Part Three: Militarization, Militarism, and the Social Sciences

Sessions 12-13: Assessing the Human Terrain System

“Social Scientist on a camel!” -- photo and caption by the US Army’s Human Terrain System

“Sometimes it gets kinetic!” -- photo and caption by the US Army’s Human Terrain System
What is the Context of HTS?

1) Post-September 11, 2001

→ expansion of the national security apparatus + new military invasions & occupations

→ Jeffrey Sluka: “applied reactionary agenda to legitimize and facilitate the active involvement of anthropologists with the US military in the ‘war on terrorism’ in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond” (Sluka, 2010, p. 100).
2 Outsourcing national security to private contractors
An all-volunteer force: increased incentives and benefits
4 Winnable wars:

- technological advancements in ordnance and logistics (“smart” bombs, “precision” airstrikes);
- better “knowing the enemy”;
- exit strategies, timelines.
Long-Term Continuities

→ US history: foundation of colonies in the sixteenth-century, conquest of Indigenous populations, nationalism, usurping Indigenous & Mexican territory, annexation of parts of the Caribbean, search for foreign markets

→ Divine providence, manifest destiny, “American exceptionalism”

→ “Isolationism” = “irresponsibility”

→ Ideological canon: the “truth” of American “liberation”

→ Hegemonic ideas: care, protection, progress, legitimacy of the violence of the mighty, the enlightened nature of the dominant, the right to rule, the duty to serve.

→ Much of both sides of the HTS debate shared most or all of these values, beliefs, ideas
Short-Term Continuities

→ US anthropology’s prior confrontations with militarism:


→ Condemned secret research

→ Responsibility of anthropologists was to those they study

→ Anthropologists were called upon to do “everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare of those they studied” (AAA, 1971, emphasis added)

→ “emerged as a direct result of the protest against counterinsurgency research in Vietnam, Project Camelot in Latin America, Project Agile in Thailand, and the Himalayan Border Countries Project in India” (Sluka, 2010, p. 102).

→ protection of others + professional self-interest
HTS’ early advocates of the program hailed it as “a CORDS for the 21st century” (see Kipp et al., 2006): Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program in Vietnam.

CORDS → Phoenix program: “led to the capture, torture, and assassination…of tens of thousands of civilians” in Vietnam (González, 2009, pp. 5, 59).

A retread of much older counterinsurgency theories

Roberto González, the roots of the “human terrain” concept: urban policing of inner cities of the US in the 1960s, Black Panther Party, FBI’s Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) (González, 2009, p. 29).

Repetition of history: (1) McFate as a corporate spy (Corn, Ridgeway and Schulman, 2008); (2) use of “human terrain mapping” in a project coordinated between the CIA and the New York City Police Department; Los Angeles Police Department (Apuzzo and Goldman, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; DGI, 2013; Ruderman, 2012).
Critiques and Their Limits

The Range of Critiques

1) Organizational
2) Financial
3) Institutional
4) Professional
5) Military strategic
6) Methodological
7) Scholarly
8) Ethical
Sidebar:

Montgomery McFate’s doctoral thesis:

- “knowledge of the enemy leads to a refinement in knowledge of how best to kill the enemy”
- “does good anthropology contribute to better killing?”
- “Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss, enemies are not only good to kill, enemies are good to think”
- “understanding the possible intentions of the enemy entails being able to think like the enemy; in other words, successful pre-emptive counter moves depend on simulating the strategy of the opponents.”

Human terrain mapping as enabling the global kill chain:
Challenges for DoD Investment
- What Have We Learned?

- Need to ‘Map the Human Terrain’ across the Kill Chain
  - Enables the entire Kill Chain for the GWOT
- Target Detection may be Difficult and Require Non-Traditional Means
- Enemy Exists inside potentially High Collateral Damage Areas
  - And… in Denied Access Areas
- Sometimes We ID the Enemy but…
  - … do not have an adequate/appropriate Strike Solution in time
- Mobile / Re-locatable Targets Remain a Problem!
- The Target Characteristics may Remain Unknown even at…
  Time Over Target … & “How Did We Do?”
- If Decision Timeline Varies and can be Long… let’s Enable the Rest of
  the Kill Chain to be Dynamically Responsive
9) Political

“Let’s sit down and share our concerns…”

→ Professional concerns, questions of scholarly research, reputation of the discipline, flaws in HTS methodology and training, ethics of research procedures, with assumptions about protection and caring shared with HTS proponents (see Zehfuss, 2012).
→ “Tone” of debate, calls for collegial respect
→ Shared affinities, mutual sense of belonging, common concerns in terms of “care” and “protection” of those under US occupation
→ Providing useful advice to military and political authorities
Executive Board of the AAA, October, 2007: “unacceptable application of anthropological expertise,” “placing anthropologists in positions in which their work will be in violation of the AAA Code of Ethics”, threatening the well-being of “both other anthropologists and persons other anthropologists study” (American Anthropological Association Executive Board [AAA-EB], 2007).

AAA’s Commission (CEAUSSIC):

“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, p. 4).

“the incompatibility of HTS with disciplinary ethics”

“the problem of allowing HTS to define the meaning of ‘anthropology’ within DoD” (CEAUSSIC, 2009, p. 3)
The Limits of Dominant Critiques

- Criticism of war, of the national security state, of militarization, are not necessarily critiques of imperialism.

- Divorced ethics from politics, preserving military anthropology broadly
In light of the criticisms of the Human Terrain System voiced by the AAA and most critics of HTS in the discipline, would you support the Human Terrain System if...

- ...it was better managed?
- ...its research passed inspection of Institutional Review Boards and was peer reviewed?
- ...it could be proven that informed consent was obtained?
- ...if it had a better, more extensive training program?
- ...if HTS actually employed well-regarded specialists in the regions where it was deployed?
- ...if deployed Human Terrain Teams lived with villagers, and not on US bases?
- ...it was a fact that HTS never directly contributes to targeting?
- ...instead of using anthropologists, HTS turned to other social scientists?
- ...if it asked better questions, but still supported the US military?
- ...if it was separate from the US military, but still supported US foreign policy?
- ...if it could be proven that it had reduced violence where it operated?
- ...if it could be shown that its work was humanitarian in nature?
The Critique of Dominant Limitations

→ McFate: military and intelligence apparatuses would always use anthropologists’ work regardless—and who is best suited to guiding their interpretations?

→ Missed opportunity?

❖ If harm can be done by appropriating anthropological knowledge, then why do anthropologists produce such knowledge in the first place?
❖ If no harm can be done with anthropological knowledge, then why shouldn’t the military have it? If you support the truth value of anthropological research, then why withhold it?
❖ What harm has HTS done to the reputation of the discipline that non-military anthropologists haven’t already done?
❖ Aside from criticizing HTS, what do you do that makes anything better?