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### **Raising an Army: The Geopolitics of Militarizing the Lives of Working-Class Boys in an Age of Austerity**

**Abstract:** This article examines the political and social impact of elevating military values in society in a context of austerity. Centring on discussions around two British Government 'military ethos' initiatives, I consider the idea that military service instils desirable qualities and values in military personnel, making them well-suited to educating and socialising children, to the advantage of both children and society. Arguing that these schemes primarily target boys from disadvantaged backgrounds in an effort to turn them into 'productive' members of society, I suggest that military ethos initiatives not only contribute to the 'raising' of working-class boys but the raising of a class-based Army. Moreover, rather than focusing solely on the implications of the military ethos in the British context, I argue that its underlying assumptions about military socialisation as a social good have significant geopolitical effects. Through characterising the military as a core institution of society and its values as moral and good for children, these initiatives obscure the military's core violent functions. Thus by both normalising violence and militarism in everyday life and targeting boys from disadvantaged backgrounds, military ethos initiatives engender the subjectivities that provide the very political, social economic, and indeed, practical resources that make war possible.

**Key words:** austerity; militarism; geopolitics of the everyday; military ethos;; gender, race and class

Making sense of war requires understanding the multiplicity of practices, materialities and logics that animate it. As Jabri (2006:49) argues, our contemporary knowledge of the world is constructed and materialised through a global war on terror, which has permeated “the normality of the political process” and produced a “mutually reinforcing relationship between global and local conditions” (Jabri 2006: 50, 52). Accordingly, our analyses of war must traverse “scales from the macrosecurity of states to the microsecurity of people and their homes” (Hyndman 2007: 36) and consider how they can be mutually co-constitutive. By focusing on the everyday practices and logics surrounding the British government’s agenda to entrench something called the ‘military ethos’ in schools, this article considers how this agenda, as a practice of neoliberal governmentality, which “has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument” (Foucault 2007: 108), facilitates war and militarism in an age of austerity. Following Jessop (2007: 36), I propose analysing “power where it is exercised over individuals” and social groups, in order to better understand how “diverse power relations come to be colonized and articulated into more general mechanisms that sustain more encompassing forms of domination”. More specifically, I explore how military ethos initiatives contribute to recruitment into the armed forces and promote popular support for war by presenting the military, its practices and its personnel as socially and economically productive. I demonstrate this by considering how military ethos initiatives have emerged in a wider social context of austerity in which it is imperative to make working-class boys economically and socially productive.

The current British Conservative government has been advocating and funding military ethos initiatives since it was a coalition partner in 2010. Though not comprehensively defined, broadly speaking, the military ethos refers to the idea that certain values and qualities are inherent to military personnel and veterans, as a direct result of their military socialisation or ‘raising’ and service. As former Education Secretary, Michael Gove, claimed “[e]very child can benefit from the values of a military ethos. Self-discipline and teamwork are at the heart of what makes our armed forces the best in the world - and are exactly what all young

people need to succeed” (DfE 2012). Thus, based on a series of assumptions about the social and educational value of military service, large amounts of Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Department for Education (DfE) funds<sup>1</sup> have been committed to military ethos initiatives. These include two schemes which form a focus for my discussion: employing veterans to “improve educational achievement among pupils disengaged with education” in alternative provision<sup>2</sup> (hereafter AP) (DfE 2012)<sup>3</sup> at a cost of around £8.2m to date; and *Troops to Teachers* (hereafter T2T) which fast-tracks veterans, including some without degrees, into teacher training, which has attracted over £10m in government funding so far<sup>4</sup>.

In an ‘age of austerity’, such allocation of state resources perhaps warrants even greater scrutiny than usual. Austerity measures are based on the neoliberal conviction that the market should be centred to maximise individual freedom. In the UK, austerity invokes the ‘blitz spirit’ of wartime scarcity, aiming to “garner public support for the reduction or withdrawal of welfare entitlements through appeals to frugality, self-sufficiency and fiscal prudence” (MacLeavy 2011: 355). As Kiersey (2009: 385; see also Foucault 2008) argues, subjects are produced through this legitimisation of “market-based technologies”; a subject whose “first responsibility is to the reproduction of itself as the rational, capital-bearing subject of Homo oeconomicus [...] a subject who accepts that the ‘rules of the game’” oblige her or him to “commit forcefully to the improvement of his own human capital and position in the market”.

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<sup>1</sup> Another key military ethos initiative is the expansion of cadet forces in state-funded schools. In 2012, £10.85m was pledged for 100 new units by 2015. A further £1m was pledged in June 2014 and in 2015’s summer budget, a further £50 million was allocated to create 500 new cadet units by 2020, despite indications that the original aim of 100 by 2015 has not been met (Scott 2015). Much military ethos funding has come from LIBOR fines which were imposed by the government on British banks for their attempts to manipulate this benchmark inter-bank borrowing rate. Some private match-funding has also been provided.

<sup>2</sup> Alternative provision herein refers to education arranged by schools or local authorities for pupils who have been excluded or who have been directed to off-site provision to improve their behaviour (see DfE 2013)

<sup>3</sup> In 2011, £1.5m was allocated to groups that enabled ex-service personnel to “use the skills and experience gained on the frontline to help young people achieve”, especially those deemed “disadvantaged” and often in receipt of free school meals (DfE 2011). In 2012, a further £1.9m was awarded and in 2014, a further £4.8m, to similar schemes.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately £2m has already been spent on T2T and a consortium of universities has won a further £8.7m tender for extending the scheme from February 2015 to September 2018 (Nye 2014).

Military ethos initiatives are an example of such market-based technologies of neoliberal governmentality. Whilst cutbacks have been made throughout the state apparatus, including to education, substantial funding has been allocated to military ethos initiatives, primarily to enhance state-schooling. Putting services out to tender is a common neoliberal practice that pits the market against investing in the supposedly 'inefficient' public sector (Means 2013). Military ethos initiatives problematize state-schools and teachers, not decades of disinvestment, for 'failing' to instil proper standards of discipline (Means 2013) and as such, constitute education and subjects consistent with neoliberalism though militarised practices. Through an emphasis on martial values such as self-discipline, education becomes a commodity through which appropriately self-reliant, economically productive subjects can be made.

Though the 'military ethos' is rarely defined substantively by its proponents, military service has long been regarded as a resource of social capital on the grounds that as servants of the state, soldiers necessarily serve others over themselves (Coker 2007: 134). Mileham (1998: 238) further argues that the military's ethos of self-sacrifice is distinct from the "cult of individualism" that supposedly characterises civilian life. This leads some to suggest that soldiers not only "elevate the collective good over individual needs" but accordingly "cleave to higher moral standards" than civilians (Strachan 2003: 50). It is this supposed moral superiority that military ethos proponents believe makes veterans valuable in schools. Socially productive moral heroes require unproductive immoral villains though, and military ethos initiatives require 'working-class boys', in particular, to improve. As Tyler (2008: 18) explains, social anxieties frequently give rise to figures such as the 'working class boy' which not only demonise but also "attribute superior forms of social capital to the subject positions and social groups they are implicitly or explicitly differentiated from".

UK Government plans to introduce the T2T programme were first announced as part of a government commitment to raise the quality of new entrants to the teaching profession. This needs to be understood in a wider political and social context

though where there is increasing concern over UK educational standards and the perceived 'antisocial' behaviour of school-age children, particularly boys (Dermott 2012). Veterans have been posited as a potential 'solution' to this social problem, yet the White Paper does not clarify why; it simply notes that veterans "have a great deal to offer young people as mentors" (DfE 2010: 22). Indeed, as with other military policies, the military ethos and its perceived benefits are never fully explicated by its proponents. It is, I would suggest, this very vagueness that makes it more malleable and thus politically useful (Ingham 2014); and it is the political effects of knowledge claims about the military ethos, however vague, that interest me.

The rhetoric of aspiration and social mobility also dominates in the self-reliant age of austerity. Becoming 'upwardly mobile' depends on aspiring to improve; on caring for oneself and converting "our looking from the outside...towards oneself" (Foucault 2005: 11). The idea that individuals should be responsible for 'improving their lot' is precisely what has led many to acquiesce to the "sharp distinctions of wealth and power" that exist in society and to accept austerity as a rational course (Reay 2013: 665). Whilst proponents of the military ethos argue it will improve the life-chances of "young people, often from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds", by instilling "discipline, self-respect and a sense of purpose" in them (Gove in DfE 2011), as Reay (2013) argues, children from disadvantaged backgrounds lack advantages, not purpose. The interweaving of disadvantage with a lack of discipline, self-respect and drive is thus a practice of "class making" (Tyler 2008: 18). By virtue of 'belonging' to social groups characterised by dependency and a lack of care for the self, those from 'disadvantaged backgrounds', not wider socio-economic conditions of possibility, are constituted as problems needing to be solved.

As I will argue, it is through such class-making that military ethos initiatives can encourage 'working-class' children to swap formal qualifications for skills especially well-suited to serving in the lowest, and often most dangerous, military ranks. By reinforcing the military as a site of opportunity - in some cases the *only* site - military ethos initiatives may ensure that the most vulnerable, and often least politically enfranchised, continue to fight and die in disproportionate numbers. As

contemporary geopolitics is now arguably “less about staking territorial claims than about securing access to market expansion” (Gilbert 2015: 215), society’s least productive subjects can be made productive by war.

Military ethos initiatives also normalise the military, the state’s mechanism for violence, in everyday life. By constituting the military as a core institution of society and its values as moral and good for Britain’s children, its core violent functions are obscured. This, I argue can foster militarism, defined herein as the “veneration of military values and appearances in excess of what is strictly necessary for effective defence” (Strachan 1997: 264-265). Although militarism can emerge from military objectives and priorities seeping into civilian life, importantly, militarism also emerges from “non-state actors behaving in non-orchestrated ways” (Jenkins *et al* 2012: 357). Thus, to better understand how military violence is made possible we must, to paraphrase Lutz (2006), be mindful that ‘war is in the details’. Everyday life is a significant site where “geographical knowledge about the world is being produced, reproduced and modified” (O’Tuathail & Agnew 1992:195).

In the sections that follow I therefore examine the inter-weavings of, schooling, gender, race, class, austerity and an ontology of war that traverses scales, to consider how the militarizing of children’s lives can animate war. In the first section I examine the politics of austerity and militarism that have allowed military ethos initiatives to emerge and be discursively constructed as a panacea for perceived social ills. The second and third sections then explore some of the most significant geopolitical implications of the military ethos. Firstly I consider how military ethos initiatives directly contribute to Britain’s ability to wage war through labour exploitation of working-class boys in an age of austerity. Following on from this, I then aim to show how military ethos initiatives, and their underlying assumptions about the desirability of military service as a social good, normalise the military and its violence in everyday life to facilitate militarism. I conclude by suggesting that all this emphasises the importance of considering how war, often regarded a macro geopolitical practice, is made possible by enactments and negotiations of militarism

and violence in everyday life (Basham 2013; Gray 2016; Hyde 2016), including those often neglected forms that target children in the Global North (Beier, ed. 2011).

### **Gender, Race, Class and Militarised 'Solutions'**

The original T2T programme arose in the United States where state-schooling is a recurring source of social anxiety, particularly in euphemistic 'urban' schools, where mostly impoverished, non-white children are educated (Means 2013). In the UK, social anxiety similarly focuses on the need to target 'inner-city' schools, terminology that evokes both classed and racialized images of potentially dangerous youths for the British public (Chadderton 2014). The social and political obsession with young people, particularly boys, being raised without father-figures, is often racially coded as a prevalent problem among poorer families of African-Caribbean heritage; educational underachievement among certain minority-ethnic groups also often receives disproportionate media attention (Chadderton 2014). Concerns are similarly raised about white underprivileged children (House of Commons Education Committee 2014) but the racial coding differs; white children are not supposed to fail.

. As Dermott (2012: 224) points out, whilst evidence on the significance of gender to educational attainment is inconclusive, "populist and political commentators still continue to lament the fate of boys vis-a-vis girls", whatever their race. 'Backlash', social indicators of growing resentment towards women and the feminist movement, fuelled by the conviction that the (albeit limited) progress of women signifies impending "masculine doom", is evident here (Faludi 1992:13). The oft touted solution is that more male teachers in classrooms will offer struggling boys positive role models. Many austerity measures rely on the enduring assumption that men are primary wage-earners, supported by women's secondary wages; this often makes women much more reliant on benefits and tax credits to supplement their incomes than men, and more vulnerable as these services are cut (MacLeavy 2011). This gendering could partly account for the emphasis in military ethos initiatives of getting male veterans into 'inner-city problem schools' to rehabilitate 'working-class boys'. Men are expected to be productive and women, re- and/or less productive.



These expectations fuel the assumption that men are best-placed to provide qualities otherwise omitted from education and these also infuse military ethos initiatives. For example, former Education Minister, Michael Gove (2011), argued that T2T was being launched in the UK:

“specifically in order to ensure that there are many more male role models entering teaching... Professionals who have devoted their lives to training young men and women in uniform will have the chance to intervene earlier in the lives of those they are best equipped to help”.

Similarly, a report on T2T by the *Centre for Policy Studies*, a right-wing think tank founded by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher in 1974, asserts that in ‘inner-city schools’:

“ex-servicemen could have a profound effect on discipline and learning. This is not merely because ex-servicemen are sure of their own moral authority. They are not intimidated by adrenaline-fuelled adolescents: they have, unlike most teachers, been there before” (Burkard 2008: 7).

Enloe (2000: 289) argues that militaries and militarised practices frequently privilege masculinity but they do so “by manipulating the meanings of both femininity and masculinity”. For example, in the UK military women are, at the time of writing, excluded from close-combat roles. A blanket ban exists on the grounds that *all* women, by virtue of being women, pose a potential threat to unit cohesion. It is assumed that men will react more emotionally to the injury or death of a woman than a man, and that women will provoke sexual competition among men in a unit. In both cases, men and women are characterised as having innate characteristics and biological urges. This maintains the normality of women’s exclusion from the Infantry, regardless of individual merit, and confirms that only men are up to carrying out the military’s primary function (Basham 2009; 2013). Even though various scholars have shown that gendered and sexualised practices within militaries are in fact “structured by contradiction” (Belkin 2012: 4; Connell 1995; Bulmer 2013),

military policy tends to be plagued by “inequalities that are the products of social structure rather than the presence or absence of individual attributes, such as intelligence, physical strength, and so on” (Morgan 2004: 167). Such essentialisms are often found at the nexus of war, militarism and gender. As Higate and Hopton (2004: 435) argue, support for military ethos-style activities such as the use of military drill and physical training in schools and the penal system, as ways to prepare young men for “law-abiding adulthood”, rely on the notion that anti-social behaviour arises from “destructive biological urges that military-style discipline will enable them to control”. Importantly, as they point out, this venerates militarism as “the ultimate form of disciplined masculinity” (Higate & Hopton 2004).

As men continue to constitute 89.1% of the UK regular armed forces, the likelihood is that ex-servicemen will dominate military ethos schemes. Furthermore, the majority of these men are likely to be white since only 7.1 % of members of the UK regular armed forces are of a minority ethnicity (MoD 2014). Such explicit prioritisation of male role models and implicit prioritisation of whiteness obscures the racial and gendered privileges that structure the British military and wider society (Ware 2012). As Chadderton (2014) points out, white supremacy already permeates the British education system which military ethos initiatives will reinforce; by sending predominantly white veterans into ‘problem’ schools with high concentrations of minority ethnic children, racialized stereotypes of unruliness and violence are confirmed, contributing to racialized essentialisms.

The veneration of militarised masculinity is frequently drawn upon by proponents of military ethos initiatives. For example the Centre for Policy Studies’ report goes on to argue that ex-servicemen are:

“perceived as having made it in a macho profession. Even though the individual soldier may not actually be proficient in combat, unarmed or otherwise...it is the image that counts. Whether we like it or not, children from more deprived neighbourhoods often respond to raw physical power” (Burkard 2008: 8).

This claim not only normalises the military as pro-typically masculine but also embraces the idea that physical aggression is “part of (male) working-class youth culture and presents the armed services as a way of harnessing this rather than seeking to downplay the value of aggression” (Dermott 2012: 231; see also Messerschmidt 2005). Though studies show that the British public grossly overestimates the involvement of children in crime (*inter alia* Barnado’s 2008; Fitch 2009; Bawdon 2009) this has not prevented working-class boys from becoming Britain’s latest ‘folk devils’ (Cohen 2002). The *Centre for Policy Studies* report is peppered with references to ‘deprivation’ and ‘roughness’ closely tied to low educational achievement and poor behaviour; the implications of this are that poverty breeds aggression and bad behaviour that then becomes grounds for intervention. Such logics are consistent with a neoliberal governmentality of austerity, self-reliance and individual merit; it is “boys in disadvantaged, working class communities who exhibit resistance to school [...who become] a problem in need of a solution”, and a militarised one at that, rather than the intersectional structures of classing, gendering and racializing that disadvantage these children (Dermott 2012: 229).

Military service has long been regarded as a process that ‘turns boys into men’, and as something that will improve the life chances of the ill-disciplined (*inter alia* Morgan 1987; Hockey 2003). However, in his critique of the role of the military in constructing cohesive national communities, Krebs (2004) argues that the impact of military training on individuals is often overstated. He points out that soldiers are not merely passive vehicles of military socialisation, and that military service is not necessarily the only organising principle in soldiers’ lives. Other features of social life, such as having a family, civilian friends, non-military hobbies and so on, all suggest that the military is not all-encompassing. Military ethos initiatives rely precisely however, on a logic where having been socialised through military practices, culture and norms, individuals, with otherwise disparate skills and experiences, become uniquely qualified to teach. Though individuals who have served in the military may make excellent teachers, and indeed, whilst military service may have provided them

with suitable practical skills, in applying a broad-brush approach to what military personnel 'are', the military ethos also effectively militarises veterans, as well as the children it seeks to target for intervention. Such identity claims mean that soldiers do not have to still be 'in' the military to be 'of' it.

Connell (1995:224) argues that military violence also "requires more than one kind of masculinity"; in particular, the "gender practice of the general is different from the practice of the front-line soldier, and armies acknowledge this by training them separately". Military ethos initiatives, however, venerate all veterans vis-à-vis their military service, concealing the structural disadvantages between them in order to promote military service as a social good for all. Military socialisation and training has however, been shown to engender significant harm to individuals and social groups. For example, over half of UK military personnel surveyed in a recent study perceived their military career as having a negative impact on their children. Though reasons for this included hardships brought about by being divorced, separated or widowed, long and recurrent deployments and post-traumatic stress disorders were also associated by military personnel with negative impacts on their children (Rowe et al 2014). Excessive alcohol consumption is also more common than in the general population in the British military (Fear et al 2007) with servicemen in particular being "likely to drink twice as much alcohol as civilians" (MoD 2008:4); and correlations have been found between acts of violence by military personnel on returning home and their holding a combat role (MacManus et al 2011).

Moreover, it is unclear as to how loyalty, self-discipline and motivation have become 'exclusive' to military and ex-military personnel. Indeed, there is an endless list of individuals, as well as identifiable occupational groups, who inculcate such values including police officers, social workers, doctors, nurses, charity and aid workers, journalists, and even teachers! As Janowitz (1960:175) has also pointed out, though the military can be seen as "a complete style of life", any profession "which performs a crucial 'life and death' task, such as medicine...develops such claims". All military personnel become vehicles of "values central to a successful society such as loyalty, self-discipline and motivation...that the nation's children will thrive under" for

military ethos proponents however (Fox in DfE 2011). As ‘solutions’ to the ‘problem’ of how to make working-class boys productive members of society, servicemen become more valuable still. Thus in an age of austerity, both children and soldiers are made ‘docile’ by the military ethos; that is to say, improved through their social and economic utility (Foucault 1991a). At the same time, the promotion of self-reliance and individualism that engenders support for providing ‘wayward youths’ with better life ‘choices’, insulates wider society from its role in reproducing the very structural inequalities that constitute that lack of life choices in the first place. As I will go on to argue, this has significant geopolitical as well as societal implications.

### **Raising an Army**

Self-reliance also lies at the centre of the Conservative Government’s ‘Big Society’ initiative. The Big Society, which featured prominently in the Conservative Party’s 2010 manifesto, is, for its proponents all “about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It’s about putting more power in people’s hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities” (Cabinet Office 2013). However, as Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley (2014: 452) argue, its aim and effect is “to produce a population of efficient, responsible, productive and self-governing individuals and communities”. Military ethos initiatives, including the veteran-led AP scheme SkillForce, have been identified as ‘great examples’ of the “Big Society in action” that “will allow former Service personnel to make a real difference to young peoples’ lives” (Fox in DfE 2011).

As Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley (2014) have similarly shown in their analysis of the National Citizen Service - another Big Society initiative that also targets young people - military ethos initiatives seek to render bodies politically useful. In the case of children targeted for veteran-led interventions, strictly regulated military-style activities seek to transform the child into a productive member of the wider social and political community. This facilitates the production of particular ‘truths’ about both the ideal citizen and society. At the same time, idealising former soldiers as experts in ‘proper’ conduct also draws – in this case, martial - boundaries around the kinds of qualities and values that full members of society ought to embody. As has

long been the case, the majority of recruits to the lowest ranks of the British Army - the vast majority of whom are men - still come from the most socially and economically deprived backgrounds (Gee 2007). By targeting 'problem' children, coded through practices of racializing, gendering and class-making, through a logic of self-sufficiency, economic productivity and opportunity, military ethos initiatives enable the military continue to draw on those members of society who are often the most-disadvantaged to replenish its lowest ranks.

Indeed, the aforementioned Centre for Policy Studies' report suggests that military ethos initiatives could "relieve the chronic recruiting problems faced by our armed forces" (Burkard, 2008: 9). What it fails to mention however, is that by targeting specific socio-economic groups for intervention, military ethos initiatives may be a significant recruiting tool for entry into the least well paid, and often the most dangerous, military roles. In the UK there are clear links between poverty and under-attainment in education. For example, among pupils in secondary education, children eligible for free school meals are half as likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C, including English and maths, than children from wealthier backgrounds (Cabinet Office, UK 2010). To qualify for officer training, applicants require specific qualifications (see British Army 2015a) and over 80% of cadets at Sandhurst, the British Army's Officer Training College, are university graduates (British Army 2015b). Without these qualifications, applicants enter the 'other' ranks of the British military.

The highest concentration of non-qualified, working-class men in the British military is in the Army's all-male infantry regiments, those units that engage enemies at close range (Beevor 1991; Gee 2007). As of 1 April 2014, there were 1570 under-18s in the Army, representing around 89% of all under-18s in the UK armed forces (MoD 2014). According to Child Soldiers International (2011), the UK operates the lowest military recruitment age in Europe and is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council to recruit 16 year-olds<sup>5</sup>. Following a spate of deaths of military recruits at

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<sup>5</sup> 16 year-old recruits to the British Army have to serve a total minimum service period of six years; 17 year-olds must serve for five. In October 2014, Child Soldiers International launched a judicial review

initial training establishments between 1995 and 2002, the UK Commons Select Committee on Defence (2005) conducted an extensive review of the MoD's duty of care to its youngest members. The review stated that 'concerns' were raised "about the appropriateness" of recruiting under 18s and it was recommended that the MoD "examine the potential impact of raising the recruitment age for all three Services to 18" (House of Commons Select Committee on Defence 2005: 7). However, in the MoD's (2005a: 1) response, they argued that:

"The Services need to attract those under 18 in order to compete effectively in an increasingly competitive employment market, and any move to increase the minimum recruiting age would have an acute impact on the Services' ability to meet their recruiting targets and hence operational commitments".

Even in the current context of personnel reductions in the armed services, the military's need to attract under-18s is unlikely to change. According to recent figures, the average age of officers in the British military is 37 years and the average age for personnel of other ranks is 30 years (MoD 2014). However, plans for the future armed forces of 2020 involve a more streamlined but rapidly deployable, expeditionary armed forces. In the Army, the infantry will play a key role and they typically recruit men aged between 18 and 24 years. As this demographic is set to decline across the UK by around 12% over the next decade (Hammond 2012), the imperative to attract young men is likely to increase. Given that the British military are so reliant on young people, particularly young men, activities aimed at children that have a military component to them are clearly potential recruitment tools.

SkillForce, a prominent AP veteran-staffed charity, began life as an MoD project that sent soldiers into classrooms in Newcastle and areas of Norfolk to assist pupils who were regarded as "hard to reach" (SkillForce 2015). Whilst some evaluations of the SkillForce model suggest that it can have a positive impact on attendance and behaviour in schools, students selected to participate in SkillForce activities "typically

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against the Ministry of Defence with the aim of reducing the minimum service for under-18s by up to two years.

drop two GCSE subjects which equate to around two half days of instruction a week” to focus on an ‘alternative curriculum’ (Hallam *et al* 2007: 46). Such curricula typically include “residential trips, sports, outdoor pursuits, community/environmental projects and classroom work” where students learn “practical life skills, e.g., number handling including understanding pay slips and bank statements, writing cheques, checking change” (Hallam *et al* 2007: 47). An archetypal activity on the SkillForce programme is to take pupils camping overnight, which has been reported by participants to involve being “given ration packs which they had to spread over 24 hours” learning to cook for themselves and put up tents, to walk “15 miles in two days” and carry out first aid (Hallam *et al* 2007: 47). These activities closely resemble those that British military cadets engage in; ‘cap’ and ‘field’ craft also includes first aid training and “basic techniques of how to live and move in a different environment” that include learning “ how to prepare clothing and equipment before embarking on an expedition [...] how to safely carry a load and identify a suitable route as well as what makes an ideal camp site [...] how to pitch a tent, cook a meal and build a latrine” (Army Cadet Force, UK 2015). They also echo the MoD’s desire to promote activities in school settings which focus on skills that “have a direct bearing on military requirements” (MoD 2005b: 5).

As well as facilitating skills and exposure to military activities, culture and values that the MoD regards as essential to maintaining its ‘manning’ levels, military ethos initiatives reinforce the two-tiered approach to schooling in the UK that has long entrenched socio-economic divides. As Young (2011: 273) argues, recent political statements on education mirror the assumptions of almost every “educational report of the last 150 years....that there are two kinds of minds – one practical and drawn to ‘the intrinsic richness of manual work’ and one academic”. Paul Willis’ (1977: 2) landmark study on how most working-class kids end up with working-class jobs suggests that for children regarded as unsuited to learning, the “main mode of *active* connection with the world” is usually ‘practical’ not the abstract and academic (Willis 1977:2). However, where practical ability is far more often “riveted to particular productive practices”, qualifications offer the means to decide which productive practices to engage or not (Willis 1977: 56). This dichotomisation of



schooling can thus channel children into the ‘qualified’ – those who are much more likely to attract the highest annual incomes - and the ‘unqualified’ – those who tend to earn around 20 per cent less than those educated up to GCSE level (Office for National Statistics, UK 2011). For the latter, low-skilled jobs, that frequently lack fixed hours and incomes and often entail low and uncertain pay, are more likely (Green *et al* 2014).

When the school leaving-age was raised in England in 1972, a chief concern for teachers’ unions was not how to develop those with poorer disciplinary records but how to exclude such ‘troublemakers’ from their classrooms (Willis 1977). Military ethos initiatives rely on a very similar logic where some children are seen to require “a type of schooling that is different from that of the majority of pupils”; whereas the majority of children are seen to be in need of “teachers who have large amounts of subject knowledge [...] a minority need discipline delivered by authoritarian role models” (Dermott 2012: 233). Many children who are referred for AP come from the most socio-economically deprived backgrounds (Taylor 2012) and on average, white children eligible for school meals tend to perform at a much lower level in education than their more affluent peers. As underachievement in education is now much more likely to lead to ‘NEET’ status i.e. not in education, employment or training (House of Commons Education Committee 2014), simplistic assumptions about the (un)suitability of children for different academic and disciplinary paths re-entrenches socio-economic divisions and prejudices, and obscures structural inequalities. As Barker’s (2005:55) work shows, in a range of different national contexts, such social exclusion, particularly in education, often leads young people, especially young men, to “internalize the negative stereotypes others hold of them”.

There is little room for aspiration or meritocracy in military ethos schemes therefore, despite the claims of its proponents - and little scope for decoupling presumptive links between low socio-economic status and ill-discipline, which are also often racially coded. One option that might become more appealing for ‘problem’ children though is military service. As aforementioned, the military operates a two-tier entry system, however, where those without qualifications enter the ‘other ranks’ and

those with qualifications enter as officer cadets. Given that veteran-led AP activities may displace the pursuit of traditional qualifications, entry into the armed forces would be at the lower levels for most. These roles are generally more hazardous – 87% of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq between October 2001 and May 2012 belonged to the ‘other ranks’. The Infantry, though only a small part of the overall Army, suffered the highest fatality rates in Afghanistan. It is a far more popular destination for school-leavers than adult enlistees and soldiers who joined the Army at age 16 were approximately 50% more likely to die as a consequence of deployment to Afghanistan than those who enlisted as adults (Gee & Goodman 2013). Moreover, the military’s two-tier entry system not only sustains pre-military class inequalities but entrenches them. It ensures that soldiers re-enter the labour market with skills for low-status jobs and officers re-enter it with skills geared towards higher-status positions (Levy 1998; Joyce 1998). In short, military ethos initiatives may be framed as a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of troublesome working-class kids but they risk reinforcing a geopolitical status quo where wars are fought by society’s most vulnerable members in the effort to make them ‘productive’ citizens.

### **Support the Troops**

In recent years, there has been much public criticism of state support for members of the armed forces, particularly injured veterans (NatCen Social Research 2012). Veteran organisations such as the Royal British Legion (RBL) have even called for veterans to receive healthcare and support outside the regular welfare system (RBL 2006), and the founding of the *Help for Heroes* charity in 2007 occurred amid political controversies about veteran care and equipment for deployed troops. In the same year, the RBL launched an ‘Honour the Covenant’ campaign, which refers to a pact said to have existed between the military, individual soldiers, state and society since time immemorial. The Covenant calls upon soldiers to make personal sacrifices, including foregoing some of the rights enjoyed by civilians in wider society, and to make the ultimate sacrifice for said society if necessary, echoing claims about the essence of the military ethos. In exchange, state and society must ensure soldiers can “expect fair treatment”; that they are “sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service” and that the military institution

must also 'be sustained and provided for accordingly by the nation' (British Army 2000, 1.2).

Ingham (2014, 4) argues the Covenant, and its proponents, have had a significant impact on British civil-military relations; despite strong opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq in particular, the "public came to separate the men and women from the missions and rallied to 'our boys' (and our girls), giving them unprecedented levels of moral and material support". Moreover, as Tidy (2015: 2) argues, the proliferation of military charities, in the wake of troop downscaling and withdrawals from recent British wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, has engendered a form of "conscience capitalism" that has produced "the contemporary British military as a notionally apolitical social 'cause', rendered intelligible within the terms of existing commoditized discourses". In recent years military personnel have been lauded for providing strike cover for firefighters in 2002-2003 and for providing security for the London 2012 Olympics. As Evans (2012) argues of the Olympic 'deployment', if it had "happened in North Korea or Iran, politicians would have undoubtedly lambasted the despotic state of military affairs" but the British public failed "to question what it means to live in a time when the distinctions between war and peace, global and local, private and public, soldier and citizen, blur".

As Ingham's (2014, 4) exhaustive study of the Covenant suggests, the focus on "the broken Military Covenant" by military charities, the popular press and civil society, "impeded any objective assessment of military performance in Iraq or Afghanistan". Likewise, in making veterans a charitable social cause, their role in state-sanctioned violence is obscured. At the same time, growing support for military involvement in strike-cover, security at sporting events, and military-ethos style initiatives suggest the militaristic veneration of military personnel and the military institution above what is strictly necessary for defence (Strachan 1997). Though typically, such societal support for military 'solutions' to social 'problems' has been identified as indicative of 'militarization', this concept often implies something being *done to* society by the military. Society, however, "has always been organized through the use of violence. What changes are the mechanisms by and extent to which this occurs in a given spatial and temporal context" (Bernazzoli & Flint 2009: 450). The introduction of

military ethos programmes in the UK thus needs to be considered in the context of a growing popular *and* elite support for the military, an institution for which state violence has become one function among many. Militarism is not imposed; it emerges because civil society is “both an object and a subject of government” (Sending & Neumann 2006: 652). In an age of self-reliance, the ‘self-sacrifice’ of military personnel becomes more resonant and venerable, and in the midst of austerity-driven concerns over wayward, unproductive youths the military’s seeming ‘success’ in solving other social problems, lends support to military ethos initiatives. In each instance, these everyday practices, which obscure the military’s core violent function, facilitate its application by fostering less-questioning popular support for the armed forces.

By constituting the military as a core institution of society and its values as moral and good for Britain’s children, military ethos initiatives obscure the military’s violent functions but they may also engender material, as well as moral, support for the armed forces. The requirement to fulfil the Covenant, particularly in a time of defence cuts and very high popular support for the British armed forces (McCartney 2010; Ware, 2010; Gribble et al 2012), also means that military ethos initiatives, in providing government-subsidised employment opportunities exclusively for veterans, provide another way to ‘support the troops’. As relatively inexpensive ‘quick-fix’ and piecemeal interventions carried out by veterans into the lives of ‘problem kids’, military ethos initiatives not only promote self-reliance among disadvantaged children but also veterans, at a time when cuts to social and military spending may be re-entrenching more structurally-embedded disadvantages for both social groups. Indeed, one possible explanation for ongoing funding for military ethos initiatives is to provide much-needed job opportunities for veterans. In a report on the future welfare needs of the ex-Service community up to 2020, the RBL (2006) found that unemployment among 18–49 year old veterans is often around twice that of the national average.

The original US Troops to Teachers programme was essentially set up by the Clinton Administration to provide veterans of the first Gulf War with employment. In a

period of ongoing global recession, Democrats and Republicans recently joined together to propose a bipartisan 'Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act' to increase annual state funding to the scheme (from around \$30 million to \$50 million) and to decrease the period of active service veterans have to undertake to be eligible for teacher training. In the UK, similar concerns over unemployment among soldiers, particularly those returning from Afghanistan, have coincided with the introduction of T2T on this side of the Atlantic. In October 2010, following the Strategic Defence and Security Review, the MoD announced that it would be cutting personnel figures by 17,000 by April 2015 across all three Armed Services, partly through decreases in recruitment, but also through phased redundancies. Creating opportunities for some veterans through T2T and AP schemes appears responsive to public concerns about veteran welfare therefore. By venerating military training and values as 'transferable' assets, military ethos initiatives also ensure that veterans come to be seen as remaining socially, economically and politically productive. Military ethos initiatives therefore facilitate austerity's attendant logics of self-reliance whilst concealing the impact of spending cuts on veterans, as well as children.

### **Concluding Comments**

For proponents of military ethos initiatives, including the UK Government, its value lies in raising the quality of teaching to engender schooling based on self-discipline, self-reliance and economic productivity. This reflects a particular inflection of neoliberal governmentality that not only denigrates the contributions of existing public sector educators, but promotes a neoliberal, masculine, militarised and individualistic account of social relations (Mendick 2012) that legitimises both austerity and warfare. Proponents of the Troops to Teachers programme suggest it will offer children "from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds, discipline, self-respect and a sense of purpose" (Gove in DfE 2011) but a closer look at the scheme reveals how the supposed ill-discipline of working-class children, especially boys, is constructed through practices of class-making, gendering and racializing that elide structural inequalities and promote military values and military service as a means of bettering oneself. In an age of austerity, the potential danger and disorder posed by economically unproductive youths is heightened and the social imperative

to care for oneself (Foucault 2005), lends support to this militarised 'solution' to a social 'problem'.

In the age of austerity, there is no room for transformative structural change, only 'personal growth'. By promoting veterans as vessels of values that will translate into social mobility, by positing military service as a social good and a potential career opportunity for the most disadvantaged, military ethos initiatives risk limiting the life chances, in both a figurative and literal sense, of socio-economically underprivileged children. They equip children characterised as unsuited to academic learning with skills that would be valuable to the armed forces at a time when the MoD needs to recruit young people, particularly young men, to sustain its warfighting capacity, whilst making other military personnel redundant through defence spending cuts. Military ethos initiatives also allow the state to be seen to be alleviating the impact of these cuts however, by providing much-needed jobs in education for a small number of veterans. In a context where public support for the armed forces has increased, despite ongoing concerns over the military's involvement in recent wars and potential future operations, the state can show it has honoured the military Covenant, diverting attention from the legitimacy of the UK's geopolitical actions.

In recent years, British civil society has exhibited forms of veneration towards the military that exceed that 'necessary' for defence (Strachan 1997). Indeed, that veneration has often been separated out from defence altogether to celebrate the military's rescue of the 2012 Olympics by providing last-minute security for the event or by focusing on the perceived benefits of military training for instilling discipline in young people. As Gilmore (2012) argues, it is vital to remember that military "training and discipline cannot be disconnected from its role in preparing individuals for obedience to the chain of command, unquestioning acceptance of orders" and indeed, "ultimately, conditioning them to overcome the moral prohibition on killing other human beings". However, the assumption that a military background immediately qualifies someone to provide young people with discipline, self-respect and a sense of purpose not only disregards the violent function of these values, it also has the effect of legitimising this violence when exerted in the so-called

'disciplined' environment of the armed forces. When participating in military-style activities is framed as a way to improve the lot of the working classes, militarism thrives; and military violence risks becoming a distinctly 'moral activity'. The framing of military ethos initiatives as a 'solution' to the overestimated social problem of failing working class children, and especially boys, thus serves military agendas more than most.

In examining the various assumptions that underpin military ethos initiatives, I have tried to suggest that it is imperative to think therefore about how war, as a geopolitical practice, is made possible by enactments and negotiations of militarism and violence in everyday life, including through such schemes. As Back (2015: 834) argues, "the everyday matters because it offers the opportunity to link the smallest story to the largest social transformation"; it allows us to see the wider issues that "are alive in the mundane aspects everyday life". Populist and elite support for the military, and for military ethos initiatives, offer us a glimpse into some of the processes that make war possible. Liberal democracy is founded on the dream of a free but ordered and "secure" society. This dream requires that some bodies are regulated and trained to fight wars, and that other bodies are disciplined or 'militarised' to support them (Foucault 1991b). What I have aimed to demonstrate through my exploration of military ethos initiatives as a practice of neoliberal governmentality is that they normalise violence and militarism in everyday life. By targeting children, especially boys from disadvantaged backgrounds racialized in different ways, as potential future soldiers or as disciplined, martial subjects, and by promoting military values as a social good beneficial to wider society, military ethos initiatives engender subjectivities that provide the very political, social economic and practical conditions of possibility for war.

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