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The Ethics of Embedded Anthropology

The army of the United States of America started the Human Terrain System, in Afghanistan, in the year 2007, which was meant to engage the anthropologists, sociologists, linguists and political scientists to help the military commanders, understand the local population. They were meant to study and observe the local population from the professional perspective and develop an understanding of their culture, language, living patterns and values. After collecting all the data, they were expected to communicate that information with the military forces, so that they could control the people of the area and develop their strategies while knowing about the regional population. The anthropologists supported the study for some time; however, later realized that it is against the ethics of embedded anthropology. The Human Terrain System may have been beneficial for the armed forces of the United States of America, as they were able to understand their target population and make the things work in their favor, however, the program was against the ethics of anthropology, as it was not meant to study the population for the research purpose but military invasions.

The purpose of the research conducted in the field of social sciences, specifically anthropology is to discover the knowledge about the culture, norms, the working of the society, and the history of its people and the problems of the society. All of this research information is kept open, and any individual of the world can utilize the research to know more about some specific population. The purpose of the human terrain system was the same, as it also wanted to explore all these things about the population of Afghanistan. However, participation in the program was against the ethical standards of anthropological research. The anthropologists do not conduct the research to reveal the information of some culture to the other party so that they can rule over them by utilizing that information. Scott Jaschik argued in his article that the research conducted in the field of anthropology is meant for the academic purpose and not to fulfill the military goals. He has also mentioned in his article that in the previous times, the anthropologist supported the causes and goals of the military by studying the populations of other areas and ended up playing a major role in the establishment of imperialism in those areas. The anthropologic research is conducted by the consent of the people under study and by ensuring them that the research would not be utilized against them, however, in the case of sharing information with the military, it is used exactly for the same purpose of harming the population (Jaschik).

The human terrain system was shut down in September 2014, as the anthropologist had declared it against the ethics of anthropologic research. However, Whitney Kassel has argued in his article that shutting down the program is not a good thing, as it was beneficial for the cause of the United States of America. The author is of the view that the program was greatly required in the present time, as it had helped the military force of the United States of America to carry forward its humanitarian service, by restoring the peace of Afghanistan. The author has also shared the concern that the program helped the armed forces to reestablish regional areas of Afghanistan while keeping the values and culture of that society intact and the only shortcoming of the program was its unethical status for the anthropologists (Kassel). The author has overlooked the fact that the imperialists use such tactics of restoring the peace of some social and then keeping the control and rule of the country in their hands.

There is no doubt in the fact that the human terrain program is against the ethics of embedded anthropology because it utilizes the information of the research population without their consent, which is often meant to cause them to harm as well. Shay has argued in his article that the human terrain system is not the first program of its kind and the anthropologist used to take part in the wars in the previous times as well. The author has also presented the details that the anthropologists worked in societies, which were later affected by the First World War (Shay). The motive and purpose of the anthropologists are to make society progressive by studying the people and devising the solution to their problems. However, if they start acting against the population, they not only violate the work ethics but also lose the trust of the public.

The world does not need programs like the human terrain system. Forte has resented the details in his research article that after the United States of America, Canada has now started its own program of studying the regional population and named the program as ‘white situational awareness (Forte).' Changing the name of the program does not change the ethics of work, and it cannot be declared progressive for society. The anthropologists have already declared that it is against the ethics of research and anthropology and they would not participate in it; however, the world still needs to realize that such programs lay the foundation of imperialism.

Involving the anthropologists in the research process, to fulfill the military goals is against the ethics of anthropology and research. Although the research in the field of social sciences is open and for all, however, it is conducted after taking consent from the public. Moreover, the personal details about the population are not revealed, and the research cannot be used against the population. In the case of the human terrain system, it utilizes the research of anthropologists to harm the public, which is against the ethics and should not be supported.

Works Cited

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