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The Ethnography of Things Military – Empathy and Critique in Military Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on the troubled relationship between anthropology and the military, we do so by discussing the underlying epistemological, methodological, and moral claims of the distinction between an anthropology of and an anthropology for the military. Through the term *ethnography of things military*, we propose to reposition military anthropology as intense engagements with militarisation through empathic immersion in things military. We develop this term through feminist critiques of militarisation and compassion, through discussions of critique and empathy as part of (critical) ethnographic scholarship, and through anthropological debates about the relationality of fieldwork and ethnographer-interlocutor relations. Suggesting that an ethnography of things military relies on empathic engagements with military lifeworlds, we argue that the relationship between empathy and critique in military anthropology should be understood as a continuous collaborative (and not always predictable) process of interrogating military lifeworlds' frames of reference without necessarily sharing compassion or sympathy for them.

KEYWORDS Ethics; fieldwork; militarisation; military anthropology; sympathy

The relationship between academia and the military is a special one. While research in the public imaginary often figures as the stronghold of so-called objective knowledge beneficial to humankind, the military is often associated with regrettable, if sometimes necessary wars, destruction, and violence. What is more, the military is the central institution of any given nation state with a monopoly on violence. Thus, when academics engage with the military, as for example in military anthropology, the independence, reputation, and moral foundation of research are cast into doubt. Accordingly, the engagement of researchers with *things military* (Ben-Ari & Lomsky-Feder 1999; Lutz 2001) is met with disapproval and might even be interpreted as a sign of the researchers' sympathy for militaristic ideas or, worse still, ideals; a collaboration turned co-option, one might say. And indeed, the accusation of academic militarisation underlies the now

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well-entrenched distinction between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military (Lutz 2009). By the logic of this distinction, researchers are time and again characterised as either good or bad anthropologists (Lucas 2008, 2009; see also Pedersen this issue) and research *for* the military is commonly met with stern disapproval. An anthropology *of* the military, on the other hand, understood as an engagement with and interrogation of institutionalised structures and pressures that explicitly denounces militarisation, militarism, and all things military, is likely to receive empathic approval among academic peers.

While a distinction between good and bad anthropology and, by extension, anthropologists might be said to rely on a simplified understanding of what is right and what is wrong, and while the division between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military is similarly imperfect, it is nevertheless this very association of anthropology with a particular set of morals that regularly comes to define how legitimate ethnographic conduct is framed (Wakin 1992; NCA 2009; McNamara & Rubinstein 2011). By definition then, ethnographers interested in things military are moving in morally liminal spaces as they are constantly at the risk of (un)doing themselves as respectable ethnographers, perpetually unable to settle in a position approved of in the eyes of academic peers. Aware that their professional engagements are always about the politics of ethnographic research more generally (see the roundtable discussion in this issue), ethnographers working on things military thus cannot avoid navigating the ambiguous space between *empathy* – often considered a prerequisite for fruitful ethnographic encounters – and *critique* – an arguable *sine qua non* of proper scholarship – that permeates their ethnographic research (Jaffe 1995).

Yet what do anthropologists actually refer to when they marshal critique and empathy in discussions of military anthropology? What forms do empathy and critique take in ethnographies of things military? And what boundaries define ethnographic engagements with the military as acceptable or not? This special issue seeks to address these questions. Rather than assuming from the start what ethnographic engagements with things military should look like, this special issue explores how the relationship between empathy on the one hand and critique on the other comes to play out in concrete ethnographies of things military. We are interested in how ethnographers tackle the moral challenges of engaging with what some might deem morally out of bounds while simultaneously asking what that might tell us about the overall epistemological and methodological foundations of ethnography.

Attending to these questions, we will first on a more general note address the complexities that characterise anthropology's engagements with things military. Doing so, we will reflect on the distinction between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military by offering the term *ethnography of things military*. In doing this, we want to ground the discussion of military anthropology in the actual complexities of doing research on things military rather than retreat to perennial political demarcations as the defining parameters of anthropology as a discipline. After that, we will address the relationship between empathy and critique in anthropological discussions of these terms and relate them to the methodological and epistemological dimensions

of an ethnography of things military. Finally, we introduce the individual contributions to this special issue.

Beyond an Anthropology of vs. an Anthropology for the Military

Perusing the relation between anthropology and institutionalised militaries throughout history, it is immediately apparent that anthropological knowledge of things military never was innocent. As scholarship on the militarisation of anthropology makes clear, throughout the existence of anthropology as an academic discipline, a number of its proponents in different countries have collaborated with militaristic objectives of their nation states (Wakin 1992; Schafft 2004; Gusterson 2007, 2008; Price 2008; Tomforde 2011; Price 2016). What is more, anthropologists with the courage to question such collaborations have historically often been silenced by academic organisations like the American Anthropological Association (AAA). While for some, this might be a matter of keeping academic organisations unpolitical, for others, this very act is in and by itself political. As David Price argues, organisations like the AAA are always already political no matter what, since they support certain political objectives while keeping conspicuously silent on others (Price 2011). Taking a stance on human rights, for example, is a political act just as the decision to hush critical voices within anthropology protesting military collaboration. Hence, different understandings of the political seem to be entangled with the various disciplinary factions' visions of acceptable anthropological conduct, and it was, in fact, anthropology's troubled relationship with the military that gave the discipline – at least in its American version – its first ethical code in 1971. In that sense, as Price writes, 'war brought anthropology ethics' (Price 2011: 27), that is, a central part of what defines anthropology today was born out of the discipline's negotiation of its relationship with the military, warfare, and empire (Lutz 2002, 2008).

Important in this context is the division of military anthropology into an anthropology of the military vs. an anthropology for the military (Lucas 2009; Lutz 2009). This division emerged from discussions of the Human Terrain System (HTS) (McFate & Jackson 2005; Gusterson 2008; McFate & Laurence 2016), which recruited and employed social scientists with the purpose of providing the US military with 'intelligence' about local populations in its deployment areas between 2007 and 2014. Grounded in extensively researched and empirically based findings by among others the Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities of the AAA (CEAUSSIC) as well as the Network of Concerned Anthropologists (NCA), the division is thus very much the result of engaging with ethnographic praxis in military anthropology as well as with the imperial and colonial history of anthropology (CEAUSSIC 2009; NCA 2009).

Arising during discussions of how anthropology as a discipline should respond to the HTS, the division can be seen as facilitating a distinction between acceptable anthropological conduct (anthropology of the military) and conduct deemed unacceptable for anthropologists (anthropology for the military). When CEAUSSIC submitted its final report on the HTS in 2009, it thus clearly defined what anthropologists should and should not engage in when working in military fields. Research that scrutinises the

military as an institution from the outside and/or embeds itself in the organisational setup of that institution in order to understand how it works and what effects it has on the people within (and outside) of it was deemed legitimate anthropological research. On the contrary, work that is embedded in the military as an institution, while at the same time producing knowledge about people outside of it for the benefit of military goals, was not. As the authors of the report state:

The key distinction between the sort of military ethnography undertaken by [ethnographers working on the military as an institution] and that undertaken by HTS social scientists is that while both work under conditions which embed ethnographers with troops in a war zone, the former's focus of study (and so both ethical commitments and negotiated representational loyalties) are the troops with whom s/he embeds, while HTS ethnographers attempt to juggle dual loyalties both to civilian populations and to their military units, under conditions which almost inevitably lead to conflicting demands. Potentially conflicting demands [...] almost necessitates that HTS social scientists choose between multiple interests in ways that stand to undermine basic ethical principles that govern research with human subjects among anthropologists [...]. (CEAUSSIC 2009: 52)

In these terms, an anthropology *of* the military distinguishes itself from an anthropology *for* the military through a difference in epistemological objectives, i.e. wanting to know something about the effects of the military vs. wanting to know something or about somebody on behalf of the military. At the same time, this distinction also relates to a difference in ethical commitments. Distinguished as such, an anthropology *for* the military in its extreme form would be complicit with and nurturing militaristic objectives in being 'highly attuned to the production, development and maintenance of state military organisations and their management and operational capacities', as Matthew Rech and colleagues argue in relation to military sociology (Rech *et al.* 2016). This kind of scholarship functions more as a facilitator of military institutions rather than that of an academic critic curious about the role of the military institution and its personal and societal effects. Moreover, such scholarship tends to be lacking a critical reflexivity about how, under what conditions, and to what effects knowledge is produced (Higate & Cameron 2006).

As George Lucas and Catherine Lutz point out, however, any strict distinction between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military is bound to be unsatisfactory (Lucas 2009; Lutz 2009). Commenting on the CEAUSSIC report, Lucas makes clear that there are anthropologies *for* the military that constitute legitimate anthropological conduct (such as teaching military personnel about different cultures and providing them with tools to gain a better understanding of them). Equally, there are anthropologies *of* the military that (might) go against proper anthropological conduct (e.g. an anthropology of the military that ends up providing the military with institutional insights, which help to make the killing of people more effective). Thus, ethnographic knowledge can be appropriated regardless of an ethnographer's moral intentions; the conditions of informed consent, ethical reciprocity, and mutual responsibility, however, are inextricably bound to the ethnographer's direct relation with the field.

Catherine Lutz agrees that the distinction between an anthropology *of* vs. an anthropology *for* the military is imperfect (Lutz 2009). Nevertheless, her discussion of these two terms highlights the linkage between epistemological objectives (what one wants to know) and worldmaking (how one wants the world to be) that is so important for the distinction itself. As she understands it, an anthropology *of* the military ultimately invests in interrogating the workings and effects of military power while an anthropology *for* the military does not. She writes:

We need to do an anthropology of the cultural supports for militarisation if we are going to be able to understand the cultural assumptions that prevent us from asking the right questions or being heard when we do. [...] it is by holding civilian and military leadership accountable by educating the public – not advising policy makers – that anthropology will have whatever effect we individually and together want it to have. (Lutz 2009: 10)

Thus what defines legitimate anthropological engagements with the military here is bound to a particular set of morals and politics (anti-militaristic activism), which positions an anthropology *of* the military as necessary and good and an anthropology *for* the military obsolete, if not counterproductive and dangerous. Furthermore, this definition positions an anthropology *of* the military to be free from state interventions while an anthropology *for* the military is understood to be falling victim to the state monopoly of military violence.

The distinction between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military thus relies heavily on institutional affiliations in order to distinguish legitimate forms of military anthropology from illegitimate ones. While discussions of military anthropology seem to anchor an anthropology *of* the military in academic institutions unaffiliated with the military and its state-sanctioned power (and accordingly assuming a critical attitude towards the military), in academic debates an anthropology *for* the military is usually positioned as military-affiliated (and therefore presumably inherently empathic to the military). This institutional affiliation equation results in a particular dynamic: scholars recognised as affiliated with the military (and thus the state) can hardly escape accusations of being uncritical of the military, while scholars formally unaffiliated with the military are automatically extended empathic gestures for their anti-militaristic work.

This juxtaposition of an anthropology *of* the military with anti-militaristic agendas and non-military institutional affiliations seems connected to a particular understanding of militarisation as an oppressive, top-down power model through which military power (and by extension empire) spreads. While feminists were not the first to attend to militarisation, feminist scholarship on the military has nonetheless contributed to the adoption of this model of militarisation among critical military scholars. Connected to an understanding of the society in which military power works through, and simultaneously perpetuates, the subordination of women, for a long time feminist engagements with militarisation have focused on power relations as oppressive. Thus, in Cynthia Enloe's and Carol Cohn's seminal work, militarisation – the proliferation of militaristic ideas and ideals – is understood to be perpetuating patriarchal society (Enloe 1983; Cohn 1987; Cohn & Enloe 2003).

As current feminist critiques of such a top-down power model of militarisation make clear, however, militarisation is not so much a one-way street but rather a dispersed set of workings and effects. That is, its transformative power is not purely limited to undercutting individual agency and resistance to militarism. Rather, as Marsha Henry and Katherine Natanel point out, militarisation needs to be understood as ‘a project in-the-making that diffuses geopolitical power through its manifestation in everyday spatial and temporal practices’, with diffusion not being ‘a unidirectional movement across a border, but as the very contingency which makes militarisation – and transformation – possible’ (Henry & Natanel 2016: 853). From this perspective, militarisation is a transformative process that produces certain kinds of agencies and resistances rather than simply undermining them (Bennike *et al.* 2018).

In light of these observations, with this special issue, we wish to offer a way out of the conceptual dilemma of distinguishing between an anthropology *of* and an anthropology *for* the military. Inspired by Eyal Ben-Ari’s and Edna Lomsky’s use of the term *things military* (Ben-Ari & Lomsky-Feder 1999), we want to offer the term *ethnography of things military* to capture the moral, methodological, and not least epistemological complexities that characterise military anthropology. According to Ben-Ari and Lomsky, the term *things military* refers to ‘social and cultural concerns related to (and derived from) the armed forces, war and provisions for “national security”’ (Ben-Ari & Lomsky-Feder 1999: 1). Hence, ethnographies of things military are concerned with militarisation and its performative effects. Furthermore, as Catherine Lutz argues, things civilian and things military can neither be distinguished nor studied separately from one another (Lutz 2001), and, accordingly, ethnographies of things military immerse themselves in the relationship between the two. In addition and based on the above insights into the relationship between anthropology and the military, we understand ethnographies of things military to be conditioned by their specific analytical focus rather than by the supposedly right or wrong institutional affiliations of scholars. And last but not least, following feminist critiques of a top down power model of militarisation, rather than assuming the (negative) outcomes of militarisation from the outset, we understand ethnographies of things military to be exploring militarisation as a diffuse process of social transformation. Positioned as such, an ethnography of things military attends to militarisation and its performative effects with and through intense empathic engagements with things military. That is, an ethnography of things military asks: what enables the proliferation of military ideas and ideals and what kinds of sociality does this proliferation produce – independent of whether or not scholars are affiliated with the military, and always attentive to the productive (in the sense of transformative) rather than only the limiting aspects of power.

Empathy, Critique, and Things Military

Understood as above, we position the ethnography of things military as an intense and sustained engagement with militarisation. As such, the ethnography of things military offers a critical reflection on how militarised sociality unfolds in its complexity, based on a profound empathic engagement with its ethnographic object, namely things military.

That is, rather than seeing critique to follow from a particular political stance and antagonistic relationship with things military (what Hautzinger and Scandlyn refer to as *critique as war*, see roundtable in this issue), the critical potential of an ethnography of things military lies precisely in its insistence on empathic engagements with things military. If one wants to explore the proliferation of military ideas and ideals and if one wants to understand what kinds of sociality this proliferation produces, there is no way around immersing oneself in the intimate entanglements between things military and things civilian.

Discussions within anthropology about the premises of critical knowledge are manifold, just as debates about how intense empathic engagements between interlocutors and ethnographers should (not) be. The dynamic between immersion in the field as an epistemological premise of (proper) anthropological insight, on the one hand, and of losing sight of one's epistemological focus when 'going native', on the other, captures in important ways what is at stake in these discussions. While a certain degree of empathic engagement with the field is posited as important, even necessary, too much engagement is understood as inimical to the production of critical insights. Feminist and queer anthropologists, for example, have faced (and sometimes still face) accusations of being too immersed in their research fields (Weston 1993; Lewin & Leap 1996; Bolton 1998; Boellstorff 2007; Mohr 2018). Similar aspects are at stake in discussions of applied anthropology, as Birgitte Refslund Sørensen and Matti Weisdorf point to in their contribution to this issue, as well as in critiques of auto-ethnography (Ellis *et al.* 2010). So too, scholars with a military background or scholars working in the military while doing research on things military are regularly faced with charges about their assumed lack of critical distance (Ben-Ari 1989; Tomforde 2011; Kirke 2013; see also roundtable discussion in this special issue). A profoundly insightful example of losing critical distance during the immersive process of fieldwork in a military setting is Carol Cohn's classic work on male American defence intellectuals (Cohn 1987). Immersing herself in these men's lifeworlds, Cohn experienced going native in a military setting. Reflecting on her changing language usage during fieldwork, she writes:

I had begun my research expecting abstract and sanitized discussions of nuclear war and had readied myself to replace my words for theirs, to be ever vigilant against slipping into the never-never land of abstraction. But no matter how prepared I was, no matter how firm my commitment to staying aware of the reality behind the words, over and over I found that I could not stay connected, could not keep lives as my reference point. I found I could go for days speaking about nuclear weapons without once thinking about the people who would be incinerated by them. (Cohn 1987: 708–709)

This dynamic between empathy (through immersion) and critique (through distance) has been intensely scrutinised in anthropology since it pertains to a variety of methodological and epistemological dimensions of anthropological inquiry, such as studying up (Nader 1972), sideways (Hannerz 1998) and 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995), but also in terms of gendered (Golde 1970), sexual (Kulick & Willson 1995), emotional (Newton 1993), and embodied (Coffey 1999) positionality. The relationality of ethnography emerged from these discussions as a central site of epistemological, methodological, and not least ethical reflexivity. Moreover, marked boundaries between home and

field, self and other became less clear since the reckoning of fieldwork's relationality forced ethnographers to consider the common dilemmas that informants and ethnographers often share (Amit 2000: 16). Turning to these common dilemmas shed light on ethnography as a collaborative process as part of which ethnographic knowledge, ethnographer and informant biographies, as well as their respective communities of practice converge in the research endeavour. Understanding ethnographic research in these terms made it difficult to continue to see the ethnographer as a marginal stranger in the field, who engages objects of inquiry solely on their own terms (Holmes & Marcus 2008). Rather, the entanglements of ethnographic conduct, analysis, and representation became the premise of how to think (with) and practice ethnography.

Positioning ethnography within this bundle of relationality and (collaborative) reflexivity, Didier Fassin posits that critical ethnography 'does not provide an ultimate judgement but rather a critical analysis of the complex consequences of the production of distinct truths' (Fassin 2017: 17). Understood as such, the critique that ethnographic scholarship might or ought to provide is not so much a matter of clear political demarcation but rather emerges from the experience and representation of complexity. It is through immersion in the complexity of particular lifeworlds that ethnographic inquiry arrives at its critical potential. And it is through firmly avoiding the analytical straightjacket of a particular set of (political) interpretations and through insisting on the multiplicity of what is at stake, for whom, and to what effects that this critical potential takes form. Similarly, the examination of the performative effects of militarisation, which lies at the core of any ethnography of things military, does not align neatly to established political and moral boundaries, nor does it emerge in a space in which judgements about what is right and what is wrong can be easily made. Rather, militarisation and its performative effects produce outcomes that are difficult to predict, which is why the forms that a critique of such outcomes take cannot and should not be determined beforehand. An ethnography of things military thus 'moves beyond [the understanding of critique as] a simple oppositional stance' to the military, as Victoria Basham, Aaron Belkin, and Jeff Gifkins write in relation to critical military studies (Basham *et al.* 2015: 1), and insists on the necessity of empathic engagements with things military, however morally or politically challenging this might be.

As a look at critical anthropological scholarship attests, this is by no means the sole rendering of critique. In Nancy Scheper-Hughes' famous *Propositions for a Militant Anthropology*, critique is a clear political voice that identifies ills and wrongs (Scheper-Hughes 1995). As she argues, abstaining from engaging in critique in this sense means to 'collaborate with the relations of power and silence that allow destruction to continue' (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 419). Scheper-Hughes advocates for ethnographers to act as witnesses rather than simply as observers in order to position themselves 'on the side of humanity' (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 420). A witness in her sense will be (held) accountable for what they do or do not do, for how politically (dis)engaged they are. Here, critique arises from empathy understood as compassion, whereby compassion grows out of the human condition of being connected to the other through (social) recognition, as Scheper-Hughes argues.

While critique in this sense is admirable precisely because of its impassioned, activist form, as an academic practice aimed at providing the grounds from which to engage with (il)legitimate forms of governance (Foucault 2007), it might also run the risk of ‘training kids [...] for wars that are no longer possible’, as Bruno Latour puts it (Latour 2004: 225). Regarding critique only as a move to emancipate the subject fails to recognise the conditions under which critique emerges. As Judith Butler remarks, critique cannot be positioned outside of the realms of governance since critique itself depends on the existence of governance (Butler 2009). What is more, critique is not so much the result of an individual will but rather a social process, of being moved together in a sociopolitical field or, as Butler puts it, to inquire into and question ‘the legitimacy of existing grounds’ (Butler 2009: 786).

In this sense, then, the critical potential of ethnography might be said to arise out of the process of being moved together in a sociopolitical field, out of empathic explorations of the conditions of (il)legitimate governance. And it is along these lines that an ethnography of things military pursues its interest in militarisation and its performative effects. An ethnography of things military is critical because it questions the premises for and effects of militarisation (as particular forms of (self)governance), while at the same time pointing out infringements of academic inquiry into militarisation (such as the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate anthropological conduct based upon institutional affiliations and political convictions) precisely because of its intense empathic engagement with things military. As such, an ethnography of things military is, in the words of Zoë Wool, ‘less driven to denunciation than bound to exploring, describing – and not necessarily resolving – the ambiguities and contradictions that animate war, military action, militarisation, and their logics and lived experiences’ (Wool 2015: 25).

Underlying this definition of ethnographies of things military is an understanding of empathy that is different from the somewhat commonsensical view that equates empathy with compassion. Whereas ethnographic empathy often *is* equated with having compassionate relationships with one’s interlocutors (Sluka & Robben 2007: 24), an ethnography of things military operates with an understanding of empathy that diverges decidedly from sympathy and compassion. Inspired by Nils Bubandt’s and Rane Willerslev’s conceptualisation of empathy as understanding through a purposeful, even tactical *feeling into* rather than *feeling with* the other person (Bubandt & Willerslev 2015), we conceptualise empathy as a *modus operandi* of ethnographic knowledge through which understanding of lifeworlds from within is enabled without necessitating sympathy or compassion for these lifeworlds’ political and moral frames of reference.

As such, empathic engagements with things military describe intense relations with military sociality by moving in and out of its frames of reference. These empathic engagements are thus not so much the source of militarism as presumed in the distinction of an anthropology *of* from an anthropology *for* the military. Rather, feeling into the other here enables understanding and, by extension, critique. While much anthropological work assumes the otherness of military experience in order to defend anthropology as a discipline, Kenneth MacLeish in his contribution to this issue argues that an

ethnography of things military makes precisely these seemingly distinct truths (in Fassin's sense of a critical ethnography) an object of its inquiry. An ethnography of things military takes the relationality of ethnographic fieldwork seriously by interrogating (the production of) distinct truths as the result of the performative effects of militarisation.

However, empathic engagements as a necessary part of critical ethnography do not simply stop at feeling into the other. As Douglas Hollan and Jason Throop remind us, empathy as a means of understanding goes further than that (Hollan & Throop 2008, 2011). As they put it, empathy is not only about understanding what state the other is in but also about comprehending why and how that other came to be in that particular state, that is, intense empathic engagements as part of an ethnography of things military take a reflective stance. Not so much in terms of compassion, however, but rather in the sense of constantly moving in and out of the other lifeworlds' frames of reference. Intense empathic engagements with things military are necessary precisely because ethnographies of things military aim at acquiring an understanding of military lifeworlds in all their startling complexity. As such, a continuously reflexive process of understanding other lifeworlds, empathic engagements with things military might be said to produce insights precisely because of the awareness that understanding does not presuppose compassion or sympathy, or, as Beatrice Jauregui puts it in her version of critical empathy: what characterises ethnographies of things military is 'the ability to approximately understand and explain the perceptions and practices of others while simultaneously maintaining a measure of distance that allows for critique or even active intervention or obstruction if needed' (Jauregui 2017: 84).

This specific take on empathy, critically perhaps, but arguably also purposive, might be seen as sharing resemblance with former US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara's infamous notion of strategic empathy – that is, understanding your enemy better than they understand you so as to be able to beat them (Morris 2003). The irony of this is not lost on us. To avoid positing empathy and empathic engagements with things military as a simple catch-all solution to the pernicious challenge of taking on military life worlds, let alone those of other purportedly *repugnant cultural others* (Harding 1991), such as right-wings nationalists, we suggest to understand empathy as a *modus operandi* of ethnographies of things military to be working through what Claire Hemmings refers to as affective dissonance, that is, the recognition that engaging with others does not require 'a presumption of reciprocity' (Hemmings 2012: 155). As Hemmings argues as part of her feminist critique of empathy as compassion, the assumption that self and other are connected by and through sympathetic allegiances is very likely to be misleading and might actually contribute to misrecognising the other rather than understanding their lifeworlds. Affective dissonance refers to the realisation that self and other relate to specific frames of reference differently (what Sørensen and Weisdorf explore as awkward moments in their contribution to this issue), and it is in this sense that empathic engagements in ethnographies of things military might be said to produce critical insights. Moving in and out of military lifeworlds allows for understanding to emerge because of the recognition that self and others do not necessarily share affective connections to those lifeworlds' particular frames of reference (see also Roekel, this issue).

Ethnographies of Things Military

Having laid out the conceptual grounds of an ethnography of things military, both in terms of its critical potential as well as in terms of its epistemological and methodological underpinnings, we want to end by introducing readers to the individual contributions to this special issue.

Initially, some of the contributors to this special issue met at a workshop held at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University in Copenhagen, Denmark in December of 2016. The workshop was organised by the editors of this special issue in collaboration with the Center for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen and the Danish Veteran Center. Under the title *Warring relations: methodological and ethical challenges of ethnographic research on soldier and veteran sociality*, we had invited scholars to address two main questions in their interrelation: (1) what are the methodological and ethical challenges of conducting research on soldier and veteran sociality seen from the specificities of a particular empirical field; (2) what challenges in conducting research among soldiers, veterans, and their social networks arise due to the specific disciplinary and academic contexts that scholars are part of. Seventeen scholars from Denmark, Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Brazil, and the United States participated after answering an open call for papers. In addition, soldiers, veterans, and volunteers from the broader field of veteran care in Denmark participated in discussions of military anthropology's different aspects and challenges over two days.

Following the workshop, we discussed the possibility of developing the ideas coming out of the workshop into a more collaborative effort, and all workshop participants were invited to write up a contribution for a special issue through which that collaborative effort was supposed to take form. Once a list of contributors was final, we identified empathy and critique as common themes across the different contributions and as important nodal points of how military anthropology is discussed and positioned in the public consciousness of anthropology as a discipline. This is how we arrived at a discussion of the role of empathy and critique in the debates around military anthropology as well as at a reflection about the forms that empathy and critique actually take when ethnographers engage with things military.

The contributions to this special issue take on many different aspects of the dynamic between empathy and critique as they play out during fieldwork, in interlocutor-ethnographer relationships, in interactions with anthropological peers and the wider academic public, in public dissemination events, or as part of military anthropologists' biographical trajectories. What binds the different contributions to this special issue together, though, is the insistence on the critical potential of ethnographies of things military as laid out above. In their self-reflective manner, all contributions commit to the idea that the desire to understand what militarisation is, what it does, and what effects it has, necessitates an ethnographic immersion in things military rather than a simple denunciation of them. As all contributions show and as argued above, this immersion might be understood as intense empathic engagements, attentive to the complexities of military lifeworlds by moving in and out of their frames of reference while also on the lookout for the affective dissonances these movements lay bare.

Experiencing and reflecting upon the complexities of things military in this way, the contributions to this special issue are committed to forms of critique that do not aim at freeing the subject from supposedly unjust forms of governance by resolving pre-identified ills and wrongs. Rather, they all insist that critique requires feeling into the other, an understanding of the what, how, and why of military lifeworlds, a collaborative movement through the socio-political dimensions of things military that aims at questioning their legitimacy without necessarily sharing compassion for them.

In her contribution, *Videla's kiss: on the dangers of empathy with the military in Argentina* Eva van Roekel discusses the challenges of carrying out fieldwork among Argentinian military officers indicted for crimes against humanity while also engaging with human rights activists working towards justice for the crimes these people have committed. Proposing the term *sticky empathy*, van Roekel attends to how feeling into the other was not only a challenge due to own personal moral convictions but also due to ethical standpoints taken by people the ethnographer relates to and engages with during fieldwork. As she argues, the stickiness of empathy blurs demarcations between good and bad and, in the eyes of anti-militaristic friends, might even stick to the ethnographer as a residue of evil, positioning her, as it were, on the wrong side of things military. Moving in and out of military lifeworlds thus brings with it not only epistemological challenges but also disturbs the moral worlds that an ethnographer and her interlocutors find themselves in together.

In *Awkward Moments in Anthropology of the Military and the (Im)possibility of Critique* Birgitte Refslund Sørensen and Matti Weisdorf reflect on their experiences of carrying out research among Danish war veterans. Focusing on the awkwardness of immersing themselves in this field, they highlight that their experience of awkwardness relates to coming to terms with Denmark establishing itself as a warring nation throughout the last decades. While debates with academic peers about being complicit with a militaristic agenda by means of research were one way these efforts took form, feeling emotionally compromised when hearing veterans talk about their pain and struggles was another. Here, moving in and out of military lifeworlds laid bare the dissonances that exist among not only interlocutors and ethnographers but also academic peers as citizens of a country invested in war. Capturing the ambiguities of this process, Sørensen's and Weisdorf's contribution is an ethnography of things military in all its complexities that connects encounters with informants, anthropological peers, and military and academic institutions to the militarisation of society at large, a transformative process as part of which the right forms of critique are never easy to identify, nor to pose.

In *Field Notes on the Politics of Veteran Care* Kenneth MacLeish attends to the question of what critical engagements with things military actually mean when the realisation that the ethnographic endeavour itself is already part of the political economies of militarised society is taken seriously. Using encounters with veterans critical of his own academic critique of the politics of veteran care as a point of departure, MacLeish argues that the arising tension between empathy and critique in discussions of military anthropology stems from the assumption that ethnography as a particular form of practice and knowledge somehow is separated or different from its object of

study in political, moral, and ethical terms. As he shows, this assumption is made both from anthropologists as well as from veterans, who claim that ‘civilians don’t know shit’ about things military. While this construction of otherness might be understood as a way of upholding one’s self-image as either an academic or a veteran, MacLeish argues that it is exactly this construction of otherness that needs to be the target of critique in a critical ethnography.

In *Breaking Bad? Down and Dirty with Military Anthropology* Thomas Randrup Pedersen reflects on why research among military personnel is often problematised by fellow anthropologists based on his own experiences of conducting fieldwork among Danish military personnel deployed to Afghanistan. Immersing the reader in different intense moments of his own ethnographic endeavour of exploring military life, Pedersen argues that the problematisation of military anthropology is the result of anthropology’s and anthropologists’ failure to empathise with military personnel and the ethnographers embedded among them. In addition, and echoing van Roekel’s observations, Pedersen also investigates how empathy as part of fieldwork is tied to the moral horizons of the researcher. Based on this, he calls upon military anthropologists to scrutinise what the conditions of understanding are in any fieldwork encounter and to subject their claims about things military to the critical gaze of informants, thus letting critique emerge from the collaborative process of investigating the legitimacy of military life.

Concluding this special issue is a conversation between five leading ethnographers in the field of military anthropology and critical military studies. Under the title *Discussing empathy and critique in the ethnography of things military: a conversation*, Eyal Ben-Ari, Zoë Wool, Kevin McSorley, Sarah Hautzinger and Jean Scandlyn discuss the role of critique and empathy when doing research on military life and reflect upon how the relationship between these two important dimensions of anthropological inquiry has played out in concrete ethnographies of things military. Using their own and very diverse experiences of conducting ethnographic research on things military as a backdrop, Ben-Ari, Wool, McSorley, Hautzinger and Scandlyn engage each other in an intense exchange about the ethical, political, and epistemological issues pertaining to the ethnography of things military.

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