International Journal of Modern Anthropology
Int. J. Mod. Anthrop. (2014) 7: 85 - 98
Available online at: www.ata.org.tn ; doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijma.v1i7.4

Research Report

Spies like us? Respondent perceptions of research sponsors in 20 African Countries

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Abstract - A continuing debate has been the roles and responsibilities of anthropologists acting as fieldworkers concerning espionage and covert research. As Ratha (2013) indicated, the ethical foundations of scientific anthropology are the basis upon which fieldworkers develop a genuine and committed empathy for the people they study. Fieldworkers are therefore obliged to help, not harm those they study. Those who would use anthropologists as spies are seen to act contrary to the cannons of scientific and or academic research. As more and more anthropologists find employment in government and the corporate world, the lines between academia and legitimate applied research become blurred. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the most important question has been totally neglected in this polemic. This paper argues that the real question is "do respondents think fieldworkers are possible spies?' To preview the findings, based on the responses of 27,713 persons in 20 African countries, the answer to that question is that few respondents thought fieldworkers were sent by intelligence or secret service agencies. Only 82 respondents thought that an intelligence agency had sent the fieldworker. The paper profiles those respondents who did think an intelligence agency sent the fieldworker/interviewer to their homes, and explores the factors that appear to distinguish them from other respondents. The significant factors were; the respondent's educational level; whether the respondent checked with others during the interview; the respondent's ease during the interview, whether the interviewer felt threatened, and whether others influenced the respondent.

***Key words*:** Afrobarometer, fieldwork, spy, research sponsor

Introduction

This paper is about the various roles in fieldwork, which substantively is about collecting data or information in one's own society or other societies. Fieldwork is described as a scholarly activity that can include observation, conducting intensive interviews, reviewing available documents, and recording the observable structure of social settings (Schensul 1980). The landmark event for our purposes here occurred in 1919 when Franz Boas published a letter in The Nation entitled "Scientists as spies". As Price (2000) indicated, Boas, the father of American academic anthropology, charged that four un-named American Anthropologists had conducted espionage in Central America during World War I. Boas was censured by the American Anthropological Association (AAA), and that action was the center of debate for the next ninety years. Subsequent releases of information bolstered Boas' claim. Price reported on information received through the Freedom of Information Act. He indicated that not only was it confirmed that the four subsequently identified anthropologists were acting as spies; so were such notables as Ruth Benedict, Gregory Bateson, Clyde Kluckhohn and Margaret Mead.

As Price (2000) suggested, many in the academic world are frustrated because the AAA never made a decision which prohibited or penalized anthropologists for conducting secretive governmental research. The censure of Boas was the center of debate for the years after 1920, and the world has changed over the last ninety plus years. Now the swing has turned in favor of governmental research, with more and more anthropologists, and other social scientists accepting employment in governmental agencies as well as corporations. Intelligence agencies actively recruit anthropologists (CIA 2007). Moos (2005) suggested that the days are gone when compartmentalization between the academe, the military and the intelligence community was useful or desirable. He called for a new relationship among and between academe, the military and the intelligence community, one that should be legitimated by an invigorated effective network of cooperation; Moos indicated a real dialog is needed between these different cultures.

The recruitment program referenced above is called PRISP (Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program) and is a central concern to American as well as non-American academics. As Fardon (2005), the outgoing Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists, suggested, the covert placement of intelligence agency trainees in Anthropology programs has implications for those not working in the US. His concern is that professional associations are committed to dissemination of research undertaken transparently, a commitment tempered by the protection of research subjects. Similar concerns are expressed by Americans. Gusterson (2005) raised issues about academic openness, and indicated that he thinks that anthropologists who heed (Moos's 2005) call for effective cooperation will find themselves in conflict with AAA's ethics code, which states that researchers must be open about the purpose, potential impacts and sources of support for research projects. The Code also states that researchers must do all in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people they study.

Gusterson (2005) indicated that anthropologists are a left leaning community, and it might be of benefit from the infusion of more conservative voices. However, he sees that as different from the development of covert institutional ties to the intelligence community, which he also sees as in conflict with informed consent. This arrangement, would in turn, cast suspicion on all anthropologists whether they work for an intelligence agency or not.

Professional Rewards, Access and Danger in Fieldwork.

Besides protecting the subjects of field work, there are four interesting lines of inquiry in the literature that are of interest to this paper. One holds large scale funding, especially connected to large scale social service ventures, furthering the career development of various classes of professionals but provides only meager benefits to disadvantaged groups (Cloward and Piven 1974). A second is concerned with the trials and tribulations of fieldworkers as they attempt to collect data (Schensul 1980), from deviant or special populations, especially drug addicts (Hser et al 2001; Pearson, 2001) and the police (Herbert 2001; Westmarland, 2001).

The third stream deals with the use of contract fieldworkers (Clinton 1976; Fetterman 1983). As Clinton indicated, the traditional anthropologist/ ethnographer career was guided by a goal to make an individual achievement, especially by publishing single-authored work, demonstrating an individual professional identity. However, because of the advent of policy research, the careers of fieldworkers have changed and non-academic contract fieldworkers occupy a role that integrates the performance of minor bureaucratic functionary and programming and accounting procedures. That is the case in this study where contract fieldworkers conducted intensive interviews, guided by a standardized questionnaire.

The fourth stream deals with the safety of all fieldworkers (Lee 1995), especially as safety relates to gender (Fry 2013). Fieldworkers do encounter numerous and professional hazards in all aspects, especially in contract fieldwork. The Fry article is important for the purposes of this paper. That study looked at the way gender affects danger in fieldwork settings. It is based on fieldwork in one of the countries included in the larger, merged sample used here, South Africa, but that research also utilized some of the same measures that will be described below.

The South African research provides an indication of the level of the interviewers' feelings of being threatened as well as their receipt of physical threats. The information interviewers collected about respondent attitude(s) towards the interview process are critical to the purposes of this paper. The analysis in the earlier paper revealed that interviewer social and demographic characteristics were not predictive of the interviewer reports of feeling threatened and/or actually being physically threatened. The findings showed that female interviewers were the recipients of all but one of the physical threats. Contrary to what was expected, about equal numbers of female interviewers who had received physical threats had received them from female respondents. Two other questions asked whether respondents received help from others to answer the questions and whether the interviewer had been approached by community or party representatives. Those two questions, and a respondent attitude scale, emerged as the primary predictors of the receipt

of physical threats by these interviewers. These findings pointed to the need for increased safety planning and training, especially for fieldwork supervisors.

The conclusions of the study were that safety planning should be introduced into supervisor and interviewer training, and should also include planning that attempts to pave the way for interviewers to enter fieldwork sites. This would begin with prior contact with significant community gatekeepers, providing them with a clear understanding of the objectives and logistics of surveys to be conducted in their communities.

Subjects and Methods

This study looks at a neglected side of the fieldworker-respondent relationship, specifically the way respondents perceive fieldworkers. The questions to be addressed include: "Are fieldworkers perceived as possible spies? " How do respondents act toward fieldworkers? "Are respondents suspicious of fieldworkers? Are they friendly, are they in any way threatening, either verbally or physically?" "Are there identifiable factors that set those as identified as possible spies apart from the remainder of the interviewers in their cohort?

This paper uses data collected during the Fourth Round of the Afrobarometer, which has collected surveys of individuals in 20 countries based on a set of standardized questions. The surveys were conducted between March 2008 and June 2009. The standard sample size in this survey was 1,200 respondents, with three countries targeted at 2,400 respondents, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda. The total sample size for all twenty countries was 27,713. The countries and their sample sizes are listed in figure 1 in the Appendix.

The sample design is based on a stratified multistage procedure that produces a randomly selected and broadly representative cross-section of adult individuals within each country (Bratten Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2004). All respondents were interviewed face-to-face by the fieldworkers/interviewers.

- Measures

***The Dependent Variable*:** The final survey question asked respondents to identify the survey sponsor, "Who do you think sent us to do this interview?" A range of verbatim responses were recorded, which included National Intelligence or Secret Service. These responses became the study's dependent variable, agent/spy. A total of 82 respondents chose National Intelligence/Secret Service and they were coded 1; all of the other respondents were coded 0. These responses became the study's dependent variable, spy.

***Other Measures*:** The questionnaire contained a series of questions which measured various social and demographic indicators; education, religion, employment, age and gender. These measures included "The lived poverty" indicator developed by Mattes, Bratten and Davids (2002). The items included in this scale are listed in the Appendix along with their means, standard deviations and this Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

The interviewers completed a series of question about the interview process and its setting. These included the following; "were you approached by community and/or political party representatives?" "Did you feel threatened during the interview?" "Were you physically threatened during the interview?" The interview was asked to assess the respondent's attitude during the interviewer; was the respondent friendly, interested, cooperative, patient, at ease, honest?

Results

Characteristics of the Study's Sample:

The first task in the analysis was to describe the study's sample characteristics. Table 1 shows those breakdowns and that the sample was young, with 81.6 percent under 50 years of age. The overwhelming majority of respondents were sub-Saharan Africans, 94.9 percent, and there was a range of educational attainment. About one- fifth (20.3 percent) had no formal or informal education only, while 10.2 percent had at least some college education; 2.2 percent had completed college and had post graduate educational experiences. In terms of residence, 62 percent were classified as rural, and 66.2 percent were unemployed; 18.1 percent of the sample was employed full time.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the South African Sample (N=27,713)

Variable		
Age		
18 through 29	10,281	40.1
30 thru 49	10,638	41.5
50 and over	4,748	18.5
Gender		
Male	13,017	50.0
Female	12, 964	50.0
Ethnicity		
Sub-Saharan Africans	24,623	94.9
Mixed Ethnic groups	677	2.6
Europeans	433	1.7
All others	205	0.8
Education		
No formal/informal schooling	5,625	20.3
Some and completed primary schooling only	9.008	32.6
Some/completed high school	10,115	36.6
Some post/university completed/post-grad	2,921	10.6
Residence		
Urban	9,867	38.0
Rural	16,114	62.0
Employment Status		
Unemployed	17,129	66.2
Employed part time	4,013	15.5
Employed full time	4,750	18.4
Religion		
Christin	19,260	70.0
Muslim	5,775	21.0
Other	1,101	4.0
None	1,376	5.0

Interviewer measures: The next task was to present the responses which asked for the interviewer's perception of the respondent's attitudes, demeanor and reactions to the interview process. Table 2 displays these results.

Table 2. Interviewer's perception of respondents During the Interview process

Question	Percent of Interviews			
	Yes		No	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Did you feel threatened during the interview?	198	(0.7)		
Were you physically threatened during the interview?	112	(0.4)		
Did the respondent check with others to answer questions?	1,485	(5.4)		
Did anyone influence respondent's answers?	1,240	(4.5)		
Approached by community/political party representatives?	393	(1.4)		
Were other persons present during interview?	9,425	(34.1)		
Was the respondent's attitude towards you-friendly?			3,328	(11.9)
Was the respondent interested?			5,693	(20.6)
Was the respondent cooperative?			4,514	(16.4)
Was the respondent patient?			5,615	(20.3)
Was the respondent at ease?			6,784	(24.6)
What was the respondent's attitude towards you honest?			5,549	(21.4)

As discussed above, the top measures displayed in Table 2 were those found to be important in the Fry (2013) paper. These were measures which asked whether the interviewer felt threatened or whether the interviewer had been physically threatened during the interview. The logistical regression suggested that the predictors of those outcomes were whether the interviewer had been stopped by community and/or representatives of local political groups before entering the interview setting, and then

whether others influenced and helped the respondent answer questions. Table 2 shows that there were low levels of threat in the survey process, less than 1 percent in terms of feeling threatened, and relatively low levels of screening by local groups before interviewers were allowed to enter research settings. As for the other measures in Table 2, what can be defined as the negative aspects of the interview process, the interviewer ratings that were listed as no, ranged from 11.9 percent, was the respondent friendly, to 24.6 percent, was the respondent at ease

The next step in the analysis was to conduct a logistical regression analysis, where all of the independent variables in Tables 1 and 2 were entered into the regression equation. According to King and Zeng (2005), logistical analysis was the appropriate statistical technique to be used in this study because respondent's indication that the interviewer might have been sent by an intelligence agency was a rare event. The logistical analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Logistic Regression of Choice of Spy and Study Independent variables

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	z	P >|z|
Check with others	1.50	.42	3.62	.000
Education	.49	.14	3.50	.000
Respondent at ease	- .76	.29	-2.64	.01
Interviewer felt threatened	1.49	.72	2.07	.04
Others influence	1.59	.80	- 1.98	.05
Other people present	-.45	.27	- 1.67	.10
Religion	.27	.21	-1.28	.24
Age	.19	.162	1.16	.20
Urban-rural	.13	.23	.54	.59
Religion	- .24	.22	-1.08	.28
Respondent patient	.30	.32	-.96	34
Physically threatened	.22	1.18	.19	.88
Interviewer approached	.87	1.12	-.78	.44
Lived poverty	-.10	.03	- 0.45	.65
Gender	-.12	.24	.49	.62
Respondent interested	-.01	.34	-.03	.98
Employment	-.92	.153	-.60	.55

Number of observations 22,583; Probability Chi square .000000 Pseudo R2 .06 .

Table 3 reveals that five independent variables were found to be statistically significant in the logistical regression equation. In descending order, these were the following: whether the respondent checked with others regarding their answers to the questionnaire; respondent's educational level; the interviewer's assessment regarding the respondent's ease during the interview process; whether the interviewer felt threatened during the interview, and; whether the interviewer thought someone influenced the respondent's answers during the interview. Table 3 shows that the logistical regression was based on the responses of 22,583 respondents and produced a preuso-R2 of .06.

The analysis could not proceed any further because the choice of the interviewer having been sent by an intelligence agency or secret service was such a rare event. When the crosstabs were generated for each of the significant independent variables in the logistical equation results, the results showed that the number of expected respondents in the cells related to the choice of the dependent variable (spy) created outcomes that violated the assumptions of statistics like chi-square (Howell 1987). Simply, there were not enough cases in cells to produce reliable results.

Discussion

This was a preliminary, exploratory study, which identified some indicators of future research needs in order to answer the questions raised. The first would be a clear question which asked respondents who chose intelligence agency or secret service as the organization that sent interviewers to their homes directly if they thought the interviewer was in fact a spy. That question needs to be asked in this manner, because if included randomly in the interview schedule, numerous respondents might choose spy. The majority of respondents thought some branch of government sent the interviewer to their homes, and there is the chance that some of those respondents might have suspected the fieldworkers were in fact spies. Africans, like other peoples, tend not to trust government, local, provincial or national. The choice of intelligence agency or secret service as the interviewer's sponsors suggested that respondents were at least thinking fieldworkers could be spies.

It was also clear that this study showed respondent identification of these interviewers/fieldworkers as possible spies was a rare event. These African respondents were more likely to physically threaten interviewers, 112 reported incidents, than to think of them as representatives of intelligence/secret service agencies.

The factors which produced statistically significant results in the logistical were a mixed bag. Two of these factors spoke to the conditions under which the interview was conducted; these were whether the respondent checked with others and whether the fieldworker thought someone influenced the respondent's answers. Table 2 showed that in over one-third (34.1 percent) of the interviews other persons were present. This finding suggests that as Fry (2013) indicated in the earlier paper, not only should supervisors pave the way for fieldworkers to enter the field, but also should look for better ways for interviews to be conducted, in private.

There was a clear finding regarding one of the factors that emerged from the logistical regression findings; that is education was a strong predictor of respondents choosing intelligence or secret service as the interview sponsor. This was one of those instances, mentioned above, where the expected cell frequencies were not sufficient. However the breakdown of the frequencies speak for themselves. Table 1 shows that 10.6 percent of the sample fell in the higher education group. Yet, the most educated portion of the sample accounted for 28 percent of those who chose intelligence/ secret service as the survey sponsor.

The final two factors that reached significance in the regression equation related to respondent-interviewer interactions. The respondent did not seem at ease and the interviewer felt threatened. It should be remembered that these were reactions recorded by the interviewer, and suggest the fieldworker felt tension. Whether such feeling was suggestive to the interviewee that the interviewer was a spy is unknown.

Conclusion: The conclusion of this study is linking fieldworkers conducting large social surveys to intelligence agencies in Africa is a rare event. Whether survey respondents believe fieldworkers sent by such agencies are really spies remains an open question. At best, the concern with fieldworkers as spies is a "straw man" exercise. If this issue is to be

pursued, then this study has clearly identified some future research needs. One relates to survey planning and suggests that large community based surveys in Africa need to include ways for fieldworkers to interview respondents in more private settings, alone if at all possible. The search for the factors that separate those who thought an intelligence agency sponsored the survey pointed to a single significant social-demographic variable, education level. The more highly educated respondents were those most likely to think an intelligence agency sponsored the research. The important point is that this was a "straw man" issue to these African respondents, and whether interviewers were possible spies was a non-issue in this large social survey.

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As you will see, there was only one correction needed, missing letters

Acknowledgements: Afrobarometer Data: available at http://www.afrobarometer.org

Appendix

Lived Poverty (5 items)
Question: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without?

Enough food to eat
Enough clean water clean water for home use
Without medical care
Enough fuel to cook your food
A cash income
Mean 3.96 Standard deviation 4.48 Scale reliability coefficient .78

Figure 1.
Countries and Their Sample size included in Afrobarometer Round 4 (N=27,713)

Country	N	Country	N
Benin	1,200	Mali	1,232
Botswana	1,200	Mozambique	1,200
Burkina Faso	1,200	Namibia	1,200
ape Verde	1,264	Nigeria	2,324
Ghana	1,200	Senegal	1,200
Kenya	1,104	South Africa	2,400
Lesotho	1,200	Tanzania	1,208
Liberia	1,200	Uganda	2,431
Madagascar	1,350	Zambia	1,200
Malawi	1.200	Zimbabwe	1,200