12 Ethics, expertise and human terrain

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One Anthropologist can be more useful than a B-2 bomber.
(Human Terrain System spokesperson quoted in Haddick 2009)

Introduction

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the American national security state has been centrally preoccupied with a new enemy: militant Islamists. American military leaders soon realized that a new enemy calls for new expertise. Within five years of September 11, as the US found itself battling powerful insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, American war planners concluded that their edge in high-tech weaponry would not enable them to subdue these two countries absent an understanding of the cultural terrain across which they were fighting. Meanwhile, as they looked over the horizon at the prospect of further conflicts with antagonists from Yemen to Indonesia, officials at the Pentagon and the US intelligence agencies decided they needed a better understanding of Islamist cultural dynamics in a range of societies.

In this context the US national security state became increasingly interested in recruiting experts on Middle Eastern and other cultures, including anthropologists, to various new initiatives that, taken together, signified a 'cultural turn' in the war on terror (Gregory 2008; Gusterson 2010a, 2010b; Zehfuss 2012). In 2004 Congress authorized the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP), the brainchild of anthropologist Felix Moos, through which US intelligence agencies funded study by individual university students in return for a commitment to work for an intelligence agency after graduation.[1] In 2006, breaking with its four-decade tradition of refraining from openly recruiting anthropologists, the CIA placed a job advertisement in *Anthropology News*.[2] Also in 2006 the US Army announced that it was forming human terrain teams, in which anthropologists and other social scientists would be embedded, to roam Iraq and Afghanistan collecting data and writing reports for the US military. And in 2008 Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the $60 million Minerva Initiative, soliciting research proposals related to the war on terror from academics; Gates told the media he was especially interested in proposals from anthropologists.[3] In the

meantime anthropologists started to see advertisements for cultural trainers for the military and anthropology professorships at military academies, and stories began to proliferate about anthropologists being approached by military contractors to write restricted circulation papers shorter than this chapter for many thousands of dollars.

The last time the US national security state had courted anthropologists on this scale was in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the US was engaged in a major counter-insurgency campaign in Southeast Asia and was concerned about Communist insurgencies in Latin America. In the words of David Price (2003: 24), 'in the 1960s, military strategists and intelligence planners suddenly rediscovered the value of anthropology, and began dreaming that culture might hold the answers to their military problems'. In 1964 they undertook Project Camelot, setting up a brains trust of leading social scientists to investigate the dynamics of insurgency in Latin America, starting with a study of Chile. When Project Camelot was publicly exposed by the Norwegian peace studies researcher Johann Galtung, it inflamed relations between the US and Chile and, amidst talk of social scientists as tools of Yankee imperialism, led to the revocation of research access for some American academics who worked in Latin America. By 1965 Project Camelot was dead.[4] In 1968 the CIA placed a full-page advertisement for a counter-insurgency specialist on the back page of the *American Anthropologist*, leading to a letter of protest signed by over 800 anthropologists and a new policy forbidding the American Anthropological Association (AAA) from accepting job advertisements from organizations whose research was secret (Price 2003: 25). Meanwhile, amidst mounting strife within the AAA over the role of social scientists in the Vietnam War, a graduate student stole documents from a UCLA faculty member that revealed secret counter-insurgency work in Southeast Asia by a group of anthropologists. In the ensuing uproar the chair of the AAA's ethics committee was forced to resign, a report on the controversy (widely perceived as a whitewash of the counter-insurgency anthropologists) written by the celebrated anthropologist Margaret Mead was voted down by the membership, and the Association's members were bitterly divided by a contentious campaign in 1970 for the presidency in which the ethics of working for the national security state was the key issue.[5]

After these divisive struggles there followed a tacit *modus vivendi* between American anthropology and the national security state that lasted for over 30 years. The military did not undertake any major new projects seeking to enlist anthropologists and US intelligence agencies did not try to recruit anthropologists through professional anthropological publications. In the meantime, those few anthropologists who did work for national security agencies did so discreetly and were left largely unmolested by their professional colleagues. For anthropologists who, like myself, came of age in this period, it seemed as if a stable boundary had been established to buffer anthropology from the national security state and regulate the relationship between the two. However, this *modus vivendi* has unravelled in recent years, with the post-9/11 emergence of the programmes mentioned above: PRISP, the Minerva Initiative and, above all, the US Army's

human terrain system (HTS) program. Through these various programmes military and intelligence planners sought to reopen and renegotiate the boundary between anthropology and the national security state. Throughout they seemed as interested in using the aura of anthropological expertise to brand their initiatives as in the actual content of that expertise.

In some respects recent conflicts over military applications of anthropology reprise the struggles of the Vietnam years. However, there are two important differences in the contemporary context. First, in the 1960s an ethos of amateurism still prevailed in anthropology. Many anthropologists considered themselves as much generalists as specialists, and specialized regional literatures were less developed then than now; the teaching of methods tended to be haphazard, with many advisers believing graduate students were best taught methods by being dropped into the deep end without training; and, until 1971, the AAA had no professional code of ethics. Over the last four decades, through processes analogous to those described by Reppy elsewhere in this volume, anthropology has become more deeply professionalized and anthropologists have been socialized into building their careers around credentialized displays of expertise and conformism to (sub)disciplinary norms. US military planners have sought to use both the old liberal aura of anthropology and the new professionalism of anthropological expertise to brand and legitimate HTS. Meanwhile antagonists of HTS in anthropology, engaging in an intense campaign of boundary work,[6] have found in anthropology's new professionalism grounds for branding HTS an illegitimate excursion into anthropology.

Second, there has been a shift in the relationship between academic anthropologists in universities and 'practising anthropologists' outside the academy. As the academic job market has declined, the last 30 years have seen the rise of a professional community of anthropologists working for international aid organizations, corporations and government agencies, and belonging to their own professional organizations.[7] Some of them work for the US national security state. This community, often working on contract rather than an academic publication schedule, has developed more abbreviated forms of fieldwork, and some of its members have chafed against provisions in the AAA ethics code that are in tension with contract research. In the 1980s and 1990s academic and practising anthropologists sometimes sparred over the practising anthropologists' attempts to weaken the AAA ethics code and over what the practising anthropologists regarded as ivory tower elitism on the part of their academic brethren. In these years academic anthropology became politicized and moved left. The elite university departments in particular produced substantive critiques of colonialism and post-colonialism, globalization, militarism and gender politics and anthropology developed a reputation as the most left-leaning discipline in the American academy. When the Pentagon sought to enlist anthropology in its so-called 'War on Terror', the strongest opposition came from academic anthropologists, many of whom were instinctively hostile to the US national security state. Although there were plenty of practising anthropologists who also opposed the new Pentagon initiatives, insofar as these initiatives had any support in anthropology, it was

more likely to come from applied anthropologists and from new Ph.D.s for whom academic jobs were in short supply.

When anthropologists began to debate the human terrain system programme, it would have been possible to put epistemology, methodology or politics at the centre of the debate. The argument was, instead, largely framed in ethical terms. I argue below that, while this framing was compelling to professional anthropologists, providing the best grounds for attempted consensus within anthropology, the ethical argument did not carry well outside anthropology because of its professional parochialism. Arguably the result was a less powerful critique of HTS than anthropologists might have made.

Introducing human terrain

The HTS programme was initiated in late 2006 under the leadership of Colonel Steve Fondacaro and its lead social scientist, the Yale-educated anthropologist Montgomery McFate.[8] In an article making the case to a military audience for the indispensability of anthropological expertise to counter-insurgency, McFate wrote:

> Once called 'the handmaiden of colonialism,' anthropology has had a long fruitful relationship with various elements of national power, which ended suddenly following the Vietnam War. The strange story of anthropology's birth as a warfighting discipline, and its sudden plunge into the abyss of postmodernism, is intertwined with the U.S. failure in Vietnam. The curious and conspicuous lack of anthropology since the Vietnam War has had grave consequences for countering the insurgency in Iraq, particularly because political policy and military operations based on partial and incomplete cultural knowledge are often worse than none at all.
>
> (McFate 2005: 24)

As this quotation makes clear, McFate sought not only to change the US approach to counter-insurgency, but also to reclaim a lost identity for anthropology and to renegotiate the boundary between anthropology and the national security state.

HTS began in 2006–7 as an experimental project with a budget of $20 million per year. The programme was rapidly expanded and, by 2011, its budget had risen to over $150 million per year. The program was run by the US Army TRADOC (Training and Doctrine) command and the defence contractor BAE until 2011 when, following allegations of incompetent management by BAE, the Canadian defence contractor CGI was awarded the management contract. The US Army expanded the programme from the original five human terrain teams in 2007 to 27 by 2010: 10 in Iraq and 17 in Afghanistan. Human terrain teams generally include a team leader, social scientists, research managers and human terrain analysts, as well as military personnel. When the HTS programme was publicly unveiled, the embedded social scientists were described as, by preference,

anthropologists (see Rohde 2007). However, confronted with widespread resistance from the professional community of anthropologists, HTS leaders found it much harder to recruit anthropologists than expected and, although the programme was branded as anthropology, anthropologists turned out in practice to be a minority of the HTS social scientists. One might say, drawing on the vocabulary of Eyal's chapter in this volume, that, turning anthropology into a branding device, HTS sought to draw on anthropological expertise even if it failed to make an alliance with the anthropological profession. Faced with that failure, HTS has sought to detach anthropological expertise from its professional credentialling mechanisms – although there is a paradox here, and the seeds of self-defeat, since it is the profession and its authorizing mechanisms that lend the expertise its credibility.

Human terrain teams in the field are supported by an infrastructure of 'reachback cells' and consultants on tap in the US ready to respond to requests for information and analysis. The HTS programme also uses its own database system, MAP-HT,

> a structured database that can be used to collect information on local populations, including personal relationships, tribal affiliations, grievances, etc. Users can tag the information in new reports to specific people or locations, which allows the information to be displayed graphically on maps or network charts. Before the creation of this data model, human terrain teams and other analysts had no way to archive the linkages that they find between various data sources, because the existing structured databases did not have the appropriate data fields in which to store cultural and local population information.
>
> (Clinton *et al.* 2010: 37)

This database is, in theory at least, to be accessible by other military and intelligence bodies outside HTS.[9]

As far as can be determined from public sources, human terrain teams do the following: they advise US military commanders on cross-cultural etiquette and on strategies for increasing support among local populations; they write reports on local practices that they think might provide useful background information to US military leaders (the most notorious of these being a report on the practice of 'man–boy love' in Afghanistan[10]); they respond to requests from military personnel for information and recommendations on particular issues, such as intertribal relations in a particular region; and they engage local populations so as to map religious, genealogical, economic and political relationships and to determine local grievances and attitudes toward the fighting between US forces and insurgents (CEAUSSIC 2009; Clinton *et al.* 2010; Finney 2008).

Official statements representing HTS to the public emphasize that its goal is to use cultural understanding of Iraq and Afghanistan to reduce the use of 'kinetic force' by the military. A number of HTS personnel, including Montgomery McFate herself, have strenuously disputed allegations by some critics that the programme is a military intelligence programme that generates information for

use in 'kinetic' military targeting (i.e. killing). The main evidence that HTS saves lives is a claim by the 82nd Airborne's Col. Martin Schweitzer, reproduced with remarkable credulity by the *New York Times* on its front page and then repeated by other media outlets, that a single HTS team reduced combat operations in a region of Afghanistan by 60 per cent – though it is hard to find any factual basis for this claim.[11]

Far from seeing HTS as a life-saving application of anthropological expertise, the American anthropological community has tended to see it, by overwhelming margins, as a programme that transgresses core precepts of the anthropological ethics code and recapitulates features of military programmes from the 1960s that were rejected by the anthropological community at that time. If ethical discourse offers a means by which professional communities consolidate their communal identity and demarcate themselves from communities outside their boundaries, the community of American anthropologists made it clear that it rejected the military's casual utilitarianism and that it saw HTS as at odds with its professional ethics code. Shortly after HTS was made public on the front page of the *New York Times*, in October 2007, the Executive Board of the AAA issued this statement:

> the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association concludes (i) that the HTS program creates conditions which are likely to place anthropologists in positions in which their work will be in violation of the AAA Code of Ethics and (ii) that its use of anthropologists poses a danger to both other anthropologists and persons other anthropologists study.
>   *Thus the Executive Board expresses its disapproval of the HTS program.*[12]

At the same time, the AAA established the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities (CEAUSSIC), to investigate the HTS programme in detail and report back. The report, publicly released in November 2009, condemned HTS unequivocally. The Executive Summary said,

> When ethnographic investigation is determined by military missions, not subject to external review, where data collection occurs in the context of war, integrated into the goals of counterinsurgency, and in a potentially coercive environment – all characteristic factors of the HTS concept and its application – it can no longer be considered a legitimate professional exercise of anthropology.
>
>   (CEAUSSIC 2009: 3)

The Commission's achievement of consensus around such a strong condemnation of HTS was all the more striking because the Commission's members included an anthropologist who does cultural training for the Marines, an archaeologist for the US Army and an anthropologist who works for a nuclear weapons laboratory. While the AAA has not formally condemned other recent programmes to recruit anthropologists for military and intelligence purposes –

such as the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) or the Minerva Initiative – it was clear that, for the overwhelming majority of American anthropologists, HTS crossed the line.

This became clearer still in July 2010 when the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, a group established in 2006 to contest the militarization of anthropology, superintended a signature drive for a letter to President Obama, the Secretary of Defense and Congressional leaders asking for an end to HTS.[13] The letter read, in part,

> We are heartened and encouraged by the Pentagon's interest in expanding its cultural knowledge, and we believe that anthropologists have an important role to play in shaping military and foreign policy. However, we believe that the HTS program is an inappropriate and ineffective use of anthropological and other social science expertise.

The letter was signed by six of the nine living ex-presidents of the AAA, 38 distinguished chairs, and 49 department heads. In all, over 600 anthropologists signed it.

Ethics and anthropology

One could imagine three grounds on which the AAA might have condemned HTS. The first is political. The AAA might have said that its members opposed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the latter being clearly illegal under international law, and that its members would therefore not assist the war effort. Given that AAA members passed a resolution[14] condemning the Iraq War at the business meeting of the 2006 AAA annual meeting, this was not an unthinkable path to take.[15] However, a significant minority of anthropologists supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and some advocates of HTS were arguing that human terrain teams were a means of harm reduction – lessening the violence – that should appeal even to opponents of the wars. Moreover, the process of professionalization the AAA had undergone since the 1970s made the kind of overtly political arguments that had been foregrounded in the debates of the Vietnam years less palatable. 2006 was not 1968. The Association felt that it could take policy positions when they could be argued to represent the professional interests or consensus of anthropologists. It did so at about the same time, for example, in protesting the terminology on the US census form, which was felt to be at odds with anthropological knowledge about ethnic categories. But taking forceful positions on major and divisive political questions was seen as inappropriate for a professional association.

The second position the AAA might have taken, but did not, was grounded in technical expertise. The Association might have argued, like psychiatrists insisting that homosexuality cannot be 'cured' and that a cure should not therefore be attempted by professional psychiatrists, that the task assigned to HTS anthropologists could not reasonably be accomplished and should not , therefore,

be attempted by responsible professionals. Such a position would, however, have run the risk of opening a rift between academic and applied anthropologists, and it conflicted with the blandly optimistic official discourse of anthropology that the discipline is really, really useful and should therefore get more respect. I will argue below that, by failing to contest Montgomery McFate's wildly exaggerated claims about the usefulness of anthropology to the military, anthropologists may have undercut the power of their opposition to HTS and, unwittingly, assisted the programme they opposed.

The third ground for opposition, the ethical, is where AAA ended up planting its flag. Ethical codes are, of course, inherently political, but they offer an opportunity for the displacement of the political into a putatively depoliticized arena where the political becomes the professional. We now live in the age of the professional ethicist – people trained in codified forms of ethical discourse whose job it is to apply ethical algorithms to complex situations (Montgomery and Oliver 2009; Petryna 2009). Recent decades have seen the increasing formalization of ethical thinking coterminous with the rise of human subjects review boards, the emergence of courts as venues for wronged human subjects, and the appearance of professional associations' quasi-legal ethics codes. There is strong overlap between the ethics codes of different professional associations, but there are also differences. For example, psychologists have routinized deception in human subjects research, while anthropologists disapprove of it. Ethics codes, then, have become a powerful tool through which communities articulate shared internal norms but also demarcate boundaries with other communities.

Like other professional associations, for the first 60 or 70 years of its existence, in keeping with its amateurist ethos, the American Anthropological Association did not have a formal ethics code. The AAA's first ethics code was promulgated in 1971, largely in response to controversies within the Association over Project Camelot and the Vietnam War (Fluehr-Lobban 2003; Price 2003).[16] Reacting against revelations that some anthropologists had advised the Pentagon on the control and repression of indigenous populations, the code stated that 'in research, anthropologists' paramount responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied.' The 1971 code also said that 'anthropologists should not communicate findings secretly to some and withhold them from others'.[17] While the forthright language of the first ethics code has been lost in subsequent revisions, this broad sentiment endures.

In discussing anthropologists' response to HTS we should distinguish between a visceral moral reaction and the formal precepts of the ethics code. In my experience ethical norms are most deeply and reflexively felt in the anthropological community in two contexts: first, as lived conviction in response to the trials of each anthropologist's own fieldwork experience where ethical dilemmas invariably arise; and, second, in informal conversations between

anthropologists over coffee, in advisers' offices and so on. The spontaneous reflexive disgust most anthropologists felt at the announcement of the HTS project emerged from a collective but informal ethical habitus grounded in fieldwork and collegial conversation. However, in keeping with its new professionalism, the AAA's public critique of HTS was more often routed through the formal ethics code, which became what we might call, in Latourian terms, an 'obligatory passage point'.[18] The AAA was able to so swiftly condemn HTS because it clearly violates four precepts of the AAA code of ethics: the injunction to do no harm; the requirement for free and informed consent on the part of anthropologists' human subjects; the obligation of openness to those subjects; and the obligation to other anthropologists.[19]

Do no harm

What we might think of as the 'prime directive' in anthropology, their equivalent of doctors' Hippocratic Oath, is the injunction to do no harm to those anthropologists study. The ethics code is quite clear on this. The first of its six principles is titled 'do no harm', and it begins:

> A primary ethical obligation shared by anthropologists is to do no harm. It is imperative that, before any anthropological work be undertaken … each researcher think through the possible ways that the research might cause harm. Among the most serious harms that anthropologists should seek to avoid are harm to dignity, and to bodily and material well-being, especially when research is conducted among vulnerable populations. Anthropologists should not only avoid causing direct and immediate harm but also should weigh carefully the potential consequences and inadvertent impacts of their work. When it conflicts with other responsibilities, this primary obligation can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge and can lead to decisions to not undertake or to discontinue a project.[20]

Montgomery McFate has argued that anthropologists should abandon the emphasis on not harming informants in favour of a situational ethics that would enable anthropologists to make cost-benefit calculations to the possible detriment of their human subjects. Anthropologists, she said, should balance

> the anthropological interest in protecting informants and the national security interests of acquiring valuable information and knowledge that might potentially hurt an informant but might protect the lives of American and foreign civilians … But most anthropologists … live in a pretty simple moral world. Their only interest is the interests of their informants. That is the sine qua non of anthropology. That is the prime directive. And I live in a more complicated world where that is a directive, but it is not the prime directive.
>
> (Quoted in Stannard 2007)

While McFate's comment deviates sharply from the logic of the AAA ethics code, it is surely a good representation of the ethical calculus of many HTS social scientists in practice, and it fits well with the utilitarian approach to ethics widespread in the military. It would not only be rejected by most anthropologists as a slippery slope toward an anarchic ethics where individual anthropologists are free to pick winners and losers as they see fit, but it also conflicted with later statements from the HTS programme itself, which claimed that the information gathered by HTS social scientists would be of no use in military targeting and would not harm those from whom it was gathered.

The example frequently given by HTS proponents of the programme's potential to generate interventions that reduce violence and do not harm informants is this one from a human terrain team in Afghanistan:

> In one of the first districts they entered, Tracy, the anthropologist, identified an unusually high concentration of widows in one village, Woods said. The large number of single women created financial pressure on their sons to provide for their families, she determined, a burden that could drive them to join well-paid insurgents. Citing Tracy's advice, U.S. officers decided to develop a job training program for the widows as a step toward easing their financial burdens.
>
> (*International Herald Tribune* 2007)

However, as the anthropologist Brian Ferguson (2011) has pointed out, Tracy's identification of the link between high numbers of widows and support for insurgents is double-edged. It is assumed that the US military will use this information to help the widows, but it is also plausible that military intelligence officers will now, taking for granted a link between widows and the Taliban, use the number of widows in a community as a proxy for Taliban support and target arrests, house searches and the deadly use of force accordingly. It is such scenarios that have led most anthropologists to conclude that, even if HTS social scientists intend no harm to their native interlocutors, the structure of the situation in which they find themselves is such that they cannot guarantee this.

Such concerns are amplified given that HTS anthropologists 'themselves are not fully informed about who might use their data and for what purpose' (Beyerstein 2007). It is normal practice for anthropologists to safeguard human subjects data they collect under their own control. However, the MAP-HT software apparatus developed by HTS created a situation where human subjects information would live in the 'cloud' where it would be accessible to an amorphous network of actors, many unknown to the anthropologist. Because of MAP-HT, functioning in Latourian terms as an 'actant' in a novel socio-technical network, the anthropologist would now be demoted from superintendent and guardian of human subjects data to a node in a chain of data collectors, analysts and information technologies. The AAA ethics code states that 'compartmented research by design will not allow the anthropologist to know the full scope or purpose of a project; it is therefore ethically problematic', adding that, 'researchers have an ethical responsibility

to take precautions that raw data and collected materials will not be used for unauthorized ends'.[21] Thus the AAA's formal Commission worried over

> how information is stored for later use, especially in the case of raw data about individuals, relationships and activities. In normal anthropological research, these kinds of data would be protected by the researcher according to whatever IRB protocol s/he developed. There has been some concern in the discipline that data from HTS may be feeding back into DoD or intelligence community databases where the social scientist has no control over how it is used.
>
> (CEAUSSIC 2009: 34)

Moreover, it is clear that not all HTS anthropologists even feel an obligation to protect local individuals or communities from harm. Thus the *Dallas Morning News* quotes HTS anthropologist Audrey Roberts saying,

> if it's going to inform how targeting is done – whether that targeting is bad guys, development or governance … All I'm concerned about is pushing our information to as many soldiers as possible. The reality is there are people out there who are looking for bad guys to kill … I'd rather they did not operate in a vacuum.
>
> (Landers 2009)

Similarly, *Time* Magazine tells the story of Patrick Carnahan, an HTS social scientist on patrol with a squad of Marines.

> During one stop, a man swore that his neighbor was working with the insurgents. Although the accusation could have potentially serious consequences for the person in question, Carnahan didn't hesitate to pass the information to company officers. 'If we get something that's a threat to a unit, then we turn it over to them,' he says.
>
> (Motlagh 2010)

This is exactly the sort of story that confirms anthropologists' worst fears about the incompatibility of HTS with the anthropology ethics code: here an unsubstantiated rumour, which might be true or might be born of a long-standing grudge on the part of the informant, is passed on by the anthropologist, without any attempt to verify its accuracy, to armed men who may arrest, or even kill, the person in question. It is hard to imagine anything further from the injunction to first do no harm.

The ethical problems for an HTS anthropologist are best summarized, ironically, by Lt. Col. Gian Gentile, who said:

> Anthropologists should not fool themselves. These Human Terrain Teams whether they want to acknowledge it or not, in a generalized and

subtle way, do at some point contribute to the collective knowledge of a commander which allows him to target and kill the enemy in wars like Iraq. I commanded an Armored Reconnaissance Squadron in West Baghdad in 2006. Although I did not have one of these HTTs assigned to me (and I certainly would have liked to) I did have a Civil Affairs Team that was led by a major who in his civilian life was an investment banker in New York City and had been in the area I operated for about 6 months prior. He knew the area well and understood the people and the culture in it; just like a HTT adviser would. I often used his knowledge to help me sort through who was the enemy and who was not and from that understanding that he contributed to I was able to target and sometimes kill the enemy. So anthropologists like Ms McFate should stop sugarcoating what these teams do and end up being a part of; to deny this fact is to deny the reality of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[22]

Free and informed consent

The AAA ethics code states:

> Anthropological researchers working with living human communities must obtain the voluntary and informed consent of research participants … Minimally, informed consent includes sharing with potential participants the research goals, methods, funding sources or sponsors, expected outcomes, anticipated impacts of the research, and the rights and responsibilities of research participants … Anthropologists have an obligation to ensure that research participants have freely granted consent, and must avoid conducting research in circumstances in which consent may not be truly voluntary or informed.[23]

This establishes an ideal quite different from that practised by HTS since, in the words of journalist Lindsay Beyerstein (2007),

> the anthropologists on Human Terrain Teams travel with uniformed, armed soldiers. Sometimes, the anthropologists themselves are armed and in uniform. The United States is an occupying power. Officially, people are under no obligation to speak to the HTT. However, the power imbalances between the population and the occupying power cannot be ignored.

Patricia Omidian (2008: 10), a civilian applied anthropologist who works in Afghanistan, writes that 'to enter a community as a member of the military, a person with power and the weight of the U.S. Army behind her/him brings about a level of power that the local person cannot act against – since any reaction can get them arrested or killed'. There is also the issue that HTS social scientists tend to have transitory, relatively brief interactions with people they never see again – the antithesis of the anthropological ideal of recursive, deepening relationships

and of the expectation shared by many anthropologists that informants know how to find the anthropologist if they need to. For all these reasons, the AAA Executive Board concluded in 2007 that

> HTS anthropologists work in a war zone under conditions that make it difficult for those they communicate with to give 'informed consent' without coercion, or for this consent to be taken at face value or freely refused. As a result, 'voluntary informed consent' (as stipulated by the AAA Code of Ethics, section III, A, 4) is compromised.[24]

Openness

The AAA ethics code states that 'Anthropologists should not withhold research results from research participants, especially when those results are shared with others.'[25] At issue here is the conviction of most anthropologists that they should not be studying a community simply to facilitate their control by others, especially more powerful others. Again, HTS research is the antithesis of the ethical ideal in anthropology. According to that ideal the anthropologist has a strong sense of obligation to and engagement with those studied, and research is part of an evolving dialogue with them – not a conversation that takes place over their heads with sponsors of the research.

This ideal is embodied in an email message sent by Barbara Rose Johnston, an applied anthropologist who recently chaired the AAA ethics committee, to Jennifer Clark, the deputy director of the HTS social sciences division in response to a query about anthropological ethics in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan. The email message, which Johnston has given me permission to quote as long as I make it clear she was speaking in her personal rather than official capacity, said,

> in many cases the simple act of receiving funding from a source that may be responsible for harming the communities I work with is enough to prohibit my engagement. My fieldwork only occurs at the invitation of the research communities (not the institutions or agencies whose actions play a role in creating a rights-abusive situation), with terms of work developed in transparent and collaborative fashion, with the community retaining full control over the content and outcomes (including the right to comment on findings and the right to control publication).[26]

Johnston specializes in studying communities that have been harmed by colonialism, militarism and corporate exploitation. Not all anthropologists adhere to such an exacting standard in their research, but Johnston's insistence on putting the researched rather than research sponsors in the driver's seat certainly dramatizes by contrast whose interests drive HTS anthropology. It is clear that, if Johnston were conducting research in Afghanistan, she would be staying with villagers at their invitation, sharing her conclusions first with them, not driving around in a Humvee, dropping in on village elders while under armed guard.

Obligation to other anthropologists

Although the most recent version of the ethics code does not enshrine a responsibility toward other anthropologists, such a commitment is widely presumed by anthropologists. In a now celebrated 1919 letter to *The Nation*, Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology condemned four anthropologists who engaged in espionage during the First World War under the cover of doing academic research by saying, 'In consequence of their acts every nation will look with distrust upon the visiting foreign investigator who wants to do honest work, suspecting sinister designs' (Boas 1919).

Although there is no evidence that the research or safety of other anthropologists have become collateral damage to HTS operations, older anthropologists remember the way many Latin American countries shut them out in the 1960s after the unmasking of Project Camelot. In the contemporary Middle East, where journalists have been kidnapped and even beheaded and three HTS social scientists have been killed – one of them deliberately set on fire by an Afghan man she was in the process of interviewing – it is not farfetched to fear that other anthropologists, particularly American anthropologists, could be in danger of losing research access or even their lives thanks to a perception that anthropologists are tools of US intelligence agencies. Thus the AAA Executive Board said in its initial condemnation of HTS that 'Because HTS identifies anthropology and anthropologists with U.S. military operations, this identification – given the existing range of globally dispersed understandings of U.S. militarism – may create serious difficulties for, including grave risks to the personal safety of, many non-HTS anthropologists and the people they study.'[27]

The futile success of the ethical critique

This ethical critique has been powerful within anthropology and presumably helps explain why, even with salaries as high as $300,000 a year for anthropologists with masters degrees, very few anthropologists have signed up to join human terrain teams. According to the CEAUSSIC report (2009: 12), in April 2009, out of 417 employees in HTS, only 11 were credentialled in anthropology. The report concludes that, 'despite the attention given to the central role of anthropology in the program, the great majority of present HTS employees have been trained and hold degrees in other fields of the social sciences and elsewhere' (2009: 12–13). As a tool for boundary work, then, anthropologists' ethics-centred critique of HTS has been highly successful in strengthening the boundary between anthropology and the army and largely keeping professional anthropologists out of HTS – even if this has not stopped HTS leaders from continuing to use anthropology to brand their enterprise.

Yet the ethical critique has failed to resonate outside anthropology, and I have found that it often mystifies mainstream liberals who oppose the war but are drawn to the rhetoric of cross-cultural understanding and harm reduction that shrouds HTS. The ethical critique has also failed to gain any traction in military circles,

where it tends to be assumed that anthropologists will eventually learn to replicate military approaches to ethics. The Pentagon's own style of ethical discourse is profoundly utilitarian – making use of rough and ready cost-benefit calculations in which civilian casualties are tolerable in the service of a greater good. The heavily deontological quality of anthropological ethics talk – with its emphasis on the sanctity of relationships with informants and informed consent – is alien to this way of thinking. Moreover, since it is the liberal wing of the military that favours human terrain mapping as an alternative to the use of brute kinetic force to crush insurgents, opposition from anthropology's left flank seems perplexing. In my experience, US military personnel have been led to believe by their own allies in anthropology that anthropological opposition to HTS is the handiwork of a small band of noisy malcontents, and they underestimate the depth, force and persistence of the opposition within the anthropological community to this programme. Since the HTS approach to counter-insurgency is so self-evidently an ethical improvement on the shock-and-awe version of counter-insurgency for military personnel, they assume that anthropologists will eventually see the light and come around.

This gulf in understanding is reinforced by the ontological status of ethical commitments in anthropology. Although anthropologists like to reference the ethics code in their ethics talk, their ethical commitments are ultimately grounded not in obedience to a legislative code but in a habitus that derives its authority from elsewhere – from the embodied practice of fieldwork. It is in the performance of fieldwork, as anthropologists struggle alone with conflicting obligations and with the implications of their actions for their interlocutors, that textual commandments of the ethics code become real as lived experience. It is, to use an analogy, the difference between reading a textbook on surgery and operating on someone, and it is a rite of passage that transforms its practitioners no matter what kind of fieldwork they do. And because anthropology's ethical commitments are so dependent on practice rather than the textual codes that mask its true grounding, these commitments are hard to communicate to those outside the community of practice – a fact that makes the experience of fieldwork, ironically, quite similar to the experience of military combat which, initiates report, can never really be communicated to those who have not experienced it.

Conclusion: a theory of practice

In Foucauldian terms, we have been incited to a discourse in which ethics is the privileged register for discussion of human terrain (Foucault 1980: ch. 1). This is a framing of the debate that may seem to privilege the anthropological critique but is, in fact, guaranteed to quarantine it. And the ethical critique of HTS relies for its force on an unwitting complicity of anthropology with official HTS discourse, which is premised on the spurious assumption, trumpeted by the entrepreneurs behind HTS, that human terrain teams have a remarkable potential to reshape the struggle between US forces and the insurgency. Why else would anthropologists be so upset if HTS was not a programme that misused their extraordinary power?

But the truth is that HTS is a feeble, incompetently staffed programme with an excellent PR strategy (Stanton 2009). The Pentagon has been suckered. Even if it were true that anthropology had the potential to reshape the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, this incarnation of the HTS programme could not have succeeded in effecting such a reshaping since its staffing and its *modus operandi* are such as to make good applied anthropology all but impossible. In addition to lacking ethics, the HTS endeavor lacks competent expertise, but anthropological critics of HTS have been slow to drive home this argument and have thus allowed the entrepreneurs of HTS to 'capture anthropological expertise' (in the sense of using it to legitimate their project). This is unfortunate since military planners would arguably have been more open to a practical than an ethical critique. There are four ways in which HTS has fallen far short of good anthropological practice: a dearth of language skills; the lack of relevant cultural expertise; the shallowness and brevity of HTS teams' interactions with local populations; and the positionality of the ethnographers in the interactions being transacted.

To begin with language, generally the foundational expertise anthropologists seek to acquire before fieldwork, it has been widely reported that few HTS social scientists have the language skills to converse directly with local populations and most are heavily dependent on translators of varying degrees of competence. As one journalist reported,

> only a select few in the program have a working knowledge of Dari, a form of Persian that is prevalent in large parts of Afghanistan, or of Pashto, the language spoken in the communities where Taliban influence is strongest. Even with a translator, the threat of violence often restricts the amount of time human-terrain teams have with people living in the most critical areas.
>
> (Motlagh 2010)

Another journalist, a self-styled neo-conservative, commented that the majority of translators 'had an inadequate command of English and lacked maturity, experience and judgment'. She concludes that sending social scientists without language skills is 'like sending a non-English speaking Spaniard to cosy up to an Iowa farmer. It's apt to be resented. And if the HTT needs interpreters, it's hard to see how they are getting closer to the people' (Marlowe 2007).[28] In academic anthropology, working through translators is looked down upon for good reason: it makes the elicitation of information slow and inefficient; it reduces the bandwidth for communication; it introduces errors of communication at both ends; it turns communications that are ideally warm, straightforward and informal into communications that are, instead, stiff and indirect; it leaves anthropologists dependent on translators who decide what really matters; and it robs anthropologists of the ability to detect nuance. In short, working through translation, even if one has the luxury of long relaxed conversations of a kind not available in warzones, neuters much that is powerful in anthropology.

This deficiency might be remedied to some degree if HTS social scientists at least had expertise in local culture. But instead we hear of experts on medieval

Catholicism,[29] archaeologists of Latin America or ethnographers who study freegan culture in the US sent to lecture US military commanders on the nuances of Afghan and Iraqi culture. According to *Newsweek*, 'of 19 Human Terrain members operating in five teams in Iraq, fewer than a handful can be described loosely as Middle East experts' (Ephron and Spring 2008). It is hard not to sympathize with the lament of Ben Connable, a Marine who has been critical of HTS, when he complained:

> I do not see how HTS social scientists are an improvement over FAOs [foreign area officers]. If we look at the demographics of the typical HTS social scientist I believe we will find that the vast majority of them have only generalist degrees. For example, one reportedly has a degree in culinary arts and another in theology. Most HTS social scientists hold a master of arts degree, a degree FAOs also possess. I earned a M.A. in Middle East national security affairs before attending 16 months of language training and living in the Middle East for a year. When I served as an advisor I already had 15 years of military experience, a company command, and a previous Middle East combat tour behind me. I picked up key nuances of Iraqi dialect within three months of working on the ground in Anbar. How is someone with, say, a PhD in theology, no language ability, and no regional experience more qualified to advise a combat commander on Iraqi cultural issues than someone with my experience and training?
>
> (Connable 2009)

When the HTS project was first unveiled, Montgomery McFate suggested it would furnish the army with experts on Middle Eastern culture. In the face of recruitment difficulties this claim was soon revised and the promised expertise was now in general anthropology rather than in local culture. Connable suggests that, if expertise in Middle Eastern culture was hard to come by amongst HTS academics, general anthropological expertise was hardly worth having. However, his plea to develop expertise in-house among experienced junior military officers rather than hire in civilians with ivory tower credentials went unheeded. In what should be seen as a sign of our times, the empty signifier of the academic credential proved the trump card, and the more useful and hard-won expertise of the experienced but uncredentialled was ignored.[30]

In the resultant situation, there is good reason to be sceptical about the quality of the information HTS social scientists have been collecting. It is not just that they may not be generating a particularly deep understanding of the local situation; some of the information they are passing up the chain of command may be misleading or flat-out wrong. Referring to rumours that HTS social scientists are advised to limit conversations to seven minutes so as not to be vulnerable to snipers, *Time's* Jason Motlagh (2010) quotes the anthropologist David Price as saying 'seven minutes isn't even enough time for an anthropologist to get properly confused'. One human terrain team is reported to have told its US military commander that the economy of the province where it was stationed

was dominated by opium production when it was a province with no significant opium crop (Marlowe 2007). Another journalist reported locals lying about their tribal affiliation when answering questions, and for good reason: in a context of escalating ethnic conflict, belonging to the wrong ethnic group might have constituted a death sentence (Raghavan 2008). A competent social scientist would have known better than to ask this question, or at least to ask it in this way.

All anthropologists have to deal with the duplicity of informants saying what they think the anthropologist wants to hear, or hiding inconvenient truths. It can often take months of painstaking interaction to get one's bearings and disentangle truth from lie. HTS social scientists do not have the luxury of time, and they inject themselves as Americans into a fraught communicative situation where a well-aimed lie or an indiscreet truth can get someone killed. The problem they lack the time or expertise to solve is nicely captured by the journalist Nir Rosen who reported that, when they learned he spoke Arabic, Iraqis said, 'The Americans are donkeys … When they are here, we say, "I love you," but when they leave we say, "Fuck you!"' (Rosen 2008). Lacking the skills to do serious ethnographic work, some HTS teams have been accused of passing off information culled from newspaper stories as the fruits of ethnographic research and doing 'mediocre cut-and-paste job(s)' (Hodge 2009) of the kind that in the first place drew the US into a war in Iraq based on false information.

Finally, there is the issue of positionality. Military leaders are interested in anthropology because they think it will give them the ability to see from the 'native point of view'. Using what most anthropologists would find a chilling locution, Steve Fondacaro, until recently the head of HTS, told the BBC that anthropologists 'give us the best vision to see the problems through the eyes of the target population' (Fattahi 2007). But seeing 'through the eyes of the target population' is not a guaranteed outcome of anthropology in the way equations that model nature are in physics. It is a hard-won achievement that becomes possible, sometimes only transiently, in the course of protracted fieldwork, and it is profoundly dependent on the embodied position from which fieldwork is conducted.

To see what I mean, imagine two anthropologists. One is embedded not with US troops but in a village where the Taliban have an intermittent presence. The other is an HTS anthropologist. The first lives with villagers for the best part of a year, eating their food, sharing their illnesses, becoming a part of the rhythm of local life. When US troops beat down doors in the middle of the night, looking for insurgents, she too is roused from her sleep and has a gun pointed at her. And although the villagers change the subject when she asks about the Taliban and try to only talk about the subject out of her earshot, over time she hears things. Meanwhile her counterpart drops by neighbouring villages for a few hours at a time, always in US military uniform, surrounded by men with guns and writing in a notebook as his questions are posed.

There is now a rich literature in anthropology on how the identity and position of the ethnographer shapes and constrains the analysis he or she generates. In our thought experiment, the positioned difference between our two hypothetical

ethnographers amounts to the difference between anthropology and a form of glorified tourism. Even if HTS social scientists have read social theory and some local ethnography, their relation to the field is more like a hybrid of tourist and interrogator than it is that of a bona fide anthropologist. If anthropological knowledge does not take the form of 'data' scraped off the surface of daily life, like a lab sample, but information produced in the context of actual relationships of deepening trust and understanding, the very understanding produced by human terrain teams swooping down on villages in their Humvees can only be impoverished.

The distinction between credentials and expertise, and the boundary work often done to protect the privileges of the credentialled, is a recurrent issue in science and technology studies (see Evans, this volume). Practitioners of science studies have often been interested in valorizing those who lack academic credentials but have important knowledge: British sheep farmers who were quicker to see signs of radioactive contamination from Chernobyl than the government experts were (Wynne 1996); people with AIDS who understood the methodological weakness of clinical trials in a way that medical experts did not (Epstein 1996); and academic ecologists dependent on local trappers and map-makers (Star and Griesemer 1989). Less often explored in science studies is the inverse case: the credentialled who lack expertise. HTS affords us an unusual example of this inverse case: a group of academics whose certifications obscured their lack of expertise and usefulness for the task at hand. Paradoxically, the successful boundary work of HTS critics in the anthropological community helped sustain the illusion of their expertise.

Notes

1 On PRISP, see Baty (2005), Glenn (2005), Gusterson and Price (2005) and Price (2005, 2011).
2 For a statement on the CIA ad by Alan Goodman, the president of the American Anthropological Association at the time, see http://www.aaanet.org/press/an/0206/goodman.html (accessed Oct. 2012). The ad was initially accepted by an automated system at the AAA, but the CIA's money was refunded and the ad cancelled following an outcry from anthropologists.
3 On Minerva, see Gusterson (2008a, 2008b, 2008c). The SSRC has a good repository of essays on Minerva at http://www.ssrc.org/essays/minerva (accessed July 2014). The Minerva Initiative's homepage can be found at http://minerva.dtic.mil/overview.html.
4 For more on Project Camelot, see Horowitz (1967), Jacobs (1967), Langer (1967), Solovey (2001) and Walsh (1969).
5 For more detail on these struggles, see Berreman (1968, 2003), Foster *et al.* (1971), Price (2011), Wakin (1992), and Wolf and Jorgenson (1970).
6 On boundary work see Gieryn (1995, 1999) and Lamont and Molnar (2002).
7 While many practising anthropologists belong to the AAA, they also have their own professional organizations. The Society for Applied Anthropology has roughly 2,200 members (personal communication, Melissa Cope, 17 July 2014), and the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology has about 500 members (http://practicinganthropology.org/about, accessed July 2014).

8 On McFate, arguably the most controversial living anthropologist, see Kamps (2008), Price (2007), Schachtman (2008), and Stannard (2007). There are also archived interviews with McFate on the PBS *Charlie Rose* show available at http://www.amazon. com/Charlie-Rose-Peter-Counterinsurgency-December/dp/B0031MXQQY (accessed July 2014), and on NPR's Diane Rehm show available at http:// thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2007-10-10 (accessed July 2014). A full list of her publications can be found at http://montgomerymcfate.com/publications (accessed July 2014).

9 Much of this information about the history and architecture of HTS comes from a 2010 report mandated by Congress and conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses. See Clinton *et al.* (2010). The report was released, then promptly withdrawn and, at the time of writing, is not publicly available, though a captured copy can be accessed through the mirror site, http://openanthropology.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/ gettrdoc.pdf (accessed July 2014). Other useful sources of information on HTS include CEAUSSIC (2009), Gezari (2013), Gonzalez (2009), and a rather suspect overview by McFate and Fondacaro (2011). The independent journalist John Stanton has mounted something between a sustained investigation of and an obsessive crusade against HTS. His work is collected together as Stanton (2009). The HTS's official website is http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil (accessed July 2014).

10 HTS social scientist AnnaMaria Cardinalli wrote a report titled 'Pashtun Sexuality' (available as a link from her Wikipedia entry at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ AnnaMaria_Cardinalli, accessed July 2014) about the Afghan practice whereby young boys dress as girls and have sexual relationships with older men. Cardinalli attributed this practice to sexual repression and argued that Afghans are in denial about homosexual practices in their society. See Brinkley (2010) and FoxNews (2010) for some of the media coverage the report attracted.

11 Rohde (2007) uncritically reported Schweitzer's dubious claim and, in doing so, lent it the credibility of the newspaper of record. As the anthropologist David Price (20090 reports, 'my efforts under the Freedom of Information Act to get any reports verifying these outrageous claims led Col. Schweitzer to write me (2/11/08) admitting that no such studies verifying these often repeated claims exist (and even if they did, they would be complicated by confounds of changes in other conditions) and that this claimed reduction is a loose estimate made by Col. Schweitzer'. On the other hand, the *Washington Post* reported that civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose 40% the following year – the year the HTS programme really took root in Afghanistan (DeYoung 2009).

12 For the full statement, see http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/Statement-on-HTS.cfm (accessed July 2014).

13 The website for the Network of Concerned Anthropologists can be found at http:// sites.google.com/site/concernedanthropologists (accessed July 2014). Full disclosure: I was one of 11 co-founders of this group.

14 http://www.aaanet.org/pdf/iraqtorture.pdf (accessed July 2014).

15 See Price (2011) for an argument that anthropologists should ground their refusal to help the national security state in politics rather than professional ethics.

16 The 1971 ethics code can be found at http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/ethics (accessed July 2014).

17 In subsequent revisions of the ethics code this phrase was eliminated. In 2008, in the midst of the HTS controversy, Terry Turner, one of the authors of the 1971 ethics code, brought a motion from the floor of the business meeting at the annual meeting to restore this phrase, and the motion carried by a substantial margin.

18 See Latour (1987). An 'obligatory passage point' is a text or theory through which discussions of a particular issue have to be routed. E.g. Watson and Crick's theory of DNA is, even if just taken for granted in the background, an obligatory passage point in discussions of genetic risk.

19 These arguments are summarized in Gusterson (2010).
20 The latest AAA code of ethics can be found at http://ethics.aaanet.org/ethics-statement-0-preamble (accessed July 2014).
21 http://ethics.aaanet.org/ethics-statement-0-preamble (accessed July 2014).
22 Gentile posted this comment to the discussion at http://council.smallwarsjournal.com/showthread.php?t=4093&page=7 (accessed July 2014). At one point it was posted to the blog of the HTS anthropologist Marcus Griffin, but it was soon taken down from there.
23 http://ethics.aaanet.org/ethics-statement-0-preamble (accessed July 2014).
24 http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/Statement-on-HTS.cfm (accessed July 2014).
25 http://ethics.aaanet.org/ethics-statement-0-preamble (accessed July 2014).
26 Quoted (by permission) from Barbara Rose Johnston, message to Jennifer Clark, date unknown but sometime in late 2010/early 2011.
27 http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/Statement-on-HTS.cfm (accessed July 2014).
28 That the HTS programme's awareness of language issues may be limited is suggested by another newspaper report (Belt 2007), presumably based on press handlers' talking points, that enthuses over the ability of one HTS social scientist in Afghanistan to speak Arabic. The problem here is that Arabic is not spoken in Afghanistan.
29 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AnnaMaria_Cardinalli.
30 For a canonical article from science studies exploring an analogous case where good but uncredentialled knowledge was ignored by authorities in favour of bad but credentialled knowledge, see Wynne (1996).

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