

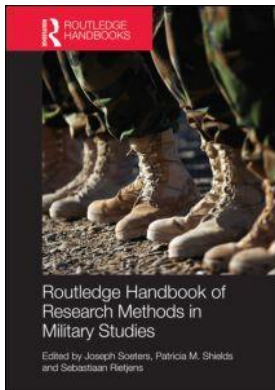
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies

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Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203093801.ch2>

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Published online on: 09 Jun 2014

How to cite :- Eyal Ben-Ari, Yagil Levy. 09 Jun 2014, *Getting Access to the Field from:* Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203093801.ch2>

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GETTING ACCESS TO THE FIELD

Insider/outsider perspectives

Eyal Ben-Ari and Yagil Levy

C. Lutz (2002) *Homefront: A Military City in the American 20th Century*. Boston, MA: Beacon.

Many issues of gaining access to the field are illustrated in Lutz's *Homefront* (2002). The volume, representing the author's first foray into the study of "things military," argues that the United States is a country "made" by war preparation. Lutz focuses on Fayetteville, North Carolina, and neighboring Fort Bragg, the largest army base in the United States. She uses a rich array of sources gathered over a period of six years – among them tens of interviews and numerous conversations with military personnel and civilians, official records, and journalistic accounts – to undergird her analysis. Despite her critical tone, Lutz presents human portrayals of soldiers and of people who live in and around the city.

This book is an ethnographic history of the relations between Fort Bragg and Fayetteville and the volume richly evokes the development of the city by situating it in wider social, economic, and political developments. Yet, this is also a volume on militarization and its implications for noncombatants who are not directly or visibly caught up in war making or war preparation. Lutz argues that since the end of World War II the United States has undergone a process of militarization and that the symbiotic couple of Fayetteville–Fort Bragg is a microcosm of this process. She shows how militarization is strongly related to the country's inequalities (along race, class, and gender lines) by being a huge employer and a very significant political actor. Thus, she suggests that scholars use the concept of "militarization," which avoids a focus on the discrete event of war and draws attention to broader processes of war preparations and their implications.

A key metaphor in the book – and related to the kind of knowledge that Lutz produces – is that of an unseen process underlying reality around the globe, what she calls the "invisible world of America and its military." This process is invisible because of secrecy laws, actively complicit corporate media, and the difficulties of tracing far-flung connections that do not seem to be directly implicated in war making or in preparations for war. Lutz makes a very good case for how "we" (meaning Americans, but her point could apply to members of other societies) have been taught

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to look at the implications of war almost exclusively for combatants and how secrecy laws, certain histories, and taken-for-granted notions of war as being directly related to the military have hidden many developments from notice.

Some methodological issues related to the volume are worth noting. First, like many researchers, Lutz does not provide much information about her access to the field in the methodological sense of creating contacts, negotiating her way into the camp and the city, or the understandings that she reached with her informants about publication. Perhaps this situation ensued because she is wary of being identified as a scholar enabled by the military; she nevertheless had access to the archives of Fort Bragg and talked to numerous military personnel. Second, because Lutz argues that we are witness to an inexorable trend toward militarization, she has problems explaining changed attitudes to the use of force and violence. Thus, for example, although aware of the antimilitarist tradition in the United States, she does not really theorize its impact on militarization or how processes of militarization have been contested during different eras. Third, there is a clear, but implicit, ideological bias at base of her volume. Lutz is highly critical of US government policies and the role of the United States around the globe. For the purposes of our analysis the question is what kind of knowledge is she producing? Fourth is the American-centrist approach in a study focused exclusively on the United States and written for American readerships. This focus raises questions about gaining access to an academic field as a field of knowledge marked by certain actors that belong to the military and wider security establishment.

Introduction

Gaining access to the field of military studies implies two types of entrées: the organizational or institutional kind that involves being admitted into a large-scale bureaucracy and the epistemological one of encountering a certain field of knowledge. We argue that both are interrelated and can best be understood via the understanding that all research is a social activity. This point implies examining both the unique features of the armed forces as a large-scale organization headed by powerful national elites focused on “national security,” and the particular kinds of knowledge that are created in and around the social institution charged with the use of organized (if at times contested) violence (Boëne 1990).

Epistemology and the sociology of knowledge

The critiques of Lutz’s volume lead us to an appreciation of the epistemological issues involved in getting access to a field in the sense of how knowledge is acquired and produced, or the conditions of possibility of knowledge about the military. Specifically, the critical approach that Lutz undertakes is related to the kind of understanding of the armed forces and the processes attendant upon them that she argues for. To be sure, research does not always start with scholarly self-awareness of its goals or implications or indeed of the biases implicit in it since these most often emerge during the process of inquiry. Yet it is important to attempt and clarify these themes since they frame the kinds of knowledge that is produced and the relations (if at all) negotiated between the military and scholars upon entry for research purposes.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas provides the key for starting our analysis. In his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Habermas offered a typology of what he termed

knowledge-constitutive interests, each expressed in a particular type of scholarly inquiry each of which can be exemplified in the study of the military. The first is *technical interest* in the prediction and control of the natural environment that aims at tying knowledge-production to controlled observation and testable general explanations yielding the *empirical-analytic* sciences. This kind of knowledge was dubbed the engineering model of military sociology by Moskos (1988), a knowledge oriented to seeking explanatory laws by which politicians or senior commanders can better control the actions of the armed forces. Concretely, this kind of knowledge has been produced by independent scholars in universities and a variety of in-house research agencies established primarily by psychologists around the world after WWII (Boëne 2000: 160). This kind of knowledge was spearheaded by an alliance between psychology and the military, and the governing idea was of military social science as social engineering that meets the urgent functional needs of the forces and based on (straightforwardly) applying universal theories to the military (Boëne 2000).

Most studies of the military or of civil-military relations belong to this category of empirical-analytic sciences (sometimes funded by security related agencies), such as those focused on enlistees' motivations and propensity to serve, reengineering of the social makeup of the ranks to promote diversity management, models of civilian control that imply the best practices to discipline the military (Feaver 2003), cohesion, leadership, primary groups, morale, race relations, and communication and persuasion (Capshew 1999; Boëne 2000: 199; Segal 2007: 49). Scholars even provide advice about how to frame the use of force to muster support despite mounting casualties (Gelpi et al. 2009). In general, research which is turned into applied knowledge is guided by technical interests, and this typifies much of the work done by military academies and the research units of militaries and defense ministries.

In a different manner, *practical human interest* in establishing consensus makes use of the cultural-hermeneutic approach relying on interpretive methods. Assuming that social life is constituted by social actions, and actions are meaningful to the actors and to the other social participants, the scholarly task is interpretation of the meanings of social actions. It aims at attaining reliable intersubjective understanding established in the practice of ordinary language to assure channels of communication, by expanding possibilities of mutual and self-understanding in the conduct of life. The search for this kind of knowledge is what Moskos (1988) calls the enlightenment model of the sociology of the military.

Some ethnographic research exemplifies this hermeneutic mode (Yanow 2006). Along these lines, given anthropology's long-term preoccupation with the broadly "cultural" aspects of social life, Lutz analyzes how the links between violence and the military are concealed or naturalized. In a related manner, understanding the language, action, symbols of military personnel (rather than searching for predictive models) has often enriched the study of military organizations by showing how soldiers and civilians create and recreate meanings centered on the armed forces (Simons 1997; Ben-Ari 1998; Hawkins 2001; Hockey 1986; Rubinstein 2008). Indeed, given the strong stress on the political arrangements that characterize the military, many studies rooted in political science and political sociology have done little to explore the cultural imagery and practices by which the militaries of the technologically advanced democracies handle their relation to violence.

In contrast to the former two sets of interests, the third category is *emancipatory interest* that makes use of *critical theory*. Its goal is to achieve emancipatory knowledge by counteracting the oppressive effects of the social construction of knowledge (assuming that science is a product of social activity). Critical thinking identifies constraining structures of power, such as relation of dependence that unreflectively appear as natural (Elias 1956). Thus, at once sympathetic to the soldiers and civilians that Lutz talked to she nevertheless maintains sufficient distance from her

subjects to wage a strong critique of the hugely influential military through being a dominant employer, a key political player and framing issues of national security. As she explains, militarization is at once a set of discourses legitimating the use of force, the organization of large standing armies, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them.

Many of the social scientific studies of the military bearing this kind of critique began to be produced from about the mid-1960s in the wake of the Vietnam War and the associated peace and student movements of the time. From that time, and primarily within sociology and anthropology and parts of political science, critical studies of the armed forces began to appear. In this sense, Lutz's analysis follows the investigations of such sociologists as Tilly (1992) or Giddens (1985), who argue that war and the institutions of war making are integral to the creation of states and to the mobilization of social resources. Such scholars have done much to uncover the main social and, especially, political mechanisms – recruitment, taxation, and propagation of ideologies of citizenship, for example – by which war has become part and parcel of the very dynamics of contemporary countries. Accordingly, critical thinking in the domain of civil – military relations has traditionally focused mainly on the rise of tacit forms of militarism and their contribution to the construction of power relations. Also important are studies about the role of the military in entrenching ethnic relations and gender relations. Similar are studies uncovering the military role in reproducing the hierarchy in society due to the hurdles in converting military service into social status (Krebs 2006; Levy 1998).

Gaining access to the armed forces for research: A sociology

Researchers of large-scale organizations are often met with concealment, harassment, or obfuscation, since their presence is often unwelcome (Spencer 1973: 91). What lies behind such attitudes? Along the lines of our appreciation that research is a social process, we analyze the characteristics of the military as a particular kind of social entity that bears at best an ambivalent attitude to external research.

Our starting point is that the armed forces are *like* any large-scale organization that is bureaucratized, centralized, secretive, masculinized, led by national elites, and preoccupied by its public imagery and *unlike* most other organizations in that it deals with the use of organized violence as part of national security. From their perspective, the greatest risk posed by researchers is the potential leakage of information and knowledge to the outside where the military organization has much less control and which may harm it or individuals within it. As such, not only are senior commanders or civilian decision-makers related to the military powerful and literate agents who read what scholars write about the security establishment (Gusterson 1997: 17), but they may also use a variety of formal and legal frameworks to limit access to the organization including formal and informal ones centered on national security.

From the perspective of researchers, the root problem of access to the military centers on the how the knowledge they potentially create (intentionally or unintentionally) may impact the armed forces (Spencer 1973). It is for this reason that researchers may encounter numerous difficulties. First, they may encounter bureaucratic rigidity because they do not fit into the regular administrative classifications and are independent of the regular bureaucratic hierarchies. Thus Williams (1984) relates how researchers of the US Army during WWII had an ambiguous and precarious status and thus had a constant need to negotiate their position that was usually dependent on local commanders. Second, research findings may threaten individual military careers by uncovering mistakes (or worse) since researchers are in a position to observe things outsiders cannot. For example, surveys of troops' view of their commanders may have harmful effects on

the possible promotion of the latter (Williams 1984). Third, the knowledge researchers create may pose wider risks to the power and image of the military institution. That is why, according to the experience of the authors of this chapter, the Israel Defense Force limits scholar's access to information covering the social composition of the military. Information of this kind may tarnish the military's image as equally representing the Israeli Jewish society. About 40 percent of respondents in a survey conducted among military sociologists in 20 countries reported sensitive topics, which were not allowed to be investigated (Caforio and Nuciari 2006: 40). Since the military controls access to information and individuals, external researchers must negotiate their access with a host of gatekeepers such as military censors, security officials, military spokespersons, public relations officers, or local commanders of units. Here it would have been helpful to learn about the difficulties that Lutz encountered in her research project since these difficulties in and of themselves may contain insights about her argument about the militarization of society in the United States.

While any external investigator (be they a journalist, civilian governmental official, or lawyer (Irwin 2011)) may encounter these problems from the perspective of academic investigators, among the most important gatekeepers (and ones that have potentially much to lose) are internal researchers. In fact, given the potential risks represented by external academic actors it is not surprising that armed forces around the world are typified by the establishment of "in-house" research arms and at times a wariness of publishing their findings outside of it. For example, most of the social research carried out within the government offices in charge of defense in France are used for internal purposes as decision-making and "of course, reports are not available for outside users" (Thomas 2000). In many countries such as Austria, Italy, or Israel furthermore only a small amount of the research carried out by the military or Ministries Defense is published openly (Caforio 2000; Maman, Rosenhek and Ben-Ari 2003). The end of the Cold War has brought about a more open attitude in regard to the study of most of the European armed forces and indeed the attitude in some of these institutions is very laid-back in regard to publication. But, when compared to other social institutions the general tendency is still towards *relative* closure (Dandeker 2000; Soeters 2000). The situation in most countries perhaps stands in contrast to Germany, where, by law, great autonomy has been put in place to assure inquiries through publicly available publications, an independent ability to set part of its research agenda and membership of its researchers in international scholarly associations (Klein 2000).

Given the core expertise of the military in the use of organized violence a host of justifications for limiting or controlling access are used by gatekeepers. First, since the armed forces are responsible for the safety of researchers in combat areas they may invoke danger as a limiting factor on access and mobility (Ben-Ari et al. 2010; Williams 1984). Thus civilian researchers are generally not allowed outside the wire of the camps they visit in Afghanistan. Second, given the still highly masculinized nature of combat units, a further restriction is often placed informally on female researchers (Sion 2004). Third is the problem of the legitimacy of the researcher as perceived by gatekeepers: since the military is closely associated with national security some military actors may question researchers' authority to do research and potentially criticize the armed forces. In this respect, as Irwin (2011) makes clear, researchers who have served previously in the military are often granted easier access. In this regard, it would have been very useful to learn if Lutz encountered any such problems in her research. The very fact that she was an external researcher from a prestigious academic institution (the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) may have sometimes hindered her in gaining access to informants or alternatively opened doors since they would have liked their story to be recorded and heard by such a scholar.

Polymorphous engagement and contracts

Sociologically, gaining access to research within the armed forces, as any large organization, is a process involving negotiations and dialogues with gatekeepers over various issues and resistances (Reeves 2010). One excellent example is Lomsky-Feder's (1996) essay on the problems of a woman entering the masculine world of the military. In her research conducted on veterans of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 she initially assumed that being an Israeli and contemporary of her male interviewees she would be easily allowed to enter conversations about their experiences of the war. However, she found that she was treated as a stranger and outsider. It was only gradually that she understood that taking the role of the stranger actually aided her access since it placed her in a situation where she was allowed to ask very basic, taken-for-granted questions and that her interviewees easily moved into "teaching" her about the military and about war.

Gazit and Maoz-Shai (2010; Castro 2013; Navarro 2013) take her insights further to show that the intricacies of studying an armed force "at home" (of one's own nationality) as the majority of researchers on the military do, carry some rather peculiar complications. They conceptualize the effects of the dynamic positioning of researchers in four social fields: the academic, the military-security, gender, and the ethno-national whose influence changes throughout research. Each of these fields dictates different expectations about the outcome of investigations. For instance, they show that many academic disciplines are populated by scholars who carry expectations that research be critical. Furthermore, when researchers and respondents share similar ethno-national affiliation and military experiences, the dichotomous relations between them break down and give way to a dense web of mutual expectations about shared concerns, the critical positioning of scholars and the problems of constantly negotiating access to the field.

The process of gaining access often begins with assorted formalities that have increasingly burdened research due to the growing legalization of social life and the juridification of the military. Requirements include submitting proposals and parleying with ethical, institutional and risk management review boards. This general trend that characterizes contemporary social and human sciences leads, as Lincoln (2005) argues, to scholarly conservatism and an emphasis on the production of Habermas' first kind of knowledge. Formal procedures also include obtaining funds from varied sources as university bodies, public or private foundations, government ministries or the military itself. Since many of these entities approve funding for proposals that are low risk in the sociological sense they too may lead to a conservative research orientation since many scholars cannot provide funders with answers at the beginning of research about its results or indeed about where their investigations will lead them. Indeed, one of Lutz's insights about the blurred lines between what are popularly seen as separate military and civilian spheres emerged only through the process of gaining access to the city and the camp she studied. Thus for instance, she underscored the complex manner through which employment, shopping opportunities and land ownership in the city were dependent on the dynamics of the military camp.

Next take social and organizational positioning of researchers upon entry and during the first stage of research. They may find themselves slotted into or negotiate their way into various relations with the armed forces. These include active military roles such as a psychiatrist at military hospitals or research psychologists at various military centers. Then there are roles combining teaching and research functions in military academic institutions (Ender 2009; Tomforde 2011) or dual appointments in military academies and civilian universities (De Waard and Soeters 2007). The great advantage of these positions is that they allow relatively unobstructed access to troops and a greater willingness of local commanders to cooperate since they are seen as part of the team. Next is research specifically commissioned by the armed forces but carried out by external civilian academics (Segal and Segal 1993), research that is externally funded but

enabled by the military (Simons 1997; Winslow 1997), or investigations carried out by coalitions between external scholars and in-house researchers (Ben-Ari et al. 2010). Finally, entry may be facilitated through guarantors who are “friends” of the military like Irwin (2011) who gained access through a senior commander that she knew or Sion (2004) who was assisted by one of her PhD supervisors who taught at the Netherlands Defence Academy.

The processual character of any research involves a number of other issues. Once inside there is a need to respond as honestly as possible to gatekeepers’ concerns such as being receptive to their suggestions and demonstrating academic suitability. The problem here, as we noted, is that many insights only emerge during the research process and thus necessitates further dialogues. It is for this reason that some researchers – presumably like Lutz – have found that gradual entry is profitable since once a modicum of trust is built between them and the informants or other authorities they can proceed further. Indeed, at all stages of the process access to participants and data needs to be continually renegotiated.

Each mode of access carries advantages and penalties. At the personal level, once one has created relations with informants or local gatekeepers, researchers may feel that they “owe” them something for their goodwill and hence possibly self-censor their findings. Similarly, any enablement by the military risks the creation of knowledge that could not be otherwise created but may come at the cost of limits on publication and official censorship (Ben-Ari 2011). In other words, gaining official permission for entry into the military may lead to an acceptance of the military’s agenda but also access to data that would otherwise not be forthcoming. Similarly, the hierarchical nature of the military makes sure that once an order is given to provide access research instruments can be applied rather straightforwardly but the disadvantage is that data elicited through this mode of entry – say a questionnaire administered by a commanding officer – may not reflect true attitudes and researchers will receive the “party line.” Thus the route of access is itself part of the limits and advantages of the research process.

It is for these reasons that some scholars use only externally available data for research on the military: public records, historical archives or journalistic reports. In this spirit, the social backgrounds of Israeli casualties were documented by using public sources as a means to bypass the need to problematically collaborate with the military (Levy 2007: 117–128). The use of external sources, however, does not mean that scholars using them hold emancipatory or critical views. Thus for example, Lewy (1980) used data from the US Congress to offer suggestions about improving the American army’s effectiveness after Vietnam. The disadvantage of the use of only external sources is, of course, that scholars may miss crucial internal aspects of the armed forces, while the advantage is a much more autonomous position vis-à-vis the military establishment. As the case of mapping Israeli casualties shows, autonomy may compensate for lack of information. Of significance here is the fact that part of the information researchers report about is related to the interests of different groups (including the military organization) to withhold it.

In order to be able to maintain a critical distance from the armed forces, we follow Gusterson (1997) who suggests a polymorphous engagement: interacting with informants and gatekeepers across a range of sites (including ones belonging to the virtual and popular culture worlds), and collecting data eclectically from a disparate range of sources in different ways. The idea is keeping one’s mind open to a variety of research strategies *and* modes of access. Such engagements should be placed within a wider model of ongoing exchange between scholars and the military about creating and adjusting expectations about the conditions of research, funding, and knowledge produced.

Our suggestion is thus in terms of access to the field, to think not only about formal contracts with the armed forces but about informal ones in which the mutual expectations of researchers and representatives of the military are discussed and agreed upon along the *whole* process of investigation.

Conclusion: Gaining entry while maintaining distance

In our endeavor to gain access to the study of the armed forces, we argue for a constant awareness – reflexivity in a more contemporary vein as explained in Chapter 4 of this *Handbook* – of the multiple issues that are involved. This move entails being clear about the dual route we undertake: into the institution or organization and into a specific field of knowledge. Accordingly this chapter has focused both on the implications of the administrative path into the military and the negotiated character of this trail *and* the different assumptions at base of the kinds of knowledge that is produced by researchers of the armed forces.

Concretely, researchers need to be clear about principles and the implications of our scholarly practices in regard to the military as they may change and emerge throughout a whole project. In this regard, perhaps their greatest challenge is to make an intentional effort to maintain a critical edge, not to become an advocate for organizational interests or legitimizing the powers that be. In this endeavor they are aided by the character of scholarship as a public discipline devoted to open discourse. The very need to publish work in scholarly journals and books and to present findings in workshops and conferences (within and outside the various relevant disciplines), as indeed this volume itself, forces researchers to constantly reflect about their own assumptions and positions.

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