'Why Do We Need Your Research?'

The Ethics of Studying Security and the Dilemmas of the Anthropologist-Expert

Article

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Abstract

The anthropology of security is slowly developing into a substantial sub-discipline of anthropology, yet there are only a few works that elaborate on how the research on security is conducted, what ethical issues emerge in this process, and how this differs from research on other topics due to the sensitive, political, and highly controversial nature of security itself. In this paper, we aim to contribute to this scholarly debate by providing a reflexive account of some of our experiences in researching security across various cases and sites. More specifically, we aim to flesh out the ethical dimensions that, we argue, are inherent to any analysis of security. We do so by focusing on two issues, namely, how we do research (including methods and access to the field site) and how we can or are expected to share our research findings (including public engagement and access to data). By drawing from our own experiences, we aim to show that these are complex matters that underline the sensitive nature of security and call for further empirical and theoretical elaboration.

Keywords

Introduction

One morning while interviewing an Israeli security specialist in his office, we received an unexpected request. After providing some insights about the particularities of private security in Israel, the specialist became increasingly interested in our position as (academic) researchers in the Netherlands. 'Perhaps', he said, 'you can help me find some customers in Europe'. We understood that our interlocutor ex-

pected something from us that we had not anticipated and that we could not and would not give him. While this was not a dilemma for us in this specific context, it serves as an example of the various tricky ethical situations that emerge for anthropologists studying security.

The anthropology of security is slowly developing into a substantial sub-discipline in anthropology (*see* Goldstein 2010), marked by the rise of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork on an array of matters concerning security actors and the implications of their work in our world (e.g. Glück and Low 2017; Low and Maguire 2019; Maguire et al. 2014, 2018; Pedersen and Holbraad 2013). Yet, despite this growing interest in security, there are only a few works that elaborate on *how* the research is conducted, what ethical issues emerge, and how research on security differs due to the sensitive, political, and controversial nature of security itself (e.g. Diphoorn 2013; De Goede, Bosma and Pallister-Wilkins 2020). Although ample discussions have examined the ethics of doing research as anthropologists *in* security apparatuses (e.g. Albro et al. 2011), in particular in the military as part of the U.S. Army Human Terrain System (e.g.; Sluka 2010; Gonzales 2008), there has not been an extensive discussion on the ethical conundrums that emerge when anthropologists select security as their prime research subject.

While any researcher could encounter interlocutors who 'want something back', we argue that researching security conjures additional ethical questions that outweigh the ethical issues that arise in more traditional ethnographic research, for two main reasons. The first concerns the political nature of the term: Security, as a concept, is highly politicised and contentious due to its prominence in public debates (Pedersen and Holbraad 2013). Security is related to processes of (b)ordering and is often used as a means of exercising power and consolidating control over others. In public spheres, and often also in the narratives of security actors, security is seen as something good and essential, and thus, as something we need *more* of. As a result, as highlighted by Thomas Kirsch (2016), it is difficult to speak out against security. Due to this politicised nature, anthropologists automatically enter heated public debates when researching security, even though their fundamental objective may be to produce more knowledge about the topic.

Secondly, researching security actors, as both authors do, entails studying power holders who can (potentially) be violent in both direct and indirect ways. As has been demonstrated by others (*see* Nordstrom and Robben 1995), studying violence conjures additional responsibilities and dilemmas that outweigh those associated with traditional ethnography. We argue that this also applies to studying security and in this paper, we will demonstrate this by providing a reflexive account of some of our experiences in researching security across various cases and sites (private security in South Africa and Israel, the military in Israel, and the state police in Kenya). By drawing on our fieldwork experiences, we aim to contribute to the scholarly debate on ethics and security and flesh out some of the ethical dimensions that we faced during our research. We specifically focus on two issues, namely 1) how we do research (including methods and access to the field site) and 2)

how we can or are expected to share our research findings (including public engagement and access to data). By drawing on our own experiences, we call for further empirical and theoretical elaboration that underlines the sensitive nature of security.

We begin with a brief discussion of some of the debates within the field of anthropology of security and ethics, and consequently argue that these two fields should not operate in such isolation from each other as they currently do. In the second section, we consider the 'how' of doing research on security and elaborate on some of the methodological choices we have made, especially in terms of choosing our research subjects. In the section thereafter, we consider some of the (practical) matters that arise in terms of sharing our data and the various, often conflicting, expectations that different actors have from us, such as stakeholders outside academia. We end this paper with concluding remarks about the ethical dilemmas of researching security and the need for further reflexive accounts on these issues.

Anthropology of Security and Ethics

Anthropologists have engaged with issues concerning security and insecurity for a long time, yet only in the last few decades has the idea of an 'anthropology of security' emerged as a focus within the discipline that regards security as 'a critical object of study in its own right' (Glück and Low 2017: 283). About a decade ago, Daniel Goldstein called for a critical anthropology of security to encourage researchers to divulge the 'multiple ways in which security is configured and deployed – not only by states and authorized speakers but by communities, groups and individuals – in their engagements with other local actors and with arms of the state itself' (2010: 492). Since then, several edited volumes (Diphoorn and Grassiani 2019; Low and Maguire 2019; Maguire et al. 2014, 2018; Pedersen and Holbraad 2013; Hurtado and Ercolani 2013), special journal issues – e.g. *Etnofoor* (2015), *Conflict and Society* (2017), *Qualitative Sociology* (2017), and *Anthropological Theory* (2017) – and articles (e.g. Samimian-Darash and Stalcup (2016) have been published on this subject.

Within this growing body of work, different approaches and perspectives have been developed to further understand security. Goldstein (2010), for example, unpacks the 'security/rights conjuncture' (489) in his ground-breaking article, whereas Maguire et al. (2014) zoom in on different experiences of (in)security. Elsewhere, Samimian-Darash and Stalcup (2016) propose an assemblage approach to security, whereas Maguire and Low (2019), drawing on Gusterson (2004), propagate the idea of the 'securityscape'. The spatial reign also emerges in Low and Maguire's (2019) approach, as well as in Glück and Low's (2017) proposition for a 'sociospatial framework' to understanding security. Within these divergent approaches also lie different definitions of what security is. Glück and Low, for example, approach security as 'a modality of constructing danger, enemies, fear and anxiety, and the measures taken to guard against such constructed threats' (Glück

and Low 2017: 282), whereas Pedersen and Holbraad take a much broader approach and define security as 'a set of discourses and practices concerned with a given social collective's reproduction over time' (Pedersen and Holbraad 2013: 9). Combined, security is simultaneously regarded as socially constructed, processual, spatial, intersubjective, and self-defined, and a readily accepted definition appears to be missing. As a concept, security is both encompassing and limiting.

We, too, have developed an approach to analyze security, namely a performative one, wherein we perceive security 'as an act that is identified, both by the actors doing it and those affected by it, as a form of "doing security"' (Grassiani and Diphoorn 2019: 6). Drawing on securitisation theory (Buzan et al. 1998), yet moving beyond, we see security as a performative act that intentionally and unintentionally moves towards some subjective safe state of being for different actors. With this definition, we have two goals. The first is to emphasize that 'security' is an emic term that conveys diverse meanings across localities for different actors. Many people across the globe identify themselves as individuals who are involved in 'doing' security and we want to foreground this process of self-labelling. By focusing on the performativity of security, and not on an objective state of being that one can achieve and that represents a certain value in society, we can better understand how security is 'done' in different parts of the world. The second is to critique the way that security has become equated with any form of (perceived) threat and thereby conjures sentiments of fear and uncertainty. In line with other critical scholars (e.g. Neocleous and Rigakos 2011), we claim that security by definition incorporates the creation of groups or actors that are secured from the (perceived) threats posed by others and thus works as a segregating force. Security is a relational phenomenon and thereby a process of (b)ordering that determines who belongs and who does not, who is entitled and who is not, and so forth. As highlighted by Wilson and Bakker: 'Working to secure someone or something from threat serves to demarcate a field in which an essential, political distinction is made between who is the "same" and who is "other"' (Wilson and Bakker 2016: 292).

In order to understand this performative act, researchers have written extensively about the everyday practices of security providers (e.g. Diphoorn 2016; Grassiani 2019; Konopinski 2014), the peculiarity of specific sites of security, such as airports and mega events (e.g. Maguire 2014; Møhl 2019; Robb Larkins 2018; Schouten 2014) and the ways in which various forms of security overlap and intertwine (Diphoorn and Grassiani 2019). This growing scholarly work has demonstrated the tremendous insight that ethnographic fieldwork yields and how this complements other disciplines, such as political science and criminology.

A missing dimension in this field is a more elaborate focus on what the controversial character of states of (in)security and the work done by security actors means for doing research on the topic, or a more methodological reflection on this kind of work. As remarked earlier, there has been substantial attention and critique of the role that anthropologists play in working in/for/on behalf of state-based secu-

rity policies and programs, largely sparked by the U.S. Army Human Terrain System's use of anthropologists in military operations (*see* Albro et al. 2011; Forte 2011; Price 2011; Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009). The (public) role that anthropologists can play in understanding, and at times executing and participating in, certain security policies and programs has thus been scrutinized. However, a less discussed dimension, which is our concern here, is an analysis of the ethical dilemmas that anthropologists face when researching security as a research subject. In a time when the search for 'security solutions' on different scales has been prioritized, researchers are faced with 'push and pull' dynamics from different directions, as we shall describe below. Such dynamics have ethical consequences, and these have not been adequately addressed in the growing literature on the anthropology of security. This is somewhat surprising, considering the attention within anthropology on the ethics of doing fieldwork.

Research ethics, as used here, address more practical considerations researchers need to take into account and the potential dilemmas they will inevitably encounter related to the safety of researchers and those researched, issues concerning positionalities, and more.[1] In the early days of the discipline, issues of reflection, ethics, and positionality were hardly present, yet we have since then learned to think through our relationships with the Other, the power relations between researcher and informants, and the need to protect the people we study (e.g. Armbruster and Laerke 2008; Pels 2005). The process of doing ethnographic fieldwork has been a central focus point of discussion in our discipline and numerous books on this topic have a section on the possible ethical dilemmas we can face, such as matters of representation, the importance of confidentiality, and informed consent, to name but a few (e.g. Gobo 2008; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019; Sluka and Robben 2007; O'Reilly 2012).

One of the most central rules in most, if not all, anthropological codes of ethics is that of 'do no harm'. Such codes, such as the one drafted by the *American Anthropological Association* (AAA), are written from the perspective of the relatively powerful (Western) anthropologist studying people in the margins of (far away) societies.[2] Yet throughout the years, anthropologists are also increasingly 'studying up' (Nader 1972; *see also* Stryker and González 2016), and including the powerful as their prime research populations, ranging from state institutions and large corporations, to members of powerful elites. Such research comes with its own and often different dilemma's, especially if these power holders are perpetrators of violence. In our research projects, we focus on individuals carrying out or ordering 'security activities', often using direct and/or indirect violence. Although we recognize the complexity of the notion of perpetrators (*see* Hedlund 2020; Maček 2009), we regard many of our interlocutors as such. Our focus on perpetrators is situated with-

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[1] We thus take a rather practical approach to ethics and will not, due to the scope of this paper, engage with the conceptual debates about morality and ethics.

[2] Despite the critique the code of ethics of the AAA may have received, this code remains to be used by most anthropologists for various issues, such as ethical review committees, even in Europe.

in an increased focus in anthropology on those carrying out different forms of violence, such as the military (*e.g.* van Roekel 2020; Grassiani 2013), and the state police (*e.g.* Garriot 2013; Karpiak and Garriott 2019). In line with other research on perpetrators (*see* Hinton 2005; Robben 1995) and violence more generally, we contend that we cannot understand those who suffer without understanding the perspectives and practices of those who are responsible for the suffering.

From this body of work, studies have demonstrated that when studying violence, there are additional responsibilities and dilemmas that outweigh those associated with traditional ethnography (*see* Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Ghassem-Fachandi 2009; Koonings et al. 2019). These responsibilities extend to the safety of both researchers and those researched, but also 'to the theories that help to forge attitudes toward the reality of violence, both expressed and experienced' (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 4). We argue that the same implies to the study of security due to the inherent potentiality of violence and its politicised nature. As ethnographers on security, we carry additional responsibilities that concern matters of physical safety, but also about the ways in which we, with our collected data, shape public debates on security. Due to the prominence of security as a topic of public scrutiny, we are inherently faced with a certain responsibility relating to the ways in which we participate in this debate. Yet, as highlighted by Kirsch, it is problematic to speak out against security because the 'provision of security is often presented in the political field as self-evidently serving the common good and thus not requiring further explanation' (Kirsch 2016: 7). To speak out against security, one must address its semantic opposite – *in*security – and it is impossible for one to legitimize insecurity as a viable and desirable option and/or alternative. As a result, 'opponents of security have to make excursions into other semantic domains which are then presented as the obverse of security and, most importantly, as being threatened by it and in need of protection' (Kirsch 2016: 7). In other words: When one critiques (aspects of) security, such as increased surveillance measures or the ways in which access to certain spaces is denied to certain individuals, one is forced to emphasise issues that security measures may threaten, such as human rights, freedom of movement, and privacy, to name a few. Directly critiquing security is thus almost impossible, particularly as this occurs amidst strong discourses and movements that portray security as a naturally 'good thing' (*see* Neocleous and Rigakos 2011). As a result, one becomes entangled in complicated discussions about who and what needs protection and how this can and/or should occur.

This discussion – on the politicisation of security and the difficulties of speaking out against it – has not permeated the growing work on the anthropology of security. Yet we argue that, as is the case for the study of violence, the study of security comes with its own ethical dilemmas that should be granted more empirical and conceptual attention. The anthropology of security would benefit from a stronger ethical reflection and in this paper, we attempt to further prompt this debate by reflecting on some of our fieldwork experiences of more than a decade.

Studying Security: Positionality and Bias

In this section, we elaborate on some of the methodological choices we made and how others have acknowledged and interpreted these.

Anthropology, as a discipline, is known for its holistic approach to analysing social phenomena and relationships. Although critiqued and problematized, a holistic approach, broadly speaking, implies that we do not analyse people's behaviour and social acts in isolation, but that we uncover how they are embedded within larger contexts, structures, and processes. Any issue or research population is analysed within the larger social, political and economic structures it is part of and that are relevant for the questions we, as researchers, ask. How does this work when we study 'security'? Considering the political significance of the term and its importance in public debates, is this even possible or appropriate? More specifically, due to the morally charged nature of security, do we always need to include various perspectives or should we choose? In our various research projects, we have had to make choices about who and which perspectives to include and exclude from the research project and this has shaped the content of our data. Such decisions are always political and are deeply connected to the way we (choose to) position ourselves in a particular field, the responsibilities we want and/or need to take, and the questions we find most valuable to see answered.

Making the choice of whom to focus on and include was a recurring dilemma for the first author, Diphoorn, in her research project on police reform in Kenya. In this project, she focuses on the different mechanisms that monitor and regulate police (mis)conduct. This includes the everyday work conducted by formalised (state) institutions, such as oversight authorities, but also a range of informal mechanisms, such as police officers who stimulate each other to engage in certain types of practices. Diphoorn engaged in participant observation, such as attending trainings and workshops, and conducted an extensive amount of (structured and open) interviews with a diverse group of people. As this project focuses on particular processes and mechanisms, there was less of a confined research population or location, but rather a diverse group of people who often oppose each other and stand on different sides of a particular social phenomena. For example, Diphoorn spent a lot of time with human rights defenders, who documented countless cases of extrajudicial killings in many of Nairobi's slums and who were regularly threatened by police officers, but also with police officers who either a) denied that officers were involved in such practices or framed it in terms of 'rogue officers' that were the exception, or b) with officers whose prime work was aimed at changing the police. As the author did not conduct fieldwork in a defined geographical area, such as a specific neighbourhood, she was able to manoeuvre between these different worlds. Yet these different worlds did sometimes collide and result in moments of awkwardness or friction, such as during a demonstration in the summer of 2018.

This demonstration was organised by several local justice centres and was specifically directed against police killings and violence. Interestingly, a week before,

Diphoorn had interviewed a high-ranking officer of that area, who claimed that these justice centres were 'spreading lies about the police', and that the organisers were 'trouble-makers who were looking for a riot' and that 'they had to be careful'. This last comment put the researcher on edge – during the march, which was heavily attended and 'secured' by officers, she was very curious about how the police would behave and whether they would resort to violence. More specifically, she was rather anxious about running into a police officer that she knew – that her different 'worlds', so to speak, would collide. This did not happen, until the very end, when she bumped into a female officer, she had met during a police training on accountability. The police officer raised her eyebrows and said, 'So you are one of them?' Luckily the anthropologist was able to explain why she was there, and the police officer seemed to understand.

The situation was fortunately not a tense one but did point towards the potential dilemmas that can emerge when a researcher purposely tries to include the perspectives of different parties that are rather hostile to one another. In this research project, Diphoorn was primarily interested in certain mechanisms and processes, in the potential forms of interaction, rather than focusing on a specific group, such as police officers or human rights defenders. However, this choice is also critiqued by, for example, human rights defenders who have judged her for not fully 'joining' the struggle, because she also interviewed 'the enemy'. One human rights defender, for example, initially refused to assist her in her research, knowing that she had also interviewed police officers at a specific police station.

Furthermore, some colleagues in anthropology who work closely with victims of police violence frowned upon the way she had looked at 'both sides' and accused her of sympathising with the police. Such an approach, that sees only a truly engaged anthropology as 'just', echoes the ideas of Nancy Scheper-Hughes in her call for a more engaged 'militant anthropology' (1995). In her work, Scheper-Hughes proposes that anthropologists have a duty to be politically committed and morally engaged and thereby speak out against wrong doings. However, we believe this can be done in a myriad of ways: 'wrong-doings' – as a broad category – can also be understood by including divergent perspectives and not by focusing on just one side. Similar to, for example, Eva van Roekel (2020) who was able to include family members from opposing sides of the Argentinian trails for crimes against humanity, Diphoorn was also able to include divergent perspectives on the issue of police behaviour and misconduct.

Grassiani took a different approach to moral engagement in her study on soldiers and security actors in the Israeli context. The first project focused on conscripts in the Israeli military who served in the Occupied Palestinian Territories during the Second Intifada and she closely examined their daily behaviour and interpretation of their daily reality in moral terms (Grassiani 2013). One of the conclusions of this work was that soldiers' (violent) behaviour was a product of the occupation they were actively part of and was thus structural in nature. Some years later her focus switched to the Israeli security industry, where she studied security profes-

sionals (mostly ex-military personnel) and the ways they and their companies sold their security products internationally. This research particularly focused on international security fairs and trainings, for example, where clients from around the world were invited to learn about and buy Israeli security products and knowledge.

In contrast to Diphoorn, Grassiani explicitly chose to focus on 'one side' in her research, namely that of the soldiers and security actors. She explicitly did not include the (potential) victims of the practices of these actors in her research. Yet, by focusing on security actors as the prime research population, the author also employed a very clear political positioning, namely one of stern critique of these actors and the nature of their activities. Importantly, Grassiani identifies herself as an activist against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Her research thus focused on actors that she herself is very critical of and this choice exemplifies that it is possible to look at the 'undesirables' as a way of critiquing them, rather than condoning their actions by studying them.

Throughout her career, colleagues have voiced criticism, in informal communication, about her choice of sides, i.e. to study those who are perpetrators of violence. However, other actors, such as journalists, were suspicious of her critical political positioning as they were looking for 'objective' science. She addressed these issues elsewhere (*see* Grassiani 2020), but one thing worth highlighting here is the way these choices influenced the methods she used, which for both projects, mostly comprised interviews and only minimal participant observation. Although also based on difficulties in gaining access, she explicitly chose to conduct a limited amount of participant observation. Getting too close to her research participants, as is expected from anthropologists, did not feel right in this case. Close engagement, which inherently comes when establishing rapport with research participants, felt as conflicting with her struggle against the Israeli military occupation and the security industry that she is researching. As such, 'taking sides' is more layered than it seems: One can critique those we study and thereby contribute to providing knowledge about a certain situation that may, potentially, result in change.

Being 'militant', in Scheper-Hughes's words, is thus not a straightforward process and we have shown how both authors have chosen different ways to include (and exclude) different actors and perspectives as a way of understanding everyday security practices. There is thus not a 'one-size fits all model' to choosing one's research population when studying security. Similar to one's positionality in the field, each anthropologist makes choices based on a range of personal, institutional, and practical reasons. It is, however, imperative to reflect on these choices and understand that this shapes the nature of the collected data. Furthermore, we claim that this process of reflectivity is particularly crucial when studying 'security' due to its politicised nature and prominent role in public debates.

Sharing the Research: Managing Expectations about Security Knowledge

In addition to how we framed our research questions and selected our research population, we should also look at the ethical issues that arise when we use, share, and disseminate our collected data. As shown in the example from the introduction, studying security can bring a host of (unexpected) expectations that we are forced to deal with. In this section we will discuss some of our experiences surrounding two commonly held expectations from the 'anthropologist-expert', namely providing 'solutions' and engaging with 'stakeholders'.

Providing 'Solutions'

In academia, there is an increasing need to produce more scientific knowledge on security-related issues and an increasing interest from policy makers to understand how we can achieve 'more security' in contemporary times of recurring terror attacks.[3] Although mentioned over a decade ago, we are still living in what Goldstein referred to as a 'security moment' (Goldstein 2010: 487). As Jonathan Spencer portrays in his autoethnographic account of his experiences with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), there is an overall assumption that Europe (or the 'West' in general) is threatened and needs to be protected and that research should be geared towards finding apt solutions (Spencer 2010). We are increasingly encouraged to address political issues, such as the containment of 'radicalization', the 'refugee problem', or technological development towards securitizing Europe in the face of the 'terrorist' threat. Such calls come from policy makers on the political level and trickle down to public funding agencies on who we, as academics, rely on for funding. In fact, the demands from such funding agencies often have a large impact on how we choose topics and how we frame our research. In the Netherlands (and surely elsewhere), the *Open Science* programme has further complicated these debates.[4] Broadly speaking, academics are increasingly expected to engage in 'open science' practices and this includes 'open' access of research data and material. Combined, the idea is that we have a professional and public responsibility to share our data. All of this has an effect on the 'anthropologist-expert' who is frequently expected to provide knowledge and contribute to producing 'more security'.

Much of this resonates with larger debates about public anthropology (*e.g.* Borofsky 2011) and engaged anthropology (*e.g.* Besteman 2013; Eriksen 2006; Low and Merry 2010). Although divergent conversations, both discussions centre on the way in which anthropologists should/can engage with the wider public and select research topics that match societal needs. Furthermore, with regards to engaged anthropology, collaboration between researcher and researched are central to achieving 'value-driven' goals (Besteman 2013). Central in these debates are ques-

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[3] See, for example, the European Horizon 2020 program https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/area/security (accessed 19-12-19).

[4] See: https://www.openscience.nl/ (accessed 28-2-2020).

tions about the audience of our study results, the topics we choose to include and exclude, our (political and social) goals, and our positionality in the field. When it comes it security, Marcus argues that, 'security, even with its special defining and restrictive characteristics, should be seen as one of several possible venues in which a public form of anthropology can granularly gain traction' (Marcus 2011: 256). Although we do not fundamentally disagree with this claim, we also approach this with caution and will show, through our own experiences, that engaging with our 'public', so to speak, can be problematic, particularly concerning the use of our data, with and/or without our consent, and the way we are expected to provide 'solutions'.

Diphoorn experienced this during her fieldwork on the private security industry in South Africa. In this project, she focused on the everyday practices of (armed) security officers and this entailed extensive participant observation with several private security companies in one of South Africa's largest cities. Since she was interested in how private security companies interact with other actors, such as the state police, she attended several workshops and meetings organised by, for example, the municipality. These workshops were often geared towards creating concrete crime-reducing strategies and she was regularly asked to provide tangible advice on how private security companies could aid in this process. The author was first of all troubled by the fact that she was requested to simplify a rather complex matter – crime – and condense this into a handful of ready-to-be-implemented strategies. Secondly, she was also frequently asked to share confidential information about these companies, such as which officer had attended a particular crime scene and how he had acted in such a situation. She refrained from sharing this information for confidentiality purposes, yet this was repeatedly expected from her. In these workshops, the anthropologist-expert was therefore not only expected to translate complex insights of everyday policing into concrete crime-fighting strategies, but also to share certain confidential data. When failing to do so, she was accused of not conducting the 'right' type of research and that her data was not 'relevant and accessible for the public'. One very critical participant posed the question: 'Why do we need your research?'

Grassiani also experienced the need for 'solutions' during the beginning phase of her project on the Israel security industry. During this preparatory stage, she participated in a workshop organized by the Dutch research-funding bureau about Europe's Horizon2020 program and its security research agenda. After the workshop, one of the organizers wrote the author an email commenting on her presentation and stated the following:

> Be aware that the Israelian [sic] approach to security issues can be quite different from Europe and to many people is considered controversial. If you decide to move forward in preparing a proposal, keep this in mind and take into account ethical issues. Depending on the subject, some countries might have reservations on cooperation with Israel as a consequence of the open

> nature of information sharing in these European projects. You mentioned a number of research questions in your presentation. They are interesting, but very descriptive in the sense that they will address the question of how things are organised in the world. They do not directly attribute to a solution.

Besides the fact that this person was not well informed about the long-standing existence of Israeli security in the European landscape, he was also convinced that the researcher wanted to promote Israeli security cooperation in Europe. When he saw the research questions, instead of realizing she was aiming for a more theoretical approach to understanding security, he 'warned' her that the questions should be more geared towards a *solution*. Implied in the message of this advisor is the simplistic assumption: There are security problems in Europe, and we, as academics, are expected to create research ideas that are geared towards concrete solutions.

But what about theoretical inquiries about and into security? It seems that when it comes to security, funding agencies do not want projects that centre around 'understanding how things are organized in the world', as the funder's advisor so aptly described in his message. Rather, calls for security are more often aligned to political agendas that continue to present security as something good, necessary, and what we need more of (*see* also Pedersen and Holbraad 2013; Kirsch 2016). For scholars, this often means that we have to adjust the direction of our research and both authors have witnessed how several researchers comply with this quest for solutions due to their dependence on public funding. Diphoorn, for example, was advised by a male employee working for a Dutch funding agency to stress the 'violent urgency' of her research in her proposal, because only then it could be translated into political demands. She was thus explicitly encouraged to emphasise the political perseverance of *in*security. Some scholars refuse to alter their research topics, yet this can entail a lack of funding and thus detrimental consequences for their careers. Such financial predicaments are amplified amidst the contemporary conditions of the neoliberal university, wherein we are increasingly expected to perform a wide variety of tasks and are measured by our 'impact' on our field (*see* Hughes 2019; Stein 2018). We need to be careful and resist these dynamics in which we are pushed, and sometimes pressured, by funding agencies and policymakers.

Engaging with Stakeholders

The second and related issue is the increasing pressure on academics to work together with different practitioners and stakeholders, especially within large consortiums, and to engage with 'knowledge transfer', i.e. 'the need to not merely learn new things about the world but also to be more effective in disseminating those new things to people who could go on to make something useful of them' (Spencer 2010: S290). Funding grants demand that we engage with our re-

search population and provide a list of knowledge valorisation and dissemination strategies. From the onset, we must have a clear plan on how the research is relevant for policymakers, who the stakeholders are, and how the practitioners of that field can benefit from the research. Yet what does this mean when one examines security, especially security actors? Who are the stakeholders in this process and is it desirable, or even ethical, to work with them? How does one speak 'with security'?

Both authors were part of a large research grant provided by the EU, wherein we were expected to organise a meeting with the relevant stakeholders and 'share' our insights. Yet when studying security actors, choosing the stakeholders is a process of political positioning. This was clearly evident in the Grassiani's research on Israeli security companies. As she takes a critical approach within the context of Israel/Palestine, she does not believe that security actors and their companies should be 'equal' partners in the project or even benefit from it. Those security companies often profit from the sales of weapons and technologies that are used in human rights abuses worldwide. She 'solved' this by organizing events with activist groups that were active against the security industry by, for example, highlighting the human rights violations that were legitimated or directly resulting from the industry.

In 2017, for example, such groups organized a 'shadow' conference parallel to one of the biggest private security fairs in Tel Aviv. Activists and critical scholars came together to discuss their work on the security industry worldwide. One day Grassiani conducted research at the security conference, and the next day, she presented her research for a room of activists and other critical academics. She visited the fair for fieldwork and afterwards joined the demonstrations outside of the fair by the activists. This seems like a complicated positionality, but it made perfect sense for this researcher in this context.

We are not arguing that practitioners should not be consulted within research projects. In fact, in various circumstances, this can be extremely beneficial. However, we are critical of the idea that *all* research must involve stakeholders and want to emphasize that the process of identifying stakeholders is inherently political. In line with this, when stakeholders have been identified, it is not always an easy and desirable process, as we outlined in the previous section. In addition to providing 'solutions', stakeholders may also have other vested interests that we cannot reciprocate, as we also mentioned in the introduction. For example, in her research on private security, Diphoorn was often expected to provide a recommendation on 'which company was the best'. Being a highly competitive industry, private security companies fiercely compete with each other over clients. As an anthropologist who had conducted participant observation among several companies, she was regularly asked to advise individuals and organisations on which company to recruit. This request was informally filed by individual South African police officers, who wanted to know which security officers were the 'best' to work with on night shifts, as well as by employees working for the Dutch embassy in

Nairobi, Kenya, who wanted guidance on which company to recruit to guard their premises. On paper, providing such recommendations could be seen as a way of 'valorising' one's collected data and sharing it with 'stakeholders'. Yet it also entails sharing confidential data and participating in processes that are not the aim of the research project, i.e. the commercial nature of the industry.

In this case, as well as in others, sharing research data can clash with other aims and ethical pillars, such as confidentiality of the research participants' identity and establishing rapport. In some cases, not sharing data is the most ethically-sound choice. This resonates with Spencer's idea of the 'privilege of non-engagement', whereby he argues that in some cases, not engaging is the best way forward and a 'source of critical knowledge' (Spencer 2010: S298). Similarly, Pelkmans also contemplates the 'public' role that anthropologists should play and argues that 'sometimes I think it is best for anthropologists *not* to have any impact at all' (Pelkmans 2013: 399, *emphasis in original*). We therefore wish to emphasize that we need to remind ourselves of our role as researchers in producing academic knowledge and be cautious that certain power holders do not abuse their position as stakeholders.

Concluding Remarks

Such choices, of engaging or not, are crucial when studying security. Yet, as we have argued in this paper, only a few reflexive accounts of anthropologists' experiences of researching security are available. This paper has aimed to fill this gap through discussing some of the predicaments faced by both authors in their research on security actors. Due to the pivotal role of social interaction and thus rather intimate nature of ethnographic fieldwork, anthropologists, regardless of the subject, are compelled to address a rage of ethical issues. Yet as has been claimed by scholars analyzing violence and conflict (*see* Nordstrom and Robben 1995), we also contend that research on security raises specific predicaments that demand further attention in both a reflexive and conceptual sense. This is due to the politicized and contentious nature of the concept itself and the inherent violence (direct and/or indirect) that accompanies security practices. Combined, ethical dilemmas and choices are pertinent, and we have tried to contribute to this discussion by sharing our fieldwork experiences.

We have specifically focused on two key issues, namely 1) how anthropologists select their research subjects, and how 2) anthropologists are increasingly expected to operate as the 'expert' by providing solutions and engaging with stakeholders. These expectations are also placed on researchers working in other fields, yet they are particularly poignant in the field of security due to the nature of the topic. As scholars, we are increasingly expected to perform a variety of tasks, such as disseminate our findings to a wider public and engage with actors outside of academia. We do not state that these expectations should not be met. Yet, in the field of security, these issues are not only problematic, but in some cases, they are even undesirable, and we must therefore be careful on how we work as anthropologists.

By sharing our own experiences, we have tried to illuminate some of the choices we have made and hopefully encourage others to share theirs, as a way of allowing us to think further about how one can research security. There are of course many other ethical dilemmas worth exploring, such as the growing pressure of us to work together with NGOs that want clear-cut answers, the media that likes to use sexy titles and emphasize the risky nature of research, the growing pressure on scholars by neoliberal policies of our universities to store and share data in a certain way, and the increasing pressure placed on social scientists to adhere to institutional ethical guidelines that stem from quantitative research projects. Combined, this shows that more systematic explorations of the moral and politicized nature of security are welcome that can also assist us in further developing the discussions on the ethics of doing fieldwork. As stated by Goldstein a decade ago, we need a *critical* anthropology of security and this critique does not only center around the way we approach security as a concept, but also in the ways we conduct our research and how we choose to, or choose not to, engage with others and position ourselves in both scholarly and non-scholarly circles.

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