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Introduction[1]

That this is the umpteenth analytical effort dedicated to war should alone suffice to underscore from the very beginning of this yearbook that we live in 'interesting times,' as the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2011) would argue. Žižek maintains that in China, in cases of extreme hatred, one uses the curse, 'May you live in interesting times.' And historically, 'interesting times' have always been characterized by power struggles, extreme social inequalities, war and the like. Žižek rightly points out the historical persistence of (and somehow the advent of new) 'interesting times,' though it would appear that the curse is not of Chinese origin.

The ways of war have changed over the centuries. Developments in weaponry have made it possible to attain increased destructive impact and kill more people. Combat strategies have multiplied. The science of war has evolved both in terms of technological complexity and human ability. Similarly, the discursive dimension of war has been complexified by new forms of communication and information. Today the correlation between individual wars is more evident, as are the correlations between global and local dimensions of conflict. The privatization of war is another element that, over the decades, has challenged and redefined the common understanding of war as an issue of state sovereignty (Hall, Biersteker 2002; Levy, Thompson 2010; Münklerr 2002). The phenomenon of 'privatized military industry' (Singer 2003) is evident in most battlefields worldwide – consider for example the role played by military companies such as Blackwater in Iraq. Furthermore, the perfection of the killing machinery of modern warfare, the destruction of bodies, and the infeasibility of proper burial create all sorts of ghosts that must be reconciled with the living – for example through family commemorative rites. Heonik Kwon (2006) observed in his study of commemoration in Vietnam, that the bereavement of the families of civilians killed

1. I am grateful to Edyta Roszko and Deniz Gökalp for their comments on earlier drafts of this introduction. My thanks also to Clare O'Sullivan for the linguistic revision of the volume.

in military operations has not been acknowledged in national remembrance ceremonies, but has produced different patterns in the domestic cult of ancestors. Thus, not only has war evolved, but in changing, it has given rise to novel patterns in many spheres of life. Yet despite these new scenarios, if we politically analyze the global order, elements of continuity between contemporary wars and those of the past delineate the contours of an on-going race for weapons and the persistence of the armed-governance model. The political (and theoretical) reaffirmation of the 'just war' approach (Falk 2004; Lutz, Millar 2012), as well as the interconnections between humanitarianism and militarism (Chandler 2001; Fixdal, Smith 1998) and the affirmation of security regimes (Eckert 2008) are all salient features of contemporaneity.

Although the key underlying question of why people make war (Bramson, Goethals 1964; Ferguson 2001; Haas 1990; Malinowski 1941; Simons 1999; Otterbein 2009) seems destined to remain open for a long time to come, ethnographies of war continue to produce crucial data and timely reflections that enhance our understanding of the multifaceted nature of warfare. War is generally described as political and armed conflict among groups, factions, nations (or among nations and groups, as in the so-called 'war on terror') that involves both fighting forces (compelled or voluntary) and civilian populations; the latter, as well as being directly hit by warfare, are subjected to regimes of terror, violence, embargos, isolation and other forms of suffering. As with any definition, this description of war provides an arbitrary delimitation of reality. For instance, in many war or war-related contexts the distinction between soldier and civilian is purely abstract (cfr. for example Rosen, ivi). There are also phenomena connected with situations of war that are not necessarily experienced on a battlefield (e.g. human bombings, acts of espionage, interrogation and torture, etc.). Indeed, wars are conducted at multiple levels, and not only through the opposing sides in battle, but also through other channels – hence the crucial role played by literature, academia and the media (Andersen 2006; Barker 2012; Chomsky et al. 1997; Dwyer 2011; Hoskins, O'Loughlin 2010; Oddo 2011). Cyber wars are another example of the multilevel dimension of warfare (Clarke 2009; Lin 2012; Sharma 2010; Sorenson, Matsuoka 2001).

While wars are to some extent governed by economic, political (in the broader sense) and geo-political interests, there are other aspects of war that interest anthropology more closely, such as mechanisms of stigmatisation of the 'other,' attempts to legitimise conflict using government propaganda, the social effects of conflict, the militarisation of humanitarian interventions, the use of collective memory in order to justify recourse to military force, the mechanisms of post-conflict reconciliation, everyday perceptions and descriptions of war, the justification of violence, the intertwining of religious/cultural and political/social dynamics, the meanings of living and dying, to name but a few. Contemporary ethnography is often faced by logics of dominion and tyranny as well as by the suffering and social implications produced by war. Far from considering war as a fact in itself, an isolated event, anthropologists have traditionally tried to analyse it in relation to historical, political and economic contexts as well as

to the cultural and social systems that confer it with both macro- and micro-sociological relevance. As has been argued, war may be seen as a 'social project among many competing social projects' (Richards 2005, p. 3). Thus, wars are not only revealing of dramatically negative developments in social life, but also of conscious attempts to shape the world in specific ways.

This volume gathers the work of anthropologists committed (within different perspectives) to the study of war – and war-related phenomena – in terms of its discursive construction, implications, and cultural and social prerequisites. The common thread running through the papers largely concerns the ethnographic sensitivity and cultural-critical approach shared by the authors, which help to identify and compare the structural, symbolic and material elements at the base of justifications of war, narratives of violence and the call to arms – and even the call to a different way of being a citizen and person, child or adult, dead or alive. Taken as a whole, this collection of essays forms a transcultural investigation that guides the reader through an immersion in the tortuous sea (with its abysses, perpetual movement and tidal waves) of sacrifice, martyrdom, mythological imagination, non-cruelty/intimacy, categories of practice and categories of analysis, childhood and warfare, long-term effects of war and its social implications, cultural representations of war and the conflicting narratives it produces.

No less important, as an effect of inevitable anthropological interest in the re-making of the world, this volume supports a counter-rhetoric of war that critiques the dominant rhetoric produced at both the mass media and specialised levels, which depicts war as a necessary evil. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the papers included here make their contribution, in some measure (and in some cases indirectly), to this counter-rhetoric of war without drawing on a humanitarian dehistoricised philanthropical narrative whereby the description of war is closely linked to the ambivalent sense of guilt typical of the modern condition of being Western (or Westernized) – constructed in contrast to the victimized condition of being 'underdeveloped.' Indeed, humanitarian discourse on war fully assimilates the idea of 'horrorism' (Cavarero 2008) but does not help us to see beyond 'the mandatory modern tropes of terror' (Rosen, ivi).

Naturally there are situations that are not fully accounted for within the framework outlined in this volume. What about, for example, the right to collective self-defence? Is a population that is oppressed by fierce tyranny, legitimised in taking up arms? Though such questions appear to fall within the domain of law, they mainly call for serious reflection on what we may view as a universal anthropological feature: the struggle to survive and the desire to do so in the best possible way.

On War (and Radical Contradictions)

At the very moment in which war is transferred from the battlefield into theory and enters the arena of news media debate, positive-sounding discourses tend to be generated, producing functional representations that serve to legitimise war while underestimating and oftentimes outright ignoring what Carolyn Nor-

dstrom (2008) calls 'radical contradictions.' Even when the 'horrorific' argument dominates, its ahistorical and non-situational character eventually comes to support the humanitarian-interventionist approach – proving functional to 'just war' ideology or, at least, to massive humanitarian-developmentalist programs.

To explain the concept of 'radical contradictions,' Nordstrom tells of a human rights activist doing fieldwork in Angola, a man who was strongly committed and active at the front line of many contemporary conflicts, ready to denounce injustice and abuse. He was the head of a major international organization with the mission of stemming the violence of war and assisting its victims: one of the big players. According to Nordstrom, this man was one of the most remarkable and effective proponents of human rights she had ever met. And he was fearless. He went out to the worst areas of fighting and, alone and unarmed, walked right into bunkers, even right into fox holes. Nobody but this man ventured out to the front. He saved thousands of lives by doing so, and risked his own life every day. Yet, he also black-marketed diamonds and had sex with little boys, hungry and desperate war orphans. This man, for Nordstrom, embodies the type of radical contradiction that is inevitable in the world we live in. An anthropology of war, from this perspective, is first and foremost configured as an anthropology of radical contradictions, which inevitably also investigates the contradictions entailed in the ways we represent war and violence – as well as fighters, terrorists, mercenaries, martyrs, and soldiers.[2]

'Enduring contradictions' (Green, ivi) take a variety of forms in the world today, and their consequences are unpredictable (Asad 2007). On the one hand, each individual has to deal with his/her own mortality while on the other, genetic science promises an infinite lifespan. To a certain extent, the sacredness of human life is considered to be above all things,[3] while at the same time people are allowed to kill and die and to do all within their power in order to defend a collective lifestyle. On the one hand, the life of every individual has equal value; on the other, the massacre of 'civilized humans' is perceived (at least in the West) as more touching than that of the 'uncivilized' (Asad 2007).

Of course a soldier, prisoner, scholar, journalist or passive spectator will each absorb the shock of war in different ways – apart from the fact that there are soldiers who become passive spectators, prisoners who are also scholars, or victims who become perpetrators, and so on. Yet, to some extent, large-scale violence also has an impact on those who have never experienced it – whether this results in insensitivity to the suffering of other people, pacifism, political activism or even nihilism. What is at stake here is that war, wherever it is fought (given the multi-level interconnections implied by contemporaneity), affects the deepest dimensions of the ordinary and everyday (Das 2007; 2012) at a global level, with manifold consequences for discourses, experiences and beliefs linked to perceptions of life and death. Furthermore, as Sophie Roche and Linda Green show in

2. See for example the articles of Fabietti, Roche and Rosen in this volume. Cfr. also Das (ivi) for a reflection on inclusion/exclusion from the scene of war.
3. Cfr. also Carrithers, Collins, Lukes 1985 and Joas 2013 for a discussion of the category of 'person' and its sacred dimension.

their contributions, the impact of war on ordinary life certainly does not cease with termination of the armed conflict. On the contrary, war has a temporal extension that reaches far beyond the time spent fighting. Hence the capacity to recognise radical contradictions and to interpret structural mutations in the ordinary constitutes the very purpose of anthropological discourse as a contemporary form of cultural and political critique that goes beyond the contingencies of the conflict frontline.

In 1997 Nordstrom commented:

> When I first began writing about war, I found it surprising that it spoke so clearly to contemporary issues of core cultural processes and personal identity. I found it equally surprising that wars in what many consider more remote parts of the world's power grid illuminated key dynamics of contemporary warfare in the world as a whole (p. 4).

It is worth clarifying here, however, that there is quite an interesting variety of positions within academia concerning what war is or how it should be studied. The intuitive idea that war is the by-product of power struggles and the pursuit of profit is nowadays not at all in fashion among scholars: 'If not exactly false in any simple way, such a vision is nevertheless narrow and misleading' (Smith 2005, p. 3). However, while the investigation of war as part of a broader attempt to explore human complexity is a never-ending road that continuously pushes the analysis in unpredictable directions, a certain form of interpretativism can culminate in essentialist approaches that exaggerate some aspects to the detriment of others. 'By the end,' says Smith at the beginning of his book, 'we will understand that war is not just about culture, but it is all about culture' (Idem, p. 4). The present volume shows that war is not understandable in 'all about something' terms. If, however, we really want to reduce it to a slogan, its causes and implications suggest that war is about us – though such a 'human focus' has repercussions for the non-human: animals, the earth.

Enemies

Whatever the real reasons that generate a war, identifying the enemy is a crucial element of every 'call for conflict.' But the changing character of 'the enemy' does not stand in one univocal and universal category. Wars have taken various forms across time and space to the point that, in certain circumstances, the enemy could not be understood in terms of the identification/construction of a 'distant other.' In the United States, for example, while the 'American Indian Wars (1775-1924) comprising a series of broken treaties, warfare and forced assimilation of Native peoples on the North American continent, circumscribed a ruthless, albeit changing set of policies and practices designed to extinguish Native peoples, a one-two punch of genocide and ethnocide' (Green, ivi), 'the American Revolution was as much a civil war as it was a war of national independence from England.' Furthermore, 'like many modern conflicts, the war was also an internal domestic conflict, which set neighbour against neighbour, brother

against brother, and father against son' (Rosen, ivi). Veena Das also emphasizes this point when she reports Piatigorsky's reflection on 'Arjuna, the warrior hero, having surveyed the enemies in the battlefield [who] wants to put down his weapons since he can see all his kin – fathers, uncles, elders, cousins – on the opposite side and says that he would rather live the life of a beggar than kill his kinsmen' (Das, ivi).

Even proximity to the enemy, however, does not necessarily mean that hate can be avoided. The social production of hate can be the result of complex historical processes as well as of common levels of communication – such as rumour – that create the 'conditions for the circulation of hate' in situations of crisis and social tension (Das 1998). Voices that feed hatred simultaneously destroy the possibility of compassion, in the sense of *sumpatheia* ('concordant vibration,' 'feeling in unison'). At another level, as Das suggests (ivi), the social production of hate unsettles the scene of intimacy, in which non-cruelty is generated. In fact, in order to be able to kill – systematically – it is not enough to (dis)regard the enemy, to despise him/her; it is also necessary to see in the foe an obstacle to the realization of a social project, which in turn implies criteria of inclusion/exclusion. As explained by Green in her paper, war consistently requires transformation of a man's identity from the status of an individual to a member of a fighting group. Here war is not simply a battlefield on which to conduct military actions. It also entails the interlaced dynamics of violence, fear, sacrifice,[4] opportunism, reaffirmation or subversion of the social hierarchy, transfiguration of the 'other,' redefinition of the individual and collective selves. The symbolic construction of the enemy thus becomes a fundamental element for those individuals, groups, factions or governments who incite war, attempting to transform it into an identity-making battle and defence of an existing lifestyle, with the ultimate aim of earning presumed freedom, attaining presumed justice or establishing a new order. Indeed, when war is reduced to an abstract ideal, or even to a way of achieving a transcendental goal, it becomes easier to obscure the connections among the interests of groups, geo-strategic plans, historical antagonisms, access to resources, development politics, privatisation, expansion of the global market, and economic networks linked to licit and illicit trafficking. The very concept of 'ethnic conflict' itself, for example, which has found ample opportunity to come to the fore in contemporary wars, when not inscribed in broader geopolitical scenarios, contributes in part to rendering such correlations less evident – elucidative examples are provided by the Rwandan genocide[5] and the Afghan wars, often seen as internal humanitarian crises with no consideration of the transnational historical processes at the core of internal political unrest. In Afghanistan, this unrest is typically and wrongfully attributed to the country's inability to spontaneously and autonomously embrace democracy. Not surprisingly, while there is widespread awareness in the Western

4. The category of sacrifice is complex and polyvalent and connected to war and violence at different levels. For a discussion see both Fabietti and Lecomte-Tilouine in this volume. See also Das 1983.
5. On the Rwandan case see Mamdani 2001; for a comparative reflection on genocides see Hinton 2002.

media and humanitarian discourses of the dramatic consequences of the Soviet invasion initiated in 1979, the historically negative impact of the Anglo-Afghan wars or the role played by the US in supporting the emergence of fundamentalism during the past twenty-five years, for example, are generally excluded from the representation of internal instability, despite their evident connection with the political tensions of today (De Lauri 2013). As Nazif Shahrani has claimed, 'Afghanistan's current, complicated situation can only be understood by focusing on its failed attempts at nation-state building within the broader geopolitical circumstance of foreign manipulation and proxy wars that have given rise to particular forms of ethnic factionalism' (2002, p. 716).

In such a scenario, ethnicity becomes the concrete manifestation of alterity as the symbolic processing of otherness and difference. In war, that of the 'other' is an uncomfortable and unexciting role, in which physical body becomes a projection of the social body, the most natural, intimate, and thus most significative site at which to identify the somatic signs of an enemy to fight. Regional conflicts are emblematic with regard to the cultural distancing mechanism produced by war. As a counterpoint to this, it is precisely in the violence towards the problematic-other that one looks for the reassuring cultural stabilisation made impossible by the relentlessly constant cultural mutations. It is thus clear that 'violence cannot be mitigated by a rational mode of argumentation but rather by accepting the power of intimacy through which we are called to inhabit the world with the other' (Das, ivi).

The experience of violence is never really cathartic, satisfying or conclusive. If the only objective of war is the mere physical elimination of the enemy, then it is not possible to explain why the torture and destruction of bodies both dead and alive is practiced with such ferocity on so many battlefields. From the researcher's point of view, among the principal difficulties linked to the confrontation with the brutal violence produced by war is the need to produce logical explanations and sound arguments in scenarios that sometimes appear to be senseless. How is it possible to investigate nonsense? How may we explain the fury involved in mutilating bodies, visceral hatred, or murderous desire? A sentiment of elusiveness permeates the 'scene of violence,' and it seems, in some ways, to be akin to placing oneself before the indefinite which, in a tragically paradoxical way, produces clearly visible and verifiable effects: the agony of bodies in pain, abandonment, death. There is a sort of uncertain upper hand that expands to every level of daily routine and that apparently finds its epilogue only in the dialectics of good or bad luck. In her work on violence, Hannah Arendt (1969) argued clearly and impactfully that there are no other circumstances in which luck plays as important a role as on the battlefield.

Achille Mbembe (2003) has noted that war is, after all, as much a means of attaining sovereignty as a way in which to exercise the right to kill.[6] However, it is formally considered unacceptable for a human group to systematically unleash its power on other groups through homicide and violence, including tor-

6. On the sacrificial nature of 'the right to kill' see Lecomte-Tilouine in this volume.

turing and raping people and dissecting their bodies. Although in abstract terms such violence appears unimaginable, it becomes possible to visualize when the murdered or tortured are aligned with dehumanizing representations portraying them as usurpers, cowards, filthy, paltry, unfaithful, vile, disobedient. Thus violence becomes a dramatic attempt to transform, redefine and establish social boundaries; to affirm one's own existence and deny that of the other. The context of war is therefore a transformative space because the experience of violence is transformative (Taussig 2004). At another level, this transformative power transcends the time-span of the actual conflict determining a long-term impact on the definition of communities and actors (Roche, ivi).

Foucault (1975) has explained that the ultimate purpose of violence is not to inflict pain but to create categories of people (cfr. also Lecomte-Tilouine, ivi), and to forge and keep boundaries around them. In this sense, the other's body is simultaneously the mirror and the tool of the attempt to establish (cultural, social, political) fences between individuals and groups. By extension, it follows that the violence generated by war is not mere empirical fact, but also a complex form of social communication (Fabietti, ivi). Insofar as this social communication is channelled within a specific imaginary and a transnational rhetoric governed by the dominant logic of war as a traditional form of political action, it becomes an integral part of the process of legitimising violence on a large scale.

Rhetorics

From my early childhood onwards, I learned about war through the memories of my grandparents and the signs (scars, amputations) on the bodies of their brothers and sisters. I have seen the wounds of war while travelling in Afghanistan. I have acquired an understanding of the long-term effects of the violence of war through meeting refugees, veterans and military in different parts of the planet. Diachronic comparison is useful in tackling the controversial issue of the rhetoric of war. In this paragraph, I therefore use two examples from two different geographical and historical contexts to reflect on the anti-war potentials of 'indiscipline' and to point out the dialectical tension between alternative rhetorics of war.

Carlo told me his story shortly before his death. He was born in the province of Lecco (Northern Italy) on the 1st May 1918, the year in which the Great War was turning into a fragile and temporary epilogue. He passed away in 2009, with his daughter and niece at his bedside. Carlo was an introverted man who was extremely respectful of rules. Without a doubt, nobody could have defined him as being talkative. His sparing use of speech vanished only when speaking about his beloved job as a shoemaker, or when his memories carried him back to the years of the Second World War, when he was a soldier, or a 'small soldier,' as a Roman officer used to call him due to his short height.

It is widely accepted that war is an extremely tragic event. However, historical records, literature and cinematography have contributed to giving shape to a sort of ethics of war identifying something humanly noble about it, something

that directly connects tragedy with grandeur as though to say: in war, human beings touch the lowest level of their existence, but at the same time it enables them to aspire to something 'more important'; they can make something more than a mere man or a mere woman of themselves; they can become heroes who escape the banality of daily routine and boldly write their names in history. Glory, honour, defence of homeland, sacrifice and martyrdom are all elements that make the tragedy of war more acceptable to some degree, elements that make up the plot of a fertile rhetoric of war and exploit the tragedies and suffering in the name of 'something greater,' a superior interest that justifies the payment of innumerable lives.

Yet, Carlo's memories emphasized the suffering, famine, cold, thirst, the loss of dear friends, the affirmation of the hierarchy and loss of self (in war not everyone pays with his/her own life, only some: others govern or guide the more vulnerable to their immolation to the conquest of this 'something' that demands such extreme sacrifice). In her essay, Veena Das reminds us that loss of one's self is an 'essential corollary of warfare.' No matter what the result of war is, given the moral overturning and the public and intimate violence that war generates, 'the self and all forms of relatedness will become frayed, if not lost.'

At the time of the Italian expedition to Russia, Carlo, who could read and who had somewhere read the story of Napoleon, knew what the Italian soldiers were going to face; he knew that the expedition would not be a bed of roses. He was serving in Rome at the time. He loved the city but was homesick and missed his fields and country lanes. When the time came to leave for the cold Russian lands, his restlessness became unbearable: 'it was not the right thing to do.' His life had already once been miraculously saved while wearing that uniform, the meaning of which he did not fully understand. He began to eat less and less. In a few weeks, his body became so weak that his captain took him to the medical lieutenant colonel. 'This man is undernourished; he cannot leave,' said the doctor. The captain, who had his own requirements to reckon with, did not want to accept this and tried to convince the doctor that the soldier had to go. 'I repeat, this man is ill,' decreed the doctor. So Carlo was exempted from the expedition and assigned other duties. 'I would have died,' he often repeated. The expedition had meant the death of his comrades who, whether or not aware of the freezing ordeal to come, had been obliged to go.

Carlo's story is certainly not to be rated among those echoing the hegemonic rhetoric that constantly invades talks, movies, songs, novels, poetry, and history books about war, in which the main focus is on killed heroes, not reluctant and 'indisciplined soldiers.' This dominant rhetoric alternates victimizing perspectives with glorifying narratives, sometimes in a schizophrenic fashion. From a comparative perspective, it is interesting to look at Carlo's hesitation in relation to other forms of what might be considered indiscipline and disobedience from an official-military viewpoint. As we have been reminded by Renato Solmi (2007), from 1965 onwards, movements opposing the war in Vietnam had repercussions also within the US military forces. The case of the Fort Hood Three was one of the first episodes of dissent against the Vietnam war in the US

army. Dennis Mora, James Johnson and David Samas were stationed at Fort Hood in Texas, when in 1966 they received the order to leave for Vietnam. The three soldiers prepared a joint statement in which they refused to obey the order, arguing that the Vietnam war was unjust, immoral and illegal. They claimed they did not want to take part in a war of extermination and they rejected such a criminal waste of American lives and resources (Solmi 2007, p. 624). The soldiers were arrested and each was condemned to three years of imprisonment by different tribunals. It has been observed that during the Vietnam war 'the military itself was the locus of widespread antiwar activity. Opposition to the war intensified as service personnel began to see themselves as occupying the front ranks of a multi-faceted struggle against American imperialism abroad and injustice at home.' Some, like the Fort Hood Three, 'analyzed the disobedience in explicitly political terms. Others sought Conscientious Objector status, even while they served in the military' (Tischler 2002, p. 395). Since then, many US soldiers have been arrested and condemned because they expressed dissent (Mattern 1990) – the post-war activism of Iraq veterans is one of the most recent examples. Although these cases of 'feeble voices' opposing the Leviathan from the inside have generally been read as forms of mere disobedience, their implications go much further.

Beyond the difference in the historical, political and social contexts of Carlo's and the Fort Hood Three's stories, both subvert the idea of the soldier as an emblem of the 'disciplined body' (Foucault 1975; cfr. also Basaglia 2005 and Goffman 1961 for a broader understanding of the category), a sort of religious figure who 'has a mission and a calling' (Lutz, Millar 2012, p. 487), somehow similar to the 'already dead' described by Fabietti in his contribution to this volume. The indisciplined soldier, it is worth pointing out, is different to the contractor (the modern version of the mercenary and one of the most visible effects of the privatization of warfare – whose death mostly remains unknown), different to the soldier who is unaware (whom we have discovered thanks to Hannah Arendt's banality of evil), and different to the deviant soldier (he/she who loses control, commits a crime or is guilty of excesses in the exercise of violence). The latter three figures are all functional to the hierarchical order. Although it may seem illogical, even the action of the deviant soldier is somehow predictable. Examples are provided by US soldiers who tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib and by the US soldier (even though there are still doubts as to whether or not he acted alone) that in March 2012 killed children, women and men in Southern Afghanistan for no apparent reason. A ferocity that at first appears incredible, yet may be explained within the dehumanizing framework provided by war. In order to reaffirm the authority of the government and the legitimacy of war, the soldier is condemned, perhaps even executed, but his action remains functional to the macro-logics of the conflict, such as creating a climate of terror, exacerbating hatred, and justifying further interventions (or justifying withdrawal, depending on the specific political moment – e.g. election time). The indisciplined soldier, on the contrary, challenges authority, reacts to a fate that seems already sealed, and searches for his/her own humanity just as war is trying to annihilate it.

Yet the agency of those who take part in war needs to be understood in another sense too. As Mbembe puts it,

> Dominant and dominated participate in the same *épistéme*. It is against the backdrop of these commonly shared 'canon' and 'genres' that one must conceive of and interpret practices of 'disorder' and indiscipline, desertion, disguise, duplication (*dédoublement*, *doublebouche*) and 'improvisation' (1992b, p. 133).

Carlo's story, for instance, might be seen as a story of indiscipline, disguise and improvisation while the Fort Hood Three case might be regarded as a story of indiscipline and 'exposure.' Because of its co-participative epistemic nature, however, war cannot be simply described as the by-product of political decisions from above, but is also determined by participation and initiatives from below.[7] This, of course, complicates the picture, as does the connection between individual actions and global forces (Nordstrom 2007). Also, the very concept of 'discipline' itself is complex and not to be understood in a univocal sense – just as the concept of 'indiscipline' cannot be viewed as an 'invariably positive' tool. On the theme of political discipline, Antonio Gramsci has for example observed that

> To discipline oneself is to make oneself independent and free. Water is pure and free when it flows between the banks of a river or stream, not when it is sprinkled chaotically on the soil or when in rarefied form it escapes into the atmosphere. Those in politics who do not adhere to a discipline are like substances in a gaseous state or contaminated by foreign elements: therefore useless and harmful (1967, p. 50; my translation).

It must nevertheless be noted that the history of political discipline on the one hand, and the history of protest movements around the world on the other, suggest that it may be deceptive to consider political action valid and effective only when imbued with political discipline. Furthermore, if scholars have devoted analytical effort (and some, political commitment) to understanding the causes of extreme violence and investigating the close relationship between historical processes and agency, so as to grasp the long-term wounds of those who 'did their job' in battle, it should at least be recognized that the stories of 'indisciplined soldiers' mostly remain untold in mainstream narratives. And throughout human history, untold stories have always had something to reveal that runs contrary to consolidated myths[8] and official memory – Howard Zinn (2001) has provided some useful examples.

To be sure, from West to East, dominant narratives of/on war are anything but the product of a coarse ideology. They rather embody a complex fusion of morality and doctrine, reason and pragmatism. In the humanities and social sciences there are many instances of those (including eminent personalities of the

7. See for example Mamdani 2001 and Rosen, ivi.
8. Michael Taussig has noted that 'cultures of terror are based on and nourished by silence and myth' (2004, p. 469). On silence as a mechanism for perpetuating violence see also Green in this volume.

past, from Machiavelli to Sun Tzu, from Evans-Pritchard to Wittgenstein) who have combined critical thinking – sometimes a revolutionary way of thinking, in the sense of those who revolutionise themselves, adopting a radically different way of expending their lives (Wittgenstein 1987) – with a personal pragmatic-interventionist tendency, or those who have objectified war as a social fact with few emotional implications, or those who have thought to prove themselves through the experience of war, or again those who have associated scientific/professional expertise with military intelligence.[9]

Conflicting narratives on war are engaged in a continuous relationship with the 'War, Inc.' universe. While on the one hand the hegemonic position of governments and large corporations fuels a dominant rhetoric that tries to offer a more acceptable image of war, presenting it as an inevitable step towards solving extreme situations, on the other hand 'indiscipline' as a critical category may be seen as a useful instrument for the production of a counter-rhetoric of war. And this implies reflecting on the political and cultural use of categories such as evil, good, justice, honour, homeland, and sacrifice, categories that become 'legitimating concepts' allowing those who detain power to preserve it (Wallerstein 2006).

A counter-rhetoric of war is, clearly, rhetoric in the sense of *rhetorikè téchne,* or the 'art of saying.' It is positioning. In this perspective, a counter-rhetoric of war avoids the traditional dichotomies of dominant war discourses. In fact, beyond the ritual forms used to refer to contexts of war and peace, the papers in this volume show that these two poles of the human condition seem to take (indeed to have taken) different forms in the global scenario, pointing up a tragic continuity between one (war) and the other (peace).

The positioning I am discussing here is not necessarily to be understood within the political framework of pacifism[10] – and of course it rejects the combination of pacifism, just war tradition and divine justice (Charles 2005). The first goal of a counter-rhetoric of war might be to destabilise the certainty of positions that aim to define what war is (intrinsic to human nature, inevitable in the logic of confrontation, a primitive way of solving a crisis, a necessity in order to protect human rights and free women from fundamentalist regimes, and so on) 'with an increasing determination bordering on the evangelical,' as Clifford Geertz (1984, p. 268) would have argued. The anthropology of war, however, is not limited to this counter-discourse. It is also 'creative narration' which continually places at the core of its *raison d'être* the relationship between the ethics of knowledge, political commitment and a moral dialectic. The last-mentioned factor mainly concerns the way in which a moral anthropology of war (Lutz, Millar 2012) – following the orientation of a critical moral anthropology (Fassin 2012) – investigates the different moralities of war and relates to what has been termed 'moral dissonance' (French 2011).

9. Some of these elements are traceable to and/or discussed in Cramer 2006; Edwards 2010; El-Tom 2012; Gray 2006; Gusterson 2007; Kelly et al. 2010; Price 2008; Utas 2009.

10. For a definition, see for example the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu

Indeed, contemporary wars have far-reaching implications and increasingly call for committed engagement from scholars. The state of being contemporary amplifies and redefines the very idea of involvement and commitment that, in the anthropological field, seems to oscillate between the embracing of a variety of non-hierarchized cultural alternatives (Barth 1994) and the politico-cultural criticism that tends to challenge and oppose structures of violence, practices of supremacy and forms of submission. It is of absolute importance to try to explain why and how a large part of the world's population live in dire need and is considered expendable in the name of god, democracy, justice, freedom, security – or, behind these, profit, control, egoism. Yet, the space between merely economic-political explanations of war and sociobiological assumptions[11] still needs to be properly filled. This in-between space is, to a certain extent, the space in which the anthropologists who have contributed to this collection give shape to their arguments.

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11. See for example Chanon 1966, 1996; Crook 1994; Diamond 1997; Dunbar 1985; Shaw, Wong 1989; Sosisa, Kressb, Bosterb 2007; Thayer 2004.

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