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FIELDS OF RESEARCH OF MILITARY ANTHROPOLOGY

ABSTRACT: The aim of the paper is to suggest moving away from the dichotomy of 'Anthropology of' and 'Anthropology for' the military. In order to preserve the scientific character and the original anthropological perspective, the paper analyzes the theoretical impasse in which this sub discipline of Anthropology is pushed in the past decades due to the moralizing stance of research attitudes. In purely a theoretical manner, the paper dissects the main currents of research and ponders how the discipline boiled down on a scholarly debate which turns around 'for' v.s 'of' while being blissfully unaware of illogical trapes it succumbs.

KEYWORDS: Morality, magic, Military Anthropology, pollution, scientific ostracism

In July 2016 the Center for Conflict Research in Marburg, Germany organized a two-day conference with a title „Deployment returnees. Discourses and living worlds of an emerging social group.” The conference dealt mostly with the topic of European war veterans and their problems upon their return from the battlefield. The participants had research experience generally on former servicemen, from Denmark to Israel across Serbia. The contributions covered various perspectives: there was even a contribution from the field of literature and one contribution which dealt with the war's 'indirect' effect, as for instance the consequence of war on the female spouses of veterans. During one of the coffee pauses in front of the conference room, the participants were 'showered' with paper-sheets thrown down from a balcony of the first floor, just above the entrance to the conference room. A couple of students of the Marburg University manifested their disagreement with the conference being held: the

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pamphlets claimed their opposition to sending German troops to Afghanistan. In their opposition the most 'logical' target seemed us, the participants: an international group of scientists studying a topic which they estimated was the result of politics which, according to their 'action' was sustained by us, because we dared to study it... Although my research faced a similar but far less loud and hostile expression back in Serbia, I was nevertheless surprised and honestly, I dare to say, amused. My stance at the time was and still is that there is not much that the researchers who dealt with war-veterans and war-returnees could actually do in order to stop governments sending troops to various battlefields. Governments from all around the world usually treat academic dissent according to the principle: 'caravans keep passing, dogs keep barking'... For starters, not all of us have received subsidy from government to study their topic: in my case, I studied most of my veterans-related topics 'clandestinely': alone, relying on myself and my own (modest) means. I didn't receive a dime while daring to highlight how the Serbian government discarded its veterans. My research underlined the general attitude of the average Serbian citizen: which is that the Serbian government treats its citizens as just a resource which the Serbian authorities can use and abuse as they find fit. In the case of other researchers, I honestly doubt that by stopping research on veterans or military personal, it would have stopped the German government sending its troops to Afghanistan or elsewhere. I too could 'pretend' that there isn't any social layer in Serbia made of men who were sent to fight in one of the war cycles of former Yugoslavia, and that there aren't many men above 40 years of age who don't have military experience.... The loathing that usually the upper, educated, pro-EU Serbian social layer has toward this often poor and rural social class is mostly a result of an active disdain for Milosevic's warmongering politics. And by extension, the war veterans are the embodiment of Milosevic's politics. However, this strong sentiment, manifested even when this layer of society lives in difficult life conditions, can't be explained otherwise than some sense of moral superiority of that upper pro-European class who wants to distinguish itself from the past political errors of its government. Most of the Serbian men who went to fight in one of the wars were drafted. Some escaped the draft, by leaving their country and escaping abroad, in many cases forever. Some avoided drafting by going to university and 'dragging' their studies for decades, just to avoid the draft while some of the wars lasted (first the Croatian, then the Bosnian, finally the Kosovar). Some pretended to be mentally unfit. Many didn't have a choice and just resigned to their destiny. Yes, there were also many who eagerly embraced being drafted and went willingly, and even joyfully. But

for sure no one came back untouched by the experience. Many still live with the repercussions of the experiences that war leaves behind. Me, by avoiding researching the phenomenon, will not solve their misery and the fact that the government used them and then forgot them. My research will probably have no effect on the life of these men. In the best case, I will only manage to expose the Serbian government's criminal oblivion toward those who once worked –or were under pressure to work –to achieve its political goals. Am I in a position as a scientist to condemn the past ambitions and wrongdoings of a past government and its elite? Only in a limited way. But that will not be achieved by not studying a topic which demonstrates the futility and the profound devastating results of that 'Greater-Serbia' project and by avoiding at all costs any topic which touches the war or the military? On the contrary, I dare to claim. Imagine Pasteur being disgusted by the bacilli and abandoning his research because he couldn't stomach what these creatures do to the human body. Same goes for the other colleagues who study the military or effects of war and militarization. So from where comes that disdain which prompted those German students to shower us with their pamphlets? We, anthropologists, familiar with various notions close to human nature can safely predict that it comes from the very human nexus 'pure-impure' (an anthropological concept introduced by Mary Douglas in 1966¹): we, military anthropologists are guilty 'by association'. We have been in contact with a topic considered as 'impure' in Anthropology: army, military, war and ipse facto we are seen as 'polluted'.

This anecdote is just one example to what the researchers of Military Anthropology experience when doing research about topics which are often labelled as 'dark Anthropology' (Webb video-lecture 2020). The unfamiliar audience would presume that this branch of social sciences which is Anthropology, similarly to the universal field of Magic, is divided into 'dark' and 'light' research topics and fields of enquiry. 'Dark' topics are all those topics which could be used for military purposes or are paid for by the military – even in those cases when our research highlights the opposite (see Gerald Hickey's war experience from Vietnam (2002)). One would expect that there shouldn't be any topic in Anthropology, which is by definition related to human existence and behavior, as an off-topic or taboo subject. Prohibited. Too revolting to research it. In this perception, which is more similar to the 'black or white world', topics are classified as either 'good to research' or 'bad to research', depending on who is

¹ Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (1966) Routledge

paying the travel-costs and conference participations and if (and when) that research is potentially usable for some obscure military purpose.

However the human existence could hardly be described as completely 'good' or 'bad'. Some practices and forms of behavior are indeed bad, but between those 'bad' and 'good' there are numerous shades of nuances. Human existence is far more complex to be simplified into either 'dark' or 'light', or 'good' and 'evil'. Indisputably science is not always used for 'good'. But here comes a kicker: things are just things, and practices are practices. It is the purpose of the use of things that qualifies them as either 'good' or 'bad'. For instance a fork is just a tool to be used to eat. But it can be used as a weapon: it has four spikes and with a precise stroke a fork can kill a man.

And it is exactly the debate turning around the 'good' and 'bad' aka the 'morality' of research that burdens the field of Military Anthropology for the past two, three decades. During these decades research was mostly built on ethical worries of the role of the researcher toward his topic (Wakin 1992, McNamara & Rubinstein 2011). In order to distance itself from the possible (unholy!) relation with the military, the field was forced to choose between only two possible outcomes resumed as 'Anthropology for the army' and 'Anthropology of the army' (Lucas 2009, Lutz 2008). This debate is born from ethical uncertainties that anthropological knowledge could be used for war-purposes, *brevi manu* as a 'weapon'. There had been a lot of examples of the 'ungodly' marriage between anthropologists and the military, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world (McFate 2018). The worries that the proximity of an anthropologist with a given population would serve colonial aspiration of some super-power (particularly the USA) as it once did in the discipline's early days. The obsessions that such proximity will pollute all future research has birthed a custom to avoid completely any topic that has to do with the military or was paid for by the military. However, not all anthropologists are US citizens and there are other parts of the world in which the American Anthropologists Association's (AAA) recommendations are only echoing.

So, a game of words has started in the field of Military Anthropology in which vernacular expressions became the main tool of theoretical analysis as well as its own purpose. Very much similar to the usual proceedings in Magic (see Favret-Saada (1977) on this). The main axe of interest became the dichotomy: 'Anthropology for the military' or 'Anthropology of the military'. How to define the unease that the usually politically left-leaning anthropologist feels when he has to deal with some 'military' topic?

In order to somehow unify these seemingly conflicting fields of research and provide a merging approach, a generic description was offered in the form of a rather vernacular expression of 'ethnography of things military' (Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari 1999). In its applied form the disciplinary development raised a lot of mayhem in the Anglo-Saxon academe. The US Human Terrain System is taken as a classical example of use & abuse of Anthropology for military purposes, although the exact conditions of this project, such as the dissemination of research, the way the research was conducted, and actually how many anthropologists participated, remains unknown. A fashionable label of 'critical military studies' with roots in postmodernism was coined as a response to this trend (Fassin 2012, Goldstein et al. 2010, Ercolani 2013). This is a neo-Marxist approach of scientific enquiry which turns around to studying any human relations from the power relation perspective. Which is per se interesting, but it is also exclusive and simplistic if it's used as the sole theoretical framework. The new 'wave' of critical military anthropologists have started, uniting all those anthropologists who worked on a topic (but from a 'critical' standpoint). This 'label' reunites scholarly effort to work on gendered topics of the military, social activism oriented to demilitarize the western hemisphere and similar (Enloe 2014).

The need to move away from this nexus with roots of moral(istic) stance of 'good' vs. 'bad' (Lucas 2008) pushed some researcher to argue about the necessity to study 'military' topics after all: some suggested the introduction of the emotional category of empathy (Mohr et al. 2019) in keeping an imaginary balance between these 'poles'.

In parallel, on the general level of scientific disciplines, the emerging branch of Military Anthropology slowly moved away from the initial Sociology of War from the first half of the XXth century (Bouthoul 1962) and Military Sociology from the XIXth century (Durkheim) and was pushed in the arena of Security Studies (Huysmans 1998), more or less becoming just another field of Applied Anthropology.

In an attempt to escape the theoretical impasse which is fostered by the moralizing of topics, several attempts were made: 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 militarization and its performative effects. It seems that the ethnography of 'things military' boils down to 'Anthropology of the military' which is understood as the study of military institution(s) and 'pressures' (Mohr et

al.2019) that 'denounces militarization and militarism' (idem). We are, again on the side of the 'light' which examines all things according to the nexus 'good' vs. 'evil'.... Mohr et al. research is the best example of that effort: the authors came up with 'empathy' as a possible solution to this theoretical impasse. However, in a logical 'twist' in both of these cases the field of Military Anthropology lingers in the register of emotions: 'empathy' conveniently being a pivotal point of all organized and institutionalized religions. As if there weren't any 'escapes' from moralizing and the religious devotion to the Supreme Good.

Lutz is right when claiming that the whole discipline today "was born out of the discipline's negotiation of its relationship with the military, warfare, and empire" (Lutz 2002, 2008). In an effort to provide a 'rightful' frame to the field of Military Anthropology it was suggested that teaching military personnel about different cultural practices is 'legitimate' while providing insight which can be 'weaponized' isn't (Lucas 2008). Of course this attitude in which epistemological objectives are the only possible fields of research became another dead-end. One can teach military personnel about any given cultural practice and belief, however what the military will do (or could do) with any anthropological knowledge is again in the realm of prediction (again: in the field of Magic). This of course differs pretty much from an anthropological enquiry which is predestined to be 'interesting' for military purposes, as for instance how many armed men are to be found in a given community (the word 'spying' fits here perfectly (see Wynn 2007). On the level of reality it boils down to the ethical (moral) sense of an anthropologist to decide which fields are 'safe' (proper) and which are not. Mohr et al. (2019) rightly state when they claim "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".

One gets the feeling that anthropologists are obsessed of being on the 'right' side of History and moral righteousness. It is often mentioned that the colonial past of this branch of humanities influenced greatly its partisanship during the XXth century. Being on the side of the weak, voicing the injustices and misery of the oppressed is a great and noble thing to do indeed. And yes, it is also important not to bring harm with one's research data. However, this obsession of eternally playing the role of a social 'warrior', an advocate of Social Justice paralyzes a whole range of research opportunities, possibly forever missed opportunities. It seems that Military Anthropology is reduced to choosing a 'side' in a battle for a pure, moral

research which again, boils down to avoiding at all costs working on the side of the Stronger (aka the State). In that sense, all subsidized research – by the Military or the State - is suspicious. The Academic Ivory Tower is again blissfully oblivious to the fact that most of the Higher Education is (also) subsidized by the State. If a state is perceived as criminal or with colonialist, warmongering ambitions, why is just one subsidy perceived as ‘dirty’ (exactly the one that is predestined to go first through the Military’s pocket)? This level of debating which money is acceptable (clean!) is oblivious to the fact that states don’t have ‘their’ money: it’s the taxpayers’ money. In both cases, the military personnel as well as the university professors owe allegiance, transparency, and good work to the taxpayers and should be vigilant how that money is spent and provide satisfying work which will have a positive impact on the lives of their fellow citizens, while at the same time, when possible, avoiding doing harm to others.

The ‘morality’ or better said the ‘purity’ of one’s research agenda is particularly of an interest to those who dare to venture into the field of Military Anthropology. In an effort to warn off researchers and ‘keep them on the right track’ or a research filed the greatest anthropological association in the world, the American Anthropological Association has issued numerous statements about ethical standards of what a research should or shouldn’t do². Interestingly the ethical standards of the organization ‘spilled over’ even on those who are not members of this organization becoming universal standards: anthropologists keep forgetting that not each and every one of their colleagues from various parts of the world can afford the membership in this prestigious (elite) organization. Impartially, most of those who can afford the membership fee in the AAA are from the western hemisphere. So, one has to wonder if the universal principles set by the AAA are to be applied for all ‘castes’ of anthropologists or only on the richest (purest?), or those who have tenure and safe jobs...? If transgressing the ethical precepts of this organization goes with the dissolution of AAA membership and social ostracizing, we can safely state that being on a ‘right side’ of anthropological research is actually rather a question of social identity and not a question of morality. Anthropologists who are regularly criticized for being ‘on the wrong side’ are critiqued even after their research: one of the best examples is Montgomery McFate whose 2018 (McFate 2018) book deals with

² Statement of the AAA from October 31st 2007:
<https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1952> (accessed 21/02/2021)
Or <https://www.drabruzzi.com/AAA%20Resolution%20on%20Human%20Terrain%20Systems.pdf> (accessed 21/02/2021)

a diachronic analysis of past anthropologists who worked for the army, often in conditions of war. In some cases, great, known names of Anthropology participated actively in war efforts for their country or the country's allies. The book was heavily criticized for elements which predated its publication because of the author's participation in the (anthropologically) notorious Human Terrain System. I honestly doubt that McFate is an AAA member, however she continues being ostracized by her peers for her past 'sins' (Price 2019, Sluka 2010). Her example demonstrates well that one needs not to have the privilege of being a member of AAA in order to be forced into respecting the precepts of this organization. In an effort to warn future anthropologists and to provide an ethic frame to all future research in the field of Military Anthropology, the CEAUSSIC (AAA's Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities with its final report on HTS in 2009³) and AAA have shot a bullet in the leg of the whole discipline.

The indirect result of risks which a transgression by venturing into a study of some (or any) Military Anthropology topic would result, most of the anthropologists avoid to study areas which would instigate academic backlash (from peers). Of course this didn't stop various state security projects though: Anthropology as all other disciplines being a tool of understanding to mankind, so under various labels – such as Security Studies, Political Sciences or other – anthropologists clandestinely study various topics which would 'upset' the AAA, taking for granted the role of moral authority this organization is so keen to play⁴.

In a desperate effort to avoid repeating past mistakes when Anthropology plaid 'the Handmaiden of colonialism', anthropologists are repeatedly oblivious that the discipline doesn't have a linear past. As the matter of fact the notion of 'Anthropology' per se might be the fruit of western effort to categorize knowledge and the world, however, under a slightly different form, a similar discipline known as Ethnology was born on the continent during the XVIIIth century. Ethnology became since a synonym of 'Cultural Anthropology' and was defined as 'the science of nations and peoples, or, that study of learned men in which they inquire into the origins, languages, customs, and institutions of various nations, and finally into the

³ https://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/cmtes/commissions/CEAUSSIC/upload/CEAUSSIC_HTS_Final_Report.pdf (accessed 21/02/201)

⁴ See the vocabulary of statements: <https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1656> (accessed 21/02/2021)

fatherland and ancient seats, in order to be able better to judge the nations and peoples in their own times.’ (František in Šmitek & Jezernik 1995). Its founding father was Adam František Kollár. Kollár, a citizen of the Hapsburg Empire, an ethnic Slovak, has dedicated his life to building a base to a science which will help the birth and the independence of Eastern European and Balkan nation states (Roldan & Vermeulen 1995). The younger ‘sister’ of Anthropology (or a predecessor of Cultural Anthropology, as you like it) was actually a tool for the conquered nations of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire to articulate their need and their desire for sovereignty and self-determination. And far from being ‘a Handmaiden of colonialism’, Cultural Anthropology of the XIXth and the first half of the XXth century was a ‘sister’ of national independence. Curiously this ‘small’ detail is consistently missing when western anthropologists reproach themselves for the colonial ‘sins’ of their predecessors from the XIXth and early XXth centuries. The fact that Anthropology doesn’t have the same cursus in Western Europe, in the USA, in Eastern Europe or elsewhere is conveniently missing in the self-flagellating narrative about past anthropological ur-wickedness. The reason for such obliviousness might be ignorance but also anthropologists’ long-standing interest in powerless or disenfranchised people (see Kulick 2006 on ‘masochist Anthropology’). In such scientific discourse, empowered nations fostered by a branch of Anthropology, interested exclusively in the study of its ‘own’ culture and ‘own’ community, has no place.

This detail leads us to reconsider also the military and military culture as an object of research in countries where Anthropology didn’t play the role of the ‘handmaiden’ but rather a tool of national sovereignty. Not all countries on this planet were colonial powers. As a matter of fact, a minority of countries engaged for a longer or shorter period of time in such economic and political activity. For many countries around the world, the military played a pivotal role on the road to national freedom. A freedom paid in blood and suffering of many. And for many countries it is exactly the military which signifies a guarantee for a future self-determination. Why would the AAA’s preoccupations affect anthropologists in countries in which the colonialist, globalist’s appetites of governments don’t exist and are not applicable?

The author of this paper has given a lot of thinking about possible answers to this question. The only thing which comes to my mind is the fact that American (US) Anthropology was for a longtime considered as a successful scientific and disciplinary model to be imitated and aspired to. Unfortunately, pre-existing scholarly traditions have fallen into the ‘backwater’ of localism, in which the study of our ‘own’ culture is considered provincial in the best case. Globalism has

polluted the field, especially in the domain of theory. Anglo-Saxon theory is used and reused, while the recycling of French postmodernist theories (Derrida and similar) have brought down the field often to a simple linguistic exercise.

In such an ethnocentric (American) perspective there can't be talk of diversity of research in the field of Military Anthropology. The need for comparative study of cultural military traditions (from a diachronic or synchronic approach) coming from various parts of the world remains a need. And all topics, such as the military credo, military philosophy and imaginary studied from the anthropological standpoint remains a distant project.

The study of violence, levels of violence or expressions of violence and demographic conditions which affect it (Bouthoul 1962, Walter 1950) still remains the field of evolutionary anthropologists or evolutionary psychologists, while cultural and social anthropologist do not venture even to touch it.

Comparative cultural approaches to concepts such as 'war'/'peace'/'violence'/'terror'/'victimhood'/'martyrdom'/'leadership', their cost and effect and its relation to demography is screamingly lacking. Such myopic anthropological attitudes stem from a mix of political correctness and a desperate need to be 'on the right side of research'. Unfortunately such academic narrative pushes a one-size-fits-all ideology of peace, democracy and progress to the rest of the planet. Strangely, a discipline which advocates diversity boils down to a scientific Gleichschaltung. Even more strangely, such 'one size should fit all' narrative is based on a permanent good-faith commitment from all parties: the standpoint that the Western world's ambitions, as for instance a permanent peace, is universal while in the same time being blissfully unaware that human nature isn't based on lasting feelings and states of mind; not to mention the idyllic obliviousness of cultural differences of what various cultural concepts of what 'war' actually means, might vary and be diametrically opposite.

Such ethnocentrism, which can only be explained by the feeling of moral superiority, and the fear of being /used/abused (exclusively by the military of the country in which they live) blinds the researchers and schools which keep producing them. They remain unaware that there are actually different points of perspective 'out there' which might harbor new visions of imperialism which could directly endanger the very basics of their own society, that after all permitted the birth of such an oblivious, self-contemplating elite caste. We can deliberate long about the reasons which birthed this and other circumstances which were fertile enough to

result in this morally superior standpoint. However one of the reasons is certainly in the philosophic concept of historicity (the perspective that all societies are developing toward a better tomorrow and that they will sooner or later become equal in all ways) which pollutes our discipline for too long.

So what remains to be done? Anthropological studies on the military, on war, and on men and women in uniform will continue. It remains a question whether these studies will go under the 'banner' of Anthropology or other, related disciplines. It also remains to be seen how the military anthropologists will organize themselves in the future. Not all colleagues can 'stomach' the research which is published under the label of 'critical military studies'. Will they (dare to) create parallel associations in which they will foster their exchanges on the international level, far from the eyes (and ears) of their 'purist' American colleagues? On a more general level, there is also the question of theoretical framework which could unite the dispersed colleagues from all around the world. Postmodernism has brought a lot of harm to the discipline, especially in the domain of theory. With all its merits, the Frankfurt School had its merits, but in simplified, banal version is theoretically barren. New winds are blowing; the old theoretical approaches cannot offer either Anthropology or Military Anthropology the necessary setting which enable them to grow and develop in the new century. Genetics has become a key player in the domain of research of human behavior. Will Anthropology embrace it? Military Anthropology could incorporate it if circumstances would allow it; for starters, if Military Anthropologists would be granted with a little confidence and trust. However, while the moralizing in a XVth century Christian missionary fashion continues, anthropologists will either not touch disputed topics or will research it clandestinely. Will this sub-field of Anthropology which is Military Anthropology recover from moralizing and Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism? If it will, it will not be thanks to the Anglo-Saxon colleagues, I dare to prophesy.

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