand out in the sociological literature, although social networks analysis hadn't as yet come into vogue, such as William Whyte's Street Corner Society (1955 Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Elliot Liebow's Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men (1967 Boston: Little, Brown), and Elijah Anderson's A Place on the Corner: Studies in Urban Society (1981 Chicago: University of Chicago Press); a similar methodology has been applied more recently to diverse marginalized social worlds, such as Mitchell Duneier's Sidewalk (1999 New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and Sudhir Venkatesh's American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto (2000 Boston: Harvard University Press); as well as to New York's affluent Battery Park City, in Gregory Smithsimon's September 12: Community and Neighborhood Recovery at Ground Zero (2011 New York: New York University

Press). I shall concentrate on those in Trinidad, West Indies, which mostly comprised young men and boys of African descent, with a smattering of Indians and persons of mixed ethnicity. The networks were tightly linked by close consanguineal and affinal kinship ties; neighborliness; friendships that had joined families across many generations; and the succession of particular interests and occupations that I shall describe below. As you may suppose, a major, universal preoccupation was observing and controlling the sexuality of young females, who were to be seen going to and fro their more household-centered activities, such as cooking, cleaning, laundering, cottage industry, and child care, stopping occasionally to interact with the males, or “limers,” as they were called in Trinidad. There is a direct continuity from primates to humans in this obsession.

These social networks, or “limes,” served other important functions: Intergenerational transmission of communal, ethical, and ethnic values; teaching and learning employable skills (carpentry, masonry, motor and tire repair etc), self-employment (often, in food preparation) or referral to wage labor, credit, and fiduciary services; courtship, marriage, family, church, and folk religion; recruitment to benevolent societies, unions, and political organizations; and they were sources recreation, sports, the arts, and just plain fun, such as kite flying, toy making (which could also earn a dollar), calypso, steelbands, dance, drinking rum, Carnival (masque making, tailoring, band organization –more dollars), football, cricket, table tennis, gymnastics, and so on. Neighborhoods often competed with another for pre-eminence in these pursuits, and individuals for reputation. A popular “limer” was an all rounder, who participated in all of these activities, finding in them a life of variety and self-fulfillment from childhood to old age and death. Those who excelled at them assumed leadership functions, and were entrusted with any matters involving money, such as the *ésusu*, a form of grassroots banking derived from West Africa, and custodianship of benevolent society and church assets: others became ritual and folk religious specialists and healers. The strong bond between an “old head” and his younger acolytes was iconic.

Change began in the 1960’s. Independence from colonial status as a colony of Great Britain segued into peripheral status and dependence in the rapidly globalizing world economy, which was the United States dominated in the Western Hemisphere, and brought an end to many of the “lime’s” key economic functions, such as access to employment, and that caused many of the others to collapse also. As adolescents aged, they realized that the traditional, birth-to-death trajectory of involvement on the “limes” wouldn’t work for them, and they turned to criminality, mostly in the form of petty theft, burglary, and robbery. On the cutting edge of the criminal life style was the “bad john,” an individual who built a folkloric identity as much from the role models of slavery (rebels, stick fighters) as from the widely available Hollywood film noir and spaghetti western icons of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Calypsonians, journalists, and fiction writers celebrated the special talents and contributions of the “bad john,” such as gang organization, derring-do, belligerence, prowess in fighting, lavish spending, womanizing, and largesse. However, lengthy

rap sheets, incarcerations, and early deaths, as well as some spectacular conversions to a calling as born-again street preachers, depleted their ranks.

Political solutions to the problems of unemployment, homelessness, poverty and marginalization, often exacerbated by the migration abroad of parents and close relatives, the consequent transformation of household structure and organization and family dynamics, and the abandonment of housing stock and “family” lands, were sought next. Well-read young men, whose educations had been terminated from lack of money, or through the brutally competitive examinations system in the schools, took charge: and the skills set that brought attention to an individual changed from those of the “bad john” to literacy, eloquence, community activism, and political maneuvering. They formed proto-political organizations to voice their grievances; and an important organizational change, from the narrow, neighborhood-based parochialism of the “limes” and the “bad johns” to citywide and even national provenance, required yet another aptitude, diplomacy. It quelled rivalries, and enabled closer links and mergers to be forged among the neighborhood-based “limes.”

In Trinidad, political hopes were dashed in the Black Power Revolt of 1970. Modeled on the Civil Rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests in the United States, the young men, joined by mutineers of the Trinidad Defense Force, who had been, or remained, active members of the “limes” after enlisting, attempted to overthrow the government; but, aided by the CIA, the government crushed the revolt. A period of harsh repression by the police, featuring arrests on sedition charges, torture, and long incarcerations, prompted some young men to seek refuge in the forested areas of the islands, where, embittered by police violence, and inspired by Malcolm, Che, Mao, Ho Chi Minh and others, they continued their opposition to the government by violent means, as “guerrillas.” Another skills set thus predominated, and prominence in, or even leadership of the “limes” passed to those young men who learned, in this phase, to acquire weapons, consulted revolutionary texts for instruction, and mastered military skills hands-on. The “guerrillas” also learned how to mobilize substantial material, logistical, and moral support from the co-“limers” they had left behind on urban street corners, and returned often to them on furlough, and to comfort fearful or anxious relatives, attend to family matters, or to continue courtship and love affairs. Trained in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism in the U.S., and supplied with helicopters and sophisticated weaponry by the CIA, local police formed units like the Flying Squad to hunt down the “guerrillas” in the forests. Their bloody successes alienated the Trinidad working class as a whole, ensuring that the ranks of the “guerrillas” were replenished.

But “guerrilla” warfare proved in the end to be a losing proposition in Trinidad, and it was then that, as in many other Caribbean islands, where similar developments had been taking place, marijuana showed up. A new talent for discretion surfaced, as a period of secret experimentation with use of the substance followed at many street corners, or, more exactly, in the many nearby abandoned

buildings, which persons migrating abroad, or deceased grandparents, had left behind. Reggae music also acquired a special meaningfulness, and replaced, or at least competed seriously with, American R & B, which had been popular previously. For one thing, it tunefully endorsed and advocated marijuana use. Then, as a creation of Rastafari musicians in Jamaica, such as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, reggae music brought attention to the Rastafari ideology and life style, which stressed Black Nationalism, Caribbean and African roots, personal spiritual growth, veganism, avoidance of barbers, self-employment, and Redemption/repatriation to Africa.

When at long last (up to five years) young Trinidadians emerged from the seclusion of secret experimentation, it was to present themselves as marijuana distributors. During the long “incubation” period, the elite among them had learned what was appealing about marijuana use, how to avoid any problems, and the best way to advertise it to potential consumers. They found an eager and willing clientele in the working classes, as well as among the more educated middle- and upper-class youths, who were copying metropolitan drug-using life styles. Finding unsatisfactory their reliance on product imported from Jamaica, Colombia, and elsewhere abroad, they ventured into the Trinidadian countryside, where a very, very few elderly Indians had maintained a 5000-year-old tradition of marijuana cultivation and use that had originated in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. They encouraged young descendants of Indians who had been brought to Trinidad under a program of indenture in 1837-1919 to initiate its cultivation, even volunteering the seeds they had saved from their imported supplies. Quantities of high quality marijuana were soon traveling from countryside to town. In thus reaching out, they brought together the two most chronically unemployed, marginalized populations on the island –themselves and the young Indians- and somewhat extended the scope of the social networks, or “limes.”

They also began learning the astuteness required of small business ownership. Selling marijuana required both a technical and social division of labor, which led to the formation of “blocks,” a form of socio-economic organization that would render the “limes” obsolete. From the technical standpoint, workers were needed to package marijuana for retails: joints, \$5, \$10,\$20 bags, half-ounces, and ounces. Other workers needed to actually make sales to the public, often from points of sale that shifted location; and others sometimes spent an entire day, scouring the countryside, looking for best quality and bargains. All had to guard against police raids and thieves. Socially, someone had to be in charge, to coordinate these various activities, while the rest followed orders. Opportunely, the Rastafari ideology was gaining currency, and it ameliorated the social/hierarchical requirement, while also giving guidance regarding the redistribution of profits, a latent source of conflict. As Rastafari, block members came to regard themselves as co-equals; the “decider” was actually their spiritual mentor rather than an employer; and profits were to be spent on joint undertakings, which furthered the religion and the individual’s personal spiritual growth, such as schools, farms, health food stores, and other legal enterprises. “Blocks” now replaced the “limes” as the centers of street-corner social

life, where marijuana users and non-users assembled to pass their leisure hours: and, as the new skills of spiritual attainment and mentorship were disseminated among yet another cadre of young leaders, Rastafari became a potent ideological force in working class neighborhoods; it helped boost demand; “blocks” proliferated; and very soon, social networks grew international, as “blocks” spanned all the Caribbean islands and Caribbean immigrant communities in the Americas and Europe. A multi-million-dollar, international marijuana economy was thus established, encompassing cultivation, production, and distribution, which was attended by equally impressive achievements in the area of reinvestment of profits.

Let me very briefly describe the tragic conclusion to the tale. In 1981, following the South American debt crisis, which drove millions of Andean peasants off their subsistence farms and into virtual slave labor on coca plantations, and after repeated battering of the marijuana economy by the DEA and DEA-trained local police throughout the Americas, the “blocks” turned to cocaine distribution. Cocaine use escalated rapidly from intranasal administration to smoking the purified precipitate, the absence of a lengthy “incubation” period, as in the case of marijuana, perhaps partially accounting for adverse effects. Own-use swallowed up the millions of dollars that had been acquired in previous years of successful marijuana trafficking, “blocks” degenerated into violent, cocaine-distributing gangs, or “posses,” Rastafari became mere dreadlocks, and the program of community uplift - schools, farms, health food stores, and other legal enterprises- had to be abandoned. Crack addicts roamed the streets of Caribbean cities, as they did in America: the skills set that the homeless and penurious required for survival thus triumphed in the end. The “Three strikes” rule caused the deportation of several who had been legal residents in the U.S, or prompted their voluntary repatriation: others drifted into legitimate low- or medium-income employment, as their education, skills, and luck permitted them. Today, “stop-and frisk” and similar police initiatives have rendered street corners off limits; professional sports have siphoned off some young males; violent gangs remain active; rehabilitation centers have claimed others; and prisons have entombed the rest, or more than three million of them.

There was enough anti-colonialist, anti-American, anti-Western, and black militant content in the “limers” curriculum I described, combined with the continuing trauma of a difficult immigrant political and civil incorporation in American society, for terrorism to have been another outcome in the present time. “Limers” allegedly evolved into that engagement in New York in 2011. Trinidadian Kareem Ibrahim, 65, 63-year-old Guyanese Russell Defreitas, a former cargo handler at John F. Kennedy International Airport, Abdul Kadir, 55, an engineer, a former mayor of a town in Guyana and a onetime member of Guyana’s Parliament, and Trinidadian Abdel Nur, 57, were sentenced to life in prison after their convictions on conspiracy charges in May of that year. By 2011, these men had graduated the “limers” curriculum as penniless, hapless, transient residents of cheap SROs on the margins of the most hardscrabble low-income neighborhoods in New York City. Federal prosecutors said they wanted to kill thousands of people and cripple the American economy by using explosives to blow up the fuel tanks at JFK

and the underground pipelines that ran through an adjacent Queens neighborhood. However, law enforcement officials conceded that they were “sad sacks” rather than “Grade A terrorists,” who had been enticed into incriminating speech and behavior by a New York Police Department informant tasked with entrapping suspects in exchange for substantial pay and mitigation of his own criminal charges.

In summary, although the social networks I studied had remained the same over time, barring changes due to natural population increase (births), and very slight in-migration, aging, and death, their meaning and significance had been altered several times. Whether or not the networks were assemblies of young people engaging in recreational activities, a conduit for the intergenerational passage of communal values, a labor and marriage exchange, the locus of criminality, political action, protest, the engine of guerrilla warfare, the medium of reentry after imprisonment, the site of marijuana use and distribution, Rastafarianism, gangs, or became the ranks of the drug-using indigent, depended on the broader socio-economic and political ecology, on the evolution of the skill sets of a succession of particular individuals, and the shifting and shuffling of roles and allegiances in the population. It would have been impossible –and completely wrong- to pinpoint “an influencer,” a “center of influence,” “a key player,” or “a pathway of information/influence,” whose functionality lasted throughout the fifty-year period.

My results, such as they were, depended upon my openness in the field, my awareness of randomness, context and contingency, and serendipity, such as only rigorous, painstaking fieldwork can apprehend, identify, describe and analyze. Such ethnographic fieldwork is a sustained, systematic, labor-intensive undertaking, requiring many years of prior preparation, and then many years to properly execute: eight years of coursework and training in the social sciences, as well as wide reading in the fields of the philosophy of science, the humanities, literature, the sciences, and the arts; a couple of years designing a research project for the doctoral dissertation; continuous advisement by the dissertation committee; feedback from other graduate colleagues, who are also busy preparing their own research projects, presentation of the research project; once other graduate students have critiqued the project, the dissertation committee has approved it, and support has been won in a competition for funds, at least a year, or a year and a half, of systematic fieldwork, as laid out in the research design of the project; and at last, a year or more of write-up, presentation of the final product to faculty and other students, and after a grilling at the formal defense, the award of the seal of approval, the doctoral degree. Throughout her/his subsequent professional life, the anthropologist/ethnographer goes through the same, or similar, steps several times: submitting a competitive research application to private and public funding agencies for scarce funds; review by peers; and, if successful, a year, or a year and a half, of systematic fieldwork, which s/he may have to explain and defend in monthly or quarterly reports to the funders; publication of the results in peer-reviewed academic or professional journals, books, or other media; and on-going defense of her/his theses, nationally and internationally, at professional conferences, seminars,

and the classes s/he teaches. A researcher may focus on a particular topic, research population, and geographical site of research over the course of a professional lifetime of several years and several research projects, steadily accumulating expertise about them, and her/his skills in the full range ethnographic and qualitative research methodologies, such as participant observation, direct observation, unstructured interviewing, in-depth interviewing, group and focus group interviewing, visual anthropology, and thematic and comparative analysis. My results also derived from the enormous respect and affection I had for the population as a whole, and the individuals I interacted with most. My fervent wishes for their present and future wellbeing were always evident.

Nowadays, anthropologists have found that they have to employ “rapid assessment techniques” when investigating the immediate aftermaths of natural or manmade disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, bombings, and warfare as a whole. Humanitarian motives, such as providing relief, necessitate the rapid response; but such disasters are also extraordinary research opportunities, allowing social scientists to be present as the most elementary building blocks of community and society –that is, humanity- come apart, and later, are reconstructed. However, even in these extreme circumstances, the most effective research tool, and it is effective in crafting the humanitarian response as well, is the responder’s personal and professional expertise, which had been acquired through the several years preceding the catastrophe, and will guide further research and reconstruction policy once the dust has cleared.

Thus, my study of social networks also benefited from the contextual knowledge I had gained while studying them for the past forty years, or since the 1970’s. Treatment of drug addiction, the use and abuse of alcohol, policing, the criminal justice system as it applies to drug offenders, prisons, drug prevention, and impacts on women and children naturally became additional topics of concern. After forty years of close, intimate contact, I also could not help having something to say about Caribbean and Latin American studies; the cultures, politics and economics of the African diaspora; Caribbean and Latino immigration to the United States; education, economic opportunity, political and civic incorporation, social services; and gangs, crime, and violence in low-income immigrant and African-American communities in the United States. The experience familiarized me with issues related to gender, community wellbeing and social justice; HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, obesity, malnutrition or inadequate diet, exposure to various pathogens, and other medical problems, irregular, on-going medical supervision and lack of access to timely healthcare; mental health services; family dynamics; and the wellbeing of children and youth. I also became knowledgeable about the environmental factors that impinge upon the termination of pregnancies, and the births, deaths, health, and development of children, such as exposure to toxic materials both in the home and on neighborhood streets; physical environments and living arrangements, which are otherwise hazardous; and parental or adult behaviors that compromise child care, such as domestic neglect or

abuse and violence. Moreover, as a Trinidadian-American, I could draw on my personal experiences since birth to shed light on some of these matters.

I have spent a lot of time describing a normal, traditional, or academic social scientific research undertaking because I want now to contrast it with the hash the intelligence community is making of it. In introducing social science into the training at HTS, a persistent quarrel between respective intelligence and social science worldviews routinely developed, concerning not only ethical issues, but also fieldwork procedures and objectives. In the latter, practical outcomes were at stake, such as verisimilitude and usefulness. It seemed, to this writer, who is a trained anthropologist, that representatives of the intelligence community, who were active-duty or retired military personnel, settled too often for hastily reached, questionable, and misleading research conclusions; the findings frequently targeted (and sometimes led to the elimination of) innocent persons, and rarely provided valid or reliable insights regarding the emergence and natural histories of problematic ideologies, associations, and behaviors. For their part, the military personnel felt that anthropologists and social scientists were at best insufficiently action-oriented; or at worst, they were “collaborators” and “fifth columnists,” whose temperament and ideological orientation was opposed to the military, and who were determined to obstruct combat operations, if not sabotage them completely. Their views would prevail, and promoted a version of fieldwork and social science that subverted their essential purposes and utility.

However, none of the rich insights I described can be gained from the methods by which intelligence personnel are investigating social networks, upon which they are focusing all their efforts. First, the training is absent. At HTS, none of the trainees in my cycle who were to be deployed as social scientists had the requisite training or fieldwork experience: they were historians, psychologists, political scientists, and international affairs –and honestly, they didn’t conduct themselves like scholars. As for affection and sympathy for the Iraqis and Afghans they were supposedly going to research, I have never met such a collection of xenophobic, racist, belligerent, inconsiderate, and ill-tempered men and women.

Then, as if these deficiencies in training and disposition weren’t enough to discredit the work, another scandal attaches to fieldwork procedure and methodology. Instead of the forty years I had invested in getting to know the population I was researching, intelligence personnel seem to think that a lunch hour is more than enough time to spend with the unwashed they are studying: they can then take that lunchtime’s worth of fieldwork (of yes/no answers to a handful of superficial questions; no observations; no participation), and spend years playing around with the so-called data on a computer loaded with software such as ANTHROPAC, the Ethnograph, AFTER, UCINET, and (for more statistical analyses) NTSYSpc. These will spew out graphics, correlations, and graphs and so on, with options for endless further manipulations. The procedure is modeled on marketing research, which, as financial meltdown after financial meltdown warns, leaves much to be desired. An algorithm thus replaces what C. Wright Mills called “the

sociological imagination” (1959), usually with calamitous results: So far, in its reliance on social networks so derived, the Army has misidentified collaborators and opponents in Afghanistan and Iraq; and, using them in the U.S., police have battered down the doors of apartments allegedly belonging to drug kingpins, only to end up shooting and killing grandmothers and other innocents.

This is exactly how we were trained in a three-week class on Research Methods at HTS. Our instructor was not a social scientist; she was a market researcher. She had worked for the past thirty years for a wide assortment of business clients: the giant HR firm, Hewitt, Ford Company, Nissan USA, the Census Department, and Rand Corporation. She had also read scripts for various Hollywood studios, advising them about how and to what screens to distribute their blockbusters worldwide. Three days into the course work, she was teaching about market research focus groups, surveys, questionnaires and the like: down the road, she promised that she’d reveal the secrets of “window ethnography,” pile-sorting, garbology, content analysis of documents, and social networks; but didn’t seem prepared to say anything at all about “ethnography” in its usual form, or “participant observation.” Of course, the categories she used, and was recommending for use in Afghanistan or Iraq, were those with which American consumers would be familiar: “luxurious interiors like a Mercedes Benz” or “movies with a big star and plenty action” and so on. The practical exercises were exactly as I have already described: lunch time spent in collecting yes/no answers to a half-a-dozen questions put to shopkeepers in the vicinity of the location where the training was taking place; then instruction in ANTHROPAC, on how to manipulate “the data,” or the half-a-dozen yes/no answers, for subsequent years without end.

In a final exercise, six states stretching from the Canadian border to Kansas (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri) were designated as a fictional “Lakeland,” a nation that had fraught relations with the surrounding U.S.: hobbled recently by a failing agrarian economy and high unemployment, and brought to the brink of extinction by insurgents and criminal gangs, which were bankrolled by a thriving methamphetamine drug industry, it had entered into a bilateral agreement with the U.S. to help restore governance, security, stability, and socioeconomic development. In short, the exercises more or less reproduced some of the conditions that actually did exist in the six states: and with the others, created a situation not unlike Afghanistan’s.ⁱ The research question was to gauge public feelings about a coal-fired power plant,ⁱⁱ discover what insurgent sentiments there were in the study site, determine whether they posed a present threat to U.S. forces, identify upon whom U.S. forces could rely as allies, and suggest how relationships with either population could be improved. The untrained trainees in my group advised everything from econometrics to advanced calculus as an appropriate field methodology; a historian responded as she usually did whenever expected to deliver anything definitive –she emitted a fog of evasion, interspersed with rudeness mainly directed at me; a social geographer predictably insisted on GIS; a Ph.D mathematician/psychologist, who had lately taken to claiming extensive research expertise and experience in every discipline from cosmology to

entomology, and now insisted that he had 20 years of ethnographic fieldwork experience, throwing in for good measure fastest runner in the world, big game hunter, came up with a questionnaire of six demographic questions requiring yes/no answers, for which he could use ANTHROPAC; a truly unprepared graduate student of social psychology got right down to word-processing the six questions; and a linguist ducked for cover, as they proceedings had turned contentious and ugly.

The result: we visited a small town in Leavenworth County, administered thirty-six questionnaires to locals in and around a shopping mall off a major interstate highway, and the social psychologist, who was selected to present our findings, declared that the town was a “tightly and harmoniously integrated community.” Of course, this conclusion directed contradicted the guiding premise of the exercise, that there were insurgents, insurgent sympathizers, and U.S. allies; anyone who has ever read an ethnography, or even a novel or short story, about small towns and cities anywhere in the world, knows how rancorously they may be divided by class, ethnicity, outlooks for the future, and many other diacritics; and, of course, if U.S. troops were sent in with the social psychologist’s guidance, they would likely be immediately embroiled in a firefight.

The sooner the military acknowledges that its current approach to the human terrain is just a criminal waste of money, the readier it will be to fund projects of a more traditional nature that actually has useful results. There are anthropologists, who, with great courage, risk to their lives, and little monetary or logistical support, are at work in Iraq and Afghanistan, where their expertise is needed about many topics. The latter include: a basic population count, demographic studies, and ethnic relations; issues related to governance, capacity building, official corruption, establishing the rule of law, and economic, political, social and cultural development; poverty, nutrition, and healthcare; and refugees, widows, orphaned children, the wounded and handicapped, and drug problems. Research on these topics may not exactly tell military intelligence officers who the person planting the IED is, but the information it yields may result in improvements, which head off the insurgent motivations in the first place.

As part of America’s effort to restore the nation’s confidence, ideals, and power after the 9/11 attacks, and in line with the Defense Department’s goal of maintaining its influence in national life and current levels of military spending, if not increasing them, the Pentagon initiated AFRICOM, its newest command, on October 1, 2008. Jointly staffed by military officers from Defense, civilian advisors from State, and planning to hire social scientists, especially anthropologists, “Its mission is a complex mix of training support, disaster and humanitarian relief efforts, development assistance, and economic projects” in Africa (Hoffmann 2011). AFRICOM is sure to radically alter social science research methodologies, social scientific and anthropological theoretical paradigms, and development goals and practices in Africa: its aims will be to gather bits and scraps of cultural information, allegedly sufficient to separate the “bad guys” from the “good (or not-so-bad) guys,”

and to promote strategies and policies that are likely to benefit the U.S. The “virtual ethnography” approach will be replicated there: it will be of a piece with covert wars, targeted assassinations, and the ongoing drone attacks. In the U.S, police have employed it in the domestic war on drugs, in gang surveillance and prevention, and to monitor possible dissidents among Muslims and immigrants; and may in fact have pioneered some aspects of it, prior to its adoption by the military. Common implementation of the methodology may thus lead to a further blurring of boundaries between military, intelligence, and police communities, and to more false arrests, violations of civil and human rights, and blowback.

In his book, “The Fires,” Joe Flood provides scary evidence of how misguided a reliance on computer-generated simulations can be. In one of the earliest attempts to create aspects of a “smart city,” Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York asked the Rand Corporation in 1968 to streamline city management through computer models. It built models for the Fire Department to predict where fires were likely to break out, and to decrease response times when they did. But, thanks to flawed assumptions and faulty data, the models recommended replacing busy fire companies across Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx with much smaller ones. As a result, roughly 600,000 people in the poorest sections of the city lost their homes to fire over the next decade. (A major fault was political, since wealthier neighborhoods, where influence was greatest, were left off-limits: the poorest neighborhoods had had to compete among themselves for diminished resources.) Openness, randomness, and serendipity –traffic conditions, the demand on fire companies to battle multiple fires simultaneously, false alarms, and the public’s erroneously subjective responses to firemen’s enquiries, other types of inadvertent public interference, victims’ inability to comply with instructions, the actual physical condition of much housing stock- hadn’t figured in the models. Much like the weather, as Jane Jacobs has said in “The Death and Life of American Cities,” cities are astoundingly complex systems, governed by feedback loops that are broadly understood yet impossible to replicate. The same applies to the successful application of ethnography in detecting and preventing terrorism.

ⁱ Kansas is the methamphetamine capital of the Mid-West; families that had formerly been engaged in the production of “moonshine” liquor control its production and distribution; and a stubborn secessionist and anti-federalist sentiment has persisted among them since before the Civil War. In view of this history, the MARDEX scenario could seem a little scary, as the other anthropologist found.

ⁱⁱ The expansion of the IATAN Power Plant at Weston, Kansas, has indeed received a negative press, and environmentalist groups have been protesting its impacts on

wildlife and human health. The secrecy with which the owners had gone about the process of seeking permits and other authorizations also raised the issue of political corruption.