

# Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz on dealing with a spy

## Maoist Information Web Site

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MIWS disagrees with most of Dunbar-Ortiz's politics, specifically in regard to class and gender questions in the United States. However, MIWS agrees with the gist of what Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz may have been trying to say, about using an organizing principle or idea to handle spying, on a few pages of *Outlaw Woman*:(1)

When I returned to New Orleans, Homer picked me up at the airport in his cab. "Jennifer's disappeared," Homer reported.

"What do you mean, disappeared?"

"Yesterday morning she talked for a long time on the telephone then she had to run an errand. She didn't return last night."

"You think she's an FBI informer, don't you?"

"I know she's some kind of informer. This morning Sheila and I went through her things -- she took nothing but her wallet with her. You won't believe it, but she left all the evidence," Homer said.

"Like what?"

"You'll see. She made carbon copies of everything. That stuff she sent her adviser goes beyond dissertation material -- for example, a list of all the books in the SFRU [Southern Female Rights Union --MIWS] office and an inventory of every piece of information we've produced. And there's evidence that she sent her adviser copies of a detailed psychological profile of you, verbatim accounts of every meeting, including the ones during your trip -- all raw data. It seems to be you, not the group or the women's movement, that she focused on."

"No ordinary dissertation adviser wants all those documents -- they want

the student's analysis. Anyway, her dissertation is on violence. What does that have to do with us?" I said.

"Precisely. There are letters from her adviser indicating what he wanted her to send. He was pressuring her, and in one letter, he threatens to cut off her fellowship if she refuses to send a psychological profile of you."

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"Well I'm no Fred Hampton. I wonder who her supervisor was working for?" I asked.

"Could be the FBI, the CIA, or the intelligence agencies of the army, navy, or air force, or even the Treasury or the IRS -- they all have spy operations," Homer said. He had been researching U.S. police power.

"But why did she leave all this stuff?" I asked.

"I think either her boss ordered her to get out fast or she rebelled against him and decided not to betray us anymore, or maybe both. I doubt that she was an experienced professional," Homer said.

"Maybe naïveté is just part of her cover and she is a pro. If she's not exposed, she could go on and work in the women's movement, we've given her credibility," Sheila said.

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We parked near the waterfront and walked six blocks to a noisy flophouse and checked in. We were armed only with a tape recorder. Three hours later, we were hungry and exhausted. Jennifer had repeated three phrases over and over in answer to every question: "I did only what I was asked to do"; "I did it to continue receiving my fellowship"; and "I don't know if any government agency is receiving the information."

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I suggested to Homer that we go next door to get some food and coffee. As we waited in the waterfront café for oyster loaves, I mused, "It was no accident she left that stuff. It's meant to make us paranoid, for us not to trust anyone new."

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Exhausted, we drove back to New Orleans, arriving before sunrise. I opened the front entry door to our house and encountered a stranger, a young white woman, blocking the stairway.

"Who are you?" I demanded. She rushed past us and out the door.

"Could be anyone," Homer said.

"That's never happened before," Sheila said. We never locked the outside door.

"I think she's a cop. She was sent to set us up, but she lost her nerve." I said. Paranoia or accurate assessment? We checked carefully for drugs or weapons she might have planted but found nothing.

Later that morning, the other women in the group listened to the hours of tape.

"I never did trust her. Rich people from Mobile are not to be trusted," Laura said.

"What does it matter if she's a conscious pro or an innocent dupe? The result's the same. In Kentucky we'd say a horse of another color," Karen said.

"We have to let other women's groups know about her," Sheila said.

After many days of discussions, we decided that Jennifer's association with us had tainted the Southern Female Rights Union, and we changed our name to "New Orleans Female Workers Union." We also agreed that rather than simply "blacklist" Jennifer, we should analyze the context in which she functioned. We composed a letter to the women's movement.

Last week we discovered that one of the members of our women's study group, a graduate student at the Heller School of Social Work at Brandeis University, which is intimately connected with the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence (also at Brandeis), was sending detailed reports of our meetings in order to continue receiving her stipend. . . . [ellipses in original --MIWS]

We are afraid that other such people may be active in the women's movement -- people connected with university departments which thrive on studies of movement and left-wing activities. Whether such things are done "innocently" as part of the desire to get degrees or receive stipends, or whether it is done in a conscious way to feed information to the government, the end result is the same.

The research that some of us and others in left movements have done reveals that this information is used at the highest level to break movements, both in this country and everywhere else in the world. Universities and research institutes are increasingly being used by the ruling class as information sources for psychological warfare (sometimes called "software" techniques) against peoples' movements as well as for developing the physically destructive "hardware" machinery for the counter-insurgency work.

We didn't name Jennifer. I believed that it wasn't an isolated incident and that the denunciation of one individual would not make a valid statement. Instead, I wrote personal letters identifying her to Betita, to members of Cell 16, and others who had met Jennifer with me.

In other words, it is not sufficient to expose individual spies publicly after damage has already been done. People need to make a generalization and turn what they have

learned into policy, such as don't keep people around who have too many bills to pay. Or, discovering that information obtained from the inside of an organization has been sent to a professor or researcher will automatically result in expulsion from the organization, without needing to have a six-hour exit interview with each individual caught and buy them lunch.

Karen in Dunbar-Ortiz's story puts the trust question in the individualist trash can where it belongs and seems to oppose handling individuals by identity. Anyone can be a spy. Somebody could have said instead, only scrutinize people with more privilege than white females or whatever the predominant identity was in the SFRU. Given the choice between treating all individuals with a certain behavior the same, and treating some individuals differently because of their identity and in an informal way, the merits of the behavior-centered approach stand out. Karen seems to suggest identifying Jennifer to stop her behavior, but Dunbar-Ortiz ends with a message about what a constructive approach would be, not just denouncing individuals.

The event Dunbar-Ortiz describes took place in 1970, but a scientific communist might not have gone so far as to even write letters identifying Jennifer to people outside Jennifer's and Dunbar-Ortiz's mutual organization, as if a real feminist movement in the United States would benefit from private discussion of individuals between people who might form an informal network.(2) This writer would argue that Dunbar-Ortiz had an underlying faith in white people, and, before the discussion of Jennifer, Dunbar-Ortiz raises the idea that feminism is a way to keep Euro-Americans on track in struggling against capitalism and other oppression. Today, white-nationalist so-called leftists say political progress among Americans can be based on issues such as abortion choice and whether females can kiss boyfriends and potential boyfriends in public in Muslim countries, i.e., on following State Department "feminists." Clearly, "feminism" has not put chauvinist and racist whites on the path to communism or ending U.\$ aggression; on the contrary, it led to invading Afghanistan and hanging the president of Iraq. However, there is a problem when people in the 21st century deal with spying primarily by other than policy and are even more Liberal than Dunbar-Ortiz was.

One should not jump to the conclusion that the Southern Female Rights Union shied away from stressful counterintelligence struggle in not wanting to name Jennifer publicly because of nervelessness. Dunbar-Ortiz's movement studied repression; Cell 16 had taken up martial arts, famously, before the Jennifer affair, though for certain

reasons; and the SFRU ended up taking up preparation for armed self-defense. On the contrary, those who do not study repression systematically and substitute Liberalism for so-called paranoia tend to have a problem with difficult counterintelligence struggle. According to Dunbar-Ortiz, one "revolutionary" organization had a collection of weapons, but having a bunch of guns wasn't everything when it came to judging whether people who turned out to be spies, who expressed a certain ideology and line, should belong in the organization. The U.S. state can infiltrate U.S. groups and achieve its international objectives without firing a single bullet in the United States, because Americans are powerful, but Liberal, lazy, and reactionary to begin with, and people in the Third World with fewer resources are still learning how to deal with them.

Apparently, the SFRU itself had poor physical security: an unlocked outer door and no method for detecting unauthorized entry. Also, it seems that not much thought went into Cell 16's decision to put its house number in its name. The same pattern of thought could lead to using a birthday for a computer password.

Multiple organizations interested in recruiting the flies hovering around a certain stinking pile of shit in the United States have claimed that it is possible to make an effective organization from scratch without talking and thinking about the history of repression. Not surprisingly, these people also have a problem with theory, which is based on the general. There is much talk about struggle and breaking with things, but few stands taken of the kinds on which progress is built, as opposed to a cult. Some of these people belong to Dunbar-Ortiz's generation or were around in the 1960s and 1970s, but act like they were born yesterday, or that discussions such as Dunbar-Ortiz's don't exist. In their case, naïveté is a cover, at best a reflection of not wanting to scare people away from a movement. Underlying this is sectarianism, a practice of putting an organization first, not to mention a commitment to the majority of Euro-Americans or the majority of people in the United States -- exploiters. Others seem to not have absorbed the lessons of their own history, things that they themselves have talked about. Discussion of repression and spying that happened four decades ago is relevant in spite of these people. There are things that people need to learn from if one is to serve the oppressed, rather than serve imperialism. Serving imperialism is much easier for First Worlders to do, regardless of intentions, not just because of the general characteristics of First World imperialist nation classes, but also because of the difficulty of opposing imperialism effectively even after one has decided that there is

something wrong with the First World and Amerika. Whether it is visible or not at times, the state is present and an influence. Some repression is obvious, but draws incorrect responses because of habits, nearsightedness, and a lack of factors moving people forward in struggle.

There are hundreds of other stories like Dunbar-Ortiz's and general discussions of repression, including statistics on COINTELPRO, on different kinds of COINTELPRO action. The point here is not to attach particular importance to Dunbar-Ortiz's anecdote. If one is not the quantitative type, there are the many qualitative discussions of U.S. domestic and foreign repression, but the numerical tables on COINTELPRO available highlight that there are things that new revolutionaries cannot just learn from their own experience before it is too late. One organization or revolutionary will not experience all the kinds of repression and spying that they still need to think about. Various probabilities appear at a group level.

Experience needs to be conceptualized on a large scale in decentralized and even anonymous contexts. The particular spying Dunbar-Ortiz experienced is not as interesting as what she raises about how to communicate in a movement about repression. According to Dunbar-Ortiz, the SFRU drew a connection between academia and international spying and drew attention to the danger of working with people who may have difficulty maintaining boundaries between an academic career and revolutionary work, resulting in conscious or unconscious spying. Even the most innocent interpretation of what Jennifer allegedly did possible -- perhaps that Jennifer was taking notes for some kind of research on social disturbance manifested in radical organizations, independently made herself look like an informer as a way of attacking someone in the SFRU whom she resented, and was never going to give the data to anyone -- would pose problems. What was going on with Jennifer may be unclear to this day, but either it was true or it was not true that what was best for a research project may not have been what was best for a social movement, and that intelligence agencies recruited from graduate schools. That is something that anyone could have checked, no investigation of the particular case of Jennifer necessary. Today, either it is true or it is not true that the Central Intelligence Agency openly recruits in the humanities and social sciences, which people have documented and explained, and people seeking career advancement in the CIA via cultural correctness have openly encouraged.(3) With Barack Obama as President and students wondering how they

are going to pay for college, intelligence agency recruiting and other activity on campuses merit renewed attention. Something that Dunbar-Ortiz does not discuss in *Outlaw Woman* and which is important is how not to rely on Liberal trust networks and majority polling to process information about repression.

Ironically, while offering some discussion of spying and counterinsurgency involving the academy, Dunbar-Ortiz has helped disseminate the notion of a scholar-activist, which is problematic in the context of academics who are part of a white structure of power and privilege in the United States, but that discussion deserves its own article. Typically, it is a challenge for academics in the United States to be effective in the midst of power struggles when "activism" goes beyond writing a so-called radical or critical article for an academic journal. For various reasons, even most Western academics who are familiar with COINTELPRO and CIA counterinsurgency history and vocal in their opposition to repression cannot discern and successfully handle concrete instances of intelligence activity around them.

Counterintelligence is part of the proletariat's struggle in general. MIWS has discussed its limited function, yet people may expect MIWS to engage in counterespionage right on this Web site in a way that goes beyond opposing the enemy line infiltrating the proletarian movement, since MIWS calls itself communist. There is an organizational difference between MIWS and Cell 16 -- Cell 16 had both ground activities and a journal, while MIWS is a Web site, not claiming to have any particular authority -- but to expect MIWS to deal with spies individually would be like expecting an organization such as Cell 16 to discuss individual spies in the pages of its theory journal.

MIWS knows that certain people are spies by their patterns of unprincipled and wicked actions, their deception and non-stop opportunism, and their location in and use of certain kinds of social networks. Some have suggested that they are double agents to defend themselves, but a spy is a spy, and discernible spy activity cannot be permitted. People are going to do what they think they need to do and maneuver in ways that they think they need to maneuver in, but certain spies asserting themselves as individuals cannot honestly expect scientific communists to not look at them as spies. At the same time, MIWS does not have the ability to figure out whether spies are double agents, or so-called double agents are triple agents, and to be complete in addressing spies individually it would be necessary for MIWS to talk about more than a dozen individuals in different organizations. Obviously, this is not going to happen,

and MIWS is not going to talk about one or two spies and not others.

Lastly, this is the World Wide Web, but the benefits of using the Internet should not be exaggerated. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz speaks of using a tape recorder, but it is interesting that they went to a presumably random hotel on the waterfront, where they had privacy. It is much more difficult to have an off-the-record conversation over the Internet without eavesdropping, hacking, and other risks. It is technically possible to achieve, but realistically some things should be done off the Internet and within a formal structure, or not at all.

The extent of spying and the amount and kind of maneuvering people think individuals have to do have a bearing on policy. Some cops to justify their provocations have raised the idea that communists in the First World have to act like spies. In the context of this, others have suggested that dirty tricks and violence are acceptable against people considered counterrevolutionary when that charge is correct, even though those making the suggestion are in the West and not fighting a war (unless they are fighting on the side of the oppressor). Though there are those with long-held stands in opposition to the bourgeois-majority thesis on the Euro-American nation who claim to tolerate it, lines like MIWS's are considered counterrevolutionary by so-called communists with faith in the Euro-American labor aristocracy. If it is nonetheless true that communists have to behave like spies and spy activity should in some sense be tolerated, that impacts the kinds of organization and practices communists should have in relation to each other -- more isolation and independence, for example. Some spies trying to justify themselves, ridiculously as if others should be expected to put up with anything they do, also want to do things in a Liberal manner as befits their opportunism and desire to have things every which way. Parasites who think of themselves as imperialist country secret agents allowed to use all means available to them and cannot confine the contradictions of that role to appropriate places should not call themselves communist publicly. "Communism" has to refer to something specific, not anything goes. In actuality, the necessarily authoritarian methods of communists in exploiter-majority countries are not the same as the methods of foreign spies with state power.

In the present stages of struggle in the First World and the Third World, revolutionary science is to a great extent a science of how to oppose the imperialist state -- a science of overcoming repression, and of overcoming domestic repression to oppose international repression. At this time, there is almost no movement to speak of in the

West carrying out the ideological and theoretical tasks of scientific communism. There is no people's war going on in any Western imperialist country; so, readers should expect the rhetoric of English-speaking alleged communists to have a different focus.

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## Notes

1. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman : A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), pp. 257-260.

2. According to JOFREEMAN.COM, the "earliest version of [Joreen's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness"] was given as a talk at a conference called by the Southern Female Rights Union, held in Beulah, Mississippi in May 1970," around the time of the Jennifer incident. So, some contrasts may have been possible even in 1970. The Southern Female Rights Union is the organization that Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz co-founded in New Orleans.

Jo Freeman aka Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structureless,"

<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>

3. Stephen Losey, "Intelligence agencies seek recruits from immigrant communities," 2008 May 29, <http://www.federaltimes.com/index.php?S=3552821>

"Intelligence leaders are reaching out to first- and second-generation Americans for help in combating terrorism and other threats.

"But members of immigrant communities say recruiting won't succeed unless officials speed up the security clearance process, look for recruits in ethnic studies and other specialized programs at universities, and be more sensitive in the treatment of so-called heritage Americans."

"Instead of recruiting at traditional engineering and computer science programs where international students and first-generation students don't necessarily have citizenship yet, federal agencies "are starting to recruit with us," said Larry Shinagawa, director of Asian-American studies at the University of Maryland. Students in technical fields who also take Asian-American studies, "are bilingual, they are the cream of the crop, and they are a targeted group that should be encouraged.""

Pamela Hess, "Intel agencies seek help recruiting recent immigrants," 2008 May 16, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2008-05-16-intel-recruiting\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2008-05-16-intel-recruiting_N.htm)

"Even the Japanese-American experience of World War II haunts this conference. Larry Shinagawa, of the University of Maryland's Asian American studies program, said immigrant groups have cause to be suspicious of the government's sudden interest. The government admitted in 2000 after years of denials that census records were used to track down Japanese-Americans by name and address for imprisonment in internment camps during the war."

"McConnell told the meeting of immigrant community leaders that he is increasing sensitivity training for the 100,000 employees of the intelligence agencies.

"U.S. officials are trying to adjust how they talk about the war on terrorism so as not to alienate Muslims. That adjustment is needed, said Mohammed H. Ali, an imam with a Virginia Muslim community organization."