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# **Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire, and Ambivalence: Gender, Race, and the Everyday Geopolitics of War**

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## **Abstract**

The use and maintenance of military force as a means of achieving security makes the identity and continued existence of states as legitimate protectors of populations intelligible. In liberal democracies, where individual freedom is the condition of existence, citizens, have to be motivated to cede some of that freedom in exchange for security, however. Accordingly, liberal militarism becomes possible only when military action and preparedness become meaningful responses to threats posed to the social body, not just the state, meaning that it relies on co-constitutive practices of the geopolitical and the everyday. Through a feminist discursive analysis of British airstrikes in Syria, and attendant debates on Syrian refugees, I examine how liberal militarism is animated through these co-constitutive sites, with differential effects. Paying particular attention to gender and race, I argue that militarism is an outcome of social practices characterized as much by everyday desires and ambivalence as fear and bellicosity. Moreover, I aim to show how the diffuse and often uneven effects liberal militarism produces actually make many liberal subjects less secure. I suggest therefore that despite the claims of liberal states that military power provides security, for many, militarism is insecurity.

## **Keywords**

Liberal Militarism; insecurity; desire and ambivalence; gender and race; everyday; critical military studies

## **Introduction**

The legitimacy and very existence of all states relies, in part, on their ability to develop and use military force to secure their populations. Over the past few decades, the growth of critical security studies (CSS) has illustrated that military power is by no means the only tool that states and other actors draw on to 'secure'. Indeed, CSS has drawn attention to the co-constitution of militarism and security,

focusing particular attention on how securitisation has extended military power into new realms (Mabee and Vucetic, 2018, this issue; see also Buzan et al., 1998; Wyn Jones, 1999). However, despite the ongoing significance of how states facilitate and justify war and war preparedness, military power has been somewhat left behind by CSS in its pursuit of broadening security.

In liberal societies comprised of 'free' individuals who must consent to ceding some degree of their freedom to the state in exchange for the provision of security for their lives, livelihoods, and ways of life (Jahn, 2007), militarism, whilst often similar in its effects and characteristics to that of non-liberal states, is nonetheless necessarily organized, made intelligible and legitimated differently (Mabee, 2016; Stavrianakis & Selby, 2013). Furthermore, peculiarly liberal beliefs in freedom, and in certain modes of political economy assumed to deliver it, have normalized the maintenance of military power and its expansionist, interventionist uses - what I, and others, would call 'liberal militarism' - to "solve the 'problem' of illiberal (and 'uncivilized') states" (Mabee, 2016: 243; Edgerton, 1991).

Modern liberal democratic states and societies are thus made and shaped by their commitment to war and their constant preparedness for its eventuality in pursuit of securing freedom (Dillon & Reid, 2009). At the same time, this security pact between consenting, 'free' individuals and the state must be sustained and reproduced. Threats must be constituted as making the social body less secure, not just the state; as putting lives and livelihoods, not just the state or the economy, in jeopardy; and as making everyday life, not just the imaginary of 'the nation' insecure. As Waeber et al (1993) have argued, 'societal security' matters; just as threats to a state's sovereignty challenge its existence, threats to its identity undermine the survival of society. Accordingly, war and its attendant industries must be squared with normative commitments to extolling liberal values of democracy, human rights, and humanitarianism globally (Stavrianakis, 2016). The facilitation of liberal militarism - that is, the commitment by liberal democratic states and societies to maintain and use military force - is necessarily diffuse, therefore.

For some, militarism occurs through aggressive practices that promote and extol war and the military in society (Jenkins et al., 2012). This stance risks presupposing that

militarism is somehow antithetical to the 'norm' however; that it is the outcome of a distinctly military sphere exerting itself over a beleaguered civilian one. This civil/military distinction has limited utility for analysing liberal militarism however, because whilst liberal states have tended towards maintaining this strict separation (Mabee, 2016), they have done so in an attempt to divorce violence from politics, characterizing violence as only ever and "regrettably...an instrument for the pursuit of political goals" (Frazer & Hutchings, 2011: 56). This distinction underlies the notion that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means', which casts violence and warfare as exceptional. However, in inverting Clausewitz's famous dictum, Foucault (2004:15) has alerted us how liberal war is "continually re-inscribed in and through society's institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals". By characterising militarism as unidirectional and top-down, as imposed on the 'civilian' by the 'military', many multiple and diffuse ways that war, and preparing for it, are normalized and legitimated are obscured.

In contrast, feminist scholars have been more attentive to the emergence of militarism from multiple sites and its diffuse effects (Hyndman, 2003; Whitworth, 2004; Woodward, 2004; Enloe, 2007; Sylvester, 2010). Feminist CSS scholars have also challenged 'traditional' and critical scholars for overlooking security as a lived experienced shaped by, among other things, gendered and everyday structures (Hansen, 2000; Hoogensen & Rottem, 2004; Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006; Wibben, 2011). These agendas have been furthered by recent work in critical military studies (CMS) which urges us to turn our critical gaze back towards military power to consider militarism as an outcome of social and political contestation (Basham et al, 2015), and pay closer attention to actors and practices at multiple scales, from the embodied to the global, and how they normalize militarism (inter alia Lutz, 2009, Basham, 2013, 2016; Rech et al., 2015; Dyvik, 2016; McSorley, 2014). CMS also prompts consideration of militarism as a historically embedded phenomenon, allowing us to better account for continuity and change (Mabee, 2016). Similarly, whilst many classic accounts of militarism - exhibited for example, in the works of Mills and Mann – tend to characterize militarism as an outcome of specific attitudes, beliefs or ideologies, CMS scholars have highlighted that "people rarely articulate militarist beliefs in any great detail or as a clearly thought through set of rational principles concerning the necessity of war readiness and the legitimacy of the state

having vast military force” (McSorley, 2014: 119; Lutz, 2009). Rather than taking the ideological production of militarism as a given, CMS has alerted us to some of the more mundane, as well as bellicose, ways in which war and war preparedness are animated and sustained.

Building on feminist and CMS work, I explore how contemporary liberal militarism might be better understood through a focus on multiple social and political struggles around insecurity, co-constituted by seemingly coherent discursive state practices and more inconsistent facets of everyday lived experience. Taking recent British airstrikes in Syria, and attendant debates on the resettlement of Syrian refugees as an empirical case study, and paying particular attention to its gendered and racialized aspects, I advocate for an analytical approach to understanding how war comes about that sees military power as the outcome of multiple, diffuse and competing forms of insecurity. Moreover, I suggest that liberal militarism, contrary to the claims of liberal states, is something which in turn facilitates greater insecurity, often in particularly gendered and racialized ways. I suggest that it is only by paying attention to the interlockings of both the geopolitical and the everyday that we can fully make sense of how liberal militarism is facilitated and sustained, with uneven effects.

I begin by examining how the British liberal state has characterized the Syrian conflict as necessitating military action in two interconnected ways. The first draws on gendered and racialized logics that the reluctant but militarily powerful liberal state must reassert itself militarily to remain at the forefront of global politics. The second involves a conflation of security and military power which relies on racialized, biopolitical, and masculinist logics that make airstrikes and the further displacement of Syrians the ‘rational’ course of action. Together these state articulations of insecurity reveal one way that liberal militarism can shore up the liberal state’s role as the primary and legitimate provider of security for a population.

In the second section of the article, I turn to tracing the reproduction, contestation, and reconfiguration of these state narratives in the social and political struggles that make up the stuff of everyday life. I suggest that in the wider social body, British military involvement in Syria is characterized less by certainty about the

effectiveness of military action offered up by the state, and more by coexisting feelings of fear, desire, and ambivalence that characterize most people's daily social existences. Here I consider how the biopolitical logics of racism can facilitate fear among members of liberal populations that legitimize liberal militarism, which in turn can facilitate greater racial - and gendered - insecurities within society for some members. However, I also suggest that both the desire to belong to a secure, imagined, social and political community, built on gendered and racialized logics, and sheer ambivalence towards military intervention, linked to a desire for a 'worry-free' everyday, are equally constitutive of liberal militarism. I suggest therefore that everyday experiences of desire and ambivalence converge with fear and feelings of insecurity to facilitate conditions in which military action can be actively supported, opposed, and ignored all at once, but normalized nonetheless. This is precisely because most British citizens have the capacity to go about their normal daily lives regardless. By considering the interlockings between militarist state logics and the everyday reproduction of militarism through fear, desire, and ambivalence, I ultimately aim to show that the ability of the liberal - in this case British - state to wage war relies both on modes of governing that engender insecurity and on everyday social practices that constitute and normalize the use and continual development of military power. I also contend that paying closer attention to the reproduction of war and war preparedness through lived experience undermines the liberal security pact by revealing how the state frequently makes its own citizens less secure by prioritising military power. I conclude therefore that by analysing militarism as co-constituted by the geopolitical and the everyday, we might better account for the diffuse ways in which war and war preparedness become possible, whilst being attentive to some of the limitations of macro and state-centric accounts of security, which can obscure the multiple insecurities liberal militarism both relies on *and* facilitates.

### **Militarism as Security: A Call to Arm(s)**

In keeping with liberal urges to distinguish the politics of the state from its violence (Frazer & Hutchings, 2011), Britain's 'national military myth' positions it as under constant threat and thus, reluctantly, prepared for war and willing to enact it (Shaw, 1991). This pairing of military prowess and legitimacy echoes how many liberal states justify their military interventions, highlighting the broader relevance of the UK

case. At the same time, focusing on the UK's involvement in airstrikes over Syria can highlight some of the contingencies, as well as continuities, of liberal militarism (Mabee, 2016).

UK Members of Parliament voted to approve military action, specifically airstrikes, against 'ISIS' targets in Syria in December 2015 resulting in the UK joining a coalition of over 60 countries involved in military action against ISIS and US-led bombing raids in Syria. This vote occurred in a particular geopolitical context whereby the UK Government had previously, though more narrowly, lost a motion to join US-led strikes over Syria in August 2013. British involvement in a highly unpopular war in Iraq – which Parliament was not given the opportunity to vote on - and the role of that war in the rise of ISIS, shaped the discursive terrain of a second vote taking place under the shadow of an unsuccessful first one. This terrain was well-summarized by one journalist:

“One [view] is that Britain has lost its collective nerve and set the stage...for the public humiliation of its leaders in the world's negotiating chambers... The second...is that the Syria vote was a welcome resurgence in parliamentary power” (Perkins, 2014).

Foreign policy produces social meanings and orders that make some practices more possible than others (Doty, 1993) and it soon became clear that 'the welcome resurgence in parliamentary power' was less possible when a Freedom of Information request in July 2015 revealed that UK military personnel had already been involved in bombing raids against ISIS within the borders of Syria, albeit as 'embedded' troops under the command of foreign coalition military leaders. The Government in contrast were not willing to be seen as having 'lost their nerve', as exemplified by the then Prime Minister David Cameron's 'call to arms' before the vote that led to the approval of British airstrikes in December 2015:

“Partly, this is about our capabilities. As we are showing in Iraq, the RAF can carry out what is called 'dynamic targeting', whereby our pilots can strike the most difficult targets at rapid pace and with extraordinary precision, and provide vital battle-winning close air support to local forces on the ground. We

have the Brimstone precision missile system, which enables us to strike accurately, with minimal collateral damage—something that even the Americans do not have” (Cameron, 2015a: col.1489).

As well as showcasing the British arms industry to would-be-clients, Cameron’s speech posits British military involvement as necessary simply because UK military power is so mighty. Moreover, the very existence of these superior capabilities further suggests that Britain has a *moral* responsibility to share them with its allies:

“Of course we have those capabilities, but the most important answer to the question, ‘Why us?’, is, I believe, even more fundamental: we should not be content with outsourcing our security to our allies... From that moral point comes a fundamental question: if we will not act now, when our friend and ally France has been struck in this way, then our allies in the world can be forgiven for asking, ‘If not now, when?’” (Cameron, 2015a: col.1490).

The specific mention of France is not insignificant given that the approval for the British military joining the airstrikes occurred in the wake of brutal terrorist attacks in Paris, which ISIS claimed responsibility for. The logics of intervention that Cameron drew upon were therefore both longstanding, wherein liberal states maintain strong militaries in case they have to fight, and more temporally bound, wherein a recent terror attack allows the British liberal state to legitimate this particular intervention.

Reading Cameron’s call to arms through a lens attentive to its gendered and racialized logics reveals other ways that the British liberal state justifies its military interventions and its maintenance of military ‘capabilities’. Cameron’s extensive knowledge and detail about the military’s ‘big boys’ toys’ echoes a longstanding “popular masculine pleasure-culture of war” (Dawson, 1994:3-4), through which association with war and its technologies confers a ‘virile prestige’ on men, including politicians (Cohn, 1987; Prügl, 2003; Kimmel, 2004). His invocation of the UK’s moral responsibility to its allies also betrays what Young (2003) has called a ‘logic of masculinist protection’ whereby liberal states take on the traditionally masculine role of protector. This role for liberal states cannot be one of simplistic domination, no matter how (militarily) strong that state may be. Instead, it can be cast as chivalrous,



self-sacrificing, and responsibly masculine in valiantly facing the dangers of the world. At the same time, whilst other liberal states may also see themselves as supposedly failing to be 'warlike' - and masculine "enough in the past" (Edgerton, 2006:1) - Britain's peculiar history as the once imperial power par excellence haunts its national military myth. As a nation frequently characterized as *the* former imperial power but now in decline (Edgerton, 2006), its desire to engage in masculinist protection is contingent upon particular historical and social factors as well as its liberalism. It relies on specific ideas of 'Britishness' that betray dynamics particular to the UK. One of these is the multiple cultural attempts to erase colonial and postcolonial bodies from the national story, which Gilroy (2005:431) argues results from an "inability to process the loss" of empire, so that "the shame that has attended the exposure of Britain's colonial crimes" continues to shape the "country's embattled politics of race and nation". For Gilroy (2005:237), this allows for a seemingly endless stream of popular revisionist histories in which "the empire comes back through a nostalgic filter" that casts Britain as both nation of past glories and prime victim of the colonial history that has meant it has not been able to preserve the (imagined) whiteness of Churchill's Britain. Multiculturalism has, as a result, become a problem and the arrival of immigrants and refugees on Britain's 'shores' is increasingly "experienced as invasive war", reinforcing the idea of a besieged island nation (Gilroy, 2005: 437).

These ideas certainly seem to resonate in the embittered political struggles around the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the UK, though they also reflect wider liberal logics around migration. Whilst a clear case for the UK's responsibility to bomb parts of Syria was made, the responsibility to resettle Syrians fleeing from those bombs was less clear. Stressing in his call to arms that "Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism", Cameron (2015a: col. 1492) emphasized the need for "immediate humanitarian support and, even more crucially, longer-term stabilisation". In boasting that the UK has already committed over £1.1 billion to this - "by far the largest commitment of any European country, and second only to the United States of America" – he made clear that this generosity was aimed at reducing "the need for Syrians to attempt the perilous journey to Europe" (Cameron, 2015a: col. 1492). Whilst in keeping with the wider liberal logic of masculinist protection, the British state's concern for deterring refugees from reaching Europe's borderlands is not

about actively saving Syrian lives but is biopolitical; it involves letting Syrians die through prioritising and seeking to preserve the way of life of the European population (Foucault, 2004).

Prior to early 2014, the UK's stance on refugees was to "be generous with humanitarian aid to Syria's neighbours rather than to accept Syrian refugees for resettlement in the UK" (Gower & Politowski, 2016: 3). Under mounting parliamentary (and some public) pressure, the government established a selective policy of refuge in early 2014. However, by the end of June 2015, only 216 people (including dependents) had come to the UK through the scheme (Gower & Politowski, 2016). In the wake of the Paris attacks, Cameron once again stressed the need to "help refugees closer to their homes" to prevent them "having to make that terrible journey across the Mediterranean" (Cameron, 2015b). This emphasis echoes EU-wide border policies and practices of frequently offshoring the policing of migration to third countries thousands of miles from EU member states. Such practices are often justified by liberal states in similarly humanitarian terms of trying to deter migrants from embarking "on hazardous journeys towards the EU" (EU Commission in Vaughan-Williams, 2015: 25). Many of these third countries are less developed or have poor human rights records however, resulting in what Gammeltoft-Hansen (2011: 30) calls 'protection lite': "the presence of formal protection, but with a lower degree of certainty about the scope and/or level of rights afforded".

Another narrative at the centre of Cameron's call to arms also reinforces disconnect between military force and the suffering of others external to the UK homeland. This is that the threat posed to the UK and to the British way of life necessitates military action. In calling on parliament for the UK to join the airstrikes, Cameron (2015a: col.1494, col. 1489) claimed that throughout British history, "the United Kingdom has stood up to defend our values and our way of life", and stated that the very reason for military action, "is the very direct threat that ISIL poses to our country and to our way of life". It follows that military power and security rationally go hand in hand therefore; but this biopolitical rationality normalizes further insecurity for Syrians whether through the production of more direct violence or further displacement. Moreover, it betrays masculinist logics that overlook how military action and

increased military spending can also make some British citizens *less* secure (Sylvester, 1994; Blanchard, 2003; Tickner, 2004). Economic trade-offs between warfare and welfare consistently impact disproportionately on some of the most vulnerable members of society, including women in particular, whose lives are shaped by “everyday patriarchy” (Blanchard, 2003: 1290). War preparedness takes funds away from domestic violence shelters, care provision for the elderly and disabled, and general healthcare.

The discourses that the British liberal state drew upon to justify its involvement in airstrikes over Syria simultaneously utilized and concealed biopolitical, gendered and racialized logics that enable liberal democratic state military action and military readiness to become intelligible. Liberal militarism becomes the solution to insecurity, despite the threat to lives at home and abroad. However, state narratives and their reproduction in social and political life are not the only source of liberal militarism. Bellicose, ‘hard-headed’ calls to use superior military power at the state’s disposal can be co-constituted by more banal, though no less “innocuous”, forms of militarism (Thomas & Virchow, 2005:27). These are found in the stuff of everyday life and it is thus to these forms of liberal militarism to which I now turn.

### **Militarism as Insecurity: Everyday Experiences of Fear, Desire, and Ambivalence**

The desire of liberal states to spread liberal democratic ideals, even if this entails bombing, occupation, and the negation of human rights, has been frequently rationalized not only as a “universal moral duty to preserve life and prevent suffering” (Bryan, 2015:33) but as an “ethical responsibility” towards one’s own population, to “the community to be protected, the future to be defended’ (Amin, 2010:16). Liberal militarism is frequently legitimized in such biopolitical terms. Eliminating “dangerous bodies” becomes necessary not only because of their immediate threat to lives, but because their elimination allows populations to be rebuilt as ‘civilized,’ ‘developed,’ or ‘democratic’, reproducing the superiority of liberal society and values (Cairo, 2006:288). As Arendt (1944: 42) suggested, such thinking can be traced through the history of the “development of the comity of European nations”, but its reproduction is not possible “without appeal to either experiences or desires, in other words to immediate political needs” (Arendt, 1944: 39; Pain & Smith, 2008). One of the

principal ways that liberal militarism is animated therefore is when “*ordinary people...hold genuine fears* that their sense of identity, security or welfare is threatened” (Duffield, 2007: 200, original emphasis).

In accounting for the role of everyday fears in animating militarism, Razack’s scholarship (2008) drawing on Arendt’s concept of race-thinking has proved especially useful. She argues that ‘race-thinking’ pervades contemporary Western law and politics, drawing crude differentiations between people of European descent and those descended from elsewhere. Race-thinking entails that ‘Europeans’ come to understand themselves as sharing a common humanity with one another, but not with ‘non-Europeans’ and thus, in sharing nothing in common with a racialized (enemy) other, many Europeans have begun to understand themselves as “under siege” (Razack 2008: 5). Contrary to salient liberal understandings, neither race-thinking nor its expression in racism requires individuals or social groups to regard themselves as superior or act in overtly hostile ways towards those deemed ‘different’. For race-thinking and racism to flourish and shape people’s lives, all that is required is the belief that racialized others constitute some sort of “threat to our way of life” (Barker in Duffield, 2007:200). Contemporary state border practices, including those aimed at Syrian refugees, attempt to manage such risks to ‘our way of life’ at the border, defining at once that which endangers and the “integrity of the inside...the presumed homogeneity and stability of that community” (Salter, 2006: 172). This simultaneously produces a knowledge of geopolitics that evokes the boundedness of the nation-state to be protected, and the dangerous unboundedness of the border that must be reinforced. The revelation that two of the attackers involved in the Paris attacks might have used refugee routes to enter Europe led to a decline in public support for the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the UK, with 44% of Britons reported to believe that the UK should close its borders to refugees entirely (Nardelli, 2015).

As Salter (2006:180) explains though, it is not simply that states manage subjects but that the price of ‘freedom’, of an everyday life removed from insecurity, is that “we come to manage ourselves through a confessionary complex”. Key to this is that we “recognize ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state” (Foucault in Salter, 2006: 181) and regard others as outside this. The

desire for this way of life means that it is not just existential insecurity that facilitates war and war preparedness therefore, but the multitude of insecurities that make up everyday life, from having steady employment to feeling part of a social and political community. Thus, whilst global fears are materialized and affective in everyday sites, other and often more pressing matters also play a role in the reproduction of liberal militarism (Pain & Smith, 2008). As Dowler (2012: 497) points out, this is why it is vital to consider how “militarization takes root in the banal processes of daily life that are essential to the reproduction of sovereignty”.

As Eastwood (2018, this issue) argues, everyday desire for war also animates militarism though; fear only gets us so far. Importantly, however, as Eastwood also contends, desire isn't necessarily fervent, it can be more ambiguous, even unconscious. Anthropologist Gerald Sider (2008:124-125) sheds further light on this when describing the everyday as an achievement; as those ways in which people work through and against the chaos, rupture, and discontinuity that shapes their lives to “try to make and to claim some kind of ordinary – some stability to today, some continuity between yesterday and tomorrow, in some parts of their lives at least”. Sider (2008:125) moreover maintains that “what we call everyday life does not name a feature or an aspect of social existence...but a very high-stakes struggle”; a struggle that is for many people throughout the world “largely unavoidable and often in the medium to long run unwinnable”. The desire for the ordinary should not be underestimated therefore; it takes on a profound, if often taken-for-granted, importance not least “because it belongs to the people who *have* it – it is their time, their space, what makes their moments and their interactions their space and place” (Sider, 2008:129-130).

It is not difficult to imagine why this possession of ‘normality’ would be desirable to liberal populations promised that freedom is the very condition of their existence. Perceived threats to that freedom might motivate fears and suspicions that foster militarism. Equally though, in the example of Syrian airstrikes, and hostility and ambivalence to resettling Syrian refugees, the desire of British citizens to have everyday lives free from concern about the everyday lives of others may call into question the ability of Syrians not only to have an everyday, but any life at all. Whilst such effects of desire to protect one's own everyday are not always deliberate or

callous, the prioritisation of some lives and ways of life over others facilitates biopolitical forms of state power that entail that “the liberal way of war is governed, in part, by the very exercise of such discrimination and the application of lethal violence to it” (Dillon & Reid, 2009:49).

You do not have to be a refugee to become abject as an outcome of such desires though. Biopolitics circulates within as well as without liberal societies. Whilst most can go about their everyday lives in relative security, some find it more difficult to socially reproduce themselves not least “because the larger society is rewarded when they don’t make it, and leave or die” (Sider, 2008: 132). Although as Stanko (1990) warns the potential for violence is something that characterizes the everyday lives of anyone who has ever stayed alert on the street, there are some lives characterized by more socially and materially violent everyday struggles. Frequently, these lives are cast as a drain or scourge on society, made abject by terms such as ‘chav’, ‘scrounger’, ‘benefit dependent’, ‘single-mother’, ‘migrant’, ‘asylum-seeker’, ‘ethnic minority’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘refugee’. Each label shapes people’s “grounded expectation[s] of a liveable tomorrow”, which may constitute bigger struggles than others (Sider, 2008:128). The desires of the many to carry on regardless elide these gendered, biopolitical and socio-economic struggles, however, and whilst the legitimacy of the modern liberal state may still lie in its ability to secure, practices of making live always entail practices of letting die within as well as without (Foucault, 2004).

The strong desire for an everyday, for ordinariness, can also facilitate ambivalence, not just fear and desire. As Stavrianakis (2016) shows, whilst state rhetorics of sustainable security, human rights and humanitarianism mean that British involvement in arming illiberal regimes is often presented more as a tension than a fundamental contradiction, this ‘tension’ can still facilitate ambivalence about Britain’s militarism. This could explain, in part, why polls of the British public do not always suggest the kind of militaristic fervour often exhibited by the state (Mortimer, 2015). Bauman (1991) argued that ambivalence is the condition of our times because contrary to the promise that modernity would generate clarity about human life, it is instead defined by uncertainty and insecurities that threaten the orderliness of the world, confounding our ability to calculate the meaning of practices and events and

to see the relevance of our memorized patterns of action. Ambivalence towards militarism – war and constantly preparing for it - can thrive in these conditions precisely because militarism becomes a normalized feature of a chaotic world.

In everyday sites and spaces, it will thus be possible to discern support for British airstrikes existing alongside opposition, and alongside ambivalence and ignorance. What is most significant I would suggest therefore, is not what or how many British citizens believe about the airstrikes or wider British military action but the fact that support, opposition, ignorance, ambivalence, fear and so on are all possible reactions for most British citizens precisely because they have an everyday. Continuing to pay your taxes, wave flags at military and monarchical parades, and to purchase poppies for the 'fallen' (Basham, 2016) may not seem like the most deliberate or obvious sites of militarism but banal does not mean innocuous (Arendt, 1963; Thomas & Virchow, 2005). After all, liberal militarism, as I've argued, produces diffuse and often uneven effects within British society as well as without. As postcolonial and feminist scholars have long argued, this is why it is vital to look to the everyday; whereas "the construction of a single national identity may seem obvious at a global scale...it is less clear when viewed by way of sociospatial forces such as gender, race, and class" (Dowler & Sharp, 2001: 171). Everyday experiences thus remind us that, despite state claims to the contrary, liberal militarism is insecurity for many.

## **Conclusion**

The existence of all states relies, to some extent, on their ability to secure their populations. In liberal states, commitments to security have to be squared with maintaining the freedoms of citizens, meaning that military force and its maintenance must be legitimated and made intelligible accordingly. This explains, in part, why the UK's 'national military myth' (Shaw, 1991) is one of a strong and technologically sophisticated, but carefully employed, military power. This entails that insecurity and threats, time and again, become "disconnected from the UK's role in world politics, requiring us to discount...the role of liberal democracies in attacking non-liberal democracies" (Stavrianakis, 2009: 513), and it gives rise to one especially bellicose facet of liberal militarism: that because dangerous, racialized elements outside the state are a threat to the state, and also the social body, military power must be

mobilized as a rational, masculinist response. In this vein, militarism becomes security.

Legitimizing militarism as a response to threats to the social body, not just the state, necessitates also paying attention to the more diffuse ways in which liberal militarism is made possible in everyday practices outside the formalized practice of foreign policy. In turning to the everyday, I have argued it is possible to see how militarism can result from fear but also from the desire for an everyday, even if that comes at the cost of other people's 'everydays', and from ambivalence, which normalizes militarism by failing to challenge it. It is thus in the co-constitution of the geopolitical and the everyday that liberal militarism is made.

However, I have also suggested, as other postcolonial and feminist scholars have done, that paying attention to the everyday highlights the limits of the idea of 'societal security' (Waeber et al, 1993) when nation, social body and population become unstable in the face of the realities of socio-economic disadvantage, racism, sexism, and the multiple and interlocking oppressions that people face. To better understand the relationship between militarism and security in the study and practice of international relations, we must pay attention to the grave significance of the inability to socially reproduce oneself as a full and legitimate member of the 'social body'. This failure entails disposability. The struggle to have an everyday depends on a person's capacity to belong. But poverty, racism and gendered inequalities still entail that some are less socially and politically useful to state and society than others; and that others still are dangerous, and thus invite and warrant disposal. Whilst the legitimacy of the modern liberal state may depend on its ability to secure, paying closer attention to the gendered and racialized aspects of its militarism reveals security, at best, as partial; it becomes clear that only parts of the social body can be secured, and that for many, militarism is insecurity.

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