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DILEMMAS OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN WARS: THE CASE OF THE HUMAN TERRAIN SYSTEM

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Abstract. The involvement of anthropology in warfare, in which anthropologists' performance helps to bridge the gap of cultural awareness of the military in wartime and provide soldiers understandings of foreign local cultures where they deploy, has a long history. The establishment of the Human Terrain System was also to fulfill the need of conducting anthropology research on the life of Iraqis and Afghans for the sake of wars in which the United States is involved. However, the Human Terrain System was seen as the most controversial program in the history of American anthropology, involved in wars. This paper, by systematically reviewing criticism imposed on the Human Terrain System through a desk study, attempts to provide a deep look at the dilemmas of the involvement of anthropology in wars. The study found that the Human Terrain System was put under pressure on organizational, financial, institutional, professional, military-strategic, methodological, scholarly, ethical, and political aspects. Among others, ethical debates were heavily taken into account, in which the focus was on whether the Human Terrain System achieves golden principles "do no harm" and "informed consent" in anthropology research on battlefields. The advocates claimed that what the organization did is consistent with codes of ethics, whereas the majority of anthropologists maintained that it violates the codes. Furthermore, what the Human Terrain System did has been considered as challenges for anthropologists and generated negative effects on the anthropological profession.

Keywords: Human Terrain System, debates on Human Terrain System, criticism on Human Terrain System, anthropology in wars

1. Introduction

The involvement of anthropology in warfare has a long history. Anthropologists' performance helps to bridge the gap of cultural awareness of the military in wartime, providing soldiers an understanding of foreign local cultures where they deploy. The establishment of the Human Terrain System (hereafter referred to as the "HTS") is also not out of the purpose, which aims to fulfill the need of conducting anthropology research on the life of Iraqis and Afghans for the sake of wars in which the United States is involved. The HTS formation, thus, led to the

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participation of anthropologists and other social scientists from various disciplines in the wartime in Iraq and Afghanistan [1].

The HTS has become the most controversial program in the history of American anthropology and has been put under criticism on several issues. The assertions of the American Anthropological Association pointed out that the Human Terrain System violates its Code of Ethics and Principles of Responsibility in several key ways [2, p. 10]. Other scholars have paid deep concerns about the establishment and the operation of the HTS, hinging on two main issues regarding ethics in the anthropology community, namely, "informed consent" and "do no harm" [2]. The advocates claimed that the research methods employed by the HTS are fit for the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics, and the HTS's missions explored new knowledge on terrain and provided rich documents for the literature [4].

By conducting a desk study through reviewing debates hinging on the operation and performance of the case of the HTS, this study provides a deep look at the dilemmas of the involvement of anthropology in wars. The objectives of this paper, thus, are constituted as follows: first, to make a review of the involvement of anthropology in warfare; second, to point out controversies over the establishment and operation of the HTS on the side of ethics in doing anthropological research. This paper proceeds with the next section touching the demand for anthropology's engagement in wartime, which leads to the emergence of the HTS. It then moves to critical debates of the HTS. The final section comes with conclusions.

2. Involvement of anthropology in wars

Research on warfare in anthropology can be divided into four major periods: Foundation Period, Classical Period, Golden Age, and Recent Period [3]. This paper focuses on the engagement of anthropology in the Recent Period with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are the wars in which the application of traditional methods of warfighting has proven inadequate, and it seems that knowledge of the enemy's culture is considered as important as knowledge of the order of battle to take advantage in the wars.

2.1. Demands of anthropology's engagement in wartime

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are complex conflicts in which the American military had a confrontation with insurgencies. Insurgency is defined as a movement organized in the form of a protracted politico-military struggle that strives for overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict [4, p. 25]. At the beginning of the wars, the U.S. military used the doctrines applied in the Cold war period countering conventional Soviet threat. This strategy emphasized on the use of advanced conventional weapons and the huge investment in technology such as precision-guided munitions, satellite

technology, airborne delivery systems, and cutting-edge communications [2, p. 10]. The implement of these tools in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan evidenced ineffective results when military leaders recognized that the wars they were experiencing were not the wars they had been fighting. The main reason for the failure in the wars was the lack of cultural awareness, as indicated by Connable, in which the author revealed three interrelated shortcomings in military cultural competency. Firstly, there was a lack of efficient cultural training for troops, staff, and commanders. Besides, military intelligence personnel has shown an inability of reading or analyzing cultural terrain and the lack of comprehensive data for cultural analysis. Finally, the staffs were incapable of using cultural terrain to their advantage leading to early series of wasted opportunities that fed the insurgencies and terrorist operations of the Taliban, Ba'athist insurgents, and Al-Qaeda [5, p. 58].

As recognized with the current lack of cultural knowledge among soldiers, the U.S. military passed a counterinsurgency strategy that ensured the socio-economic development and empowerment of local politicians and indigenous security forces. In terms of fostering the effectiveness of the strategy, the military would be equipped with knowledge about the population that they would protect. Practically, the call for using cultural knowledge in the war was mentioned at the beginning of the violence in Iraq in 2003 when Ike Skelton (a congressman) called for Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, to address cultural shortcomings in the military's strategy. After that, the retired Major General, Robert Scales, stressed on drafting soldiers who were equipped with exceptional cultural awareness and an intuitive sense of the nature and character of war [6] and emphasized the importance of understanding the enemy's motivation tactical method and cultural environment for success rather than the deployment of modern weapons [6].

The awareness of this lack of cultural knowledge in military forces led to setting up several initiatives to improve the military's cultural acumen implemented by the Defense Department, in which there have been appearances of cultural training centers (the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center and the United States Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning). The activities of enhancing cultural knowledge also included running cultural awareness classes of which students are soldiers who would perform their tasks in battlegrounds [2, p. 11].

2.2. The emergence of the Human Terrain System

The HTS has been known as "a new proof-of-concept program" developed by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command [7, p. 150]. With the failure of the doctrine applied in the period of Cold War, the HTS has responsibility for improving the understanding of the military on the complex of local socio-cultural environment in the areas where they are

deployed and providing the U.S. government information of foreign countries and regions prior to organizing an engagement [7, p. 150]. As mentioned above, the establishment of the HTS was in the context of the appearance of efforts of the Defense Department in addressing and remedying gaps of cultural knowledge of the American military. As a result, the emergence of the proof-of-concept program that is also known as the Cultural Preparation of the Environment is considered an unavoidable consequence of the process. The program's principal architect was Montgomery, a cultural anthropologist [8]. The Cultural Preparation of the Environment was designed at the beginning as a database storing the social-cultural information collected by military leaders who return from theaters of operation. However, this database was not appreciated by military commanders during its initial field test [2, p. 6]. The miscarriage of the Cultural Preparation of the Environment resulted in the suggestion expressed by Colonel Steve Fondacaro who tested the program, in which he contended that the Cultural Preparation Environment administrators have originally contributed in devising a program connecting cultural advisors up to military units [2, p. 6]. Accordingly, in an article entitled "*An Organizational Solution to DOD's Cultural Knowledge Needs*", McFate and Jackson proposed to set up a team of social scientists who are responsible for carrying out on-the-ground ethnographic research and delivering cultural knowledge to deployed military units [9]. The Department of Defense's Joint Improvised Explosive Devise Defeat Task Force has been known as the Human Terrain System after that [2, p. 7].

The mission of the HTS was clearly clarified that the program was developed to provide military commanders and staffs with knowledge and understanding of the local population and culture, of which impact on operational decisions in wars is found highly important. Furthermore, the program also aimed at dealing with knowledge transmission within the military in war zones [7, p. 150]. The HTS also had a campaign of recruiting the expertise and experience of social scientists and regional experts and deploying them in the Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) placed within combat brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan to effectively facilitate the process of decision making at the tactical, operational and strategic levels [7, p. 150].

As specified above, the birth of the HTS was to fill the gap of cultural knowledge in the U.S. military on battlefields. To reach this goal, the HTS needs to bring benefits and reduce harms for local people. That goal would be achieved in the process of involvement in the war through several major points. First, the HTS is responsible for protecting people in the war, thus "saving lives" was one of the likely benefits of their work. The operation of the HTS was initially expected to reduce violence and death in wars that arose from "cultural misunderstandings" on the part of U.S. forces and bring down the need for lethal operations through providing aid and services to win "hearts and minds" of local communities [7, p. 150]. In addition, the Human Terrain System also claimed that there was not an intelligence program in their operations, in which their goals were also to mobilize employees with expertise in

anthropology to war zones for mapping tribal networks and social structures and collecting data on local culture. This is because the indifference to local cultures would harm all sides who are involved in wars [7, p. 150].

3. Critical debates on Human Terrain System

The emergence of the HTS attracted much attention from the public. Right after being set up, its officials claimed that the presence of the HTS was to contribute to the reduction of harm and the death toll on battlefields. Scientifically, the HTS's employees pointed out that their research methods are fit for the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics, and they do not violate any items of the code. Furthermore, with the mission of discipline in social science, the teams sought to explore new knowledge on terrain and provide rich documents for literature as well. From the good things that Human Terrain System would gain, the organization, at first, attracted positive assessments from media and the public. There were huge positive media coverage and numerous articles, as well as television news reports made and produced to favor the establishment and operation of the HTS. McFate, one of the fathers of the HTS, was regarded as "a brave thinker" and one of ten key people who had great influence in the political arena at that time. Furthermore, the emergence of HTS attracted the attention of scholars who published numerous articles and books on the organization in Anthropology Today and Anthropology News. In addition, there was a documentary film, and a play was produced to report on the HTS [7, p. 150].

However, besides such praises, from the time of being born, the HTS came under the challenge of criticism. As reported by Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities, by April of 2009, the HTS employed 417 people, of whom 49 held a Ph.D. Of the 417, only six had a Ph.D. and another five an MA in anthropology [10]. The presence of anthropologists makes only a small number of the HTS employees, while scientists from other social sciences account for a large part, including international relations, political science, and their subdisciplines [10, pp. 60–61]. According to Zehfuss [11, p. 178], the comparative lack of debate about HTS within international relations is noteworthy and a considerable shortcoming.

It is also noticeable that at the time of being established, the HTS had to face strong opposition from the American Anthropological Association. In 2007, the Executive Board of this organization considered the HTS as an unacceptable application of anthropological expertise, while the Board of the Society for Applied Anthropology raised its 'grave concern' about the program [12, p. 12]. In 2009, the American Anthropological Association Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities published a report on the HTS with the suggestion that the American Anthropological Association should

criticize HTS for its violation of disciplinary ethics and practice for job seekers and whether HTS could be recognized as a research agency in the field of "anthropology" per se within the U.S. Department of Defense [10, p. 3]. Furthermore, the Network of Concerned Anthropologists released critiques and promoted a "Pledge of Non-Participation in Counterinsurgency" [11, p. 178]. The critiques and critics are both diverse, but according to Forte [13, p. 395], the critiques of the HTS tend to focus on nine areas as follows:

First, for the organizational side, criticisms were developed to deepen labor relations and (mis)management within the HTS' ranks.

Second, the financial dimension was also taken into account, in which the issue of cost-effectiveness of the HTS was proved as problematic due to the high salaries paid for staff, as well as the occurrence of financial fraud. In addition, the shortage of full-time employees who earn doctorates in anthropology and the heightened anxiety within anthropological ranks in HTS was strongly emphasized in critiques.

Third, the institutional condemnation of HTS stressed on which sections between the U.S. military and the American Anthropological Association the HTS mainly belong to. While the American Anthropological Association did not recognize HTS as a valid practice of anthropology, HTS was criticized for the duplication of functions at a higher cost in terms of a military organization. Besides, the budgets that the HTS gets preferential treatment were the main points in institutional criticism.

Fourth, as for the military-strategic aspect, the HTS was in doubt about the efficacy of counterinsurgency doctrine that it applied. The doubt was also about the dubiousness of the likelihood of success and the deficiencies of using civilian non-experts in its operation.

Fifth, regarding the professional dimension, criticisms put the HTS under questions of the actual or potential harm to the anthropology's reputation resulted from the performance of HTS. In this vein, the low level of professionalism of the anthropology research carried out by the HTS was found to generate the danger of anthropological fieldworkers. Besides, the danger was also anticipated due to their relationship with the U.S. military or intelligence agents in war zones.

Sixth, the critiques of methodology focused on the research methods and theoretical models that HTS employed as standards in doing research. The HTS fell under suspicion regarding the quality of works that the organization carried out. Critics contended that it is difficult to recognize Human Terrain Teams actually as ethnography. The dispute hinging on this issue was more intensive with the presentation of the structural-functionalist models of society and culture in both the training handbook issued by HTS and in the U.S. Army's 2006 counterinsurgency Field Manual.

Seventh, in terms of scholarship, critics emphasized the low quality of research works, as well as the in-qualifications of the researchers employed to mark the incompetence of HTS.

Eighth, regarding the ethical issue, the operation of HTS was proved to fail to protect informants who participated in the research undertaken by the HTS. This critique pointed to the basic research procedures neglected by HTS during research implementation regarding informed consent, confidentiality, and "do no harm". Moreover, the HTS was also condemned for endangering real harm in which the HTS was supposed to refine targeting instrument and covert function as a means of gathering intelligence on "enemies".

Finally, regarding the political dimension, there have been intensive critiques placing the emergence and operation of HTS in wider contexts of the militarization of the social sciences, and foreign intervention and occupation. The suspicion about the "humane war" and "humanitarian intervention", justified the establishment of HTS, was strongly discussed. In this debate, the involvement of anthropology in wars, which is the case of HTS emergence, was considered as the result of political purposes, distorting anthropology in public eyes. More specifically, the doubters contended that the adoption of the HTS served the interest of a certain group of anthropologists in the American Anthropological Association, and thus forming commissions to pass judgment on both the HTS and military anthropology.

As aforementioned, criticisms of the HTS remarkably vary across scholars, however, the debates tend to prefer to ethical and professional concerns, which lead to opposite opinions about the assessment of whether the HTS has been considered violated [13, p. 396]. It was suspected that the involvement of anthropology of the HTS in the military required various approaches to do anthropological research that led to a change of nature of anthropological works on the side of ethics established in codes by the American Anthropological Association. Accordingly, the ethical deliberations hinge on how to guarantee two golden standards of ethical codes to be fully achieved in research. The two golden principles in anthropological studies are "do no harm" and "informed consent".

"Do no harm" is perceived as a principle regarding both morality and ethics, in which the former is regarded as principles of right conduct, while the latter is a system of moral principles and the rules of conduct "associated with the human actions described as right or wrong, good or bad [14, p. 19]". "Do no harm" is seen as a moral principle helping to avoid, prevent, or lessen harm to extend common morality [14, p. 19]. To prevent or lessen harm, the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly, refugees, IDPs or human rights activists should be the most taken into account, which is also reinforced by the ethical norm to "do no harm" [14, p. 19]. As criticized by many anthropologists, at first, the works of the HTS are very difficult to avoid harming others because the engagement of HTS in armed conflicts inherently harms the other [13, p. 396].

While most advocates of the HTS see that the appearance of anthropologists in combat zones would reduce and prevent harm for civilians, others have doubts about the issues. It is evident that it was not always the case in which the identity data collected by HTS's employees were removed to protect civilians, and that it seems to exist an oversight mechanism to do such things. Moreover, the processes of doing the research carried out by the Human Terrain Team were not reviewed externally by any authoritative institutions of social science; thus, data quality standards and identity protection measures were only ensured to implement within army force [2, p. 13]. The assessment of Kusiak presented in Greanias [2, p. 13] also laid out this issue that it is difficult to assess whether the Human Terrain Team obeyed the guiding principle to "do no harm" because there was no certain mechanism to control and manage the obedience of this sort of the research ethic taken by the HTS.

Not self-controlling data is another point that other anthropologists concern about. According to them, the principle of "do no harm" has not been made sure as it is in the system of the codes passed by the American Anthropological Association. This is due to a systematic chain of causes, of which the starting point is the HTS's inability to recruit top anthropologists to be its employees. The failure of enlisting such anthropologists is because of the issue of military patronage toward the organization. This resulted in losing self-control of data of the HTS, and hence, social scientists have taken this shortcoming to argue that the HTS was not able to guarantee the protection of the source of data and led to the uncertainty of implementing the principle of "do no harm" [2; 15, p. 4].

"Informed consent" is the second issue on which most anthropologists focus their debate on whether the HTS violated the codes of ethics. "Informed consent" was drafted in the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics in 1988. Although there has been no consensus on the code among anthropologists, it can be commonly perceived that "practitioners endeavor to disclose any significant risks to those we study" [14, p. 20]. It was drafted in the 1998 code as follows:

> "*III.A.1. Anthropological researchers should obtain in advance the informed consent of persons being studied, providing information, owning or controlling access to material being studied, or otherwise identified as having interests that might be impacted by the research. It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project and may be affected by requirements of other codes, laws, and ethics of the country or community in which research is pursued. Further, it is understood that the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous; the process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied. Researchers are responsible for identifying and complying with the various informed consent codes, laws, and regulations affecting their*

projects. Informed consent, for the purposes of this code, does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form. It is the quality of the consent, not the format, that is relevant".

The most striking criticism for this issue comes from the members of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists. They suspect that the HTS did not fulfill these requirements due to not providing a meaningful informed consent, the high possibility of endangering the researched and increasing the likelihood of perceiving as spies and military operatives for other anthropologists by which endangering the physical safety of professional colleagues. It is also suspected that anthropologists, who were embedded in military units, armed, and worn soldier uniforms, are not likely to obtain consent from civilians because their shape as a soldier causes fear for local people [15, p. 4].

The involvement of the HTS in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan means that its members had a military life in all aspects. This results in the fact that their doing field research becomes something else, and it is not the study that they are used to carrying out. Most anthropologists argue that being accompanied by the military leads to conditions to reduce the likelihood in which the HTS's members would collect accurate and valid data for research. The likelihood takes place due to the fear of civilians in relation to the U.S. military. Some scholars held the view that the uniforms and weapon carried by the HTS's members when they did their tasks are considered as benign gestures, and that the effect of those things is that it is less likely to make conversations between them and civilians). However, others insist that it is difficult to foresee how civilians thought about the presence of the military, and those activities of the HTS also originated fears and worries of civilians, which is likely to minimize the chance to get informed consent for study [2, p. 11]. It is argued that the anthropologists going out in uniforms to do fieldwork change the nature of anthropological works, which is considered as attempts to influence a certain outcome rather than observe the empirical world. Therefore, what anthropologists as members of the HTS do is different from what they do without engaging in the military, and it might not be due to them, but it is because of the context [2, p. 11].

Besides the above major issues of ethical debates, the arguments regarding the professional reputation of other anthropologists have been strongly discussed. At first, as argued by Network of Concerned Anthropologists and American Anthropological Association, the engagement of the HTS in militaries with the facts, such as wearing uniforms and carrying weapons, has distorted the image of anthropologists and prevented social scientists from acting openly and ethically as well [2, p. 13]. Furthermore, they added that, by doing so, anthropologists who did join the program would also be considered as soldiers and mistaken as a spy. These things lead to barriers that an anthropologist has to face when doing fieldwork. Moreover, the emphasis on the lack of peer review process on all aspects of the program is also

mentioned in discussions. This lack makes the HTS be challenged to be seen as very social science, as well as to have been qualified as top experts who are willing to cooperate with the team [2, p. 13]. The HTS's involvement in intelligence gathering was also questioned when the July 2010 Wikileaks release of Afghan war records presented evidence that there had been a regular occurrence of HTS's cooperation with intelligence branches of the military, in which the HTS was acquired to provide information regarding the private field notes of civilian members of Human Terrain Team during research [7, p. 151].

4. Conclusions

Despite having a contribution to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Human Terrain System has been seen as the most controversial program in the history of American anthropology due to the context in which it existed. This paper has attempted to review and systemize criticisms on its existence so far. Although there are advocates of the HTS's establishment and operation, those, who suspect benefits from the organization, account for the majority, and most of them are social scientists, not least anthropologists.

The birth of the HTS, which has been the tendency of anthropology's involvement in wars with a long history, resulted from the need for cultural knowledge in the U.S. military. This is because of the failure of the strategy in the cold war, which is applied in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The HTS with the Human Terrain Teams deployed in combat zones conducts research through anthropological instruments to provide crucial data on cultures of local civilians, from which the counterinsurgency strategy of the U.S. military has gained initial effectiveness. Criticisms on the HTS vary in several aspects. As analyzed in the previous sections, there are nine areas where the HTS was put under challenge. They are organizational, financial, institutional, professional, military-strategic, methodological, scholarly, ethical, and political aspects. Of those, professional and ethical issues have attracted the most criticisms from social scientists, especially American anthropologists. Ethical debates have focused on whether the HTS achieves golden principles "do no harm" and "informed consent" while conducting research on battlefields. The HTS's advocates claim that what the organization did is consistent with codes of ethics, whereas the majority of anthropologists assert that it violated the codes. On the professional side, what the HTS did has been considered as challenges for anthropologists and generated negative effects on the anthropological profession.

Although the HTS terminated on September 30, 2014, the debates about the organization seem to continue until now. It can be said that the application of anthropology to dimensions of human life, in general, and wars, in particular, is deemed necessary. In the case of the HTS, the establishment and operation of this organization in wars that the U.S. was involved in played a significant role as well. It helps to intrinsically prevent harm from the suffering of local people

by improving soldiers' understanding of the cultural environment. Thus, it reduces violence and lethal actions in wars. In theory, the HTS also provided significant opportunities for the anthropologists conducting research on cultures in local places, leading to enriching the literature in social sciences. These are supportive sides when considering the HTS as an academic organization. However, in practice, the operation of the HTS had been demonstrated to violate ethical principles, by which the end of the HTS's performance should be understandable.

The failure of the HTS raises a question that what is a sustainable solution for the involvement of anthropology in wars in which the distortion of anthropology as a discipline does not exist but still serves the military to reduce violence and save lives for both sides (local people and soldiers)? While the participation of anthropologists in military forces should be acknowledged from the fall of the HTS, the priority should be given to providing cultural knowledge to deployed military soldiers. In this respect, the solution can be fulfilled by providing junior leaders in military forces courses in social sciences and encouraging them in attending and completing these courses with awards of ranking promotions. This also applies to ordinary soldiers. The military force also officially launch new sectors operating within it by which social scientists, as well as social science graduates, are employed to work as officials in the force. More importantly, ethical codes in doing anthropology should be regularized as a part of regulations and rules in the operation of the military, especially in battlefields.

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