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Introduction to the Special Issue on Military Sociology: Distinctions and dynamics between military and civilian spheres

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Relations between militaries and their host societies is one of the central themes in military sociology. The theme is timely because of the changes in European security policies implemented during this decade. The long process of demilitarisation after the Second World War meant gradual decline in military budgets and disappearance of several conscript armies in Europe. Coincidental growth of welfare regimes, civilian state and the deepening internationalisation weakened the role of the military as a legitimiser of the state. Due to societal and institutional changes of previous decades, a qualitatively new kind of securitisation or even militarisation of societies has led to a historically divergent process between countries. Tasks, organisation and the level of participation in international alliances and operations vary between national militaries. While in some countries armed forces are clearly professionalised with differing roles for the reserves, others maintain and develop mass conscription and military training of citizens to serve primarily national defence, but also many other purposes.

All the four articles in this special issue deal with interfaces and dynamics between two central social categories in military sociology, namely military and civilian spheres. The blurring of borders between these two fields – as well as between war and peace or crises and normal conditions – has been for a long time a theme gaining much scholarly attention. The tradition of civil–military relations theorising, with its focus on the civilian control of the armed forces and the relative independence of the officer profession as a field

of expertise, has in its sociological stream since the work of Morris Janowitz (cf. 1960; Feaver 1996) focused more on the social organisation of relations between or according to military and civilian logics: How these relations change, how they give structure to lived realities, what kind of power relations are involved and how they affect identities?

The articles of this special issue look into the relations and social categories of military and civilian in terms of role identities of military personnel, divisions and cooperation within military workforce, division of labour between security officials and changes in the tasks of military organisations, as well as citizen-soldiers questioning their military duties. Importantly, the shifts and processes between civil and military spheres are often reflections of changes in the security environment. The spectrum of Operations Other Than War (OOTW) has, within, for example, peacekeeping, challenged warrior identity tied to masculine and soldierly values and practices (op den Buijs et al., this issue). As the authors show, soldiers identify to peacekeeper and warrior roles respectively. In the best case, identification can support carrying out tasks, reduce stress and support adequate perceptions of situations.

Another change in the security environment has been visible in the street scene of London, Rome, Paris and Brussels, among others. In the article “Boots on the Streets” (Manigart and Resteigne, this issue), the authors ask whether terrorism and the “pollicisation” of the Belgian armed forces has made the constabulary patrolling of soldiers a permanent practice. Even if the public opinion sees terrorism as the main security threat and favours military patrols, current tasks under police control do not meet the expectations of soldiers and recruits. Within the military, the consequences of frustration can be corrosive for morale, recruitment, and training, and call for reorganising.

Civil–military divide plays a role also within the military organisation and workforce. Social, cultural and educational differences between the two groups, as well

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as their dissimilarities in structural positioning within the military, are both challenges and strengths in workplaces (Goldenberg et al., this issue). As the multinational study shows quite consistently across participant nations, both civilians and soldiers find that attitudes, unfairness, working styles and lack of mutual understanding are central causes of friction in working together. The positive aspects of mixed work environment enhance the military as a knowledge organisation: Diversity of perspectives, complementary knowledge and skills benefit decision-making and learning. In terms of organisation and management of the military, there might be a lot more to say about the observation that soldiers see continuity and stability as a key positive outcome of mixed workforce, whereas the civilian employees find instability caused by constant turnover of military personnel as the major problem.

If most of the civil–military relations theorising and research has taken place in countries that have abandoned or deactivated conscription, what kind of a solution is conscription in terms of civil–military relations? The comeback processes of mandatory military service (in countries like Sweden and Lithuania) and initiatives to build new forms of civic service (in France and Germany) can, again, be seen as reactions to developments in international security. Still, they are to a great extent also forums of debate on nation-state, citizenship and security. (Kosonen et al., this issue) argue, “one particular forum of civilian control [of the armed forces] is the citizens’ or conscripts’ negotiation of their individual role, attitudes, values, identity and agency in national defence and within the conscription system.” The article shows, among other things, how citizen-soldiers as “transmigrants” between civilian and military spheres consider the ethical and political basis of national defence, and reconsider role of citizens in security production.

Additional perspective into the articles of this Special Issue is that they can all be seen to discuss the questions of “societal division of security labour” (Tallberg 2017). For example, defence, as work, is not only divided technically and administratively in terms of tasks and skills but also between socio-economic modes (public, state, private, household, not-for-profit, market, community, etc.) (cf. Glucksmann 2009). Additionally, defence work is done on different motivational bases: as obligation, vocation, occupation or voluntary work. Fighting war, keeping peace and policing the streets can be seen as work entangled with different meanings, identities and capabilities (op den Buijs et al., this issue; Manigart and Resteigne, this issue). Inside militaries, there are divisions

(of labour) between different intersecting social categories – including civil–military divide both within professional military personnel and in their relationship with citizen-soldiers (Goldenberg et al. and Kosonen et al., this issue). Private security and defence companies have gained a lot of scholarly attention, but it largely remains to be asked, what the role of the third and fourth sectors is, can or should be in security production. Within the division of security labour framework, the different actors in the field of security, the tensions created by organisations reacting to changes in threat environment, and the numerous encounters on civil–military borders could be brought to discussion with each other.

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The Call for Papers for this JMS special issue on military sociology was sent out in February 2018. We were glad to receive 32 abstracts, mainly from Western and Northern Europe but also from North America, Australia, Russia and Middle East. Seven articles were chosen for peer review. As a fruit of the call, also a separate publication on military training and education was published in November 2019 (Paananen and Pulkka 2019). For us, making a haul this good tells about the vigorous state of the field and the multifaceted interest in themes of military sociology. It is especially gratifying to see the amount of international comparative military sociology, represented in this issue by two articles. We thank all the authors and anonymous peer reviewers for contributions to this special issue, and wish you readers rewarding moments with the articles.

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