

Robert A. Rubinstein, Kerry Fosher & Clementine Fujumura (eds.),
Practicing Military Anthropology: Beyond Expectations and Traditional Boundaries, Sterling, VA, Kumarian Press, 2013, 153 pp.

Reviewed by Ruth Margolies Beitler

The relationship between the military and anthropology is not a new phenomenon. Anthropology's affiliation with the military has always been complicated, with some anthropologists advocating interaction to achieve national objectives and others rejecting all cooperation. During World War II, anthropologists explored the "national character" of both Germans and Japanese to advise the military. Questions arose then as to the nature of the relationship between the military and anthropologists. Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, coupled with over a decade of war in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the normative question of what role anthropologists should play in the prosecution of war has re-emerged. Many vociferous debates have ensued among anthropologists as to the level of their participation in the national security realm. Clearly the 'do no harm' obligation of those who study other cultures has an impact on how researchers use collected cultural data and complicated ethical questions arise for those who work for or with the military.

In 2005, with the war in Iraq in its second year, the US Army developed a programme called the Human Terrain System (HTS) where anthropologists and other social scientists embed with military units and provide cultural information to military leaders. The programme was part of the US counterinsurgency campaign intended to limit kinetic activity by providing cultural knowledge to military commanders. The highly controversial nature of this program has led to an almost laser focus on HTS as emblematic of all military relations with anthropologists and has eclipsed a more nuanced understanding of the role of military anthropologists. Contrary to opponents of HTS, proponents of the programme contend that gathering cultural data is necessary to foster peace rather than for "target information".

According to the editors of *Practicing Military Anthropology: Beyond Expectations and Traditional Boundaries*, their book arose, in part, to respond to the misunderstandings of the role of military anthropologists who, in 2007 at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), were labeled by one participant as "war criminals". This highly readable book offers an alternative perspective on the relationship between anthropologists and the military and presents a refined and complex view of the military-anthropology nexus. The book investigates the previously unexplored questions of "who are military anthropologists and what do they do?". The study attempts to broaden both public and academic understanding of the intersection between the military and anthropology.

The book's introduction provides a brief, yet useful overview of the history of anthropologists' participation with the US military. A fundamental and crucial debate to emerge from the introduction is the evolution, within the discipline of anthropology, of its role with regards to the military. During WWII, the American Anthropological Association placed itself "*at the disposal of the country for the successful prosecution of the war*" (p.1). Not surprisingly, during that period, concerns emerged among anthropologists regarding the impact that military policies formulated with information gathered by anthropologists would have on host populations. Additionally, many questioned how cooperating with the military would affect the discipline itself. For this book, all contributors were asked to reflect on personal experiences that directed them toward employment with the military and through this reflection to explain the various challenges they faced.

The book consists of seven chapters, each of which tackles challenging aspects of being an anthropologist working with the military. The first chapter by Laurie W. Rush, "Archeological Ethics and Working for the Military", provides an exciting look at how an archeologist can contribute to the military mission. Within her discussion, she elucidates ethical challenges that affect all anthropologists, not just those working with the military. Rush's "*wake up call*" on ethical dilemmas in anthropological work came when she was involved in a project excavating a Native American burial site that removed human remains for analysis. In the Native American culture, the spiritual being dwells with the physical remains and therefore when physical remains are disturbed, it affects surviving tribal members on a psychological level. After this experience, Rush decided never to work with human skeletal remains again.

Yet what is unique about Rush's discussion on ethics regards the heightened dilemmas that military anthropologists face since assisting the military is a controversial topic in and of itself. Rush began working for the US military in the 1990s, but following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, became involved in protecting archaeological sites in Mesopotamia. In reference to Iraq, although the concept can be applied to all wars, Rush expands on the perception that "*participation by anthropologists in military undertakings legitimizes the coalition invasion of Iraq*" (p.16). This criticism stems from flawed assumptions that anthropological knowledge in national security issues can only be used to inform the military on how to target or kill. Rush discounts this argument by claiming that anthropologists' participation in educating the military to protect archeological sites in no way legitimizes the military invasion. In fact, Rush discusses how military anthropologists have increased soldiers' awareness of the cultural implication of firing upon religious and cultural sites. The fact that soldiers are asking about the cultural ramifications of their actions is a step in the right direction and exemplifies the necessity of anthropological knowledge in combat zones to diminish damage rather than provide intelligence for targeting. Most fascinating about Rush's chapter is her realization that her ethical dilemma lies not just in whether to move Native American remains or advise

soldiers on how to respond to provocations, but that refusing to provide cultural information to military personnel who are interested in conducting warfare in an ethical fashion is unethical.

As an anthropologist teaching languages and culture at the US Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland, Clementine Fujumura has spent the last 15 years unofficially studying the culture of midshipman. Her chapter, "Living the Dream", offers a brief, yet, tantalizing ethnographic view of the Academy, specifically exploring rites of passage. Fujumura, by her own admission, knew very little about the military upon arrival at the Academy and clung to the stereotype of the military as a conservative and inflexible institution. Fujumura offers a truly insightful perspective, one that should inform even those anthropologists who oppose working with the military by explaining that isolating oneself from understanding another culture runs contrary to everything that anthropology espouses. Fujumura put it simply when she wrote, "*to isolate myself from something I knew little about was not the way to learn more about others or about my own values*" (p.31). As Fujumura spent more time at the US Naval Academy, her initial perception that "*all midshipmen are the same*" eventually dissipated. Simultaneously, she realized that although manifested differently, the Academy culture retained rituals and rites of passage reflecting a purpose similar to other cultures she had studied. The heavy symbolism and rituals in both the US Navy and the Academy are required to communicate and foster a unified identity and worldview. Midshipmen enter the Academy as civilians and after four years emerge as naval officers. Within that timeframe, they undergo many rites of passage nested within the four year experience. Having this understanding of military rituals from an anthropological perspective informed Fujumura's teaching and ability to relate to the midshipmen. What she provided in return was an anthropological approach to understanding culture and an appreciation for the complexity of culture, although this lesson sometimes "*fell upon deaf ears*" in the Academy administration.

Anthropologist Paula Holmes-Eber in her chapter, "A Day in the Life of a Marine Corps Professor of Operational Culture", also recounts life in a military academic institution. Her appealing writing style elucidates her relationship with the Marines whom she engages in her classroom so that they can apply that knowledge in the field. As she reminds the reader, "*I have to influence the way these future leaders of the Marine Corps will evaluate the cultural factors in their next operations*" (p.49). Like Fujumura, Holmes-Eber feels as if she is conducting research in a foreign culture, having new experiences and acting in ways that diverge from her norm. This is particularly evident in the integrated and teamwork approach to teaching that varies widely from the more individualist method to which Holmes-Eber was accustomed in civilian academia. Holmes-Eber admits, as do several of her coauthors, that the attacks of September 11th changed their calculus. Where they had not considered the military as a valid career option, the tragic events of that day jettisoned them in a new direction. Many began to ask how they could use anthropological knowledge to save lives in the midst of confrontation.

Jessica Glicken Turnley describes her circuitous route to working as an anthropologist for the military and the national security community, which includes both federal and private agencies. She traces her path from the academic pursuit of studying anthropology to recognizing its use in applied settings. Although initially Turnley did not appreciate how her anthropological experience with various organizational cultures or microeconomic development with women in New Mexico would be applicable to stability operations in Iraq, it soon became apparent that her prior work would prove indispensable to her efforts with the military. Turnley's frustration working for the national security community which she felt misunderstood the contribution that anthropologists and social scientists could make to the organization, changed after September 11th when the military recognized the necessity of understanding adversary culture. Suddenly, with the military's new-found interest in human-centered aspects of the security environment, Turnley's expertise was in demand. She became a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University and laboured to make anthropology relevant to the military's mission. She was able to assess gaps in understanding social networks, organizational structures and their relationship to organizational culture. Most important, Turnley concludes that her role is to use *"her professional background and knowledge to critique (not criticize) approaches and methods in national security and help others be more sophisticated, more knowledgeable, and aware participants in their own organizations"* (p.81).

Kerry Fosher, in "Pebbles in the Headwaters", asserts that making cultural, anthropological and critical analysis relevant to the national security realm is crucial. She discusses her work initiating the Cross-Cultural Competence Project at the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, based on the assumption that military personnel need general cultural skills to execute missions effectively. Since over the span of a military career service members are likely to serve in various locations, it is vital to expose them to generalized cultural skills, rather than focus on one regional culture. Although Fosher appreciates that small changes can lead to noteworthy transformations over time, she encountered a significant frustration as she educated service members on how to approach culture. She recognized that assessing the value of the project would be difficult. To further clarify the nature of the challenge, she compares assessing cultural competence to the public health dilemma where success is based on nothing happening. As she herself admits, *"Nothing is a hard product to keep selling"* (p.85).

Fosher's role both in the Cross-Cultural Competency Project and her eventual employment in the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity is in shaping institutions by understanding their organizational culture deeply enough to help them integrate new ideas, not an easy feat in any organization. She explains that working with the military is a reflexive experience where effectiveness relies on developing a keen insight into the other's culture. One of her most interesting discussions centres on why other anthropologists should care

about her work with the military. She explains that she can convey the best of the anthropological discipline to the military organization and implement sound methods and rigour to address key problems. Additionally, by maintaining her contacts in the world of anthropology, Fosher can bring important data to colleagues who are unconstrained by military rules when publishing.

Christopher Varhola is the only anthropologist in this book who was a former military officer and as such, he presents fascinating insights in his chapter on “Ethnicity and Shifting Identities”. He simply explains that the world “*is composed of humanized landscapes in which all militarily significant terrain has some sort of human presence*” (p.102). This is significant in that military operations, conflict, and culture are all intertwined and therefore, having anthropologists who understand social processes and their fluid nature is critical to minimize the potential negative impacts of military operations on civilian populations. Varhola’s chapter lays out the positive impact that collaboration between social scientists and the military can have in activities other than combat operations including disaster relief, humanitarian and medical work.

Through specific discussions of ceasefire monitoring, peacekeeping and mine removal in Sudan, Varhola, in his role as director of the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) as part of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), advances several critical observations. First, he emphasizes that the military culture placing concepts neatly in taxonomies can impede a deeper understanding of the fluidity of ethnic identities. Placing too much emphasis on one element of ethnicity such as religion “*can distort the larger social reality*” (p.106). Understanding the interconnection of religious identities, environment and geographic space, economic systems, subsistence strategies and language is crucial to the success of any operation. As such, social scientists with this knowledge are an integral part of any operation. Second, programmes such as demining need to take into account cultural understandings. For example, in public awareness campaigns regarding mines, it is important to spread the word using culturally appropriate tools such as posters, skits and songs rather than radio or television broadcasts. Having cultural knowledge enhances the military’s ability to successfully implement programmes. Third, military personnel who are deployed for peacekeeping or stability operations are in country for a relatively short period of time and with no real training in areas such as economic development which are instrumental to successful operations. Thus, poorly implemented civil-military activities can have a negative effect on strategic objectives. Working with anthropologists with regional expertise can significantly enhance successful outcomes for both the military and local populations. As Varhola explains, working with the military does not necessarily reflect a scholar’s moral approval of certain operations, but should be understood as a way “*to sensitize military leaders to some of the costs and benefits associated with potentially shortsighted or harmful operations*” (p.115).

The final chapter by Robert A. Rubinstein explores obstacles that anthropologists have faced working for the military and discusses mechanisms to overcome them. But even more interesting, Rubinstein raises the oft-cited issue by many anthropologists as to whether anthropologists should engage with the military at all. He also points out a key deficiency in anthropology and that is the freedom that some anthropologists accept in treating the military and military anthropologists in ways that would be unacceptable when dealing with other cultures. His discourse points to a dysfunctional schism in anthropology where some scholars invoke a type of “*moral purity*” that places them above military anthropologists. Rubinstein states that the military is a prominent institution in our society and despite the fact that the military might implement objectionable policies espoused by the civilian leadership, anthropologists and societies can benefit from their participation.

The editors hoped that the book would “*enlighten, enrich, and inform our disciplinary discussions of what military anthropologists do*” (p.8). Undoubtedly, the book does this and more by providing insightful accounts of the practical application of anthropology in the military. The subliminal text also fosters a discussion of the role that anthropologists should play in implementing national security policy. This small book fills a niche by introducing opportunities for applied anthropology and perhaps will launch a dialogue regarding the abovementioned theme. Another overarching subtheme of the book is the authors’ own education regarding military culture. They were all able to implement anthropological methodologies including participant observation to gain an intimate understanding of military culture. This understanding, as with learning about any foreign culture, made them more effective in their work and more human in their outlook.

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