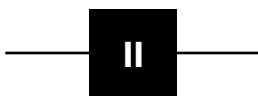


# Dedication in Memory of Ralph Sprenkels

1969–2019

We present this special section with a mixture of pride and sorrow, as the coming together of the section has been marked by illness and loss. This special section is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ralph Sprenkels (9 March 1969 – 14 September 2019). He was the co-organizer of the panel *The Construction of War Veterans* at the PACSA conference in August 2017, which was the beginning of this special section, which he co-edited. Ralph spent fifteen years in El Salvador which was reflected in his deep knowledge of the country's history and politics. Ralph's work includes his most recent book *After Insurgency: Revolution and Electoral Politics in El Salvador* (Notre Dame, 2018) and is marked by his role as expert witness in the El Mozote massacre. The last four years, he spent teaching at Utrecht University's history department. Ralph was an inspiring colleague with profound knowledge of El Salvador and a strong dedication to human rights and critical scholarship. This special section is one of the many ways in which we will remember him and his work.





## SPECIAL SECTION: WAR VETERANS AND CITIZENSHIP

### Introduction

#### War Veterans and the Construction of Citizenship Categories

*Nikkie Wiegink, Ralph Sprenkels, and Birgitte Refslund Sørensen*

■ **ABSTRACT:** War veterans often constitute a specific category of citizens as they inspire and bring forward particular claims on recognition and resources of the state. The authors featured in this special section each explore processes of the construction of categories of war veterans in different contemporary contexts. Drawing on ethnographic data, the contributions explore the interactions between (those identified) as war veterans and the state, and the processes concerned with granting value to participation in war. This involves (the denial of) rights and privileges as well as a process of identity construction. The construction of war veterans as a specific kind of citizens is a political phenomenon, subject to negotiation and contestation, involving both the external categorizations of war veterans as well as the self-making and identity politics from former fighters “from below.”

■ **KEYWORDS:** citizenship, ethnography, postwar politics, reintegration, war veterans

Rather than “becoming like everyone else,” war veterans often constitute a specific category of citizens. In war and postwar contexts, fighters and former fighters bring forward particular claims connected to their services or disservices to the polity that merit varying degrees of recognition or condemnation. War veterans may be privileged and receive benefits like jobs, pensions, and allowances (Cowen 2008; Kriger 2003; Logue and Blanck 2010; Metsola 2010), be vilified as enemies (and worthy of punishment or exclusion) (Malaquias 2007; Rueda and Vázquez 2015), be pitied and stigmatized as disabled victims (Gerber 2012), or something in between (Banégas 2012; Wiegink 2013). Which depictions of war veterans gain more societal recognition depends on several factors, including how the war ended, how the fighters’ behavior during the war is perceived, the postwar power balance, and war veterans’ own manifestations and public appeals. It follows that categorizations of war veterans are multiple and contested, and often shift as political contexts evolve (Kelly and Thiranagama 2009). Moreover, the creation, consolidation, and contestation of war veterans as an identity and citizenship category are relevant for shaping political hierarchies, allegiances, and (renewed) animosities. “War vet-



eranship” thus entails the dynamic and interactive construction of war veterans as a category of citizens with specific endowments.

Common approaches to the study of former combatants tend to overlook war veterans’ citizenship struggles, as well as their broader implications for postwar societies. Instead, this work focuses on former fighters as beneficiaries of “reintegration” (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; McMullin 2013; Muggah 2009) and on traumatized veterans and reconciliation (Burnell et al. 2006; Hoge 2010; Tick 2012). Recently, a large body of work on the roles and characteristics of political parties spawned by armed struggle has also emerged (Berti 2013; Ishiyama and Batta 2011; Lyons 2016; Sindre and Söderström 2016; Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz 2016). While these different strands of literature have generated relevant insights in the position of war veterans in socioeconomic, therapeutic, and partisan spheres, these approaches provide only limited insights into war veterans’ positions as citizens in the postwar social and political orders and have yet to cross-fertilize into more comprehensive and comparative theoretical reflections on research agendas on the “making” (or “unmaking”) of war veterans.

The studies in this special section begin to fill this gap by elucidating the processes by which the status of war veterans as a specific kind of citizens is constructed, negotiated, and contested in post-conflict societies. The contributions in this section draw on an anthropological notion of citizenship in understanding war veterans as a citizenship category that is part of “a cultural process of . . . subject-making, which entails the dual dimensions of ‘self-making’ and ‘being-made’” (Ong 1996: 737; see also Kabeer 2005). Similar to citizenship, war veteranship is approached as a “negotiated relationship” (Stasiulis and Bakan 1997: 114) and a process that is taking place on different scales and with variegated outcomes (Lazar 2013).

The main aim of this special section is to contribute to debates about war veterans and the reintegration of former combatants. Yet the study of war veterans as citizens may also offer interventions to debates about citizenship. Our studies draw attention to patriotism and participation in a particular armed struggle as markers for inclusion in the polity (see Metsola, this section), which broadens the analysis of identity markers often associated with citizenship such as language and autochthony. Furthermore, the study of war veteranship also contributes to recent critiques in anthropology of citizen—state relations as shaped by the state’s top-down imposition on the one hand and resistance or alternatives to the state “from below” on the other (Jansen 2014). The claims of veterans to be “taken care of” by the state (see, e.g., Wiegink, this section) resonate with analyses that emphasize people’s hope for incorporation into a state (Jansen 2014). Finally, as several of the contributions show how war veteran pensions may change people’s daily lives and how the politics of distributing these pensions unfold (Sprenkels, Weisdorf and Sorensen, Wiegink), the study of war veteran pensions may offer empirical insights to advance debates about the (re)distribution of resources by the state, in particular debates about cash transfers or pensions as means for poverty relief (Ferguson 2013). The study of war veteranship offers a lens into processes of claim-making on the state and into the broader construction and negotiation of social and political recognition, as well as how such processes may change over time.

This special section presents a set of articles that explores the making of veterans as political, social, bureaucratic, and historical processes in a variety of case studies situated in different geographical contexts. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, the contributions try to capture how these processes are understood from “within” by those involved, including a focus on vernacular categories of war veterans, and how these are situated within historical, social, and political contexts. Combining the contributions to this special section, we can tease out three central elements that form an analytical framework of war veterans as a particular citizenship category.

A first central element is the role of the state or state-like institutions in defining the contours and content of war veterans as a citizenship category, resulting from the contingent convergence

of peace agreements, politics, bureaucracy, procedures, and (official and public) narratives of war. Recognition of service in the form of pensions often plays an important role in the interaction between veterans and the state. War pensions were among the first welfare interventions by modern states (McMullin 2013: 55–61; Metsola, this section; Schafer 2007: 11–13). With this, war veterans have long been citizens with a particular status and therefore offer an excellent lens to understand the intricacies of citizenship hierarchies and the differentiated politics of the distribution of (state) resources and the processes of claim-making for these resources. From different perspectives, the articles explore the construction of relationships between the state (or state-like institutions) and (those identified as) former fighters as processes concerned with granting value to previous wartime participation and that involve (the denial of) rights and privileges as well as a process of identity construction. Inherently, this is a process of boundary drawing between categories of deserving and undeserving war veterans. Several of the articles also show the emerging of “gray areas” (e.g., deserters, part-time militias, etc.) (Wilson, this section), the coexistence of multiple veteran categories in the same context (Wiegink, this section), and different subcategories among those veterans who originally participated in the same belligerent organization (Sprenkels, this section).

Second, the contributions of this section highlight the changing and negotiated status of war veterans, exploring how the meaning and value of such categories often change over time, as political orders shift, narratives of war are contested, and “new” interpretations of the past emerge or receive different appraisal (see, e.g., Weisdorf and Sørensen, this section). The contributions highlight the long-term sociopolitical currency of war veteran status and the lengthy character of the postwar accommodation of former fighters. While the value of war veteranship may vary with political tidings (Van Roekel and Salvi, this section), it tends to remain a relevant category for decades on end (see, e.g., Metsola; Wiegink, this section). Longitudinal and multi-temporal ethnographic fieldwork therefore adds value to the understanding the salient roles of war veterans in post-conflict state- and nation-building processes.

Third and finally, we think of the categories of war veterans as shaped and reshaped at different levels. While powerful institutions engage in the top-down grooming of specific groups of veterans as a distinct category of citizens, the rank-and-file veterans themselves also organize and mobilize to strengthen common identities and pursue collective agendas. Other subgroups of veterans, such as the disabled veterans or ranking officers, have also organized and mobilized resources, both in function of specific subgroup interests, as well as for broader veterans’ agendas (Sprenkels 2018; Weisdorf and Sørensen, this section). Bottom-up activism and “struggles for recognition” (Honneth 1995) constitute a crucial facet of veteran politics. While the “new social movements” literature has emphasized the worth of mobilization around distinct subaltern identities to construct more inclusive forms of citizenship for different subgroup of society (Alvarez et al. 1998; Salman and Assies 2017), war veterans’ struggles for recognition can be only partly inscribed within this trend, as their goal is often less emancipatory and more benefits or prestige-oriented. War veterans do not necessarily aim for or support egalitarian forms of inclusion. Instead, they often implicitly emphasize that society should acknowledge certain hierarchies in citizenship by framing war veterans as exceptional citizens (see, e.g., Metsola; Söderström; Wiegink, this section). The special section addresses both the self-making efforts of former combatants in social networks, (disabled) veterans’ associations, advocacy groups, the formulation of alternative narratives, and so on, and the external categorizations of former fighters (by the state, political parties, media outlets), thus highlighting the interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes and strategies (Söderström; Van Roekel and Salvi, this section).

The first contribution, by Ralph Sprenkels, examines three decades of the construction of war veterans as a sociopolitical category in a post-settlement context in which insurgent and army

veterans coexist. The article focuses on the gradual postwar ascendancy of El Salvador's war veterans as a major sociopolitical force, able to obtain significant political influence and state benefits. Sprenkels identifies five cycles of veterans' mobilization and highlights the "bifurcated mobilization strategies" used by the veterans: "internal" mobilization to gain leverage inside the partisan force connected to their historical affiliation, and "public mobilization" to stress their claims on the state. Echoing the contributions by Metsola, Wiegink, and Wilson, this article emphasizes the versatility and resilience of veterans' struggles and how these struggles impact postwar political order.

The second contribution addresses veteran politics from the perspective of disabled veterans of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. Matti Weisdorf and Birgitte R. Sørensen explore how disabled war veterans have long been able to draw on rich and materially rewarding narratives of sacrifice and bodily capital in order to produce and sustain a particular kind of veteran citizenship and to pursue socially meaningful and differently abled post-injury existences. At the same time, they also show the temporal and contingent character of such claims, as after 2009 public opinion about disabled war veterans shifted from "heroic" to "parasitic." The article thereby demonstrates how war veterans' struggles for recognition exist in dynamic fields of narrative contestation. It draws attention to how shifts in the political context can fundamentally impact veterans' struggles, as is also evident in various other contributions (i.e., Sprenkels; Van Roekel and Salvi; Wilson) and draws attention to the value of multi-temporal and longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork in our understanding of the construction of war veteran categories.

The two contributions by Eva van Roekel and Valentina Salvi, and Alice Wilson both zoom in on the construction of categories of war veterans that are considered undesirable by the state. Both pieces demonstrate how marginalized war veterans' identities are maintained and constructed "from below," which create specific subjectivities and contestations of the state. Van Roekel and Salvi trace how the legal, discursive, and commemorative practices in post-authoritarian Argentina have ostracized the former military of the dictatorship from society and the military as an institution. Drawing on unique ethnographic fieldwork among the convicted military officers and their family members, the authors explore how former militaries have negotiated and contested their downgraded position in the face of criminal prosecutions and argue war veteran identity for them is best characterized as a process of unbecoming veterans as they have limited leverage to make claims on society or the state.

Alice Wilson's contribution examines the politically "invisible" defeated revolutionaries in Dhufar, Oman. The war they fought is silenced, and these former fighters are denied public recognition and are politically repressed. At the same time, Wilson shows how this diverse group of male and female former revolutionaries constitutes and reproduces their distinctive veteran identity through everyday private socializing, including their revolutionary ideals of social, especially tribal and ethnic, egalitarianism. Her ethnographic material offers a novel insight into "invisible" networks of war veterans that nonetheless continue to have some kind of political currency and sociocultural resonance. The practices documented by Wilson mark a distinctive veteran identity and indicate an "afterlife" of lasting social legacies of defeated revolution.

The last three contributions take a more comparative approach. Nikkie Wiegink's article traces the emergence of three categories of war veterans in postindependence Mozambique: former liberation fighters, former soldiers of the armed forces, and former RENAMO combatants. Wiegink proposes an analytical framework for the comparison of the construction, negotiation, and contestation of these categories as interrelated processes that involves memory politics, bureaucratic practices of inclusion and exclusion, and veterans' collective political practices "from below." This results in the rendering of some war veterans as "worthy" of privileged

state resources, some as enemies of the state, and some as in-between. This article thus explores not only how moral claims on state benefits are constructed, negotiated, and changed over time but also how these claims are shaped in relation to other categories of war veterans in the same national context.

Johanna Söderström's contribution takes the comparative perspective further by exploring differences and similarities among war veterans in three very different societies: Namibia, Colombia, and the United States. The comparison deals with veterans from different war experiences and outcomes: triumphant ex-insurgents (SWAPO in Namibia), non-triumphant ex-insurgents absorbed through a settlement (M-19 in Colombia), and government soldiers who returned after fighting a lost war in a distant land (Vietnam veterans in the United States). Söderström finds that all three groups of veterans create and nurture a narrative by which they emerge as the inheritors of the state. While in Namibia this narrative takes the form of veterans as creators of the state, in Colombia they emerge as reformers, and in the United States as the nation's most dutiful citizens. Echoing Sprenkels's contribution on El Salvador, at the core of the veterans' narratives lies the idea that the state owes them a debt. Söderström provides an analytical framework to understand how this "historical debt" narrative facilitates the war veterans' organization, mobilization, and engagement with the state.

The last contribution, by Lalli Metsola, examines war veterans' politics in Namibia in comparison to other African claims and struggles over citizenship. Metsola juxtaposes the long-term process of negotiation between war veterans and the Namibian state to address the literature on citizenship in African contexts that is focused on autochthony and ethnonationalism. Metsola finds that the citizenship politics of Namibian veterans are not based on explicit "cultural" markers of difference such as language, religion, or regional origin. Rather, war veterans construct significant differentiation through a gradated scale of patriotism based on precedence in "liberation" and the associated narrative of the Namibian nation. Former participants in Namibia's liberation struggle engage in what Metsola refers to as "a particularistic appropriation of a supposedly unifying nationalist narrative" to achieve a position of positive discrimination by the state. Metsola thereby uses war veterans' struggles to argue for a wider conceptualization of citizenship negotiations in African contexts to include the institutional environments and particular histories of the actors involved.

Combined, the articles in this special section contribute to recent scholarship that goes beyond debates and paradigms that view the reintegration of former fighters as "a return to normality" and a process of societal healing and that instead highlight the veterans' complex and variegated trajectories (Christensen 2017; Harnisch and Pfeiffer 2018; Meinert and Whyte 2017). Likewise, we caution against the stereotyping of war veterans as inherently violent and a potentially destabilizing force. In contrast to such normative approaches, the findings presented in this special section make an argument for a perspective on war veteranship that considers individual and collective accommodation of former combatants as social and political processes that are negotiated as well as contested. By understanding the transformation of war veterans into distinct categories of citizens as a dynamic, contentious, and contingent political process, this special section provides further insight into the ramifications of this process for postwar societal hierarchies and political orders.

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