

Walking with Soldiers: How I learned to stop worrying and love cadets

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PDF version of the text in the exposition in Research Catalogue

Abstract

“Walking with Soldiers” examines an auto-ethnographic moment of marching across the city of Helsinki with first-year cadets of the Finnish National Defence University. In a reparative reading, the walk dismantles boundaries of bodies, critiques, and affects. Through a walking methodology and autoethnography, the present exposition demonstrates how the author began orienteering within military structures through an affective investment. The exposition is a researcher’s journey across subjectivities and difference in a female civilian body. Epistemologically, it brings theory closer to the skin; and empirically, it offers insight into the affective world of belonging. “Walking with Soldiers” is multimodal and polyphonic: it consists of a text for reading, three audio tracks for listening and co-walking, as well as illustrations created by Julia Järvelä based on photographs taken by the author. The provided materials can be selectively attended to. The artistic technique used in the exposition is seduction: the reader/listener is invited into an experience. The exposition is a conversation between critical military studies and artistic research: it gives artistic attention to a military march, and places importance on the acoustic and vibrating qualities of academic research. The writing itself subverts the practice of authoritative scholarly writing by presenting descriptive work as theoretical work, and by using citations as companions from the outside.

Instructions on how to walk with this exposition

This exposition is meant to be both serious and playful. It is made up of a written script, three audiotracks and three illustrations. You can examine all of them, or only some. They are iterations, different and yet the same. The idea behind such diversity of material is to propose that form is not insignificant or trivial. If you want to engage with only one thing, my proposal is that you listen to Track two.

If you decide to listen to some or all of the audiotracks, I recommend you go walk outside while listening to them. You can try to walk and breathe in the same rhythm. The order of the tracks does not matter.

TRACK 1: Walking Postscript, 23:09

A 13-minute speech with an additional 10-minute silent walk

The first track, Walking Postscript, was recorded on May 4th, 2020. It is a response to five peer reviews, and it explains some of the issues that I had not been clear about previously. I recorded the track between 9am and 3pm, while walking, or rather stumbling, in a forest in South Finland. It contains a speech, and after that 10 minutes of walking sounds. It is not essential material, but if you like to hear my thoughts on artistic research, you can find them here. This track is also an instance of walking autoethnography, in which the practice of walking, reading and writing are intertwined.

TRACK 2: How I Learned to Love, 12:14

Spoken autoethnography

The second track, How I Learned to Love, is a mix of different recordings. It contains sounds from a march with Finnish cadets in September 2018 and sounds from the military base of Santahamina in Helsinki recorded in October 2018. The speech in this track was recorded based on a lecture

performance I gave at the Carpa 6 Conference in 2019. At the end of this track, you can hear us marching at the conference. This track was also played at the EISA 2019 Conference in Sofia. The purpose of this audio is to create an instance of spoken autoethnography which plays with vocal expression and the power of affect in storytelling. This track is a condensed version of the written part of this exposition.

TRACK 3: Sounds from Santahamina, 12:22

Listening

The third track, Sounds from Santahamina, is the same as number two without the spoken word and the marching sounds from the Carpa 6 Conference. It is focussed on *sounding knowledge* without words or explanations. It consists of sounds of walking, mundane sounds from the military base, and sounds from the cadets' 'warrior education' class. It includes some spoken sentences in Finnish from the march with the cadets. The track is sound art as well as documentation of human and other-than-human sounds in a militarised world.

The illustrations you will find in this exposition have been made by Julia Järvelä based on photographs taken by me at Santahamina (*Cadets in the sea*) and at the march (*Cadets by the grave* and *Cadets from behind*).

Things of Military

Walking is a subject that is always straying (Solnit 2001, 8).

On September 8th, 2018, the weather is warm, but the sky is cloudy. I watch intently how students of the 1035th cadet course of the Finnish Defence University march as one body. One hundred and sixty-three pairs of feet stomping in sync. The rhythm is loud, and captivating. The sound changes when the surface changes from sand to gravel, yet the rhythm persists.

I am touched by that rhythm as it runs through my body. Rhythms are pleasing in themselves, but when military bodies move in rhythm more is moving than just them. This timed marching is a visual theater, thick with meaning. The marching bodies come to a standstill in a formation, at arm's length from each other. When the lines are straight, a silence follows.

We are at a military cemetery. They are facing the grave of Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1867-1951), who led the Whites in the Finnish Civil War (1918-1919), was the commander-in-chief in Finland's defence forces during the Second World War and acted as the sixth President of Finland (1944-1946).

The symmetry of the crowd, the timing, and the trained precision of body movements reveal a rehearsed choreography. This is how an organised crowd works: at a simple shout, everyone knows what to do. We could call this crowd a troop, but cadets are both. They are studying for a university degree, a Bachelor of Military Science, yet their University is a military institution. The (aesthetics of) soldier makes the crowd a troop.

A crowd is a force to fear, an embodiment of danger, the dark side of modern society. It has rarely been seen as a solution to any problem. (Borch 2012).

A military troop is a force to fear too, an embodiment of danger for some, while at the same time it represents a legitimatised solution to violence. This crowd-troop at the grave is not dark and dangerous, it is admirable, unreachable, floating. This is how I feel when I look at it.

Later when I reflect on the significance of military remembrance, I think of Dan Öberg's writing about his 2013 visit to the Heroes' Acre war memorial in Namibia, where many graves were emptied when the state went through the process of deciding which heroes should be buried there.

Heroes' Acre captures the empty glory of power like 'amen' does in prayer. Arguably, the resting place of the hero or heroine is not prepared through the empty grave – as if 'in case there is one' there will be a grave ready. Rather, the grave precedes, intersects, and succeeds the history of war as it is ready but empty. The emptiness of the grave is a guarantee that war endures – not in case it occurs – but as a ready-made symbol, always virtually there, waiting to be filled. (Öberg 2016, 165–166).

Namibian graves were empty, but the Finnish ones were not. However, that did not mean war was in the past. Graves are not just a reminder of the past, but of the future alike. Graves speak: they whisper, *War is always a possibility*. The presence of cadets, the living (more powerful than graves), guarantees war can persist, emotionally and materially. Cadets' bodies perform in a constant state of military preparedness. And *performance* is the key to militarisation, the iterative process of becoming more and more sympathetic towards military force (Brady and Mantoan 2017, 2).

Öberg stood before the Namibian graves in the absence of both the living and the dead, I stand in the presence of both. But I am hiding behind plants, with visitors who happen to be there. They take photographs, I take one too.

The march, the graves, the drill, all "render concepts materially in practice", and attending to those bodily utterances "forces us out of the comfort zone of using predetermined words or phrases, and we can no longer rely on jargon" (Coleman *et al.* 2019).

But I think materiality and bodily utterances can be examined through concepts, words and phrases, because naming is a political act. Names excite the body; naming is a tool to make something difficult visible. In order to become conscious of and communicative about the unconscious corporeal sensation, we need language, descriptive language. Yet to address the corporeality of walking, (written) word is not adequate. Only the

body can speak the language of the body. This is why I provide an auditory experience into the rhythmical, physical, and situated knowledge of marching/walking back and forth across the military/civilian border.

Under my skin a boundary

I listen carefully to an address to the young cadets,

Find out how youth your age, in your home village, paid the price with their lives...

The plea to remember the sacrifice takes me home, home to why I am standing there. "Here we go", I think to myself and grin, as if I was outside of this story. The cadets face the grave, which looks like an excessively large resting place. I bring myself back to the present from a state of drifting, and try to listen to what is being said,

*love for the fatherland
the most valuable gift to the fatherland*

I get a bit teary-eyed. I am, after all, written in this story. It is our shared national memory. We are not allowed to forget. The imminence of death, so much at stake, and the romantic idea of something greater than me. I recognise an oral history and a popular imagery of clichés which gave birth to the soldier and the militarised state, yet I am neither appalled nor even judging. Rather, something tickles my insides. As a subject I become invested in these particular structures (Ahmed 2004, 12) which, in this case, means the state and its military constituents.

During the day, and the months to come, I live this paradox. I believe I am above these military fantasies, but they fascinate me. During the autumn of 2018, when I observe their classes and conduct interviews, I judge the cadets for their values and beliefs that prioritise military solutions. But the

more I speak with them, the less I can judge them. Until someone says something outrageously militant, and I am flabbergasted. Until someone says something beautiful, and I am moved. I am engaged in their performance. I feel the world of military bodies in my own muscles tensing, breathing changing and heart racing, whether I like it or not. I see a community in the making, and I see my own homecoming.

When I observe the cadets move according to their script – straightening their backs, heads turning to the right, and at ease – I play that script in my body as if I was doing the movements. In fact, I have done it countless times.

[...] the brain can simulate, within somatosensing regions, certain body states, as if they were occurring (Damasio 2010, 101).

Walking as a method

While a research permit from the Army Command to the bases of Pori Brigade and Utti Jaeger Regiment was denied, I luckily got permit to study the sense of a collective body and its influence on emotions among the first-year cadets of the Finnish Defence University.

It is my first day of fieldwork, and their first day of training. The purpose of the intensive day of physical performance is team-building (*ryhmäytyminen*), by enduring and moving together. I believe I am present as an observer, and that *I* will have no role to play. But I am wrong, and I will later re-write the script in the following way.

Walking with soldiers is:

– walking with

If you walk beside someone, you see more. This is an act of

witnessing. 'Understand' is such an academic word; you need to empathize. (Bulmer and Jackson 2016, 9).

It was one thing to walk at the end of the group and another to walk beside someone. At the end of the group, I could safely observe; when walking beside, I was listening to my body and the bodies of others. The placement of bodies matters.

– bodily activity

Fieldwork is necessarily an embodied activity (Coffey 1999, 59).

The researcher is embodied, the field is embodied, and the ethnographer's notes are likely to have daily mentions of the body whatever the topic and framework. "Knowing is a direct material engagement" (Barad 2012, 52). This is the relational ontology: my experience depends on how I measure it. Our ontologies are entangled, dependent on each other moment-to-moment.

I had written in my field notes that I felt stiff. But I felt tense in my body only when we walked through the city, not after we had moved under the trees, away from an audience. Walking is such an automatic bodily activity that it does not require attention. If walking is difficult for some reason, or impossible, walking sensations become important. When I think about walking, I begin to feel as if I was walking. When I pass a particular site that we traversed during the walk, I immediately travel in time, and my body remembers the march.

– a meeting space of an autobiographical impulse and an ethnographic moment

[...] the autoethnographic text emerges from the researcher's bodily standpoint as she is continually recognizing and interpreting the

residue traces of culture inscribed upon her hide from interacting with others in contexts (Spry 2001, 711).

These residual traces in the body are not so easy to recognise. For me, the crucial moment was when I followed the ceremony at the grave, and noticed my body changing. I felt shivers. I felt connected. That is when I knew that military rituals were already inscribed in my body.

– sweaty queer orienteering

More specifically, a sweaty concept is one that comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world (Ahmed 2017, 13).

[...] the question of orientation is not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home' (Ahmed 2006, 7).

In the following pages I will demonstrate how my autoethnographic moment is entangled in the socio-political context of gender and militarisation. I am an orienteering body simply because I am gendered as a woman. Because my body is trying, it begins sweating. As I will later testify, I came to feel at home through what felt like 'the end of gender'. I did not come home as a woman, emerging differentiated from military masculinity, but the queering of bodies, my own, in particular.

– getting lost

The word 'lost' comes from the Old Norse *los*, meaning the disbanding of an army, and this origin suggests soldiers falling out of formation to go home, a truce with the wide world. I worry now that many people never disband their armies, never go beyond what they know. (Solnit 2005, 6-7.)

Orienteering means that someone is potentially lost, that there is an unknown territory where people are finding their way. With being lost comes finding, but not always. Being lost can be a good starting point for a search. Loss and being lost are a venture into the unknown, into a world which has no militaries. It is a utopia of course, but we do not know what it would be like.

– not a call for a major shift or a conclusive theory, instead

[...] attention to affective assemblages, to the ways things, people, affects and places, with different trajectories, may come together, albeit in often tentative, inconclusive or evolving ways (Wright 2014, 392).

Walking with soldiers is a speculation, an experimentation, a proposition which does not stabilise experience into an explanation. It promotes an orientation to research and to the world that is more attentive, more in tune with vibrations, thresholds and madness.

– a walking methodology

Walking is one of the many bodily methodologies which examine intensities and materialities – sensual, affective, rhythmic and temporal experience (Springgay and Truman 2017). Walking as a method affects the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and thus results in data different from an immobile context (Anderson 2004, Evans and Jones 2011).

In walking methodologies, it is thought that the place and the geographical context inform the interviews. But I think movement affected my interviews more than place. The walking interviews also disrupted self-body situational awareness. They drew attention to language and rationality, away from

sensory experience. But then again, of course knowledge is spatialised, and beings in space make place and movement, and place and movement make them. Place and movement made the interaction the way it was. So, when we sat down for interviews at the Defence University, later on, the stillness, the closed space, the bad air, the institutional setting and symbols all around made the interview less rhythmical and much more tense. I wish I had done all the interviews while walking.

The military walking method and my walking method are two different things. Cadets were training, I was researching. It was not aimless walking, but labour walking, and it was not exactly meant to be enjoyable. Walking is not necessarily pleasurable, especially after 20 kilometres and a heavy load on the back. Walking can be exhausting and boring. One cadet told me that he felt the interview made him forget how much pain he was in. Time moved faster. Walking was painful, talking was a pleasure.

We can think of marching as one of those military practices that increase the soldiers' resilience and endurance as well as promote social cohesion through movement. Benjamin Schrader (2014), an academic and veteran, explains that life in the military is filled with disciplinary training of the body. The purpose of this disciplining is "to maintain the ability to do the job required of a soldier, which is often to kill but only to kill those whom they are told to kill and when they are told to kill (19)."

Walking is a mundane practice which turns into marching only when other ideas and practices are attached to it. Walking is not marching until it is seen and felt as militaristic. Timed marching is so common in military movement language that it is difficult not to associate the two.

Military cohesion is about movement training, but it is even more about emotional training. Jesse Crane-Seeber (2016) makes an interesting connection between military service and kink, what he calls kink-informed queer theory of militarization. He (2016, 9) argues that the fetishism of militarism comes from the association of pleasure, admiration and desire

with the will to endure suffering. Pleasure is derived from self-mastery, but under submission. Then bodily movement, suffering and pleasure are all intrinsically entangled.

Reparations

As a profoundly bodily institution, even with the development of war technology, the military has plenty of experience in walking. This time walking was a team-building method, an intentional pedagogic choice. The cadets did not need to travel by foot in order to get back from the graveyard to the base, a trip of about thirty kilometers. However, the journey was more important than the arrival. The travel needed to be time-consuming, the route had to be long enough for connections to emerge. Time was of the essence then, and physical effort too. All bodies were needed, and all bodies needed to move at the same speed – the slowest setting the pace.

Walking with soldiers, belonging was at stake and the site of belonging is not just any. It is structured around the state so tight that the site can be forgotten, and yet it is always there. The walk did not happen only in a place, but within an institution. In this institution bodies were able (they had passed the test), white (all-white), manly (but not statically), and also different from each other.

The concept of belonging is ambiguous and multiple in everyday and scholarly uses alike, and “perhaps what is most important about the term is the texture of how it is felt, used, practiced and lived” (Wight 2014, 392). Belonging is an experience lived moment-to-moment. It is not just about stories of the inside and the outside, but sensations such as the thickness of a silence, the tightness of a grip and sweaty armpits ; nuances hard to detect.

I was there too, as a body, walking and feeling. I could, of course, ignore that. But that would be ignoring an intensity which threw me out of balance,

face down. After I got up, I walked with pleasure, and that pleasure was not just an aesthetic quality. It was a challenge, a reorientation. So, I began to think about the juxtaposition of paranoia and reparation.

According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank 2003, 144), paranoia relies on exposure, that is a

cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of gender roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions).

I am not able or willing to abandon paranoia entirely. The paranoid part of me walks at a distance and affirms what it already knows. Paranoid Me wants to save people and save herself. But I will try to think-feel beside that paranoia, because I did not walk with paranoia alone. I wanted to exist in relation, to walk with. So, I walked – not knowing it at the time – repairing damage.

Next I'm going to walk you through four 'small acts' from my autoethnographic moment which I hope can shed light on to the profound human need to belong: Act one: shame; Act two: walking in; Act three: being a body, leaving a body; Act four: arrival.

Act one

Shame

Being faithful to reality is a matter of taking part in it, of allowing it to take part in us, rather than making a pronouncement on it (Paper Boat Collective 2017, 23).

The morning of September 8th begins with a Tough Viking competition in downtown Helsinki, which cadets are taking part in. The first thing I notice when I arrive is how their uniforms give them a particular visibility: camouflage is an aesthetics of exceptionalism, and more: a maker of fetishism. I meet with the commander kind and helpful beyond my expectations, giving me the opportunity to take part in the march which follows the competition. He tells me that the cadets compete in sixteen groups of about eleven cadets each. I literally follow the commander, and other officers, in following the competition.

The result of the Tough Viking competition determines the marching order of the groups. The march is conducted as an orienteering competition towards the Santahamina military base in Helsinki: cadets follow a track marked out for them on a map and perform tasks along the way at control points. The entire walk is about 30 kilometres, finishing well after midnight.

While one group after the other finishes the competition, I wait. I look at the cadets undressing and changing clothes. They do it casually, not hiding their bodies, as if they were public property anyway. I do not want to talk to anyone at this point because they are tired and half-naked. Because there are so many of them, I couldn't even decide whom to approach. The commander proposes a group which I can join and tells the group leader that they will take me along. I am so glad he assigns me to a group, because I wouldn't manage to approach anyone to ask if I can go with them. I wonder if they see me as a burden and a nuisance. After I have learned which group to follow, I keep my distance, roaming nervously around not to lose sight of them, but not knowing what to do exactly.

We finally leave the competition site and begin marching towards Hietaniemi cemetery and its military section, for the cadets' lunch break.

I stay at the back of the group when we begin marching. I do not know where I am supposed to be. Do I walk with them, as one of them, or at

some distance? Every step matters, every step is a possibility, and I am losing a possibility every step of the way. The group quickly takes the formation of a line in pairs, and I notice the cadets are an uneven number. I move slowly and carefully closer to the cadet walking without a pair. I move from the outside to the inside and hope nobody notices how I am crossing a border. "I might as well talk", I think to myself, and ask him something about his day so far. He tells me that he is not yet certain of his place in the group.

Marching through the city, I soon realise that I am not simply walking but I am part of what looks like a military parade. A crowd subject to a blatant gaze, photographed as if it were a tourist sight. I suddenly feel like I do not belong among these bodies, to those photographs, under that gaze. I am supposed to be an invisible body, my body does not provide security. I am a body from a different fantasy. At the same time, I feel a little special.

In patriarchy, we are constantly told men are the providers of security. I have been told that, and that I should have no say about the military, when my body is not on the line. But my body was always on the line.

The warrior and the warrior aesthetics are not only exceptional, but sexy. Yet, even if soldiers are objectified and hyper-sexualised (Crane-Seeber 2016), they are still protecting bodies, and civilian women are protected bodies. Needy bodies. These roles remain, and the feminised (woman, queer, non-normative) soldier is caught somewhere in-between.

Cynthia Enloe (2014, 88–89) writes:

Women have served as symbols of the nation violated, the nation suffering, the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest. [...] Moreover, because a nation is framed as an 'us', it puts a premium on belonging. It has a strong potential to be exclusivist, even xenophobic.

Women are needed in war, they rebuild and have children after war, yet they

are excluded from preparing for war. Having a few women in the military does not change that (six women out of 163 cadets at the march). In fact, the (Finnish) military is an example of how to perpetuate a patriarchal system by turning "what used to be a site of masculinized privilege into a site of feminized marginalization" (Enloe 2017, 22). That means, you bring some women into an exclusively male site, but you do not give women real power and you do not allow the space to become 'feminised'.

We arrive at the Hietaniemi beach, and I begin to feel increasingly anxious and awkward. When the cadets have lunch and rest, I sit among them, but separate and alone. I stare but avoid eye contact. I walk and sit down again. I do not want to interrupt the eating or chatting – that would be rude. But I feel stupid, and it occurs to me that even though the cadets were informed of my arrival, they certainly were not expecting a timid female figure walking around them like a shadow. I feel small and shrinking. I am in shame. I forget who the members of my group are.

After what feels like an eternity, but is likely less than an hour, I see the commander, and I rush towards him, confessing that I lack the courage to talk to anyone. I trust him with my vulnerability. With ease and kindness, with no sign of judgement, he guides me to some of the cadets, telling them I would like to interview them. He solves my problem and does not make me a problem. There, a reparation. Movement across another kind of border. When care and command solve my insecurity, the relief is immense. I recover my dignity. I return to presence. I am not a failure.

Act two

Care

This is what Brené Brown has discovered about belonging:

Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted (Brown 2010, 25).

You are only free when you realize you belong no place – you belong every place – no place at all (Maya Angelou, quoted by Brown 2017, 5).

True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. (Brown 2017, 137).

Reparation is only possible in belonging, not in the act of trying to fit in. Belonging is the homecoming. When I began to realise that belonging was somehow at stake, with all the emotions I was experiencing at the march, I knew that a paranoid reading was not the only way to analyse my marching transformation, the end of worrying and the beginning of loving.

When we begin the march from the Hietaniemi beach towards the Santahamina base, I have a chat with the leader of my group. I tell him I have not yet found a suitable moment to interview anyone in our group. He promises to ask a cadet to volunteer and come walk with me for the interview. Such moments of care take me by surprise, and even more surprising is how good the clarity of command feels. I am released from the anxiety of trying to figure out when and who to talk to. I do not even have to know where we are and what we are doing. I can breathe, move my legs and follow.

Perhaps this is a particular militarised care, and I am new to it. As part of it, there is a regular check-up to make sure no one is left behind. Someone shouts from the front, "Is researcher Hast still here?". I am called out in the same manner as soldiers are in the Finnish military, by my last name, including my 'rank'.

The way care functions here is as a “critically disruptive doing that can open to ‘as well as possible’ reconfigurations engaged with troubled presents” (Bellacasa 2017, 12). Care disrupts: it soothes, connects and attunes, but within structures which are exclusive, expensive and destructive.

The group gets more talkative and relaxed as the march proceeds, and by the time we are in the suburb of Pasila, bodies are at ease. There is a particular moment when crossing a street, the sun shining sweetly, that I feel the group has marched long enough for bodies to have synched. Nothing visible happens, I just sense a subtle change. At the first control point, the group begins joking. Even if the jokes are gendered, I do not mind, because the fact that someone is making contact with me, and joking around me, feels like a small victory. They are getting used to me.

Someone asks if I need water, and shares from his bottle. Sharing a water bottle becomes a somatic marker for me – an object through which affect can move. I tell them about my father, how he told me that Finnish peacekeepers used prostitutes in Israel in the 1980s and their main concern was getting gonorrhoea. This is so absurdly unethical, and my openness so uncanny, that we laugh about it. The laugh and the bottle make a memorable moment. I remember where we sat (on a stone), who I was interviewing, and how the bottle passed from a cadet to my hand, and how I gave it back. The sharing of water embodies a memory.

I do not take part in the tasks which the cadets have to complete before continuing the walk, but my body shares the pain of walking. At least until the moment I have to leave my group for a while. Not because I am tired, but because I had not imagined I would want to (or would physically be able to) walk that much, so I did not bring enough food with me. I call my husband to pick me up, and I go back home to eat.

At home, I feel anxious. I want to go back. At 21:52 I text a cadet who keeps track of where each group is. I have been given a map and decide

that I will go to control point R4 in Laajasalo. I am there before my group, so I sit on the gravel and wait. I am back to being awkward and silent, until I see my people, and join them for the last few kilometers of the march. But it is at this control point that something shifts again.

Act three

Being a body, leaving a body

We are waiting because there is a queue to perform the control point's task. I need to pee. There is no toilet, which means I need to pee in nature. I get up and try to find a place where I can squat without anyone seeing me. But cadets seem to be everywhere, and because it is so dark, I do not want to wander too far. I finally find a place where I hope not to run into anyone, but it is also a spot from where I can see another group of cadets marching towards the control point.

The following is hard to explain, but I will try. Squatting, I feel an odd sense of relief and power. I am exactly where I am supposed to be, and where I want to be. At that moment, I belong to the world as a body. I belong to no place and every place. I do not remember if I laughed out loud, or in my head, but I laughed out of childish joy. I am under no threat. I do not feel like a sexed/gendered body. Maybe I felt this way, because "I wanted there to be places to go where I could just leave my body behind" (Ahmed 2017, 29).

As if I am simultaneously a body, and I am leaving a body behind. I am in a place I have not been before. There is nothing familiar to rely on. For once, in a public space, I do not have to be careful and cautious. I do not feel protected, and yet I feel safe. My body has a new presence. I am de-gendered, and in my eyes, soldiers are de-gendered too.

I feel outside of all places, and inside of all possibilities.

As we approach the base, I am told I will not get in from the gates without a commander's escort, so I am prepared to be stopped at the checkpoint. Yet, I walk so confident as part of the group that I get in, even though I am not supposed to. I stand out with my civilian clothes, but even still, I am not stopped and checked. Then someone says, or maybe it was later at the base, that I fit in so well the guard did not realise I was not a cadet.

When the march is over, and the blisters are examined at the sports field outside, joking increases. Someone realises I am still there. The fact that they forgot that they need to be careful with what they say in my presence makes us all laugh. A cadet proposes a group hug. Someone says, "We are soldiers, and we do not show emotion. You should write that down."

"Soldiers", his words, not mine.

Act four

Arrival

My arrival is the discovery of pleasure. It is finding something I did not know I wanted: an experience of belonging and receiving. When everything else keeps moving and changing, arrival is the capturing of a moment that makes sense and feels permanent for a while.

The title of this paper is Walking with Soldiers, not cadets. Cadets are soldiers, but 'cadet' sounds different from 'soldier'. Words matter, and being a *soldier* connects a body to war. Soldiers are capable and willing to take life. Cadets train operational skills, which are "the desire and ability to win battles", as the University web page states. No other university than a military one will teach a student how to shoot a bazooka or drive a tank. But when I asked about killing, during the walk and in the following months, no cadet could identify with a potential killer. No loss, no war scars, no PTSD – not even as a possibility. Instead of soldiers, the cadets appeared to perceive themselves as 'citizens with a uniform'. Extraordinary citizens, yes,

who can shoot a bazooka, drive a tank, guard a border, fly a Hornet, or strategise amphibious warfare. Yet, war (as an experience they are preparing for) seemed to be written off from their everyday military experience.

This ambiguity was tangible, bodily, sometimes a squirming, especially later in autumn when I conducted more interviews. The trouble we need to live with, then, is the pull between two seemingly distinct poles: soldier and civilian. The imagined value of a military institution is built on fear of the not-yet, but familiar, and this requires the very exceptionalism which I began my struggle with. Exceptionalism which is presented in imageries of battle and weaponry, such as a recruitment video.

But when I walk, I have no such thoughts.

War endures in relation to and through their continual absence (Öberg 2016, 166).

It was the absence of war which made a soldier invisible. Speaking of a soldier prepared to kill and to die, is to bring war from absence to awareness. To evoke the idea of a soldier is to bring to light a civilian. 'Civilian' is a category useless to me, unless it means 'non-military'. Alone, 'civilian' stands for nothing. I wonder, in war-time, would I still be a civilian?

The longer I stayed, the more I found myself capable of walking. I wanted to show my group I had the bodily capacity to march just like them. I was a trained body too, a regulated body. Militarisation is not only about ideas, values and priorities. It is also a process of bodily regulation (Macmillan 2011). Entrainment to common bodily rhythms and intensities is part of the emergence of friendship in a shared embodiment (McSorley 2016).

Walking changes the body. But it also requires a body, a certain kind of privileged body, which can walk the walk. In my movement forward, I wanted to prove something to myself. I would be tough too. A steady sound

of stamping feet, a reliable proceeding, was recorded on my phone during interviews. I can hear the determination in those footsteps. My feet, their feet creating a collective rhythm of walking.

The march was over, and I found someone to drive me to my car parked outside the base. There, I reflected: I had walked in, and I wanted to stay. Emotionally, I no longer cared where I was, and why I was there. I was confused and content at the same time. Militarism – is that about mistaking abuse for love? *Love for the fatherland... remember... paid the price with their lives*. The military offers attunement, and thrill, and excitement too. Deployment can be a source of trauma, but it can make life worth living. It is so full of contradictions that I see no other response than contradicting through and out.

Cadets, or any other group in military uniforms, were other to me, in a way that, I am ashamed to admit, is dehumanising. They were a group of people I could not identify with. Until I could. I had roles in mind for all of us, none of which involved me in any loving condition. Yet, there I was, receiving. There I was, marching with pleasure, without a second thought.

What was the reparation?

The small acts – shame; walking in; being a body, leaving a body; and arrival – are intruders in a rationalist narrative. Emotions just barge in uninvited and untamed. Emotions, they are real.

The beginning is coloured by feelings of shame. I do not remember ever hearing a researcher speak publicly about their shame. Shame is like that; it does not want to be spoken of.

The second act casts light on moments of care which proved to increase my shame-resilience. The further I walked with the group, the better I felt.

The third act takes me further from a core-shame of being the wrong kind of body for the world. Exhilaration becomes the somatic marker of the small, yet meaningful, ethnographic moment which attaches my body to the idea of the cadet. My life-long experience of being feminised, girled and sexed vanishes for a moment.

Act four is a reflective state which returns to the separation of soldier and civilian body, because the border has begun to fade. Arrival has been in the making throughout the other acts.

The reparation is pleasing. It is also unsettling. It consists of an emotional investment. It is intimacy and reflexivity. It is being present as a body and then leaving a body behind. It is walking side by side. The reparation is also *not knowing*. It is a refusal to bow to a violent epistemology, to affirm a hierarchy. It is writing otherwise, even not writing at all. The performer and spectator are interchanging, and so is paranoia and reparation. Neither is, without the other.

We are never self-contained. The need to belong is a profound human experience and I never imagined it would concern me personally on a fieldwork day with the cadets. Belonging is overwhelmingly political, and its manipulations can be traced to violence from home to state, from street to basement. When belonging takes precedence over humane, people do awful things just to fit in.

Walking with soldiers unsettles my thinking and my attachments. I see a ritual not just in the regime of a military body, but in the body and voice of the critic.

Walking with soldiers is an eerie relationship – it is bliss. Normal and perverse coexist in a queer orienteering experience. Walking with soldiers is a promise of a different body, the burden of the lived body, and the weight of ghosts in cemeteries. The civilian-soldier divide becomes an unsatisfying binary. A soldier's exceptional body and my capable body are different, yet

the same. I am excluded and included, I am a target and an agent. I am gazing, I am gazed. I began with a binary, and arrived elsewhere. Because difference is an experience rather than an unchangeable reality, walking with soldiers is a practice for transmuting difference.

Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world. We are true through and through, and have with us, by the mere fact of belonging to the world, and not merely being in the world in the way that things are, all that we need to transcend ourselves. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 530).

It was reparative to belong instead of fitting in. It was healing to forget gender for a while, to be needy and still stand alone; to be a body while leaving a body behind, to feel belonging in a place where I do not belong, to be on the outskirts, hovering, visiting.

I loved the experience, the order, and the care. So, I had a personally reparative experience but would my flirting with the military be of any interest to anyone else?

Because I attach personal pleasure to the study of military training and I am honest about it, I emerge as a disturbing and disobedient plurality. In my experience, such disturbance speaks to people, because it excites the question, *who am I?*

The military is always interesting because it is dangerous and sexy, so anyone I ask will talk with me about soldiers. But how could I speak to the military? By studying the autoethnographic moment. A paranoid walk would likely be treated with suspicion by those who believe in the military, but an intentional walk on ambivalent ground is more likely to be heard by anyone.

Writing from an autoethnographic perspective gives my performance an authentic touch. I really do begin to walk with conformity, and I do it

because it feels good. I become seduced by the care, command and marching. This is the power of autoethnography, the power of *spoken autoethnography*. And this is how it speaks back:

I have to tip my hat to you. "Walking with Soldiers" is awakening, and what is funny, I had similar thoughts during the march. (A cadet from the march.)

A cadet heard Track two and felt connected to it. She reminded me that gender always matters, sometimes it is the thing which matters the most. I had to reorientate and confront my paranoia again. Reparation is a confrontation with paranoia.

the title of this writing proposes love for cadets,
not soldiers
love as a political force and a multitude
walking instead of marching
a refusal to disclose and fully arrive,
but keep on searching
this is how I stopped worrying
and learned to love

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