ETHICAL BEHAVIOR AND MILITARY ANTHROPOLOGY?

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1. Introduction


This assessment was made by Barbara Mück, a German Ethnologist who worked for five years for the German Armed Forces, among other things as a cultural adviser. She and a few others advocate for a stronger involvement of anthropologists in the military. But there has been a big discussion going on within the discipline itself whether this is ethically and morally tenable. Two prominent events which spurned discourse on this subject in recent years were the Human Terrain System launched in the United States, which incorporates social scientist in the military and the rejection of a seminar at the University of Tübingen about applied anthropology and the military. The idea of the Human Terrain System was introduced by Montgomery McFate, who is an anthropologist and also went as part of a Human Terrain Team in the field. Her actions and the Human Terrain System itself were heatedly discussed within the American Anthropological Association and strongly rejected. Another example of heated debate came from the University of Tübingen where a seminar called „Angewandte Ethnologie und Militär“ was planned but before it could even take place was rejected.

But there are several other examples of Anthropologist working for/in/with the military or related organizations such as intelligence services or the government of a state.

This paper aims to look at the different aspects of applied anthropology as it pertains to anthropological research in the field, how it has been used in the past and how it could be used more efficiently and ethically in the future. Looking at examples from the last century, especially in the context of counterinsurgency, and investigating the ethical implications that arise for social scientists and especially for anthropologists concerning their code of conduct in situations where obligations to a third party conflict with professional responsibilities to research subjects or informants.
A strong focus will be placed on the ethical dilemmas that arise during military intervention, how the intercultural competence of social scientists (and the empathy which accompanies it) could change the direction and ultimate outcome of a mission by adding valuable the counsel to military decisions. Arguing that increased understanding of and the ability to contextualize the behavior of the Other, could alter the situation for military personnel on the ground (up to and including questioning the task to which one has been assigned). And finally the underlying question is whether or not it is ethical for non-involved entities to interfere in situations, such as conflicts between states as well as civil conflicts, especially concerning non-state agents (some Taliban groups for example). If interference is chosen to what extend can intercultural competence be used ethically to guide or shape the conduct of those involved? How could anthropologists and other social scientists be used in the German Armed Forces? Or how can anthropological knowledge be made accessible to the military? I used as key source the book of Prof. George Lucas Jr. “Anthropologists in Arms: The Ethics of Military Anthropology” as well as his article “Military Anthropology and the Ethics of Espionage”, additionally I referred to the article “Fitting Round Pegs into Square Holes: civil servant-anthropologists and dual professional theory” by Professor Brian Selmeski. Also I used as a source the American Anthropological Association’s Code of Ethics (released in 2009) and their Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities (2009) and additionally to this the “Frankfurter Erklärung“ zur Ethik in der Ethnologie“ (2009).
2. The Litany of Shame

To lay the foundation for the still tangible discussion about military anthropology in general, it is necessary to have an understanding of the controversial history of the discipline, including those instances where anthropologists have been accused of being engaged in espionage by people outside as well as inside the discipline.

“The Litany of Shame” (Lucas 2009) is a term used by Professor George R. Lucas in his book “Anthropologists in Arms: The Ethics of Military Anthropology” for the history, or better a part of the history, of anthropology. It focuses on the ethically and morally questionable chapters, mostly questioned by the discipline itself and not by an outside authority, in the history of the discipline.

“A philosopher’s fresh perspective on this quasi-sacred language (Lucas 2009) notes that there is a certain American obsession with the “secrecy” and “clandestine research” when in fact the justification for the actual use of these terms is weak in real (rather than imagined) history of American anthropology. Philosopher George Lucas’ characterization of anthropology’s obsession with some nonissues and its historic neglect of real issues, like informed consent, offers a refreshing view. Lucas sees anthropology’s history of ethics as an exercise in a ‘Litany of Shame’ over alleged secrecy in research and ethical malpractice, while critical standards, such as informed consent and ‘do no harm,’ were historically ignored” (Fleuhr-Lobban 2012: 111; emphasis in original).

One of the most important and haunting examples in this litany is the one of Franz Boas who accused some anthropologists of espionage during World War I. Boas, however, did not reveal the names of his colleagues and presumably students. He went on to criticize them about what I would call their code of conduct and their own ethical and moral values, specifically not about how they behave in the personal realm of their own but how they behaved and acted as scientists. Finally accusing them of prostituting science.

“A person, however, who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demands himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researchers in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed a scientist” (Lucas 2010: 18).

But even during the time of the British Empire anthropologists collaborated with governments and provided their insight into the respective culture to aid the authorities. In colonial
countries problems such as understaffing (both in troops and administrative staff), linguistic problems, such as many different languages were spoken in the colonized countries and of course cultural difficulties, such as diverse customs prevailed. Adding to that the colonial rulers also had to face problems like sudden uprisings, for which they had no satisfying explanation or solution and therefore engaged anthropologists to explain and devise solutions for these various things. They needed the anthropologists to understand the peoples they were colonizing and even to control them to a certain degree, which is often termed ‘social engineering’ (Lucas 2009: 62). But in the way Margret Mead writes about the collaboration between the respective governments and the anthropologists, it seems not to be a critique of this kind of practice in general. This is also suggested by the fact that Mead, Gregory Bateson and Ruth Benedict among others worked with intelligence services during times of war over the last century namely:

“the collaboration of Margaret Mead, her husband, Gregory Bateson, her colleague and close friend Ruth Benedict, and other anthropologists at the time with the OSS during world war II and with its successor, the CIA, and military intelligence services during the Cold War, […]” (Lucas 2010: 6).

The last incident I would like to mention here, not that it is less important than the others, is ‘Project Camelot’ (Lucas 2009), which is very often cited when it comes to the topic of anthropologists working as spies or conducting clandestine research. ‘Project Camelot’ was to take place in the 1960s, but before it could even get off the ground it was canceled. It was one of the biggest and most controversial research programs of its time. And it included social scientists from different fields, among them anthropologists. It was funded largely by the US military, which is and was a problem: science founded by a third party and not being free and only obligated to their field can be an ethical dilemma, especially when that third party has their own agenda – which generally is the reason for the funding in the first place. The undertaking was defined as follows:

“Project Camelot is a study whose objective is to determine the feasibility of developing a general social systems model which would make it possible to predict and influence politically significant aspects of social change in the developing nations of the world” (Lucas 2009: 52).

Eventually ‘Project Camelot’ was shut down by the Department of Defense (from here on DoD) before it had even started or any research could have taken place. One of the people, namely Hugo Nuttini, assistant professor for anthropology, who had only a very limited role in the project, had approached the vice chancellor of the university of Chile about ‘Project
Camelot’, which started the whole internationally controversy about the project. It was as Lucas writes “a perfect storm” (2009: 59), it was even taken up to the Chilean senate and the press where it was described as “‘intervention,’ ‘imperialism,’ and a vast continental spy plan know as ‘Operation Camelot’” (Lucas 2009: 59). ‘Project Camelot’ is therefore widely considered as an example for counterinsurgency and anthropologists being willing to instrumentalize their abilities and knowledge for the military and its purposes. It fits as one of the corner elements of the ‘litany of shame’ (Lucas 2009), although one has to bear in mind that the project never took place.

3. The Human Terrain System

But also in more recent history there are examples of ethically and morally questionable undertakings by anthropologists. The most prominent and widely discussed one is the Human Terrain system (from here on HTS). The concept has its beginning in 2005 and was endorsed by anthropologist Montgomery McFate and David Kilcullen, as well as general David H. Petraeus on the military side. The HTS is composed of social scientists, among them anthropologists, who support the military during their deployment in the respective area, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

“The Human Terrain System (HTS) is a U.S. Army program that recruits, trains, and deploys mixed military and civilian Human Terrain Teams (HTTs), which embed with military units in Iraq and Afghanistan. These teams conduct social science research about the local population to provide situational awareness to the military and ‘enable culturally astute decision-making, enhance operational effectiveness, and preserve and share socio-cultural institutional knowledge’” (McFate and Fondacaro 2011: 63; emphasis in original).

The HTS was extensively debated in the anthropological community and featured in two reports (AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities (from here on CEAUSSIC)) by the American Anthropological Association (from here on AAA) the first one given in 2007 claiming, “that the HTS program, in particular, represents an unethical, unprofessional, and hence unacceptable application of anthropological expertise” (Lucas 2010: 8). But it has to be said, as also the second report of
the AAA stated, that this endeavor did not mostly consist of anthropologists but quite the contrary:

“[…] despite the attention given to the central role of anthropology in the program, the great majority of present HTS employees have been trained and hold degrees in other fields of the social sciences and elsewhere. HTS cannot, therefore, be characterized simply as composed of anthropologists or as a military program to recruit anthropologists” (American Anthropological Association 2009: 12f.).

Still at the end of their report the AAA (2009) points out five issues to why the HTS has given reason for concern (especially ethically and morally): The first concern that is brought to attention is that in certain situations anthropologists might not be able to identify themselves as such. Therefore they might not only be associated with the military but also identified as military personnel, which would complicate their work, for example revealing to a research subject that they are in fact anthropologists, in order to adhere to their own ethical standards, which could be compromised in such situations. The second concern mentioned in the report is that they would be working for the military and therefore have a responsibility to the military that might conflict with the loyalty of an anthropologist to the people they are studying.

The third point considers the implications given by the circumstances of the environment the military is working in with respect to informed consent, which seems to the AAA not possible to be ensured under such circumstances. Especially taking into consideration the fact that the consent has to be given voluntarily. Another concern is that the information the anthropologists would gather could and probably would be used to select targets, due to the fact that they advise as members of a Human Terrain Team (hereafter HTT) the military in their decision making process. This fact would violate the ethical code of anthropologists, of which one of the key elements is to ‘do no harm to the ones you are studying’. A last point is added, which states that the identification of some anthropologists with the military could put the safety of anthropologists in jeopardy on a global scale, also for anthropologists not associated with the military at all.

Using the five main concerns mentioned above and the additional points in the report the AAA argues that the HTS is “an unacceptable application of anthropological expertise” (McFate and Fondacaro 2011: 64).

This is one of the prime examples of why it is complicated for Anthropologists to work in a military environment. Not only as a member of a HTT, but in general as more examples from other anthropologists show in connection with the history of the discipline itself. Which brings up the question about how anthropologists could be meaningfully integrated and help
the military while retaining the ability to behave in accordance to the ethical guidelines and codes the discipline has. In other words is it possible for anthropologists to help the military steer clear of cultural misunderstandings and help them with cultural competence without violating their own ethics. Additionally to the ‘do no harm to the ones you study’, which could be considered as a prime directive for anthropologists, the military might even give anthropologists the opportunity to prevent harm coming to the peoples and still be true to their own ethics and morals. (But steering clear of that minefield one should first go back to consider what that minefield practically looks like.)

So far we established that working with or in the military can be challenging due to the standards set by the academic field itself. But how does anthropology actually define itself? As mentioned above anthropology defines itself to some degree through its history as many other disciplines and professions do as well. In the case of anthropology a big part of it is the ‘litany of shame’ additionally according to George Lucas anthropology defines itself more by what it is not than by what it actually is.

“The first act of negation in anthropology’s case is historical. We are to understand how the discipline or profession of anthropology sees itself today largely through the negation of their shared past: that is, through anthropologists’ collective reputation of succession of morally abhorrent things that past anthropologists have said and done (or, more accurately, are accused by anthropologists in the present of having done in the past)” (George Lucas 2010: 5).

Also it is not only about the narrative that is created by a history of a discipline or profession but also by values and common ideas of the people who belong to that discipline and what kind of practice they choose and what they collectively hold to be right and wrong behavior. Eventually these ideas and the discourse about a certain ethical conduct becomes a code of conduct for the respective discipline as in anthropology’s case it is the Code of Ethics (from here on CoE) set by the AAA.

In addition to the recent example of the HTS there had been a broader discussion within and also to some degree outside of the discipline about military anthropology, which has occasionally been deemed the next chapter in the ‘litany of shame’. Anthropologists who worked in that area were accused of ethically wrong behavior and even of clandestine practices. Although working with/in/or for the military does not automatically equal unethical practice or even as it was called frequently “mercenary anthropology” (Lucas 2009: 7). There are anthropologists working in different areas concerning the military, for example doing research about military culture (just as doing research about another subculture), working to
educate military personnel about anthropology, languages and/or regional studies, which shows that anthropologists doing military anthropology cannot all be painted with the same brush.

“It was fairly easy to demonstrate that anthropologists engaged in studying military cultures, for example, or others involved in routine education of the military or even intelligence and security personnel in such subjects as foreign languages and regional studies in federal service academies and colleges – not to mention reserve officer training – were not engaged in unethical or unprofessional practices, and certainly were not explicitly engaged in espionage or in the conduct of secret or clandestine research” (Lucas: 2010: 8).

Therefore and due to the fact that the discussion, especially in the US, was and is to a great part focused on the HTS, the AAA’s CoE should be looked at to figure out how anthropologists can be meaningfully integrated within the military without being denounced as unethical and more importantly without using practices that are morally questionable. In regard to that and the potentially positive involvement anthropologists and social scientists could have, it seems inevitable to have a closer look at the CoE and the Frankfurter Ethikerkärung by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde as well as at attempts to integrate anthropologists and more so other social scientists into the German Armed Forces (from here on GAF).

4. The ethical Codes

As it is for all sciences or fields concerning humans or living beings in general, there have to be certain standards pertaining to ethical and moral conduct. For anthropology this is important and difficult because it contains such a wide terrain of disciplines with expert knowledge of interest to many non-academic employers. Take for example archeological excavations and cultural heritage preservation in conflict areas as one area where social scientists can be brought into an ethical dilemma. By being forced because of their expertise to advise policy makers on how to preserve cultural heritage, which may entail higher human causalities, they may be put into a situation where they could compromise their professional and personal codes of conduct. The destruction of cultural sites might be devastating for moral and cultural identity yet when the preservation of said sites involves putting human lives at risk we must beg the question whether or not the means justify the ends. This quickly draws one into the arena of international law and relations. Each anthropological profession
has its own code of conduct which generally overlaps with the professional codes of conduct for the discipline as a whole but are specific to their other related fields. Areas such as medical anthropology, legal anthropology and psychological anthropology, which are all disciplines in their own right, have their own codes of conduct. Due to the immense variety of already existing ethical codes and guidelines and the difficulty comprising all them into a comprehensive professional protocol presents, the AAA released the CoE, with general guidelines which includes an indication that this should not be considered a comprehensive code of conduct:

“The principles and guidelines in this Code provide the anthropologist with tools to engage in developing and maintaining an ethical framework for all anthropological work“ (American Anthropological Association 2009: 1).

Therefore these guidelines should be viewed as a toolkit to assist an anthropologist in navigating through a vast field of different norms, values and cultures as well as different ethical frameworks, which can overlap and contradict each other from time to time and not a binding code of conduct.

First of all given the diversity of the field and second due to the variety of cultures and communities, who have their own sets of norms, an anthropologist will work with a number of shifting ethical frameworks depending on their obligations to employers, research subjects, and personal ethical views. The code defines these different obligations as:

“[…] obligations to the scholarly discipline, to the wider society and culture, and to the human species, other species, and the environment” (American Anthropological Association 2009: 1).

Additionally the code of ethics clearly points out that the first obligation of the anthropologist is to the research subject:

“Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work“ (American Anthropological Association 2009: 3).

This clearly implies that an anthropologists primary obligation should not be to a third party that might be involved, companies, governments, or military bodies which mostly are the source of funding and therefore expect certain results, but should not compromise the ethics the researcher has to adhere to.

“In conducting and publishing their research, or otherwise disseminating their research results, anthropological researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety,
dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, […]” (American Anthropological Association 2009: 2).

Working for a third party has historically been a tricky business for anthropologists. Having to be open and transparent about funding sources, research aims, and honest towards the research subject as well as the funder, can be difficult and was, in the past especially, not always done by either anthropologists or other social scientists. Even during the Cold War and before that during World War II anthropologists and social scientists have often been accused of espionage, as mentioned above. Which clearly contradicts contemporary ethical norms such as:

“Anthropologists should never deceive the people they are studying regarding the sponsorship, goals, methods, products, or expected impacts of their work. Deliberately misrepresenting one’s research goals and impact to research subjects is a clear violation of research ethics, as is conducting clandestine research” (American Anthropological Association 2009: 3f).

Also the German „„Frankfurter Erklärung“ zur Ethik in der Ethnologie“ passed on October the second 2009 recognizes the complexity of the ethical problem of a coherent ethical code by stating that:

„Ziel der vorliegenden Ethik-Erklärung ist es also nicht, universelle ethische Normen zu dekretieren, die die konkreten Widersprüche einer kulturell heterogenen Interaktion und Forschung ignorieren, sie möchte vielmehr zur Ausbildung einer ethischen Urteilskraft beitragen, die grundlegende Prinzipien mit kulturell komplexen Anforderungen vermitteln kann“ (2009: 2).

The above is basically in agreement with the AAA CoE but the Frankfurter Erklärung additionally brings in the aspect of power relations not explicitly handled by the CoE stating that:


Additionally the anthropologist is responsible for taking care of the implications and consequences of their own research, regarding local power relations.

This is especially important when talking about the possibility of using anthropologists and social scientists in the military. The military is marked by hierarchies and involves many assignments where the researcher comes into a situation where his status in the community is most likely the same as the status the military he or she is coming with has.
Additionally one should not forget that the ethics we automatically apply by judging a situation and or a person, culture, and so forth are the ones we were acculturated with. Although anthropologists are trained to reflect on their personal acculturation and to be as objective as possible in the face of conflicting worldviews, in areas of conflict where violence can be the norm this can be especially difficult. The ethics we mostly see as a universal constant are a part of our socialization and culture in other words it is a distinctly western concept derived from Ancient Greece, Roman concepts of law and the Enlightenment. As much as our cultural norms are deeply imbedded in our habitus the same is true for other cultures.

Although working with/for the military presents moral and ethical dilemmas for anthropologists or other social scientists because of their expertise they are best equipped to handle said dilemmas and provide crucial intelligence in navigating foreign cultures. One of the big potential risks for military personnel in a deployment aboard is the misunderstanding that can arise from not fully comprehending the culture one is in. In this case intercultural competence is highly important.

Brian Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changnon define intercultural competence as follows:

“(…) intercultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (2009: 7; emphasis in original).

Therefore intercultural competence makes the communication between different groups and peoples possible by trying to reduce misunderstandings due to cultural differences down to a minimum.

Clifford Geertz illustrated one prominent example of intercultural miscommunication in his book “The interpretation of cultures” (1973). One person winks at another person in a conference room. Both people have the same cultural background yet the wink can still mean a number of things. Is the person winking trying to indicate something to the other person? Or do they just want to express affection? Or is the person just winking because they have something in their eye? So even knowing the cultural context does not necessarily mean that one is able to understand the meaning of a gesture. However not knowing the cultural context would make it nearly impossible to interpret. Ethical and moral values are dependent on context and this context can shift situationally. Individuals may also possess or express different sets of ethical and moral values (on flights from Teheran to Europe for example,
upon crossing the border most women get rid of their burka, wearing western cloths beneath it). If one is not prepared for these cultural differences conflict is inevitable.

The claim of legitimacy for universal human rights as they are defined today is based on a western idea of personhood and a historico-philosophical development that implies western norms and values. These norms need to be reflected on critically before we can take a look at the cultural Other. Therefore ethics and morals are normative terms, which have to be negotiated (Hornbacher 2006). In addition double standards inherent in our morality must also be considered, gender bias or torture for example. Looking at the adoption of human rights concepts in the UN charter by member states it is easy to think that certain values are universal, however it is important to keep in mind that there is an opposing charter signed by 45 Islamic states (Mayer 1991: 17). As an anthropologist it is important to understand ones own moral and ethical beliefs and act upon them. This can make working with or for military institutions very difficult.

The GAF uses intercultural advisers who can be Germans with specific knowledge or indigenous people from the respective country (Bundeswehr 2014). One thing the GAF should be aware of is that they rely on knowledge from indigenous people and translators, who are not in most cases anthropologists. The question that needs to be asked is where they stand in the conflict, e.g. an Afghan advisor/translator is most likely to have his or her own agenda. Therefore the information provided by these informers needs to be reflected on and contextualized by the GAF, which generally has no personnel adequately trained in doing that due to the ethical dilemma that would arise for anthropologist working for the military.

5. Outlook

In my own experience with the GAF and intercultural advisors as well as military anthropologists and applied ethicists concerned and involved with and in military ethics I have come to the conclusion that there is no consensus within all involved entities as to how these ethical dilemmas should be solved.

If the military is to engage anthropologists, a more cultural relativistic approach needs to be implemented which clearly says that no culture is better than another, which opposes sociological universalism and is based on the understanding that direct translation from one culture into another is impossible. This approach tries to avoid ethnocentrism and advocates the pluralism of cultures. Certain behavioral patterns have to be seen in the light of the social system of a culture as well as their value systems. Thus cultural phenomena should be only understood in emically, i.e. within their own cultural system. Therefore the use of
anthropologists as cultural translators or mediators, not as integrated parts of the military but as an additional profession along side the military so that they are still able to adhere to their own code of ethics could present an interesting approach, although they will still have a dual loyalty in this respect. The question that needs to be addressed here is if anthropology is a profession, preceded by the question what a profession is. A profession can be said to be based on five criteria: it is a distinct body, which is based on a body of knowledge, recognized by society and providing a specialized service to the former, and most importantly be self-regulating concerning their ethical standards (Selmeski 2008). Which brings me back to the first question: Whether or not anthropology is a profession.

Prof. Brian R. Selmeski addressed the five criteria in his talk as follows: he says, that the first criterion, does not apply to anthropology, because there are no clear regulations that concern the question when one is or becomes an anthropologist concerning their academic grade. The second criterion is clearly met, although the anthropological community does not agree completely on what that body of knowledge contains. About the third one, if anthropology is recognized by society, he writes: “Sort of. Society may not consider anthropology to be illegitimate, but it certainly does not appreciate what we do or why” (Selmeski 2008: 7). The question if anthropology provides a clear defined service to society is negated, by stating the following:

“Anthropology has not yet agreed to a particular responsibility to society. Some bear witness, some affect change through application, some teach, some document/analyze through research, and so forth“ (Selmeski 2008: 6).

The last criterion is met to a certain extent; anthropology is self-regulating and has its own ethical standards. But the discipline cannot sanction unethical behavior it can only regulate it as mentioned above before by accusing fellow anthropologists of unethical behavior and improper practices, etc.

Hence it can be assumed that anthropology is not a profession or at least not currently considered one. But why would such a distinction be important? It could be important for anthropologists working for the government and government related agencies as well as for/in the military. Being able to claim a status as dual-professionals (Selmeski 2008), such as other licensing professions, for example psychology and medicine would give anthropologist the option to adhere to their own ethical standards and codes while working for a third party, such as the military.
“Most fundamentally, they would know where they stand vis-à-vis their two groups of reference and could ensure their anthropological requirements and standards were not impinged by their other profession” (Selmeski 2008: 7).

But anthropology is not, at least not yet, a licensing profession. Therefore the question arises how anthropologists and other social scientists can be integrated in the military, without being accused of unethical behavior and if they transgress, having the option of being sanctioned. Academia could be used as a link between the military and civic society. Hence a center for social science might be a suggestion, with a strong focus on anthropology. But the leaders of this center should be scientists and not military officials, which would ensure that scientists employed there can follow their own ethical standards and not be impaired by the military as a third party. They would work for the ministry of defense and take contracts from them and additionally advise them further. Also they should operate independent from the government so that a change of government does not impair their research and work. Although working for the military the anthropologists and other social scientists could act just as chaplains do, as non-combatants, and therefore would not carry a rank. Again suggesting that if anthropology would be a profession and therefore a distinct body working with the military they would be able to keep their own ethical standards as the primary one – which also entails being able to refuse an order unlike a soldier whose task is to obey regardless of personal convictions.

6. Conclusion

If there is a way for anthropologists to work with/for the military I would argue that one way could be that they should not be incorporated directly but instead be organized as an independent branch in the military so that they can act in accordance to their own convictions as well as the professional standards set by their respective fields, and also in respect to humanitarian international law. I think that if social and human scientists are meaningfully integrated into the structures of interference that their unique knowledge and empathic understanding of cultures and communities could be part of preventing war and civil conflict. Subsequently the question remains if intercultural competence could be so influential, even perhaps representing a destabilizing element in the field, could it be used as a tool to make more informed ethical decisions?

In working in/with/for the military, as harmless and ethically innocuous it might be in some cases, the problem of working for a third party and being financed by the military, the DoD or some other governmental organization still remains. A third party always has its own agenda
in the first place, which is of course why they finance research, but believing that this is an issue exclusive to military anthropology and that pure (meaning being only obligated to science itself and not to a third party) science is free from it would be naïve.

Also anthropologists, and for that matter all scientists who publish, should be aware that their research can be used and therefore misused by anybody. Steering clear of these dilemmas is a very tricky business, but being as transparent as possible about financing, the aim of the research and so forth is good starting point.

So is it possible for anthropologists to work with/for the military? On the one hand given my limited experience with the GAF and the finite number of anthropologists and ethnologists working for it, I cannot possibly answer this complex question. On the other hand far more examples can be found in the US military including less problematic examples such as teaching and educating the military personnel about culturally relevant topics which may offer interesting material for further discourse. I think it is important for people who do the teaching to be aware of both sites of the coin, meaning the military and academia. Just like getting to know the culture when one is doing fieldwork, the military can also be considered as such, take for example people who are former members of the military and now practice anthropology or other anthropologists who engage in military anthropology. It is still an ethical minefield and continues to be heatedly discussed for a reason but there are already a number of anthropologists working in that field, such as Kerry Fosher (PhD in cultural Anthropology), Robert Rubinstein (Professor of Anthropology and International Relations at the Maxwell School of Syracuse, University Syracuse) and Brian Selmeski (PhD Anthropology). They should not be all stigmatized or painted with the same broad brush. But also as the ‘litany of shame’ shows there are more problematic examples of cases where anthropology may have been instrumentalized. Should anthropologists intervene by giving military leaders advice and therefore probably changing the outcome of a mission? Is the, as I called it, prime directive of ‘do no harm to the ones you are studying’ still secured in such cases? Would it be ethically and morally acceptable to actively interfere in conflicts? Or could anthropological advice maybe even be a tool for better decision making in such situations? And which are the cases where it would be acceptable to interfere and which are not? All these questions are additionally linked to the just war theory which people from within the discipline and also outside the discipline have been discussing these issues for sometime without coming up with stringent guidelines. I concur to a large degree with the AAA’s report and judgment considering the HTS in regard to anthropologists. But I also think that military anthropology, as a field of study should not be generally condemned due to the variety of it. I
am still of the opinion that there are options for anthropologists to work with the military, such as giving lectures about culturally relevant topics to non-anthropologists who go as it is the case for the cultural advisors into the field – or in cases where their advice may diminish collateral damage. What anthropologists in military anthropology are doing should be carefully analyzed but if there is a chance for anthropology to improve the way conflict is handled and even save lives in a world where war and conflict persists on a daily basis, they should carefully think about dismissing opportunities too easily because of a possible ethical dilemma and the history the discipline has. As George Lucas writes:

“If warfare constitutes a highly variable form of ‘cultural performance’ worthy of anthropological study, one might also observe that such performances are routinely accompanied by equally unique forms of cultural discourse concerning the circumstances under which the performance is to be staged, and to what extend, and by whom, and most important, for what ends” (2009: 38).

Anthropology studies culture and even if it is upsetting to admit war and conflict are part of our culture and therefore military anthropology is necessary as well as the constant discourse about it to prevent unethical behavior, such as espionage and clandestine research, not only in that area of anthropology but in general.
Sources


Bundeswehr 2014. *Konflikte reduzieren, Vertrauen schaffen – mit kompetenter interkultureller Beratung*. [http://www.streitkraeftebasis.de/portal/a/streitkraeftebasis/?ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP315EyrfHK94uyk-ILMKr3SnNTM4hK9zNQk_YJsR0UAEMVL1g!!/](http://www.streitkraeftebasis.de/portal/a/streitkraeftebasis/?ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP315EyrfHK94uyk-ILMKr3SnNTM4hK9zNQk_YJsR0UAEMVL1g!!/) (15.01.2015)


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