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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The gendered politics of researching military policy in the age of the 'knowledge economy'

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Abstract

This article explores our experiences of conducting feminist interpretive research on the British Army Reserves. The project, which examined the everyday work-Army-life balance challenges that reservists face, and the roles of their partners/spouses in enabling them to fulfil their military commitments, is an example of a potential contribution to the so-called 'knowledge economy', where publicly funded research has come to be seen as 'functional' for political, military, economic, and social advancement. As feminist interpretive researchers examining an institution that prizes masculinist and functionalist methodologies, instrumentalised knowledge production, and highly formalised ethics approval processes, we faced multiple challenges to how we were able to conduct our research, who we were able to access, and what we were able to say. We show how military assumptions about what constitutes proper 'research', bolstered by knowledge economy logics, reinforces gendered power relationships that keep hidden the significant roles women (in our case, the partners/spouses of reservists) play in state security. Accordingly, we argue that the functionalist and masculinist logics interpretive researchers face in the age of the knowledge economy help more in sustaining orthodox modes of knowledge production about militaries and security, and in reinforcing gendered power relations, than they do in advancing knowledge.

Keywords: Research Ethics; Military Policy; Gatekeeping; Knowledge Economy; Impact Agenda; Feminist and Interpretive Methodology

Introduction

The circumstances under which academics produce knowledge, and how and why certain modes of knowledge become valued over others, has long interested International Relations (IR) scholars.[1] While research expertise is under fire from 'fake news' and anti-intellectual strains of populism, knowledge has always played an important role in human advancement. Faced with increasing deindustrialisation and greater outsourcing of manufacturing and service jobs to developing economies, many governments in the Global North have come to believe that continued economic prosperity will come from growing their 'knowledge economies'.[2] This term,

[1]Mathias Albert and Barry Buzan, 'On the subject matter of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 43:5 (2017), pp. 898–917; Berit Blieseman de Guevara and Roland Kostić, 'Knowledge production in/about conflict and intervention: finding "facts", telling "trust"', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 1–20; Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994).

[2]Andrew Gunn and Michael Mintrom, 'Higher education policy change in Europe: Academic research funding and the impact agenda', *European Education*, 48:4 (2016), pp. 241–57.

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while often over-used and ill defined,[3] broadly refers to the idea that knowledge, conceived of as 'creative problem-solving', has utility that drives economic development.[4] In the context of the knowledge economy, universities have become producers of *entrepreneurial* knowledge; UK universities have been described by the government as 'powerhouses' that 'create the knowledge, capability and expertise that drive competitiveness'.[5]

This commodification of knowledge means research is now expected to '*add value*', to have utility beyond academia.[6] British Research funding councils have also been awarded additional funds to boost government, industry, and academic cooperation to develop 'the next generation of innovators',[7] leading them to become fixated on evaluating, measuring, and monitoring research utility.[8] One of the ways that the utility of research is evaluated and measured is through 'impact case studies', which now inform a large part of the prestige and public funding awarded to British universities and so increasingly determine what types of research are valued.[9] Research does not occur in 'apolitical vacuums' and particular forms of 'research productivity' tend to be consequently rewarded.[10]

By subjecting researchers to 'impact agendas',[11] funders have created an imperative for them to demonstrate that their research has some utility and value in the 'real world'.[12] In 2014, we, and three other UK-based research teams, were awarded public funding amounting to £1.35 million to carry out 'impactful' research,[13] which would 'help inform some of the pressing issues facing the armed forces in the process of integrating regular and reserve components into a "Whole Force" structure'.[14] These four funded projects became collectively known as the Future Reserves Research Programme (FRRP). Co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and British Army, our three-year research project aimed to examine how Army reservists – the majority of whom are men in relationships with women – balance their work-Army-life commitments.[15] We also examined the role of reservists' women partners/spouses in facilitating this balance, and the implications for them of reservists having to juggle multiple roles under the MoD's plans to rely more heavily on reservists to fulfil UK military objectives than previously.[16]

As IR scholars, our intellectual interest in the FRRP was that the UK's defence restructuring plans were occurring in a highly politicised context of public spending cuts justified by global financial recession, and in changing geopolitical circumstances in which the UK's military and

[3]David Mills and Richard Ratcliffe, 'After method? Ethnography in the knowledge economy', *Qualitative Research*, 12:2 (2012), pp. 147–64.

[4]Gunn and Mintrom, 'Higher education policy change in Europe', p. 243.

[5]Jo Johnson, in Department for Business Innovation and Skills, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice Cm 9258* (London: TSO, 2016), p. 5.

[6]Mills and Ratcliffe, 'After method?', p. 151, emphasis in original.

[7]HM Government, *Information Economy Strategy* (London: TSO, 2013).

[8]Richard Watermeyer, 'Impact in the REF: Issues and obstacles', *Studies in Higher Education*, 41:2 (2016), pp. 199–214.

[9]David Blagden, 'Politics, policy and the UK impact agenda: The promise and pitfalls of academic engagement with government', *International Studies Perspectives*, 20:1 (2019), pp. 84–111.

[10]Kathleen M. Blee and Ashley Currier, 'Ethics beyond the IRB: An introductory essay', *Qualitative Sociology*, 34:3 (2011), pp. 401–13 (p. 407).

[11]Gunn and Mintrom, 'Higher education policy change in Europe'.

[12]Demonstrating impact is now required to receive public funds in multiple countries. See Jennifer Chubb and Richard Watermeyer, 'Artifice or integrity in the marketization of research impact? Investigating the moral economy of (pathways to) impact statements within research funding proposals in the UK and Australia', *Studies in Higher Education*, 42:12 (2017), pp. 2360–72; Francis Gavin, 'Policy and the publically-minded professor', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:1–2 (2017), pp. 269–74.

[13]Total programme funds consisted of £600,000 funding from the ESRC, £600,000 from the MoD, and £150,000 from the Army.

[14]ESRC, *Future of the Armed Forces: Understanding Issues around Integration of Regular and Reserve Personnel Call Specification* (Swindon: ESRC, 2014), p. 2.

[15]MoD, *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics 1 October 2019* (London: MoD, 2019).

[16]MoD, *Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued Cm 8655* (London: MoD, 2013).

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foreign policy goals were being questioned.[17] This intellectual curiosity was accompanied however, by the growing pressure on us to demonstrate the value and 'impact' of our work beyond academia. As interpretive researchers, we make knowledge claims about the 'social existence of others' that are not readily amenable to the evaluation, measuring, and monitoring often required to easily demonstrate research impact and utility.[18] We were therefore surprised that our project, and some of the other projects with interpretive-qualitative components, were funded by the FRRP, given strong preferences towards positivist/quantitative studies among policymakers. Our success might also be attributed to the fact that our pathways to impact statement may have slightly exaggerated the impact prospects of our research. Jennifer Chubb and Richard Watermeyer, who locate the requirement to produce pathways to impact statements in the knowledge economy, argue that many prospective researchers are susceptible to such 'impact sensationalism and hyperbole' in order to win the increasingly diminishing public funding available to academics.[19] What will become apparent below is that the knowledge economy is the motive for why functionalist research is privileged and the impact agenda is the means by which functionalist research is often privileged.

While cognisant of critiques of the impact agenda, we saw the FRRP as an opportunity to work with MoD and Army stakeholders to potentially influence defence policy through insights drawn from the everyday lives of those most affected by it, namely reservists and their family members. We began the research optimistic about the knowledge we would produce through our direct access to reservists and their spouses/partners, afforded to us by conducting publicly funded research with the direct support of the MoD and Army. We were well-aware that the secretive nature of the military as a core institution of the security state means that, 'military-social scientific collaboration or interaction' is often the only way to access primary and/or secondary data on the military,[20] and that such collaboration requires cooperating with military gatekeepers, who due to the 'total',[21] and significantly hierarchical, nature of the military will likely have substantial influence in forging the direction in which research develops.[22] As recipients of FRRP funding we saw ourselves as having been afforded a seat at a table where we would have to negotiate such hierarchies to conduct our research. However, we also hoped to sit at a table alongside stakeholders with a clear interest in facilitating our project and in learning from us as researchers. It soon became apparent that this was not the case.

A key strength of our interpretive approach was that it would allow us to explore reservists' and their spouse/partners' personal experiences of military transformation and to trace what modes of sense-making were 'culturally available' to them. Interpretive research can provide rich, contextualised data that enhance our understanding of the 'latent, underlying or nonobvious issues' that often occur within social and political settings.[23] If we had instead prioritised what could be readily evaluated, measured, and monitored, as the MoD arguably already does through its annual Reserves Continuous Attitudes Survey (RESCAS), we would have reinforced the idea that policymakers are best placed to identify the most pertinent issues, arguably undermining the rationale for funding our project.[24] We would have been less able to understand how the lived experiences

[17]HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review Cm 7948* (London: TSO, 2010).

[18]Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 105.

[19]Chubb and Watermeyer, 'Artifice or integrity', p. 2364.

[20]Matthew F. Rech, 'An introduction to military research methods', in Matthew F. Rech, K. Neil Jenkings, Alison J. Williams and Rachel Woodward (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–17 (pp. 6–7).

[21]Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

[22]Rech, 'An introduction', pp. 6–7.

[23]Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (London: Sage, 1994), p. 10.

[24]David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage, 1993).

of reservists and their motivations to serve compare and contrast with the conceptions that policymakers have of these.[25] As Matthew F. Rech et al. caution, however, cooperation between social scientists and security institutions may necessitate assenting to the latter's 'definitions of acceptable methodologies' and 'conceptualisations of the social world', which often validate the idea that military research should befit a wider national interest rationale.[26] We soon realised that we had very different ideas from our military stakeholders about *why* researching the lives of reservists and their family members mattered, about *how* the research should be conducted, and about *whose* voices provide better understanding of the implications of military transformation. Ultimately, this determined *what* knowledge we could produce and communicate to others during the lifetime of the FRRP. By reflecting on the why, how, who, and what of the research process below, we contend that the challenges that we faced during the project are best explained as having been shaped by functionalist and masculinist logics that pervade both the military and the knowledge economy. These made our research, and its value, intelligible in specific and limiting ways.

We begin by focusing on the challenges that can arise when members of a research programme have divergent agendas as to *why* the research is necessary and who it should primarily benefit. We explore how positivist and functionalist logics suffuse military research and the impact agenda, favouring instrumentalised knowledge over other forms, including interpretive and feminist-inspired research like ours, which seeks to generate knowledge from people's everyday lives to better understand their relationship to (geo)political phenomena.[27] We then turn to *how* the research was conducted and the masculinist politics of methodology that pervades IR, military ethics committees, and defence communities. Linked to this we examine the various barriers we faced as a result of having to rely on 'gatekeepers' to access our research participants, which shaped *who* was accessible to us as researchers external to the military. This highlighted how the marginalisation of women's voices can result from masculinist assumptions about which topics and modes of inquiry are deemed 'legitimate'. Finally, we ponder *what* knowledge we could produce as a result of our collaboration with the MoD and British Army and what we could subsequently communicate about our findings.

This article acts as a cautionary tale for those planning to research the security state but also constitutes an invitation to do so. Given that our project was heavily influenced by MoD stakeholder collaboration, we are able to offer detailed insights into the kinds of interactions that can take place between social science and public policy, and thus into the pitfalls and opportunities of this, something that warrants systematic academic inquiry.[28] By centring our experiences of researching a timely policy issue in the context of the knowledge economy, we aim to show how gendered power relations, and orthodox knowledge about militaries and security, are (re)produced. We conclude that functionalist and masculinist logics must be scrutinised and challenged to advance complex experiential knowledge of the military, which could greatly enrich international studies.

[25]Victoria M. Basham and Sergio Catignani, 'War is where the hearth is: Gendered labor and the everyday reproduction of the geopolitical in the army reserves', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20:2 (2018), pp. 153–71; Stephen Gibson and Jackie Abell, 'For Queen and country? National frames of reference in the talk of soldiers in England', *Human Relations*, 57:7 (2004), pp. 871–91; Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*; Rachel Woodward, '"Not for Queen and country or any of that shit…"', in Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert (eds), *War, Citizenship, Territory* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 363–84.

[26]Rech, 'An introduction', pp. 6–7.

[27]Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Knowledge? Whose Science? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[28]Sarah Parry and Joseph Murphy, 'Problematizing interactions between social science and public policy', *Critical Policy Studies*, 9:1 (2015), pp. 97–107 (p. 104).

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Why research military transformation? Functionalist vs enlightenment approaches

The study of military institutions and civil-military relations has been principally dictated by functionalist rather than enlightenment approaches.[29] Functionalist approaches concentrate on producing knowledge of benefit to the military, whereas enlightenment approaches seek to advance scholarly knowledge of the military. The favouring of functionalist research by government and military officials arises not only from it being conducted with a view to benefit the security state but also because such officials tend to prefer what they often perceive as more clear-cut, generalisable (usually quantitative) data that can be readily operationalised as policy. Research seeking to produce knowledge about, rather than for, the state can conversely often shed critical light on the state's policies and practices, making it harder to operationalise.[30] The effect of this, especially in an environment where knowledge is seen as a commodity to trade with public officials or private industry, can be the dismissal of critical scholarship as lacking clear value or as merely antagonistic, constraining its impact and perceived value to the knowledge economy.[31]

The preference for easily applicable data among state and military officials often makes them doubtful of more experiential, particularly feminist, approaches. Whereas feminist research often aims to generate knowledge from and about everyday – and often underexplored – settings because women have historically been less visible in the public sphere,[32] militaries have long exploited the divide between public and private life[33] in highly heteronormative, gendered, and gendering ways to utilise women's private and men's public labours.[34] The public/private divide has marginalised women's experiences by obscuring actions that arise 'within the feminised psycho-social and physical spaces of privacy', allowing men to wield power over women without repercussion.[35] Space, including the military home, is therefore permeated 'with power and politics, constructed by, and in turn constitutive of, social relations'.[36]

For many feminists, social reality and our knowledge about it are situated in experience (interpretivism),[37] so one must reject the notion that researchers are somehow outside or above that social experience (positivism). Feminist IR scholars have accordingly demonstrated that focusing on people's experiences, and how they are mediated by gendered, racialised, socioeconomic, and other power relations, tells us much about the international.[38] The situatedness of subjects and knowledge embraced by feminists often proves uncomfortable for policymakers precisely because it refuses any certainty that there can be 'complete truth, objectivity or self-knowledge', while also

[29]Paul Higate and Ailsa Cameron, 'Reflexivity and researching the military', *Armed Forces and Society*, 32:2 (2006), pp. 219–33; Eric Ouellet (ed.), *New Directions in Military Sociology* (Whitby, ON: de Sitter, 2005).

[30]Tim Hope and Reece Walters, *Critical Thinking about the Uses of Research* (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2008).

[31]Mark Hayes, 'The ESRC university project on "dissident" Irish republicanism: Some reflections on the relationship between research, academia, and the security state', *Contemporary Social Science*, 15:2 (2018), pp. 1–21.

[32]J. Ann Tickner, 'What is your research program? Some feminist answers to International Relations methodological questions', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49:1 (2005), pp. 1–21.

[33]Harriet Gray, 'Domestic abuse and the public/private divide in the British military', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 23:6 (2016), pp. 912–25.

[34]Nancy Duncan (ed.), 'Renegotiating gender and sexuality in public and private space', in *Bodyspace: Destabilising Geographies and Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127–69; Susan Gal, 'A semiotics of the public/private distinction', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2002), pp. 77–95.

[35]Gray, 'Domestic abuse', p. 915.

[36]Ibid., p. 914.

[37]Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991); Sandra G. Harding, *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[38]Catherine Eschle, 'Feminist studies of globalisation: Beyond gender, beyond economism?', *Global Society*, 18:2 (2004), pp. 97–125; Swati Parashar, J. Ann Tickner, and Jacqui True (eds), *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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promoting normative political interventions into those social forces.[39] The feminist case for situated knowledge is animated by the fact that claims to objectivity and generalisability are, in practice, rarely cognisant of the prioritisation of the masculinised ways of experiencing and seeing the world that underpin them. Hostility towards experiential research and the favouring of functionalism can therefore retrench masculinist modes of knowledge production,[40] and perpetuate masculinist modes of social relations.[41]

It was clear from the funding call for the FRRP that the hoped-for outcome was that the three-year programme would inform military policies regarding the Future Reserves 2020 (FR2020) transformation programme and especially help the armed forces overcome the recruitment, retention, and integration challenges it posed through empirically grounded research.[42] Given that prior research has shown that family support is a key determinant of retention,[43] we sought to explore what role family members, especially reservists' partners/spouses, have in enabling reservists serve in the Army Reserves. We sought to build on feminist work on militaries that highlights how the 'ordinary, domestic and intimate spaces so often occupied by women have remained understudied',[44] and offer up original insights into 'the interactive and entangled nature of domestic life and geopolitics'.[45]

Such aims, we believed, were consistent with the ESRC's impact agenda, which presses social scientists into proving that their publicly funded research projects make a 'demonstrable contribution … to society and the economy', particularly by encouraging engagement with stakeholders.[46] To secure public funding, we had to write a 'pathways to impact plan' with such potential stakeholders in mind. We were required to outline the detailed steps we intended to take in order to, among other things: (1) establish 'networks and relationships with research users', that is, stakeholders; (2) involve 'users at all stages of the research'; and (3) develop 'good understanding of policy/practice contexts [thus] encouraging users to bring knowledge of context to research'.[47] While these expectations could permit a range of interactions between researchers and stakeholders, the ESRC call specification expected our research *inter alia*, 'to inform personnel and training policies' and that the pathways to impact would provide 'evidence of … engagement and dissemination plans to maximise … the potential benefits to defence and national security capability'.[48]

While what constitutes impactful research is not always so prescriptive, the impact agenda raises important questions about why knowledge is produced and to what ends, especially given that not all researchers can establish relationships with research users and stakeholders on equal terms. It can be harder for example, for those with disabilities and/or caring

[39]Lise Nelson, 'Bodies (and spaces) do matter: The limits of performativity', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 6:4 (1999), pp. 331–53 (p. 349).

[40]Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[41]On how reserve service perpetuates such masculinist modes of social relations, see Sergio Catignani and Victoria M. Basham, 'Reproducing the military and heteropatriarchal normal: Army Reserve service as serious leisure', *Security Dialogue* (2020), available at: {doi: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0967010620923969} accessed on 17 October 2020.

[42]ESRC, *Future of the Armed Forces*.

[43]Chris Bourg and Maddy W. Segal, 'The impact of family supportive policies and practices on organizational commitment to the Army', *Armed Forces and Society*, 25:4 (1999), pp. 633–52.

[44]Marsha Henry and Katherine Natanel, 'Militarisation as diffusion: The politics of gender, space and the everyday', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 23:6 (2016), pp. 850–6 (p. 852).

[45]Katherine Brickell, 'Geopolitics of home', *Geography Compass*, 6:10 (2012), pp. 575–88 (p. 576).

[46]ESRC, 'What is Impact?', available at: {https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/what-is-impact/} accessed on 1 February 2019.

[47]Ibid.

[48]ESRC, *Future of the Armed Forces: Understanding Issues around Integration of Regular and Reserve Personnel Call Specification* (Swindon: ESRC, 2013), pp. 3, 6.

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responsibilities to travel and engage in overnight stays to attend meetings, which may limit diversity among contemporary 'impact stars'.[49] Such structural constraints may also exacerbate others. For example, if institutions do not address the 'exclusionary tendencies of impact work' and instead invest greater resource in 'impact stars', this could further entrench 'inequalities of workload, bearing in mind the context of gendered workloads and time constraints already affecting career progression' within academia.[50] Moreover, while social media can be a hostile environment for any researcher seeking to disseminate 'real world' research, it has proved especially so for women and ethnic minority scholars.[51] Though arguably all scholars should want to develop a better understanding of the policy or practice contexts of their research, the impact agenda elides the unequal relationships between scholars and stakeholders who 'gate keep' access to their environments. Academics may find themselves demonstrating 'deference to power' in exchange for access, often by engaging in functionalist research, which risks either 'inadvertently or deliberately sustaining dominant' and, we would suggest, masculinist, ways of producing and applying knowledge.[52] In the more particular context of military and defence research, where functionalist and positivist perspectives dominate, it is easy to see why our messy engagement with the everyday experiences of women in relationships with reservists might trouble military stakeholders.

While some of the FRRP projects used more critical approaches than others, all of us hoped to influence military policy through our findings. We adopted a critical military studies (CMS) perspective, an approach that emphasises that critical engagement with militaries and other security institutions can be generative of deeper insights, especially when 'underpinned by an understanding of these institutions as accountable to the civilian world, and necessarily understood as potentially open to collaboration and knowledge exchange'.[53] For many CMS scholars, there is often a clear 'desire to engage with [military] people in interpersonal situations that comes with asking critical questions about the military writ large'.[54] Mindful of the militarising processes of functionalism that can often occur when researching the military,[55] we attempted to make sure that we did not carry out 'sanitized military-driven research',[56] while being open to the possibilities for dialogue highlighted by CMS scholars. We prioritised the experiences of reservists and their spouses/partners because as K. Neil Jenkings et al. highlight, while there is much research on military recruitment and retention relating to general trends, policy reforms, and organisational practices, there is a dearth of fine-detailed accounts of individuals' lived experiences of joining and remaining in the military.[57] We approached our project believing in the 'need for everyday mundane experiences of respondents to be heard'.[58]

[49]Michael Dougan and Charlotte O'Brien, 'Reflections on law and impact in the light of Brexit', *The Law Teacher*, 53:2 (2019), pp. 197–211.

[50]Dougan and O'Brien, 'Reflections', p. 208.

[51]Dougan and O'Brien, 'Reflections'.

[52]Hayes, 'The ESRC university project', p. 13.

[53]Matthew Rech, Daniel Bos, K. Neil Jenkings, Alison Williams, and Rachel Woodward, 'Geography, military geography, and Critical Military Studies', *Critical Military Studies*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 47–60 (p. 56). See also Catherine Baker, Victoria Basham, Sarah Bulmer, Harriet Gray, and Alexandra Hyde, 'Encounters with the military', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 18:1 (2016), pp. 140–54; Victoria M. Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the Armed Forces* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Victoria M. Basham, Aaron Belkin, and Jess Gifkins, 'What is Critical Military Studies?', *Critical Military Studies*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 1–2.

[54]Baker et al., 'Encounters', p. 142.

[55]Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p. 69; Carol Cohn, 'Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals', *Signs*, 12:4 (1987), pp. 687–718.

[56]Higate and Cameron, 'Reflexivity and researching', p. 224.

[57]K. Neil Jenkings, Rachel Woodward R, Alison J. Williams, Matthew Rech, Ann L. Murphy, and Daniel Bos, 'Military occupations: Methodological approaches and the military-academy research nexus', *Sociology Compass*, 5:1 (2011), pp. 37–51 (p. 42).

[58]Brickell, 'Geopolitics of home', p. 577.

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All of the FRRP teams were aware that attracting public funding would involve clear plans for stakeholder engagement, which was even more crucial because our projects and the programme had been co-funded by the MoD and Army. Immediately following notification of our award in April 2014, the ESRC held an initial meeting between the four research teams and our MoD/Army stakeholders. Following this meeting, and notwithstanding the fact that all four projects had developed their own detailed pathways to impact plans, which had already been reviewed by the ESRC's Peer Review College, the ESRC issued a call for applications for further funding for establishing a programme-wide 'integrator' team led by one of the four project teams. The specific remit of the Integrator Team (IT) was to increase the potential impact of the research programme, by coordinating and facilitating knowledge exchange activities and collaboration across the programme and with all interested stakeholders.

The effect for us of establishing the IT was to engender unease about the potential conflict of interest between one project team being given overall control of the impact agenda for the whole FRRP. This increased when it became evident that the IT appeared keen to closely align the FRRP's impact objectives with military stakeholder aims without full discussion of its merits. One critique of the impact agenda in relation to security projects is the risk that academics can end up 'offering, in effect, to work for the security services' to get ahead in the knowledge economy.[59] Another is that many security practitioners and scholars marginalise women's experiences of insecurity and the benefits of better understanding them, instead universalising 'malestream' experiences, which our project sought to challenge.[60] This kind of deference and willingness to be useful to masculinised defence actors was evident in many of the interactions between the IT, which was managed by a veteran turned academic, and the FRRP's military stakeholders. This was particularly the case for the dissemination of results and engagement with the media (discussed below), and the ESRC's, FRRP's, and our institution's acquiescence to the MoD's ethics approval procedures to which we now turn.

How can we know? Disciplining feminist research on militaries

Traditional studies of war, strategy, and militaries are 'characterised by hypothetico-deductive epistemology and a resultant emphasis on positivist methodologies'.[61] The preference for making sense of military power in this way has led some to question the place of feminist research in IR.[62] There has been considerable debate between feminist scholars, who approach the international with an epistemological understanding that 'the theorising that counts or matters, in terms of affecting and/or creating international political events, is not confined either to policymakers or to academics',[63] and more traditional scholars who regard such approaches 'unscientific'.[64]

[59]Hayes, 'The ESRC university project', p. 13.

[60]Heidi Hudson, '"Doing" security as though humans matter: A feminist perspective on gender and the politics of human security', *Security Dialogue*, 36:2 (2005), pp. 155–74.

[61]Jenkings et al., 'Military occupations', p. 38.

[62]J. Ann Tickner, 'You just don't understand: Troubled engagements between feminists and IR theorists', *International Studies Quarterly*, 41:4 (1997), pp. 611–32.

[63]Marysia Zalewski, '"All these theories yet the bodies keep piling up": Theories, theorists, theorising', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 340–53 (p. 346). See also Cynthia Enloe, 'Margins, silences and bottom rungs: How to overcome the underestimation of power in the study of International relations', in Smith, Booth, and Zalewski (eds) *International Theory*, pp. 186–202; Christine Sylvester, 'The contributions of feminist theory to International Relations', in Smith, Booth, and Zalewski (eds), *International Theory*, pp. 254–78.

[64]Robert O. Keohane, 'International Relations theory: Contributions of a feminist standpoint', *Millennium*, 18:2 (1989), pp. 245–53; Robert O. Keohane, 'Beyond dichotomy: Conversations between International Relations and feminist theory', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42:1 (1998), pp. 193–7; Tickner, 'You just don't understand'; Tickner, 'What is your research program?'; Cynthia Weber, 'Good girls, little girls, and bad girls: Male paranoia in Robert Keohane's critique of feminist International Relations', *Millennium*, 23:2 (1994), pp. 337–49.

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Ironically, given the feminist emphasis on engaging with people's lives and experiences, one line of questioning that feminist IR scholars have been confronted with is what gender has to do with 'real-world' issues.[65] Feminist IR has demonstrated repeatedly how profoundly gender matters to the international.[66] Yet the most authoritative voices in, and on, state security are still, for many, those who occupy the elite masculinised world of statesmen, diplomats, and the highest-ranking military officials where both men and masculinised cultures dominate.[67]

The positivist and masculinist emphasis on the 'numerical representation of reality' in the study of war and militaries has been bolstered by the military's own needs to quantitatively evaluate personnel and their motivations.[68] Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, the greatest challenge for us in aiming to avoid conducting functionalist research while trying to gain access to participants was created by members of the Army Scientific Advisory Committee (ASAC), comprised of psychologists, who acted as the guardians of what they considered 'proper' scientific, that is, positivist, quantitative research, and the MoD's Research Ethics Committee (MoDREC), comprised almost entirely of medical and natural scientists plus some lay members either working in or with the NHS.[69] MoDREC was established in 2005 to assess and approve any research protocols involving human participants within defence. Anyone in receipt of MoD funding must seek MoDREC approval before initiating research on human subjects, though in practice, the broad remit of the *Joint Service Publication 536* (*JSP 536*), which establishes the MoD's policy on research usually means that individual services, sections, and units of the armed forces who have been approached by non-MoD funded researchers for access defer to MoDREC. This is because MoDREC stipulates that it provides guidance 'for all involved in sponsoring, funding, managing, reviewing and utilising research funded by MoD and/or involving MoD staff and/or MoD entitled dependants that involves human participants'.[70] This steering of researchers without MoD or armed forces funding who want to engage with military personnel and their 'entitled dependents' towards MoDREC as a condition of access raises important questions about the democratic accountability of the military given that the MoDREC process arguably makes it harder for civilians, including researchers, to subject the military to oversight.

Until the early 2010s, social science research involving military personnel did not require MoDREC approval. Ethics approval obtained by university/institutional boards was deemed sufficient and researchers' access to potential military research participants was informally granted by mid-to-high ranking officers (lieutenant colonel and above) through 'gentlemen's agreements'.[71] 'Sponsoring' senior officers would provide access to researchers on the understanding that they would conduct research that could be useful to them/the military and that such research

[65]Tickner, 'You just don't understand'; Marysia Zalewski, 'Well, what is the feminist perspective on Bosnia?', *International Affairs*, 71:2 (1995), pp. 339–56.

[66]Catherine Eschle, 'Gender and the subject of (anti-)nuclear politics: Revisiting women's campaigning against the bomb', *International Studies Quarterly*, 57:4 (2013), pp. 713–24; Lene Hansen, 'Gender, nation, rape: Bosnia and the construction of security', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3:1 (2000), pp. 55–75; Maria O'Reilly, 'Muscular interventionism', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14:4 (2012), pp. 529–48.

[67]Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State*; Eric M. Blanchard, 'Gender, International Relations, and the development of Feminist Security theory', *Signs*, 28:4 (2003), pp. 1289–312; Ann Towns and Birgitta Niklasson, 'Gender, international status, and ambassador appointments', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13:3 (2017), pp. 521–40; Catignani and Basham, 'Reproducing the military and heteropatriarchal normal'.

[68]Rech, 'An introduction', p. 6.

[69]For a list of current MoDREC members, see MoDREC, available at: {https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ministry-of-defence-research-ethics-committees#ethics-committee-members} accessed 4 April 2019.

[70]MoD, *JSP 536 Ministry of Defence Policy for Research Involving Human Participants Part 1: Directive* (London: MoD, 2014), p. 1.

[71]'Gentlemen's agreements' are common in militaries because they are masculinised, self-governing institutions as a result of the axiomatic significance afforded to security actors. See Joni Seager, *Earth Follies: Feminism, Politics and the Environment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

would not cause any reputational damage to them or the wider military.[72] However, in early 2014, Territorial Army Captain Mike Martin, who had been commissioned and funded by the MoD to pursue a PhD examining the British military campaign in Helmand, was banned by the MoD from publishing his thesis because his critique of the intelligence mishaps and failures of commanders on the ground proved embarrassing to several MoD officials. Due to this very public fallout between Martin, his publisher, and the MoD, Martin resigned from the Army in order to get his uncensored PhD published.[73] Then Defence Minister, Phillip Hammond, already accused of being paranoid about his handling of any criticism involving the MoD,[74] set out to limit researchers' access to defence.[75] This, we argue, has circumscribed what research is conducted, and how – and thus, whose voices are heard – by mandating that projects undergo MoDREC in order to avoid research causing further reputational damage to the MoD.

JSP 536 ensures that functionalism is built into research involving military personnel from the outset by stipulating that the MoD 'does not undertake research involving human participants unless it is for the benefit of MoD or other Government Departments'.[76] On submission of a research protocol – a form comprised of some twenty sections, numerous subsections, and up to 11 supporting documents – applications are first sent to the relevant service committee, in our case the ASAC 'for scientific review'.[77] Our relationship with most of ASAC's members was fraught from the start because of their assumptions about the validity of our interpretive methodology and about the utility of our critically informed approach. ASAC members conduct 'in-house' research on the Army's behalf when not assisting the MoDREC process. Suspicion towards our methodology and the utility of our project was likely heightened by the fact that such in-house teams 'have potentially much to lose from research that is conducted by academic investigators'.[78] That is, external academics can be perceived as competitors or as disruptive if challenging long-held assumptions of what good social science is.

While ASAC's official role in the MoDREC process is to guarantee that studies do not 'present an unacceptable risk to either the participants or the researchers' from a research ethics standpoint, protocols are assessed also 'for technical and scientific rigour, i.e. to ensure that the methods proposed in the application are well-designed and sufficiently robust to provide the information required'.[79] Although the process was purportedly focused on research ethics, ASAC principally concentrated on ensuring that our project was 'scientifically and methodologically robust'.[80] Despite being told that we had a 'clear rationale' and that the 'overarching project aims [were] clearly specified', ASAC reviewers insisted that we 'more fully explain what potential value there might [be] to the MoD in terms of application/utility of the research findings'.[81] Despite the fact that we could not predict our research findings, and thus their utility to the MoD, due to adopting a grounded theory approach, and given the fact that ASAC had already mandated changes to our research participant recruitment strategies that were not envisaged in

[72]Both authors had been granted such informal sponsorship and access to conduct research on the British Army during the period in which *JSP 536* was already in force, but not systematically enforced against social scientists.

[73]Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (London: Hurst, 2014).

[74]Ian Drury, 'Fury over MoD bid to ban soldier's book about Afghanistan: Officials embarrassed by study they asked for', *Daily Mail* (10 April 2014), available at: {https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2600411/amp/Ministry-Defence-tries-block-book-Helmand-commissioned-claims-contains-secrets-published-Wikileaks.html} accessed 4 June 2019.

[75]Telephone conversation with retired British Army colonel, 8 August 2014.

[76]MoD, *JSP 536*, p. 4

[77]Ibid., p. 9.

[78]Eyal Ben-Ari and Yagil Levy, 'Getting access to the field', in Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields, and Sebastian Rietjens (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 9–18 (p. 13).

[79]ASAC reviewers' comments, 2 September 2014.

[80]Authors' telephone conversations and email correspondence with ASAC members during the ethics approval process, June to September 2014.

[81]ASAC reviewers' comments, 2 September 2014.

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our original research proposal, we were nonetheless forced to speculate, again, on the utility of our future research findings as already outlined and assessed in our pathways to impact plan.

Furthermore, although we had not made generalisability claims in our research proposal or ethics application – given that our project was based on an interpretive, inductive, and grounded theory approach – ASAC insisted that we 'emphasise the limitations of findings derived through the proposed methodology, particularly with regards to generalisability'.[82] Within military institutions, masculinist common sense knowledge dictates that generalisable data is preferable;[83] being asked to emphasise the limitations of our feminist approach was gendered.[84] Moreover, this stipulation from ASAC made it easier for those within the MoD, who later did not like our findings, to more easily dismiss them as anecdotal and of no use to the MoD.

Throughout the ethics approval process and during our mid-term and final project presentations to stakeholders, it was difficult to convince ASAC members and MoD stakeholders of the benefits of our interpretivist approach and, thus that experiential data could be of value to the MoD. As emphasised by others who have researched the military, 'those working within military institutions and forces … have a more traditional view of what constitutes "reliable" social scientific research'.[85] For example, at a mid-project stakeholder event held by the four FRRP project teams in June 2017 to share our interim findings, we went to great lengths to explain that our data was rigorously obtained and analysed in accordance with established qualitative social science methods and that it was therefore indicative of clear trends across interviews. Regardless, a disheartening number of military personnel and stakeholders dismissed our findings as 'anecdotes' and our methodology as inadequate. The vehement criticism levelled at the methodological underpinnings of FRRP projects in front of a large stakeholder audience led to the research teams and FRRP stakeholders having to agree at a subsequent Programme Board (PB) meeting on minimal standards of civilised behaviour that future stakeholder workshop/conference attendees would have to adhere to. A primer explaining the utility of qualitative research was also drawn up as a result of the blowback the projects experienced in stakeholder workshops and PB meetings.[86]

Other objections from ASAC during the MoDREC process seemed to be based on political concerns. The complex reality of recruiting research participants and, even more so, getting to interview them again, requires flexible sampling strategies. We consequently built flexible timelines into our project because our purposive sampling method involved recruiting reservists with very busy lifestyles and spouses/partners who likely had caring responsibilities, were in some form of employment, and possibly were also involved in volunteer work and/or a hobby. Yet, ASAC insisted that sampling timelines should be 'unambiguously specified'. ASAC justified this on the basis that it was 'a key component of a triangulated approach' but admitted that their request was 'especially important as this subject is highly politicised and therefore subject to much media scrutiny'.[87] Indeed, following many years of underfunding and neglect, the Army Reserve was set to receive significant investment (£1.8 billion) and to increase its personnel numbers at a time in which,[88] as a result of the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review process, Regular forces and capabilities were undergoing major cutbacks, including 30,000 personnel cuts in the Regular Army alone. As Patrick Bury and Sergio Catignani show, this sizeable investment of the Reserves, notwithstanding the planned Regular armed forces cuts, was the result of lobbying efforts by both serving and former Reserve personnel who were members of Parliament, some

[82]Ibid.

[83]Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State*.

[84]Ramazanoglu and Holland, *Feminist Methodology*.

[85]Jenkings et al., 'Military occupations', p. 45.

[86]FRRP, *Understanding the Social World through Qualitative Research* (2018), available at: {http://www.future-reserves-research.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FRRP-information-sheet-qualitative-research-and-numbers-of-research-participants.pdf} accessed 1 July 2019.

[87]ASAC reviewers' comments, 2 September 2014.

[88]MoD, *Reserves in the Future Force 2020*.

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of whom were also sitting on the Defence Select Committee. Such members recommended the expansion of the Reserves in order to obviate the cuts of the Regular armed forces. Even so, many other Conservative backbenchers resented the planned Regular Army personnel cuts.[89]

Born out of political controversy and in contrast to the wishes of the Army's leadership,[90] which consisted almost entirely of Regular officers, the Coalition government were concerned that the Army would not fully comply with the FR2020 reforms and that deviation from its implementation would galvanise opposition from both proponents and opponents of the proposed organisational reforms. Thus, '[f]rom the outset of the FR20 programme, the size and capability of the Reserves … attracted intense political and media interest.'[91] Many believed that the feasibility of FR2020 programmes hinged on achieving ambitious recruitment and retention objectives. Reports from organisations such as the National Audit Office,[92] Select Defence Committee,[93] Reserve Forces and Cadets Association's Annual External Scrutiny Team,[94] as well as Parliamentary debates,[95] and media coverage obsessively focused on whether or not the Army would achieve its recruitment and retention targets.[96] During the period of research associated with the FRRP such scrutiny was at its height given that such targets were regularly being missed and reported publicly, much to the Army and MoD's embarrassment.[97] Thus, projects like ours, which examined factors affecting recruitment and retention shortcomings had the potential to highlight the Army's recruitment and retention failures, and thus, add further stress on the Army's and MoD's public image concerns. As we show below, the MoD accordingly ensured that social and regular media engagement with the FRRP was severely limited, if not stifled, by the 'Communications and Engagement Plan' that all projects had to abide by during the programme's duration.

Who can we know about? Marginalising women's voices in military research

The central concern of research ethics frameworks is avoiding the coercion of potential research participants and, thus, ensuring that participation in research is voluntary.[98] However, the fact that ethics committees require that research relationships must be 'formalized through written

[89]Patrick Bury and Sergio Catignani, 'Future Reserves 2020, the British Army and the politics of military innovation during the Cameron era', *International Affairs*, 95:3 (2019), pp. 681–701.

[90]'Reservists are no replacement for regular troops, head of army says', *Daily Telegraph* (28 October 2014).

[91]Robin Brims, *The United Kingdom Reserve Forces External Scrutiny Team Annual Report 2016* (London: Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association, 2016), p. 8.

[92]National Audit Office, *Army 2020 HC 263* (London: NAO, 14 June 2014); National Audit Office, *Investigation into the British Army Recruiting Partnering Project HC 1781*.

[93]See, for example, Defence Committee, *Future Army 2020: Ninth Report of Session 2013-14 HC 576* (London: House of Commons, 29 January 2014), pp. 33–41; Defence Committee, *Re-Thinking Defence to Meet New Threats HC 512* (London: House of Commons, 24 March 2015), pp. 44–5.

[94]For 2017–19 Reserve Forces and Cadets Association's Annual External Scrutiny Team Reports, see: {https://glrfca.org/publications/index}.

[95]House of Commons, 'Army Reserve', Hansard 588 (24 November 2014); House of Commons, 'Army Reserve', Hansard 590 (12 January 2015); House of Commons, 'Defence', Hansard 634 (11 January 2018).

[96]BBC News, 'Armed forces plans criticised as reservist recruitment stalls', *BBC Online* (13 November 2014), available at: {https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30033506} last accessed 16 November 2020; Adam Lusher, 'Revealed: How the government's big austerity plan to replace regular soldiers with reservists has "led to crisis"', *The Independent* (24 July 2017), available at: {https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/austerity-british-army-recruitment-crisis-philip-hammond-cuts-capita-outsourcing-not-enough-trained-soldiers-low-numbers-morale-poor-pay-conditions-understrength-armed-forces-accommodation-security-strategic-a7825626.html} accessed 16 November 2020; Frances Perraudin, 'UK frontline troop numbers down by as much as a third', *Guardian Online* (1 April 2019), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/apr/01/numbers-in-uk-frontline-army-units-fall-by-up-to-a-third-figures-reveal} accessed 16 November 2020.

[97]Bury and Catignani, 'Future Reserves 2020'.

[98]Tina Miller and Mary Boulton, 'Changing constructions of informed consent: Qualitative research and complex social worlds', *Social Science and Medicine*, 65 (2007), pp. 2199–211.

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consent at the outset … has implications for those trying to research hidden groups or those who are difficult to access'.[99] Moreover, efforts to 'standardise procedures and regulate ethical practice' can act as mechanisms to 'contain what are often, in reality, complex social worlds and research encounters that do not fit neatly into boxes which can be ticked'.[100] Such standardisation and regulation is particularly challenging for research, such as ours, which attempts to focus its 'attention to the micropolitics of military power'.[101]

We had set out to examine 'the intricate [and thus] … complex and often contradictory power of gender in terms of the various roles, identities and scripts',[102] which spouses/partners of military personnel take on or are subject to and which have been shown to affect the everyday lives of those involved in war-making or war preparations.[103] Both ASAC and MoDREC made this difficult when they deemed snowballing, a commonly used and legitimate sampling strategy that is particularly effective for accessing 'hard to reach' populations,[104] a 'poor' methodological approach. ASAC and MoDREC forced us to create an intricate recruitment process whereby spouses/partners would learn about our research project only if the reservist interviewed was willing to share our information and recruitment leaflet with his spouse/partner. That is, we could only recruit spouses/partners through reservists acting as gatekeepers. Such restrictions in the name of 'ethics' impeded our ability to give voice to the concerns of reservists' partners/spouses, highlighting how the politics of knowledge production often influences and underpins ethical quandaries.[105]

Accessing prospective research participants presupposes that individuals can decide whether or not to consent to participate. Yet most qualitative research depends on gatekeepers: those who are in a position to permit access to others. While the nature of the research relationship between researcher and researched is crucial, we believe that particularly within the context of researching military institutions, the research process and types of information that are ultimately produced are produced through the relationship that develops between the researcher(s) and gatekeeper(s). As Paul Higate and Ailsa Cameron, and Amanda Chisholm, have argued, access in military-related research is often influenced by military culture, which tends to engender the social construction of 'insider and outsider categories between military personnel and civilians'.[106] They argue that this '"them" and "us" dichotomy may impact on the practical problem of access' to the military and the interactions that civilian researchers can have with their military research participants.[107] The outsider researcher can come to be seen as a comparatively 'uncontrolled element in an otherwise highly structured environment'.[108] Thus, gatekeepers often evaluate the potential for any negative consequences as a result of the research before granting access to those they have gatekeeping power over.

[99]Tina Miller and Linda Bell, 'Consenting to what?' Issues of access, gate-keeping and "informed" consent', in Tina Miller, Maxine Birch, and Melanie Mauthner (eds), *Ethics in Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2012), pp. 61–75.

[100]Miller and Boulton, 'Changing constructions', p. 2202.

[101]Alexandra Hyde, 'The civilian wives of military personnel: Mobile subjects or agents of militarisation?', in Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson (eds), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 195–209 (p. 195).

[102]Hyde, 'The civilian wives', p. 195.

[103]Basham and Catignani, 'War is where the hearth is'.

[104]Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, *Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies: Social Research Update No. 33* (Guildford: University of Surrey, 2001).

[105]Kevin D. Haggerty, 'Ethics creep: Governing social science research in the name of ethics', *Qualitative Sociology*, 27:4 (2004), pp. 391–414.

[106]Higate and Cameron, 'Reflexivity and researching', p. 224. Amanda Chisholm, 'Ethnography in conflict zones: The perils of researching private contractors', in Williams, Jenkings, Woodward, and Rech (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 138–52.

[107]Higate and Cameron, 'Reflexivity and researching', p. 224.

[108]Tom Clark, 'Gaining and maintaining access: Exploring the mechanisms that support and challenge the relationship between gatekeepers and researchers', *Qualitative Social Work*, 10:4 (2010), pp. 485–502 (p. 488).

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Eyal Ben-Ari and Yagil Levy suggest that insider/outsider categories are determined 'upon entry and during the first stage of research' on the basis of how closely the researcher is associated/aligned with the military at the outset of the project.[109] Whether an academic is deemed an insider or outsider is particularly crucial when considering which academics are invited to provide advice or conduct other impact activities by policymakers. As eminent defence academic Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman admits, those selected as defence 'insiders', are those who will most likely 'share assumptions and are likely to reinforce conclusions' with policymakers, thus turning what should be a 'challenging interaction into an echo chamber' and creating a 'regular clique of scholars consulted'.[110] Our own experiences of engaging with such 'defence intellectuals' are that these circles are notoriously dominated by ideas and bodies that are male, pale, and, we would argue, increasingly stale. As feminist IR scholars have shown, it matters who gets to be in the 'circle' because 'gender discourse informs and shapes' security discourse and 'in so doing creates silences and absences. It keeps things out of the room, unsaid, and keeps them ignored if they manage to get in.'[111]

While *JSP 536* aims to ensure that ethical standards are met, it neglects 'the potentially complex power dynamics that can operate around access and consent especially where issues of gender' are conspicuous.[112] As Sue Jervis has shown, 'considerable anxiety arises in military communities when ordinarily concealed emotions are revealed', which 'inevitably influences negotiations between the military and researchers engaged in exploring service families' underlying feelings??.[113] Rather than being motivated purely by research ethics, we contend that the MoDREC process was a means through which research on the complex lived experiences and emotions of reservists and members of their family could be kept hidden. Such barriers are perhaps unsurprising 'given that the military institution *itself* discourages any engagement with potentially messy and unruly feelings'.[114] Our interviews highlighted discrepancies between the accounts of reservists and their spouses/partners over who and what enables reservists to fulfil their reserve service obligations, so they had the potential to cause friction. Nonetheless, while we were cognisant of the possibly delicate nature of research involving household relationships, we were also aware that British Army reservists' partners/spouses (and by extension their families) are considered 'hard-to-reach' populations, making it important to try to reach them.[115] Indeed, during the ethics approval process ASAC members admitted that prior attempts by Army internal research teams to recruit reservist spouses/partners as research participants had all failed.[116] Ironically, ASAC members could not fathom that reservists' spouses/partners are hard to reach precisely because of the complex recruitment and gatekeeping procedures that the ASAC/MoDREC process requires.

Military stakeholders set up methodological recruitment barriers that frustrated our attempts to explore dynamics we originally proposed and that the Army and MoD co-funded. In allowing reservists, the majority of whom are men, to act as gatekeepers, MoDREC gave them substantial power and choice over whether to allow or deny access to their spouses/partners, the majority of whom are women in heterosexual relationships. We recognised that our ability to access

[109]Ben-Ari and Levy, 'Getting access', pp. 14–15.

[110]Lawrence Freedman, 'Academics and policy-making: Rules of engagement', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:1–2 (2017), pp. 263–8 (p. 3); Blagden, 'Politics, policy and the UK impact agenda', p. 99.

[111]Carol Cohn, Felicity Hill, and Sara Ruddick, 'The Relevance of Gender for Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction', The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission Paper No. 38 (Stockholm, 2005), p. 5. See also Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar (eds), *Rethinking Silence, Voice and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

[112]Miller and Bell, 'Consenting to what?', p. 63.

[113]Sue Jervis, 'Psychoanalytically informed reflexive research with service spouses', in Williams, Jenkings, Woodward, and Rech (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods*, pp. 167–79 (p. 175).

[114]Jervis, 'Psychoanalytically informed reflexive research', p. 167.

[115]Anna Sydor, 'Conducting research into hidden or hard-to-reach populations', *Nurse Researcher*, 20:3 (2013), pp. 33–7.

[116]Telephone conversations with ASAC members, summer 2014.

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women's voices was contingent on reaching those reservists who less jealously guarded their personal time and space from the scrutiny of not only civilian 'outsiders' such as us, but also from their spouses/partners. By impeding access to their spouses/partners, reservists could avoid raising uncomfortable discussions regarding the gendered and unequal division of household labour and the negative impact that their time away has on household members.[117]

The difficulty in accessing and recruiting spouses/partners led one of the project's stakeholders, the Army Directorate Personnel Capability, which administers and analyses responses from Army reservists to the RESCAS, to agree to inserting recruitment leaflets in each of the 12,428 questionnaires sent out to Army Reserve units during 2015 to assist us and two other projects researching reservist family issues. While the response rate for the 2015 RESCAS was 28 per cent (3,495 responses),[118] only 11 spouses/partners replied to the recruitment leaflet, giving a dismal response rate of 0.09 per cent. Once it became apparent during fieldwork that the recruitment strategies for spouse/partners approved by ASAC and MoDREC were not working, we considered breaching the protocol and resorting to snowball recruiting. We considered this to be justified because: (a) some of our project research aims and methods (including snowballing), and pathways to impact plans that had been approved during the ESRC peer review process could not be achieved by abiding by the MoDREC protocol; and (b) because the prohibiting of snowball sampling had been rationalised by ASAC and MoDREC on methodological rather than ethical grounds. Yet, because of the disciplining nature of the MoDREC process and the requirements for periodically reporting on our research activities to the FRRP PB – which included representatives from ASAC – we feared potential sanctions had we used snowballing and been discovered by members of the PB or by MoDREC itself. We therefore complied with restrictive participant recruitment measures and fell in line with the knowledge economy ethos to pander to stakeholder sensitivities.[119]

What can we know and say? National security and research

Our research was also affected by assumptions about how it fitted with 'a broader "national interest" dictum' held by military gatekeepers.[120] As Ben-Ari argues, the 'specific characteristics of the military as a large-scale, hierarchical, masculinised, and secretive organization' influences what knowledge is produced about it.[121] Indeed, gatekeepers hold concerns over 'representation … unwanted intrusions … concerns for the privacy of those engaged … and even harm to the gatekeeper or those associated with it' that engagement can bring.[122] We argue that such concerns made our military gatekeepers more concerned about the public representation of their organisation than about civic and moral responsibilities to engage. Given the methodological hostility towards our qualitative, interpretive, feminist-inspired research and how this shaped who we were able to interview, our research objectives to identify good practice and areas for change in military policy were only partially reached. When it came to accessing reservists' partners/spouses, a population overwhelmingly comprising women, gatekeepers limited our ability to engage and learn about these women's experiences. The spouse/partner interviews that we did manage to conduct highlighted the significant contributions they make to the UK's security capabilities through their support for reservists, but it left some questions we had about this 'hidden population' unanswered and left us frustrated about the ethics of marginalising these women, supposedly for their own protection.

[117]Basham and Catignani, 'War is where the hearth is'; Edna Lomsky-Feder, Nir Gazit, and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Reserve soldiers as transmigrants moving between the civilian and military worlds', *Armed Forces & Society*, 34:4 (2008), pp. 593–614.

[118]MoD, *Tri-Service Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey 2015* (London: MoD, 2015), p. 34.

[119]Hayes, 'The ESRC university project'.

[120]Jenkings et al., 'Military occupations', p. 44.

[121]Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Reflexivity: Potentially "dangerous liaisons"', in Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies*, pp. 29–39 (p. 32).

[122]Clark, 'Gaining and maintaining access', p. 488.

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These limits on what we could know were accompanied by limits on what we could say. Some months into the project, our military stakeholders suddenly communicated that in future, all communications material, whether in print or online, would require formal approval by the Army Media Team or Defence Communications Directorate before it could be circulated publicly. Ben-Ari has observed that any facilitation of access to material or personnel by militaries may come at the expense of constraints on publication and censorship.[123] Yet, as researchers co-funded by the ESRC, a body committed to independent research, this came as a shock. This stipulation was issued despite our project already having been approved by the ESRC's rigorous peer review process and by the MoD's highly bureaucratic and lengthy ethics approval process,[124] which had already limited what and who could be researched, and more crucially, how our research could be conducted methodologically.

Following initial work between the MoD and the IT, the first draft of the 'Communications and Engagement Plan' was matter-of-factly distributed by email to all project teams outlining the 'Standard Operating Procedures' [*sic*] that we would have to follow in order to disseminate any project and programme research findings. The plan was all encompassing; all dissemination events and communications were to be subject to 'confidentialities by the MoD', thus, raising concerns that the plan would produce unsuitable expectations of MoD control over research findings.[125] Despite tense negotiations conducted over two years between MoD/Army stakeholders and FRRP academics,[126] and despite the project teams' continued resistance to such constraints, the plan continued to contain highly restrictive dissemination provisions. By late 2015 these were justified by the MoD as necessary in order 'to avoid any unintended breaches of security'.[127] Notwithstanding the challenges of sharing information even within the military, let alone with people external to the military, due to the over-classification of most of its documentation,[128] the fact that none of the research projects had been given any security clearance made it highly unlikely that we would be privy to security-sensitive information that could be breached. Moreover, such 'security' concerns seemed preposterous given the fact that our project was mainly focused on ostensibly civilian individuals who spend their 'spare' time engaging in military activities or supporting their spouse/partners to do so.

Two years into the three-year research programme, reaching some form of compromise on dissemination and media engagement became necessary due to several project teams being close to submitting articles to academic journals. Communication guidelines for this were grudgingly agreed upon by all parties in June 2016. Reaching the agreement on the 'Funders' Communications and Engagement Guidelines' was more a result of attrition than genuine collaboration. We simply could not continue negotiating guidelines into the third and final year of the programme because of the MoD's continued intransigence. Due to the fact that our stakeholders were not only co-funders, but also our sponsors – the principal gatekeepers who could grant us continued access to research participants – the balance of power ultimately remained with them. While the guidelines acknowledged the serious concerns regarding academic freedom that we had raised during negotiations, we would nonetheless be required to inform the MoD 'of all planned releases of publications and/or contact with the media'.[129]

[123]Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Anthropological research and state violence: Some observations of an Israeli anthropologist', in Laura McNamara and Robert A. Rubinstein (eds), *Dangerous Liaisons: Anthropologists and the National Security State* (Sante Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2011), pp. 167–84.

[124]MoDREC was such a lengthy process that all four project teams had to apply for a one-year no-cost extension.

[125]*Standard Operating Procedures: Communications and Engagement Plan*, February 2015 draft.

[126]Email communications and PB discussions, June 2014 to March 2016.

[127]*Communications and Engagement Plan*, September 2015 draft.

[128]Sergio Catignani, 'Coping with knowledge: Organizational learning in the British Army?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37:1 (2014), pp. 30–64.

[129]*Communications and Engagement Plan*, September 2015 draft.

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The MoD insisted that all outputs would have to be reviewed in advance of dissemination for three key reasons. First, 'to check that any material released posed no risk to national security'.[130] Given that any issue, no matter how mundane, can be securitised and, thus, become ultimately subject to censorship in the name of security,[131] we felt intellectually constrained by, but powerless to challenge, this. This was compounded by the second requirement, which necessitated that the MoD 'check for factual accuracy' in order to 'reduce the need for any formal response of correction following the publication or release of material'.[132] Although the guidelines specified that this would mostly pertain to 'numbers and dates', the IT and eventually the project teams capitulated to MoD sensitivities by granting 'that "facts" can become a grey area' and that 'in the spirit of collaboration, the MoD may offer comment about what may be perceived as deduction or interpretation'.[133] This allowed for possible MoD challenges to researchers' deductions or interpretations making the guidelines' reiteration of the need to not compromise 'academic freedom or rigorous research practices' sound rather perfunctory.[134]

The third requirement was to provide the MoD with 'adequate notice of the release of findings from the programme to allow them to prepare an appropriate response if required'.[135] Again, a major area of contention during negotiations related to what would be considered 'adequate notice' in light of the fact that the MoD was asking for long timelines to comb through research outputs. Ultimately, the research teams begrudgingly accepted both processes, and also the specific timescales for review and approval set out by the MoD and agreed by the ESRC. These were 28 days for the review and approval of any substantive publications (that is, research articles and monographs), 14 days for any other papers, and 72 hours' notice for blog postings and press releases. In September 2016, the MoD also obliged project teams to provide 'a copy of the abstract and details of the conference or event' researchers were expecting to present research findings at within 72 hours of the proposal being accepted.[136] Any engagement with the media would require prior media training and 72 hours' notice in order to receive 'clearance of communications' from the FRRP MoD Liaison Officer and the ESRC Lead/Press office. This effectively obliterated possibilities for media engagement, which require much quicker response times given the rapid media/information cycle. Both Twitter and blog media platforms could only be employed by the IT to disseminate information containing 'previously approved content' by the MoD.[137]

While the above processes and timescales were portrayed as requirements instigated by both the ESRC and the MoD, the obsession with security sensitivities and the level of scrutiny instituted far superseded the ESRC's standard reporting requirements and media sensitivities. The ESRC only requires that researchers briefly summarise research outcomes, outputs, and impact-related activities annually through a simple online reporting platform called *researchfish*.[138] Furthermore, the ESRC does not require researchers to seek feedback, corrections, or approval for publication/dissemination. Crucially, it does not expect researchers to notify or seek its approval to communicate with, or publish in, the media; in fact the ESRC keenly encourages engagement with the media and even provides guidance and practical support, including media training. Media engagement is encouraged because 'when academics seek to

[130]Ibid.

[131]Joseph Masco, '"Sensitive but unclassified": Secrecy and the counterterrorist state', *Public Culture*, 22:3 (2010), pp. 433–63; Owen D. Thomas, 'Security in the balance: How Britain tried to keep its Iraq War secrets', *Security Dialogue*, 51:1 (2019), pp. 77–95.

[132]*Communications and Engagement Plan*, September 2015 draft.

[133]Ibid.

[134]Ibid.

[135]Ibid.

[136]*Funders' Guidelines for Communications and Engagement*, 29 June 2016.

[137]Ibid.

[138]See: {https://www.researchfish.net/}.

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demonstrate their impact, they are most likely to point to blogs, tweets and TV commentary'.[139] It is often through such mediums that research is 'picked up by the media and become[s] the subject of regular debate'.[140]

Notwithstanding these differences in public dissemination requirements and the research teams' protestations, the ESRC deferred to the MoD on these matters. The ESRC also acquiesced to the MoD's demand – which came after they heard our interim findings – that all FRRP researchers undergo bespoke mandatory media training provided by an external consultancy. Despite being reassured that this training would be a 'safe space' to test out communicating our findings to wider audiences, MoD personnel attended and offered commentary throughout, some of which directly contested the mock presentation of our research findings. The ESRC's senior press manager told us that the training would be 'bespoke' because as 'part of the scheme you will be placed in a high-profile position when it comes to being spokespeople for any potentially contentious issues and policy areas affected by your topics'.[141] As a publicly funded organisation, the ESRC thus used additional taxpayer money to ensure we would communicate potentially politically contentious material 'appropriately'; that is, according to the sensitivities of the MoD.

These communication control measures ultimately fulfilled the MoD's desire to mitigate any reputational damage by deliberately limiting public knowledge of the FRRP and its findings. While the number of followers, tweets/retweets, and likes are not an exact indicator of a Twitter account's popularity and impact, the small number of followers (263) and the trifling number of tweets, retweets, and replies (303) mostly of other Twitter accounts and content not produced by the FRRP or any of its members, attests to the irrisory online/social media presence of the FRRP between 2014 and 2018.[142] Moreover, despite the compulsory media training and the stringent 'standard operating procedures' for engaging the media that FRRP researchers were required to undergo and abide by, MoD stakeholders were able to censure any media coverage of FRRP activities and outputs throughout the programme's lifetime. As part of its wider impact agenda, the ESRC sees increasing the likelihood that publicly funded research reaches a wider audience and has a greater chance of 'influenc[ing] policy and public opinion' as essential and encourages researchers to have a 'clear media strategy'.[143] However, the bureaucratic and militarised approval process that the FRRP teams were subjected to reveals the extent to which the ESRC – given that it was closely involved in all correspondence and had attended all PB meetings with our MoD stakeholders – caved into the MoD's stifling media and communications 'standard operating procedures'.[144] Indeed, the ESRC co-signed and, thus, approved the guidelines. Although the ESRC itself did not seek such reporting and approval requirements from the research teams, it nevertheless left us at the mercy of the MoD's scrutiny and its micromanagement of our public engagement and dissemination activities during the programme's duration.

The MoD's fastidious intrusion throughout the project can be explained by the fact that ultimately militaries are 'bureaucratized, centralized, secretive, masculinized … and preoccupied by [their] public imagery'.[145] From their standpoint, the ultimate danger posed by 'external' researchers is the possible exposure of 'information to the outside where the military organisation has much less control'.[146] Our stakeholders' concerns regarding our potential research findings were palpable even during initial PB meetings where some stakeholders admitted from the outset

[139]Freedman, 'Academics and policy-making', p. 4.
[140]Ibid., p. 5.
[141]Email correspondence with ESRC senior press manager, 11 May 2016.
[142]See: {https://twitter.com/FutureReserves}.
[143]ESRC, *Working with the Media: A Best Practice Guide* (Swindon: ESRC, n.d.), p. 28.
[144]*Funders' Guidelines for Communications and Engagement*, 29 June 2016.
[145]Ben-Ari and Levy, 'Getting access', p. 12.
[146]Ibid.

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that the FRRP was too politically sensitive and that our findings would raise undue media and political scrutiny.

The peak of such concerns manifested when, following the review of our end of project and programme draft reports, our MoD stakeholders admitted that 'there remain[ed] some strong concern that there [would] be a negative backlash rather than constructive debate' at the end of the programme stakeholder conference that was scheduled to run on Reserve Forces Day 2018. Our MoD stakeholders accordingly asked us to revise our reports by 'consider[ing] how best to avoid easy wins for the press'.[147] The project teams though did not write such reports to gain press notoriety, but to candidly report three years' worth of research findings. In light of the fact that the project teams were unwilling to tergiversate their findings due to MoD public image sensitivities, our MoD stakeholders informed us, just weeks prior to the end of programme stakeholder conference that it would have to be cancelled and rescheduled at a later date.

This event had been planned for almost a year. Exasperated by the MoD's behaviour, the four project teams threatened to walk out of any future MoD-endorsed events. The threat worked and the event went ahead as scheduled. However, the MoD insisted that no social media messages could be posted during the event and that no media representatives could attend given the programme's decision to not attenuate project and programme presentations. The conference had no dissemination or impact effects. Without any significantly senior Regular or Reserve commanders – including the actual MoD sponsor of the FRRP, the Head of the Army Reserves – present, the event that was supposed to represent the culmination of a major research collaboration between the military and civilian researchers, became little more than a footnote.

The MoD's growing disinterest, and ultimately the imminent conclusion of the FRRP, led our MoD stakeholders to concede that, with the official closure of the programme on 31 October 2018, they would no longer have personnel available to liaise with the FRRP and review future publications, and thus would no longer require the review and approval of our publications, including this one.

Conclusion: A cautionary tale and invitation

In this article we have examined the key challenges we faced as scholars trying to contribute to better policy and practice through a feminist, qualitative approach that prioritised the experiences and voices of those we researched. Cognisant of the pitfalls of contributing to the knowledge economy, which prioritises utilisable research, but mindful of the advantages of engaged critique outlined by CMS scholars, we sought to challenge the functionalist and masculinised assumptions of MoD policymakers and widen their understanding of 'meaningful research'. However, the pervasiveness of functionalism, the politics of military policymaking, the weight of military bureaucracy, the passivity of the ESRC, and the power asymmetry between the four project teams and the MoD, ultimately frustrated how we could conduct our research, who we could access and hear, and what we could know and say.

This matters because the lives of reservists and their partners/spouses were our primary focus and little was known before our project about their lives began. Unfortunately, the challenges that we have detailed above meant that our project too was limited in its ability to give voice to these women's experiences. The effect of the ethical and methodological obstacles we faced has therefore been to reinforce functionalist and masculinist modes of knowledge production and to uphold the very power relations that we sought to probe and trouble as feminist, qualitative researchers.

As Carol Cohn notes, the 'dominant voice of militarized masculinity and decontextualized rationality speaks so loudly in our culture, it will remain difficult for any other voices to be heard until that voice loses some of its power to define what we hear'.[148] Our article is thus a

[147]Email correspondence with MoD liaison officer, 7 May 2018.
[148]Cohn, 'Sex and death', pp. 717–18.

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cautionary tale to those seeking to contribute through critical methods and analysis to military research in the context of the knowledge economy but also an invitation to do so. While our experience was taxing, it remains vital that feminist researchers seek to elevate voices beyond the malestream so that eventually, the power to define, be heard, and name the world becomes more dispersed. In liberal democratic contexts like the UK, why we study security institutions, how, whose voices we prioritise, and what we can say are crucial to ensuring meaningful democratic oversight of martial power.

Scholars who continue to examine only what makes militaries function and how to make them function 'effectively' are failing to further knowledge. In problematically reproducing the same tired methodological approaches and accepted ways of contributing to the knowledge economy, they impoverish our understanding of militaries, security, and contemporary international relations. We thus hope that while this paper is a cautionary tale, it also encourages more scholars to prioritise producing knowledge *about* military power than producing knowledge *for* it.

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