

Encounters with the military: toward an ethics of feminist critique?

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This conversation developed from a panel titled “Interrogating the Militarized Masculine: Reflections on Research, Ethics and Access” held at the May 2013 *International Feminist Journal of Politics* conference at the University of Sussex, UK.¹ During the panel, we talked about our experiences of conducting fieldwork with or around the military institutions, and the methodological and ethical issues these experiences raised. The panel revealed some pertinent shared experiences and topics, especially in relation to the importance of fieldwork for international relations (IR) and for feminist critical military studies, notions of insider/outsider status and the civil–military divide, and the ethics of critique. The panel created a reassuring space to share successes, failures, concerns and strategies that we had experienced while *doing* research on the military – an institution which has long claimed its own inescapable difference from civilian society. In this piece, we come together and continue to share our experiences in the hope of opening up yet more, wider conversations.²

The conversation includes five academic researchers who have all conducted fieldwork on militaries. Catherine Baker carried out an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded research project (“Languages at War”) on languages and the military between 2008 and 2011, conducting oral history interviews with former peacekeepers and civilian linguists who had been involved in peace operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Victoria Basham researches issues of gender, race, class and sexuality in the British armed forces and has carried out focus groups, one-to-one interviews and ethnographic research with a broad range of members of the military community. Sarah Bulmer has investigated attitudes towards sexuality within the UK Royal Navy through individual interviews with serving personnel, and her current project involves collaborative research with British war veterans. Harriet Gray's PhD research focused on domestic abuse in the British military community, and involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with victim-survivors, perpetrators and support staff working in both military and civilian capacities. Finally, Alexandra Hyde has undertaken ethnographic research of a British Army regiment based overseas, from the perspective of women married to servicemen, which involved six months' participant observation living on a military camp in Germany.

We discussed some of our experiences of conducting fieldwork in military settings and reflected upon how they continue to frame our identities and our practices as researchers in the broad field of critical military studies. Critical military studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field which interrogates some of the assumptions of more established fields such as traditional military sociology – which has frequently taken as its focus apparently a-political issues such as increasing the efficiency of military institutions – by paying attention to the politics of militaries, militarism and militarization. As a field, it draws on diverse methodologies as well as critical analytical frameworks to explore the broad political functioning and significance of military institutions and power.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF A MILITARY KIND

Alexandra Hyde: I've just written down in capital letters the idea of “encounters” – we've all had very different encounters with the military. Encounters imply an immediacy and an experiential aspect to *doing* the research, to conducting fieldwork and meeting people face-to-face. The idea of “encounters” also speaks to something responsive, it allows for the fact that our experiences are bound to be subjective.

Victoria Basham: Yes; this idea of “encounters,” of physically going and interacting with people and doing fieldwork, is something that I'm really keen to reflect on. Sarah Bulmer and I have been talking recently about how a lot of work in IR, including a lot of really valuable and interesting feminist work, seems somehow devoid of people. It's not that they are missing altogether – mainstream IR is populated by insights from and into the actions of elite actors, and more critical work, particularly feminist scholarship, sheds light on the diverse lived conditions of possibility of different social actors. However, fieldwork is still somewhat of an anomaly in IR. As a result, I often wonder if the stories we tell are too “neat.” I think that critical military studies is a field that is particularly enriched by fieldwork. Not to suggest that work that doesn't involve fieldwork cannot be critical military studies, or even that fieldwork is always necessary. But, given that we've all done fieldwork and that a lot of people in IR don't do fieldwork, what does that mean? I think there is an interesting methodological pluralism inherent in broadly critical ways of engaging with the military; a desire to engage with people in interpersonal situations that comes with asking critical questions about the military writ large.

Sarah Bulmer: I agree with Victoria. I worry that we spend a lot of time talking about the challenges and problems that fieldwork brings, and of course, it does. But it is precisely in the discomfort, the unease and the ethical quandaries that these encounters with the military are so valuable.

Harriet Gray: For me, fieldwork – in terms of involving people in the research that I do – is a really important part of doing feminist critical military studies. This is because dominant ideas about militaries, what they are for, and how they should work, are so often de-personalized in that they are removed from the level of people and their everyday interactions. We talk about big strategic concepts as if they have nothing to do with people, as if they could exist independently of our own beliefs and actions. In addition we talk about these concepts as if they are un-gendered, whereas they seem to me to be deeply embedded in gendered ideas, and this gendering plays a central role in their normalization. In deciding to do fieldwork I aim to look at the level of everyday interactions, such as those within the family, and to draw links between these mundane gendered performances and larger, supposedly inevitable structures and strategic concepts. Following Cynthia Enloe (2000, 3), I want to argue that we cannot fully understand the larger structures of militarism without taking seriously the gendered configurations of everyday life upon which they rely. And this is what I'm trying to do under the umbrella of critical military studies; to challenge our de-personalized assumptions by looking at their reliance on the level of the personal everyday, and showing how this then changes the fundamental questions we need to be asking.

Alexandra: Thinking about these “encounters” also has important implications for interdisciplinary research methodologies – for example, several of us have drawn on methodologies more commonly seen in ethnographic or sociological research in work intended to address concerns and audiences within IR. The challenge is to remain alert to the kind of power relations and perspectives that certain methodologies can reproduce. I'm aware of having conducted a fairly conventional ethnography, spending an extended period of

continuous fieldwork “abroad,” embedded within one small regimental community. This was crucial for what I wanted to draw out about how the Army reproduces its physical, national, social and cultural boundaries both internally and externally. In the sense that I’ve now returned from “the field” and am “writing up” my ethnography however, it’s quite easy for me to fall into the trap of looking back on my fieldwork as if it were sealed off in another time and place. That’s an interesting dynamic when part of my argument is about the paradoxical conditions of fluidity and fixity that characterize “army life” and create a range of what I’m calling *militarized mobilities*. It raises the possibility that some of my experiences and attitudes have come to mirror those of my participants: many people spoke about intense but transient friendships created in the geographical and temporal moment of a posting, which neither party expects to endure for example. But as the narrative I write freezes the research participants in a certain time and place, my time “in the field” represents a very short period in the cycle of deployments and postings for the military families who move on to the next one and continue to live that reality.

Catherine Baker: There are differences in duration and degree of embodied “immersiveness” among the methods we’ve each used, but even an encounter that is short in terms of time can involve an intense and intimate rapport (maybe the very act of deep listening almost requires that). The affective politics of that encounter don’t necessarily dissipate immediately afterwards just because the encounter was short-lived. And then of course there’s all the “corridor talk” that one experiences as a researcher, which is a different dimension of encounter in a way – it’s not something we’ve made happen for the sake of getting “data” as a result of it.

Alexandra: Yes absolutely, encounters can spill over beyond the official time or place where they are “conducted.” And they can exist in many different forms – the official and the unofficial encounter, the interview in someone’s home versus their office; or fieldwork encounters that are embedded in the everyday life of participant observation (for example, my encounters with the military include running a cake stall and taking part in a “Fitness Fiesta” weekend). The idea of “spillover” (Gillem [2007](#)) is interesting in relation to research on the military specifically – it reminds me of militarization as a way of understanding the depth and scope of military power, how it spreads, the transformations it entails and the vectors of power it works with, such as gender of course. Except that “spillover” implies the existence of a boundary that is breached, which I guess leads to some interesting reflections on the nature of the (false?) division between the military and civilian.

Victoria: One of the things that struck me while you were all talking is that although the research I did was quite a while ago – in terms of that entrenched, embedded ethnographic style – that work has continued to shape all the subsequent encounters I’ve had and indeed, often enables them to happen. When I meet veterans, for example, I have a language that I am able to share with them; there is a sense that I understand their world to some extent, or at least as far as a civilian can. Whether it is with military personnel, veterans, defense journalists, civil servants, policy wonks or antimilitarist activists and campaigners, it has become clearer to me that the initial encounters I had with British soldiers were not “contained” and cannot be confined to the past. As you become known as someone who works “on the military,” further encounters ensue and are shaped by past ones.

Harriet: I wonder how the work that we see our research encounters doing – bringing out the messy, fluid, subjective nature of the ways in which big abstract ideas about security are lived on an everyday basis – resonates more broadly? I feel perhaps, when I speak to people in the

military, or in more “traditional” forms of military scholarship, that this emphasis on the importance of messiness and of a focus on the interpersonal is still seen as broadly irrelevant to the “bigger picture,” especially when it comes to the applicability of research to policy. Victoria: I've actually been thinking about this recently, as I've had a lot of encounters with retired military personnel, civil servants who are involved with the Ministry of Defence, and academics who I consider to be “military friendly.” At times I feel a bit like how I imagine Carol Cohn (1987) may have done when she was researching Cold War defense intellectuals. I'm encountering all this talk about war and military strategy that is articulated in the most abstract of terms, so removed from the violence inherent to it. I'm especially fascinated by the gendered politics of this. The assumption is that only a supposedly rational, focused and highly reactive mode of thinking about the military and security is relevant and thus deserves to be listened to, deserves to inform policy and, increasingly, deserves to shape teaching and research agendas. I have noticed the validation of this kind of thinking, the normalcy of denigrating any attempts to engage with the emotional, the complex and the reflective dimensions of war, in a number of ways recently. For example, at a conference on private military security, contractors told academics and NGO workers that their questions about profiting from war were “inappropriate” or denied them by omission through insisting we “return to the important issues.” Similarly, in discussions about teaching applied security strategy, concerns about ensuring students had adequate time for careful reflection were dismissed as catering to “gatherers” not the “hunters” that the course aimed to recruit (a highly sloppy analogy given that hunters would have starved without gatherers). Though I can still maintain that my research has “policy relevance” by virtue of my military encounters and all the encounters that they have since engendered, the promotion of the “rational intellectual” risks positioning my own work on security as outside the realm of policy relevance and therefore beyond relevance of any kind. And yet, it is by virtue of having had some proximity to the military establishment that I've been privy to these conversations at all. There's a tacit assumption that I must know relevance when I see it, that I must have tried to be relevant, even if I cannot always sustain that agenda. I am neither friend nor foe but stranger in Bauman's terms (1991) and that often elicits ambivalence over what to make of me during these encounters.

Sarah: But isn't this what feminist research is about? Engaging the military community in a genuine dialogue that deepens our understandings of militarization and war, and actively intervening in those processes and subjecting them to critique – for me this is at the heart of feminist praxis. And yes, it can be uncomfortable and awkward, and there is a fine line between being complicit in military processes and critiquing them when you engage in this type of work. Personally, I look for points of connection with the people I want to engage with and go from there. For example, over the past year I have been working with David Jackson, a former Royal Marine and now a researcher and counselor of war veterans. There is a lot of synergy between us in terms of wanting to foreground the lived experiences of veterans in our research. However, his critique of the treatment of veterans by society (this includes the government and the military institution) does not extend to a critique of militarism itself, as it does for me. This is not a problem and through working with him I have continued to question a lot of my own assumptions; it's a very productive relationship. I see him first and foremost as a *person*, not the “object” of my research, and this is very important. This is why the concept of “the encounter” resonates with me, as it suggests a dialogic, exploratory and creative potentiality which is inherent to this mode of praxis.

“CIVVIES” ENCOUNTER THE MILITARY: QUESTIONING THE NOTION OF A CIVIL–MILITARY DIVIDE

Harriet: One of the things I think is particularly interesting about our research encounters is how they highlight the permeability and fluidity of what is often referred to as the civil–military divide, as well as attempts to fix these boundaries in particular ways. While none of us have served in the military ourselves it seems that our research encounters, and the process of negotiating access to participants in the first place, have been shaped by our own multiple and fluid locations on the scale of “insider” and “outsider” in relation to the military institution and to our research participants, as well as how we are positioned in terms of gender, race and class.

Alexandra: Absolutely. I think that fieldwork highlights really well the processes of othering, of meeting across an institutional boundary (for instance, during my fieldwork I was called a “civvie” enough times to have internalized this a little bit!). If all these encounters have their own rules and boundaries, then it is important to explore how they're drawn or transgressed and, ultimately, how they shape the knowledge we hope to produce. My access to the Regiment for this research was expressly informal, negotiated through a family member. And of course this shaped my fieldwork in important ways, on the one hand helping me to gain people's trust, on the other hand giving rise to some interesting dynamics that included a lot of conventions around rank and assumptions about class and sexuality for example.

Sarah: My access to the naval community was somewhere between informal and formal. I met a senior commander from one of the bases where I was hoping to do my research and he was very keen to get involved and liked the idea of building links with the university. He paved the way, so I never had to do the official Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee (MODREC)³ process. Researching veterans, as I am doing now, is in many ways easier in terms of access because they are no longer in the military so you can approach people directly, although this is still a close-knit community and there is a need to build relationships with “insiders.” I'm particularly interested in working with veterans because they embody the fluidity of this divide; are they civilian or are they military?

Catherine: This question of whether someone is civilian or military, an insider or an outsider, is something that the Bosnian interpreters I interviewed in my research had had to work out for themselves in the process of doing their jobs. They were helping soldiers fulfill their peacekeeping mission, but sometimes they may not have agreed with every dimension of the mission, and only some were living on the base, only some were wearing camouflage uniform. They each had to think for themselves about where the borderline between “civilian” and “military” lay, which side they wanted to be on and how comfortable they were with crossing it (Baker [2010](#)). Theirs was a much more sustained engagement with that insider/outsider dynamic than mine, but because it was so important in many of their narratives I could not escape thinking about the same dynamic as it applied to me.

Harriet: My access to support workers directly employed by the military has been negotiated through official channels, including the lengthy processes of finding a sponsor within the military institution and having my plans assessed by MODREC. On the other hand, the access I've negotiated to other sections of my sample, including civilians who work for military charities and civilian (former) spouses of military personnel, has been much more informal. My experiences talking to women who are/were married to servicemen particularly reflects your thoughts on veterans, Sarah. Officially they are not part of the military so gaining access to them has been significantly simpler, but many of them have lived with or even within the institution for many years and their lives have been shaped by it in significant ways. So they're not officially “military” (and many never have been), but it would be overly

simplistic to say they're purely “civilian” either. Relative to me, of course, both (former) military spouses and civilians who work in service charities are very much “insiders;” they have knowledge of living and working with the armed forces and they speak the language in ways which I simply don't.

Victoria: The more I think about the military writ large, the more wary I become of those *around* the institution. I do not say this to excuse those in the military; I've written about how enlisting means that one is implicated in violence, whether one sees it that way or not (Basham [2013](#)). However, some of the most anti-militarist people I have met have been in the military or are still in the military, including anti-war veterans such as Ben Griffin, a former SAS officer who has made a 180 degree turn-round from killer to pacifist. On the other hand, some of the most militaristic people I've met are primarily white, middle-class men – and to a lesser extent women – who work in Whitehall and around it. These men and women perform war as something abstract, bureaucratic and to be dealt with decisively without sustained reflection and certainly without emotion. Ultimately, these “civilians” allow violence to function in significant and terrible ways.

Catherine: Also, there are multiple cross-cutting factors that could create a partial “insider-ness” between a civilian researcher and people in a certain sub-area of the military, yet which might mean very little outside that sub-area. For instance, one of the ways that I was able to generate rapport with some of the (ex-)service people who were linguists was because I'd learnt another language (Croatian) to a high level. That makes me a linguist, which makes me similar to them in one way, even though we are positioned in very different parts of the knowledge-using apparatus. This is useful when you are interacting with some branches of the military; not so much with others.

Victoria: Absolutely – what we have all suggested about boundaries and the ways in which they are drawn is really important. The civil–military divide shifts, reforms and reasserts itself in some spaces and not others; it has a temporality and a spatiality to it that's constantly blurring, shifting and moving. What is really interesting is the power relations that are facilitated when the civil–military divide is invoked or when it becomes blurred and how, of course, it becomes blurred, entrenched and so on. During my doctoral research, I was mistaken for a woman soldier and sexually harassed as a result of that misunderstanding. I thought I was just out socializing with soldiers but instead something unpleasant happened that was relevant to my research questions. Those kinds of things make you question where the divide is, what it looks like and how it comes into being.

Alexandra: Given this fluidity, then, if the boundaries between civilian and military appear less concrete when they are encountered close up on an everyday level, and if they are transgressed or complicated in the process of doing our research, does this mean we are being militarized? If we develop professional relationships and personal friendships with military personnel, empathize with particular narratives, begin to identify with certain values? Does this impact our capacity to do critical research?

Harriet: This is something I worry about in light of my official mode of access, especially having read the work of scholars such as Enloe ([2010](#)) and Jenkins et al. ([2011](#)), who express concern over the ways that official access to the military institution may require researchers to adapt their language, priorities, outlook and world-view to a more militarized one. I am conflicted about this access because I worry that it means I am expected to produce certain types of findings which are considered useful to the military institution itself, and that

this might limit my capacity to be critical and to question the underlying assumptions upon which military welfare practices are constructed – for example the centrality of ideas about the importance of “operational effectiveness.” On the one hand, if I don’t speak to the military institution, how can I expect my research to have any positive impact on the welfare services accessed by victim-survivors of domestic abuse? On the other, if I posit improvements to support practice in the language of the military, am I further entrenching the social acceptability and efficiency of militarism? As much as I recognize the depoliticizing impact of the ideas about military specificity inherent in the reification of the civil–military divide, we need to be careful about abandoning all claims to separation if it means we end up learning to speak the language of the military too proficiently (Cohn [1987](#)).

A FEMINIST ETHICS OF CRITIQUE?

Sarah: Something else that interests me is how the encounter changes our ability to critique military power. I think it's important to recognize that in our role as researchers we're actually intervening in social processes, not just observing or data-gathering. We should think more critically about this, to go beyond the acknowledgment of power relations between researcher and researched and actually theorize the research as political intervention. I want us to acknowledge that we *actively* intervene in social and political life when we research the military. For example, in my own research I realized that in asking questions about gender and sexuality I was reproducing the very discourses and subjectivities I wanted to challenge. This problem has been discussed by others (Stern and Zalewski [2009](#)) but I'm not sure we've got closer to engaging with it. I sought to actively destabilize the gendered terms I was using in my asking of certain questions and in gently challenging my interviewees on some of their responses.

Harriet: How do you mean? What kind of things were you asking?

Sarah: I was asking a lot of questions around sexuality and military identity. My aim was to understand how gendered difference is produced in military cultures, and simultaneously to demonstrate that those categories of difference are contingent, unstable and ultimately contradictory. Rather than asking questions about straight and gay soldiers, waiting for my interviewees to answer in those terms, taking “my data” home and conducting a clever deconstruction, I tried to enable a deconstruction of gendered difference to take place in the interviews themselves. For example, on one occasion I was probing a senior commander about why he felt LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) personnel marching at Pride was inappropriate, despite him being “very happy” with them serving in the military. He was talking about the need to have a “military bearing” in public, but when I further questioned him on what that was exactly and why it was not possible for LGBT personnel to demonstrate that, he ultimately conceded that it was impossible to answer because it depended where one drew “the line” (Bulmer [2013](#)). He deconstructed his own position. So it was quite an active way of interviewing, which might have its own problems if that destabilizing of someone's identity or gentle challenging of their views is considered to be “harmful” to the participant, but I felt that it was more honest and I wanted the people I was engaging with to reflect on their own identities and assumptions. For me, research is always a political intervention and there is no way to escape, hide or pretend otherwise. I felt I had a responsibility as a feminist researcher to try, in a very limited way, to disrupt the gendered regime I was researching. I should also admit that this approach did not always work! Some of my interviewees did not understand my probing questions and simply responded by repeating their previous statement.

Catherine: I like this idea of starting to deconstruct what people say while still in the interview. I know that in my interviews, I did not get into a space where I was able to challenge people's narratives or ideas that much. I think this is partially because I had internalized from my institution's ethics committee at the time the idea that every interview, every question, is potentially a source of harm to participants and that the responsibility not to cause them distress would have to outweigh the researcher's inclination to critique.

Alexandra: I think I took a different view of “challenging” interviewees, and for me it comes back to this idea of having academic mastery over the story we tell with other people's stories, what Alcoff resists in “The Problem of Speaking for Others” ([1991](#)). When I began living in the sergeants' mess and was diligently writing my field diary, as we have said, a lot of social encounters became part of the research. And with that I became really aware of the fact that I was going to be taking “my data” back home and deconstructing it, as if it was mine to do with as I wished. And then I felt that I should not go back to my room and scribble down an experience I had at dinner, or note down what someone had said, without giving them a chance to respond. So I decided I would also have to interview some of the people I was living with in the mess. This required a transition from casual encounters and chit-chat round the dinner table to a quiet, pre-arranged one-to-one encounter that was openly designated as “an interview” – these often started off more awkward than my interviews with strangers. These interviews were reflexive in a way that was very different from the others, because I was asking people about experiences we had shared. Essentially the purpose was to air my own critical interpretation of events and pose it back to research participants, so I asked questions like “Why would you make that racist, homophobic, sexist joke? What is the function of all this ‘banter’?” Or I asked people to tell me what they thought of my presence, if it had changed any of the social dynamics in the mess. By doing this I felt that at least I was “outing” my critical position with respect to some really challenging issues, and giving people a chance to deconstruct the situation themselves.

Victoria: I also came across comments in my early encounters with military personnel that were highly problematic: racist, sexist, homophobic and the like. I just did not know how to deal with them. I remember thinking when people were saying these terrible things, “Oh my god, what do I do now?” – but at the same time, “This is gonna be great for the thesis.” When other white people would try to make me complicit in their racism by telling me how “different” the culture of their Fijian comrades was or rhetorically asking, “Do you know what I mean?” when making some complaint about ethnic minorities rather than white people featuring on the cover of a military publication – assuming that, as a white person too, I would agree with them – in all honesty, I was both appalled and thrilled. These were difficult moments. What do you say in that situation? The answer may seem obvious – you challenge, you intervene – but these people gave me their time, they willingly opened up to me so what I actually did in those situations was usually to just ask the next question. I think this highlights just how deeply *personal* research is. We have all had experiences like this where the material is sensitive, where there's an interpersonal relationship and a set of presumptions that you both bring to that encounter, or which that encounter engenders. This is why what Sarah did was really valuable, and strikes me as a much better enactment of the ethics of critique.

Sarah: I think the idea around the intervention is to ask questions which enable people to reflect on themselves, and that's what makes it political. It's not that you go in with your own ideas and then tell them what to think because you think they're wrong; it's challenging them to self-reflect on the meaning of what they're doing, which then helps you better understand what they're doing and why.

FINAL REMARKS

This conversation, which began at the 2013 *IFJP* conference, has helped each of us to explore our relationship to the military. The collective process of putting together and refining these ideas has also illuminated productive tensions and connections between our different approaches. Bringing together our diverse experiences in this extended and informal way has to some degree mirrored the messiness and complexity that we are seeking to acknowledge in our research. We have all emphasized the contribution that fieldwork has made to our understandings of the everyday power relations through which people (including ourselves) live out the concepts that so easily become abstracted in IR theory and scholarship. Our “encounters” with people whose lives are shaped in diverse ways by militaries and by militarism complicate our understanding of even apparently simple ideas – such as the civil–military divide – which have long framed academic and popular discourse on the military. They force us to question our preconceptions and to resist the urge to tidy up the loose ends and make a coherent “whole” of “Feminist IR” as a unified field, something which we might well argue is beside the point of the feminist project itself (Zalewski 2007, 305). Perhaps the broader point of our conversation then has been to bring to the fore those very tensions, to air the contradictions and concerns rather than smooth them away. Because, as is clear from what we have learned from each other in the course of this conversation, these tensions function as much to shape our research – as a set of encounters and negotiations – as the formal methods and disciplines we choose. Two difficult questions remain. One is how to be “taken seriously” (Enloe 2013) by the military and those around it, in order to be able to impact discussions in a meaningful way, and yet retain our political stance as critics of the institution. The other is how to ensure our critiques are “taken seriously” by fellow feminists for whom seeking out direct encounters with the military may be contentious.

Despite this, our conversations did suggest ways in which, as critical scholars of the military, we can engage in political work which transcends the research itself; draws on our research during the course of our encounters with participants and long after it is “finished” and frozen on the page. By deconstructing the intersecting gendered, racialized, sexualized and militarized narratives with which we come into contact during the course of our research as well as during the process of writing up, we can engage more openly with the communities in which we work. This approach, paying attention to the political work that our research does *at every stage of the process* is, it strikes us, an accountable and politically engaged way of approaching feminist research. We note parallels between this – the notion that feminist research can engage in an open and active process of challenging and of dialogue with our participants – and our decision to come together to share ideas in this format. This process of reflecting together is itself a political one, helping us to maintain our “feminist curiosity” (Enloe 2004) so that we keep asking questions of ourselves and others.

Notes

1 Thanks go to Dr Paul Kirby for organizing and chairing the panel.

2 As with all conversations, ours was one (over Skype) with many “erms,” “ahs,” pauses and interjections, which were edited out in the process of turning speech into text, for which our conversation was transcribed and then jointly edited. This process struck us as interesting given that the discussion included the question of how we represent our participants’ narratives and the issues this highlights about the editing of people’s lives, including our own.

3 MODREC exists to ensure that research which is undertaken, funded or sponsored by the MOD and which involves human participants meets certain ethical standards. The MODREC

committee is made up of both MOD personnel and independent experts, and meets once a month to discuss and approve proposed research. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ministry-of-defence-research-ethics-committees>

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