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## Voices of Veteran Researchers

The 'voice of the veteran' is simultaneously over and under-represented in our society and our scholarship alike (Bulmer and Jackson 2016). Veterans' voices are both privileged and marginalised, their stories glorified and vilified, their subjectivity either militarised or demilitarised, and their experiences both banal and extraordinary (Kelly 2013; Tidy 2015; Bulmer and Eichler 2017; Wool 2015). The figure of the veteran suffers from an 'over-determination' of meaning and an impoverished language to explore it, such that negotiating a veteran identity can become overwhelmingly complicated (Macleish 2013; Caddick forthcoming). Veterans' voices are a site of contestation related to their authenticity, and mediated or performative nature (Tidy 2015; Woodward and Jenkins 2011). Within scholarship, military experience either bestows legitimacy upon the author (e.g., traditional war studies, see Antrobus and West 2022), or invites suspicion (e.g., *some* anti-militarist feminist scholars, see Duncanson 2013).

In this special issue we move away from attempting to determine the meaning of the veteran's voice in research, and instead reflect on the contingent and contextual emergence of voices, how stories are made, and what reflective labour is undertaken, when veterans critically engage with their experience in their academic research. We foreground the 'disruptive potential' (Basham and Bulmer 2017: 62) of veterans' voices by bringing their unique and complex positionality to 'throw light onto the dark recesses of the military interior' (Ware 2016: 240). We bring together an interdisciplinary collection of contributors with different military experiences to think about their voices and contribution in new ways. This special issue emerged from a series of workshops and panels held over the last eighteen months by both the European International Studies Association and the Defence Research Network, funded by the Volkswagen Stiftung (Cooperation Agreement 2134-002) and the Defence Studies Department, King's College London. These workshops and panels provided a space for dialogue between our authors, their past selves, and their academic expertise, using conversation as 'an alternative mode of research praxis' (Bulmer and Jackson, 2015).

The articles examine the themes of criticality, positionality and reflexivity in scholarship which draws upon the researchers' embodied knowledge of the military. We consider the epistemological significance of veterans' knowledge of the self and (military) other and what possibilities it creates for knowing military experiences differently. Contributing authors reflect on how they have negotiated conflicting emotions and affective entanglements with military power and what their reflexive journey brings to their scholarship and professional re-engagement with the military. Scholarship which draws upon the researcher's own experience - whether autoethnographic or otherwise - engages in particular kinds of academic labour. This special issue is concerned with what kind of knowing is enabled when veterans interrogate the embodied legacies of military service to generate new insights about military power. The labour involved is also personal and ongoing as our authors engage in dialogue with their past selves, with each other, and with wider audiences. As West and Antrobus (this issue) point out, "We are not just negotiating close proximity to the military through interviews, archives, and locations: we have been part of it, it will always be part of us". And, as all of our authors acknowledge, this can provoke or resurrect intense emotions, and can pose risks to their own mental health (see Lee, this issue).

The articles challenge us to refuse singular meanings of veteranhood and voice and encourage us to value the ongoing dialogues that arise from personal experiences to generate new knowledge. The challenge of transitioning from military life to the academic arena is introduced in Paul Higate's article in which he examines his journey from a junior administrator in the Royal Air Force (RAF) to a professor of sociology. He deconstructs the

concept of military pride both in terms of military personnel and veterans, as well as for the wider civilian public. Higate shows how a typically unquestioned assumption of military life (i.e., pride in one's service) can radically depart from the embodied truths of their own experience. He recounts an experience of being surrounded by veterans who all demonstrated pride in their service and feeling "deeply troubled, disappointed, and somewhat perplexed", an affective response which provoked the critical reflection which led to the article. The article exemplifies the potential of veteran scholars to expose the absurdities of an unquestioned military pride.

In Hannah West and Sophy Antrobus' article, different ways of seeing and knowing the military are similarly produced through reflexive engagement with their past selves, but with a different focus on memory and gendered experience. By wrestling with their insider-outsider status - in both veteran and academic circles - West and Antrobus begin by interrogating their own memories of service life through the critical feminist lens they now apply in their academic work. The result is a jarring identification of the 'deeply odd' nature of gender relations and practices in the military. Through their reflexive practice, they undertake what we might describe as a 're-gendering' of their military pasts. Given the pervasive normalisation of sexualised 'banter' and relations, in which the authors were enmeshed, the 'oddness' of these experiences was fundamentally obscured for them during service. Through distance, time, and critical reflection amongst academic peers - including those both supportive and suspicious of them as veterans - West and Antrobus reinterpret the gendered experience of military life and find the taken-for-granted nature of the hyper-sexualised culture freshly startling. Seeing and knowing differently - as female veterans and critical feminist academic researchers - involves a shift in their embodied understanding of what military power and culture is like, which is a form of knowledge that could not have been created and shared without their prior immersion in the military and subsequent critical insights. Their critical perspective also sheds light on potential assumptions, held by critical military scholars who do not have direct military experience.

Neil Jenkins explores the unique competencies veterans can bring to critical research as a result of their dual experience of being a member of the military and a member of the critical academic community. He demonstrates this through his discussion of friendly fire and fratricide, arguing that the critical veteran researcher is ideally placed to identify the absences and silences within many accounts of fratricide because of their own practical experience of military life and warfare. Rendering these absences visible opens up new avenues to research and exploration, drawing attention to wider issues including the impact of friendly-fire's victims' injuries, their future military career and the economic and psychological impact of the fratricide on them and their families' future. Jenkins argues that such an approach 'can truly critically describe the full phenomena of war'. What is clear in Jenkins' analysis is that there is nothing inherently critical or insightful from military experience alone, rather it takes active reflection and critical analysis to harness these insights.

Ben Schrader's article provides a pedagogical perspective to this special issue, reflecting on his experiences of living, writing and teaching war as a teacher in the North American higher education system. Echoing our other contributors, he explores the tensions of finding distance from one's veteran identity in an academic setting, in particular in the American system where the veteran student is more prominent than perhaps is the case in the UK. In addition, he explores the pedagogy of teaching war to students of varying cultures and experiences of war as a critical veteran researcher. What emerges from his reflections is a number of strategies, born from his experience as a veteran and a teacher, to enable others to create their own knowledge of war. As he says: "We are constantly living with those effects

[of governments' policies] long after the war has ended, and we can utilize that embodiment to teach others a multiplicity of ways in which we can look to understand war.”

Our Encounters contribution by Peter Lee exposes his sudden reawakened trauma provoked by his own academic research. Here his military identity bursts back into life and he questions the ethics of military research which protects the researched but not the researcher. Following on from West and Antrobus, he challenges the MOD's bias towards 'defence benefit' in research. The contributions are united by their rejection of conventional military research and its inability to reflexively explore inconvenient truths. Instead, the embrace of critical thought underlines the value of the critical veteran researcher in using their own reflexive journeys to provide fresh approaches and analysis to critical military scholarship.

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