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Gender, race, militarism and remembrance: the everyday geopolitics of the poppy

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This article offers a feminist analysis of how British military violence and war are, in part, made possible through everyday embodied and emotional practices of remembrance and forgetting. Focusing on recent iterations of the Royal British Legion's Annual Poppy Appeal, I explore how the emotionality, and gendered and racial politics of collective mourning provide opportunities for the emergence of 'communities of feeling', through which differently gendered and racialised individuals can find their 'place' in the national story. I aim to show that in relying on such gendered and racial logics of emotion, the Poppy Appeal invites communities of feeling to remember military sacrifice, whilst forgetting the violence and bloodiness of actual warfare. In so doing, the poppy serves to reinstitute war as an activity in which masculinised, muscular 'protectors' necessarily make sacrifices for the feminised 'protected'. The poppy is thus not only a site for examining the everyday politics of contemporary collective mourning, but its emotional, gendered and racialised foundations and how these work together to animate the geopolitics of war.

Keywords: gender; race; everyday militarism; remembrance; emotion

Though war is often framed as a state activity, the ability of liberal democracies to wage war requires some normalisation in more everyday settings. There must necessarily be some 'emotional energy within the polity' that incites at least some citizens to volunteer to 'defend the security of the state under threat' through military service, and wider citizen support for military power that enables the forfeiting of 'income to taxes' by 'free' individuals in pursuit of collective security (Berezin 2002, 39, 36). In the UK, that emotional energy relies on the drawing of racial and gendered boundaries. Although thousands of West Indians and Indians fought for Britain in the Second World War for example, 'this fact hardly registers in public memory'; instead, the war is celebrated as exemplifying the best of Churchill's (white) 'island race' (Cesarani in Mason 2000, 133). Similarly, Britain's wars and war-preparedness have long-relied, and largely continue to rely, on gendered divisions of labour that posit men as 'warriors and women as worriers' (Yuval-Davis 1997:94). Men who have rejected militarism have been routinely portrayed as effeminate, naïve and even dangerous and

women who choose to fight are often regarded 'suspect' (Basham 2013).

Militarism thus gives meaning to the national identities of states but also to identities within constituent societies. Whilst at its most extreme, militarism entails the aggressive promotion of war-preparedness, through 'intentional, sustained and deliberate practice[s] on the part of state military institutions and wider actors supportive of state objectives' (Jenkings *et al* 2012, 357), people's bodies and everyday experiences more routinely intersect 'with places, environments, objects, and discourses linked to geopolitics' (Dittmer & Gray 2010, 1673; see also Tyner & Henkin 2013). This means 'locating militarism amidst the people and places it affects' and exploring how these everyday sites not only reflect or are formed by militarism, but are central to its effects and (re)production (Rech *et al*, 2014, 11). Understanding it requires paying attention to the everyday; to people's 'understandings of and reactions to military activities and institutions' (Jenkings et al 2012, 357). Moreover, whilst militarism can be a 'by-product' of 'the deliberate extension of military influence into civilian spheres of life and the prioritising of military institutions', it is not reducible to those practices (Woodward 2005, 721). The everyday and the geopolitical are sites of mutually co-constitutive practices that 'make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence' of one or the other (Foucault 1991, 103).

Feminist scholars have been particularly attentive to how political practices operate at and through multiple scales 'that include, but are not restricted to, the nation-state' (Hyndman 2003,4; see also Whitworth 2004; Woodward 2004; Enloe 2007; Bernazzoli 2008). The routine casting of the state as agent and referent of security confines gender relations to the 'national' or 'private' sphere and obscures how women (and indeed, many men) are often rendered more *in*secure by military spending and wars offset against social and interpersonal security. Moreover, women's peripheral

status in decision-making processes conceal how war relies on women's symbolic, cultural and biological reproduction of nations (Yuval-Davis 1997).

One way that populations come to collectively understand and react to military institutions, practices, power and force, is through acts of remembrance. Armistice Day, now more commonly, 'Remembrance Day', was first observed throughout Britain and the Commonwealth in 1919, to commemorate the nation's 'fallen' soldiers of the First World War. As an event that asks that soldiers are popularly and annually remembered in collective public sites, Armistice Day serves as 'connective tissue' through which Britons can orient present practices of war remembrance to those of the past (Hite 2012).

However, in helping make sense of the present all such 'memory work' is 'embedded in complex…power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end' (Gillis 1994, 3). For example, what is most often remembered of the First World War in Britain is the ordinary white-British Tommy: *his* 'innocence lost', *his* 'passive victimhood', and the incompetence of *his* 'politico-military' leaders (Bell 2003, 75). What is forgotten istelling; from British imperialism and the thousands of West Indians and Indians who served, to the erasure of the experiences of women, the 16,000 British men who conscientiously objected, and the soldiers who found joy in battle.

Analogising and mythologising past wars invites the risk that 'past' becomes affirmation of present (Till 2005; Bond 2012). This is exemplified by recent practices surrounding Armistice Day, now dubbed as 'Poppy Day' by the Royal British Legion (RBL), 'the nation's custodian of remembrance'. The RBL has raised funds for veterans via its annual Poppy Appeal since 1921 and its exchange of red poppies for charitable donations has become ubiquitous with remembering 'fallen' soldiers. Soldiers do not of course 'fall' in battle; they are maimed, and they maim; they are

eviscerated and they eviscerate; they bleed and make bleed; they are killed and they kill. However, designating soldiers as 'the fallen', and their deaths as sacrifices, enables mourning and remembrance to be separated out from military violence.

More recent Poppy Appeal launches are noticeably different from those that have gone before through their focus on the celebration of serving soldiers. Recent Poppy Appeals have thus conjoined the longstanding narrative of the poppy as one of sacrifice, of 'represent[ing] deaths as purposive and meaningful' (Edkins 2003, 230), with the veneration of serving military personnel, simultaneously erasing the violence of both dead and living on behalf of the British state. Remembering war as visceral and embodied – as violence to bodies, ecology and territory – is periodically erased or blunted 'by stories of service and duty' (Edkins 2003, 1). The state frequently utilises 'language and representations to reframe…violence as something other than violence' (Hite 2012, 4) Making sense of these geopolitical representations, and with them, how the possibility of war becomes salient, requires more than attention to the 'personnel of statecraft' though (Kofman in Hyndman 2003, 3). It necessitates consideration of 'a contingent set of political practices operating at multiple scales' to provide 'a more accountable and embodied' explanation of how militarism operates (Hyndman 2003, 4, 3; see also Pettman 1997; Hyndman 2007; Sylvester 2010; Dowler 2012).

In this article I therefore examine how contemporary British acts of remembrance serve to reproduce war as a matter of sacrifice and in so doing, work to erase the violence, done to and by the bodies they commemorate and celebrate. Focusing on the RBL's annual Poppy Appeal, I explore how the 'everyday', and its sites and materialities, animates the geopolitical and vice versa. Moreover, I suggest that remembrance's ability to 'localise' war deaths, as interpersonal, emotional experiences of collective mourning and sacrifice (Till 2005), is heavily reliant on gendered and racial geopolitical logics, where sacrifice becomes a regrettable but

necessary burden for the white, muscular, masculinist British state, threatened by irrational enemy others. At the same time, remembrance, as a public political and everyday ritual, enables 'communities of feeling' to emerge which can 'serve as arenas of emotion…where citizens enact and vicariously experience collective national selfhood' in its gendered and racialised forms (Berezin 2002, 44).

The article proceeds in three sections. The first outlines the UK's masculinist muscular liberal national identity and how it engenders militarism.. The second examines more closely how the Poppy Appeal - and how gender, race and emotion work with and through it - acts as a locus for the reproduction of this militarism. The third then explores some of the ways in which the Poppy Appeal and especially its jovial, celebratory facets have been contested. Here I pay particular attention to how such contestations work to destabilise, but also partially reinvigorate, the masculinist British state. Throughout, I aim to show how the British state's capacity for 'large-scale, state-sponsored violence' both shapes, and is shaped by, 'gendered, raced, and nationalistic political realities and moral imaginations' of the everyday (Cuomo 1996, 30).

Muscular liberalism, liberal militarism

The fundamental importance of freedom to liberal democracies means all rely on 'national military myths' to justify control of land, resources and people, both at 'home' and globally in exchange for defending the nation from 'constant' threats to that freedom (Shaw 1991). In Britain, this myth materialises through the interrelated notions that Britain is more welfare than warfare state and that as such, its armed forces, though strong, are only deployed when necessary.. Though Britain has time and again been characterised as a 'welfare state', it has waged war more frequently than most other countries (Fey 2012), and consistently undermined the welfare of 'others' to

promote that of its own citizens. Its erasure of colonial and postcolonial bodies with and on which it has waged many wars, has also reinforced the notion that Britain has but a small-scale volunteer military separated out from society and that, in consistently punching above its weight, Britain tt deserves to be heard in the world (Edgerton 1991; Barnett 2012).

A recent materialisation of this national myth is exemplified by what Prime Minister David Cameron has termed 'muscular liberalism'. Though this phrase emerged in a speech in 2011, muscular liberalism is neither novel nor fleeting, but a reconjuring of a Britain with strong and mighty armed forces albeit, only used under rational, justified conditions. In light of defence cuts and large-scale military reorganisation, Cameron (2011) asserted that 'Britain will continue to have one of the world's largest defence budgets because it is 'hard headed' to do so. That Britain has such a large military budget for a small nation, that it has been at the forefront of recent contentious wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is what 'secures' Britain. What threatens it, Cameron (2011) goes on to suggest, is 'terrorist attacks, some of which are, sadly, carried out by our own citizens'. Cameron's (2011) portrayal of this 'threat' is couched in deeply racialised terms; despite stating that 'terrorism is not linked exclusively to any one religion or ethnic group', he asserts that 'we should acknowledge that this threat comes… overwhelmingly from young men who follow a completely perverse, warped interpretation of Islam'. Cameron's 'muscular' antidote is that Britain needs to be much more focused on ensuring that 'others' come to share 'our values'. In a paradigm where 'we' are not the problem, 'they' are, Britain emerges as put upon victim turned (reluctant) fierce warrior; as a hard-headed civilised nation defined by liberal values which are clearly shot through with whiteness in taking their - albeit vague - meaning from what they are not: those of a racialised, inward looking 'community'.

Cameron's speech also belies an assumption that military spending equates security; that it is rational to plan for the inevitability of war. However, as feminists scholars have shown (Tickner 1992; Steans 1998), this is profoundly gendered. The notion that war is inevitable relies on assumptions about 'human' nature based on the experiences of a small number of (white) men whose 'rationality' to undertake such decisions is secured by women's historical exclusion from the public sphere (Pateman 1988) and ongoing exclusion from close-combat and relative absence as war's decision-makers (Hudson 2005). Women in the UK 'are more reliant than men on the welfare state as a source of income, for public services and for employment' (Annesley 2014, 1) so commitments to warfare when welfare is being cut reinstitute security as state-centric. Moreover, asserting that Britain's 'defences are strong' and 'hard-headed' draws on masculinist language (Cohn *et al* 2005; Hutchings 2008); such phrases have become synonymous with sensible, rational politics, a politics shaped by the normalisation of men as society's decision-makers and women as its homemakers (Pateman 1988). In reifying the public masculinised sphere, more localised, non-violent alternatives become 'softheaded, wishful, naïve', feminine in contradistinction (Peterson in Basham 2013, 516).

Muscular liberalism- its veneration of 'British values' and the allocation of resources to defence- is not only brought into being and sustained by state actors though; national military myths are also animated by their diffusion and reproduction in everyday life. An ordered and 'secure' society are central to the fulfilment of the liberal social contract between those who govern and are governed. Collective security thus entails that some citizens are trained to fight wars and others are 'militarised' to support them (Foucault 1991). The historical and ongoing qualification and disqualification of women's and ethnic minority bodies in and from military cultures, policies, practices and relationships works to reinforce the idea that white men are more 'naturally' suited

to defending the British state. In the UK, around 94% of all military personnel are white and around 90% of personnel are men.

Though women were deployed to recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in unprecedented numbers, and seven died and women were represented among the seriously injured, gender norms mean men make up the vast majority of the deployed, of military casualties (90%) and that they form the majority of those who sustained battle injuries. In recent years, there has been much public criticism of state support for injured fighting bodies (NatCen Social Research 2012), among which men have been most visible. The RBL has criticised 'inadequate' veteran support 'in recognition of their contribution to defending their country', and has called for veterans to receive support outside of regular welfare systems (RBL 2006, 1). The founding of the *Help for Heroes* charity in 2007 also occurred amid political controversies about the inadequacy of veteran care and the insufficiency of equipment for deployed troops. In the same year, the RBL launched its 'Honour the Covenant' campaign which saw its civilian and military members lobbying the government to honour a pact said to have existed between the military, soldiers, and British state and society since time immemorial, though only traceable to a 2000 Army doctrinal document (Ingham 2014). The Covenant establishes the military's 'need to be different' from other institutions because of its role in motivating soldiers to fight and possibly die in defence of the UK and its interests (Dandeker 2000; McCartney 2010). It calls upon soldiers to make sacrifices, 'including the ultimate sacrifice – in the service of the Nation' and in return, calls upon British state and society to ensure soldiers can 'expect fair treatment', and that soldiers and the military institution are 'sustained and provided for accordingly by the nation' (British Army 2000, 1.2).

Subsequent media coverage raised further awareness of the Covenant and by 2011, the enactment of that year's Armed Forces Act required that the Defence Secretary annually prepare and present a report on its progress to Parliament. As Ingham (2014, 4) argues, the recent 'process by which the public came to separate the men and women from the missions and rallied to 'our boys' (and our girls), giving them unprecedented levels of moral and material support' began with the Covenant. Members of British society called upon politicians to ensure that the rights and needs to the Armed Forces Community were met through their taxation but also through more everyday acts of honouring the military and its charities.

Significantly, Ingham's (2014, 4) exhaustive study of the Covenant suggests that 'focus on the broken Military Covenant impeded any objective assessment of military performance in Iraq or Afghanistan'. Whilst a majority of British people believed that Britain was wrong to deploy troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, nine out of ten declared their support for soldiers who deployed there, regardless of their opinions about these wars (NatCen Social Research 2012). Moreover, despite their unpopularity, it is thought likely 'that there has been a strengthening of public support for the military throughout the duration of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions' (NatCen Social Research 2012). This 'support the troops, oppose the war' mentality separates soldiers from the wars they wage, and society from the wars the state wages on its behalf. In doing so, it depoliticises those wars and conceals a wider history of British warfare. Thus, attempts to make politicians remember bodies broken by war when the wars that broke those bodies are forgotten, reproduces the myth of a state and society that at once shies away from war but steps up to fight when necessary. Moreover, as I will go on to show, the gendered division of labour that casts men as society's 'natural' protectors and, by contrast, women as its 'protected', and the racialized logics that conceal British aggression, work with and through practices of remembrance and forgetting so as to reinstitute the necessity of war and the bodies it breaks.

The appeal of the poppy

When death comes to bodies required to fight for state security, those bodies often need

to be reintegrated into the national community of the living (Drake 2013). Remembrance Day provides that opportunity. It now comes in a 'highly scripted' form, performed at the London cenotaph. Though televised and thus not entirely bounded to this place, the cenotaph is where cameras are trained on the official two-minute silence, and the ceremonial laying of poppy wreaths by royalty, politicians, ambassadors of the Commonwealth, armed forces chiefs, and the RBL (Edkins 2003: 72). The launch of the RBLs Poppy Appeal in the run up to Remembrance Day, whilst no less scripted, perhaps allows for more democratised, informal, and spatially diversified experiences of collective mourning though. Recent Poppy Appeals have been especially emotionally-charged affairs, from the 'celebratory', in which serving soldiers are venerated as the 'real stars' by celebrities; to the 'tear-jerking', exemplified by love songs released by military wives and girls; and the 'consumerist', as poppy paraphernalia becomes a source of belonging.

Recent RBL Poppy Appeals have drawn heavily on the celebrity from politicians such as Tony Blair (1998) who subsequently deployed RAF pilots on bombing missions over Iraq, and pop stars, including The Spice Girls and World War Two singer Dame Vera Lynn (1997), Westlife (1999) and The Saturdays (2010 and 2013), to poster campaigns featuring actresses and sporting stars[1]. Multiple spaces of the everyday become host to Poppy Appeal paraphernalia, from Tube stations to Facebook and Twitter feeds; and videos of musical launches are viewable on fixed and mobile devices, television and the internet.

2011's Poppy Appeal involved posters featuring actress Helen Mirren and tennis player Andy Murray declaring 'Our troops are the real stars' and 'Please remember those who don't return' respectively. In an age where celebrity status has been democratised by televised talent shows and viral homemade videos, perhaps soldiers are more ethereal. As Jordanova (2014) argues, 'a thirst for heroic figures…is

willingly met by the media in an age of celebrity' and when people become 'highly emotional about certain figures', they are also often 'reluctant to subject such responses to critical scrutiny'. The focus of collective commemoration is still soldiers, 'with the many civilian victims of warfare marked by their absence', despite political dissent about the wars that created those victims (Noakes 2010). As Noakes (2010) points out, it is 'harder to integrate the death of civilians into national acts of war remembrance because it reminds us that, as well as dying, soldiers kill'. In the age of the Covenant, they perhaps do so more clearly in our name. Similarly, King (2010, 21) argues that the increasingly individualistic framing of military obituaries means that 'public support for the military campaign may be stealthily encouraged'; it is 'very difficult to be drawn into the now personalized process of mourning, valuing the individuality of each soldier, while simultaneously rejecting the strategic purpose of their deaths outright', especially as denying the sacrifice of British soldiers feels like denigrating 'the personal memory of the soldier and…the grief of the family'. Individualising war deaths thus 'enables an ambivalent and non-political interpretation of military actions, as it disguises the coercive nature of military service and obscures the collective state interests that are served by the individual male [and less so, female] body' (Sasson-Levy 2008, 299).

Whereas servicemen are often remembered through individualised personality traits however, the death of a servicewoman is more often framed by the media as the loss of a bride or daughter (Basham 2008). Recent practices of collective remembrance display similar gendered tropes. In 2011 the 'Military Wives Choir', formed through a BBC TV series, reached Britain's Christmas number 1 spot with their single 'Wherever You Are'. The money its sale raised went to the RBL and SSAFA, a military families' charity that acts as a parent charity to the Military Wives Choirs Foundation, 'a network of choirs that reaches across the *whole* military community to bring *women*

closer together through singing' (SSAFA 2014, my emphasis). In 2013 the RBL also ran a talent competition for children of military families to raise money for its Poppy Appeal. The outcome was the 'Poppy Girls', five daughters aged between 10 and 17 years with British military dads. Their single, 'The Call (no need to say goodbye)', was performed at the RBLs Annual Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall to the regular spectacle of poppies fluttering from the ceiling. Both the Military Wives Choir and the Poppy Girls provided opportunities for normally stoic, invisible parts of the military community to achieve emotional expression of their anxiety and pain; but the very public, televised way this happened 'could hardly have been more dramatic' (Jervis 2014, 164). The packaging of these emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects on 'our boys' and the women and (girl) children they leave behind as hit singles, allowed the wider British public to personalise war. Objecting to such heartfelt expressions of support for soldiers would be heard-hearted, cynical or snobbish; *even if* an effect of remaining silent is to back 'our boys', 'wherever they are' and whatever they do (Barnett 2012). Though the spectre of death hangs over British servicemen - and indeed the far less visible servicewomen who serve alongside them - their role in bringing about the deaths of others is obscured.

As performances of 'appropriate' femininity – good wives and angelic daughters in appropriately feminine white dresses with poppy broaches – there is also much to suggest that British society remains heir to 'a tradition that assumes an affinity between women and peace, between men and war'… so that ' actual men and women are expected to 'take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls' respectively (Elshtain 1995, 4). The muscular liberal state that will not retreat from the hard-headedness of war requires the sacrifice of men's bodies 'for the sake of the 'home', as both family and as sovereign state',

whereas women embody, 'represent and reproduce the object of protection through…children and…tears' (Pin-Fat & Stern 2005, 44).

As something now persistently characterised by patriotism and belonging, donations to the RBL and other veteran and remembrance organisations conceal the role that British people play in supporting war materially as well as symbolically. The tradition of exchanging donations for red paper poppies remains but the British public can now purchase a much wider range of poppy paraphernalia, including poppy-branded umbrellas, broaches, stationery, mugs, hoodies, t-shirts, dresses and much more, from the RBL's online shop (see http://www.poppyshop.org.uk/). The RBL web shop also features 'gifts for him' and 'gifts for her'. The aforementioned brightly coloured red and pink broaches and stationery for her, and the more utilitarian spitfire cufflinks, lapel pins and military diaries for him. This presents shoppers with gender-conforming opportunities to consume remembrance and to enable its diffusion as a bodily accessory.

Whilst not everyone wears a red poppy and people exchange donations for them for various reasons, in an era where one can support the troops even if one opposed the war, to wear the poppy, often on a lapel wherever one goes, is to belong in some way to a community that respects the fallen. In October 2014, the consumption of remembrance and its 'respectability' was 'extended' to gendered and racialised bodies more often subject to reproach. Muslim women were invited to buy and wear poppy hijabs for the RBLs Poppy Appeal. *The Daily Mail* (Doyle 2014) reported that 'British Muslims are being urged to wear a new 'Poppy Hijab' as a challenge to extremist groups who 'spout hatred' about the Armed Forces'. For non-whites living in the UK, especially those seen as belonging to the 'Muslim community', and particularly since the brutal murder of British Army Drummer Lee Rigby at the hands of two self-proclaimed 'soldiers of Allah', communities of feeling and belonging surrounding the

Poppy Appeal may be harder to access. Muscular liberalism demands that even those Muslims previously regarded as 'moderates' must prove to the polity that they are truly 'modern'; that they are part of the polity because they fully share its values and emotional energy (Basham & Vaughan-Williams 2013). The poppy hijab is one such way for Muslim women, at least, to show this.

Though the launch of the poppy hijab also marked 100 years since the first Muslim soldier was awarded the Victoria Cross during World War One, the statement of Sughra Ahmed, President of the Islamic Society of Great Britain, that it provides 'a way for ordinary Muslim citizens to take some attention away from extremists who seem to grab the headlines' (Doyle 2014), illustrates just how contingent the politics of war and war-preparedness is on ideas of 'us' and 'them' in an age of muscular liberalism, and on forgetting that our ability to wage wars has long-relied on racialized bodies. As Razack (2008) has shown, the necessity for British Muslims to prove they 'belong' comes from the localisation and emotional investment people make in 'race thinking' which entails that 'Europeans' come to understand themselves as sharing a common humanity with one another but not with 'non-Europeans'. Muscular liberalism evokes this idea and in sharing nothing in common with this racialised (enemy) other, many begin to suspect they are 'under siege' (Razack 2008, 5). Moreover, the spectre of the 'extremist' is 'inescapably tied in an interdependent relationship – linguistically and politically' with that of the 'hero' who seeks to repel *him* (Kelly 2013, 724). That hero is the British soldier; and the effect is to legitimise one and demonise the other, including any who do not prove themselves 'truly modern' 'in a structured moral hierarchy' of race thinking (Kelly 2013, 724).

Seeing red

The Poppy Appeal has thus become a site for 'communities of feeling, whether staged or spontaneous' and the intensification of individual 'emotional identification with the polity' (Berezin 2002, 39) through gendered and racialised symbolism. The Appeals localise remembrance, even for those who have no personal connection to the 'fallen' or those who could potentially 'fall', and offer particular exemplars for how differently gendered and racialised bodies should participate in collective acts of mourning. However, public political rituals of remembrance also create 'an open interpretive space' (Berezin 2002: 45) where how war is acknowledged and understood can be contested (Edkins 2003).

In its history of the Poppy Appeal, the RBL suggest that the poppy gave civilians a way to remember those who gave their lives for peace and freedom (RBL 2014). However, remembrance and wearing poppies was a contested terrain even in post-World War I Britain. Though the RBL has succeeded in making the poppy the symbol of remembrance, some First World War veterans were highly critical of its association with opium, oblivion and forgetting (Iles 2008). The 1921 Armistice Day ceremonies were also disrupted by unemployed veterans brandishing placards stating the 'Dead are remembered but we are forgotten' (Gough 2000, 215). However, when the Women's Co-Operative Guild introduced the white poppy in 1933 as a symbol of lasting peace, some women lost their jobs for wearing them in the midst of a gendered backlash by male veterans who felt it detracted from the red poppy and its symbolism.

In 2010, a group of veterans declared that the Poppy Appeal was 'once again subverting Armistice Day', a day that ' should be about peace and remembrance' but was being 'turned into a month-long drum roll of support for current wars'. They suggested that the campaign had been 'launched with showbiz hype' whilst the 'true horror and futility of war is forgotten and ignored'. They also critiqued the idea of the

public being urged to wear poppies ‘in support of ‘our Heroes’’ on the grounds that ’there is nothing heroic about being blown up in a vehicle… about being shot in an ambush and there is nothing heroic about fighting in an unnecessary conflict. Remembrance should be marked with the sentiment ‘Never Again’’ (Griffin *et al* 2010).

This letter, written by six British military veterans, was especially critical of the ‘showbiz hype’ surrounding the Poppy Appeal. Britain has a heritage of undertaking celebratory, jovial approaches to fundraising for alleviating human misery, as exemplified by Comic Relief, but the objections of the six veterans suggest that celebrity fundraising has displaced peace and remembrance as the ‘real’ purpose of Armistice Day and indeed, has made it a celebration of current wars. Though these objections somewhat reinforce my claims, it is also important to note that the potential impact of veterans’ dissent comes from the fact that ‘military authority is simultaneously the target of and [their] means to dissent’ (Tidy 2014, 2). This is not to dismiss the potential for alternative emotional energies of remembrance that they enable, but by virtue of having been bodies of war, their voices are more authoritative than others might be. As a group of entirely male veterans in particular, their appropriate embodiment, ‘even as it targets militarism’, risks reinstating normalised ‘gendered relations of power’ (Tidy 2014, 3). Finally, in suggesting that the meaning of Armistice Day, in light of the character of the contemporary Poppy Appeal, but not Armistice Day itself, is what must be challenged, their grievances against British state and society find expression through ‘the same repertoire of ritual actions learned from state sponsored events’ (Berezin 2002, 45). As Tidy (2014, 3) argues, dissent, particularly from militarism, is never ‘straightforward, simple or consistent’ but its ‘productive tensions and inconsistencies’ can at least alert us to the ways in which

‘contestation reinforces that which it seeks to disrupt’, as well as its capacity to provide alternative communities of feeling.

Conclusion

The everyday, as a significant site for the animation of the geopolitical, has been habitually marginalised by state-centric masculinist accounts that characterise war as a hard-headed, rational and inevitable course of action. Feminist geopolitical analyses reveal however, how the very possibility of war relies on everyday militarisms as well as geopolitical practices and their profoundly gendered logics. The emotionality, gendered and racial politics of collective mourning, as a site where war deaths find meaning through everyday sites and practices, provides opportunities for the emergence of ‘communities of feeling’, through which differently gendered and racialised individuals can find their ‘place’ in the national story. In theUK, , that story is of a nation that only wages war when necessary. This invites communities of feeling to remember war in particular ways, most notably, as a matter of masculinised military sacrifice, necessary in the face of a racialized enemy other who refuses values considered ‘appropriate’. Such stories also invite communities of feeling to forget the violence and bloodiness of actual warfare and the victims it creates; and to forget the boundedness of their community and how it reinforces and creates racialized and gendered hierarchies of values.

The Poppy Appeal’s celebration of soldiers, living and dead, as ‘heroes’ who exemplify the values of the polity, makes it much harder to question the violence done to and perpetrated by them; the impassioned love songs of their wives and (girl) children make questioning that violence cruel in light of their pain; and the ability to consume and exhibit one’s respect for soldier heroes and their families in ever more diverse ways, only invites people to become part of a community of feeling that shares

'our' values, not to question them and how they might exclude racialized 'others'. Moreover, even attempts to contest these communities of feeling rely on emotional pleas that these communities search their feelings and judge if they are the appropriate, intended ones. Though the RBL's annual Poppy Day is but one site for tracing some of the multiple ways in which the geopolitics of war and its place in the national story are realised, reinforced and contested through everyday practices, it is one of significance, therefore. It shows how integral everyday gendered and racialized expressions of emotion and belonging are to the reproduction of militarism, and with it, the geopolitics of war.

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Notes

1. Images from recent Poppy Appeals are at: http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/photo-galleries/poppy-appeal [last accessed 20/05/15).

Notes on contributor

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