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Militarisation, universities and the university armed service units

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ABSTRACT

This paper asks what militarisation looks like when encountered in university settings, using the example of the UK university armed service units. It identifies a specific definition of militarisation, which is then used as a framework to explore the USUs. The USUs have been subject to critique as emblematic of militarisation, and thus problematic. The paper looks at practices where militarisation can be identified as evident on university campuses, such as in disciplinary engagements with military institutions and activities, as well as flows of funding and knowledge. We show how the military-university nexus problematizes the idea of separate and distinctive military and civilian spheres which pervades much of the discourse around military involvement at universities, and highlight the generative and creative capabilities of militarisation as co-constituted within the military-university nexus. The paper then examines in detail how the process of militarisation works in practice through the USUs. This confirms the importance of individual agency to a conceptualisation of militarisation. In conclusion, we argue for the continued utility of process-focussed understandings of militarisation which emphasise how such processes are generative of social relations. We emphasise the necessity of capturing the nuance and complexity through which processes work not least around the engagements of people as active agents with such processes. We also note the potential significance of scale to future conceptualisations of militarisation.

1. Introduction

This paper is about militarisation and military involvement in UK universities, and the ways in which we can develop our thinking about the former through examination of the latter. We examine the case of the university armed service units (hereafter USUs) as a 'perspicuous example' (Garfinkel, 1967) of UK military involvement in universities, because such examples disrupt accepted orders and thus make their practical organisation visible.[1] USUs are military units managed and funded by the UK armed forces and populated by students studying for higher education degrees at UK universities. Students receive training in military doctrine and practices through weekly drill nights and weekend and vacation exercises. Student members are not obliged to join the armed forces following graduation, although some do.

At first sight, USUs could be readily identified as an illustration of militarisation at work on university campuses; as we go on to show, this charge has frequently been levelled against them. We are interested in this paper in what 'militarisation' might mean in this particular context. If we subject USUs to close scrutiny, how does the militarisation that they are said to demonstrate actually work? Do assumptions about what militarisation is and does remain confirmed or become untenable when we look at the granular detail of militarisation in action? What are the affordances of such an examination in terms of how we can conceptualise militarisation? We start by discussing debates on militarisation, identifying work by Kuus (2008, 2009) as providing the definition of militarisation which we wish to take forward. We then examine how the processes of militarisation work in practice through the university-military nexus in which USUs sit, discussing disciplinary engagements with military institutions and activities, as well as flows of funding and knowledge. We then break Kuus's definition down to discuss how USUs have been constructed in critical commentaries as emblematic of militarisation, and look to empirical evidence for this. In conclusion, we argue for the utility of process-focussed understandings of militarisation which emphasise how such processes are generative of social relations. We emphasise the

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[1] This paper is solely about the USUs in the UK. For information on the United States' Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) — which has certain marked differences, not least around assumptions about recruitment — see Neiberg, 2000; Ax, 2007; Giroux, 2012; Griggs, 2005.

necessity of capturing the nuance and complexity through which processes work not least around the engagements of people as active agents whose practices constitute and perpetuate them. We also note the potential significance of scale to future conceptualisations of militarisation.

2. Conceptualising militarisation

In much social science scholarship, the category of 'military' is understood in moral terms because of the association between military forces and the execution of lethal violence, and is often loaded with pejorative associations. As Jauregui (2015: 457) states, militarisation can be understood as a process through which 'a mostly unilinear vector of militaristic violence [infiltrates] what would otherwise be a more peaceful or critical populace.' This conceptualisation is particularly visible in critiques of USUs and of military involvement in higher education practices. The necessity — or otherwise — of having and using concepts of militarism and militarisation within the social sciences, and the ways in which those concepts could be defined and used, has of course generated considerable discussion (see Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009; Cowen & Smith, 2009; Woodward, 2014). Arguments have been made for a renewed focus on militarisation in recent years, because of the continued prevalence of political violence and its effects, and the continued salience of military organisations, institutions, objectives, cultures and personnel in shaping the social world (Gusterson, 2007; Stavrianakis & Selby, 2013).

Militarisation is usually understood as a process or set of connected processes facilitating the engagement of military institutions, activities and modes of organisation into multiple spheres of social life. The concept is generally accepted as a useful one in identifying the specificity of material and discursive practices and relationships through which the social world is shaped by the requirements of the state to have the capacity to exercise lethal force, and in turn how that state capacity is itself socially constituted. For example, Lutz, drawing on Geyer, defines militarisation as:

> … "the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence" (Geyer, 1989: 79). This process involves an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. (Lutz, 2002, p.723)

As Lutz and others note, militarisation may be understood best as both a discursive and a material process (see also Basham, 2013; Basham, Belkin, & Gifkins, 2015; Stavrianakis & Selby, 2013). Some analysts take this further, viewing militarisation as a biopolitical practice productive of subjectivities as part of wider systems of structural violence (Belkin, 2016; Loyd, 2009). In terms of the reach of militarisation as a social process, it has been identified as having its own political economy (Gouliamos & Kassimeris, 2012) and as productive of a specific cultural politics (Giroux, 2004; Kuus, 2009) and cultural practices (Stein, 2008).

Whilst recognising the validity of these engagements, in this paper we draw specifically on Kuus's (2008) definition of militarisation, because she argues for militarisation to be seen as an integral part of social life in Western liberal democracies, and as something which takes place outside the institutions and practices which explicitly promote military solutions to political problems — something she refers to as 'civic militarisation'. Specifically, Kuus (2008) defines militarisation as 'a multifaceted social process by which military approaches to social problems gain elite and popular acceptance' (p.625; see also Kuus, 2009, p. 546). Her definition emphasises militarisation's processual and thus dynamic nature, its

multiplicity and multiple points of engagement, and its purchase across social formations from high politics to daily life beyond the institutions or organisations themselves responsible for the organisation and execution of lethal violence. Kuus' definition has underpinned much of our previous work (Rech, Bos, Jenkings, Williams, & Woodward, 2015; Rech, Jenkings, Williams, & Woodward, 2016; Woodward, 2014), and has wider purchase within political geography (see for example Bernazzoli & Flint, 2010; Christian, Dowler, & Cuomo, 2016; Paasche & Bachmann, 2012). Furthermore, although not explicit in the wording of the definition above, Kuus (2008, 2009) and others (Basham, 2016; Shaw, 2010) emphasise the importance of a focus on the prosaic, banal or everyday aspects of militarisation in contrast to approaches which prioritize its place in grand or state-level geopolitical narratives. As such this framework enables us to critique and analyse organisations, such as USUs, which straddle the civil-military binary, and to focus on the detailed, granular, evidence around militarisation in accordance with arguments within critical military studies and critical geopolitics literature more widely. Thus, whilst we note that there is other literature which could be cited to emphasise the same point about the necessity of considering militarisation's contingent and embodied aspects (see Basham, 2016 for an overview), we focus exclusively on operationalising Kuus's definition in this article because it enables us to answer the following questions: what does militarisation mean in the context of universities, and how does it actually work? In the next section, we discuss the university-military nexus and then introduce the USUs. We then use the two central ideas within Kuus's definition — the social problems for which military approaches might be seen as being mobilised, and the mechanisms by which these approaches gain popular or elite acceptance — to explore what the idea of USUs as emblematic of militarisation might actually mean in practice and what this might mean for our conceptualisation of militarisation.

3. The military-university nexus

As Jauregui (2015: 457) states

> [M]ilitarization tends to be conceived as a contagion invading and increasing society's existing penchants toward racism, sexism, and oppressive imperial warmongering, and this process of invasive contamination is assumed to be driven by a relatively static, destructive and hyperempowered military though a domestic and global citizenry that otherwise would be more constructive and healthy.

Such pejorative conceptualisations of militarisation have implications for the way we understand the contexts in which USUs sit — the universities themselves. Universities and military institutions are usually held to be quite separate and distinct as organisations, with markedly different missions. Those missions are readily constructed as morally quite different (although they are both, of course, public goods or services). Viewed in this way, it becomes possible to subscribe to the idea that the militarisation of universities leads to the contamination of these academic educational spaces by invasive ideas, priorities and practices which originate in state requirements for the organisation of lethal legitimized violence. Whilst we do not wholly subscribe to this interpretation of the militarisation of universities we do recognise that there are connections between military and higher education institutions and often tensions between their respective missions. However, we want to think about the translation of agendas and priorities between these two missions in terms of generative capacities and creativity, as something to be empirically evidenced rather than *a*

priori dismissed simply because of their military origins. As such, we seek to challenge the fixity of the civil-military binary in this context, instead using the term 'military-university nexus' as shorthand for these multiple points of connection between military and higher educational institutions and practices (see also Jenkings et al., 2011).

Perhaps most fundamental to the military-university nexus are the academic disciplinary connections that show particular points of engagement, contact and refutation with military institutions and practices. One example would be the discipline of geography as a subject for tertiary education and research. Although the discipline has some very long roots in the writings emanating from scholars working in ancient Greek, Roman and Islamic civilizations, the discipline we now understand as geography has its roots in the ambitions of 19th century states (Britain, France, the United States are all examples) for mercantile, colonial and imperial expansion and control over space. These state ambitions required the technical skills of geographical practice in terms of description and cartography (Woodward, 2004, 2005). The intertwining of state and military ambitions for geographical knowledge, technical expertise in the compilation of information and curiosity about a wider world, are evident across the history of the discipline and into the present, particularly at times of war (see for example Clout & Gosme, 2003; Farish, 2010). A contemporary example would be the funding of what are known as the Bowman Expeditions via the US State Department (Wainwright, 2012), which were developed as a means of collecting and mapping geographical data (including data about people – the 'human terrain') for US foreign policy purposes. This in turn has generated much critique, not only about the purposes to which the results of geographical research might be put, but also about the questions this raises about the epistemologies underpinning the discipline (Wainwright, 2016; see also Sheppard & Tyner, 2016 and associated special issue of the Annals of the Association of American Geographers). It is also worth pointing out that for all the critique that examples such as the Bowman Expeditions has initiated, many geographers work quite happily as self-identified military geographers, engaged in the application of geographical tools and techniques to the solution of military problems explicitly for the benefit of military users (see for example Galgano & Palka, 2010).

A second example would be the discipline of anthropology which, as with geography, has roots in state ambitions requiring knowledge about culture and difference, and technical expertise underpinned by recognised disciplinary protocols developed in order to construct that knowledge for state purposes. Anthropological knowledge, including techniques for generating such knowledge, has recently been deployed through the development of the Human Terrain System within US military counter-insurgency strategies (Lucas, 2009; McFate & Laurence, 2015), a practice widely critiqued within the some sections of the professional anthropology community (Gonzalez, 2007).

A third example would be the development of a self-identified military sociology which has flourished in the US and mainland Europe (though it has had less purchase in the UK). Military sociology has a long history of drawing on the tools of sociological inquiry to make sense of military institutions and personnel for applied purposes (Caforio, 2006), and has been undertaken through and is reliant upon close connections between academics and military institutions (see Castro, Carreiras, & Frederic, 2016). As recent debates coalescing around the idea of a critical military studies show, the nature of disciplinary engagements with military institutions and objectives are necessarily subject to critique over the ways in which those engagements do, should, or should not take place, and the consequences of this for informed understandings of military activities, militarism and militarisation

(Baker, Basham, Bulmer, Gray, & Hyde, 2016; Rech et al., 2015).

Although we can clearly identify disciplinary engagements with military institutions and activities, as part of the military-university nexus, these are not necessarily well-known or visible across these disciplines. Furthermore, the history of social theory shows what Joas and Knöbl (2013) term the 'suppression of war' within social thought. They interpret social theory's disinterest in war as a consequence of the hegemony of modernization theory within macrosociology since the 1950s, with its Enlightenment heritage of 'dream[s] of a non-violent modernity' (p.184) and its consequently distorted view of violent phenomena. They also note a Durkheimian inheritance within sociology with its focus on the rights of the individual, preceded by the foundational work of Comte and Spencer in utilitarianism whereby a future of state peace was imagined as a consequence of the civilising effects of trade (pp.123–4). So we note not only that disciplinary engagements as part of the nexus may be obscure for want of visibility or academic interest, but also that in certain respects the fundamental or foundational premises of some disciplines has actively directed attention away from the study of military phenomena and their effects dismissing them *a priori*.

The disciplinary connections that draw the military-university nexus together may be implicit and quite possibly invisible particularly to those engaged in undergraduate study. Rather more explicit, but operating also to construct the military-university nexus, are the flows of funding for research which draw military institutions and the wider defence sector including the defence industry together with universities through the knowledge and labour of (primarily) academic researchers. Commentaries and critiques about military-related external funding for university research in the UK range from concerns about the inadequacy of existing flows of knowledge and expertise between the defence industry and the UK research and development base, including that located at universities (Edwards & Jaffray, 2015), through to concerns about the extent to which defence industry investment has skewed research priorities within the UK higher education research base (CAAT, 2007; Smart, 2016; Stavrianakis, 2006, 2009). We could also consider here flows of knowledge between academic research establishments and military institutions, whether or not the knowledge that is produced is funded from military sources. We have produced research intended quite deliberately to do this, not least through the research which underpins this paper (Woodward, Jenkings, & Williams, 2015). The UK's sector-wide Research Excellence Framework in 2014, a major assessment of research quality which included consideration of the impact of research in non-academic contexts, likewise showed evidence of the transfer of knowledge directly to defence institutions and related organisations (see for example HEFCE, 2014a and b).

Whilst critiques of the military-university nexus may focus on explicit connections and tangible evidence such as funding spreadsheets or statements of wider research engagement and impact, at a higher level of abstraction we can consider how the military-university nexus may be forged and sustained through neo-liberal configurations of the political economy. Both have been subject to sustained transformations reflecting state adoption of neo-liberal economic regimes. Analysts including Giroux (2012), Godrej (2014) and Gonzalez (2014) have charted in US contexts the range of connections which exist between neo-liberal models of tertiary education emergent in institutions and in educational practice, and the incorporation within these of practices and politics redolent of militarism and militarisation.

Once one starts to look for examples of the range of ways in which the military-university nexus is constructed, they appear in a great variety of forms. Professional connections may link institutions through the labour of academics employed in universities

and teaching within military establishments; UK examples include academic labour used at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, or for professional development purposes via Cranfield University or under the umbrella of the UK Defence Academy. Some institutions have developed degree programmes explicitly targeted at future military personnel including the Defence Technical Officer Engineer and Entry Scheme (DTOEES).[2] We can identify links embodied through patterns of Reserves participation amongst academics and students. We can consider the history and present role and function of university Military Education Committees which oversee USUs.[3] We could also consider the spaces constructed in many universities for the remembrance and memorialisation of staff and students killed during conflict, both as military personnel and as civilians.

Consideration of the military-university nexus is undertaken from a range of subject positions by students, academics, university administrators, armed forces personnel, and across a spectrum of political positions from endorsement to critical condemnation (and indeed apathy and disinterest). Finally, it is also important to note the dynamism of the military-university nexus, and the fluidity of the policy landscapes affecting both armed forces and universities, which may or may not shape the evolution of the military-university relationship. In the UK context, examples might include shifts in research funding and how that shapes the availability of research funding in different disciplines; the changing nature of higher education from an elite to a mass-participation experience and the shifting emphasis towards a utility model of tertiary education at the expense of an enlightenment model; and shifts in military personnel strategies via the Future Force 2020 programme and how that shapes recruitment practices on university campuses. To summarise, the military-university nexus is multiple and varied and co-constituted. The USUs, which are the focus of this paper, are just one of many connections within that nexus. In the follow sections we focus specifically on USUs to begin consideration of their role and place within this assemblage.

4. The university armed service units[4]

The USUs collectively comprise three separate organisations; the University Royal Naval Units (URNU), the University Officer Training Corps (OTC), and the University Air Squadrons (UAS). Although there are minor variations in the stated missions of the three organisations, reflecting both their distinctive roles in relation to defence and their specific patterns of historical development, all three organisations have two core functions. These are, first, to encourage the recruitment of suitably qualified personnel for military training as officers within their parent services, respectively the Royal Navy, the British Army, and the Royal Air Force, and second, to promote enhanced understanding of defence amongst their student participants (see Ministry of Defence (MoD), 2015a, p. 27). As of April 2015, the USUs had a combined strength of 6,580, comprising 880 URNU members, 4680 OTC members and 1020 UAS members (MoD, 2015a). They are small relative to the

number of students studying for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the UK (roughly 2.3 million in 2013—14), but more significant in size relative to the total UK armed forces (which number around 195,600) (HESA 2015; MoD, 2015b).[5] There are 19 OTCs (including two Officer Training Regiments) which in turn may have one or more detachments, 14 UASs and 14 URNUs. The units and detachments are spread relatively evenly around the UK, with distribution patterns reflecting a longer tradition of USU establishments in universities (Strachan, 1976), particularly through the OTCs in older universities within the Russell Group of elite, research intensive institutions. Each unit has in its catchment area a number of geographically local universities. For example, Northumbrian University Officer Training Corps (NUOTC) recruits from across the north-east universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside. East Midlands University Air Squadron (EMUAS) draws students from the universities of De Montfort, Leicester, Lincoln, Loughborough, Nottingham, and Nottingham Trent. The Sussex URNU (HMS Ranger) draws students from the universities of Brighton and Sussex. Individual units therefore consist of students from different universities across the increasingly diverse UK higher education sector.

Organisationally, the USUs come within the purview of the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) via the office of the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff: Reserve Forces & Cadets, and unit management and administration is the responsibility of the three parent services via their respective officer training establishments (Britannia Royal Naval College for URNU, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for OTC, and RAF College Cranwell for UAS). The USUs are funded entirely through the UK defence budget. Exact figures as to the total cost of the units are almost impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy, due to the difficulty of separating out USU-specific operational costs, and costs for facilities and equipment which are shared across the respective parent services.

Student participation in USUs is entirely voluntary but recruitment is selective, contingent on student applicants meeting fitness and other required standards, and on citizenship qualifications whereby units are open only to UK and Commonwealth students. Participants are paid based on attendance at weekly drill nights and at regular weekend and university vacation exercises, including military and adventurous training following specific syllabi determined by the parent service. Students may also take part in wider publicly visible ceremonial activities such as Remembrance Day parades, and for the URNU, which use P2000 fast inshore patrol vessels, port visits to locations inaccessible to regular Royal Navy warships. Participation also entails activities undertaken usually for charitable purposes, and various social events. Unit staff (who may be Regular or Reserves personnel) oversee training activities, and may also participate in activities in their catchment universities such as the provision of personal and professional development training for university staff and non-USU students. USUs may also be a useful point of contact between the armed forces and academic staff working in research on military-related topics. We ourselves are a case in point, drawing in the first instance on our local USU units to develop research on the value of the university armed service units (Williams, Egdell, & Woodward, 2010; Williams, Jenkings, & Woodward, 2012).

Why study the USUs? A simple response is the knowledge gap; whilst they have existed for many years, they have received scant attention to date within the military social science literature. Some might argue that this lack of attention is merely a reflection of the

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[2] The universities of Aston, Birmingham, Cambridge, Loughborough, Newcastle, Northumbria, Oxford, Southampton and Southampton Solent all participate in this scheme. See: http://www.da.mod.uk/dtoees. See also the University of Wolverhampton's BSc. degree programme in Armed Forces http://courses.wlv.ac.uk/course.asp?code=LW031H31UVD.

[3] For information on the Council of Military Education Committees (COMEC), see http://www.comec.org.uk/home.

[4] We use the term 'university armed service units' to make clear the distinction between these units and other groups within universities that provide service functions such as catering and cleaning. We use the abbreviation USU in recognition of common usage of the term 'university service units' within the UK defence sector.

[5] Student numbers include both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Military personnel numbers include trained and untrained personnel, regular personnel and all categories of reservists, but exclude cadets and USU students.

units' insignificance within the UK student body. However, following Flusty's (2008, p.619) arguments that it is the phenomena which are the least dramatic to the point of invisibility which can have the most insidious effects on belief and action, we would argue that the potential insights about militarisation and the university-military nexus which can gleaned from close scrutiny of this small, normalised organisation (that is, small relative to the student body, normalised in UK educational terms) could say something quite revealing about either militarisation in higher education, or social scientific conceptualisations of militarisation, or both. As we go on to discuss, the USUs are commonly seen as a focus of militarisation, and are of interest in those terms. Furthermore, and as the figures above show, the USUs are of ever-increasing significance to the UK armed forces as processes of restructuring driven by neo-liberal economic agendas continue to down-size and hollow-out the UK Regular armed forces.

The project on which this paper draws set out to explore the non-financial value that may or may not exist in the USUs for four different constituencies: student participants in units, graduates who had USU experience whilst at university but who did not pursue a career with the regular armed forces, the armed forces, and the universities which provide the units with students. Data collection comprised: firstly, an on-line questionnaire survey of USU student members conducted in spring 2013 (n = 1,798, around one third of all USU-registered students) which generated quantitative and qualitative data[6]; secondly, semi-structured interviews with graduates (n = 54 ranging in age from 23 to over 70, with the majority in their 20s and 30 s at the time of interview) who had had a USU experience but had not joined the Regular armed forces; thirdly, semi-structured interviews with a sample of 15 unit commanding officers, five from each service across a range of localities; and finally, semi-structured interviews with a small sample of senior university administrators (n = 4) in one UK region. The full research findings are written up elsewhere (Woodward et al., 2015, 2016). Here, we focus on research data which speaks to the question about the meaning of 'militarisation' in the context of the USUs and of universities.

5. Militarisation and the USUs

Much of the opposition to USUs takes place through practices which are undocumented in the public domain, or may conflate different and quite separate military phenomena, and for this reason it is often difficult to disentangle the root objections and more wide-ranging criticisms that are levelled at them. Critique has taken place primarily within the armed forces and within student organisations. Within the armed forces there is some albeit muted critical commentary about the USUs, and we include this here to counter the idea of military institutions as entirely monolithic. These critiques sit within a context of full, publicised, institutional support for the USUs and their respective roles and activities — and there is no evidence that the Ministry of Defence and the three armed forces as organisations are anything but supportive of the units. But critical voices exist. For example, during the course of our research we have heard questions raised about the possibly unfair advantage that those selected by University Air Squadrons (which

are highly selective, not least because of the opportunities they provide for flying training) then have if they choose to go through the recruitment process for officer entry within the Royal Air Force. In a context where the armed forces seek to be seen as an equal opportunities employer, there are broader questions about the provision and reach of USUs across the higher education sector — or lack thereof — and the ways in which that then shapes the social diversity (or otherwise) of those encouraged towards recruitment into the Regular or Reserve armed forces through their USU experience. There are also resourcing issues; we have been told of discontent amongst Royal Navy Reservists about the provision of suitable training vessels to the URNU (the P2000 ships) and the absence of suitable vessels for the Royal Naval Reserve. There is also recognition, as noted above, that the USU experience is restricted only to students who are UK and Commonwealth citizens.

Within universities, opposition and critique tends to involve some combination of a rejection of the general idea of the visibility of the UK armed forces on university premises, and a more specific objection to the idea of recruitment to the armed forces taking place on those premises. For example, an article in the *Guardian* newspaper (Young-Powell, 2013) illustrates this with a headline 'Armed forces make over 300 visits to UK universities in two years' that introduces an article about how, following a Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Defence, the UK armed forces were shown to have visited university campuses for recruitment purposes, and the differentials between universities in terms of the number of visits made. The article then quotes a number of commentators advocating either against or for this practice.

It would be highly surprising if recruitment teams for the British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy did not visit UK universities for recruitment purposes. Recruitment events for graduate recruiters are a staple of university careers service calendars. Careers within the UK armed forces at officer level are *de facto* graduate careers (a degree is not required for entry to officer training, but in practice the trend is towards officer training as a graduate occupation). The UK armed forces have an established history of engagement with universities (and third party external organisers) in graduate recruitment events. For 2015/16, *The Guardian UK 300* list of top graduate employers ranked the British Army at 35th, the Royal Air Force at 38th and the Royal Navy at 71st. The UK armed forces are a perennial presence on university campuses for direct recruitment purposes (leaving aside for the time being the question as to whether current practices reflect concerns about declining recruitment levels, or whether there is a longer history and more complex story about armed forces recruitment; see Morgan, 2015).

Opposition to the idea of 'recruitment on campus' is sufficiently broad to stoke any number of fears, worries and concerns about what this entails. At its most inflammatory, this idea becomes constructed as malign targeting of vulnerable people. For example, an article in the *Huffington Post* (UK edition) in October 2013 painted a particularly disturbing picture:

> Now that the new academic year is starting, vans painted in camouflage colours are present in university campuses across the country. Next to these vans, smiley and well-groomed soldiers are trying to lure students into enlisting in the Naval Service, the British Army or the Royal Air Force. The promise is that their fees are going to be payed and a prosperous career in the armed forces is to be expected. (Iordanu, 2013)

Quite apart from the lack of accuracy in this report (if the recruitment is to USUs, no university fees will be paid; if recruitment is to a scheme offering either an armed forces bursary or a place on a defence-sponsored programme which will cover fees, recruitment will have happened many months prior to the recipient matriculating at a UK university), the tone is suggestive of innate student

vulnerability to recruitment. This argument is repeated elsewhere. In response to the Freedom of Information request about armed forces visits to university campuses, the President of the University of the West of Scotland students' union (which was not visited by recruiters) argued that:

> It's preying on vulnerable students and can make international students feel unsafe. University campus is a place for learning, not for being signed up to go to war. We've got a duty as student unions to make sure our students feel safe on campus. (Quoted in Young-Powell, 2013)

Again, it is not clear who, exactly, might be targeted and for which recruitment purposes. What is also interesting is the way that the idea of 'safe spaces' is mobilised (see also Iordanu, 2013), itself subject to vigorous debates about its necessity, utility and consequences on university campuses (Anthony, 2016; Dunt, 2015).

Opposition to USUs, manifest in the rejection of USUs on student union premises, is perhaps also an inevitable extension of anti-war protest targeting specific military engagements and operations. For example, in 2008 University College London's student union voted against the accommodation of USU units at Freshers' events, as part of a broader protest and statement against the Blair government's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A number of student unions over the years have taken comparable decisions (or at least had such debates) for similar reasons — for example, University of East Anglia in 2011 and Manchester University in 2013.

The USUs, then, may be seen as emblematic of the militarisation of universities. In the following two sections, we return to Kuus' definition as a basis for analysing the role and place of USUs within the university-military nexus, with the objective of unpacking this further.

6. Militarisation: military approaches to social problems

Breaking down Kuus' (2008) definition of militarisation, we can consider as a first step what, exactly, *military approaches to social problems* might constitute in practice, both discursively and materially. This raises the questions as to what might constitute a social problem, and who might have the authority to determine whether an issue is problematic or otherwise. So, for example, we might define as a social problem the lack of public awareness, knowledge and understanding of the constitution and capabilities of the UK armed forces, an issue raised as problematic in a range of defence policy debates (see Davies, Clark, & Sharp, 2008; HCDC, 2013). Similarly, we might define as a social problem the issues raised for the UK's defence capabilities and thus the safety and security of the UK populace by difficulties in the recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of military personnel possessing the appropriate skills and abilities, also a matter of on-going concern within defence policy debates (MoD, 2011, 2013).

The issue of authority over naming aside, the social problem that we use as an example to explore what militarisation might mean in the context of USUs, is that of ensuring that UK university graduates have the graduate-level transferable skills that are required in the graduate labour market, and the capacity of universities to help students develop these skills during the course of a degree programme. This is an issue which has been framed as a social problem by policy-makers, employer associations and lobbying groups, and university leaders and student organisations alike. Flagged initially as an issue in the 1997 Dearing report on higher education in the UK (Dearing, 1997), this problem rests on the observation that as well as having subject-specific knowledge, graduates also need skills variously defined as 'generic', 'soft' or 'transferable' in order to be able to perform at the required (i.e. graduate) level in jobs. It is framed as a problem because as

subsequent commentaries have identified, under-employment by potentially skilled graduates is limiting to the productivity of labour, which is a driver of gross domestic product and of higher potential rates of tax revenue. Commentaries by the Confederation of British Industry and Universities UK (2009) have argued for greater focus among higher education providers on the employability of graduates, and for the necessity for degree-level education to provide skills for engagement with an increasingly global labour market (see also HEPI, 2015; HEA 2015). In response, across the higher education sector, institutions have shown direct engagement with the graduate skills agenda through the development of measures such as graduate skills frameworks and other methodologies (see for example Cole & Tibby, 2013) which seek to codify and apply these ideas to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes. An example, from our own institution, is the graduate skills framework against which all Newcastle University taught modules on undergraduate and Masters-level degree programmes are evaluated in terms of the development, practice and assessment of five core skills which sub-divide into nineteen specific competencies.

The USUs provide, in effect, the military with a potential resource solution to this specific social problem. This is visible in the use by students of the USU experience to demonstrate attainment of graduate skills such as leadership, team-working and self-management on CVs and job applications. 58% of our survey respondents identified 'CV enhancement' as a motivation for joining a USU. In qualitative commentary collected around questions about CV enhancement, respondents reported, or anticipated, the utility of their USU experience in being able to provide evidence to demonstrate their possession of key competencies:

> Where do I start? The list of transferable skills goes on forever, and if an interviewer ever asks for an example of a situation that you have never even thought about, it won't take long to think of something that you did in the UAS. (Student respondent, survey)

Students also reported that the extent to which they developed specific graduate skills through their USU experience exceeded that of their degree programme. For example, 7% of OTC, 9% of UAS and 7% of URNU students reported that their self-confidence (one of the skills in the Newcastle University skills framework) had increased 'way beyond their expectations' through their degree programme (and overall responses reflected a normal distribution across five categories, the lowest being 'not at all'). Yet 34% of OTC, 36% of UAS and 37% of URNU students reported that their self-confidence had increased 'way beyond expectations' through their USU participation.

Our interviews with graduates showed considerable reflection on this, from the perspective of individuals who had graduated and were now proceeding through graduate-level careers (which all respondents were, or had been prior to retirement). This was evidenced in the process of applying for a job, in being able to perform in a job once appointed, and assimilating into the workplace. The value-added to graduates in reflecting on the utility of their USU experience was seen particularly in the first two years following graduation, again in terms of being able to display competency:

> The skills you do pick up […] skills that industry itself will find useful […] leadership skills, organisation skills, time management skills […], it gives you demonstrable qualities that when an employer picks up a list of CVs from graduates, those that actually have degrees and experience that are relevant — [it] makes them stand out. (Graduate interviewee)

Observations such as these, raise a very specific question about how we talk about militarisation. So often, the discourse through which

this process is discussed emphasises it as pernicious or malign, as discussed above. Yet what we see through this example is militarisation as a process that is productive of social relations and individual benefit. There are of course a range of issues which follow from this, and which space precludes discussion of here, concerning the (in)equalities of access to USUs activities which are structured as a consequence of the effects of the UK higher education system (see Woodward et al., 2015; for details). For our purposes here though, we want to make the point that militarisation has to be seen in terms which recognise the nuanced ways in which it plays out across individual lives and as active choices.

We can problematize this idea of militarisation and graduate skills development further by drilling down into our data to consider one specific skill that exists in many graduate skills frameworks — that of leadership. Leadership is a skill highlighted prominently within commentaries and marketing materials emanating from the defence community about the utility of USUs. For example, the British Army's web page giving information about the OTC flags leadership prominently, with its stated mission being 'to develop the leadership potential of selected university students and raise awareness of the Army ethos' (British Army, 2016). Leadership also appears prominently in graduate skills frameworks; the Newcastle University (2013) framework defines it as the ability to 'motivate and co-ordinate group members, taking responsibility for decisions and results.' There is substantial evidence from our research establishing the high degree to which graduates and USU participants recognise the levels of leadership training they receive; 31% of OTC, 35% of UAS and 33% of URNU respondents considered their leadership skills had developed significantly more than they had expected through their USU participation.

Of course, leadership can be defined in a number of ways. Leadership in USU training contexts may be developed as a set of capabilities which look entirely different to leadership capabilities developed in other social and employment contexts, which in turn will also be varied. Military leadership, in other words, may be a distinctive way of doing leadership. This might suggest that USUs are militarising students through the inculcation within them of a very specific (military) model of leadership, which in turn may at best have irrelevant or at worst dangerous or malign effects on the wider social world. The interesting point with that line of argument, however, is the evidence from our research of reflexivity and awareness of precisely this issue amongst commanding officers, students and graduates. This reflexivity was evident in interviews with unit commanding officers, whom social science often stereotypes as enforcing limited or rigid (military) practices, but who in discussion displayed considerable reflexive awareness about military ways of doing things and their application in USU settings and beyond. Interviews with USU graduates also showed their reflexive awareness of the need for thought and consideration in the application of skills developed in military settings to non-military employment situations, with leadership a case in point, and it could be argued that all leadership training will have some generic aspects. We conclude from this observation that if, as many writers on militarisation agree, the process works through human agency as well as more structural mechanisms at far larger scales, we have to include in our consideration of agency the self-awareness and reflexivity of these people.

7. Militarisation: engendering elite and popular acceptance for military approaches

Drawing again on Kuus (2008), we can consider the second part of her definition of militarisation which points to the ways in which military approaches to social problems *gain elite and popular acceptance* and examine what this means in the USUs context. In

this instance we are interested in knowledge dissemination. A number of examples could have been used to explore this point, including the processes and practices of dissemination of knowledge about USU-derived skills amongst employers (or the lack thereof), or the reception of USU student members at public events and wider public perceptions of the utility of the units, or the perception of units and USU participants by student peers and indeed academic staff. We have chosen, however, to discuss this with reference to the ways in which the idea of the very existence of a nation's armed forces as a public good is mobilised and circulated through the units and through unit participation.

This is a significant issue for USUs, because a long-standing argument for the existence of the units presumed that graduates who did not pursue military careers (i.e. the majority of participants) went out into the civilian labour market and, as graduates, rose to positions of public or commercial influence. The idea of the 'captain of industry' was used frequently by members of the USUs community to convey to us the idea of a figure of influence moulded by the USU experience, and we have explored elsewhere the validity of this idea and its consequences directly for the UK armed forces (Woodward, Jenkings, & Williams, 2016). Here, we are interested in how ideas about the value and worth of the UK armed forces and their roles, inculcated within students through their participation in USUs, are then disseminated by those students as graduates in their working and social lives.

When asked whether they held positive or negative views about the armed forces and whether these had changed, 77% of our survey respondents said that their views were positive, and this had remained unchanged. A further 15% reported that their views had changed during their USU experience and were now positive. Interviews with graduates enabled respondents to discuss in more detail their views about the UK armed forces, and how this may or may not have been shaped by their USU experience. The majority expressed broadly positive views based on personal, if limited, participation with the armed forces. Furthermore, rather than espousing unquestioning loyalty to the idea of armed forces, interviewees were careful to specify how their positivity might operate; for example, it might be in terms of positive attitudes to military personnel or the institution in the abstract, and qualified with more critical views of government foreign policy objectives involving the use of armed force. From this, we would argue that the process of gaining elite and popular acceptance for military interventions might be highly contingent, rather than simply assumed on the basis of past participation in a military organisation.

Interviewees were asked about their role in the transmission of their (broadly positive) views of the armed forces. Respondents emphasised that theirs might be an informed opinion that they could act as advocates for the armed forces:

> I can go out and promote what the armed forces do, with my peer group, friends. I'm a *Guardian*-reading, go-on-strike firefighter — I'm on the other side of what a lot of people are, I can see the benefit of having an armed forces system. I'm not right-wing. I have a liberal point of view. (Graduate interviewee)

Thus, transmission of positive opinions took place not unthinkingly, but in nuanced ways negotiated with care by those with USU experience.

The empirical data on the USUs demonstrates the significance of agency to this idea of militarisation as a process of gaining elite and popular acceptance for military approaches to social problems. Militarisation is a socially contingent process, and whilst it may be operationalised most visibly (and possibly most directly) by military institutions themselves (for example, the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces, private sector partners in defence enterprises), it

is also a process undertaken by people. What is very evident, however, is that the people involved can do this consciously, reflexively, thoughtfully and often in ways which are critically mediated and contextualised through other forms of knowledge and experience. This underscores not only the need for militarisation as a process to be examined in empirical detail, as part of everyday life, but also the necessity of exploring this process with attention to the agency, context and nuance that pervades the everyday.

8. Conclusion: militarisation and agency

To summarise, through our analysis of USUs, we have indicated how it is (almost) impossible to imagine universities and the military as entirely separate, distinct and self-contained institutions, and the simple military/civilian binary is meaningless in many of the above contexts. Military and university institutions and objectives have emerged together, have shaped and formed each other. The idea of a boundary defining what sits inside and what sits outside the institutions and practices that explicitly develop military solutions to problems breaks down when the full assemblage of this nexus emerges. Although a simple vocabulary of 'military' and 'civilian' may have descriptive utility, the explanatory value of these terminologies is restricted. If universities in the UK are militarised spaces, they need to be seen as always already militarised; military-educational engagement is not new and we suggest that there is little (if any) space within the higher education sector which sits beyond this web of military-educational connections. The idea that universities are *becoming* militarised in the UK (Ahmed, 2014) does not hold up to scrutiny, they are already militarised but changes in the way that this manifests itself do occur and are worthy of such scrutiny.

If we are talking about militarisation at universities, we need to consider the generative, productive capacity of militarisation as an outcome of this relationship. In the examples above, engagements between university and military institutions and objectives do not result in loss or destruction, either in material or discursive terms. These engagements are productive of something, which in turn might be recognised as a public good. Our argument is not, however, a mindless celebration of militarisation; further down the line, these engagements of course may lead to the application of lethal violence and negative consequences. But we have to recognise that militarisation can be understood as a developmental or creative process, generative of something, whether in political, economic and social terms and that to dismiss militarisation as *a priori* archaic and negative is inadequate social science.

Furthermore, if we talk of the militarisation of universities and the military-university nexus, and the co-constitution of these, we must also discuss the influence of universities on military institutions. It is tempting to use the metaphor of the two-way street to reinforce this point, but that would obscure the complexity and inter-relatedness of the military-university nexus as an assemblage. We also note, perhaps provocatively, that a conceptualisation of civilianisation as an equivalent process has also been identified within some military contexts as a (sometimes unwelcome) extension of civilian approaches to social issues into military spaces. Yet if we take, for example, current defence policy debates about the need for a more diverse UK armed forces which recognises the structuring of social difference around identities, or about the significance of family dynamics as a morale issue, we can see how critiques developed in academic contexts can be absorbed into military institutional thinking, organisation and practice (see for example how ideas articulated by Dandeker and Mason (2003), Woodward and Winter (2007), Ware (2012), Basham (2013), Bulmer (2013), Hyde (2015) and Gray (2016) have been drawn on

in internal armed forces personnel policy debates). The idea of reciprocity between universities and military institutions has had considerable purchase in military sociology through the thesis of the citizen-soldier (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960), and as something that is essential within contemporary democratic states for cementing civic consent for the state's use of legitimized violence (Burk, 2002).

In conclusion, in this paper we have explored the issue of military engagement in universities through examination of the USUs and a wider military-university nexus. Both are sites where militarisation has been identified. We asked what that might actually mean in practice, and on the basis of evidence what the consequences might be for how we conceptualise militarisation. In the case of the USUs, we can see a nuanced and complex process of engagement which highlights the significance of individual and group agency. In the case of the wider military-university nexus, we note the always-already existing connections which bring military activities onto campus and extend academic ideas and practices to military institutions. We highlight the generative, creative capacity of this militarisation process and the reciprocity this process requires, so often contingent on complex power relations working through military and educational institutions.

It should be clear that we want, still, to be able to talk about militarisation because the social relations involved in the preparation for, and conduct of, organized violence continue to be highly significant in shaping the social worlds of Western liberal democracies, and in other state formations as well. We see this as a necessary part of the emergent intellectual movement around critical military studies with its focus on military phenomena as the outcome of social practices and political contestation (see Basham et al., 2015), its arguments about the necessity for active engagements with the very institution which is the subject of critique (Rech et al., 2015), and political motivations to tackle difficult and complex questions about what we want military forces to be (Duncanson, 2013; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016).

We suggest that continuing to talk about militarisation, though, requires us to think explicitly about agency. What is evident to us is the significance of people as agents in militarisation processes, with all the nuance, contradiction and complexity which that entails. Militarisation is productive of social relations, and social relations in turn shape what militarisation is, how it works, what it effects. Our point is that by looking in granular detail at the lives and experiences of people involved we can start to make sense of what those social relations are, moving beyond assumptions which equate militarisation with particular sets of social relations and social constructions. For example, and as our research found, there was evidence in the USUs of both the reproduction of gendered and class-based inequalities and simultaneously of challenges to these in the lived practices of being in a USU, which in turn both reinforces and undermines assumptions about military organisations as gendered and class-stratified. The point is that both reproduction and challenge were evident simultaneously, as a capacity of individuals and groups. Furthermore, the military-university nexus is a social formation maintained by diverse informal interpersonal as well as formal relationships, practices and structures where people clearly have reflexivity and agency. Understanding militarisation only in structural terms seems, to us, to have the potential of missing instructive detail.

What we seek to emphasise here is that people and their agency merit recognition and inclusion wherever militarisation is found, not just as the subjects of military action but as active and reflexive agents in the militarisation process. In the case of the USUs, people have agency in choosing whether or not to join and participate, in structuring a narrative around their participation which is meaningful to them, and in choosing what to take forward from that

experience and what to leave behind. We would include here both students, and the military personnel responsible for running the units. They do this with reflexivity as active participants consciously engaging with and constituting (and indeed embodying) militarisation as a process, not as passive automatons, cultural dopes or vulnerable victims.

Following from this, thinking about militarisation in terms of agency also requires us to think about scale, in terms of the scales at which processes and practices of militarisation are evident, enacted and experienced, and in terms of the relationships between the ways militarisation proceeds and is reproduced at these different scales. Space here precludes a fuller discussion of this, but we conclude by noting that implicit in much of our discussion above is the idea that assumptions about militarisation become troubled or untenable when local practices are explored in fine-grained detail and equally might be confirmed when looked at in institutional or structural terms. This is implicit in our discussion of universities' reproduction of a labour-force comprising compliant neoliberal subjects ready to engage with a labour market structured by the contemporary neoliberal economy. What is potentially interesting here, and requires examination in its own right, is the potential offered for our understanding of the different spatial and temporal contexts in which people engage with militarisation, by thinking about the scales at which militarisation takes place, is made meaningful, is regulated, and is potentially resisted.

Acknowledgements

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