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Notes from a Small Place: Anthropological Blues in the Face of Global Terror

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Notes from a Small Place

Anthropological Blues in the Face of Global Terror

by Pnina Werbner

Can there be an engaged public anthropology of global Islamic terror? Arguably, anthropology was not meant to be a study of clandestine networks or unreachable social groups secretly plotting sudden cataclysmic international crises. These days, anthropologists study societies in motion and, increasingly, the impact of a global media and global economic events on local communities. In order to comprehend these, our conceptual tools have had to be stretched beyond their original limits in the study of small-scale societies. Yet our ethnographic mediations still start from the bottom—from the small places where we do our ordinary, quotidian research. This includes, as in my own work, the study of religious mobilization and social movements, radical religious rhetoric, and ontologies of religious nationalism as they are inflected and moved by mediated global crises. Importantly, also, anthropologists have studied and continue to study violence: in the face of civil war or the fallout from global and state terror, they have contributed evocatively to an understanding of the sufferings and force of memory of ordinary citizens, the victims of such crises, and the activism of human rights NGOs. But September 11 defied the scale of such events. In this paper I consider the possibilities for a genuinely anthropological analysis of Islamic militancy in the West following the suicide bombings of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. As anthropologists we may try, I argue, to rely on journalistic accounts to supplement our knowledge of small places. After all, journalism too creates its own ethnographic mediations from the collocation of many small places. But are journalistic accounts of war zones or clandestine terror reliable? The paper explores some of these issues for anthropology.

After September 11: Between the Quotidian and the Global

The destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, was a cataclysmic event; it left even hardened journalists and TV commentators stunned and momentarily speechless. But within 2 hours the world media had begun to mobilize its resources not only to describe but to comment on, interpret, and attempt to explain the social dynamics leading up to September 11. And as events unfolded in Afghanistan in the following weeks, foreign correspondents were quickly on the scene, while local commentators, from Pakistani journalists to political scientists, were soon mobilized for interviews and expert opinions and commentaries.

For anthropologists studying Muslim societies in the West, and even in Afghanistan or Pakistan, the global crisis that followed September 11 raised serious questions about what

might constitute specifically anthropological expert knowledge. Anthropologists, after all, tend to do detailed research over long periods of time in and on very small places. Rarely, if ever, do they study clandestine terror networks. Even in those small places where we anthropologists conduct our fieldwork—an ambiguous activity that we call participant observation—we mostly encounter the normal and the quotidian, not the extraordinary and world shattering. At most, we might be able to study the responses of people to such world-shattering events, their mobilization in defense of what they perceive to be sacred values or predicaments resulting from it. Often, we do not even know when we begin our research where our study will lead us or even how long it will last. So global crises affecting the people we study in quotidian times challenge our interpretive capacity as anthropologists. They are the very opposite of the everyday and the local. Yet it is precisely our knowledge of the everyday, hidden beneath the surface, that is presumed by others to be capable of illuminating the secretive and the clandestine. Although I had studied Pakistanis in the diaspora in Britain and Sufis in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, what could I say about September 11 from the vantage point of the small places

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I knew well? This was the beginning and origin of my anthropological blues.

My predicament was compounded by the fact that I was repeatedly invited to speak as an expert on the Muslim diaspora, in the unspoken hope that my research might throw light on British Pakistanis' involvement in Al-Qaeda terror networks, despite the fact that to the best of my knowledge, in all my research on Muslims groups, from Sufi peace lovers to religious hard-liners and populist fundamentalists, I had never encountered a Pakistani terrorist, young or old.

My hesitations about the limits of public anthropological knowledge on 9/11 seemed on the surface to go against the trend calling on anthropologists to be "engaged"—to "speak out" on public matters of war and conflict (González 2004) to counter the "retreat in anthropology from a challenging and critical role that had become one of its most important stocks in trade," linked to the broader "decline of the liberal institution of the University" (Kapferer 2002:148).

Indeed, many anthropologists have felt compelled to respond to September 11 in a whole series of forums and collections.¹ As anthropologists, their opinions were implicitly authorized by the anthropological aura of insider knowledge. But *were* they writing as anthropologists? Some were undoubtedly expressing their opinions as public intellectuals who felt the need to comment on global policies as citizens of the world. Others responded as citizen-scholars of their nations to what they regarded as misguided or illegal policies. Both categories relied heavily in their commentaries on the immediately available global media and national press for basic facts. Closer to a full grasp of the events were anthropologists who, though away from the field, were regional experts on the history, politics, and social demography of the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. These anthropologists drew on scholarly research and a local press in addition to the international press and media. Even more persuasive and well informed were indigenous citizen-scholar experts, including those teaching in non-Western universities and members of minorities within the West. These experts had continuous and intimate knowledge of affected populations and their vernacular press and media.

Anthropologists may choose to speak out eloquently and persuasively on global terror as public intellectuals or citizen-

scholars, even without regional expertise, but the question is, what particular anthropological theoretical or analytical insights can they bring to bear on an event produced by a hidden world of clandestine plotting and scheming beyond their knowledge? And in what sense have their commentaries added specifically anthropological insight to those of other public affair analysts? When it comes to the study of shadowy groups like Al-Qaeda and their allegedly unholy alliances with the intelligence communities of several countries, there were no public anthropologists who could speak from a position of authority based on immediate fieldwork at the time of the crisis. The hidden world of international intrigue that led ultimately to the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11, has meant that even an intimate anthropological understanding of past conflicts and civil war in one place (e.g., in Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka) does not make anthropologists experts on violence and conflict on a quite different scale elsewhere. Closer to home, I propose that the study of everyday Muslim politics, including the study of Islamic movements and political mobilization in the name of Islam, does not in itself equip anthropologists to make sense of the rise of clandestine, seditious terror plotting *even in the same society*.²

Before September 11: Studying the Local in Britain

An example from my own fieldwork in Britain and Pakistan illustrates the dilemmas of extrapolating from the quotidian to the cataclysmic. The suicide airplane bombing of the Twin Towers appeared to be the work of "foreigners," though some had been students at European universities. They were not children of the diaspora, born in the United States or Britain. It was not long, however, before it emerged that a small but significant number of British diaspora Pakistanis were also members of clandestine Islamic militant networks. These spanned Britain and Pakistan and sometimes Afghanistan and the Middle East. But such secretive networks in Britain, even if they existed before September 11, were beyond the reach of anthropologists. My fieldwork on the Muslim diaspora in South Manchester, a small community of some 10,000 mostly Punjabi Muslims from Pakistan, aimed to understand the evolution of their diasporic public sphere (Werbner 2002a), a space in which representatives of different Islamic and secular movements along with aspiring community politicians formulated fables of diaspora from different perspectives and in which transnational political imaginaries were interpreted and argued over and political mobilization generated. In-

1. See contributions to the *Social Analysis* forum *The World Trade Center and Global Crisis* (Kapferer 2002b), which were outstanding both in terms of the fine quality of intellectual reflections by contributors and almost invariably their secondhand, tangential, or nonexistent expert "anthropological" knowledge about the event itself. See also the *American Anthropologist* forum *In Focus: September 11, 2001* (Mascia-Lees and Lees 2002), which drew on Middle Eastern and Muslim society regional experts, most of whom expressed the angst and hesitations that 9/11 had generated for anthropologists of Muslim society (see in particular Abu-Lughod 2002). There were many other collections and Web sites also published in 2002, such as the volumes edited by Calhoun et al. (2002) and Hershberg and Moore (2002), extracted from the Social Science Research Council Web site *After September 11*: <http://www.src.org/sept11/>.

2. Kapferer (1988) argues perceptively for the leakage between everyday exorcism rituals and anti-Tamil Sinhala ideologies. While recognizing that "terror" is a disputed term, I use it here for want of a better term, to refer to nonstate militant actors who deliberately target civilian populations violently in order to cause fear and mayhem and disrupt the usual assumptions about personal safety. This is not to deny the possibility of state terror or of some terrorists defining themselves or being redefined as liberation or freedom fighters.

creasingly during the 1990s, following the *Satanic Verses* affair in Britain and the first Gulf War, this local diasporic public sphere became a space where nation, citizenship, Islam, and international conflicts were intertwined in the rhetoric of local leaders. While culturally part of a wider South Asian diaspora and usually identified in Britain as "South Asians," British Pakistani migrant-settlers now defined (or redefined) themselves as a *Muslim* diaspora. They constructed the world as a network of Muslim communities and positioned themselves as an affluent, privileged community centrally located within that network.

The diasporic public sphere was a local arena of political, factional, and Islamic sectarian conflict, argument, and imaginative creativity. It was hidden and thus invisible, before it unexpectedly emerged to national visibility during the *Satanic Verses* controversy in 1990. That affair, focused on an allegedly blasphemous postcolonial novel by Salman Rushdie, revealed for the first time the passionate intensity with which diaspora British Muslims were willing to defend the honor of Islam and the Prophet and their public mobilization as a united front, transcending their internal divisions. Like September 11, the Rushdie affair, following the Ayatollah Khomeini death *fatwa* and the author's retreat into hiding, became a global event that raised questions about multicultural citizenship and the rule of law. In different parts of the world, rioters were killed and translators assassinated. Its magnification as a global event, the focus of intense media attention and countermobilization by prominent writers, politicians, ethnic representatives, and public figures, marginalized the significance of anthropological insights into the matter.

Hence even before September 11, documenting the coexistence of a multiplicity of public discourses in a single diaspora still begged a critical question: why focus on obscure, localized disputes and arcane arguments of identity in hidden arenas in Manchester when at stake are global issues of postcolonial migration, racism, and religious nationalism? Why study the local, even in its response to globally mediated events, when the discourses enunciated are pervasively global and versions of them are publicized and debated by both English and Urdu media? Indeed, why study "the local" at all? This, of course, is an issue of some consequence for anthropology and subaltern studies more generally. One key message of my research in Manchester was to recognize the intellectual and aesthetic work performed by a buried Muslim diasporic intelligentsia, organic intellectuals operating beyond the objectifying gaze of social scientists and journalists alike and belying simplistic profiles of Muslim underprivilege. But, perhaps more significantly for the events following September 11, I found that in their political discourses on world events, British Pakistani orators often agreed with one another across religious sectarian divisions: they enunciated a pervasive discourse of Muslim failure and abjection that demonized the Judeo-Christian West while at the same time enunciating millennial hopes for Muslim ascendancy. This was true even of those speakers of the majority Barelvi Sunni tendency, who

certainly did not envisage taking the law into their own hands.³

After September 11: An Engaged Anthropology of Terror

Notwithstanding the forgoing comments, my initial inability to make definitive statements as an expert on the Muslim diaspora and its response to September 11 calls for explanation. As I watched the collapse of the Twin Towers, I wondered what I, as an anthropologist, could say about the events unfolding before my eyes—and the inevitable repercussions that would follow. Did the fact that I had studied Pakistanis' responses to previous crises make me a prophet or an expert on the current one? After all, like the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Pakistanis in Manchester might have remained in the same river yet different waters were flowing through it now. What right did I have to assume that the river was still the same river? How does an engaged anthropologist respond to violent global crises without resorting either to essentialist notions of culture or to becoming yet another current affairs analyst, reliant on the public media for her expert knowledge?

Answering my question calls for a theoretically informed perspective on recent anthropological studies that have sought to analyze societies in flux and to understand rupture and violence at a national scale without abandoning the notion of culture and society altogether. Before considering anthropological insights into Islamic radicalization and militancy, I want to reflect first on the strengths of engaged anthropologists in their study of national crises that, like the Rushdie affair or 9/11, have also been the subject of intense media focus. Ethnic and religious conflicts and civil wars in Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Columbia, and India, among others, have created a powerful literature of the everyday experiences and suffering of victims of civil wars and state terror and the embedded myths-cum-ideologies used by perpetrators of violence.⁴ There are several strands in this anthropological oeuvre. A dominant strand concerns the memory of violence and the politics of memory. This "testimonial" literature records the voices of victims who have suffered terrible atrocities; it constitutes a major contribution to a human rights discourse demanding moral accountability for disappearances and massacres (e.g., Arditti 1999; Chatterji and Mehta 2007; Das 1990; Schirmer 1993; Werbner 1991, 1995). In many instances victims have asked the anthro-

3. On this, see P. Werbner (2004). Barelvi followers endorse saintly veneration within a Sufi tradition that is normally nonviolent.

4. It would be impossible to list all the studies of victims of human rights atrocities. On Zimbabwe see, e.g., Lan (1985) and Werbner (1991); on Sri Lanka see Kapferer (1988), Spencer (1990, 2000), Tambiah (1986, 1992), and Valentine (1996); on perpetrators/victims of violence in Burundi see Malkki (1995); on Northern Ireland see, e.g., Aretxaga (1997), Feldman (1991), and Jarman (1997); on Columbia see Tate (2007) and Taussig (1999, 2003); and on communal riots in India see Chatterji and Mehta (2007) and Das (1990).

pologist to record their narratives for posterity, to give public voice to the cruelty inflicted upon them by the state. Such painful recollections have enabled these anthropologists to theorize the roots of ethnic, communal, and religious violence.

A second anthropological strand has considered the myths and ideologies of the perpetrators of violence (Kapferer 1988; Malkki 1995; Tambiah 1992).⁵ Within this strand, the voices and phenomenology of embodied strategies of imprisoned members of underground movements give some insight into the motives of those who perpetrate terror (Aretxaga 1997; Feldman 1991; Khosrokhavar 2006).⁶ A third strand in this anthropology of terror is that of “witness” accounts in war zones (e.g., Nordstrom 1997; Taussig 2003). Such accounts show how civilians, caught between murderous and even genocidal armed actors, try to make sense of the deaths and disappearances around them and suffer the terrible consequences of displacement. Sometimes the anthropologist’s voice has been the only one documenting such events for a wider audience. The fourth strand in this growing literature of engaged anthropology is the study of truth commissions and human rights organizations as they seek restitution for victims (Tate 2007; Wilson 2001).⁷

These studies highlight the unique capacity of anthropologists to comment on the aftermath and consequences of terror through intimate ethnography. As regional experts with firsthand fieldwork, they can also map out key terms and actors that make possible an analysis of evolving processes in zones of conflict. The question is, can the same be said of anthropological studies of Islamic radicalization, militancy, jihadism, martyrdom, and violent activism? Reviewing some of the anthropological responses to 9/11, written from the point of view of regional experts, I believe that the contours of an implicit anthropological theory of jihadism may be discerned. Whether it can explain geopolitical confrontations such as 9/11 remains questionable, however.

Seen together, the studies point to key features of global jihadism. Ideologically, it is: (a) millennial; (b) Manichean; (c) altruistic; and (d) characterized by infinitely nuanced scholastic distinctions in militant groups’ rules, regulations, and attitudes to gender, violence, and the state. These define their boundaries. On this latter feature, Hefner’s study of radical Islamic movements in democratizing Indonesia, for example, highlights the nuances of radicalism and pluralism in these movements, as does his insight that radical Muslims in Indonesia differed from Al-Qaeda in their support rather than opposition to the Saudi regime (Hefner 2002:762). So too,

5. For Tambiah’s debate with Kapferer, see Tambiah (1992:170–181).

6. Khosrokhavar interviewed Islamist jihadists in French jails. See also Rosenthal (2006). In Britain the law forbids criminals to profit from crime. Most prominent jihadists wait to be released before selling their stories. It is unclear whether they would be willing to be interviewed or whether this would be allowed by authorities at present.

7. Wilson (2005) has also edited a book on the human rights implications of the war on terror.

Muhammad Zaman, an orientalist, moving beyond Metcalf (2002), shows the subtle shades of Deobandi political thought and mobilization in Pakistan. While recognizing the central role of the Deobandi in creating the Taliban and threatening to “Talibanize” Pakistan, Zaman points to differences between some *‘ulama* in the Karachi Deobandi seminary and the hard-liner Taliban *‘ulama*; the former appeared to have “broader horizons” (Zaman 2002:140) and even urged the hard-liners to follow “the path of culture and civilisation” (Zaman 2002: 139).

The Manichean worldview of Islamists has been highlighted by anthropologists who have analyzed the historic resentment and negative constructions of the West and the United States in Iran (Beeman 1983) and more recently in the Middle East and Pakistan. A salient further distinction characterizing Islamist rhetoric is between “millennial” discourses that invoke a utopian kingdom on earth and a return to the pristine time of the Prophet, on the one hand, and on the other, “jihadist” discourses that promote martyrdom as the gateway to paradise, the kingdom of heaven (P. Werbner 2004). Jihadists often live in a world where dreams of paradise seem more real than the mundane reality around them (Edgar 2004). Further important ideological distinctions are between those aiming to install an Islamic state through the ballot box (as in the case of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan); jihadists, who espouse the violent overthrow of Muslim and other regimes (as in the case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir or Al Muhajairun); neofundamentalists, who seek to “purify” and reform the person as a precondition to the ideal Islamic state, whether peacefully (as in the case of Tabligh-i-Islam) or violently (as in the case of the Taliban); and those who espouse martyrdom, the fight to the death against so-called infidels (as in the case of Al-Qaeda). Among these, so-called young *takfiri* (rejectionist) groups who espouse violence and regard most other Muslims as apostates, have been found to be composed of clusters of friends, affines, and close relatives, many of whom grew up or played soccer together (Atran 2008; Sageman 2008:39, 66–69, 140–143).

Gender is also a key source of distinctiveness, including questions of whether women are entitled to vote or be voted into Parliament, as in Iran; whether they are violently prohibited from education, as enforced by the Taliban; and whether they should wear a scarf or a full *niqab* (full face covering). Anthropologists as regional experts have considered why contemporary Islamist women veil and ritualize their lives to the point where the sacred is understood to envelope the profane entirely, as in the subtle analysis of pietist women in Egypt (Mahmood 2005). Several have written on the European response to diasporic Muslim veiling and how this relates to notions of shame, and to honor killings.⁸ At some moments in history, as Fischer shows in his analysis of the events of the Iranian revolution, a swirl of competing

8. On France, see Bowen (2007); on Britain, Werbner (2007b); on Germany, Ewing (2008); and on Norway, Wikan (2008).

ideologies can coexist, some authoritarian, others socialist or even liberal, before one triumphs (Fischer 1980, chap. 6, pp. 181–231; see also Fischer and Abedi 1990).⁹

The reach of institutionalized politicized Islamic organizations may be vast. Research by historians, orientalist, and journalists in Pakistan has recorded the enormous proliferation of Deobandi *madrasas* (Malik 1998; Zaman 2002) alongside the politicization of a significant Deobandi Islamic school of thought focused on the Dar al-‘Ulum Haqqaniyya seminary near Peshawar and the Jam’iat al-‘Ulum al-Islamiyya seminary in Karachi. Both these religious seminaries became huge recruiters to the Taliban and international terror networks (Hussain 2007:135–143).

The ideological divisions of Islamists and jihadists have led organizationally to an efflorescence of militant groups whose networks often extend globally (Abou Zahab and Roy 2004). At their core are often cadres of dedicated members focused on a charismatic leader. Iain Edgar has analyzed jihadist dreams, including those by Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, and found that dreams both motivate conversion to jihadism and are regarded as divinatory predictions and prescriptions of future events and actions, especially when the dreamers are divinely inspired charismatic leaders (Edgar 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008). I have argued, in response to Peter van der Veer’s view (2004) that charisma had ceased to be a useful concept in the modern world, that

Against the skeptical view of charisma as irrelevant to post-colonial or globalization theory, one may argue that transnational communication has enhanced the status of religious charismatic figures and their organizational reach. Osama bin Laden, one such figure, constructed his persona in the classic image of a Sufi world renouncer; a man who had abandoned his wealth to live in the desert for the sake of Islam. (Werbner 2003:283; see also Devji 2005:42–44)

Seen together, the key organizational features of organized jihadist movements can be summed up as (1) multiplicity, (2) cadre-type structure with elite members and a wide fan of sympathizers, (3) charismatic leadership, and (4) global connections and international movement of members (to study in the Middle East or to jihadist camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan). A further key feature is (5) media and publicity hunger. Even Al-Qaeda, despite its clandestine activities, has sought interviews with journalists and media exposure through its video recordings. Quintan Wiktorowicz, a political scientist who studied the radical jihadist group Al-Muhajiroun in Britain (Wiktorowicz 2005: 150–160), stresses this feature.¹⁰ Suicide bombers aspire to be viewed as heroes (Sageman 2008:158). Finally, (6) mar-

9. See, e.g., my own interpretation (Werbner 1996, 2002a).

10. Wiktorowicz conducted fieldwork over three separate months in 2002, supplemented by interviews and documentary research over a longer period. Although members of the movement were apparently involved in seditious plots, he appears to be unaware of this.

tyrdom movements are altruistic, espousing the ultimate self-sacrifice (Asad 2007).

Despite the violent tendencies of some Islamist movements, most anthropologists have stressed the subjective, nonviolent dimensions of the Islamic movements they study (e.g., White 2002). Much more than studying global Islamic extremism and violent militancy against the West, anthropologists have been prominent in trying to explode essentialized stereotypes of all Muslims as terrorists.

Such anthropological insights, significant in scholarly regional and anthropological debates, are hardly satisfactory for those who believe that anthropologists as “embedded” ethnographers hold the magic bullet for the “why” of Islamic terror following 9/11.¹¹ Lila Abu-Lughod reports being “deluged with invitations to speak” after 9/11, and she asks herself, “Why did this not please me?” (Abu-Lughod 2002:783). Such invitations put anthropologists in a false position. Being there does not in itself give them a privileged handle on current affairs, clandestine terror networks, or cataclysmic events, and this is particularly so in our information-rich, media-saturated society. Being there certainly gave me, I felt, very limited competence to comment on underground Islamic militancy in the Muslim diaspora from the perspective of an expert. Anthropologists like myself had studied ongoing familial or religious transnational networks linking British Pakistanis in the diaspora with their homeland. There were no anthropological studies of young British Pakistanis’ secret visits to jihadist camps in Pakistan, a transnational movement linked after 9/11 to the rise of diasporic Pakistani militancy and suicide bombing in Britain.

The basic question remains: what can anthropologists contribute to the public understanding of Pakistani jihadism targeting Western nations? Can anthropologists go beyond the well-known insight that British Pakistanis are politically angry at the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the continued plight and sufferings of Iraqis, Afghans, and Palestinians? Almost universally, Pakistanis doubt that it was Muslims who bombed the World Trade Center. The official report to the House of Commons on the July 7, 2005, London underground bombings drew on one of the suicide bombers’ videos to argue that a dominant motivation for the bombers was “the perceived injustices carried out by the West against Muslims” (HM Government 2006:19). Such conclusions by the commission did not rely on anthropological knowledge, and this is true of most of the interpretations of Islamic militancy, since the discourse is widely available on jihadist Web sites.

11. In her study of human rights organizations in Columbia, Winifred Tate calls herself an “embedded ethnographer” (Tate 2007:13, 23) in a deliberately provocative sense, to underline the partial nature of any account. Like her, I use the term somewhat ironically, in the light of recent debates about anthropologists as embedded ethnographers in the American military in Iraq and Afghanistan (see n. 7).

Conspiracies and International Political Intrigue

If many of the features of militant Islam were known before September 11, what evidently changed was the globalization of militant networks and their spread into Muslim countries beyond the Middle East and into the Muslim diaspora in the West. In 2001, in the public domain outside the intelligence world, little was known about Al-Qaeda beyond the bare facts of Bin Laden's career (Beeman 2004 [2001]; Scheer 2002).¹² The mobilization of young Saudis for a transnational jihadist movement supported by large-scale Saudi funding, their subsequent inglorious return home at the end of the first Afghan war, and their suppression by the Saudi state are analyzed by anthropologist Madawi Al-Rasheed on the basis of a range of indigenous sources in Arabic, including speeches by Saudi Islamists. Al-Rasheed (2007:106 *passim*) stresses the transformation undergone by these young "Saudi Afghan" fighters, redefined as dangerous insiders, in the evolution of Al-Qaeda. Others have argued, less subtly, that the rupture with the Saudi regime arose in response to Saudi hosting of U.S. troops during the first Gulf War and its aftermath (Ahmed 2005:12).

At this point one enters the murky waters of intelligence services, undercover alliances, conspiracies, and counterconspiracies. Based on recent fieldwork among the Tuareg, anthropologist Jeremy Keenan has argued that they were falsely constructed as members of Al-Qaeda by the Algerian state, part of a deal with the United States to expand into the Sahara in the global war on terror (GWOT). Based on interviews and observations in the field, Keenan's analysis reveals a world of political intrigue (Keenan 2006, 2009, forthcoming).

Far more fantastical are allegations by informed regional experts, basing their arguments primarily on journalistic interviews and intelligence reports, that for the sake of oil, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were supported by a secret alliance of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan from 1991 almost until September 2001, in an operation conducted through periodic secret meetings (Ahmed 2005:14–24, 26–28). The same sources claim that, having backed radical Islamic *mujahideen* groups in the Afghan war against the Soviet invasion, the United States, in alliance with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, assisted the recruitment of thousands of young Islamist militants to fight against the Serbs in Bosnia, thus effectively globalizing the jihadist movement (Ahmed 2005:32–33). Among those recruited were scores of Al-Qaeda members (cited in Ahmed 2005:34). Osama bin Laden himself was said in a Republican Congressional Report in 1997 "to bankroll numerous militant groups" (Ahmed 2005:34). The United States' alleged support for bin Laden continued despite the fact that he had "publicly declared war against the USA

in 1996" while in the Sudan (Ahmed 2005:21) and that after 1998, when he moved to Afghanistan, the Taliban's anti-American and anti-Saudi worldview became increasingly strident (Ahmed 2005:24). In an about-turn in mid-July 2001, in secret alliance with Russia and India (Ahmed 2005:25), America was said to have warned the Taliban through an intermediary of her intention to bomb Afghanistan and topple the regime (Ahmed 2005:29). It was a "game plan" intended "to remove al-Qaida from the face of the earth" (Ahmed 2005:30). If any of this is to be believed, that threat in itself would have prompted a preemptive strike by Al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center 2 months later! Other accounts in this conspiracy genre allege that Islamist plots in the West were instigated by *agent provocateurs*; that self-proclaimed militants such as the "Blind Sheikh," who masterminded the 1993 World Trade Center attack, were in the pay of the CIA. Despite the claimed wealth of evidence presented by Ahmed, most research in the Middle East or South Asia neither anticipated nor was able to explain fully the events leading to the cataclysmic global crisis of September 11 and its aftermath.

"Public" Anthropology and the Question of Anthropological "Relevance"

The internationalization of Islamic militancy raises several related questions that anthropologists have agonized over following 9/11 and its aftermath: first, can there be a "public," "engaged" anthropology; second, is anthropology "relevant"; and finally, is an "anthropology of international relations" possible (Thomas 2001:7)? Such questions have come to be particularly pressing for anthropologists studying Muslims in widely separated localities, from Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia to their evermore widespread diasporas in Europe, North America, and Australia. There is an ethical dimension to this dilemma—how closely should we attempt to influence the centers of power and policy making? How will our pronouncements affect the people we study as well as professional colleagues? There are countries such as Norway in which anthropologists regularly comment in the press on current affairs involving minorities, however tangential to their fieldwork.¹³ In the English-speaking West, however, as Ahmed and Shore remark somewhat despairingly, "a good journalist could produce what anthropologists produce, only more cheaply, better and faster—and in a format calculated to reach a far wider audience" (Ahmed and Shore 1995:23).

The call for a kind of popular anthropology, accessible to the masses, is, however, not my concern here. Public anthropology, as I read it, is a more serious scholarly engagement with public affairs from the informed standpoint of a fieldworker. But it is true, nevertheless, that such engagements

12. William Beeman, an anthropologist who is an Iran and Middle East expert, writes a blog titled *Culture and International Affairs*, on Iranian-American relations and current affairs in the Middle East and South Asia, <http://www.wbeeman.com/>.

13. See Eriksen (2005) on this tendency in Norway. In Israel, Dan Rabinowitz, Smadar Lavie, and Esther Hertzog contribute regularly to the press.

often take place, at least in the United Kingdom and the United States, in a crowded field of expert current affairs analysts and indigenous public intellectuals, including journalists and TV reporters. These may, indeed, be better placed professionally or ethically to analyze local/global crises.¹⁴

The brave aspirations of public anthropology are summed up in an introduction to a special issue of *Current Anthropology*, *Going Public with Anthropology*, in which Robin G. Fox (Fox 1996:nil5) reminds us that Sol Tax (founding editor of *Current Anthropology*) “practiced an anthropology based on civic responsibility, public participation, and radical humanist principles,” that anthropology “from its professional start aimed to play a significant role in civil society—as a means of education, social reform, policy making and educational debate on public issues.” Similarly, Jeremy MacClancy’s edited collection, *Exotic No More* (MacClancy 2002), aims to show the “large contribution” that anthropologists can make to a wide range of practical social issues, drawing on the strengths of anthropological fieldwork, while recognizing the effects of globalization and the need sometimes to “study up.” Ulf Hannerz, reflecting on the possible anthropological contribution to major debates on world transformations, suggests that perhaps “anthropologists can enter the public culture” by giving a “human face—better yet, a number of different faces, and voices—to large scale, too easily anonymous processes and offer an understanding of what human agency has to do with them” (Hannerz 2004:231). The new University of California Press Series in Public Anthropology aims to continue “anthropology’s commitment to being an ethnographic witness . . . but also adds a commitment, through ethnography, to reframing the terms of public debate—transforming received, accepted understandings of social issues.”¹⁵

There is no doubt that in some developing countries in the South the anthropological voice can and does reach beyond authoritarian official discourses or can add authoritative legitimacy to local activists’ social and political mobilization. In civil war-torn Mozambique, in Zimbabwe under Ian Smith’s and Robert Mugabe’s regimes, in Argentina and Columbia in the face of disappearances or mass violence, in Sri Lanka and Burundi during the civil wars there, anthropologists have aimed to describe, explain, and understand terror and its consequences.¹⁶ But critical public anthropology, as Richard Werbner argues, is beset with, on the one hand, the

“hazards of disengagement” arising from the local specificity of fieldwork and, on the other hand, the “hazard” of “dissolving into other disciplinary subjects, perhaps better equipped to navigate the flood of media representations” (R. Werbner 2004:4, 5). My point is not to dismiss public anthropology—and I say more about my own engagement below—but to demand a better appreciation of its heightened predicament in the face of current pressure for extraordinary expertise.

After September 11: The Anthropologist as Public Expert

In the current charged field of hidden conspiracies, anthropologists such as myself easily acquire the aura of experts who understand the below-the-surface motivations and passions of apparently ordinary young people. It is not a matter of seeking a “voice” for anthropology. In the period directly following September 11, policy makers and the media were all too eager to tap this hidden and seemingly powerful anthropological knowledge. Admittedly, in the United Kingdom the “authentic” voice of Pakistani academics commanded most respect, while political scientists were the ones who most often tended to venture into the media with their scholarly opinions.

Over the years I (like many of my colleagues) became, almost despite myself, a reluctant public anthropologist. I had to respond to national and global events impacting the people I studied: the *Satanic Verses* affair (Werbner 1996, 2002a), the first Gulf War (Werbner 1994), protests against the murder and rape of innocents in Bosnia (Werbner 2002a), September 11 and the second Gulf War (P. Werbner 2004), riots in Oldham and other northern cities (Werbner 2005b), Islamophobia (Werbner 2005a), the headscarf affair (2007b), and the Danish cartoon affair (*Der Spiegel Online International* 2006). Most recently, I analyzed a public discourse in the media invoking “seditious” spaces and organizations that developed in Britain following the July 7, 2005, London underground bombing (2009). During several of these crises I was indeed an “embedded ethnographer” in the sense that I was doing fieldwork: in 1989–1991, at the time of the Rushdie affair and the first Gulf War, in 1995 during the Bosnian crisis, and in 2000, just before 9/11. Each time my reluctance to venture into the realm of public affairs arose from the view that while such crises may seem to expose “a limited area of transparency on the otherwise opaque surface of regular, uneventful social life,” as Victor Turner (1957:93) poetically commented, in reality, the *ordinary cannot explain the extraordinary!* If fieldwork taught me one thing, it is that there is no essential clash of civilizations between the Muslim world and the West, despite global crises like September 11 and despite attempts by extremists on both sides to construct an epic conflict in these terms. Instead, extraordinary global crises make it impossible to go back to business as usual. More often, as in the case of diaspora Muslims, extraordinary global crises cause spiraling

14. Joining this crowd in 2006, 5 years after the bombing of the Twin Towers, Akbar Ahmed, ex-Pakistani civil servant, anthropologist of tribal society, Western academic, and Renaissance man of Urdu literature, poetry, and history, embarked on an “anthropological excursion” throughout the Muslim world, meeting young students and prominent political leaders; a personal journey in which he reflects on global geopolitics and their implications for Muslims after 9/11 (Ahmed 2007). His research methods for this particular project were, however, more journalistic than anthropological.

15. Taken from the final pages of Tate (2007) in that series, which is edited by Robert Borowsky.

16. See references above, n. 4.

alienation and marginality in a transnational community holding deeply felt anti- or postcolonial convictions arising from an historically embedded diasporic sensibility.

The Rushdie affair and the civil war in Bosnia had taught me that despite Pakistanis in Britain being defined as an underprivileged minority, they saw themselves as a privileged group, located at the hub of world politics and hence responsible to protest against the injustices and sufferings of Muslims elsewhere. What I could not—and perhaps did not want to—know was that a minority of young Pakistanis had been for some time, even before 9/11, involved in serious illegal activities. These have come to light since 2007, during court trials of conspiring suicide bombers, which revealed that many members of the most radical young Islamist groups in Britain had trained in so-called jihadist camps in Pakistan. Such revelations of clandestine transnational networks merely underlined my inability to fully comprehend or “explain” the community I had studied in the present heated-up atmosphere. A wide range of locations—mosques, internet clubs, Islamic bookshops, schools and even youth camps in the Lake District—were disclosed by British intelligence, the police, and courts to be terrorist “hotspots” (and hence evidently beyond the bounds for anthropologists).¹⁷ It seemed that like Pakistan itself, Britain too had become a place of “multiple armed and clandestine actors”; alongside young Muslims, MI5 (the British equivalent of the FBI), Scotland Yard, undercover investigative journalists, and TV photographers all jostled for a piece of the action.

Anthropological fieldwork is necessarily based on long-term relations of trust. This is particularly so when the West is perceived as the enemy of Islam, in contexts in which conspiracy theories abound along with suspicion of hidden motives beneath the surface. These make the anthropologist's stated aim to study knowledge for the sake of knowledge highly suspect. Ulterior motives are invariably presumed by subjects, and the presumptions are often impossible to fully dispel. My research on Sufism and a Sufi order in Pakistan and Britain was seen by some disciples to be motivated by a hidden desire to convert to Islam and by others as having more nefarious objectives, perhaps even military spying. I was a woman, a British Jew, and an Israeli. The living saint at the centre of the cult I studied was, for his followers, the axis mundi, a man of infinite spiritual power and hence a security threat to the enemies of Islam. An important British vice-regent (deputy) of the shaikh once accosted me and asked, “Are you studying Islam or something else?” When I replied that I was studying *tasawwuf* (Sufism), he responded with intense anger, “How can you study that without being a Muslim?” (Werbner 2003:300 *passim*). There were disciples who trusted and supported me, as did the shaikh and his son, though now and then they too wavered in response to malicious gossip.

17. I describe these accusations, gathered from the press and media, in Werbner (2009).

My research in Britain on the diasporic public sphere made evident that ethnic community leaders prefer to represent their views to the wider British public themselves; they certainly do not entrust outsiders with this task. They did not feel that they needed me, in other words, as an advocate who could speak on their behalf, and they were concerned that I, an independent academic beyond their control, might misrepresent them in print. The burden of representation for anthropologists is thus a heavy one. It is certainly not our task to add to the sense of pervasive conspiracy generated by politicians, public commentators, and journalists. Yet an engaged anthropology cannot be based on fieldwork as usual. It is naive and self-delusionary to think otherwise. Perhaps an engaged public anthropology should aim instead to bear “witness” to the suffering of ordinary people in the face of extraordinary predicaments?

We need thus to reflect on our main task as anthropologists. Is it to speak out on “terror,” broadly defined, and attempt to “explain” its causes and consequences? If so, what might such explanations consist of? Or is it rather to study the predicaments of vulnerable minorities suspected or accused of harboring terrorists. The first option would lead us to highlight Islamic violent militancy—in Britain the so-called radicalization or fanaticism that persuades apparently ordinary young British-born Pakistanis to become suicide bombers. The alternative aim would lead more modestly to a reflection on the impact that widespread securitization and wars in the Middle East and Pakistan have had on local diasporic lives. But even this modest anthropological objective is fraught in the post-9/11 era, given a pervasive sense of anxiety, resentment, and suspicion among British Pakistanis, faced with perceived Western stereotypes, stigmatization, and violent international aggression.

The dilemma of how to write about Muslim minorities at a time of terror without becoming a mere apologist is compounded by the fact that suicide bombings and seditious plots by a small minority of young, apparently ordinary, British-born Pakistanis have undermined any illusion of Muslim harmonious integration into British society. Attempts to profile this cohort by experts reveal a tendency to strip away the particular in order to discover the average.¹⁸ Reliance on news vignettes is equally problematic for anthropology: news features often lack the veracity, the considered analysis, the richness and contextual embeddedness of anthropological accounts based on long-term fieldwork.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the

18. A recent survey of the press and other sources by a journalist and expert reporter on Pakistan, Jason Burke (2008), identifies British Muslim terrorists as on average older than might be expected (29 years old), married (30%), mostly affluent and educated (many in science, engineering, and information technology), and with petty criminal records. It seems they become radicalized very quickly, within a year, and not necessarily by mosques' “preachers of hate.” See also Sageman 2008, chap. 3.

19. This view, of the unreliability of much available public information and academic commentaries on militant networks is supported by the careful “scientific” or “field-based” research by Sageman (2008:25–28) and Atran (2008:2).

“news” as reported by journalists and foreign correspondents has been the dominant source of information for most public intellectuals including anthropologists in their commentaries on 9/11 and its aftermath. It is thus legitimate to ask, in what respects do anthropologists resemble or differ from journalists, and particularly foreign correspondents?

“Being There”: Anthropologists versus Journalists

In a series of publications, Ulf Hannerz (1996, 2004) contrasts anthropologists with foreign correspondents. Anthropologists, he says, tend to study the long or medium *durée*, the relatively unchanging, while foreign correspondents study the present moment of crisis. Anthropologists usually choose places to study where other anthropologists have never set foot; they appropriate a field as theirs. Foreign correspondents converge on a trouble spot, swap information while competing for scoops, hang out at the same bars and are taken on the same guided tours of war zones. Anthropologists tend to study over their lifetime career at most two or three different, culturally distinct “societies” or localities, even if we return repeatedly to our sites of fieldwork. Foreign correspondents easily accumulate portfolios of a dozen or more crisis spots all over the world. Sometimes they stay in one place for several years, longer than most anthropologists, developing regional expertise and local contacts. At other times they flit in and out of a place in short sorties. Nevertheless, however brief their stay, they maintain the authoritative façade of experts. The contrast is one that reaches to the heart of representations of culture. Whereas anthropologists tend to stress cultural difference and transformation within a broader humanistic framework, journalists either ignore cultural difference altogether—people are victims of earthquakes, bombings, repression or terror in a panhuman sense, immediately communicable—or they tend to dehumanize the “Other” altogether by stressing uncompromising cultural difference, as in the case of representations of the Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

At first glance, a key difference between foreign correspondents and anthropologists lies in their modes of data collection. Journalists gather most of their information via a media industry—press releases, government guided tours, translations from the local press, and assistance from local, indigenous journalists. At their best, anthropologists gather their data through observation, piecemeal, from many informants, “in particles,” as Evans-Pritchard described his fieldwork among the Nuer.

But there are also similarities in the collection of data. In Evelyn Waugh’s satirical novel on foreign correspondents, *Scoop*, the intrepid foreign journalist who is sent by mistake to Africa uncovers his scoop indirectly from a hairdresser who happens to also work at the palace. While other foreign correspondents are driven off into the desert, far away from a brewing palace coup, our reluctant foreign correspondent scoops the big story by staying put, isolated from the crowd.

As for journalists, so too for anthropologists—informants come in all shapes and guises. Hannerz records that major TV networks and newspapers run well-oiled foreign media machineries, combining indigenous journalists and foreigners, stringers, handlers, translators, secretaries, and photographers. Yet equally, a great deal can be learned free of charge through casual conversations with local taxi drivers, hotel porters, and shopkeepers.

Like journalists, anthropologists too have their loquacious informants, more insightful, reflective, and willing to share their thoughts than others in the field. Clifford Geertz has argued that contemporary anthropologists are no longer able to do their research in glorious isolation. They must work alongside historians, sociologists, political scientists, and demographers, as well as writers and poets commenting on their own society. As Geertz says,

Walking barefoot through the whole of culture is really no longer an option, and the anthropologist who tries it is in grave danger of being descended upon in print by an outraged textualist or a maddened demographer. (Geertz 1985: 623)

Although we may study a very restricted local scene or personal network, this local scene is invariably penetrated these days by global images, economic interests, and political events elsewhere. To comprehend the local, then, we anthropologists, like the people whom we study, must become amateur experts on world affairs.

Why, then, my anthropological blues in the face of global terror? Part of this has been the simple fact that it is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct genuine fieldwork based on trust among British Muslims at a time of intense suspicion and alienation and increasingly pervasive intelligence surveillance, although one can certainly sustain friendships that have reached a point where they transcend the political. I have had a few such friends in Manchester with whom I can talk freely about September 11, knowing they will share with me their innermost thoughts, however unacceptable to English society. But to gauge the full impact of the Muslim diasporic response to September 11 and its aftermath, I have often had to rely on the virtual cascade of information coming from radio, the press, and television, including the Asian and Muslim ethnic press published in the United Kingdom.²⁰

During the Afghan war, 3,000 foreign correspondents were said to have descended on Islamabad and later Kabul (Hannerz 2004:44). In Britain, it seemed that at least as many journalists descended on Muslim inner city areas, interviewing the young and the old, male and female, secular Muslim women in jeans and pious Muslim women in scarves and *niqabs*. One radio news channel, Radio 5 Live, ran a 2-hour daily phone-in debating the crisis: Why do British Muslims support the Taliban? Has Osama bin Laden’s guilt been

20. This includes, among others, *Muslim Weekly*, *Q News*, *Eastern Eye*, and various magazines and Web sites.

proven? How much guilt does America bear for the current crisis? Are British Muslims who went to fight in Afghanistan to be regarded as traitors? What does loyalty to Britain mean? In the first weeks after 9/11, daily news bulletins on television regularly featured Muslim leaders meeting the Prime Minister in Downing Street, while a satellite channel featured debates by British parliamentarians on the problem of British Muslim potential treason. Alongside this, Muslim polemicists wrote critical columns in the British press.²¹ This cascade of public opinion and information was augmented by a series of polls and surveys and followed by the publication of four reports on inner city Pakistani riots during the summer of 2001 in Oldham and other Northern towns.²²

News journalism resembles anthropology in looking to the particular for a broader message. But journalists also have an advantage over anthropologists in that in times of crisis their reach is immense. The power of the press and media is such that both politicians and ordinary people will express their opinions and even their most intimate thoughts to the media, in the hope of reaching a broader audience. We can say that, like anthropologists, journalists believe in *mediated ethnography*. But at the same time, unlike anthropologists, journalists speak to the highest in the land as well as the lowest, from the British Prime Minister to the controversial cleric of an extremist mosque in an obscure London suburb. An anthropologist who enters such a radical mosque at a time of heightened tension and suspicion existing in Britain today is likely to be suspected of being an agent, an undercover journalist, or a clandestine TV photographer. Several television stations in Britain, including the BBC and Channel 4, have beamed a series of exposés of the radical discourses enunciated in local mosques, based on such clandestine filming.²³

Anthropology and the Study of Islamic Radicalization

Can anthropologists study Islamic radicalization without compromising the discipline, endangering anthropologists in the field or queering the pitch for future anthropological research? What specific ethical responsibilities do anthropologists bear toward the discipline and the people they study? Other disciplines can resort to trawling radical groups' Web

sites, reports in the press, or whistle-blowers' accounts.²⁴ *The Islamist* by Ed Husain (2007), for example, recounts the career of a born-again radical who moved from his parents' Sufi order through a series of increasingly radicalized groups and finally back to Sufi spirituality. Moazzam Begg's autobiographical account records his journey through a range of Middle Eastern countries, arrest in Afghanistan, and internment in Guantanamo Bay (Begg 2006). Another such life story, *Leaving Al-Qaeda*, by Hassan Butt, scheduled to appear in 2007, turned out to be a sham and Butt's radical past something of a fantasy that was repeatedly sold to a gullible press.²⁵ Terrorist profiling appears to be a key pastime of counterterrorist experts, but deeper probing finds all kinds of complex personal histories, as in the case of one of the July 7, 2005, London suicide bombers, Muhammad Sadiq Khan, whose bitter family rift over his marriage may hold the key to his radicalization (Malik 2007).

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that government pressure to appear relevant has impelled the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of Great Britain to fund research on Islamic radicalization. Nor is the Council content with mere armchair research of Web sites. The Council's joint research program, with funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Humanities Board, was initiated in 2006 and in 2007 renamed New Security Challenges: "Radicalisation" and Violence. The connection between supposedly independent scientific research and government policy was explicitly spelled out in the first-round outline:

The FCO wants outstanding research to inform the policy making process. The FCO's interest in this initiative stems from the recognition that independent, high-quality research on radicalisation issues can inform UK Counter Terrorism policy overseas. As part of the Prevent strand of that policy in particular,²⁶ the FCO seeks to use research to increase its knowledge and understanding of the factors associated with radicalisation in those countries and regions identified as high priority. The Prevent strand is concerned with tackling the radicalisation of individuals, both in the UK and elsewhere, which sustains the international terrorist threat. The Government seeks to do this by, among other things, deterring those who facilitate terrorism and those who encourage others to become terrorists by changing the

24. Olivier Roy's (2004) fine study of Islamic neofundamentalist movements is almost entirely based on surveys of their Web sites, supplemented by newspaper accounts and casual discussions. Trawling the World Wide Web, I myself found a wealth of information on jihadi terror camps, radical Muslim organizations, and actors, all available without leaving my study.

25. See, e.g., this Web site: http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/law_order/hassan+butt+freed+amid+scam+claims/2264552

26. The "Prevent Strategy" is a British Home Office initiative to challenge violent extremist ideology and support vulnerable individuals (HM Government 2008). Available on <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/violentextremism/downloads/Prevent%20Strategy%20A%20Guide%20for%20Local%20Partners%203%20June%202008.pdf> (visited February 5, 2010).

21. Among these, Akbar S. Ahmed, an anthropologist, has been one of the most distinguished, regularly commenting on unfolding political events in South Asia and the diaspora on the BBC and other media, including British, Pakistani, and American daily newspapers.

22. For details and a full discussion, see Bagguley and Hussain (2008). The riots in August 2001 tended to get conflated in the public and political imagination with the "problem" of young Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11.

23. For a review of these exposés, see Werbner 2009.

environment in which the extremists and those radicalising others can operate, [and] engaging in the battle of ideas by challenging the ideologies that extremists believe can justify the use of violence, primarily by helping Muslims who wish to dispute these ideas to do so.

In the first-round outline, 10 regional annexes and within them several country-specific outlines were included. The program asked researchers in all these countries to

name and assess the key figures (moderate and extreme) and key groups (including charities and proselytizing religious groups) influencing the local population in each region, to assess the role of informal networks, information networks and rumours in spreading messages that encourage radicalisation, [to] describe the attitude of each country's government and assess the effectiveness of its measures for dealing with terrorism both within and beyond its borders; [to] assess the response of governments to the challenge of ideas, what counter-radicalisation strategies have been used, their success or failure; [and to] indicate the impact of events in specific countries on UK ethnic communities originating from those areas.

In addition, it asked researchers in Pakistan, for example, to "assess the effect of AQ/terrorist propaganda on the wider population; assess the degree to which the armed forces have been radicalised; assess the role of *madrassas* as radicalising factors; to what extent is radicalisation caused by radicalized individuals from the Pakistani diaspora returning to Pakistan?"²⁷

Following the outcry that ensued when the program was first publicized, the ESRC redrafted the initiative (with funding increased to £2.5 million!) but retained clause 3.2 outlining the objectives of the FCO. In protest, the anthropologist on the committee (Jonathan Spencer) and the international relations scholar (John Sidel) both resigned. The anthropological community in Britain, through its Heads of Departments forum, also expressed its strong objections, and these were publicized in an October 20, 2006, *London Times Higher Education Supplement*, with minor dissent (Baty 2006).²⁸ Support came from the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies and the Middle East Studies Association of North America, adding their voice to the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies. These learned societies expressed concern that the program had "crossed the line" separating scholarly academic social science research "from the foreign policy, mil-

itary, and intelligence agencies of the government and their policy and research agendas." They pointed out "the special sensitivity of research relating to the Middle East and the Muslim world at the present time." Moreover, they argued, "the initiative's focus, and the partial funding it receives from the FCO, may heighten the dangers faced by British and other scholarly researchers studying the Middle East and Muslim world." This argument was echoed in an anthropology Heads of Departments meeting: the request to name potential radicals "could jeopardise the granting of research visas in India, would place researchers in the Philippines in danger, and could lead to the 'disappearance' of named informants in a number of South or Latin American countries."²⁹ One letter made the point that "the programme entails a series of extremely specific intelligence-driven questions that start from the premise of a link between Islam, radicalization (nowhere defined!) and terrorism," and that the "overtly security-research agenda" could endanger the very "physical well-being of anthropologists."³⁰ In a joint letter of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA), the British Sociological Association, Development Studies Association, Academy of Learned Societies Social Sciences, Council of Professors, and Heads of Departments of Sociology, this problem of "risks posed to the security and reputation of British researchers overseas" was reiterated, with the ASA "strongly disassociat[ing]" the anthropological community from the program. In its annual business meeting, the association resolved not to participate in peer review of applications for the program. In response to the barrage of complaints, the ESRC defended its position by arguing that not to disclose FCO involvement and funding might have risked accusations of acting covertly, and it proposed a continued dialogue with the ASA.

Despite the protests, the program has gone ahead and has elicited a rush of applications. Although modified it appears to have kept its original aims.³¹ It bears out my argument put here that anthropologists who study the everyday cannot take on the role of spies who study underground networks or pronounce authoritatively on cataclysmic crises and global terror from the position of insider experts; doing so may compromise professional ethics and endanger fellow anthropologists. Similar arguments have been made against embedded anthropologists in the United States military.³² Thus Gusterson (2003:25) has argued that "anthropologists have a professional obligation to one another not to conduct slash-

29. Minutes of meeting held at University College London on November 28, 2006. Full text available from the author.

30. E-mail written by Dr. Martha Mundy to Heads of Departments, the London School of Economics, at the start of the debate.

31. See the Warwick University Web site of the program: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/nsc/> and especially the report of the first meeting with the FCO: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/nsc/events/nscrvmeeting/>.

32. See, e.g., contributions to the debate in *Anthropology Today* by González (2007a, 2007b), Gusterson (2003, 2005, 2007), Price (2007), and Kilcullen (2007).

27. Documentation on this program and the correspondence surrounding it is available from the author and from John Gledhill, at the time chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the U.K. and the Commonwealth, Department of Social Anthropology, Manchester University.

28. See Baty (2006). A minority of Heads of Departments disagreed. The various articles debating the ESRC program can be found at the *Times Higher Education* Web site: http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/search_results.asp?qkeyword=Gledhill&categories=0§ions=0&issue=0&x=28&y=14.

and-burn fieldwork,” while González (2007b:19) proposes that “when such work is performed clandestinely this undermines and endangers the work of anthropologists more generally, not to mention their families and informants, potentially putting them at risk.”

The personal dangers of first-hand investigative reporting, even for seasoned journalists, were underlined by the murder of Wall Street journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi in 2002. The context of the murder, Karachi, is instructive and bears on anthropological research as well. According to Robert Sam Anson (2002),

For a time in the early 1990s, violence in Karachi was so endemic that the army took over from the cops. When the troops pulled out, killings started averaging eight per day—and those were merely the ones involving political and criminal gangs. No one bothered to count the shootings, bombings, garrotings, and throat slittings between ethnic and religious groups, much less the toll racked up in quotidian armed robberies, home invasions, and just-for-the-hell-of-it sniper slayings.

In Pakistan in 2008, semiclandestine militant groups fighting in Kashmir—the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other hard-liner religious groups; the army, the police, intelligence, and rogue ISI elements; political parties, drug crime syndicates, and other mafia—operated with apparent impunity. Suicide bombers attacked politicians, the army, police barracks, shopping malls, hotels, and restaurants. Religious zealots burned CDs and DVDs and banned cinemas and civic public spaces of consumption, entertainment, and desire. In such a context any research on Islamic radicalization is dangerous. Daniel Pearl was warned by one Pakistani journalist that “They (Al-Qaeda) may be here, but [it] is impossible for you to meet them or me to meet them. They are all wanted and they would like to stay quiet. Especially they won’t be meeting an American journalist.” But this did not deter him. “I told him, ‘If you try too hard, it could be risky.’ But he was very focused. There are rules for journalists in war zones of what *not* to do to stay alive. Danny ignored these rules.” Another local expert said, “Danny got more and more confident. This was the biggest thing that hit him. He was suddenly having access and chasing down an area where he had no expertise. I mean, Danny just didn’t have it.” An investigative reporter at *The News*, a Pakistani newspaper, quoted a senior Pakistani official as saying, “An India-based Jewish reporter serving a largely Jewish media organisation should have known the hazards of exposing himself to radical Islamic groups, particularly those who recently got crushed under American military might.”

Anson refers in his article to a shadowy figure, Shaikh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, allegedly an Al-Qaeda operative, who Pearl was expecting to meet, believing he had recruited Richard Reid, the American Airlines failed shoe bomber. Although the topic of Shaikh Gilani, the militant Sufi, is beyond this paper, my online research on the shaikh is instructive to the argument presented here. I had met Shaikh Mubarak,

who is related by marriage to a close Pakistani friend of mine, briefly during earlier fieldwork in the 1970s, and until recently, his English-medium school in Islamabad was attended by the daughters of another Pakistani friend, before it closed down suddenly following the events surrounding Pearl’s assassination. Testing my capacity to pronounce on radical Al-Qaeda supporters for purposes of this article, I discovered a wealth of information about the shaikh on the Web, mainly taken from newspaper articles, much of it alleging crime and sedition by his followers against the United States and his connections to, alternatively, the Pakistani ISI, the CIA, and Al-Qaeda³³—accusations rejected by Shaikh Mubarak and his followers on his own Web site.³⁴ After a close reading of this range of sources, I reached the conclusion that allegations that Shaikh Mubarak had preached a violent Islam in America or was closely connected to Al-Qaeda are hard to substantiate on the basis of published news sources, though it is conceivable that a few of his more ardent U.S. followers engaged in violence against other religious groups. Despite a host of allegations, he was never imprisoned, and the accusations of his involvement in Daniel Pearl’s abduction and assassination were dropped. It is most unlikely that he ever knew Richard Reid. The transnational organization the shaikh, as a living Sufi saint, appears to have built up is composed of African-American followers organized in branches throughout the United States. If true, this quite remarkable organizational achievement highlights the extraordinary qualities of inventiveness and imagination Shaikh Mubarak has brought to this project and his willingness to transgress conventional boundaries and explore the unknown.

The ambiguities surrounding the study of terror, terrorists, and terror networks are highlighted by the case of this Sufi warrior (if indeed he is one), illustrating the fact that authoritatively presented Web sites have to be treated with great caution. They also make evident the deep anthropological truth that *fact is stranger than fiction*, that however much security forces attempt to profile the ideal-type terrorist, there is no single “identikit” that can portray the reality on the ground. Shaikh Gilani’s unusual profile underlines the impossibility for anthropologists of studying Islamic terror via the media and the pitfalls of trying to rely on journalists’ accounts that simplify and sort the illogical, unknown, and contentious. The case of Hassan Butt, the self-proclaimed jihadist whose numerous newspaper interviews were exposed as a fabrication perpetrated on a gullible press, is a further

33. On Shaikh Mubarak, see Anson (2002), Hussain (2007:123), the *Boston Globe*, and the following: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/03/13/60II/main503644.shtml>, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/jamaat-ul-fuqra.htm>, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/911timeline/2002/bostonglobe010602.html>, and <http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/847>. Leonard (2003), in her survey of Muslims in the United States, makes no mention of this group.

34. See http://www.iqou-moa.org/rebuttals/slander_against_muslim_communities_miss_the_mark.htm, http://www.iqou-moa.org/open_letters/index.htm, and <http://www.holyislamvillesc.org/sheikh/>.

warning of the unreliability of using news reports as the main sources of empirical fact in serious academic research (see n. 25).

In his semifictional diary of a Colombian town he knew well, Michael Taussig depicts the inherent ambiguities of a field in which local people attempt to account for inexplicable disappearances and deaths, perpetrated by multiple armed groups—militants, mafiosi, guerrilla, paramilitaries, the army, the police, and young delinquents (Taussig 2003). In such a nightmarish world, reality becomes a suppressed yet menacing and terrifying “public secret” (Taussig 1999). “Truth” is uncertain, and there is a constant struggle to make sense of events and facts “on the ground” that refuse to fit any neat, coherent logic, as Winifred Tate demonstrates in her hugely insightful study of human rights development and activism in Columbia (Tate 2007). It is probable that a similar ambiguity pervades the world of Islamic militancy, despite attempts by counterterrorist experts to strip away this unpredictable quality or the uniqueness of its actors. Only an embedded anthropological study can produce a textured richness that discloses the unexpected, the unsterotypical, even the unimaginable, hinted at by the Web site accounts of Shaikh Mubarak, the warrior saint.³⁵

Crises of the *Longue Durée*

Despite the fact that the British secret service increasingly appears to have gained command of Britain’s Islamic terror networks, the ESRC program and others like it indicate that the insights of embedded ethnographers are still being sought by policy makers. As the global crisis of Islamic terror becomes one of the *longue durée*, anthropologists are able to say more about the way the crisis has affected ordinary Muslims (Abbas 2005:144–163) and public debates among Muslims (Lewis 2007) or between them and British politicians (Werbner 2009). It is now possible to write about the impact of the so-called war of terror on the stigmatization of U.K. Muslims. A few examples will suffice: on a visit to a minor saint’s congregation in Manchester in March 2008, I commented jokingly that I had become “half a Muslim,” to which one of the shaikh’s devotees, a sophisticated businessman who travels regularly to India, responded, jokingly but with barely disguised bitterness, “Don’t say that. Then you’ll be related to Osama bin Laden!” For British Muslims, being tarred with the brush of extremism has become a daily burden. The incessant newspaper headlines reporting on extremist plots cast a shadow on their everyday lives. A Pakistani friend told me that traveling on a local bus in a suburb of Manchester one day, she noticed that the people around her were reading a free newspaper with the front page headline “terror plot uncovered.” She sat back in her seat, helplessly wondering what they thought of her. Such stories—of being stared at suspi-

35. On the unexpected in the context of violence in Sindh, see the anthropological studies of Verkaaik (2004) and Ring (2007).

ciously in queues, at airports or in shops—abound, revealing the sense of estrangement that the so-called war on terror has generated. Most Pakistanis are avid television viewers, but this merely compounds their sense of alienation as the immediacy of suffering by coreligionists in Israel, Iraq, Palestine, or Afghanistan is tangibly experienced by viewers.³⁶

If journalists compose their reports from other people’s reports, cutting, snipping, and pasting, so too, increasingly, do modern-day anthropologists. Where anthropologists may gain a momentary insight beyond that of foreign correspondents, it is because they know a local culture beyond crisis, in its quotidian daily forms, or as it has responded to earlier crises. It is this dialectical tension between a cataclysmic event and the continuities of everyday life that needs to be understood. Past memories and current expectations shape the partial, meroscopic political visions of people responding to a present crisis.³⁷

Conclusion

It is tempting to believe that public anthropology can say something relevant about global crises like September 11, that our insights and disciplinary knowledge count in the public forums where policy is made. But while global crises are experienced in our own fieldwork backyard, they are not normally generated there. We need constantly to remind ourselves that today’s political crisis soon becomes yesterday’s news and that our anthropological ventures into print are often irrelevant even before they appear. This, paradoxically, may be anthropology’s greatest strength—our knowledge of the quotidian and the intimate, of ordinary people beyond crisis. In an oblique critique of Said’s *Orientalism* (Said 1978), Talal Asad revised his earlier accusation (Asad 1973) of anthropological complicity with the colonial enterprise:

The role of anthropologists in maintaining structures of imperial domination has, despite slogans to the contrary, usually been trivial; the knowledge they produced was often too esoteric for government use, and even where it was usable it was marginal in comparison to the vast body of information routinely accumulated by merchants, missionaries, and administrators. (Asad 1991:315)

So too, in our information-rich, media-saturated society, Muslim responses to the events following September 11 have been closely monitored by journalists and their stringers, government researchers, and spies, and along with them an army of Islam watchers trawling the Internet: political scientists, orientalist, Muslim columnists, and British policy makers. Events have followed each other in quick succession since 9/11: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the expansion of the

36. On television viewing after 9/11, see Gillespie (2006).

37. I use “meroscopic” in *Imagined Diasporas* (Werbner 2002a) to refer to the positioned, and hence partial, political fabrications of different diasporic actors.

so-called global war on terror to many widely separated fronts, the 2005 London underground bombing, the Danish cartoon affair, and by 2006, the serial arrest of young Muslims, the majority being British Pakistanis who were charged (and increasingly found guilty) of various seditious conspiracies.³⁸ I was in Britain on 9/11 when the World Trade Center was bombed in New York, and in Botswana on 7/7 when the London underground was bombed. I watched both events on the BBC and CNN along with the rest of the world's population. I did not attend the protests over the cartoon affair in London, which glorified terror, though I did participate in the huge peace march against Iraq before the war started. To the best of my knowledge, perhaps with the exception of one Pakistani warrior saint, I had never known a member of Al-Qaeda or any other illegal or terrorist organization.³⁹ Nor had I ever visited any clandestine *jihadi* training camps in Pakistan as radicalized British Pakistanis allegedly do. What privileged insights do I, an anthropologist, have to be able to comment on any of these events? But the question can be turned round: do anthropologists have a duty to speak out on public affairs that affect the communities they have studied, along with other so-called academic experts?⁴⁰ Is there a sensibility developed through lengthy fieldwork that gives us a specific standpoint from which to view these crises?

Whatever their origins, these days anthropologists increasingly study people who are the victims of violent and humanitarian crises, of civil war, incurable disease, and the fall-out from global or state terror. Our conceptual tools have had to be stretched beyond their limits to comprehend such events. Our ethnographic mediations necessarily start from the bottom—from the small places where we do our ordinary, quotidian research. If we rely on journalistic accounts to supplement our knowledge of small places, to contextualize and broaden our perspective, perhaps this is because journalism is, somewhat paradoxically, a cognate discipline, one that creates its own ethnographic mediations from the collocation of many small places.

Acknowledgments

This paper was first presented at a seminar at the University of California, Irvine, and I am grateful to the participants in

38. For a summary review of these events based on the ethnic and mainstream press and media, see Werbner (2009).

39. On November 20, 2009, the *Muslim Weekly* (2009) reported that "five men were arrested by counter-terrorist police, including a Sufi spiritual leader, after raids on a network allegedly sending young men to receive terrorist training abroad." I had interviewed the Sufi spiritual leader in question, Shaikh Farooqui, in Manchester, and noted his Deobandi, pro-Taliban tendencies (Werbner 2007a:208). I also noted that his Web site was later mysteriously removed. His arrest underlines the point made in this paper regarding the difficulty of conducting ordinary anthropological research at the present moment.

40. A large number of collections and special journal issues have commented, and continue to comment, on September 11 and its implications in particular. See P. Werbner (2004) for references.

the seminar, especially Cecilia Lynch and Karen Leonard, for their comments as well as to the audience at a seminar at the University of Oslo. I am particularly grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this *Current Anthropology* paper for their insightful critical comments. Special thanks are also due to Jeremy Keenan and to Richard Werbner, whose comments helped me to radically improve the paper. The research on which this article draws was supported by several grants from the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council and the Leverhulme Trust. I wish to thank both bodies for their generous support.

Comments

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In commenting on Pnina Werbner's paper, I must start with two qualifiers: (1) I am not an anthropologist but a social scientist who draws upon ethnography as an especially useful technique to study the processes of Islamic radicalization, and (2) I study radicalization in Muslim societies and not in diaspora. However, like Pnina, I have been approached to inform policy on global terror and like her have questioned my qualifications to illuminate this process. I will respond to three specific points that Pnina has raised: the relevance of anthropology for studying global terror, the ability of the Muslim communities to speak for themselves, and the moral dilemmas faced by the U.K. academics when faced with a joint Economic and Social Research Council/Foreign and Commonwealth Office (ESRC/FCO) research call to study global terror.

Pnina has provided an extremely eloquent account of the internal tensions faced by a conscientious academic trying to understand the working of Muslim societies at a time when policy circles have a noticeable appetite for such research. As an anthropologist, she is not convinced that the study of ordinary Muslim communities can help illuminate global terror, she worries about the possible breach of trust of one's respondents, and she wonders whether anthropologists have anything more to add than journalists. Is anthropology at all relevant? she asks. In the past 5 years, I have undertaken a large-scale study of madrasas in Pakistan that aims to understand the basis of their demand and to explore their possible links with jihad. I have focused on eight districts of Pakistan and have used multiple research methods, including interviews, survey, and ethnography. In my own experience, ethnography, the ability to immerse oneself in the given community, remains the most powerful technique to understand how religious beliefs get radicalized.

Militant Islam survives not only because of religious in-

doctrination of a few but because of the popular appeal it enjoys in many sections of the Muslim societies. If Islamic terror is to be addressed, its basis of appeal within Muslim societies has to be understood. Such an understanding can be acquired only by using notes from a number of small places to inform the global picture. Thus, the answer to whether anthropology is relevant to the study of global terror rests in the nature of the research question. If the objective is to trace Al-Qaeda's financial flows, undoubtedly the intelligence agencies are better placed to answer that. If, however, the focus is to understand the forces leading to popularization of radical views in Muslim societies or developing an understanding of which segments of a given Muslim population are most likely to respond to radical groups, I have no doubt that the anthropology of Muslim society has a lot to contribute.

Such a broader conception of radicalization does not necessarily make a researcher approach her respondents with suspicion—something that Pnina fears. Rather, it implies starting the research with an assumption that there has to be some logic to why the radicalization process, despite its apparent futility, continues to hold an appeal for many Muslims. In my own research, I have found the *'ulama* within the madrasas in Pakistan keen to engage because they wanted their viewpoint exposed to the Western audience. I therefore do not fully agree with Pnina's claim that these communities do not need researchers to put forward their claims. The Sufi that Pnina studies in Manchester might want to hold his own audience. However, his audience will surely not be the same as that of an academic, nor would his arguments hold the same legitimacy as those advanced by an academic.

Finally, while I fully understand Pnina's discomfort and those of others senior colleagues who took a strong position on the ESRC/FCO joint research call, I do not think boycotting such calls is the best strategy. Pnina argues that such research calls encourage researchers to take high risk, as did the American journalist Daniel Pearl. Such a position runs the slippery slope of eventually suggesting that because of volatile political situations or armed conflict, some countries are unfit to study. As an academic who belongs to one such country, namely, Pakistan, such a stance is worrying. If increased funds are being made available for the study of Islamic radicalization, then academics need to engage with the research councils skillfully to ensure that the funds are used for the right studies. I did not apply for the ESRC/FCO joint call, but I have benefited from other ESRC funds. The ESRC never told me what I should or should not study.

Thus, while it has been a pleasure to engage with Pnina's thoughts on this subject, my research has brought me to slightly different conclusions. If we draw on ethnography as a specific technique to answer clearly identified questions, if we engage with the Muslim communities not as helpless victims but as purposeful agents capable of explaining the logic of their actions, and if we as researchers are confident of our own ability to use the research grants to meet high research standards, then

I think the anthropological notes from small places can go a long way to highlighting the causes of global terror.

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I sympathize with Pnina Werbner's frustration at applying anthropological insight to matters of immediate concern in the Islamic world. However, I do object to her implication that there is a necessary separation between anthropology and writing for the public—otherwise known as journalism.

American anthropologists have, in my opinion, largely shirked their duty to communicate with the public about the cultural underpinnings of current events. In short, we must engage in journalistic analysis in order to protect the intellectual integrity of public discourse. The rest of the world does this. Look at Europe and Latin America, where university professors are featured prominently in the news media all the time with great effectiveness and benefit for the public.

Professor Werbner cites one of my opinion pieces that has been reprinted in an anthology (Beeman 2001). In fact, I have published more than 600 opinion pieces since 1979, many of them dealing specifically with public misunderstanding of terrorism and the dynamics surrounding it. These works, as well as much of my academic writing, deal not only with terrorism itself but with the "culture of U.S. foreign relations," which gives rise to myths and misconceptions about terrorists and terrorism—the message being that "terrorism" is itself a cultural construction that distorts understanding of the real causes and dynamics of violence in the Middle East and elsewhere (Beeman 1986a, 1986b, 1986c).

Journalistic accounts cannot be used reliably as exclusive sources of information for commentary and analysis, but they can be used effectively when the anthropologist in question has sufficient experiential background to make sense of them. The significant elements of any news story leap off the page to the trained anthropological eye. Similarly, distortions and impossibilities are equally apparent. For example, journalistic reports of U.S. government claims that Iran was supporting Al-Qaeda can immediately be seen as absurd when one realizes that the extreme Sunni conservatism of Al Qaeda sanctions the killing of Shi'ite Muslims—the dominant sect in Iran—on the basis that they are heretical.

My recent book, *The "Great Satan" vs. the "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Beeman 2005, 2008), deals extensively with such public misunderstandings not only about Iran but about the dynamics of relations between Middle East populations and the West. It censures bad journalism and praises good journalism.

I write this not to tout my own work but rather to insist that anthropologists definitely have a strong role in blasting public misconceptions about the Middle East and especially

in countering ideological writers who try to mislead Western publics about the nature of these phenomena. In the last 2 decades, organizations such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy have put huge publicity machines in place to pump misleading commentary into the news media—commentary that is largely prejudicial to the Islamic world. These “think tanks” frequently hire PhD researchers to give a patina of scholarly respectability to their work, but the ideological color in their output is unmistakable, and it is all the more apparent since they rarely if ever publish in academic, peer-reviewed publications.

It is very hard for real academic researchers to break through this wall of propaganda, but we must try. For those interested in trying, I have written two guides to this kind of writing (Beeman 1987, 2001). I urge every anthropologist reading this to make a serious effort to counter prejudice and misinformation through public outreach. It can be frustrating, but when the public is presented with real information rather than ideological blather, they respond with positive interest and, frequently, relief at encountering understanding in depth.

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In asking what anthropologists can say about jihadism, Pnina Werbner gives us a tour (de force) of public anthropology, the relative merits of journalism and anthropology, the study of violence, jihadists and Islamists (more below), and the ethics of participating in government-run antiterrorist programs, and she reflects on the question of what the study of the ordinary can say, if anything, about the extraordinary. She reminds us of ways we might draw on our studies of violence in other contexts to examine jihadism and points to some of the rather ill-informed claims made about supposed radical Muslims that a bit of online research can defuse rather well.

What is less clear at the end is what we should be doing or even who the “we” should be. The “implicit anthropological theory of jihadism” for which she calls would, I would think, examine mechanisms and processes of recruitment, leadership and communication, radical commitment (even to the point of suicide), and the relationships between religious education and specific acts of violence. Surely this kind of venture calls for multiple kinds of expertise.

We do have some of the elements already, in ways that both give us insight into these processes and help to “explode essentialized stereotypes” about Muslims and Islam, an anthropological endeavor given perhaps somewhat shorter shrift here than it merits. Let me mention two. The forensic psychiatrist and counterterrorism consultant Marc Sageman, hardly suspected of papering over uncomfortable truths, argues that young men join Al-Qaeda when, away from home, they find

themselves with a “bunch of guys” who just happen to be convinced of the jihadist mission. This conclusion differs from the idea widely held by the public that it is Islamic teachers in Pakistan or France who are actively recruiting these men from their own local religious schools. He also concludes that had these men had a better understanding of Islam, they would not have been led so easily into terrorism: “It follows that more religious education for these young men might have been beneficial” (Sageman 2008:60). This sort of work is hugely useful when we engage in debates with those who argue that “Islam is the menace” in Europe. Werbner mentions Quintan Wiktorowicz (2005), but in fact a number of younger political scientists are studying recruitment to various Islamic groups in England and elsewhere. From them we learn to differentiate between calls to violence and calls for other sorts of activity, branded “radical” in the media (and sometimes by Werbner) but better understood as separatist or pietist.

As colleagues we work in different disciplines and with diverse methods, and that seems to me to strengthen the cases we wish to make, because the studies triangulate on certain conclusions. Werbner asks what the anthropologist’s comparative advantage might be in all this. As she says, most of us do not know any jihadists, or at least we do not know if we do know any. But we do know quite a bit about Islam, blamed by many as the source of violence, and we know what we know in a way that allows us to critique these simplistic views. Let me suggest two such ways.

First, we can and do argue that people take diverse messages from the same scriptural passages. One’s legal school, regional tradition, and the exigencies of the strategic moment all shape how one reads a Qur’anic verse or a report of the Prophet Muhammad’s statements and acts. In emphasizing that interpretation is a human act we often contradict Muslim scholars who insist that there is but one message or that “Islam is a religion of peace,” statements that convince no one—us, because they essentialize, and the wider public, because they read about jihad.

Second, we can and do critique the notion of “Islamism,” used relatively uncritically here, for its tendency to lump together movements or individuals seeking to create religious institutions in their societies, those seeking to fashion a state around religious teachings and those seeking to subvert or attack democratic governments. Among groups with relatively radical messages, it becomes even more important to identify these differences. Rather than calling the Hizb ut-Tahrir “jihadist,” as does Werbner, we might wish instead to study the everyday lives of its members and the nature of its message, which in England has been closer to Christian fundamentalists’ call to separate from society and to wait for the arrival of a suitable religious time, than the more violent preaching of Al-Muhajirun. These are the sorts of anthropological endeavors that ought to have a direct bearing on public understandings of Islam and of pathways to violence.

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In this paper Pnina Werbner raises very timely and thought-provoking questions about the possible contribution of anthropological expertise to understanding contemporary militant Islamic jihadism following the collective trauma of 9/11 and other military actions by Al-Qaeda and its global affiliates. Her concerns and arguments clearly arise from the many media commentaries of various kinds that she has been asked to give in recognition of her very considerable understanding of Islamic communities, gained through her ethnographic practice of localized Pakistani and Pakistani diaspora ethnographic settings. Yet, she has to her own knowledge, presumably like almost every other anthropologist, never actually met a militant member of such a group as Al-Qaeda, and she asks how and whether her anthropological expertise can actually add more information, indeed as much as a finely grained journalistic account. Anthropologists, Pnina argues, do indeed gather and gain in-depth knowledge of both explicit and implicit knowledge of the world views of their informants and the bounded groups to which they belong, but what happens when such insightful and empathic knowledge is assumed to be transferable to such hidden Islamist groups? “Not a lot” is part of the answer, hence the anthropological blues she has encountered.

Certainly Pnina outlines well how anthropologists can undertake engaged anthropology to give voice to victims’ testimonies, to articulate the worldviews of the perpetrators of violence, to witness testimonies, and to describe the struggle of human rights initiatives in violent domains. Rightly, she acknowledges that such contributions focus on the “aftermath and consequences of terror” rather than on an analysis of Islamic militancy and violent jihadism itself. However, the development and articulation of the “myths and ideologies of the perpetrators of violence” is a work of supreme importance and, arguably, sufficient to justify the media airtime for such competent anthropologists. Militant jihadism is an enigma to most people, especially the deliberate destruction wrought on himself/herself and often innocent others by the suicide bomber or *Shahada*. The articulation of how an angry well-educated second- or third-generation Pakistani militant can convert the anger he or she feels, in common with most of their community, over the militant and hypocritical behavior of the United States and the United Kingdom in their Middle Eastern foreign policy, into the mind-set and practice of a suicide bomber, seems to me to be an eminently and profoundly important contribution. Most people just don’t get it!

“We love death, while you love life” is another difficult-to-grasp concept for the secularist West, which can be historically and culturally contextualized in terms of spiritually inspired altruistic suicide—witness the Christian martyrdom

traditions. Islam is not distinct from the other Abrahamic faiths and indigenous wisdom traditions in its promulgation of hidden worlds and heavens and hells, though their “content” may be ecologically different, albeit invisible.

Pnina also outlines a possible core set of features of global jihadism as being millennial, Manichean, altruistic, and characterized by “infinitely nuanced scholastic distinctions” in their perspectives and rules. Surely such analysis is important and helpful even if the world leaders most engaged in the Iraq war had their ears glued either to their inner deities and/or estimates of Iraqi oil reserves. Anthropologists, like well-informed journalists, can to a degree analyze the outer and inner creative factors leading to militant jihadism through their awareness and study of group and personal constructions of identity, group process, and radicalization. Why and how a jihadist’s allegiance to a transnational Islamic Ummah is stronger than to a nation-state that has educated them is not intrinsically different, perhaps, from how some Christians or even perhaps Rotarians may see themselves.

Journalists, of course, often get to meet militant jihadists, and they often get to outlive them too. Moreover, they often have as much if not more historical and contextual knowledge of the militant groups they write about, compared to anthropologists. Osama bin Laden was reported to say of Robert Fisk, of the United Kingdom *Independent* newspaper, that if people wanted to understand Al-Qaeda, they should read Fisk. Certainly in Fisk’s (2009) recent collection of writings on the Middle East, *The Age of the Warrior*, every page in its way spoke “truth to power” indeed. When I interviewed Rahimullah Yusufzai, BBC journalist in Peshawar in 2005, for his account of the inspirational night dreams of Mullah Omar, founder of the Taliban (referenced in Werbner’s paper; Edgar 2007), I was awed by his close-to-the-ground experience and understanding of the genesis of the Taliban, the worldviews of its members, and his ability to articulate the vitals of such a right-wing revolutionary movement. Power to both the best of anthropology and journalism, I say.

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Anthropologists who speak out publicly on pressing international issues face many challenges, and Werbner’s essay includes useful starting points for discussion. What sorts of “particular anthropological theoretical or analytical insights” can one contribute to an understanding of contemporary crises? Is it possible for an anthropologist whose research is focused locally to speak with authority on cataclysmic global events in an “information-rich, media-saturated” society? How might one communicate effectively with the public without producing “essentialist notions of culture” or becoming “yet another current affairs analyst”?

Though Werbner is mostly skeptical about anthropologists' ability to comment authoritatively on issues of war and peace, she acknowledges that "if fieldwork taught me one thing, it is that there is no essential clash of civilizations between the Muslim world and the West, despite global crises like September 11 and despite attempts by extremists on both sides to construct an epic conflict in these terms." Such basic knowledge underscores the importance of anthropological participation in public forums, for it is still exceedingly rare to hear voices that counter the "clash of civilizations" discourse clogging television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. Even as some anthropologists worry about producing essentialist notions of culture, self-proclaimed "experts"—myopic, ethnocentric, unimaginative—fill the airwaves in the United States and beyond. Should we stand aside while the likes of Bernard Lewis, Thomas Friedman, Dinesh D'Souza, Robert Kaplan, and Samuel Huntington establish themselves as culture experts? We are extraordinarily well positioned to explain to the general public *Why America's Top Pundits Are Wrong* (Besteman and Gusterson 2005).

Werbner seems to view anthropology as a discipline primarily anchored in "small places" and driven methodologically by participant observation. Clearly Malinowski's legacy continues to shape anthropological work, but there are many other approaches that can help anthropologists transcend "small places." Franz Boas's integrative approach (incorporating material culture, language, biology, and culture) contrasts starkly with the reductionism of today's technical current-affairs analysts. The work of Max Gluckman and Eric Wolf, whose methods exposed the dynamics of power in historical terms, gives us a means of articulating small places with sweeping global currents—a perspective that typically is absent in much journalism. And Laura Nader's notion of "studying up, down, and sideways"—by analyzing social problems comparatively at multiple levels and by questioning received assumptions—offers a creative way for anthropologists to confront the challenge of our time: "never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species" (Nader 1969:284).

In short, anthropologists have the potential capacity to speak to broad publics authoritatively because they are generalists, because they understand power, and because they challenge accepted premises and categories. Mahmood Mamdani (2002, 2007), Paul Farmer (2003 radio interview, 2005),⁴¹ Jeff Halper (2008), and Catherine Lutz (2001, 2008 radio interview)⁴² provide us with extraordinary examples of how anthropological perspectives can offer lay audiences fresh insight into contemporary crises. The fact that some people

41. Interviewed by Barbara Bogaev on the radio program *Fresh Air* (produced by WHYY Philadelphia and syndicated by National Public Radio), September 25, 2003, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1446061>.

42. Interviewed by Peter Hart on the radio program *CounterSpin* (produced by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), June 13, 2008, <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3403>.

might describe these scholars as "public intellectuals" or "citizen-scholars" does not diminish the power of anthropological analysis in their work.

Werbner's tentative outline of an "anthropological theory of jihadism" is problematic for several reasons. To begin with, her uncritical acceptance of the terms "jihadism" and "jihadist" echoes the language of policy makers, spy agencies, and commercial mass media. Werbner correctly notes that "anthropologists have been prominent in trying to explode essentialized stereotypes of all Muslims as terrorists," so it is puzzling that she would adopt loaded language that reinforces these stereotypes.

Another problem with Werbner's exploration of militant radicalism is that in her attempt to classify types of jihadist ideologies and organizational structures, her analysis tends to focus primarily upon internal dynamics—as if the genesis and development of these ideas and networks have little to do with Western imperialism (i.e., Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, the United States-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, etc.). It is worth considering Wade Davis's post-September 11 reflections on global "interdependence." He notes that "anthropology . . . suggests more darkly that when peoples and cultures are squeezed, extreme ideologies sometimes emerge, inspired by strange and unexpected beliefs . . . such movements prove deadly both to their adherents and to those they engage" (Davis 2002).

Finally, Werbner's discussion might benefit from a broader, more comparative perspective. For example, would it not be important for an anthropological analysis of Al-Qaeda or the Taliban to consider the possibility that they are "revitalization movements" sharing certain characteristics with the Native American Ghost Dance or Melanesian cargo cults (Mooney 1991; Wallace 1956; Worsley 1957)? What about similarities between the range of contemporary militant religious movements—not only jihadism, but militant evangelical Christianity, militant Zionism, and other comparable movements—on the rise in the twenty-first century? Treating cultures of jihadism or martyrdom as special cases in isolation from the rest of the world tells only part of a much bigger story.

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Pnina Werbner has provided an important essay on the promise and perils of anthropological engagements with terror. The article has Werbner's trademark qualities of subtlety and insight. My remarks will focus on just three of the points she raises.

Werbner observes that our ethnographic mediations "start from the bottom," from the "small places where we do our ordinary, quotidian research." As a result, our methods equip us with an "aura of insider knowledge." But they also impose

limitations when we confront “discourses . . . pervasively global,” such as those of terror networks.

All this seems true enough. At various points in our lives, we cultural anthropologists place ourselves in the thick of field experience, and we privilege those moments because of the intimacies and subjective refigurations they allow. For an anthropology of knowledge concerned with the genesis of our disciplinary practices, however, it is important to add that field insights are the result of a highly decentered process of knowledge formation. Anthropological knowledge is never fully present in the field moment but emerges through a broader process of cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparison. Talal Asad has been the most recent exponent of the idea that rigorous comparison, not ethnography alone, is anthropology’s true analytic core. But the claim was also implicit in Mary Douglas’s group-grid theory, Marxist anthropology, cross-cultural studies of human development, the “Social Studies” approach of the Geertz, and the historical-materialist anthropologies of Julian Steward, Marvin Harris, and Leslie White, to name but a few anthropologies grounded in the broader sweep. In the aftermath of the critiques and deconstructions of ethnography in the 1980s, many anthropologists began to question the possibility of comparison across cultures. However, not only did it not “go away,” ethnography is inarticulate without it. It is now more important than ever.

This leads me to a second point, related to Werbner’s wry reflections on the “anthropological blues” she experienced in the aftermath of September 11. Like her, I was drawn into public scholarship at that time, through media and policy inquiries into “what’s wrong with Islam.” I had a somewhat different experience than Werbner, however, perhaps related to the course of public scholarship on Islam in the United States during the Clinton era.

In 1993, Sam Huntington had launched the first of his several broadsides concerning the clash of civilizations. The Muslim world had the most violent borders in his troubled civilizational imaginary. The argument was not simply academic. Over his career, Huntington had trained dozens of U.S. State Department and intelligence officers. If taken seriously, his views had dire implications for Western governments’ engagement with Muslims.

Although in the early 1990s I had begun to conduct annual research in Indonesia on Muslim democrats and their radical Islamist rivals, I had not done writing of a public anthropological sort. But I and many other anthropologists with views of Islam different from Huntington’s were pressed into that task after the Harvard professor’s pronouncements. Our engagement intensified after 9/11. Publications and think tank exchanges left me with the impression not of a dearth of public anthropologists able to speak with authority but of an embarrassment of anthropological riches. Needless to say, U.S. policy was not massively redirected by this public scholarship, not least with regards to Iraq. Nonetheless, this work had a significant impact on media and U.S. government engagements with Islam.

This brings me to a third and final point, specifically as regards terror. In the aftermath of the Bali bombings of October 2002, in which some 200 people died, I conducted a series of interviews with a few dozen radical Islamists, including one known to have had ties to the men who carried out the Bali killings. I knew this man before the bombings and respected him. In the late 1980s, he had been tortured for his views, and he bore himself with great dignity. His comment in response to the loss of life in Bali nonetheless surprised me: “Those Western tourists were all going to hell anyway, so there’s no point in faulting the bombers.”

In the retrospect of our many conversations, my affection for this man has not diminished. But neither has my disquiet with his justification of mass killing. My own grappling with the ethical and epistemological issues posed by terrorism, then, ends in a somewhat different place than that Werbner so movingly describes. What is awful about terrorism is not just that it is pervasively global but that it can be rationalized down to ethical normalcy or, worse yet, the banal. Understanding how this comes to be remains a challenge. But, like Werbner, I believe we can get a better grasp on the problem by pushing forward toward more self-conscious juxtapositions of the local in the global.

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Werbner discusses how the pressures for anthropological relevance to large issues of public concern pushes anthropologists outside the domains of their knowledge and expertise. She says that their typical involvement with the local and the intricacies of everyday practice ill equips them to comment on major cataclysmic events such as 9/11. Journalists are better capable, for their profession drives them towards the necessary insider knowledge and the preparedness to take dangerous risks.

The microwork of the anthropologist, a gaze too often diverted from the larger scene (I am uncomfortable with the micro/macro implication of Werbner’s definition of anthropological practice), does not rule out an ability to unravel forces underlying events of global impact, as exemplified by Werbner herself. Anthropology can indeed reveal the dynamics giving rise to and extending from events that catch the public eye (see Sahlins 2005). For anthropologists, hidden dynamics leading to the disastrous happening of 9/11 are of less interest than its social and cultural construction as an event. The 9/11 happening is not an event in an anthropological sense. Rather it is a happening that *becomes* an event through its ongoing sociopolitical construction and gathering posthappening significance. This is of the greatest import for populations worldwide in relation to which anthropologists are well positioned. It was the Bush administration reaction—

the way it defined the significance of the Twin Towers' destruction—that was one element, among a diversity of other responses, transmuting a happening into an event of perhaps irreversible consequence. Such processes of event construction are part and parcel of anthropological work. Their concern with the local and the micro facilitates this, although Werbner's suggestion that this is the key defining character of anthropology could be challenged. It leaves out the important contribution of ethnographically grounded theoretical insight that anthropologists have built over the generations.

Anthropologists can descriptively and analytically go well beyond the kinds of insights offered by journalists. They are not bound by journalistic constraints involving consumerism, newsworthiness, and an immediately digestible appeal to commonsense. Anthropology is professionally oriented to a discourse of suspicion and is given to exposing the prejudicial and the easy stereotype.

My commitment, as many anthropologists, is to an anthropology that is thoroughly and uncompromisingly critical, often of the taken-for-granted status quo. Anthropological ethnography contributed to an overcoming, I think, of a tension in all academic knowledge practices to serve the interests of the humanity-destroying potential of power (including its motivating philosophies). Anthropology is often self-marginalizing as a function of its fieldwork method and critically so, as Werbner suggests in Asad's retreat from certain aspects of his anthropology-as-colonialism critique.

However, anthropology as an instrument of oppressive power is possibly more relevant today than ever. The idea of public anthropology demands deconstruction. In practice, this often seems to mean that anthropology should be useful to those who command political and economic interests and who define the public good. As Werbner notes, we are in an era of the embedded ethnographer. An Australian adviser to the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, David Kilcullen—trained in anthropology and political science (by the American Carl Thayer in Canberra)—is one such. The role of anthropological consultants in Timor (Chomsky's Canberra "New Mandarins") during the Suharto regime is another case in point. Among Australian anthropologists, largely in Canberra and ANU, a major debate on the Internet is under way regarding what anthropologists might do about the plight of aborigines. Remarkably colonialist and paternalist (evident in the very questions being posed), the protagonists display a "balanced" socially responsible mood often oblivious to racial and state oppression in which they are perhaps continuing unconscious agents, as some of their critics are pointing out (see Australian Anthropological Society Network). A high proportion of academic and independent Australian anthropologists are involved in paid and compromising consultancy to government and corporate interest regarding aborigines. In bed with the powerful, their critique is muffled.

Anthropology and its critical potential have encountered crises before, as during Vietnam, but the risk for anthropology

is greater now. One reason is definitely the widespread changes of state orders (see Kapferer 2005 for a discussion of the corporate state) and the situation of universities within them. Within the haven of the university, anthropologists had relative intellectual protection and were able to issue critiques of practical matters affecting the populations among whom they worked without the risk of having funding and other support for their research withdrawn. The continuation of the anthropological project of critical ethnographic enquiry is contingent on cries for relevance outside the proven knowledge-value of anthropology in itself. If funding is dependent on criteria defined by political and economic interests of corporate business and state policy, the idea of anthropology is under threat. In the neoliberal circumstances of the contemporary university, the economics of research is dependent increasingly on anthropological service to pragmatic business and government interest. Anthropologists in the concern for department and university economic survival are being driven to frame grant applications in terms of such epithets of relevance as suffering, poverty, human rights, citizenship, ecology, technology, and so on that frequently mask their cooptation into a dialectic of control and power in which valuable anthropological critical capacity may be muted.

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Pnina Werbner raises numerous questions of critical relevance to our subject, especially that of our relationship with journalists. She also discusses the importance of engaged, "public" anthropology; why we should continue to study the local; the ethics of the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and why anthropologists must "speak out."

Werbner asks whether we can "rely on journalistic accounts to supplement our knowledge of small places," while noting that "'news' as reported by journalists and foreign correspondents has been the dominant source of information for most public intellectuals including anthropologists in their commentaries on 9/11 and its aftermath." It is precisely this reliance on the news that has made so many "intellectual" analyses of the post 9/11 situation deeply flawed. Bush's post-9/11 global war on terror (GWOT) was largely an "information war," waged as much against the American people as "the enemy." Some 80% of media reports leading up to the Iraq war were mis- or disinformation. In the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Defence engaged a private firm to assess how successful the embedding of some 700 journalists with coalition forces had worked to manipulate coverage of the Iraq war. According to the results of the exercise, "analysis of the print output . . . produced during the combat phase show[ed] that 90% of embedded correspondents' reporting was either

positive or neutral" (Miller 2003; U.K. Ministry of Defence 2003). In the United States, the government gave contracts worth millions of dollars to private contractors, such as the Lincoln and Rendon Groups, to plant, fabricate, or buy news stories favorable to U.S. interests in what was nothing less than a secret propaganda war. In 2005, the Lincoln Group admitted to having planted more than 1,000 articles in the Iraqi and Arab press. The Rendon Group is still hard at it, screening journalists seeking to accompany U.S. forces in Afghanistan. As Henry Giroux (2009) remarked of the Bush administration, "when the government wasn't lying to promote dangerous policies, it willfully produced and circulated fake news reports in order to provide the illusion that the lies and the policies that flowed from them were supported by selective members of the media and the larger public." In my own field, all but some 100 of an estimated 6,000 articles and reports on the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel are based on disinformation. Such disinformation is not restricted to journalism; it has spread like a contagion into academe.

Journalists might argue that they are not party to this "information war," that it is the work of government, their media bosses, and the likes of the Lincoln and Rendon Groups. Nevertheless, it is the sloppy "cut-and-paste" culture of contemporary journalism (and much of academe) and the failure to check the facts that enables such disinformation, once placed in the system, to run and run.

The above remarks take me to both the importance of engaged (and "public") anthropology, especially in the context of studies of national crises that are or have been the subject of intense media focus, and Werbner's question of why we should continue to study the local. Anthropologists, she says, have a unique capacity to comment on the aftermath and consequences of terror through intimate ethnographic work on such things as the memory of violence and the politics of memory; the myths and ideologies of the perpetrators of violence; bearing witness and the study of truth commissions and human rights organizations. Our work in these areas is critical in helping to defeat the "lie" that is so often, for the reason outlined above, the prevailing (usually Western) explication of such situations and events. Our ability to study what Werbner calls "the long or medium *durée*," often in places where other anthropologists, let alone journalists, have not set foot, not only enables us but obligates us to "bear witness." We may be one voice against an empire, but it is likely, in the long run, to be the one that counts. And, as Werbner emphasizes, as the Islamic crisis becomes "the long *durée*," it is anthropologists more than journalists or other social scientists who can give the "true" accounts of the impact of the so-called GWOT on the stigmatization of Muslims.

Werbner's reference to the scandal of the ESRC's abrogation of its own ethical standards raises a number of awkward questions. Under pressure from the U.K. government, the ESRC ignored the advice of the anthropological community and, in an act of hubris, dished out more than £2 million to improperly peer-reviewed projects. Given that some of these had all the

appearance of slush funding and inadequate scholarship, there is the question of whether their final reports will be subjected to proper peer review or simply swept under the carpet.

Do anthropologists, as Werbner asks, have a duty to "speak out" on public affairs that affect the communities they have studied? The answer is most emphatically yes. Anthropologists are often the only outside witnesses to appalling events and situations. In a world in which truth, to borrow Giroux's words, "is not merely misrepresented or falsified, but overtly mocked," it is our task as anthropologists and writers, and as Solzhenitsyn (1973) directed us, "to defeat the lie."

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It is interesting that Pnina Werbner raises the difficulties of providing something approaching an anthropological comment on topical political events. She has, of course, done just that over recent years with comments on various aspects of Pakistani migrant integration (or not) within a pluralist British context (see, e.g., Werbner 2002*b*). I have always respected and enjoyed her comments on these and other timely matters and did not imagine that she saw any real problem in expressing views that were more akin to editorial comment than scholarly analysis. It is useful to see that it is not the expression of bias or personal opinion that gives her pause but rather, in true academic style, the lack of credible evidence upon which that bias is formed. In those cases where she has commented, she has done so from a solid base (be it issues of marriage arrangements, attitudes towards British multiculturalism, or immigration law). I applaud this contribution, though I fear that the problem may lay precisely in this issue of credible expertise, which most anthropologists lack. What most anthropologists can say is largely unfit for the questions being asked in the sorts of circumstances Werbner describes here. Unless we set out to produce data that is relevant to such questions, the sorts of topics we can clarify are not linked to extraordinary events of atypical behaviors. Consequently, I do not feel any obligation to comment, as an anthropologist, on most of the public affairs that affect the communities in which I have worked. I provide the sort of background contextual analysis of situations which might be of use. I have provided expert opinions in legal cases where I have been asked to comment on some aspect of Pakistani culture that is being cited by the defense or the prosecution as a significant factor in the decision making of the defendant, but I have no knowledge of the defendant's guilt or innocence. My public engagement is therefore entirely detached from the affected people. It is not my anthropological opinion in those specific cases that is needed but rather my anthropological analysis of evidence that I know to be true and that may bear some similarity to the evidence in those cases. In other words, an-

thropology does not confer any magical properties on any of us when we go outside our areas of expertise.

It does not follow, however, that anthropologists can never be useful analysts in circumstances where we cannot carry out the usual research methods. Pnina Werbner may or may not have met anyone who was intent on carrying out political violence (under the umbrella of Islam or any other belief system), but I am sure that she could have known about such people had she so desired. The recent work of Scott Atran on jihadi groups does engage with the very short-term schedules required by journalism (or nearly) and manages to generate useful analyses on the social organization and communication networks of men engaged in political violence classified as terrorism (see Atran 2008 for the transcript of his testimony before the U.S. Congress). Atran has done an interesting job of combining data production methods that most anthropologists would find dissatisfying, to say the least (interviewing jihadis in prisons among other things), with theoretical and analytical tools that are part of the diverse stock in trade of anthropologists. His insights are timely and useful and delivered with none of the critical self-reflection present in Werbner's very well-written and admirable piece. To some extent, this merely illustrates Werbner's point. We are constrained from producing data in many, though not all, of our usual ways (hanging out and taking an active part in the important activities of our informants/friends), however, we are still able to analyze whatever data is on offer in our usual ways. For anthropologists who have little to no experience in doing more than treating ethnography as a form of literary criticism, it may be that they have nothing to contribute to the debates on such public events. But there are those who have a slightly more performant battery of analytical tools, and while I continue to share Werbner's general concern about such anthropological engagement, I nevertheless accept that it can be convincingly anthropological.

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Pnina Werbner has written a thoughtful and provocative reflection on what it means to be an anthropological expert in troubled times. What stands out above all in this piece is Werbner's sensible refusal to claim special insights into processes that she herself finds difficult to understand. Werbner's claims to expertise are grounded in years of work with a small group of British Muslims in South Manchester. Like other British Muslims since the 9/11 attacks and the July 2005 London bombings, they have been the subject of all manner of scrutiny from the media, from politicians, from the intelligence services, and, presumably, from their neighbors in South Manchester. Meanwhile, the official sponsors of much

anthropological research in Britain have tried to "sell" social scientists to government as useful sources of insight into a mysterious process they choose to call "radicalization."

I can offer two comments, each based on firsthand experience of issues touched on in Werbner's piece. During the first 6 months of 2009, as the 30-year civil war in Sri Lanka built to its final dreadful conclusion, I was called quite frequently by journalists looking for a quick quote on the situation that was developing in the north of the country. The government had long since denied local and foreign journalists access to the war zone, and both sides tried to milk the situation for propaganda purposes. The government presented itself as authors of a "humanitarian intervention" to liberate civilian "hostages" from their "terrorist" captors. Tamil secessionists, and especially their supporters in the extensive Tamil diaspora in Europe, Australia, and North America, described what was happening as "genocide." Much of the time the most useful comment I could offer was a simple warning that whatever was actually happening in the north, it was almost certainly *not* what was being claimed by the propagandists on both sides. Now that the dust is settling, like many others concerned with the situation there, I spend my time piecing together partial truths about what has happened by triangulating across the best journalists' Web sites, like the excellent Groundviews, run from Colombo, Sri Lanka, or the equally valuable TransCurrents that operates from Toronto.⁴³ If I want the best-quality information on a particular event—such as who really murdered the 17 aid workers killed in the town of Muttur in 2006—I go to the extraordinary work of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), which is also available on the Web.⁴⁴ Yet the fastidious work of an organization like University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) goes completely unmentioned in recent high-profile anthropological work on the war (e.g., Trawick 2007). Some anthropologists working in Sri Lanka have indeed presented themselves, in Werbner's words, as the "lone voice documenting . . . events for a wider audience." But almost all such recent work, in my experience, is less accurate, and much less carefully researched and presented, than the best efforts of local journalists and human rights activists. Against this background, I find the call for disciplinary humility refreshing and necessary.

My other observation concerns the controversy about the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)'s ill-fated joint project with the U.K. Foreign Office on "Combating Radicalisation." In the last 10 years in Britain and across Europe, there has been a wave of genuinely excellent research by anthropologists and others on the extraordinary waves of change, reform, and counter-reform in patterns of local Islam. Much of this work challenges stereotypes and forces the reader to take a complex and more nuanced view, both of Islamic reform and of the political movements labeled as "Islamist"

43. <http://www.groundviews.org>; <http://www.transcurrents.com>.

44. <http://www.uthr.org/>.

(as well as Werbner's own earlier work; see, e.g., Ahmad 2009; Marsden 2005; Osella and Osella 2008; Simpson and Kresse 2008; Soares and Osella 2009). From my own semi-insider role in the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) process, two things are clear. This was what not the kind of evidence the sponsors of the program were looking for. As the original program specification made clear, the policy-makers "knew" what the problem was and they "knew" quite a lot about how and where it could be found; what they needed researchers for was simply, as it were, to provide the names and addresses of the usual Islamist suspects. And although the program has indeed run and apparently has been deemed a great success by its paymasters, the researchers who know most about the topics under investigation have kept well clear; in the commissioning process, the ESRC had to turn to nonacademic research bodies for key studies of Europe and South Asia, while the best academic researchers were quietly boycotting the whole thing. Again, sometimes disengagement is the dignified ethical stance.

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Pnina Werbner raises a number of interesting questions in her article while failing to give clear answers to them or to suggest a promising framework in which we might address them. The main question seems to be how ethnography of the quotidian in particular field sites may help us to understand global terrorism. Before we can answer that question, we need to address a preliminary question, namely, how anthropologists should deal with the demands from the state and from the public to comment or do research on issues of national security. These are, in my view, perennial questions from the beginning of the modern study of society. Let me give one early example. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) was paid by the Dutch Ministry of the Colonies to go to Arabia and find out about pilgrims from Aceh in Mecca. He stayed in Mecca in 1884–1885 and came in close touch with these pilgrims. In 1891–1892 Snouck stayed in Aceh as an advisor of the colonial government. His analysis of local society was used in 1898 in the bloodiest military expedition of the Dutch in the Indies, the war in Aceh that left 60,000 to 70,000 dead in a population of about 500,000. Snouck's work was excellent in scholarly terms and has been used until today in anthropological work on Aceh, but it is also a good example of what we would call today "counterterrorism," especially since "Pan-Islamism," the term used in the colonial period, looks so much like "global Islamic militancy" today. Other, more recent examples would be Ruth Benedict's work on Japanese culture in World War II, Project Camelot in the 1960s, and the current attempts to use anthropology for the Human Terrain System, a form of intel-

ligence gathering for military purposes (see González 2009). Is September 11, 2001, such a watershed that this longer history cannot inform us? I think this is only the case if one does not only do anthropology "at home" but also firmly locates oneself "at home" in the West. The perception of "global terror" is quite different from place to place and therefore also the perception of the role of social science is quite different if one's home is not that of the Home Office (van der Veer and Munshi 2004). The question today, as in the past, is how much anthropologists should become an instrument of state policy, and in Britain, anthropologists have given a clear answer to that question. Werbner discusses the British debate but does not make her own position clear. Her problem is not so much whether anthropology should be used by the state but rather how valid anthropological knowledge is for understanding global terrorism. She doubts that validity in terms of what I would call counterinsurgency, but what she does not mention is the importance of anthropology as an intellectual pursuit for the theoretical understanding of secrecy in relation to what is public and what is publicity. Anthropologists have been working on secret societies, on public spheres, and on media and mediation, and it seems to me that this kind of theoretical work is important for our understanding of how global businesses work, how the global financial market works, and how global terrorism works (Devji 2005). This is not precisely counterinsurgency but a valid contribution of our knowledge of today's world. Finally, anthropologists have to respond to the demand of the public to be informed about the world. Given the nature of media-scapes this is not an easy task, but it is unavoidable. However, besides participating in public debate on the basis of one's general knowledge about religion or Islam, for instance (which is different from special knowledge about specific terrorists and so on), one also has the task to analyze the nature of public debate and the relation between public opinion and state policy. It is thus perhaps more important "at home" to study the ways in which the media construct debates by giving some people a voice while denying it to others (van der Veer 2006). By emphasizing the Weberian analysis of charisma, one may fail to understand the production of images and the nature of mediation.

Reply

These are very troubled, anxious times for Pakistanis at home and abroad. The war in Afghanistan has spilled over into Pakistani cities, into the very heart of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore, and into the North-West Frontier Province, with almost daily suicide bombings in Peshawar. As I write, a full-scale civil war is being waged, moving from Swat to South Waziristan. Soldiers and civilians are killed daily, and hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced and are

living in makeshift camps. My more fortunate Pakistani friends in Lahore and Islamabad have travelled on philanthropic missions to Swat with food, clothing, and bedding and to offer medical care for the displaced. Kohat, the garrison town located nearby the Sufi lodge I studied, Ghamkol Sharif, was recently the site of a suicide bombing. It seems quite possible that the *urs* festival will not be held at the lodge this year.

For the past 20 years since the Rushdie affair broke out, Pakistanis in the diaspora have had to live, at least in their political imaginaries, global lives. Since 9/11 their sense of being under surveillance has intensified, along with the antagonism felt for the West, despite the fact that many have prospered economically. In Pakistan there may not have been one single cataclysmic event, as van der Veer comments rightly, but regional conflicts, military rule, endemic violence, struggles for democracy, and most recently, the rise of the Pakistani Taliban, have left the population deeply troubled. Conspiracy theories abound, and lack of trust typifies much of public life.

I mention this background in advance of my detailed response because it seems to me that as an anthropologist, one can no longer write about the daily lives of Pakistani subjects or their religious ideas and organizations without addressing participants' experiences as they respond to these conflicts. Yet this is precisely what two recent anthropological collections on politics and Islam in South Asia and the Muslim world achieve. With a brief nod to 9/11 in their introductions, the articles in the two special issues, though excellent in their detailed scholarship as Spencer points out (see Osella and Osella 2008; Soares and Osella 2009), nevertheless convey the sense that anthropologists are living in a bubble in which geopolitical conflicts do not register or even exist.

We are faced with a disjunction between public anthropologists who comment on global crises such as 9/11 or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, often without any reference to contemporary scholarship about the Muslim societies most affected (in some cases recent anthropological research is simply absent, as in Iraq under Saddam Hussein), and anthropologists who fail to convey in their studies the urgency of local people's voices as they struggle to understand the conflicts swirling around them. Instead, an analysis of Muslim reform movements or customary veiling and piety seem to substitute obliquely for direct engagement.

Thinking about what I can say in reply to the thoughtful and, may I say, gentle responses of the *CA* commentators to my paper, it seems evident, then, that I should start by recognizing that public anthropology at this historical moment is not just an option—it is an imperative for anyone claiming to study the people of this troubled region and its scattered diaspora. And it is to the great merit of all the *CA* respondents to my article that in their own work as anthropologists and ethnographers, they have attempted to speak to the times—whether of terror, extreme nationalism, religious zealotry, or Islamophobia. Perhaps—though this goes against the central

message of my paper—it needs to be admitted that sometimes one has to speak out on current events despite doubts about one's capacity to fully command the whole field and complex facts at stake.

My paper has considered the methodological and ethical disjunctions inherent in writing about Pakistanis at a time of terror: first, the disjunction between social formations studied at one point in time and events taking place at another point in time; second, between socialities studied in one place and events taking place in another; and finally, the disjunctions between the seen and the unseen, the ordinary and the extraordinary. These untheorized leaps in time and space, which allow us to comment on current affairs, involve an intellectual act of generalization underpinned by essentialist assumptions about continuity. To bridge the time/space gap, public anthropologists of the current global crisis must rely on the media for basic facts about the here and now. Both these gestures—of generalization from scholarship at another time and place and heavy reliance on the media—were evident in a 2008 American Anthropological Association panel debating the war in Iraq. With the exception of William Beeman, one of the *CA* respondents here, none of the other speakers were regional experts, and the data on contemporary Iraqi society was notable by its absence; in its place were demographic realities mapped in nineteenth-century colonial Iraq and dubious figures about casualties. Much of the immediate response to 9/11—and not only by anthropologists—reflected the same sort of disjunctions in time and space and the same absence of reference to directly relevant expert regional anthropological knowledge. It is as though when it comes to the current confrontation with Muslim societies, anthropological research is deemed irrelevant even to public anthropologists themselves. In Talal Asad's book on suicide, there is one minor reference to an anthropologist (Mary Douglas), and this is not untypical.

For the remainder of this reply, I want to respond briefly to the specific comments on my paper. I begin with Masooda Banu who argues, generously, that Islamic terror within Muslim societies can be understood by drawing on anthropological field notes from a multitude of small places in order to explain the "forces leading to popularization of radical views" and the social segments most likely to respond to the call of radical groups. There is, however, an unspoken disjunction in this reading: the discourses of many different—and opposed—diasporic Pakistani groups, I found, all share a rather similar radical and, on the surface, shockingly incendiary language. Over time, however, I came to realize that such emotionally charged oratory *substituted* for action (P. Werbner 2004). Radical rhetoric and political views, in other words, in no way explains the move from emotion to action—which is precisely what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Economic and Social Research Council want to understand. My research certainly did not lead me to anticipate the involvement of young diaspora Pakistanis in suicide bombing plots.

Peter van der Veer suggests in this regard that perhaps the real need is to study secrecy. Against that, Hefner's encounter with an Indonesian Islamist indicates that Muslims are not afraid to speak truth to power. This outspokenness has been true in Britain, at least until the passing of a recent law on incitement to religious hatred. Both local and national British Muslim leaders do not hide behind a mask of secrecy. Their open condemnation of the West is what makes fear of Muslims, Islamophobia, qualitatively different from anti-Semitism or antiblack racism (see Werbner 2005a). Of course, Pakistanis who engage in illegal activities (tax avoidance and other white collar or petty criminal activities) are as secretive as any other Briton, but when it comes to political opinions, Pakistanis are not afraid to speak out. Some will express their views to interlocutors like Maqsooda Banu, who they believe can publicize them, but this is certainly not true when it comes to anthropologists like myself who have little access to the public media and who study more informal, less controlled settings.

In this regard, Hefner's encounter with his Islamist friend is instructive in another way as well: it highlights the element of surprise, the unexpected, that makes fieldwork qualitatively different from armchair anthropology. His friend responded to the Bali bombings cynically with the words "those Western tourists were all going to hell anyway," but this apparently unfeeling response raises several significant questions. Were his comments to be taken literally, at face value? Do they point to the tragic ambivalence of the Islamist struggle? Or do they merely reflect a desire to shock an insider/outsider? As with the wink immortalized by Geertz, following Alfred Schuts, only intimate knowledge can tell what such statements are meant to convey.

I agree that there is great strength in comparative anthropology. Who would deny the monumental achievements of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marcel Mauss, or of more recent scholars such as Marilyn Strathern and Marshall Sahlins? Indeed, I was myself surprised in writing and rewriting this article at how much of value could be gleaned by looking comparatively at different studies of Islamism (returning to Bano's point). But what saddens me about most commentaries post-9/11 is how little in fact they draw on anthropological fieldwork in their attempts to analyze such global confrontations critically in public. I do agree with Hefner and others that it is imperative to speak out against Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, popularized in the media and among political leaders. The challenge nevertheless must be that of not sounding merely apologist but recognizing that Muslims in the diaspora and Pakistan are often passionately hostile to Western policies in the Middle East and the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, that most do not believe that 9/11 was the work of Muslims, and that most do not regard the Taliban as a terrifying threat but, rather, the invention of the United States or India. This is not to construct an orientalist image—conspiracy theories proliferate not only in Pakistan but in the United States too (Fenster 1999; Knight 2000; Parish and Martin 2001). Muslims have a right to protest publicly against national policies

they perceive to be unjust or dangerous. Their concerns are legitimate, founded on their own positioned understanding of events, right or wrong.

I think it is perfectly legitimate to argue, with Kapferer, Hefner, Beeman, Keenan, and González, that anthropologists must take a critical view of media constructions of events such as 9/11. This is okay as long as critics make clear the grounds from which they speak. If they write as concerned citizens against the American "Leviathan" on the pages of anthropological journals, they do not inevitably speak as *anthropological* experts. If they write for the public press, they may be speaking as informed orientalists, not firsthand anthropological observers, though close familiarity based on earlier research can certainly sensitize anthropologists to glaring distortions in media representations. Public anthropologists must take care not to cheapen the distinctive anthropological cache of intimate, beneath-the-surface knowledge by claiming the aura of an expert—especially when anthropological knowledge is evidently lacking and when they are treading into a veritable ocean of expert opinion.

What constitutes expert knowledge, and how does it contribute to our capacity as anthropologists to comment on the conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia? I agree with Bowen and González that we need to be meticulous in the terminology we use. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, for example, may be "jihadist" without espousing personal martyrdom. I know, however, from the personal experience of Keele colleagues and students, that the group does not welcome researchers and puts itself beyond the state and mainstream Muslim diaspora, refusing, for example, to join antiwar demonstrations in Britain. Attran and Sageman's argument that those seeking martyrdom are just a bunch of guys recruited through friendship and kinship networks is very instructive, complementing post facto identikit studies of suicide bombers. But their studies raise the question of whether such cliques of conspirators can best be understood in terms of "culture," broadly speaking, rather than "youth culture," "deviance," or idiosyncratic personal circumstances? Could we learn more about them, for example, by studying the Red Brigades than the "culture" of diasporic Pakistanis? It seems to me that too much evidence has emerged by now of youngsters' active recruitment by more mature actors and their attendance at Pakistani training camps for this to be true in any simple way. But the further question remains: are these findings about recruitment patterns relevant, and in what sense, to public anthropologists' capacity to challenge Islamophobic stereotypes?

I have to accept, because all the American respondents to my article stress this, that American journalism has demonized Muslims more stridently and allowed more media space to propagandist supporters of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than the British broadsheet press and media have, though the American media have also sought out the voices of moderate Muslim leaders and spokespersons (Leonard 2003:23–24). There also appear to have been fewer home-grown conspiracies by American-born young Muslims than

in Britain. In so far as the United Kingdom is concerned, I do not accept the simplistic claim of many scholars, including anthropologists, that the press has been biased against Muslims in any straightforward way, though it is true that they have claimed the right to investigate the rhetoric within mosques and the ideologies of some organizations. My own reading of the British press tends to confirm Iain Edgar's view of the excellence of much reporting by Middle East and South Asian journalists, both indigenous and foreign, who are far better placed than anthropologists to gain access to the facts on the ground. How one uses this material remains the question. Edgar's own study of Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders' dreams is one of the most original, truly anthropological contributions to the understanding of these movements.

González cites the outspokenness of Max Gluckman and Eric Wolf, representatives of a previous generation of anthropologists, who criticized colonialism and imperialism, as well as contemporary anthropologists Jeff Halper, Paul Farmer, and Catherine Lutz. With the exception of Mamdani, who in an article in the *London Review of Books* unforgivably exonerates Robert Mugabe and his murderous regime, I have nothing but admiration for the courageous activism of many anthropologists who, in different parts of the world, represent the suffering of ordinary people. Jeff Halper, for example, undoubtedly speaks out as an activist, a public intellectual, and an anthropologist on the basis of intimate knowledge of human rights violations and Palestinian persecution under Israeli occupation.

There is also little doubt that, in a repeat of the Great Game, American, Soviet, Saudi, and Iranian interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with the struggle with India over Kashmir and the ruthlessness, mendacity, and irresponsibility of postcolonial elites, have combined to bring about the emergence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. This is not a simple instance of an Islamic revivalist movement of the type arising periodically in the Muslim world, described for North Africa by Gellner and Geertz following Ibn Khaldoun. These new Islamic movements have been seeded by global forces and international money. At the geopolitical level the facts are known, and I have often heard them recited not only by regional scholars but by local Pakistanis at home and in the diaspora who blame the United States, the Saudis, the Russians, the Iranians, the Israelis, the Indians, the British (particularly for Kashmir), and their own political leaders for their current predicaments. What to do about it and how anthropologists are to represent these conflicts to Western audiences nevertheless remains problematic, especially since we are rarely experts on the Occident, the stamping ground of other disciplines.

Keenan and Lyon both study local-level politics. In Keenan's case, this has produced revelations about American conspiracy that affect the Tuareg, the people he has studied for many decades. He is the kind of public anthropologist who speaks from personal knowledge. Recent media revelations about American and British extraordinary renditions

and complicity in torture point to a world of hidden conspiracies. Lyon's study of village Punjabi politics (Lyon 2004), like other recent monographs on Pakistan, highlights the important fact that most of the time local-level leaders try to avoid real violence even while violence remains a threatened option. It is certainly worth reflecting on such studies in the light of the outbreak of widespread violence and civil war in Pakistan.

We need, as van der Veer points out, to be aware of the repercussions of the knowledge we gather and whether it is open to abuse. Nevertheless, as Spencer points out, much fine-grained anthropological knowledge is of little use to the British government concerned to manage events in South Asia and the diaspora. The problem often faced by public anthropologists like Keenan, however, is the opposite one: how to call attention and convince the world of the victimization of ordinary people where access has *not* been denied to the anthropologist, as it is in Sri Lanka or Iraq during the present troubles, or where anthropologists are *not* perceived as dangerous outsiders, as in some parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. When access is denied, it is evident that local human rights groups—and local journalists—are often far better placed to gather information about such atrocities. We as anthropologists must learn to respect these sources of knowledge. But above all, we must keep reminding ourselves that judging between media-sourced findings is not our area of expertise and that the knowledge it produces differs from the intimate knowledge gained through close ethnographic research. A postgraduate Danish-Pakistani student of mine currently researching the madrassa of women supporters of the Red Mosque movement in Islamabad was shocked, for example, by an article on the Red Mosque published in *Public Culture* by a recognized South Asianist. I bring this as an example to point in conclusion once again to the disjunctions of time, space, and knowledge outlined in this article. In the absence of primary research, only careful and systemic scrutiny of all the relevant sources, an exercise ironically often achievable only after the crisis has passed, can justify in my view our public interventions as anthropological experts in a saturated field of opinion makers.

—Pnina Werbner

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