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# Going Beyond Human Terrain System: Exploring Ethical Dilemmas

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**ABSTRACT**

Modern technology-dominated methods of warfare have proven to be inadequate to counter threats presented by non-state actors. Today's conflicts are increasingly waged *among* the people instead of *around* the people. It is therefore not a surprise that social scientists are recruited by governmental, military, and intelligence institutions. The use of the "Human Terrain System" (HTS) brought to the forefront ethical debates regarding the potential involvement of social sciences and social scientists in various military activities, with an ultimate aim to reduce the pain and suffering of war victims. However, this involvement brought also criticism of such involvement. This article discusses three main ethical concerns associated with HTS, namely, the possible usage of knowledge in enhanced interrogation techniques; the issue of clandestine research; and the sources of funding. Due to ethical controversies, I will propose three models of cooperation between social scientists and governmental, military, and intelligence institutions, which might help them find a common ground. Furthermore, the paper concludes that there is much social scientists can and should do in field work that goes beyond the Human Terrain System. United Nations peacekeeping operations can be a fertile ground for establishing mechanisms that might clarify the role of social scientists in the battlefield.

**KEYWORDS**

Human Terrain System; academic ethics; military ethics; social scientists

## Introduction

The important place of warfare in human affairs has made it the focus of intense research within a wide range of disciplines, from biology to history, from psychology to political science. The outset of the twenty-first century did not bring about the "end of history," but rather, arguably, a clash of civilizations marked not least by the events of September 11, 2001 – and thereby also renewed attention to war. This article will take as its point of departure that contemporary technology-oriented methods of warfare have proven to be inadequate to counter the threats presented by non-state actors.

Today's conflicts are increasingly waged *among* the people instead of *around* the people. It is therefore not surprising that social scientists are recruited and consulted by governmental, military, and intelligence institutions (hereafter GMI). The wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) revealed an extensive need to develop methods for gaining a

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sociocultural understanding of the adversary. In order to combine the requisite cultural understanding and facilitate the execution of counterinsurgency warfare (hereafter COIN) in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. Army and allied forces introduced the "Human Terrain System" project (hereafter HTS). Its purpose was to conduct operationally-relevant social science research, and to deliver to the commanders and other military personnel cultural and social knowledge that would allow them to establish a coherent, analytical framework for operational planning, decision-making, and assessment (Finney 2008).

However, the HTS has awakened negative memories among social scientists of past engagements with various government-supported projects. Many scholars and academic associations opposed participation in the Human Terrain System because of what they believed to be serious moral and ethical dilemmas (AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities 2009; Forte 2010).

Most military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have come to an end and HTS is no longer an active project, but there are still many unresolved questions, which we need to discuss, and from which we can learn. Social scientists are indeed currently engaged in United Nations peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions, where they provide expertise that can ultimately lead to mitigation of pain and suffering and facilitate social justice, but where many dilemmas are also present.

The social sciences and social scientists are of course not separated nor isolated from the contemporary globalized world. It is critical that we analyze ongoing debates about the engagement of social scientists with governmental, military, and intelligence institutions, and their role in various military interventions, so that we can better understand their legitimate role.

The first part of this article will briefly examine the pathway from COIN to the Human Terrain System, with a focus on the existing lack of knowledge about cultures and war-torn societies. The second part will discuss the essence of HTS, what kind of field research social scientists were engaged in, and what the research methodologies and research questions were. The article points out that projects similar to the HTS could be used in peaceful interventions, such as humanitarian assistance. The third part will elaborate on major ethical issues related to HTS and possible future HTS-related projects: the possible usage of knowledge in enhanced interrogation techniques; the issue of clandestine research; and the sources of funding. The conclusion will present three possible models of cooperation between academia and GMI: first, the "Academia and Think Tank" model, focusing on comprehensive educational process and research; second, the "Decision-making" model, focusing on ways to improve and shape decisions made at the political and strategic levels; and third and most controversial, the "War-related engaging" model, which addresses and depicts future HTS-like projects by proposing a separation between academic and military ethics when conducting field research in the realities of the battlefield. I conclude that any academic code of ethics must not leave social scientists in a position of ancient Chinese monkeys: see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

## The cultural deficiencies of modern warfare

Any military operation, whatever its aim, represents a complex and multidimensional environment involving numerous people-to-people interactions. In these interactions,

individuals bring along their own luggage of grievances and worldviews, often combined with strong ethnocentric preferences for their own "superior" sociocultural systems. A lack of knowledge and understanding of sociocultural factors can impede the achievement of military and political objectives – and the opposite can facilitate it. Counterinsurgency operations require knowledge of people, topography, economy, history, and culture. In 2006, the U.S. Army introduced its Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3–24 (Headquarters Department of the Army 2006), underlining that culture is an essential element of waging a successful COIN.

Military personnel, however, have missions and objectives that divert their attention from studying the culture and history of specific countries. Moreover, military institutions are characterized by cultural constraints that further limit a deeper understanding of other societies. The inability, or limited capability, to perceive the world through the eyes of different national or ethnic groups, the tendency to prefer one's own way of life or culture over others, combined with a language that seeks or creates "the enemy," can contribute to the vilification of the human beings on the "other" side, which may also make killing easier (Booth 1979; Eikenberry Karl 2013, Pawiński 2018b). In other words, what is good for military efficiency – namely, cultural understanding – is not always seen to be good for military effectiveness.

In order to reduce the lack of cultural understanding vis-à-vis Iraq, in 2003 the US military produced Cultural Smart Cards (hereafter CSC) (Federation of American Scientists 2006), wallet-sized notes providing a portable orientation to Islam. It had sections about Iraqi hand gestures, ethnic and cultural groups, cultural history, customs, female dress codes and basic examples of phrases or words that might be useful in daily communication. For example, CSC explained that touching or holding hands among people of the same sex is not considered homosexual, it advised discretion in interactions with Arab women, and warned that the Western hand gesture for "stop" means "hello" in Iraq. It also went further by stating that "Arabs do not believe in cause and effect but rather in isolated incidents or the will of Allah," that "Arabs perceive problems as someone's plot to make their life more unpleasant," and that "Arabs make group decisions. Do not try to force an individual to make a decision … if forced to make a quick decision … they feel no commitment to abide by it" (Guesterson 2010, 282–283). Such oversimplifications and overgeneralizations of sociocultural complexities led to increased tensions and misunderstandings, and sometimes to cultural oversensitivity. In the section discussing "don't do this" there are recommendations such as "don't use your left hand for contact with others, eating, or gestures. It is considered unclean," or "don't slouch, lean, or appear disinterested when conversing with Iraqi men. Do not expose the soles of feet or shoes" (FAS 2006). However, as one U.S. Army National Guard captain battalion intelligence officer in Baghdad noticed,

> everybody was all freaked out about touching with the left hand and, you know, when you sit down, don't show the bottom of your foot. That's all true, but it's all in context. If it's a friend or someone you've known for a while, they are not going to give a s**t (Davis 2010).

These types of "should or should not do's" are stereotyped instructions focusing on surface elements of culture, and most often on those surface aspects that are different or exotic from the perspective of the person giving the instruction. Also, such surface knowledge can only prevent the most catastrophic cultural indiscretions, and will not lead to a

deeper understanding or appreciation of cultural traits. Therefore, several governmental, military, and intelligence (GMI) institutions turned their attention to social scientists and civilian academia.

## The human terrain system and beyond

Between July 2005 and August 2006, the U.S. Army assembled the Human Terrain System project, which aimed to support ongoing COIN missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. What was meant to be a tool to increase understanding, thereby mitigating pain and suffering as well as facilitating peacebuilding and nation (re)building processes, rather spurred a mix of emotions from the very beginning and divided social scientists into two camps. The one side presented a set of ethical dilemmas supported by historical cases from the Cold War, exposing inefficiencies associated with cooperation between academia and GMI institutions. Among the accusations were clandestine research, violation of the "do no harm" principle during field work, and the engagement of unwitting social scientists (Price 2002, 2011; Gonzalez 2007, 2008; Forte 2013). On the other side of the debate were governmental officials praising HTS effectiveness. For instance, a 2008 speech delivered by Robert Gates, then U.S. Secretary of Defense, indicated that the project resulted in alternative thinking in the military, leading to less violence with fewer hardships and casualties among civilians (Jaschik 2008). In his testimony, Colonel Martin P. Schweitzer said that the increase in available information on and understanding of human terrain factors delivered by Human Terrain Teams, resulted in a 60–70 percent reduction of kinetic (physical or destructive) operations that would otherwise have occurred (Schweitzer 2008). An assessment of HTS presented by the Center for Naval Analysis concluded that HTS has been a success in many ways. The report argued that the main reason for criticism and misunderstanding of the project stems from poor communication and absence of an overall outreach (Clinton 2010). Voices from the field, the engaged social scientists, were in general favorable toward HTS and its contributions (Griffin 2010).

In order to understand the reasons for the contrasting views on HTS, it is necessary to explain what exactly caused the debate and the negative reactions.

The Human Terrain System based on Human Terrain Teams consisted of five to nine military and civilian personnel attached to a Brigade Combat Team. The objectives and missions of the Human Terrain Team can be summarized in five points (Griffin 2010, 218):

(1) Provide descriptions and analyses of civilian considerations for each district, and areas of operations;
(2) Maintain an understanding of local leadership, how they interact with each other, and what their interests and concerns are;
(3) Provide specialized assistance to the Brigade Combat Team and battalion projects to facilitate completion, efficiency, and social impact;
(4) Provide guidance to soldiers regarding how to collect human terrain information to improve their Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield and other reporting efforts;
(5) Respond to requests for information from Brigade Combat Team and battalion.

Each team included at least one Team Leader, one Social Scientist, one Research Manager, and two Human Terrain Analysts. The optimum composition of the team consisted of at least one person speaking the language of the area of operation, one person with subject expertise of the area, and one female member in order to gain access to female members of the population. The Team Leaders were focusing and supervising the team's efforts based on the unit's needs, integrating the collected information into the military staff decision-making process. Social Scientists were responsible for managing ethnographic and social science research, tying the team's research design to the unit's campaign design or operational concept. They would conduct ethnographic and social science analyses based on information gathered. The Social Scientists should also support the commander's decision-making process by recommending options for the use of non-lethal effects to build trust, form partnerships and apply informed cultural knowledge to problem-solving and building solutions (Finney 2008). According to HTS guidelines, both the Team Leaders and the Social Scientists should become trusted advisors to the commander and staff. The Research Manager in the team should cooperate with the Social Scientists to develop, draft, explain, and implement a research design/strategy for a given mission or research project. The Research Manager should also be responsible for the processing, storing, disseminating, and tracking of data. The last member of HTT is the Human Terrain Analyst (HTA) – there could be two of these – a regional, cultural or linguistic expert. He or she should supplement the Social Scientist's methodological expertise with a cultural and regional expertise and provide the HTT with a resource of situational awareness and deeper understanding of how the culture influences the battle space. The HTA's primary function was data collection, assessment, and analysis (Finney 2008).

After receiving a request for information from individuals, units, or offices, the HTT would devise a plan to collect all the data and conduct all the research necessary to fulfill the task. The most common way to gather the data during field work was through surveys and interviews. The scope of questions varied from basic questions such as "how old are you?" or "where and when did you finish school?" to more detailed ones, connected with networking and mapping. For example: "What five people here have you known the longest?" and "Who are the most important people in here?" (Finney 2008). These types of field interviews were usually guided by broader research questions pertaining to the objectives of the mission. For instance, in order to facilitate economic development in the occupied country, it is necessary to identify the "cultural economy," which can be separated into three models: 1. formal and informal economic systems, 2. the economy as a network of exchange, and 3. the economy as a way of structuring social relationships (Salmoni and Holmes-Eber 2008, 74). Distinguishing and understanding the three economic models is particularly important in underdeveloped countries, such as Afghanistan. In 2002, for instance, drug trading in Afghanistan generated as much as USD 2.5 billion, representing around 40% of the official economy and involving more than 20% of the population (Guimbert 2004). Changing the existing patterns of the cultural economy requires knowledge and a sound understanding of potential outcomes after a reduction of the "informal" economy and the introduction of a more formal economy. This conceivably prompted HTT field-research-guided questions such as: "What categories of people work in the informal economy?", "What is considered an illegal good or service in the area of operations, on what basis?", and "How do local

economic structures reflect the relationship of the group to the larger political and state system?" (Salmoni and Holmes-Eber 2008, 74 ff.).

These kinds of research questions can also serve beyond the Human Terrain System, for example, in peace-promoting and humanitarian operations. Peacekeeping and peacemaking operations can be defined as the deployment of unarmed or lightly armed troops whose mission is to restore order or to buttress a fragile political situation between two or more contending political groups within a state. Humanitarian assistance interventions are of a similar character, consisting of deployed forces and aimed at saving lives, but without necessarily altering the political context within the target state (Arnold 2008). Contemporary peacekeeping operations under the UN are a complex amalgamation of challenging interrelated, multitask, multilateral, multidimensional, and multinational or multicultural environments (Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger 2008). So far, cultural integration with UN peacekeeping operations has been treated instrumentally, as a tool that can be used to achieve an end. Instead of being regarded as the background or pre-condition for the military operations – including the required communication, cooperation, and coexistence – cultural understanding tends to reinforce distinctions between "us" and "them." According to a US Marine Corps General,

> we never do a good job of cultural intelligence, of understanding what makes people tick, what their structure is, where authority lies, what is different about their values and their ways of doing business. Cultural bias limits our ability to understand what is going on around us and often prevents commanders from making informed decisions (Odoi 2005, 14).

Therefore, integrating Human Terrain System-like projects into UN peacekeeping operations can be beneficial at various stages and levels of conflict. Social scientists could provide support and expertise mitigating internal tensions and misunderstandings within mission personnel, as well as supervise and facilitate a line of communication between local communities and UN troops. Furthermore, opportunities to participate in peacekeeping missions could be a rewarding experience and allow social scientists to study communities that otherwise would not be accessible due to the instability of a specific country. Hence, one may ask, what are the arguments *against* participation in HTS-like projects? Are they well grounded? Do ethical and moral costs really outweigh potential practical benefits?

## Ethical dilemmas – ghosts from the past, fears of the present

World War II intensified and transformed the social sciences. Scholars developed new methods and procedures to help win the war. For example, Clyde Kluckhohn worked on the Japanese "national character" for the Foreign and Moral Analysis Division of the Office of War Information. Further, Samuel Stouffer's moral studies of American soldiers were conducted for the research branch of the Information and Education Division of the War Department (Isaac 2012, 82). This and similar research convinced a generation of social scientists that knowledge of general laws was possible in the realm of human behavior. Due to the rise of a communist enemy, a new interdisciplinary behavioral approach became fashionable among policy-makers and policy-oriented academics. Those who favored this approach boasted that it could shape the postwar period as much as physics had shaped war itself. This interdisciplinary movement derived much of its

strength from private and public patrons, including the Big Three foundations: Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Ford Foundation. All of them were interested in making the social sciences relevant to the intellectual, technical, diplomatic, and military challenges associated with the Cold War (Solovey and Cravens 2012). Throughout the Cold War period, various governmental, military, intelligence, and civilian bodies had been funding and supporting projects as part of the fight against global communism (Pawiński 2018a).

In 2004, the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP)[1] was established in order to improve the analytic depth and quality of the Intelligence Community (IC). Its purpose is to help 15 different agencies of the US IC recruit and educate analysts on critical linguistic and/or scientific skills that the labor market does not readily provide. These critical skills are determined by intelligence agencies and include areas in which the current analytical capabilities of the IC are deficient or are likely to be deficient. PRISP students receive scholarships amounting to up to $25,000 per year. There would arguably not be anything wrong with PRISP if not for the fact that participants are strongly recommended to "exercise prudence in disclosing their affiliations and roles primarily because identification may invite harassment" (Nuti 2005). Further, students receiving this scholarship are required to participate in closed meetings with other PRISP scholars and individuals from their administering intelligence agency (Price 2011). Similar concerns of secrecy relate to the The Minerva Initiative, a US initiative seeking to mobilize and build creative capacity of area-studies specialists fluent in strategically crucial issues connected to national security (Asher 2008).

Financial support of social sciences research by private or public institutions throughout the Cold War, as well as the contemporary Human Terrain System, have raised many ethical questions about research objectivity and independence. Gabriel Almond, a political scientist from Stanford University involved in Project Camelot – a project begun in 1964, which was designed to determine the feasibility of developing a general social system model which would make it possible to predict and influence politically significant aspects of social change in developing nations[2] – explained:

> I am not arguing that scholars who act as a consultants to government agencies or who receive contracts for research from government agencies thereby lose their independence of judgment. On the other hand, I cannot go along with those who feel that this kind of pattern of participation has no effect whatever on the independence of the social scientists (Robin 2001, 208).

Furthermore, it is often the case that those who provide funding will decide the fate of the outcomes and data gathered during the research (Bishop 2013). In other words, research can be classified, which will impede development and contributions to general knowledge, or which can be used improperly to inflict harm onto the research subjects.

One thing is to provide opportunities through grants and scholarships, and at the same time offer future employment or requiring "payback" from recipients for the invested money, another thing is hiring scholars to do research without clear information regarding the use of the research outcomes. The question of how collected information by HTTs or related units was (or is) stored for later use is especially important in the case of raw data about individuals, networks, and activities. This kind of information may be fed back into Intelligence Community databases where the social scientists have no control over its use

(AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities 2009). Anthropologist Gerald D. Berreman (1971) has emphasized that doing research in secret, or reporting it in secret, is to invite suspicion, and legitimately so because secrecy is the hallmark of intrigue, and not scholarship.

The underlying assumption is that any kind of research produced through HTTs might be handled improperly by IC (the intelligence community) to inflict harm or could even be used during enhanced interrogations. One scholar has pointed out that the military has its own ways to collect intelligence, and that they do not need social scientists for this purpose (Lawton 2014). Further, information collected by intelligence units is significantly different from the type of knowledge gathered by HTTs. The most important role of intelligence is to assist military leaders in determining adversary capabilities, critical links, or high-value targets, and to thereby help determine the course of action. In contrast, HTTs collected data that is similar in nature to data frequently used in conflict and war-related studies (see, e.g., University of Central Florida, Conflict, War and Terrorism: Datasets n.d.) and which could easily be used by United Nations peacekeeping forces, as mentioned earlier (Fluehr-Lobban 2009). Moreover, the production process of intelligence differs from the production process of knowledge. While the intelligence model separates collection and analysis of data, HTS follows an academic model whereby the same people collect and analyze information.

Lastly, human intelligence requires highly specific information about individuals in order to capture or kill. Social scientists in the HTS had on the other hand sought rather broad contextual information for nonlethal purposes (McFate and Fondacaro 2011). Therefore, Kamari Clarke (2010) has distinguished between providing general knowledge to the army and providing specific knowledge of persons and activities, which might be improperly used or disseminated to inflict harm.

Secret government research might inflict harm and might be unethical, but not necessarily so. Secrecy policies in themselves are neither immoral nor entail that other fundamental moral principles are being violated. Secrecy is a policy employed in pursuit of certain strategic aims or goals, or on behalf of some set of underlying strategic intentions. To illustrate this point, consider a case study by Fluehr-Lobban concerning a woman who had been raped and who was asking for anonymity. Few scholars would consider it ethical to refuse her, even though honoring that request would entail keeping the results of their research "secret" (Lucas 2009, 172). Similar responsibilities to protect the identity of subjects are found in journalism. Confidentiality of sources in journalism is one of the basic conditions for press freedom and is rarely compromised. Other examples of professional ethics regarding identity protection can be found in psychology and psychiatry. When psychologists are conducting blind or double-blind experiments, what human subjects know beforehand about the goals of the research, might fundamentally compromise the validity of the research outcomes. Deception is part and parcel of the research design (Pemmons and Albro 2012; Kimmel 2007). Therefore, there is nothing inherently wrong with a policy of secrecy employed as part of an overall strategy aimed at respecting the rights and protecting the well-being of research subjects. Nevertheless, there is a chance that information gathered by social scientists might be used improperly.

During debates about HTS, there have been concerns about the possibilities of using this kind of knowledge to facilitate "softening up" of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan (Whitehead 2009). The fear is that anthropologists or any other social scientists may

unwittingly participate in interrogation processes. According to the Nuremberg Code, scientists must protect physical, social, and psychological welfare and honor the dignity and privacy of those studied (The Nuremberg Code 1949). It is morally and ethically unacceptable for scientists to participate in torture in any way. To paraphrase the words of Franz Boas, engagement in torture would constitute a prostitution of science "in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist" (Boas 1919).

There are, however, many examples of intelligence and military operations that can be classified as containing elements of torture, or that do not respect the privacy and dignity of suspects. In 2014, the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence concluded that since September 2001, the CIA has been using various torture techniques in order to gather information from suspects. According to the 500-page report delivered by the Senate, captives were deprived of sleep for up to 180 hours, were exposed to simulated drowning, or were sexually abused (Hosenball 2014). In 2004, before that report was made public, a journalistic investigation discovered that the U.S. military used the book *The Arab Mind* written by cultural anthropologist Raphael Patai, as a guide for (mis)understanding Arabs, and for developing torture techniques. The book offensively described Arabs as lazy, sex-obsessed, and apt to turn violent over the slightest thing. It offered the notion that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, information that might have been employed in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons. Many scholars described *The Arab Mind* as old and discredited, as an example of bad and biased social science. Nonetheless, it appealed to the military due to its simplicity and superficially coherent view of the Arab enemy and their supposed personality defects (Whitaker 2004; Khalili 2008).[3] Due to the character of the interrogation techniques, the American Psychological Association (APA) condemned and prohibited psychologists' participation in any sort of activities that relate to enhanced interrogation techniques. According to APA Code of Ethics "torture in any form, at any time, in any place, and for any reason is unethical for psychologists and wholly inconsistent with membership in the American Psychological Association" (Kaslow 2014).

On the positive side, social scientists' participation in HTS-like projects would allow them to expose immoral actions undertaken by intelligence-related agencies and discredit enhanced interrogation as an ineffective way of collecting and using any kind of information or knowledge. Inaction would lead to silent acceptance of such methods and their intensification. There are already social scientists focusing on the exposure of human rights abuses suffered by individuals in conflict zones, or excavating various hidden or everyday forms of violence in countries torn by wars (Low and Merry 2010). Blind adherence, combined with fear of unintendedly breaking the ethical principle of "do no harm," might result in behavior similar to the three monkeys of ancient China – see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. It is arguably better to act and prevent than to turn away and allow any wrongdoing. The duty to prevent and halt genocide and mass atrocities lies first and foremost with the state, but the international community has a role that cannot be blocked by the invocation of sovereignty. According to the 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome Document and 2009 UN Secretary General's Report, there are three "responsibility to protect" principles in cases where the welfare and lives of people are under threat: 1. the state carries the primary responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, and their incitement; 2. the international community has a responsibility to

encourage and assist states in fulfilling this responsibility; 3. the international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other means to protect populations from these crimes. If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect n.d.).

Would it not be permissible and ethically acceptable for social scientists to participate in such missions under the United Nations? If the "responsibility to protect" principles of the UN allow the concerned international community to act to protect populations from war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity, are anthropologists, sociologists, or psychologists somehow outside of the "concerned community?" Participation of the social sciences in field research aims to improve the understanding of populations in occupied territory. This might result in a possible reduction of harm inflicted by armed forces, and ultimately lead to increased chances of prosperity in the country or region in question. Are there ways in which social scientists could participate in HTS-related projects in military operations, which do not ignite ethical dilemmas and controversies like the Human Terrain System?

## Conclusion: the three models and the "separation of ethics"

There are clearly no easy solutions, which would satisfy everyone, to these dilemmas. Past and present debates about the participation of social scientists in the HTS indeed have some resemblances to Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit puzzle, in which the very same picture might be perceived as a duck or a rabbit, or both. Hanna Pitkin, a political theorist from University of California – Berkeley, used a duck-rabbit experiment to ask what the objective facts of the world are, as distinct from what particular people would or could say about them (Wedeen 2010, 266):

> Is the man who has not perceived the ambiguity in the duck-rabbit seeing a rabbit, or is he seeing a duck-rabbit picture puzzle as a rabbit? He would say the former; we might say the latter, and so would he in retrospect, after he had discovered the ambiguity. Is it obvious that one of these must be the real, objective truth? One might want to say: the experimenter's view is "truer" because he has some knowledge which the subject lacks – namely, that the picture is a trick picture. The real truth, which even the subject would acknowledge if he were well informed, is that he is seeing a duck-rabbit as a rabbit. But one might, alternatively, want to argue that truth is a matter of interpersonal, intersubjective agreement, what both men could agree on. In that case the subject's view is "truer." For the experimenter could say of the subject "he sees a rabbit" if he were trying to give a phenomenological account of the subject's experience. But the naïve subject would not, no matter what he was trying to give an account of, say "I am seeing a duck-rabbit as a rabbit."

The point of this extensive quote is that when people disagree about facts, for example, whether HTS-related projects are ethical or not, they still may be able to find shared vocabulary or some common ground on which to agree. But this agreement does not mean that there exists a neutral objective truth. For some scholars, HTS-like projects will always remain unethical, while for others such projects will be a useful tool in military operations. This paper argues that past debates have lacked a mutual understanding focused on improving the lives of war-torn societies. Sometimes there is no *one* right way of

understanding a problem, such as the duck-rabbit puzzle or the participation of social scientists in military operations. Building on this insight, the concluding part of this article has exactly this purpose: not to judge or to measure morality or ethics, nor to find the "truer" perspective of HTS-like projects. This remains to be decided by individual scholars. The aim is to propose a common ground on which it would be possible to agree or work from, namely, to focus on mitigating the suffering of the people affected by military operations.

The proposed models of cooperation between social scientists and governmental, military, and intelligence institutions are as follows: The first, the Academic and Think Tank model, is based on a comprehensive educational process and research. The second, the Decision-making model, focuses on cooperation with political and military decision-makers. The third, which I call the War-related engaging model, is the most controversial and is based on field research in the battlefield. This model will propose a clear separation of academic from military ethics, and reasons behind this separation.

The first model is based on a comprehensive educational process and research. Teaching is what most social scientists actually do. In improving soldiers' cognitive skills, social and cultural understanding is a fundamental and primary way to decrease the chances of mistakes, conflicts, and clashes with the local population. The purpose is to educate soldiers about diversity, and about existing differences and commonalities. A soldier should be able to distinguish basic concepts, norms, and values. The value of knowledge about history and language can surpass the value of hard-power approaches. Johann Herder, an eighteenth century German philosopher, stressed that "the very stage of conscious awareness could not emerge without man's spontaneous ability to put his thoughts into words (…) Language is collective treasure, the source of social wisdom and communal self-respect" (Schoenmakers 2012, 14). However, it might be much more efficient to improve one's own cultural literacy as a first step. Cultural literacy is about understanding your individual cultural patterns and knowing your own cultural norms. This type of "self"-knowledge can facilitate the process of adaptation to a new culture (Bennett 1998; McConnell 2011). The flaws and problems mentioned earlier in this paper regarding Cultural Smart Cards illustrates that education of soldiers remains underdeveloped.

In the first model, there are no ethical constraints similar to HTS (for, e.g., violation of the "do no harm" principle) that would prevent scholars in educating military personel on the issue relevent to HTS, unless one takes seriously the possibility of "jurisdictional fallacy," taking responsibility for events that are beyond one's reasonable control. However, there is one significant flaw, namely, the distinction between explanatory knowledge on the one hand and empathic or intuitive understanding on the other. Scholars do not teach how to feel the pain or grievances of others, or how it feels to be threatened. This goes beyond academia and requires open-mindedness and immersion into other cultures and societies (Tyrrell 2007).

The second model focuses on political and military decision makers. History presents us with a plethora of examples of politicians lacking sufficient knowledge and understanding of other societies. Secretary of Defense during much of the Vietnam War Robert McNamara once noted: "I had never visited Indochina, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, language, culture, or values. […] When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was *terra incognita*" (McFate 2005, 42). The end of the Cold War did not change this type of attitude. During the Bosnian War (1992–1995), American

elites were favorably disposed toward the Bosnians arguably because they supported the idea of a multicultural country, and in the early stages of the war, the Bosnian government successfully promoted this image and ideal. Throughout the war, the American policy remained committed to a multiethnic Bosnia despite the fact that the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats overwhelmingly rejected it. The creation of such an entity was simply impossible due to the ongoing ethnic tensions. American idealism, moralism, naiveté, and cultural ignorance concerning the Balkans arguably led to a detachment of policies and strategies from the ground reality (Huntington 2011). A similar ignorance of other cultures has been seen in Iraq. In May 2003, shortly after Saddam Hussein's ouster, Paul L. Bremer, then head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), issued a CPA order No. 1 banning all but the lowest members of the Baath Party from holding any governmental job. Following this, CPA order No. 2 disbanded the Iraqi Army, leaving over 250 000 Iraqi men out of a job, on the streets, angry and armed. Bremer later explained that his intent was to show to the Iraqi people that the Saddam regime was gone and would never return. His orders might not have created insurgents directly, but they certainly inflamed and accelerated the rise of insurgents in a war-torn country (Kaplan 2014).

These are just some examples of politicians and decision makers disregarding the complexities of the societies with which they engage. Bernard Brodie was right when he said that a "good strategy [and politics – added by author] presumes good anthropology and sociology. Some of the greatest military blunders of all time have resulted from juvenile evaluations in this department" (Brodie 1974, 332).

Similar to model one, model two has limited ethical constraints, as in case of HTS that would prevent scholars to advice or engage in political-military decision-making processes. Some hindrances remain, however. The role of the advisor is often determined by the expectations or requirements posted by the decision-makers. Hence, there is a risk of producing biased expertise aimed to support specific policies. There is a chance the advisors absorb the assumptions and beliefs of the organization for which they work – indeed, exactly the same can be said about academic associations. Good case examples are ambassadors and embassy staff in foreign countries. They are sent out due to their knowledge about a specific nation or region, and they are often experts with an academic background. However, due to their political objectives and the specific character of the job, their expertise risks being subordinated to politically influenced and misleading stereotypes. Just like soldiers receiving specific training, ambassadors and advisors have their own agenda and missions that limit their understanding and awareness of other cultures and societies (Porter 2013).

Another possible constraint related to an advisor's job is time. One former special advisor mentioned that "most cabinet ministers are pretty busy (…) you will look for those opportunities where you can grab hold of them for five minutes (…) your ability to sit down and talk for any length of time is somewhat limited" (Hazell 2014). Nevertheless, even the slightest chance to have an influence on national policy and strategy making can have a significant impact the moment this policy or strategy is being implemented. Furthermore, the process of creating cultural and ethical institutional mechanisms is only possible from the inside out, rather than from the outside and in.

To summarize, model one and two are basically about making trade-offs between academic and governmental work (Fosher 2010). In the face of such trade-offs, much remains

to be decided by each individual and his or her own sense of ethical responsibilities. Any academic code of conduct should not prohibit such engagement by the individual. Otherwise, one easily ends up with a one-dimensional sort of moralism or moralization, with simplified "true" or "less true" rules and principles.

The third model is most controversial, and simple trade-offs between academic and governmental work will not work here. Therefore, in order to make the third model work, I propose a separation of academic and military ethics.

On November 4, 2008, Paula Loyd, an anthropologist working for the U.S. Army, was conducting interviews among the local population in the small village of Chehel Gazi in Afghanistan. Her mission was to get to know the villagers and their problems, to help the military map out "human terrain" and thus improve their ability to fight Taliban and Al-Qaeda insurgents, as well as improve the quality of life of the people in order to win their "hearts and minds." According to witnesses, Loyd approached a man carrying a fuel jug and they began discussing the price of gasoline. Suddenly the man holding the jug hurled the gasoline at Loyd and set her on fire. She would pass away a few weeks later, in January 2009 (Constable 2009). Her teammate, Don Ayala, initially apprehended the assailant and forcibly took him into custody. According to the Army Criminal Investigation Division, approximately 10 min later, a soldier approached the location where Ayala detained the perpetrator and informed the personnel in the area that Loyd was burned badly. Ayala allegedly flew into a rage and executed the offender on the spot with a bullet to his head. He, in turn, was arrested and pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the unlawful killing of a civilian noncombatant in custody. Ultimately, the sentence was five years' probation and a US$12,500 fine (Shachtman 2009). This tragic case is a reminder of an existing distinction between theoretical and field research. First of all, in the field, the so-called "subjects of study" are not acting according to the same or similar ethical and moral principles as the ones elaborated in professional codes of ethics in the social sciences. Therefore, the question is whether academic professional codes of ethics *can* be applied to the realities of the battlefield or in extreme cases where life is under threat. This leads to a second issue, a distinction between ethics in the social sciences on the one hand and military ethics on the other, and the question of social scientists' legal binding to one or both forms of ethics.

Article 3 of Geneva Conventions states that:

> persons taking no active part in the hostilities (non-combatants) (…) shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, with the following prohibitions: a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; b) taking of hostages; c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment; d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples' (Convention IV, art. 3, 1949).

In other words, as a part of the Human Terrain Team, Don Ayala was legally obliged to respect the laws of war and international humanitarian law. Hence, any social scientist participating in future HTS-like projects, if undertaken during war, is responsible for respecting military ethics first of all. Professional academic ethics, such as it is expressed by the American Anthropological Association, is partly included in military ethics and military law, but what is more important, articles of the Hague and Geneva Conventions

are enforced seriously by the courts, either military or international, contrary to academic ethics. For instance, military law forbids employment of arms, projectiles, or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering (Brandt 2008), which corresponds to the AAA principle to "do no harm.". Rules of war must be formulated in such a way that it is possible to decide whether a person has violated them, and it must be possible to produce evidence that determines the question and removes it from the realm of speculation. Opposite to this, the debate over academic ethics related to the Human Terrain System has brought on speculation, uncertainty, and confusion. Since both the military and academic codes of conduct cover largely the same principles, yet it is the former that social scientists are legally obligated to follow, this brings us to the further distinction between social sciences and social scientists.

Why distinguish the engaged social sciences from the engaged social scientists? We should do so because social scientists as human beings, citizens, or in any particular role they perform become engaged in ways that go beyond engaged disciplines and their principles. Gary A. Fine has a point when he asks: "Are academics more moral than other social groups?" (Fine 1993). Various codes of ethics in academia try to establish ideal rules, and in their own way they are utopian examples of pure science separated from the corrupted outside world. However, this article has tried to show that there are many cases in which academic ethical principles and field research face blurred borders. It is, therefore, impossible to avoid the amalgamation of social scientists, as individuals, with the reality of field research where different ethical standards might apply (not only military ethics, but also local cultural norms). At the same time, this amalgamation allows social scientists to make potentially positive contributions in post-conflict and peacekeeping operations. They can participate in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or other relevant bodies (such as various NGOs) in order to mitigate memories of atrocities and wrongdoings. Arguably, a mission under the United Nations, which is internationally accepted and fulfills the requirements of just war, creates a unique opportunity to find mechanisms and tools facilitating mutual understanding, respect, and successful cooperation and coexistence, which are prerequisites in horizontal peacekeeping and vertical interoperability interactions. Lastly, access to war-torn societies would allow conducting neglected theoretical and empirical work, for example, on the cultural consequences of childhood soldiering, the fate of war orphans, the role of religion in combat, and much more. This is work that can be done only if one has engaged social scientists working in the field. Therefore, academic codes of ethics limiting such engagement are inadequate for situations where anthropology, sociology, or psychology (to name only three areas) can be of great interest to national security and the security of the population. Such codes of ethics should, in my view, be re-written to better address field-work reality; if not, the internationally accepted laws of war as well as local cultural norms should remain the main guide for any social scientist.

There will always be "duck-rabbit" dilemmas when we are faced with difficult questions and trade-offs such as the ones discussed here. However, the past debates about the Human Terrain System have been too much focused on different interpretation of ethics rather than on finding a common ground, a solution, or a tool that would ameliorate the suffering of war-torn societies. There is no doubt that the future will bring another HTS. To be more precise, there is a need for HTS-like projects in the, at the time of writing, 16 ongoing UN peacekeeping missions around the world. Social scientists

cannot hide behind the wall of academic ethics and render impotent governmental or non-governmental institutions. Ultimately, it is important to remember that the nine-year-old girl in Kabul, the children in South Sudan, or the many people in any other conflict environment do not have the luxury of waiting for us to sort out whether is it ethical to help out or not.

## Notes

1. Charles Patrick Roberts is an American politician of the Republican Party; since 1997 the Senior Senator from Kansas and former Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee (2003–2007) (U.S. Senate, https://www.roberts.senate.gov/public/).
2. Due to controversies, Project Camelot was terminated in 1965 (Robin 2001; Lucas 2009).
3. Tony Langouranis, an interrogator in Iraq, described his training in Abu Ghraib prison before he began working there as a study of the Arab Mind. What he learnt is that Arabs are culturally backward, for instance, "lying is not taboo or dishonorable to Arabs … . So you can't trap them in a contradiction or force them to admit they're lying. They'll consider you impolite or uncultured" (Khalili 2008).

## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributor

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