(En)Acting Our Experience: Combat Veterans, Veteranality, and Building Resilience to Extremism

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Abstract: Drawing from emerging arenas within (applied) anthropology and informed by on-going ethnographic fieldwork alongside combat veterans in Southeast Europe, this paper follows indications that veterans and veteran organizations are potential enablers/maintainers of resilience to violent extremism within societies. This position builds from the recognition that veterans embody a unique capacity for resilience; a capacity generated by surviving combat and deepened as veterans encounter the struggles of life after service. Exploring this proposition of veteran contribution and collaboration suggests a (re)theorization of the veteran in society is required. In service of this (re)theorization, the concepts of "veteranality" and "critical veteranality" are introduced to signify and engage a social ontology representing the dynamics of the veteran life-world. In conclusion, it is argued that (re)theorization, ethnographic methodologies and anthropological engagement will guide how socio-political strategies countering extremism can be opened to veteran (en)acted experiences with resilience.

Keywords: veterans, veteranality, resilience, extremism, applied anthropology

> "You have seen what happens when a nation accepts hate and intolerance…Start being a leader as soon as you put on your civilian clothes. If you see intolerance and hate, speak out against them. Make your individual voices heard, not for selfish things, but for honor and decency…for the rights of all people."
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> - General J.M. Wainwright (official memorandum[1] to WW II veterans, 1946)

> "…and the tortures of the past are like a fortune for the future…"
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> Doomtree[2] (from the track "Bangarang", 2012)

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1   Internet Archive n.d.

2   Doomtree is an American indie hip-hop collective.

Introduction

Combat veterans embody a unique, multi-dimensional capacity for resilience. It is a capacity that builds from accumulated experiences of life (and the taking of life) during service in the armed forces as well as from reflections on what it took to survive along the frontlines. For many veterans, this sense of resilience also bespeaks the capacity to absorb, alter, and/or adapt the challenges of civilian life after combat; challenges that range from personal health and finance to state bureaucracy and stereotypes. Altogether, such a capacity, though intrinsically linked to past experience in the armed forces, may be engaged as an object of inquiry so as to contribute to dynamic considerations of social resilience today. In so doing, there can emerge new opportunities to recognize contemporary roles for veterans in society while also supporting a society's broader conceptualization of resilience. This by seeking out the hard-fought, experienced voices of veterans and incorporating them into capacity-building strategies and discourse. On that note, I hasten to add that this call should not be heard as an attempt to militarize the discourse space around resilience nor militarize the very sense of resilience itself. On the contrary, veterans may be seen as extraordinarily adverse to such militarization as we[3] know all too well where such militarization can lead and what it costs. The emphasis here then is on *past* wartime experiences that shape *present* peacetime perspectives of veterans who, perhaps unseen or unaware of how we may continue to be of service to our societies, can be unique partners within a range of socio-political projects.

Following the Belgrade Security Forum's 2021 topic of "resilience to violent extremism," I take an opportunity to focus a lens on the special relationship between veterans and resilience in a manner that seeks to inform broader concepts and methodology of civil resilience today. This approach works from an understanding that veterans and veteran collectives are potential (thus, implicitly unrecognized) contributors – or, in the same vein, enablers or maintainers – of civil resilience. In referring herein to the concept of resilience, I take as point of departure a contextualization structured for the forum: In terms of violent extremism, resilience is understood as the capacity of individuals, communities, and formal and informal institutions to positively or successfully adapt to external problems or threats. In support of this context, I generally understand resilience as "the capacity of a system, community, or society to adapt to hazards by resisting or changing to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure."[4] For clarity of conversation, I mark resilience at times as either veteran or civil, with the "veteran" qualifier positioning particular (en)acted experiences and potentiality on par with, yet still separate from, capacities of resilience across broader social spectrums. Yet it is hoped this distinction will eventually be rendered more muted as partnerships become inclusive and progress is evidenced toward collective capacities of resilience.

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3   A point of clarity is needed regarding the use of "we" and "ours" in this work. I use such grammar as I am a combat veteran (Iraq 2007) and former Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician with the U.S. military. Thus, for this conversation, I speak as both a researcher and veteran.

4   Barrios 2016, 29.

How then can veterans (en)act experiences and perspectives to build our capacity for resilience? For we can see resilience as a performed, semi-innate tactic, acted and enacted, that guides how we handle and absorb the problems or difficulties faced as veterans in (a post-conflict) society. Furthermore, how can this capacity be engaged as an object of academic inquiry? What is needed from academia and what doors opened by society to bring the lived experiences of veterans to the task of adapting to threats of extremism? Exploring these questions and the proposition of veterans contributing to capacities of civil resilience suggests a (re)theorization of the veteran in society is required. As envisioned below, this (re)theorization works to enact a transnational and decentered/decolonized framework for holistic representation within academia and beyond. The representation that acts to immediately foreground the totality of the veteran life-world as a point of departure in any research or discourse that looks to veterans today.

Toward this goal, I discuss in the first half of this paper what is needed to (re)frame and (re)theorize the veteran within socio-academic spaces. In service to this discussion, I propose one possible path forward as well as associated concepts that speak to a holistic conceptualization of the dynamics – resilience and remembrance, patriarchy and patriotism, gender and geography, or sickness and silence – that structure the veteran life-world. In the second half, the field of applied anthropology is brought as a foil to continue considerations of structuring a holistic framework for veteran studies but also to argue that one of its core methodologies, organizational ethnography, is exceptionally well-suited to access, understand, and build from veteran resilience. As a means to ground and exemplify such an ethnographic approach to veterans, I include two vignettes from my own, ongoing ethnographic fieldwork alongside veterans in former Yugoslavia; fieldwork that explores the embodied concepts of veteran subjectivity, social imaginaries, and post-conflict (transnational) relationships. In sum, it is argued that such a theoretical and methodological alignment will function to empower veteran voice and representation across broader exchanges of knowledge in the realms of academia, civil society, and politics. Indeed, a founding principle must be a sense of reciprocal exchange with veterans in the discourse and capacity-building of resilience so as to ensure sustained, equitable engagement. In that spirit, my goal here is to initiate several conversations within academia, highlight (for academic and non-academic stakeholders) the potential of veterans as contributors to resilience and suggest a theoretical framework that builds its own endowment of resilience.

What We Need – The (Re)Theorization

In "The State of Research in Veterans Studies: A Systemic Literature Review," Leonard Lira and Janani Chandrasekar create insightful, wide-ranging labor of love that provides a critical step toward self-reflexivity within the emerging field of veterans studies. They open the review with a particularly poignant observation: "Veteran studies are unlike other areas/identity studies … veterans studies have yet to cohere into a tangible focus of study

that exhibits the interdisciplinary nature and academic pedigree of its predecessors."[5] Furthermore, while the review is firmly situated within North Atlantic-centric research, Lira and Chandrasekar do not miss the opportunity to highlight the potential for new voices and research avenues. Notably, they speculate that "more research on comparative veteran experiences from other nations could be beneficial for a focused field of study in veteran research."[6] A speculation which lends a sense of empowerment to my own ethnographic fieldwork alongside veterans in Southeast Europe; veterans who seemingly exist solely in the unsung margins of North Atlantic-centric veterans research. Margins that are enforced by American exceptionalism within, and general dominance of, research narratives, methodology, and engagement today. In an alternate vein, though further aligning with both my personal and professional encounters within veteran-oriented research, Lira and Chandrasekar call out a "misleading impression" that perpetuates "the existence of the 'wounded hero' myth or 'broken veteran' syndrome" while minimizing "the extreme complexity and variety of veteran experiences."[7] A point that had me, as a veteran and academic, clapping my hands as I read their work. This point also informs their conclusion that what is needed is "more research on veterans as independent variables, not dependent variables."[8]

In reading through the review, I came away with an encouraging sense that with this self-reflexive work, more insightful questions are being formed and the voids highlighted in the field of veterans studies. Yet I also sense a missed opportunity to argue for a distinct point-of departure from which to launch socio-academic engagements that will in turn inform Lira and Chandrasekar's critical call for coherence and rigor within the field. A field where the number of contributing disciplines and invested stakeholders is only exceeded by the manifold challenges faced by veterans around the world – and, to make it explicit, throughout the Global South and in our so-called geopolitical margins. It is a missed opportunity to situate the process and production of 'academic pedigree' (to take up the call from Lira and Chandrasekar) as only emerging from an existential, indivisible premise: veterans build, maintain and embody a unique, demarcated life-world or mode-of-being, structured by shared (and collectively imagined) experiences from the past and into the present. In other words, the field of veterans studies should be guided by (and engaging with) the veteran as representative of an entire subjectivity that is existentially and experientially distinct from other social subjectivities and as such, refuses essentialization, pathologization or atomization in service of discursive predilections. It is a geopolitically decentered subjectivity informing a transnational identity that is protected by veterans as we find life within society and engage the state along ever-shifting frontlines of memory and bureaucracy.

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5   Lira and Chandrasekar 2020, 46.

6   *Ibid,* 60.

7   *Ibid.*

8   *Ibid.*

To speak of subjectivity vis-à-vis the veteran, we must recall certain fundamentals. Here I chose to return to the basics of subjectivity via Søren Kierkegaard and an excerpt from Nigel Rapport's trenchant engagement with the philosopher's work speaks succinctly to understanding (veteran) subjectivity:

> Kierkegaard sought to affirm the integrity of the individual and a personal sense of self-identity in the face of impersonalizing trends. Pure and passionate, unique subjectivity possessed an intransigence in the face of an objectivizing, universalizing or absolutizing mediation of reality which must be recognized… Existence preceded all and could be reduced to nothing; hence, *the existing individual and his or her subjectivity must remain the touchstone of any human accounting.*[9] (emphasis added)

A return to, or recognition of, this accounting of subjectivity informs a discursive and methodological framework that intrinsically guides researchers within the field of veterans studies to foreground veteran subjectivity as a point of departure for any one particular research vector, thereby providing a coherence that is empowered reciprocally by both veteran and academic. And while Rapport speaks specifically to the interplay of subjectivity and anthropology (in a manner that indeed foreshadows the second half of this paper), his argument and conviction should resonate in academic realms beyond anthropology. For if we within veterans studies wish to attempt any answer to Rapport's quandary – "how to write rationally and systematically of a sociocultural milieu of experiencing individuals without generalization or stasis?"[10] – we must consider advocating subjectivity as our rallying point for the foundation of any future academic "pedigree" or rigor. A foundation that will support efforts to "turn individual experience into a systemic object…achieved by attempting to write of and as ongoing movement between experienced worlds."[11] Moreover, I hope it is from this foundation that we can also begin to reverse the near-pathological representation of veterans within research and discourse; an enforced characterization-cum-pathology that represses and ignores veteran agency in order to collectively cast veterans as damaged, disgruntled and/or traumatized. A pathology that seeks and sees victims, not veterans, who are perpetually in need of salvation while also conveniently cast as society's (sole and stable) reservoirs of remembrance.

In identifying this need for the (re)theorization of the veteran within society, especially as a prerequisite for understanding or building with veteran resilience, I am following with the turns of anthropology toward ontology[12] and reflexivity[13] while guided by a prime directive of decentering/decolonization vis-à-vis North Atlantic hegemony.[14] In a num-

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9   Rapport 2002, 170.

10   *Ibid.*, 179; see also White and Strohm 2014.

11   *Ibid.*, 179.

12   See: Kohn 2015; Pina-Cabral 2014a, 2014b.

13   See: Fabian 2014; Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau 2018.

14   See: Getachew 2019; Getachew and Mantena 2021; Pels 1997; Stoler 2008.

ber of ways then, this discussion approaches veterans in much the same way that Jelena Vasiljević approaches a (re)theorization of citizens and citizenship in the regions of former Yugoslavia. In one respect, her work can offer a kind of blueprint that guides how to imagine and speak of one approach to the (re)theorization of veterans, despite her subject(s) being situated in an altogether separate domain of social experience. In another respect, pointing to her geographical focus and ethnographic approach indicates both a desire to situate this conversation outside North Atlantic academia while also connecting with my own, ongoing ethnographic fieldwork alongside war veterans in former Yugoslavia. Fieldwork that guides me through Croatia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia as I shadow the lives and contemporary experiences of veterans; much to their alternating expressions of pride, surprise, suspicion and exasperation ("You're still here? How many questions can you have about veterans?").

The framework built by Vasiljević[15] to analyze citizenship "combines a social ontological perspective, which sees documents as constitutive of social reality [*documentality*], with an ethnographic approach that stresses the lived and affective dimension of citizenship as social practice."[16] She calls on this concept of documentality[17] to inform her social ontological approach and pulls it into lockstep with current ethnographic trends that explore "the personal, *intersubjective* and affective dimensions of states policies as they are lived in the everyday" (emphasis added).[18] Here then is a component for our aforementioned blueprint, as I suggest what is needed is a similar social ontological perspective of veterans that can be seen as comprehensively referential to all the generated, constitutional traces of the veteran life-world. Another component is reflected by situating affective ethnography as structurally critical to approaching social subjects,[19] a realization that also plays into the argument that more sustained, extensive ethnographic engagement (most especially, perhaps, with veterans in the Global South) is critical for understanding veteran subjectivity.

This suggested blueprint and approach embraces a key point asserted by Bulmer and Jackson's engagement with veteran embodiment and voice: "Academic ways of listening foreclose the potential of narrative to open up different ways of knowing and being with another person. Alongside new ways of speaking, we also need new ways of listening, and seeing, if we are to engage with embodied experience."[20] In that very same register and to build further upon Vasiljević's assertion that "beyond merely merging an ontological and an ethnographic approach,"[21] our blueprint holds inseparable veterans and their affectivity

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15   My thanks to Jelena Vasiljević for taking me through her work and thoughts as I consider a veteran-centric blueprint of (re)theorization.

16   Vasiljević 2018, 1143.

17   As developed by Ferraris, in Vasiljević 2018.

18   Vasiljević 2018, 1145.

19   See also: Kirin 2020.

20   Bulmer and Jackson 2016, 36.

21   Vasiljević 2018, 1143.

or materiality as well as "the state-regulated and the socially lived" dynamics of veteran subjectivity. Yet a piece – a term, an expression – remains missing from the analogue and blueprint I have thus far drawn alongside Vasiljevic's work. For as Vasiljević works from the term "documentality," signifying a social ontological approach to/representation of documents, what do we have for veterans?

The earliest reference I find[22] of the term "veteranality" is in a short yet engaging piece from 2013 by Emma Murray for the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. Her adaptive creation "veteranality" reads as being inspired by an intersection of the terms "criminality" and "veteran" Murray encounters during her insightful work within the British criminal justice system. Murray writes of her intent to situate veteranality as "indicating that the criminality of veterans is something that is perceived as being different from other criminality."[23] Subsequent engagement with the term is growing[24] and I hope to expand upon Murray's own drive toward seeing veteranality as a signifier for veteran distinction and representation amongst other social ontologies. Indeed, more recent considerations of veteranality speak of veterans as a "specific ontological category…[o]ften overwhelming normative social policy agendas" and sees from us a "subjecthood…embodied with risks and potential behaviours which shape emerging social policy agendas."[25] However, there remains to my eye (veteran and academic) certain tones of criminality, stigma, imbalance and hegemony that narrow thus undermine the deployment of veteranality as a holistic, anti-colonialist social ontological lens. Tones perhaps only to be dispelled by positioning it (read also: relinquishing it) entirely within the spectrum of veteran subjectivity and enacting a re-signification that builds from Murray's crucial work.

This realization brings with it a need for veteranality to discursively progress from its criminal/justice system origins and subsequent confinement. In so doing, veteranality, much in the same manner as documentality vis-à-vis documents and citizen-subjects, can come to more fully signify an entire social ontological approach to veterans and veteran subjectivity. An ontological approach not characterized by stigmata, but free to be embodied by, thus representational of, veterans themselves the world over. In this call to unleash veteranality, I see a maintenance of Murray's core desire for the term "to 'give voice' to veterans by allowing them to narrate their own experiences prior, during and after war."[26] At the same time, it opens the term to grander potentials beyond the realm of the (British) justice system and veterans running afoul of said justice system. A term that can ultimately demand the rigor with which we academics engage "femininity," "sexuality," "documentality" and "criminality" itself today. Seen in those same registers then, "veteranality" is enabled to signify a broad social construct and its manifold traces built of lived experiences unique to veterans. A construct that is perpetually shared, (re)created, and

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22   Within English-language publications and journals.

23   Murray 2013, 21.

24   See: Jakir 2019.

25   Taylor, Murray, and Albertson 2019, xxiv.

26   Murray 2016, 325.

maintained by a vibrant, complex range of individuals and felt vocabularies that continue to sound-off long after the battlefields have gone quiet. By extension, this may also enable more focused lenses of critical examination *within* veterans studies, envisioned here as "critical veteranality," as well as potential programmatic subjects and engagements with:

- precarity in pursuing post-conflict (re)inscriptions of femininity, masculinity, patriotism, etc.;
- vulnerability in post-conflict veteran negotiations within/against patriarchal systems;
- veteran status/identity as a survival strategy in post-conflict economies (thus engaging the global issue of so-called 'fake veterans' from a socio-economic lens);
- "toxic veteranality" – akin to toxic masculinity yet veteran-centric to include:
  - veterans (en)forcing on other veterans idealized, traditional, or normative expectations and standards of veteran behavior, appearance, politics, patriotism, activism, etc.;
  - actions (e.g., ostracization, verbal abuse, physical assault) brought against perceived transgressors of 'normative' veteran behaviour;
- disabled veterans (en)countering normative/ableist veteranality;
- victor narratives enforcing/structuring veteranality (e.g., 'gatekeeping' the subjectivity);
- imperialist paternalism and geo-centrism (e.g., North Atlantic region) in veterans studies;
- gendered or racial dynamics of veteranality and created/unseen margins of veteranality;
- 'necroveteranality' – a discursive arena within which the dimensionalities of power and death vis-à-vis the veteran can be assembled and critically engaged (inspired by Achille Mbembe's development of 'necropolitics'[27]); to include, but not limited to:
  - consensual/non-consensual embodiment of death and remembrance;
  - post-combat mortality (e.g., suicide) and the socio-politics of veteran mortality;
  - the veteran netherworld of slow death, visibility-only-in-death, or carrying and caring for the dead;
  - veteran agency in the narration, cleansing, and/or absolution of state or societal responsibility for the death;
- (transnational) veteran social imaginaries as well as associated veteran materiality ranging from prose, poems and porn to posters, pictures and pistols.

While further discussions and critiques of veteranality are hoped for (even though they may ultimately render aspects of the re-signification I have constructed above as unten-

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27   See: Mbembe 2003; Mbembe 2019.

able), I suggest that by building up veteranality to include new connotations, it will be seen more as a consensual and comprehensive social ontological approach. As such, we can then include the conceptualization as a key component in our blueprint toward (re) theorizing the veteran. Furthermore, veteranality can facilitate efforts of counter-hegemony and decolonization within academia by explicitly signalling/embracing a need for veteran voices from the geo-political margins of the North Atlantic and further afield in the Global South. In turn, this acknowledges veterans as controlling their own narratives – indeed, identified as the very well-spring of narratives versus passive subjects of imposed discourse – and as agents of (self) transformation, drawing on lived experiences. In sum, this acknowledgement of (re)theorization is key if we are to engage veteran resilience and envision veterans as collaborators in solutions to socio-political concerns such as violent extremism.

How We Get There (And Beyond) – Accessing Veteran Resilience

My opening gambit for the second half of this discussion returns us to Rapport's structuring of anthropology through Kierkegaard's insights. Rapport asserts that "Through a methodology of processual understandings – self-fashioned, made *in situ* – anthropology can lay claim to a holism which alone does justice to the complexity of human social life and its individual experiencing."[28] Following this assertion, anthropology is to be seen as a key field from which to engage veterans, veteran subjectivity, and veteranality. Though a full accounting of anthropological practice vis-à-vis the veteran is beyond the scope or intent of this paper, I see its introduction here as both discussant and guide in structuring a framework for understanding veteran subjectivity while also accessing, understanding, and building from veteran resilience.

Drilling down deeper into the field of anthropology for a more exact point-of-departure for exploring veteran lived experiences thus veteran resilience brings me to the field of applied anthropology. While I share a view held by more than a few anthropologists that the term "applied anthropology" is inherently redundant or 'oxymoronic,'[29] I also understand the need for the term as due to the seemingly intractable mysteries that shroud the field of anthropology from many partners. Alternately, anthropology continues to be plagued by the perception it is solely concerned with the generation and/or interpretation of knowledge. Unsurprisingly then, both fellow veterans and academic colleagues have reacted with mild confusion or surprise to the revelation that anthropologists can and do "deal with" veterans. So, to center the field of applied anthropology and, by extension, frame its relevance to the conversation at hand, I include here a statement of intent (slightly edited for readability) from the Applied Anthropology Network,[30] part of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA): Applied anthropology is dedicated to the

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28 Rapport 2002, 180.

29 See: Darnell 2015; On re-claiming/transitioning applied anthropology, see: Bennett 2005, Rylko-Bauer *et al.* 2006.

30 Applied Anthropology Network n.d.

exchange of information and experiences related to practical applications of anthropology and ethnography, thereby enabling a circular transfer of knowledge between academia, private and public sectors, NGOs, interest groups, students and other individuals. In essence, as Dan Podjed and associates[31] have argued, applied anthropology is a vector for anthropologists, with our unusual training and as creators of original knowledge, to move from interpretation to creating real change.

As a field, applied anthropology can be seen as encompassing a number of themes, objects of inquiry, and methodologies that inform a "bridging discipline – linking the diversity that exists within anthropology...with the realities of an increasingly complex world."[32] More specifically, emerging conceptualizations of the drivers, enforced subjectivities, and outcomes of disasters, catastrophes, and crises[33] may prove instrumental in approaching resilience (veteran or civil). For example, in "Applied Anthropology of Risk, Hazards, and Disasters," Faas and Barrios see a "disjuncture and (in)coherence between anthropological knowledge and the policies and state/NGO practices that address risk and disasters...[finding] social disarticulations, with groups and networks fragmented and factionalized."[34] Similarly, Oliver-Smith recognizes in his work "Disaster risk reduction and applied anthropology," that "most disaster risk management interventions are aimed more at emergency management than at contesting the causes and drivers, leaving current development approaches essentially unquestioned and unchallenged."[35] While these works may be situated somewhat distant from immediate conceptualizations of resilience to violent extremism, the methodologies employed as well as the resulting observations and lessons learned[36] can lend frameworks with which to envision and enact applied anthropological approaches to resilience.

What I also find intrinsic and of particular interest to this envisioned anthropological engagement with crisis, violent extremism, and resilience is ethnography. Many projects within applied anthropology (and far, far beyond) position ethnographic fieldwork as a fundamental point of departure and with good reason. Oliver-Smith notes that there is "general recognition that ethnographic methods are extremely effective in capturing the processual dimensions of disaster risk construction, vulnerability...and postdisaster processes of recovery."[37] (An observation to which I would humbly add "and postdisaster ramifications to resilience.") While a comprehensive review of ethnography is not feasible in this work, highlighting one particular ethnographic method can succinctly illustrate the capabilities and envisioned applications of a larger practice. In the wide-ranging vol-

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31   Dan Podjed 2016, 61.

32   Rylko-Bauer *et al.* 2006, 187.

33   See: Goldstone and Obarrio 2016.

34   Faas and Barrios 2015, 293.

35   Oliver-Smith 2016, 74.

36   See also: Barrios 2017a; Lucini 2017; Smith 2015.

37   Oliver-Smith 2016, 76.

ume *Organisational Anthropology – Doing Ethnography in and among Complex Organizations*, Garsten and Nyqvist assemble an eclectic chorus of voices highlighting different techniques and experiences with what can be generally referred to as organizational ethnography.[38] In a manner deserving full inclusion here, they emphasize that:

> The anthropological study of organisations thus brings to the fore the variability of organisational forms, the character of social relations that constitute and overthrow them, the forms of connectivity that bind them together and dissolve them, the norms underlying social interactions, the sanctions used to keep behaviour in its place, and *the ways in which the distribution and exchange of resources contribute to the stabilising and ordering of social activities.*[39] (emphasis added)

Reading this from a perspective of developing and discussing capacities of resilience to violent extremism, I cannot help but make more than a few connections with their declaration and assembled ethnographic methodology. Doubling-down, I also see in this articulation a ready-made argument for the power and benefits of organizational ethnographies that take as objects of inquiry veteran associations and organizations. The resulting ethnographic insights would contribute to our understandings of what may be seen as an infrastructural aspect to veteran world-making as well as contribute narratives that speak to how veterans (en)act, share, and support resilience *within* our ranks. For if my initial ethnographic encounters thus far in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and beyond (with both individual veterans as well as within local/regional veterans organizations) continue to coalesce into structuring narratives, veterans are aware of their capacities for resilience and self-identify the capacity as a potential veteran contribution to society.

Resilience Lived – Practical Paradigms

While this work is conceived along the lines of theory and potential methodology, space can be claimed to offer brief ethnographic insight into veteran awareness vis-à-vis resilience. I structure these insights around two ethnographic vignettes drawn from on-going fieldwork across former Yugoslavia and their inclusion elaborates my own first encounters with veteran resilience narratives in an ethnographic context. Seen in a more holistic manner, the current ethnographic fieldwork informs broader anthropological research with(in) veteran subjectivity and post-conflict veteran relations as well as contributing new (theoretical) insights into the potentials, perils, and praxis of veteran inclusion in strategic peacebuilding. Thus, in the course of this research, several of my discussions with veterans have turned to notions of resilience as a capacity inherent to veterans and necessary when considering veteran quality-of-life after combat. And it was in the small Croatian town of Vodice, situated directly on the Adriatic coast and near to the renowned bastions of Šibenik and Split, that I encountered a veteran who sharply rendered that

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38   See also: Dvora 2009; Niezen and Sapignoli 2017.

39   Garsten and Nyqvist 2013, 13.

which had previously been more of a sensed meta-narrative of veteran life. Following several evenings of getting acquainted with the veteran at his seasonal watering hole, I arrived by foot at his family home after accepting a warm invitation into his private world. After we observed the requisite pleasantries of cold, bubbly gemišt[40] and cold, wordy consent forms, we embarked on a semi-structured interview that could generally range, depending on the veteran reciprocator, from two to three hours. As we proceeded through the twists and turns of our discussion, I came to pose the question, "What do you think veterans can contribute to their local communities or broader society?" His response, direct and without hesitation, is 'resilience'.

The manner and speed with which he engaged the question drove me to mark that point of the interview strongly in my mind and notes. For past interviews have demonstrated that many veteran reciprocators met this research question with pauses for reflection, hesitation, or clarification. Following such pauses, our conversations would resume and often cover many insights and possibilities that could be heard as indirectly speaking to post-war, veteran-specific resilience. Yet in Vodice, this immediate declaration conveyed in a one-word sentence marked the first encounter I had with a veteran explicitly asserting this self-identified potential. In chasing this declaration further, we primarily focused on why he thinks through the term "resilience" as well as his thoughts on how veterans have come to embody the capacity. Yet one reflection upon resilience we broached in a more direct manner revolved around the politicization of veterans associations. A reflection that may add a new dimension of meaning, especially for politicians, to the proverb, "Ne možeš imati i ovce i novce" (You can't have both money and sheep).

Many veterans I speak with, some who are elected leaders of said associations, highlight a desire to remain apolitical but at the same time acknowledge this stance can lead to a lack of political patronage (to put the paradox politely). This creates certain issues when it comes time for a city or county government to create annual budgets and determine what public resources should be made available to recognized veteran associations.[41] During a fiscal year wherein political relationships deliver fiscal precarity, veterans resort to more invisible, behind-the-scenes connections to ensure memorials continue to be held, the assistance provided to veterans in need, or future operations of the association ensured. A

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40   Gemišt (or špritzer in Serbia) is a beverage served chilled that combines equal parts (depending on preference) white wine and mineral water.

41   An important issue recognized here as a potential roadblock to methodologies of engagement with veterans: so-called "fake" veterans associations. As variously described by veterans in Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia, a "fake" veterans association can be 1) an association that, via corruption, is officially registered with the city or state but in fact exists only on paper or embodied solely by a bank account; 2) an association that began with a minimum number of required members to petition for recognition and public funding yet, after recognition, becomes inactive; and/or 3) an association that again via corruption or bureaucratic obfuscation allows for "fake veterans" to join, be recognized, and thus artificially increase the association's claimed number of members. This is not an exhaustive list nor are these strongly demarcated categories as one "fake" association may survive using all three (or more) tactics.

resilience compiled from narratives in Vodice as well as in other Croatian towns as, "Some of us survived intense periods of battle during the war to return to our lives, so we can survive the politicians trying to claim the same." A sentiment often followed with a wink, grin, or, shall we say, "adult language" directed at politicians in general. This recognition also comes into play when veterans (associations) unilaterally decide that the cost-to-benefit ratio of engaging the politics tied to "public" funds is not in their favor or requires sacrifices they are unwilling to make. As such, "resilience" is a three-syllable articulation of tactics deployed in the face of state strategies that render governed subjects such as veterans as needing to be resilient. (A state of affairs that we will return to shortly from a theoretical standpoint.)

Directly following my two-month stay in Dalmatia, which marked the end of an initial eight-month fieldwork period in Croatia, I moved to Belgrade and initiated what has become six months of engagement with Serbian veterans. Methodologically, the semi-structured interview questions adopted in Croatia were only slightly adjusted for relevancy in Serbia. However, the decision was made to incorporate a discussion point specifically speaking to the identification and conceptualization of resilience. This discussion point is initiated after the veteran reciprocator forms a response to the question "What do you think veterans can contribute to their local communities or broader society?" if the reciprocator has not specifically used or otherwise triggered the term "resilience." While these conversations are ongoing with Serbian veterans, reciprocators have so far either implicitly referred to resilience, responded positively and with enthusiasm to the notion of veteran resilience, or spoke about how veterans have learned to "rebound" from sociopolitical challenges and help their former comrades-in-arms (en)act this quality.

Such challenges were further confirmed (and poignantly embodied) during a guided group discussion held in Belgrade with an "invalid" veterans association, civilians who were wounded during combat, and veterans who work closely with both their wounded comrades-in-arms as well as civilian victims. The group discussion was organized by the head of a veterans association several days after we held an initial one-on-one meeting, where I presented a briefing on my fieldwork and conducted one of my first semi-structured interviews with a Serbian veteran. As a group, we gathered together in a well-worn but central cluster of offices that offer expansive views of a rapidly changing cityscape, with a new, towering statue of the Great Prefect Stefan Nemanja[42] seemingly standing watch over our arrival (see Figure 1). Later, in glancing out the windows at a mute monument to a long-dead prefect while sitting next to very alive and very vocal Serbian veterans discussing recognition and finances, it was difficult not to reflect upon priorities when it comes time to spend money on remembrance or tribute (the total cost of the statue is re-

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42 Prefect Nemanja, according to the current Serbian government, was "one of the most important Serbian rulers [and] the founder of the medieval Serbian state" (The Government of the Republic of Serbia 2021).

portedly[43] "classified" until 2023). Indeed, during the statue's unveiling, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić himself observed in official remarks[44] that the statue "means repentance for all the years during which we forgot about him." Forcing someone in my position to also wonder: what will be the "repentance" for forgetting about veterans alive today? But perhaps these are just tenuous connections, made in the active imagination of an anthropologist who spends most of his days either searching for, or spending time with, veterans on the fringes of society.

Figure 1: *The Great Prefect Nemanja, as seen during the ongoing development of the Belgrade waterfront. Photo: by author – 2022.*

As our guided discussion progressed and shifted, a further reflection would emerge: how to articulate the series of "grunts" issued by the man across the table from me, rendered blind in his youth by white-hot shrapnel, when presented with questions about social issues and resilience? Even one such grunt can reflect a hundred words and a hundred day-to-day challenges that have structured his life over decades. Moreover, these challenges also structure dimensionalities of resilience wherein, as we will soon discuss, both

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43   Srbin.Info 2020. https://srbin.info/en/ekonomija/spomenik-stefanu-nemanji-gradjane-kostao-bar-milijardu-dinara/.

44   The Government of Serbia 2021.

individuals as well as veteran collaborative care are tasked to build capacities that retain/return stability in life. An abstraction rendered into reality by "invalid" veterans living a life invalidated, per their own accounting, by government intransigence (vis-à-vis recognition or sufficient support) *and* by a society whose infrastructure and overall mindset are still formed almost exclusively within an ableist spectrum of being.[45] A state of social exclusion that is by no means unique to Serbia or Croatia. However, what was unique (in my fieldwork thus far) to this particular group encounter was the composition of its members; a composition I had no influence upon nor the previous consultation. As such, it is particularly interesting to note here that the veteran who coordinated the outreach for our group discussion thought to invite representatives of an association whose members are not veterans, but civilian victims of war. This inclusion, as I was further informed, reflected long-standing cooperation between the two associations which is built upon the recognition that together, they present a stronger chorus of voices petitioning for visibility and change. Furthermore, it indicates routine conversations and collaborations occur behind the scenes, and not just for/on select public occasions of protest or remembrance. As seen through the lens of a hypothesis that veteran associations may collaborate (or be open to collaboration) with non-veteran associations in order to form networks of reciprocal support in the face of broader social challenges, this unprompted inclusion to our gathering was an unexpected realization that may be taken as yet another indicator pointing to possibilities and potentialities of future methodological engagement.

As noted previously, this work is just beginning in Serbia while the veteran voices and participant observation from the Croatian phase of ethnographic fieldwork are just beginning their own journey into critical assemblage and consideration. As a result, it is anticipated that exploring the responses of reciprocators to find concrete 'examples' of resilience that NGOs, civil society, or politicians can parlay into action-oriented projects (should the desire even emerge) will be challenging. This is in no small part due to the fact very few 'outsiders' ask veterans directly about their post-war lives in the present, thus structuring and conditioning veterans to be living memorials of a contested past. This structuring and the resulting frustration felt (or anticipated) by veterans may very well undermine initial explorations of potential strategies of collaborative transformation. Yet the strategy suggested here – sustained ethnographic presence and fieldwork as part of broader applied anthropological efforts – can potentially overcome the frustrations or benign neglect felt by veterans as the strategy envisions a long-term, veteran-centric form of engagement largely unknown to veterans today.

Resilience Found – Critical Paradigms

Alternately, what can be called 'resilience' has become such an ingrained part of the veteran life-world that it may be difficult for veterans to articulate a particular example during the suspended reality of a one-off interview session. A realization that has been en-

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45   See: Durban 2021; Wolbring 2008.

countered elsewhere, leading to fresh lines of ethnographic inquiry and extrapolation that can suggest mechanisms of progression for the theory and fieldwork proposed herein. For example, Kim *et al.*, in working to identify concepts and practices of social and psychological resilience, present original examinations of 'idioms' and 'themes' of resilience that suggest both discursive and methodological points of departure. Looking closely at social support dynamics of resilience (among a number of other dynamics), the researchers situate caretaking or financial support (both of which are actions routinely performed by veterans, for veterans) as "themes of resilience … because they lacked a common, distinctive mode of expression, either linguistically or behaviorally."[46] So positioned, these themes serve as "potential concepts from which idioms of resilience may emerge in other cultural contexts."[47] Subsequently, the concept of "idioms of resilience" can become "an heuristic to identify and explore the cultural scripts and processes that represent modes of resilience."[48]

Yet (self) recognition of "resilience" does not a methodology make; operationalizing a perceived quality or building it into methodological spaces requires agency and imagination. Characteristics that governments and politicians do not exactly embrace or empower. Furthermore, while provocations of resilience may contain the seeds of (self) critique or reflection, such seeds need the light of exploration to grow. Even if they may eventually grow along lines that are seemingly counter-productive or counter-intuitive to original (read neoliberal or hegemonic) conceptualizations of what 'we' think resilience is 'suppose' to do and for whom. Returning to Barrios' considerations of resilience from the vantage point of anthropology, "the idea that resilience is the capacity to return to a precatastrophe state of affairs, where the 'prestate' was a stable condition is a fundamentally inadequate model for understanding what human communities are…"[49]

For example, when policymakers speak of resilience, what is left unsaid or rendered strategically implicit is that resilience is needed to maintain a status quo wherein they/the state retain power after dealing with invisibility, crisis, disaster, or other seemingly 'existential' threats. What is sought then is the adaptive power of resilience to retain static notions of future governance and power, not building futures that pre-emptively eradicate the need to be resilient. This mirrors an insight structured by Wakefield *et al.* as they engage the term 'asymmetrical Anthropocene' and in so doing, suggest that "resilience merely extends modernist fantasies of control as it flattens social and ecological difference into processes of mutual adaptation and information exchange."[50] In a similar vein, Amo-Agyemang, working from an Africa-centric positionality, argues to unmask resilience as governmentality with "resilience rationalities of adaptability, vulnerability, complexity… [being] deployed to govern the neoliberal crisis…and as Foucault might say, to discursive-

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46   Kim *et al*. 2019, 735.

47   *Ibid.,* 735.

48   *Ibid.,* 737.

49   Barrios 2016, 30; see also: Barrios 2017b.

50   Wakefield *et al.* 2022, 391; see also: Chandler and Pugh 2020.

ly produce new forms of resilient subjects."[51] Governmentality is also a point of departure taken up by Finkenbusch, who examines resilience as a field of transition that facilitates the problemisation of liberal forms of governing. As such, this "allows for a more nuanced understanding of resilience-practice as a hybrid policy discourse encompassing both neo-liberal *and* post-liberal elements."[52]

Heard in such registers, we do not need to necessarily focus on veterans as generating or embodying resilience. Rather, the systems veterans struggle within have resilient capacities or seek resilience to the pressures exerted by veteran demands of responsibility and care.[53] This bespeaks a realignment suggested by Barrios[54] that "if resilience is the capacity of a system to deal with" emergent socio-political pressures, "then the site[s] of intervention" are not veterans seeking post-war survival. On the contrary, the sites of intervention/examination should include the social, political, economic, or religious practices that spawn (perceptions of) insecurity or precarity in the course of structuring and maintaining governable subjects. In a similar vein, Chandler and Pugh highlight that "relational, embodied and entangled approaches of late modernity are increasingly argued to be an extension of the modernist will to govern and problem-solve on the basis of intervening, governing, adapting and being resilient in the face of non-linear or complex life."[55]

Pushing back against neoliberal notions of resilience ever further, Olsson *et al.*, in a work that puts the "theory" in theoretical, assert: "Given its insensitivity to theoretical development of the social sciences and lack of attention given to agency, conflict, knowledge, and power, resilience can become a powerful depoliticizing or naturalizing scientific concept and metaphor when used by political actors."[56] By speaking of a lack of attention to agency and conflict (a term that takes on a sense of multi-dimensionality when read from veteran perspectives), we see and relate to a very accurate rendering of veteran positionality today. A positionality supporting the acknowledgement that "exploring what fosters resilience requires critical reflection to avoid conflating individual weakness or failure to thrive with subjugation and systemic disempowerment."[57] Including such critical observations within this brief tangential discussion of alternate perceptions of "resilience" leads the necessity for an ethical note. Returning us to the realities of the Anthropocene, Wakefield *et al.* challenge the creation of an "ethical imperative" that purposely places the burden on

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51 Amo-Agyemang 2021, 699.

52 Finkenbusch 2021, 683.

53 One manifestation of this systemic resilience in the face of veteran demands, crises, or future claim-making may reside in a polyvocal suspicion-cum-observation made by veterans across former Yugoslavia that I distill here as: "The government is just waiting for all of us to die…from old age, cancer, suicide…since if there are no veterans, there are no budget line-items. And memorials are easier to maintain than veterans."

54 Barrios 2016, 31.

55 Chandler and Pugh 2020, 67.

56 Olsson *et al.* 2015, 9.

57 Kim *et al.* 2019, 740.

subjects (read here veterans) to "learn from and adapt to emergent conditions [which] allows the concept of resilience to constantly expand, laying claim to alternative forms of knowledge and practice that otherwise fall outside its remit."[58]

Yet since resilience as a "concept is now at large [thus] beyond our power to decide whether or not it remains in use,"[59] we should not necessarily conclude the original object of theoretical engagement – veteran resilience – be unilaterally ignored. In his concluding argument, Barrios asserts that anthropology can provide "an analytical checklist to help ensure conceptualizations of resilience do not help sustain vulnerability-making practices;" a list which includes the need to "foreground the voices of people and communities" via ethnographic engagement.[60] Finkenbusch also highlights this possibility as "avant-garde policy" within the field of resilience and though he describes as "radically empiricist discourse" the ethnographic alignment of practice, it is acknowledged that this "puts the focus on the locally embedded practices of real-world communities."[61]

So assembled, this brief sketch of critical perspectives and possible realignments vis-à-vis resilience seeks to further strengthen a space within which to assemble reciprocal relationships and guide future-oriented transformations. A collaborative space that can be seen as structured by 1) necessary realignments of engagement with "sites of resilience" as well as 2) a present-day recognition of adaptive practices that are embodied, without consent, by social assemblages such as veterans. Arguably, to ignore one will imperil, or render more imperiled, the other. For while (critical) resilience theory is absolutely necessary, when it comes to an unemployed veteran trying to pay for medicine or a network of female veterans associations seeking equal recognition and visibility alongside male counterparts (e.g. the "Žena – Majka – Ratnica" Conference 2022[62] in Karlovac, Croatia), veterans do not rhapsodize about abstractions such as governmentality. They (re)act as they did in combat; an arena wherein hesitation, inaction and rigidity can hasten a soldier's already fast pace toward death on the frontlines. (Re)actions that today are formed and (en)acted by veterans – some of who build and maintain veteran organizations that now take on the role of caregiver or financier – as they seek to retain or sustain always-already tenuous positions within society.

New 'Comrades,' New Collaborations

Yet, as indicated above, veteran organizational considerations only form half of the theory and methodology proposed in these lines. In addition to ethnographic explorations within veteran organizations, it is necessary to conduct organizational ethnographies within

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58   Wakefield *et al.* 2022, 394.

59   Barrios 2016, 35; see also: "idioms of resilience" in Kim *et al.* 2019.

60   Barrios 2016, 35.

61   Finkenbusch 2021, 692–693.

62   Narod.hr 2022.

non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and government ministries that are engaged with counterstrategies to violent extremism. These ethnographic projects should incorporate parameters that, along with other socio-academic considerations, are open to the identification and investigation of veteran inclusion within these organizational spaces (or, more likely, lack thereof). Should such organizational ethnographies encounter limited or non-existent veteran participation, lines-of-inquiry are required to understand why veterans are excluded or unrecognized as potential collaborators. Considering how invisible and easily forgotten veterans are within society as a whole, it is well-within the realm of possibility that no one thought to invite or include veterans. On a further note, regarding society vis-à-vis the veteran, the stereotypes applied to veterans and veteran communities offer another impediment to engagement by stakeholders. For example, one of the stereotypes I hear frequently (and not just in Southeast Europe) is that veterans are difficult individuals to partner or collaborate with. A curious perspective as violent extremists and their rhetoric are not exactly known for compliance or compromise.

Moreover, one of several organizations[63] I shadowed in Serbia, and whose leadership I have interviewed, speaks of two reasons why veterans are not engaged by their organization. First, a lack of financial capacity and staff bandwidth to build or capitalize on engagement with veterans. Second, the organization believes that it cannot reliably identify veteran partners who have been in war yet who are not complicit in war crimes or veterans who will be accepting[64] of the organization's diverse membership and agenda. Hence, there is made-manifest a stereotype of veterans as either linked to war crimes or seen as the source of state/political violence, therefore rendering veterans as unsuitable partners with whom to counter extremism, war-mongering, or violent rhetoric in post-conflict regions. This organizational hesitation can be seen as well-earned, given the voids of recognition, transparency and accountability surrounding the crimes committed during the 1990s in former Yugoslavia. Voids that are, at times, perpetuated by veterans ourselves. However, such preemptive and collective condemnation of veterans by non-veteran organizations not only eradicates potential strategies for transformation but also disenfranchises veterans interested in socio-political collaborations.

Speaking of such collaborations within the realm of my research thus far, there are several NGOs and civil society organizations encountered in Southeast Europe that demonstrate partnerships with veterans. Some of these examples, depending on which metrics of success are applied, can be held up as interesting models and guides to creative considerations of future methodologies. However, upon close examination, these organizations

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63   Due to the on-going nature of the ethnographic fieldwork as well as the diversity of voices included, I opt to leave anonymous the organizations discussed herein.

64   Left unsaid during our multiple (group) discussions but in need of articulation here is an impression that the organization's leadership may also not want to deal with the challenges that may come with fully including veteran voices in decision-making processes. Challenges that veterans themselves, within their own organizations, have difficulty resolving at times in ways that preserve organizational cohesion and project momentum.

also embody at least two concerning dynamics relating to the engagement proposed in this paper. First, when projects are designed and implemented by NGOs, post-collaboration communication and support appear minimal, if not altogether neglected, for veterans; some of whom may find precarious social positions waiting for them after their collaborative efforts in areas such as reconciliation dialogue. This attitude of "we got what we need from you, so … we'll be in touch" is quite familiar to veterans and may reinforce veteran presumptions that NGOs are little concerned with sustained engagement or will be "there" when things grow difficult. Direct questions in this regard brought to members or leadership of two NGOs quickly turned the tone of our conversation defensive, indicating recognition or problematization of post-collaboration veteran outreach is not a common (nor welcomed) topic of discussion.

Second, organizations appear to have a "default setting" toward methodological nationalism[65] for project paradigms or frameworks of engagement. Furthermore, perhaps on par with methodological nationalism, is a parallel concern with the persistent emphasis placed on ethnic identity as foundational for potential projects. This emphasis may, in unintentional or unexpected ways, influence or structure desired project participants or perpetuate past ethnopolitical agendas.[66] While this is most definitely not an issue unique to organizations operating within former Yugoslavia, it needs to be highlighted here as this work heavily emphasizes forward-thinking possibilities of praxis and future-oriented potentials of partnership; paradigms that must inherently consider how to dispense with stagnant contextualization. Without critical reflection directed toward these defaults, it is difficult to imagine how organizations will be able to build or inspire new social, economic, or political transformations that will not simply replicate past results.

In reflecting on these two obstacles emerging from ethnographic engagement with organizational perspectives, I find myself registering a third obstacle that can be entirely "owned" by veterans. This obstacle returns us to the aforementioned concept of "toxic veteranality" that captures how veterans attempt to police or enforce certain normative conduct, politics, and voice upon other veterans. Specific to this discussion of organizational ethnography and applied anthropology, a manifestation of toxic veteranality is rendered in sharp relief when veterans choose to collaborate with a non-veteran organization that is perceived by other veterans (perhaps even a small yet vocal minority, whose voice is fanned by the media) as violating closely held narratives of memory, patriotism, or ethnonationalism. The resulting abuse and ostracization perpetrated by veterans against one of our own following a perceived normative transgression arguably qualify as a heinous form of "friendly fire" or fratricide within the veteran ranks. In highlighting this as one of several fractures within veteran (organizational) landscapes, fractures that veterans see as being embraced and encouraged by politicians at multiple levels of power, I am reminded of a veteran in the southern Serbian city of Niš.

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65   See: Chapters 6 and 11 in Amelina *et al.*, 2012; Brickell and Datta 2011; Castells 2008.

66   See: Maksić 2017.

During our one-on-one discussion of unity and cohesion amongst veterans, he related to me a certain veteran-oriented variation of the traditional Serbian mantra: "Only unity can save the Serbs." A mantra that can be euphemistically answered by Serbs with, "God forbid the Serbs become unified," since such unity is seen as less of a possibility than Comrade Tito or Prefect Nemanja returning to walk Serbian lands. For the veteran in Niš, his somewhat resigned variation of this mantra is, "Only unity can save the veterans." To which Serbian politicians are apparently seen as (not so) secretly answering: "God forbid the veterans become unified." This variation engenders a recognition of both the need for veteran unity as well as the perceived tactics of policy-makers to undermine veteran unity out of fear for their own political power. Tactics were suspected and spoken of by veterans from Novi Sad to Niš and Vodice to Vukovar. Finally, this veteran fratricide spills over into the families and communities that surround veterans, leaving in its wake shell-shocked battlefields that are felt more than seen. Tragically, as my ethnographic fieldwork has demonstrated, one need not look far and wide across the former Yugoslavia – or in the United States, for that matter – to find such battlefields and damage today that are linked to organizational collaboration. While toxic veteranality can manifest itself following any number of stimuli or be tactically triggered to enact an outcome, this particular form relating to post-conflict partnerships must be recognized when examining the organizational interplay of veteran and civilian stakeholders.

These few insights I have just shared, selected from an ever-expanding assemblage of voices and experiences encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork alongside veterans, are but traces of what coordinated organizational ethnographies might reveal. Such "[m]acro- and micro-levels of observation…twinned not only by theoretical concerns, but also by ethnographic practices"[67] can become a recognized methodology with which to access, understand, generate or capitalize on capacities of (veteran) resilience. Compressed into graphic form, my mind's eye visualizes the organization-oriented ethnography I have described as structured and progressing in a manner similar to what can be seen in Figure 2. With such an ethnographic strategy, we will begin to have a more robust, complete picture of organizations and their participants as well as the capability to amplify the spaces of discourse and praxis already primed for, or pointing to the potentiality of, veteran collaborations. This generation of knowledge via observation within diverse realms reciprocally enacts and engages action-oriented interpretations of possibility that are the *leitmotif* of applied anthropology. For setting such a trend of research and praxis as described above is heralded by Podjed, Gorup and Mlakar, who, in examining the recent state of applied anthropology, suggest that "anthropologists could be excellent trend setters because they are guided by multiperspectivity, which allows them to make sense of the world from the point of view of various different actors."[68]

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67   Garsten and Nyqvist 2013, 14.
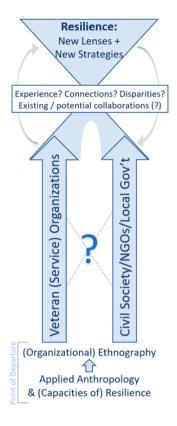
68   Podjed, Gorup, and Mlakar 2016, 61.

Figure 2: *Suggested outline and strategy for an organizational ethnography examining the (potential for) interaction and collaboration between partners engaged with resilience and extremism.*

Conclusion

This text opens with a selection of excerpts from two very, very different sources and periods of time. While this decision is meant to foreshadow and situate the multiplicity of voices – from veterans to civil stakeholders to extremists themselves – demanding to be seen in this work, each selected excerpt also drives the argument I have sought across these lines. General Wainwright's words to soldiers returning home from World War II ring true in the 21st century, thus continuing to reflect the (potential) engagement by veterans with social issues encountered around the world. Fast-forwarding from 1946 brings us to lyrics excerpted from the indie hip-hop collective known as Doomtree. Much as with poetry, the power and impact of hip-hop reside in the fact that a few short rhymes of the spoken word can convey expansive messages of action, representation and self-reflection. With thirteen words, Doomtree creates a trope – almost a mantra – heard here as conveying the very origins of veteran resilience while simultaneously declaring this capacity as one veterans can (en)act in service to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Much work remains to be introduced and examined in order for these research avenues to grow to influence strategies of engagement with violent extremism. I have attempted to initiate several conversations within these research avenues while also considering both discursive and methodological frameworks with which to move forward into the future. In so doing, I argue that a holistically-conceived veteran subjectivity – with a present and future, not just a past – must be the point of departure for any research engagement with veterans. From such a point, we can begin to (re)theorize the veteran and veteran assemblages as well as state pressures and societal structures working upon veterans. In this same register, the concept of "veteranality" and subsequent programmatic directions have been introduced, examined, and (re)signified to represent/reflect a social ontology evocative of veterans and our life-worlds. As previously stated, these concepts should be seen in a state of discursive flux as researchers and research reciprocators collaborate to develop meaning and representation. Finally, I have proposed an ethnographic strategy that takes organizations (veteran and civil) as objects of inquiry when considering sites and capacities of resilience. In so doing, I highlight the dynamics and insights that can be brought by applied anthropology, an action-oriented field that takes organizational ethnography as a core methodology, to understanding and building capacities of resilience to violent extremism. At the same time, this proposed strategy underscores a call for more expansive ethnographic fieldwork with veterans; from those "seen" today in the North Atlantic region as well as those veterans forgotten within each of our geo-political margins. By embracing such fieldwork, the realm of veterans studies can further build the rigorous voice required for equal footing within social, political and academic spheres of collaboration. For it is within these spheres that our collective futures are considered, constructed, and, ultimately, claimed.

Acknowledgements

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