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Vicarious Militarism

Ontological (In)Security and the Politics of Vicarious Subjectivity in
British War Commemoration

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*A thesis submitted to the University of Warwick in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Politics and International Studies*

August 2020

Department of Politics and International Studies

The University of Warwick

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Acknowledgements

The path to completion for this thesis has been a long and difficult one – more so than I could ever have imagined when I began in 2014. The death of my mother in 2016 and of my partner’s father in 2017 affected me deeply and led to a period of anxiety, depression, and temporary withdrawal. By the end of 2017, I seriously doubted whether I would return to the project. There were days when it seemed unthinkable that I would ever be able to be able to function ‘normally’ – whatever *that* is – again, let alone produce a Ph.D. As such, this thesis very nearly didn’t happen at all. But I’m so glad that it did. And that it did is thanks to the patience and support of a great number of people and organisations, to whom I am personally indebted for their support.

Firstly, a huge debt of gratitude is owed to my supervisors Christopher Browning and Trevor McCrisken for encouraging me to pursue doctoral study in the first place, and for their steadfast belief in me and enthusiasm for the project ever since. Their wisdom, constructive feedback, and ability to see the wood for the trees have been constantly inspiring and reassuring. It has been a privilege to try to make sense of this mad world we live in during our supervisions. But far more than their academic support, I have cherished their humanity and appreciation of the things that truly matter. They gave me the time and space I needed to recover after bereavement, weathered my multiple existential crises, and kept believing in me and the project, long after I had given up. Supervising me was far from straightforward, but now that it is done, I hope I have done justice to their efforts. I simply could not have asked for two better mentors.

I would like to thank the University of Warwick and the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research without which the thesis would not have been possible; I am also grateful to the Department of Politics and International Studies for providing a stimulating and welcoming academic home for my past eleven years of study.

One of the best things about academia is being surrounded by interesting, witty and inspiring people, and I have had the fortune of sharing my Ph.D. experience with some truly exceptional people who have kept me sane – just about. Thanks to Jason Dymydiuk, Ben Gannon, Emma Hall, Sarah Mainwaring, James Sampson-Foster, and Julian Schmid. Thanks also to my study-buddy ‘schnubbers’, and Alban, my library friend who, for the past two years, has watched my bag for me (and I for him) whenever I had to leave my desk in the Learning Grid. Special thanks go to three people who have become my academic partners in crime: Shahnaz Akhter, Katie Dingley, and Francesca Melhuish. They are the members of CROSS (CRITICAL Ontological Security Studies) – a group which occasionally convenes over tea for a grumble and gossip about academia, to exchange fashion compliments, and to share photos of the dogs of CROSS. And sometimes we talk about ontological security studies. I have lost count of the times that their humour, sparkling wit and unparalleled ‘gif’ game has turned a bad day into a good one. I will always treasure our experience of going to BISA 2019 in London – back when going to conferences was ‘a thing’.

I also wish to thank various members of the critical IR community for their input on the project. I am indebted to Stuart Croft, whose work was a key inspiration in my own thinking about ontological security. Thanks also to Pertti Joenniemi for providing comments on my MA dissertation which were invaluable in developing this project into something much more ambitious. I’d also like to say a special thank you to Brent Steele who got several of us thinking about vicarious identity way back in 2014 and has always been very supportive - including inviting me to write an article for a journal special issue

back in 2016. Unfortunately, due to life events I was unable to deliver, but I wish to thank him for the opportunity. Thanks also to the participants at the European International Studies Association Pan-European Conferences in 2015 and 2017, the British International Studies Association Annual Conference in 2019, and the ISA workshop on war preparedness in Gothenburg in 2020 for your incredibly kind and supportive questions and comments.

I will be forever grateful to Gurpal Matu and Jackie Clarke who both saw me at my lowest points and helped me to process my grief and anxiety and, in different ways, gave me the space and opportunities I needed to recuperate and once again contemplate writing a thesis. I also wish to thank Dean Howes whose Wednesday mindfulness sessions were a source of calm during a turbulent period.

I am also incredibly grateful to my friends and family who provided encouragement for my work even when it seemed that the sky was falling all around us. To Christopher Booth, Victoria Fowler, and Khrystyna Chelak, thank you for your continuing friendship. To my Aunt and Uncle Sue and Alan Gorey, thank you for always encouraging me to persevere with the project even when it seemed in doubt. To Grandma Haigh – who will probably disagree with most of this thesis – thank you for taking me to a Royal Marines homecoming parade in 2010 which started me thinking about militarism more deeply. Special thanks are also owed to Lynne Cox and Andrew Rennison. Not only are they wonderful people who have made me feel part of the family, but they have shared in the writing up period in a most unexpected way. When Tory and I came down to Dorset for week-long holiday in March 2020, who could have predicted that we would still be living here five months later? Thank you for putting up with having a stressed Ph.D. student in your midst and allowing him to effectively occupy your study for half a year while trapped by the coronavirus pandemic. To my dad, Stephen Haigh – who has promised to read the whole thing – and my brother Ben Lismer-Jones, thank you for your enduring support through what has been an incredibly difficult period for us all and for never wavering in your belief that I could do it. I am so proud of you both (in a non-vicarious way, obviously) and the lives that you have made after grief, and I'm looking forward to sharing in them with you again now that all the referencing is done.

Finally, it is difficult to express quite how indebted I am to my wonderful partner Victoria Cox. It is a cliché – and I usually do not *do* clichés - but without her love and support this thesis simply would not have happened. She read drafts of every chapter, patiently listened to my incoherent ramblings as the deadline loomed, always offered hugs and words of encouragement, and put up with my absent-mindedness when on dog walks with Patch. I am looking forward to being fully-present with you once again.

These words hardly do justice to her part in this project and my life; and so, it is to her that this thesis is dedicated. It is also dedicated to Tory's father Hugh Jeremy Cox, my Uncle Ian 'Smuttery' Lismer, and my mother Diane Elizabeth Haigh who sadly did not live to see it completed but are loved and dearly missed.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work. I also confirm that no part of this thesis contains work that has been published elsewhere or has been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Contemporary British political discourse abounds with declarations that ‘we’ won World War II, made by those not even born at the time of the event and without any first-hand military experience. Instead, such claims frequently invoke genealogical – and *vicarious* - connections. While the (in)authenticity of such claims has become a topic of intense public debate in recent years, scholarship in Critical Military Studies and IR has paid only scant attention to vicarious dynamics, focusing instead upon how the exclusivity of military subjectivities is maintained through contradistinction with the ‘civilian’. This thesis provides the first examination of vicarious dynamics in contemporary British war commemoration through a qualitative discourse analysis of remembrance initiatives between 2014 and 2018. It explores the motivations behind, and stakes of, vicarious identification, arguing that the social intricacies of such dynamics exceed the explanatory power of existing frameworks. Accordingly, the thesis develops scholarship on ‘militarised subjectivity’ and ‘ontological (in)security’ through the notion of ‘vicarious military subjectivity’, interpreting identifications with military ancestors as responses to ontological insecurities in late modernity. It argues that appeals to an idealised military past have been central to recent attempts to reactivate the language of patriotic obligation, providing the resources for offsetting ontological insecurities around meaning(lessness) generated by Britain’s contemporary wars and political upheavals. Ancestral experiences of total war have also been at the forefront of attempts to achieve emotional resonance, providing powerful points of personal connection with militarism for a public with declining primary military experience. Individual, organizational and collective subjects have re-engaged with military ancestors to assuage anxieties – including ‘civilian anxieties’ unleashed by the militarization of society – and to establish authentic claims to ‘vicarious military subjectivity’ which confers ‘telling rights’ about war. Finally, the thesis concludes that militarized vicarious identity promotion frames war commemoration in a way that discourages critical engagement with the past, and that vicarious military subjectivity is subject to competing impulses to maintain the exclusivity of military subjectivities and to promote vicarious identifications as a route to militarized national self-articulation.

Key words: Vicarious Identification, Militarism, Britain, Anxiety, Subjectivity, Ontological Security

List of Abbreviations

BIRG – Bask(ing) In Reflected Glory

CSH – Critical Security History

CSS – Critical Security Studies

CWGC – Commonwealth War Graves Commission

EDL – English Defence League

EU – European Union

FA – Football Association

FIFA – Fédération Internationale de Football Association

IFAB – The International Football Association Board

IWGC – Imperial War Graves Commission

MoD – Ministry of Defence

OSS – Ontological Security Studies

RBL – Royal British Legion

RFU – Rugby Football Union

SSAFA – The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (The Armed Forces Charity)

VfP – Veterans for Peace

WW1 – World War 1

WW2 – World War 2

Introduction

Nationalism does nothing but teach you how to hate people that you've never met... and all of a sudden you take pride in accomplishments you had no part in whatsoever and you brag about [them]. And the Americans go, 'fuck the French... fuck the French. If we hadn't had saved their ass in two World Wars they'd be speaking German right now.' And you go, 'Oh, was that us? That was *us*? Was, was that me and you, Tommy? *We saved the French*?! Jesus. I know I blacked out a little bit after that fourth shot of Jägermeister last night but I don't remember [...] saving the French. And I went through the last ten calls on my cell phone and there's nothing incoming or outgoing to the French looking for 'muscle on a project'; I checked my pants and there's no mud stains on the knees from where we were 'garrotting Krauts in the trenches at Verdun'. I think 'we' didn't do anything but watch sports bloopers while we got hammered. I think 'we' should shut the fuck up.

Doug Stanhope¹

The sentiments expressed in American comedian Doug Stanhope's sketch have received renewed attention in recent years, having been summarised and repackaged as a pithy meme reading: 'nationalism teaches you to take pride in shit you haven't done, and hate people you've never met.'² Even a cursory glance over the comments section responding to the sketch on YouTube suggests that Stanhope has touched a nerve: 'You should sit down and shut the hell up. We fought so your dumb ass could make a fool of yourself In front of sheep', writes 'Aaron McNelly'.³ For many others, however, Stanhope's take on nationalism is evidently – not least by its success as a sketch and a meme - one that resonates. Observational comedy, as Herring and Caulfield argue, 'essentially involves saying "Did you ever notice?" and then recounting something that will hopefully be universally familiar, but that won't necessarily have been consciously noted by your audience.'⁴ What Stanhope has noticed, then, is a key but often unspoken feature of contemporary political life: that the nation is not simply a site of politics, but a transhistorical agent through which citizens seek to live vicariously.

¹ From 'National Pride' in Milton Lage, *Doug Stanhope: No Refunds*, DVD, Documentary, Comedy (Levity Productions, 2007).

² For example, see @christoq, 'Nationalism Teaches You to Take Pride in Shit You Haven't Done and Hate People You Have Never Met.', Twitter, 27 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/christoq/status/1210416393130106880>.

³ 'Aaron McNelly' (n.d.) Re: rollnrocksteve, *Doug Stanhope on Nationalism*, YouTube, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsPDT5qHtZ4> Accessed 23 August 2018.

⁴ Richard Herring and Jo Caulfield, 'The Comedian's Toolbox', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/22/comedy4>.

While these vicarious dynamics often pass unnoticed in everyday life however, they have also been largely ‘hidden in plain sight’ within the discipline of IR.⁵ While scholars have been attentive to nationalism’s tendency to encourage subjects to ‘hate people you’ve never met’, with a few notable exceptions, they have devoted far less attention to the ways in which nationalism seemingly encourages people to take pride in actions in which they have played, at best, an extremely tenuous role. This is a curious lacuna, both because they have long been recognised in the fields of sociology and social psychology from which IR has derived much inspiration over the past three decades, and because vicarious relationships are such ubiquitous features of the everyday. The notions of ‘living vicariously through others’ is now such an established part of the popular lexicon that when journalist Olivia Willis recently posed the question ‘[a]re you living vicariously through your children?’ after witnessing a dad coaching his young child during a football game in a manner that caused apparent distress to the child, readers knew exactly what she was referring to.⁶ And most will be familiar with sports fans who exclaim ‘we won!’ upon their team winning the cup. And there is much invested in such attachments. For psychologist Robert Cialdini, ‘[t]his is not some light diversion to be enjoyed for its inherent grace and harmony’; rather, sport offers fans access to intense emotional experiences against the backdrop of humdrum modern life: ‘our sports heroes are our warriors.’⁷

In contemporary British political discourse, however, claims that ‘we won’ are as likely to refer to war as they are sport. Sometimes, the two are conjoined, as in the song ‘Two World Wars and One World Cup’ sung by fans at England football matches, especially when the opposition team is Germany.⁸ The experiences of the two World Wars – especially the Second – are a regular touchstone in British culture. In 2019, for example, when *BBC Newsnight* sought the opinion of former miner Danny Gillespie about the negotiations surrounding Britain’s departure from the European Union, he claimed:

We fought in the Second World War. We liberated France, we liberated Belgium. We beat the Germans. And what we getting now? [The EU are] trying to tell us what we can do and what we can’t do. It’s absolutely ridiculous.⁹

⁵ Christopher S Browning, Pertti Joenniemi, and Brent Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Forthcoming), 58.

⁶ Olivia Willis, ‘The Warning Signs: Are You Living Vicariously through Your Children?’, Independent.ie, 5 October 2016, <https://www.independent.ie/life/family/parenting/the-warning-signs-are-you-living-vicariously-through-your-children-35093579.html>.

⁷ Robert Cialdini, quoted in James C. McKinley Jr, ‘Sports Psychology; It Isn’t Just a Game: Clues to Avid Rooting’, *The New York Times*, 11 August 2000, sec. Sports, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/11/sports/sports-psychology-it-isn-t-just-a-game-clues-to-avid-rooting.html>.

⁸ On the cultural significance of this song, see Christopher Young, ‘Two World Wars and One World Cup: Humour, Trauma and the Asymmetric Relationship in Anglo-German Football’, *Sport in History* 27, no. 1 (2007): 1–23.

⁹ Danny Gillespie, quoted in @BBC Newsnight, “‘We Fought in the Second World War. We Liberated France, We Liberated Belgium. We Beat the Germans. And What We Got Now? Trying to Tell Us What

And yet, as the experience of the two World Wars fades into memory with the passing of the generations that experienced them, such claims are increasingly made by those not even born at the time of these events and without any first-hand military experience. This fact was not lost upon some of those commenting on the *Newsnight* clip who objected on the grounds of the inherent vicariousness of Gillespie's claim. Simon Bruni, for example, commented: 'He doesn't look old enough to have fought in WWII, "we" is doing a lot of work there.'¹⁰ Such claims have attracted wider criticism and ridicule too. A *Daily Mash* headline from the same year read: 'Brexiters claims to remember fighting World War Two inside grandfather's left testicle'.¹¹

What was also interesting, however, was how many of those reacting to Gillespie's claim seemed to invoke vicarious connections of their own to reinforce their view that Britain should remain within the EU. One, for example, said: 'My RAF [Royal Air Force] Dad wasn't old enough either. He was 17 when the war ended and was sent to Germany to work on the clear-up operation. He's now 90 & voted to remain in the EU.'¹² Here, a military ancestor was used to bolster an argument; and unlike Gillespie's claim to live through the nation's past military exploits, the invocation of ancestral connections did not attract controversy. Indeed, such vicarious connections have become increasingly prominent in British politics, foregrounded by the First World War centenary commemorations in which individuals and companies have been encouraged to explore genealogical connections with the events of a century ago. Even as debates about war commemoration – frequently centred on the Royal British Legion's red 'Poppy' symbol sold each November as a symbol of remembrance and to raise money for veterans' welfare – have become increasingly intense and emotionally-charged over this period, genealogical connections have become key focal points. In 2018, Glenton noted: 'It is that time of year when a vocal and presumably rather unfulfilled section of our society begin to fantasise openly that they not only fought but actually died at the Somme.'¹³

We Can and Can't Do." Former Miner Danny Gillespie, Who Voted Leave, Says the Situation Is "Absolutely Ridiculous"', Twitter, 28 January 2019, <https://twitter.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1090019939774193664>.

¹⁰ @SimonBruni, 'He Doesn't Look Old Enough to Have Fought in WWII, "We" Is Doing a Lot of Work There.', Twitter, 28 January 2019, <https://twitter.com/SimonBruni/status/1090035235780288512>.

¹¹ 'Brexiters Claims to Remember Fighting World War Two inside Grandfather's Left Testicle', The Daily Mash, 10 October 2019, <https://www.thedailymash.co.uk/news/war/brexiters-claims-to-remember-fighting-world-war-two-inside-grandfathers-left-testicle-20191010189660>.

¹² @hugh_canning, 'My RAF Dad Wasn't Old Enough Either. He Was 17 When the War Ended and Was Sent to Germany to Work on the Clear-up Operation. He's Now 90 & Voted to Remain in the EU.', Twitter, 29 January 2019, https://twitter.com/hugh_canning/status/1090186805704564736.

¹³ Joe Glenton, 'How Do We Know It's Poppy Season Again? The Foaming Rage of War-Hungry Gammons – and I Say That as a Veteran', The Independent, 15 October 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/poppy-remembrance-day-cambridge-university-students-soldiers-british-transport-police-a8584956.html>.

Research Question

Vicarious dynamics, then, are central to modern British political discourse. This raises several intriguing questions. How can we account for the prominence of vicarious identification in national life? What are the different forms that this behaviour can take? What motivates subjects to live vicariously through military ancestors and exploits? Or, put slightly differently, what social functions do such identifications fulfil? And that these identifications are often the subjects of intense emotions and contestation raises another question: what is at stake in such claims? In short, what is the politics of living through militarism? These are the core research questions that guide this thesis and can be summarized in the following way:

What are the political and psychological motivations and stakes of attempts by Britons to promote/claim authentic military subjectivity by living vicariously through ancestral military connections; and what can this politics tell us about militarism's broader affective appeal?

I want to suggest that the juxtaposition of the banal and the extraordinary captured so vividly by Stanhope may hold the key to answering them. While Stanhope views the mundanity of modern life as the reason why 'we' should desist from claiming 'we saved the French', in this thesis I want to suggest that desires to transcend conditions of meaninglessness in late modernity are key drivers of such attachments, rendering the stakes of living through militarism *existential*. Rather than turning to metaphorical warriors for cathartic transcendence, processes of militarisation have led people to turn to the real thing. And understanding how such processes manifest themselves in contemporary debates around war commemoration can contribute novel insights into militarism's affective appeal for subjects and the visceral emotional investments that it inspires, or so I will argue.

Thesis and Contribution

This thesis speaks most directly to debates within the interdisciplinary research programmes of Critical Military Studies (CMS) and Ontological Security Studies (OSS). The former has contributed valuably to sociological understandings of military power, not least through the concepts of militarism and militarisation, which have been used to explore the diffusion and attraction of military solutions and ways of being. Recent work has explored the ways in which militarism creates desiring subjects, with 'desire' encapsulating myriad affective engagements

ranging from enthusiastic support of military power to grudging and even tacit acceptance of it.¹⁴ Moreover, scholars have begun to explore the role of psychological insecurities pertaining to the everyday and social status in underpinning the emotional resonance of militarism.¹⁵ Such dynamics are also present – albeit largely implicitly – in scholarship on ‘militarised subjectivity’ and ‘military masculinities’ which demonstrates how desires to ‘be’ military are subject to gendered, racialised, and classed hierarchical dynamics. These hierarchies are built around the hegemonic figure of the hypermasculine combat soldier, which effectively imposes limits on the extent to which subjects further away from this ideal can attain recognition as authentic military subjects.¹⁶ Such limits are especially profound for ‘civilians’, whose socially-ascribed inferiority in militarised social hierarchies generates feelings of ‘civilian anxiety’ and attempts to ameliorate it through performances of ‘good national citizenship’.¹⁷ However, hierarchical military subjectivity imposes limits on the ability of civilian subjects to do so, with most restricted to demonstrations of support – albeit paternalised and re-masculinised ones – that reinforce the boundaries of self and other.

While this scholarship has made invaluable contributions to understanding the dynamics of military subjectivity, the thesis identifies two areas as requiring further development and investigation. The first is that despite recent explorations of anxiety as underpinning desires for militarism, the focus of most of these attempts has been on acute instances of anxiety as the disruption of ontological continuity. By contrast, the analytic potential of broader understandings of existential anxiety pertaining to meaninglessness has remained underdeveloped. Secondly, while the thesis adopts Millar’s notion of ‘civilian anxiety’ as a productive route forward for unpacking such potential, it also argues that CMS scholars have developed only a partial understanding of the ways in which civilians might seek to overcome such anxieties. The vicarious dynamics illustrated above have not yet been explored by CMS scholars, but provide intriguing examples of strategies for attending to civilian anxieties that *transcend* the boundaries between civilian selves and military others rather than reinforcing them. The primary aim and contribution of this thesis is to account for such vicarious dynamics in a way that develops CMS’ existing

¹⁴ James Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology: The Critique of Violence after Security’, *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 1–2 (2018): 44–56.

¹⁵ Victoria M. Basham, ‘Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence: Gender, Race and the Everyday Geopolitics of War’, *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 1–2 (2018): 32–43; Swati Parashar, ‘Discursive (in)Securities and Postcolonial Anxiety: Enabling Excessive Militarism in India’, *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 1–2 (2018): 123–35; Katharine M. Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/Ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2019): 239–59.

¹⁶ See, for example, Paul R. Higate, “‘Soft Clerks’ and ‘Hard Civvies’”: Pluralising Military Masculinities’, in *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*, ed. Paul R. Higate (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 27–42; Joanna Tidy, ‘The Gender Politics of “Ground Truth” in the Military Dissent Movement: The Power and Limits of Authenticity Claims Regarding War’, *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2016): 99–114.

¹⁷ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/Ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’.

engagement with anxiety and psychological insecurity as motivating subjectivity and moves scholarship beyond conventional conceptualisations of self and other.

The first move made towards providing such an account is to place CMS scholarship and the account of subjectivity sketched above in dialogue with work in IR and sociology on the concept of ontological (in)security. Inspired by the foundational work of R.D. Laing and Anthony Giddens,¹⁸ Ontological Security Studies provides an account of subjectivity that centralises the insights of existential philosophy on the concept of anxiety in motivating social behaviour. While much IR scholarship on the concept has, like CMS scholarship, viewed anxiety as generated by disruption to a subject's sense of being in the world and motivating attempts at stabilisation - not least through its focus on securitisation dynamics - more recent critical readings of ontological (in)security have moved to reappraise anxiety.¹⁹ On such readings, anxiety is not simply generated by critical situations manifesting in the search for stability but can also be generated *by* stability and the everyday in the form of feelings of meaninglessness and *existential boredom* in late modernity. What is provided is an account of subjectivity that emphasises ontological security-seeking as oriented not only towards stability but also self-esteem and recognition in the context of militarised social hierarchies – which is sought through articulating claims to distinctive and authentic subjectivity.

Although turning to OSS helps to address one of the limitations of existing CMS research, however, OSS scholarship – like IR more broadly - has largely (with a few notable exceptions) reproduced the second by focusing on processes of self-articulation relying upon the delineation of boundaries between self and other.²⁰ As such, the social intricacies of vicarious dynamics exceed the explanatory capacity of existing frameworks, necessitating the development of new conceptual tools. The second move of the thesis is therefore to extend the insights of both CMS and OSS by developing nascent work in IR and sociology on 'vicarious identity (promotion)' and 'vicarious identification'.²¹ More specifically, it advances scholarship on 'militarised subjectivity',

¹⁸ R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1990); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

¹⁹ See, for example Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31–47; Dmitry Chernobrov, 'Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises: Uncertainty, Political Imagining, and the Self', *Political Psychology* 37, no. 5 (2016): 581–96; Jakub Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression: Fantasy as a Factor in International Politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 1 (2019): 243–68; Felix Berenskoetter, 'Anxiety, Time, and Agency', *International Theory* 0, no. 0 (2020).

²⁰ Felix Berenskoetter, 'Friends, There Are No Friends? An Intimate Reframing of the International', *Millennium* 35, no. 3 (2007): 647–76; Ayse Zarakol, 'States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking', *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 48–68; Christopher S Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'From Fratricide to Security Community: Re-Theorising Difference in the Constitution of Nordic Peace', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16, no. 4 (2013): 483–513.

²¹ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Lisa Silvestri, 'Surprise Homecomings and Vicarious Sacrifices', *Media, War & Conflict* 6, no. 2 (2013): 101–15; Christopher S. Browning, "'Je Suis En Terrasse': Political Violence, Civilizational

‘ontological (in)security’, and ‘vicarious identity’ by developing the concepts of ‘vicarious militarism’ and ‘vicarious military subjectivity’, interpreting both as responses to ontological insecurities – including existential boredom and growing dissatisfaction with contemporary neo-liberal subjectivity – in late modernity. Beyond making a theoretical contribution to CMS and OSS by exploring instances in which the self-other distinction is collapsed, the thesis also contributes insights that speak to other debates in and beyond IR. In addition to developing an approach to the temporal dynamics of military subjectivities, the exploration of genealogical dynamics contributes to recent attempts to revive the study of Kinship in IR.²² The argument about the roles played by such connections and their invocation for establishing claims to authentic vicarious military subjectivity is also relevant to the endeavour of Critical Security History insofar as it demonstrates one vector by which memory is transmitted and channeled, as well as helping to account in greater detail for militarism’s emotional resonance, particularly where ancestral connections are concerned.²³

Through the case study chapters, the thesis also makes an empirical contribution to historiographical and sociological debates about the role of war commemoration in British politics. By exploring discourses of British militarism predominantly from 2014 to 2018, I argue that appeals to a sanitised and idealised military past have been central to recent attempts to reactivate the language of patriotic obligation and, in so doing, reconnect subjects with the national story on a personal level to assuage personal and collective anxieties around meaning(lessness) generated by Britain’s contemporary wars and political upheavals. While discourses of liberal militarism have deliberately fomented ‘civilian anxieties’,²⁴ the emphasis on the past has also offered militarised resources for offsetting them. Individuals, organisations, and collective subjects have sought – and been encouraged – to re-engage with the nation on an emotional level by vicariously identifying with military ancestors or other personal connections to war, as well as the nation’s military past more generally. As first-hand military experience declines, ancestral connections provide powerful points of personal connection with militarism – and the nation – for a public increasingly removed from war, enabling subjects both to experience vicarious pride and to establish claims to ‘vicarious military subjectivity’ which confers ‘telling rights’ about war.

Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be’, *Political Psychology* 39, no. 2 (2018): 243–61; Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*.

²² Kristin Haugevik and Iver B. Neumann, eds., *Kinship in International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

²³ Brent J. Steele, ‘Critical Security History and Hiroshima’, *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 3 (2015): 303–7; Faye Donnelly and Brent J. Steele, ‘Critical Security History: (De)Securitisation, Ontological Security, and Insecure Memories’, *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 2 (2019): 209–26.

²⁴ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’.

Beyond explaining why subjects of various kinds are attracted to vicarious identifying with ancestral connections to past wars, the thesis also argues that the authentic and authoritative social capital conferred by vicarious military subjectivity has rendered it a focal point for intensely political disputes. Experiences, signifiers, and symbols of war commemoration have become a key site for such contestation over how the past should and should not be used, and subject to competing impulses to maintain the exclusivity of military subjectivities and to promote vicarious identifications as a route to re-engagement with the nation. While the analysis draws primarily upon debates and events during the First World War centenary commemorations, there is more at stake than simply the past; claims to vicarious military subjectivity reach to the core of individual and collective subjectivity and anxieties around British national identity and geopolitical self-expression. It is important to note that in pointing to controversies surrounding vicarious identifications and their function, the thesis is analytic rather than normative; I seek to highlight contestation rather than indicating where the boundaries of vicarious identification should lie.

Chapter Outline

These arguments are elaborated through the following structure. Chapter 1 takes the form of a literature review that situates the thesis in relation to the interdisciplinary area of Critical Military Studies, unpacking the research question in relation to some of its key debates. The chapter explores the conceptually sophisticated approaches for studying military power provided by CMS scholarship: not least the concepts of ‘militarism’ and ‘militarisation’ pioneered by feminist work in sociology and IR. Although widely used, both terms fell out of favour at the end of the Cold War – being replaced by a hegemonic focus on security - and have only recently been revisited in detail by scholars of IR and security studies. Despite consensus regarding the concepts’ value, there is considerable diversity underpinning how they are delimited and deployed. Accordingly, the chapter makes key decisions relating to how the concepts are defined, and also outlines the as yet largely undeveloped analytic potential of thinking about militarism as a response to existential anxiety beyond acute crisis situations and questions of stability. Finally, the chapter argues that the study of civilian subjectivities in the context of militarised social hierarchies might be advanced by considering vicarious dynamics that collapse the boundaries between self and other.

Having argued for an account of subjectivity centralising anxiety as a motivating factor as a promising avenue for developing scholarship, Chapter 2 sets about this task by providing a critical reading of the concept of ‘ontological security’ – a term referring to the pursuit of a secure sense of self and subjectivity. As well as outlining the main tenets of ontological security as developed within psychiatry and sociology, I also explore how the concept has been fruitfully applied by IR and critical security scholars to rethink security conceptually and empirically using insights from social psychology. The recent popularity of ontological security, I argue, is partly due to its focus

on anxiety rather than fear, and its attentiveness to emotions, the everyday, and the visual; but it also speaks to issues that dominate many contemporary political landscapes. The popularity of the concept has led to ontological security studies becoming a pluralistic sub-discipline, and the third section of the chapter constructs a theoretical framework by drawing upon recent critical insights on the concept. These include an emphasis on ontological security as centring on status as much as stability - which brings the Foucauldian notion of entrepreneurial selfhood to the fore – and ontological security-seeking as a continual work-in-progress, structured by Lacanian fantasies of fulfilment and wholeness.

While ontological security studies has done much to help us understand how individuals and collectives seek to uphold a sense of secure selfhood, it has largely reproduced IR's tendency to focus on instances in which a threatened self is privileged over securitised Others. As such, the study of how selves relate to Others regarded as being of equal or superior standing remains a relative lacuna. In Chapter 3, I contribute to addressing this gap by engaging with nascent research exploring the political significance and vicarious dynamics in international politics. While the IR work of Browning et al. on the concepts of vicarious identity (promotion) and vicarious identification is my starting point, I also draw on scholarship in sociology, political theory, cognitive psychology and philosophy to begin mapping out possibilities of vicarious relationships and why anyone would vicariously identify with another. I begin by unpacking how the attractiveness of vicarious identification with nation-states as an ontological security strategy is influenced by late modern anxieties around uncertainty and meaninglessness. As the state's provision of resources for ontological security have declined in late modernity, it has led to feelings of existential boredom which have prompted longing for transgression – which has periodically found expression through militarism and war. The chapter then bridges the theoretical and empirical interests of this thesis by exploring vicarious militarism in modern Britain, arguing that militarism has been portrayed as the answer to multifaceted anxieties around national identity, subjectivity, and authenticity. As social hierarchies have become deliberately situated around the armed forces, militarised subjectivity has become increasingly attractive and exclusive. But even as militarisation has generated significant 'civilian anxieties', the emphasis of such initiatives upon the past has led to the promotion of vicarious identification with military ancestors as a way of establishing what I term 'vicarious military subjectivity'. The chapter concludes by arguing that war commemoration is thus a particularly valuable site for exploring such dynamics, and by outlining the scope and discourse analysis methodology of the project.

It is to exploring processes of vicarious identification in war commemoration that the remaining three chapters are devoted. In Chapter 4, I begin by tracing the origins of contemporary hegemonic practices of British War Commemoration to the First World War and interpret memorialisation of that war using the concepts of ontological security and vicarious identification. I then analyse several initiatives run as part of the centenary commemorations of the First World

War (WWI), aimed at encouraging members of the British public to explore their ancestral and local connections with the war through genealogical research. Such projects have been the primary means for engaging an increasingly temporally distant public with the war on historical, personal and emotional levels, and for the promotion of vicarious identification with WWI soldiers and other figures as a means of embedding subjects in the national military story through identifying with ancestors/connected others as a way of assuaging insecurities around civilian masculinities, and broader questions of national identity and cohesion. Subjects are encouraged to take vicarious pride in their ancestors' (and other related persons') military participation and accomplishments – something made possible by the rehabilitation of the WWI soldier through their juxtaposition with modern day soldiers, which serve to neutralise themes of victimhood and critique. I then turn to explore how the commodification of remembrance has been oriented towards promoting consumption that promises to bolster the consumer's authenticity by vicariously augmenting their militarised subject positions in ways that are both politically and commercially expedient.

It is not just individuals who have been encouraged to vicariously identify with militarism, however. Chapter 5 picks up the theme of commodified remembrance introduced in Chapter 4 by exploring how commercial entities themselves have been invited to participate in militarism, not only to sell branded products – though that *is* a key motivation – but in order to articulate what I term corporate vicarious military subjectivity. As we will see, the fragility of meaning and trust in late modernity renders such initiatives attractive to corporate entities looking to establish trusting relationships with customers. In addition to demonstrating that vicarious military subjectivity operates at a different level, corporate attempts to leverage connections with the nation's military past offer a lens for the study of the politics of such claims in greater detail. Although some claims 'pass' without much notice, others generate anxieties among different constituencies for different reasons. While some worry about the commodification, and increasingly militarised tone of modern remembrance, others raise different concerns that the commercial and political appeal of military symbols are eroding the integrity and exclusivity of military subjectivities. The chapter emphasises the arbitrariness of claims to authenticity and the fundamentally political nature of judgements around remembrance – despite frequent claims to the contrary.

Whereas many of these controversies centre on establishing the limits of what is acceptable when it comes to the invocation of remembrance, Chapter 6 explores the growing political sensitivity of the Royal British Legion's Red Poppy emblem against a turbulent British and geopolitical climate in which far-right preoccupations regarding national self-articulation and enacting the 'will of the people' have become relatively mainstream causes in the context of the Brexit referendum and the election of US President Donald Trump. It argues that in this context the Poppy has become a proxy for broader political sentiments including national re-assertion. The chapter then moves to consider how the novel political salience and sensitivity of the poppy has had a

particularly profound effect upon British football and sport more generally. An analysis of right-leaning press campaigns traces how the poppy – largely absent from the sporting arena between 1914 and the early 2000s’ – has become the central and essential feature of October and November fixtures in recent years. These campaigns framed poppy-wearing in terms of freedom of expression and made extensive use of vicarious identity promotion to encourage fans to put pressure on their teams to participate in the national spectacle in ever more ostentatious ways. To explore what happens when vicarious identification is threatened or disrupted, the chapter analyses FIFA’s 2011 and 2016 decisions to ban the England football team from wearing the symbol, arguing that both episodes generated ontological insecurity which was then channelled into Lacanian fantasies of fulfilment which positioned vicarious identification with the England team as a way to attend to highly salient personal and collective anxieties around self-expression.

Finally, in addition to summarising the main claims and contributions of the thesis, the conclusion outlines several pathways for future research. The thesis raises questions that might lead to a deeper study of vicarious (military) subjectivities in war commemoration and also broaden the focus to encapsulate other important aspects of vicarious militarism.

1. Militarism, (In)Security and the Limits of Desiring Militarised Subjectivity

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, I made the case for a study of ‘vicarious militarism’ in Britain. Using the term ‘militarism’ is not uncontroversial. While many working in British defence and security policy-making circles would be content to label their foreign adversaries as ‘militaristic’, applying the description to the British context would be anathema to policy-makers and some ‘impact’-focused scholars too. Indeed, any suggestion among such circles that Britain is engaged in anything other than the prudent pursuit of security – understood as territorial sovereignty – is likely to prompt, at best, puzzlement, and at worst, consternation and stigmatisation. This is because militarism, in common parlance, is a pejorative term reserved for threatening Others and almost never reflexively applied to the self. As Eastwood puts it, ‘whereas many practitioners are quite comfortable being identified as security actors (even if this appellation is used with critical intent), far fewer are comfortable being identified with militarism.’¹ In this thesis, however, I want to make the case for exploring the empirical phenomena identified in the introduction through the analytic concept of militarism.

This chapter provides a non-exhaustive overview of scholarly approaches to militarism, highlighting some of the key arguments, ongoing debates and main limitations within this scholarship in order to identify the contributions to be made in the subsequent chapters. To this end, the chapter is divided into three sections which progressively focus in on the specific nature of these contributions. Part 1 situates the thesis in the nascent interdisciplinary area of Critical Military Studies (CMS), which has advanced the concepts of militarism and militarisation to account for and critique the myriad ideological and structural dynamics and manifestations of military power. Part 2 explores recent debates and reflections upon the relationship between militarism and (in)security, arguing that existing scholarship has not fully exploited the potential contribution of notions of psychological insecurity – particularly the concept of existential anxiety – to understanding what leads civilian subjects to desire militarism. Having identified this underdeveloped aspect of current scholarship as ripe for development, Part 3 turns to scholarship on military masculinities and militarised subjectivity as providing a promising starting point for addressing a second lacuna: the impact of military masculine hierarchies on civilians. The specific contribution that this thesis can make to addressing this, I suggest, is in problematizing self-other distinctions by highlighting dynamics of vicarious identification.

¹ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 47.

Critical Military Studies: From Civil-Military Relations to Militarism and Militarization

This thesis seeks to contribute to the interdisciplinary area of Critical Military Studies (CMS). While CMS deliberately elides any ‘static or precise’ definition,² its distinctive aims and contributions can be partly understood through its critique of military sociology – particularly of scholarship using the notion of ‘civil-military relations’ to study how military and civilian ‘spheres’ relate to one another.³ Civil-military relations scholarship relies on a fundamentally Hobbesian conception of (in)security and the state, with an anarchic and dangerous world of other state and non-state actors leading civilians to consent to supporting armed forces through a ‘social contract’ in exchange for safety and security. This literature is partly concerned with securing ongoing public consent for military institutions whose *raison d’être* – the conduct of organized violence – is dissonant with the ostensibly non-violent character of the civilian society it serves. A second concern is the question of how to maintain robust and flexible military forces in a way that minimises the notional civil-military ‘gap’ in understanding while ensuring that militaries are kept under civilian control sufficiently to allow the flourishing of democratic politics. As Burk notes, central here is ‘a normative belief that civilian political control over the military is preferable to military control of the state’, and that military interference in civilian affairs should be avoided where possible, and regulated where necessary.⁴ The key guiding concern of this literature is how best to balance military and civilian power in the pursuit and maintenance of national security.

While this literature has contributed a wealth of empirically-rich quantitative and qualitative insights, its assumptions regarding the inevitability and desirability of military institutions and priorities - derived from hegemonic security imaginaries established by governmental and military elites – and the social contract as an analytic truth severely limit the scope of analyses and conclusions by precluding debate on some of the most fundamental questions. The tendency of civil-military relations scholars to (in Basham’s words) ‘interpret critique solely as a means through which to offer recommendations for the improvement of military policy’⁵, leads to scholarship that often relegates the ‘civilian’ to an instrumental role as moral and financial supporters of the armed forces, emphasising what military institutions require of citizens to work effectively.⁶ This one-sided focus has often occurred at the expense of explorations of what civilians themselves take from the discourses and practices of contemporary civil-military relations and how military

² Victoria M. Basham, Aaron Belkin, and Jess Gifkins, ‘What Is Critical Military Studies?’, *Critical Military Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 1.

³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1957); Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1971).

⁴ James Burk, ‘Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations’, *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 1 (2002): 7.

⁵ Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins, ‘What Is Critical Military Studies?’, 2.

⁶ For examples of this focus, see Rachael Gribble et al., ‘Public Awareness of UK Veterans’ Charities’, *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 1 (2014): 50–57; Joakim Berndtsson, Christopher Dandeker, and Karl Ydén, ‘Swedish and British Public Opinion of the Armed Forces after a Decade of War’, *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 2 (2015): 307–28.

imperatives may diverge from the needs of, and adversely affect the lives of, civilians.⁷ In so doing, this literature arguably fails to capture the dynamics underpinning public support for the armed forces precisely because it largely (and ironically) takes ‘military power for granted’ and cannot see beyond orthodox understandings of security.⁸ Finally, such analyses perpetuate imaginaries of the liberal-democratic state as the global ideal (often juxtaposed with orientalist representations of non-Western states), thereby unduly privileging Western-centric visions of order and security, and limiting the range of political possibilities and scope of critique itself.⁹

By contrast, CMS scholarship focuses critical attention on those aspects of military power taken for granted or ignored by traditional military sociology, insisting that ‘military institutions, practices, processes, and geographies are an outcome of *social practices and political contestation*’.¹⁰ This emphasis on social construction and contingency means that CMS operates according to ontologies and methodologies closer to those found in critical IR than to the civil-military relations literature. It also expands the field of study analytically and normatively by ‘problematiz[ing] the idea that a neat boundary can be delineated between what is ‘military’ and what is ‘civilian’, and challenging the hegemony of military priorities in the civil-military relations literature by turning focus onto the impact of militaries – and the *ideas* that underpin them – upon societies.¹¹ Importantly, however, CMS approaches do not constitute simple, homogenous opposition towards military institutions and personnel, or traditional military sociology.¹² Indeed, despite their differing commitments and approaches, CMS scholars have engaged with military sociologists and the armed forces themselves on issues of mutual interest, including the dynamics

⁷ Indeed, this one-sided relationship characterises security politics more broadly. In their discussion of national risk registers, for example, Haggmann and Dunn Cavely argue that attempts to define ‘how the larger organization of public danger is to be understood in the first place, and on what kinds of authorities should be regarded as entitled to define danger on behalf of political collectives [...] advance a distinct security rationality that “depoliticizes” security politics, as they circumvent or close off debates about values, purposes and formulations of security.’ Jonas Haggmann and Myriam Dunn Cavely, ‘National Risk Registers: Security Scientism and the Propagation of Permanent Insecurity’, *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 1 (2012): 87; moreover, Stevens and Vaughan-Williams note that despite civilians being enlisted to enact national security risk frameworks in the everyday, the frameworks themselves are informed by technocratic concerns rather than public ones. Beyond measuring public attitudes to the specific security issues identified and prioritised by national security infrastructures, they argue that governments and security policy communities alike have been uninterested in and have marginalized the security perceptions of citizens themselves. Nick Vaughan-Williams and Daniel Stevens, ‘Vernacular Theories of Everyday (in)Security: The Disruptive Potential of Non-Elite Knowledge’, *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2016): 41; Daniel Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams, ‘Citizens and Security Threats: Issues, Perceptions and Consequences Beyond the National Frame’, *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 1 (2016): 150 The assumption tends to be that a narrow cadre of security experts (often drawn from the Royal United Services Institute [RUSI]) know best – or at least better than the public – what the most pressing security issues are.

⁸ Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins, ‘What Is Critical Military Studies?’, 1–2.

⁹ Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby, eds., *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security and Theory*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), 6–7; Anna Stavrianakis and Maria Stern, ‘Militarism and Security: Dialogue, Possibilities and Limits’, *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 1–2 (2018): 6–8.

¹⁰ Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins, ‘What Is Critical Military Studies?’, 2.

¹¹ Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins, ‘What Is Critical Military Studies?’

¹² Cynthia Enloe, ‘The Recruiter and the Sceptic: A Critical Feminist Approach to Military Studies’, *Critical Military Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 3.

of growing inclusion of female and LGBT personnel in military institutions, British reliance upon ‘military migrants’ and the implications of the British armed forces refocusing on ‘reserve’ units.¹³ Nevertheless, as Enloe notes, adopting a ‘sceptically curious’ approach is likely to ‘[dim] the glow generated by any military institution which has been elevated to an exalted status’.¹⁴

Militarism

CMS’ interest in discourses and processes which permeate society has entailed a turn towards correspondingly broader concepts such as *militarism*. While the concept has been defined in numerous ways, recent analytic uses of the concept have generally conformed to Stavrianakis and Selby’s broad definition of militarism as ‘the social and international relations of the preparation for, and conduct of, organized political violence.’¹⁵

Although militarism broadens the analytic scope from the liberal institutionalist commitments of the civil-military relations literature, importantly, the nation-state looms large in most accounts of militarism, with the concept’s fluctuating popularity being tied to its association with state power. Stavrianakis and Selby, for example, have noted that the concept declined in popularity after the Cold War, being a victim of its association with the state at a time when critical scholarship was reorienting itself to a broadened and deepened security agenda as a partial corrective to the state-centrism of Cold War era security studies. Popular concepts of the time such as ‘state failure’, ‘human security’ and ‘new wars’ emphasised that the state was but one of many different referents of security, and one of rapidly declining relevance.¹⁶ This view was further underpinned by influential work in sociology and IR during the late 1980s/early 1990s’ which sometimes viewed ‘global flows’ of people, resources and capital as foreshadowing the decline of the nation-state as the predominant unit of world politics.¹⁷ As such, even scholars using militarism over this period began to divert their attention to its transnational manifestations, conditioned by global political and economic processes, that could not be understood through recourse to the policy of any particular nation-state in isolation. Enloe, for example, argues that to remain focused on the

¹³ See, for example, Victoria Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the Armed Forces* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013); Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, ‘Regendering the Military: Theorizing Women’s Military Participation’, *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2016): 3–21; Vron Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); ‘Understanding the Lives of Reservists: Families, Work and Military’, Future Reserves Research Programme, accessed 26 June 2020, <http://www.future-reserves-research.ac.uk/>.

¹⁴ Enloe, ‘The Recruiter and the Sceptic’, 7.

¹⁵ Stavrianakis and Selby, *Militarism and International Relations*, 2.

¹⁶ Stavrianakis and Selby, 6–10.

¹⁷ E.g. Ken’ichi Ōmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (London: HarperCollins, 1995).

nation-state alone is to underestimate the reach of militarism into seemingly unrelated aspects of the everyday, such as the globalised militarised politics of producing ‘sneakers’.¹⁸

While challenging ‘methodological nationalism’ is vital in exposing militarism’s often subtle or unseen circulations, it is also important to recognise that what gives militarism its conceptual coherence is its concern with configurations of organized violence situated around the nation-state.¹⁹ Recent work utilizing the concept of ‘liberal militarism’ in the context of the ‘war on terror’, for example, proceeds from the observation that militarism is mutually constitutive of the nation-state.²⁰ Stavrianakis and Selby have also noted that “‘human security’ analyses tend to sideline the wider influence that organized military actors exercise on social relations above and beyond direct lethal violence and war preparation’ with many of non-state parties to contemporary conflicts - whose proliferation has been presented as evidence of the extra-national dimensions of ‘new’ wars and declining relevance of the state in modern conflicts - on closer inspection constituting proxies for states.²¹ Moreover, even non-state groups that have been regarded as challenges to state sovereignty demonstrate remarkable fidelity to state norms – not least aspirations to statist territorial sovereignty. Bilgin, for example, argues that despite ISIS’ pretensions to disavowing the state system in favour of a caliphate, beyond its ironic self-styling as the ‘Islamic State’, ISIS demonstrates ‘a commitment to the military-focused, state-centric and statist regime of security governance that has characterized the Middle East in the past century’.²² Rather than being a question of state vs non-state actors, what differentiates the study of militarism from the study of violence per se is that it is concerned with organised violence that is structured around statist logics.

In addition to its ability to more adequately account for the broader extent of military power beyond the obviously military aspects of high politics, scholars have also found militarism useful for the way that it moves beyond the concept of war. For example, in 1959 Vagts argued that:

¹⁸ Cynthia H. Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 33.

¹⁹ Although militarism, like the nation-state, is a relatively recent phenomenon, Vagts notes that it has antecedents in the classical civilization – not least the Greek and Roman empires and city states - that the romanticism of the Eighteenth century sought to restore. And the crusades also provided a later reference point for contemporary militarism, particularly to the extent that they envisaged the cohesion and common-purpose of militarism and the church, with armies doing God’s work. I return to these dynamics in Chapter 3. See Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981), 17–21.

²⁰ See, for example, Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009); Bryan Mabee, ‘From “Liberal War” to “Liberal Militarism”’: United States Security Policy as the Promotion of Military Modernity’, *Critical Military Studies* 2, no. 3 (2016): 242–61; Basham, ‘Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence’.

²¹ Stavrianakis and Selby, *Militarism and International Relations*, 8.

²² Pinar Bilgin, ‘What Is the Point about Sykes–Picot?’, *Global Affairs* 2, no. 3 (2016): 357.

militarism is more, and sometimes less, than the love of war. It covers every system of thinking and valuing and every complex of feelings which rank military *institutions and ways* above the ways of civilian life, carrying *military mentality and modes of acting and decision* into the civilian sphere.²³

In this way, the concept of militarism draws attention to a broader set of processes than considered by the ‘tip of the spear’ emphasis of (critical) war studies, and challenges us to think about militarism, in Enloe’s words, as ‘a package of distinct but interdependent values and beliefs about how the world “works” and how the world ought to work’.²⁴

While some have found militarism’s conceptual focus on ideology to be advantageous because it gets at the ideological underpinnings of assemblages of organised violence, however, others have been more circumspect about this move for a couple of reasons. The first, as Berghahn notes, concerns the tendency of political actors to discursively deploy militarism pejoratively as a term of ‘political propaganda and polemic.’²⁵ For sceptics, the concept of militarism brings with it much ideological baggage – not least implicit or explicit anti-militarism – which might preclude its useful incorporation in the scholarly analytic toolkit. As Stavrianakis and Selby have noted, however, while some scholars do adopt explicitly anti-militarist stances,²⁶ militarism has also been deployed by CMS scholars in a range of different ways which, although informed by an overarching commitment to reflexivity and an expanded understanding of the political that takes seriously Cox’s famous dictum that ‘theory is always for someone, and for some purpose’,²⁷ nevertheless do not rely on an implicit or explicit normative commitment to anti-militarism.²⁸ Secondly, and relatedly, some have worried that conceptualising militarism as ‘a package of distinct but interdependent values and beliefs’ seems, as Eastwood puts it, to ‘[risk] foreclosing the study of a broader array of non-ideational phenomena’, thus drastically reducing militarism’s analytic scope.²⁹ Accordingly, some scholars have preferred a more expansive sociological definition that is better able to capture the way in which ‘militarism pervades social structures and subjectivities, reshaping culture, political economy and identities.’³⁰

While Eastwood acknowledges that reducing militarism to a particular set of values would indeed be ‘hopelessly narrow’, however, he argues that this particular critique of ideological militarism

²³ Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, 17 (Emphasis added).

²⁴ Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*, 54.

²⁵ Volker R. Berghahn, *Militarism: The History of an International Debate, 1861-1979* (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers, 1981), 2.

²⁶ Cynthia Cockburn, *Antimilitarism: Political and Gender Dynamics of Peace Movements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Chris Rossdale, *Resisting Militarism: Direct Action and the Politics of Subversion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

²⁷ Robert W. Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1981): 128.

²⁸ Stavrianakis and Selby, *Militarism and International Relations*, 11–12.

²⁹ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 45.

³⁰ Eastwood, 45.

stems from a fundamental misreading of ideology as being synonymous with ‘glorification’.³¹ Moreover, he and others such as Åhäll and Shepherd have turned to the ideology critique of Louis Althusser to provide a more viable conceptualisation of militarism as ideology.³² An Althusserian reading holds that ideologies are ‘systems of representation’ which amount to ontological frameworks for how to live, comprised of ‘discursive chains’ overlapping with different ideologies rather than single ideas.³³ While discourse here is defined broadly as comprising linguistic and material phenomena, as Eastwood argues,

ideology is reducible neither to the beliefs those subjects hold nor to the material practices that instantiate those beliefs. Rather, ideology is a structural relationship between social practices and the individuals who participate in them, which works by producing those individuals as subjects.³⁴

Understood this way, ideology operates through the interpellation of subjects as a means to the reproduction of the social order.³⁵ Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Eastwood argues that ‘the key process to be understood is the way that ideology becomes desirable, at a deep unconscious level, for the subjects it interpellates.’³⁶ Importantly, in psychoanalysis ‘desire need not take the form of an enthusiastic love. It can be a much more ambivalent, even involuntary or unconscious, phenomenon that manifests itself in a variety of ways’, including ‘the work of soldiers, but [also encompassing] the contribution of a much wider range of actors in economic, caring or supporting roles, and can even be extended to passive acceptance or acquiescence in war.’³⁷ Ideology critique holds that social (re)production is achieved through the interpellation of subjects desirous of the ‘common sense’ at the heart of the social order in question. As Stuart Hall notes, the point at which something is rendered ‘common sensical’ is the ‘moment of extreme ideological closure’.³⁸ Following Cynthia Weber, Åhäll argues that this reveals how ‘power works

³¹ In making this point, Eastwood draws particular attention to Shaw’s critique of Vagts’ aforementioned definition Eastwood, 46; Martin Shaw, *Post-Military Society: Militarism, Demilitarization and War at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 12; Martin Shaw, ‘Shaw M (2013) Twenty-First Century Militarism: A Historical-Sociological Framework’, in *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory.*, ed. Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 19–20.

³² Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 47–48; Linda Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation: A Feminist Security Studies Take on “the Political”’, *Critical Studies on Security* 4, no. 2 (2016): 154–68; Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Militarisation’, in *Visual Global Politics*, ed. Roland Bleiker, Interventions (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 209–14. [See also Althusser 1971]

³³ Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 161; Stuart Hall, ‘Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-structuralist Debates’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (1985): 103–4; See also Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121–76.

³⁴ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48.

³⁵ Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 161.

³⁶ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48; For Lacanian-inspired approaches to ideology, see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (London: Routledge, 1977); Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, eds., *Concept and Form, Volume I: Key Texts from the Cahiers Pour l’Analyse* (London: Verso, 2012); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008); Slavoj Žižek, ‘Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology’, in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2012), 1–33.

³⁷ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48.

³⁸ Hall, ‘Signification, Representation, Ideology’, 105.

by appearing to take ‘the political’ out of the ideological’, with the consequence that ‘something that appears to be natural and unalterable also appears to be apolitical’.³⁹

With this definition of ideology in mind, scholars have viewed militarism as a ‘system of representation’ that reproduces organised violence. As Shepherd argues, ‘militarism as an ideology works [...] to shape the parameters of what is considered to be “common sense” in a society.’⁴⁰ Moreover, because ideology consists of language and practical behaviours there is no tension between broader sociological understandings and defining militarism as ideological. In this way, as Eastwood puts it, ‘militarism is inherently rather than contingently ideological [because] it always includes an ideological legitimation of violence.’⁴¹ Importantly however, this concept of militarism does not begin with a prescriptive list of principles, but consists of a curiosity about how military power is continually constitutive of, and (re)constituted by, desiring subjects.

While Eastwood and Åhäll agree that militarism is ideological and focused on the (re)production of organized violence, however, there are important differences between the two approaches. Åhäll, for example, distinguishes between militarism and *militarisation* (to which I return in a moment) by defining the former as the ‘open, visible and conscious display of, and belief in, militaristic ideology’ and ‘those relationships directly linked to military institutions, soldiering and practices of warfare’, adding that ‘[i]deology is a practice; militarism is a *security* practice.’⁴² Åhäll views militarisation ‘as forming part of the not-so-obvious practices, relationships and politics of militarism in the everyday, in particular those that have ‘travelled’ to non-military contexts.’⁴³ For Eastwood, however, militarism is not limited to ‘visible and conscious displays’. Rather, in line with the psychoanalytic work from which he draws, it covers a spectrum of desire spanning the enthusiastic soldier, the civilian factory worker whose job ostensibly depends upon arms exports, and the apathetic subject who, while having no strong attachment to militarism, nevertheless regards it as normal.⁴⁴ And finally, it is by naming these diverse, embedded manifestations as ‘common sense’ examples of militarism that we expose the ways in which they are underpinned - implicitly or explicitly - by consent for organized violence, which serves the goals of ethico-political critique in generating self-reflexivity and discomfort.⁴⁵ Here, Eastwood insists upon a critical conceptualisation of militarism which he argues is particularly well-suited to exploring the wide range of desirous attachments that military power generates. This is especially compared to the concept of security, which in his view tends to ‘crowd out’ other useful concepts by viewing

³⁹ Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 161–62; see also, Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5–7.

⁴⁰ Shepherd, ‘Militarisation’, 209.

⁴¹ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48.

⁴² Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 161. (emphasis added)

⁴³ Åhäll, 162.

⁴⁴ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48; see also, Basham, ‘Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence’.

⁴⁵ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’, 48.

them as subordinate to and oriented towards security.⁴⁶ In this way, CSS scholars' engagement with militarization has tended to be grounded in securitization theory rather than a concept of militarism. While militarism and security are *contingently* linked, of course, the analytic purchase of readopting militarism as a tool of critique on its own terms resides in exposing those instances in which self-referential militarist imperatives diverge from security logics, and where war 'loses strategic impetus and restraint'. More fundamentally, it can help to illuminate the ways in which:

war can begin to serve a wide array of non-strategic instrumentalities as a result of [militarism's] ideological penetration of social relations. Militarism can entrench a pattern of conflict by binding social relations, subjectivities and identities to the pursuit of war'.⁴⁷

To reduce militarism to security, then, is to lose sight of the diverse attachments that people have to the exercise of military power beyond security logics. Understood through the lens of ideology critique, there is no issue with understanding militarism in a critical sense; rather its 'pejorative' critique of 'common sense' as ideology without being prescriptive about the content of said ideology is one of its distinguishing advantages.⁴⁸ It is Eastwood's definition that I adopt in this thesis.

Militarisation

This understanding of militarism also helps us to make sense of what it means to talk in terms of militarisation. If ideology critique places an emphasis on how militarism lurks in everyday life as common sense, then concerns around militarisation centre on how this state of affairs is continually (re)produced in social settings and imbricates subjects desiring of military power.⁴⁹

Though many different definitions of militarisation have been suggested, feminist approaches have largely converged on the centrality of *normalisation*. As Åhäll puts it: 'militarisation [is] a normalising process to do with preparation for war – the social and cultural preparation for the idea of war, which relies on a gendered logic and takes place in the mediatised everyday.'⁵⁰ Similarly, Shepherd argues that militarization concerns the ways in which 'military institutions, approaches and even aesthetics are depoliticised, detached from their original imbrication in violence and war.'⁵¹ Importantly, both emphasise that militarisation is not simply about military institutions or 'direct violence [...] exercised by the police and military', but also concerns how subjects come to 'think of ourselves as citizens of a particular state, how we relate ourselves to

⁴⁶ Eastwood, 53.

⁴⁷ Eastwood, 52.

⁴⁸ Eastwood, 47.

⁴⁹ As Laura Shepherd puts it 'Militarism comes to be accepted as an ideology through the process of militarization'. Shepherd, 'Militarisation', 210.

⁵⁰ Åhäll, 'The Dance of Militarisation', 162.

⁵¹ Shepherd, 'Militarisation', 210.

formal politics, and how we engage with others both inside and outside our own territorial boundaries.⁵² Understood this way, militarization is not limited to ‘high politics’ but is experienced in everyday settings by non-military subjects. Indeed, as Enloe puts it, ‘[m]ost of the people in the world who are militarized are not themselves in uniform. Most militarized people are civilians.’⁵³ In recent years, for example, scholars and campaign groups in Britain have pointed to the expansion of cadet units in schools, the growing prominence of armed forces personnel at sporting fixtures, and the considerable growth in the sale of military-branded products (often themed as vintage nostalgia), as evidence of a ‘new tide of militarisation’ and the ‘militarisation of society’.⁵⁴

What the example of militarised consumption helps to illustrate is that while militarisation is sometimes described as a ‘process by which any person, any group, or any society *absorbs* the ideas and resultant practices of militarism,’⁵⁵ civilians aren’t simply passive objects of militarisation; rather, they are active participants in such processes. This understanding is advanced by Åhäll’s characterisation of militarisation (following Enloe) as a dance that involves subtle ‘movements, bodies and emotions.’⁵⁶ And although it can be highly visible – as in the examples above – Åhäll’s emphasis on militarisation’s subtle dynamics also focuses our attention on the insidious ways in which, for instance, the terminology and logics of militarism punctuate the everyday vernacular of national subjects and shape approaches to unrelated aspects of life. For example, ‘military metaphors’ are frequently applied by policy-makers to a range of social problems – e.g. the ‘war on drugs’, ‘war on bureaucracy’. Notably, even as militaries have increasingly invoked medical metaphors – e.g. ‘precision surgical strikes’ – to obfuscate the violence of modern warfare, there has been a significant proliferation of *military* metaphors within medicine. Drawing on the work of Martin, Nie et al. remark that:

Today, phrases like the following are so common to medicine that their military connotations pass almost unnoticed: “pathogens (bacteria or viruses) invading or attacking”, “the body’s defenses”, “medical

⁵² Shepherd, 210; Here, she follows Enloe, who argues that ‘[t]o become militarized is to adopt militaristic values (e.g. a belief in hierarchy, obedience, and the use of force) and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes.’ Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*, 4.

⁵³ Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*, 4.

⁵⁴ Victoria M. Basham, ‘Raising an Army: The Geopolitics of Militarizing the Lives of Working-Class Boys in an Age of Austerity’, *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 3 (2016): 258–74; John Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’, *Sociology* 47, no. 4 (2013): 722–38; Joanna Tidy, ‘Forces Sauces and Eggs for Soldiers: Food, Nostalgia, and the Rehabilitation of the British Military’, *Critical Military Studies* 1, no. 3 (2015): 220–32; Sam Walton, ‘The New Tide of Militarisation’ (London: Quakers Peace and Social Witness, 2014); Paul Dixon, ‘Warrior Nation: War, Militarisation and British Democracy’ (London: ForcesWatch, 2018).

⁵⁵ Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*, 11 (emphasis added).

⁵⁶ Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 155; Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 10.

intervention”, “doctor’s orders”, “the magic bullet”, “fighting diseases”, “the patient’s condition is under control”, “the patient is winning or losing the fight”, “medicine as a battle against death and disease”.⁵⁷

Military metaphors are favoured because of their perceived rhetorical emphasis: to describe something as the object of war-like focus is to emphasise the severity of a problem, and the seriousness with which it is being taken – particularly in emphasising the urgency of marshalling resources. As Nie et al. argue, journalists describing innovations in the ‘war on cancer’ usually use such terminology for laudatory purposes: ‘to portray the dedicated scientific undertakings of researchers and glorify new medical advances’.⁵⁸ Such language also paves the way for the extension of ‘heroic’ plaudits to patients – routinely described as having ‘lost their battle’ with disease - and staff alike.⁵⁹

However, such framings can have truly transformative implications for approaches to illness and disease. For example, embedded within military metaphors tend to be pervasive ontological assumptions regarding war as an intractable feature of the social world, bestowing upon war a similar kind of inevitability associated with natural disasters. Thus, military metaphors portray disease as something inevitable to be cured rather than resulting, in large part, from the harmful social and environmental practices of those same industries that focus their philanthropic efforts on finding a cure: a framing which ‘distorts research and investment, drawing resources away from prevention and treatment’.⁶⁰ Moreover, militarised metaphors further the expansion of neo-liberal governance with individuals assigned responsibility for their own fate, And while some cancer patients find such terminology ‘a powerful source of strength and determination’ in the face of serious illness and death,⁶¹ other patients have criticised the use of such metaphors for exaggerating – often unintentionally – the agency that patients have over their diseases .⁶² This is

⁵⁷ Jing-Bao Nie et al., ‘Healing Without Waging War: Beyond Military Metaphors in Medicine and HIV Cure Research’, *The American Journal of Bioethics* 16, no. 10 (2016): 4–6; They cite Emily Martin, ‘Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State’, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1990): 17; Emily Martin, ‘The End of the Body?’, *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 1 (1992): 20; Emily Martin, ‘Histories of Immune Systems’, *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 17, no. 1 (1993): 10; Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Jing-Bao Nie et al., ‘No More Militaristic and Violent Language in Medicine: Response to Open Peer Commentaries on “Healing Without Waging War: Beyond Military Metaphors in Medicine and HIV Cure Research”’, *The American Journal of Bioethics* 16, no. 12 (2016): W9–11.

⁵⁹ Mike Marqusee, ‘I Don’t Need a “war” to Fight My Cancer. I Need Empowering as a Patient’, *The Guardian*, 29 December 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/dec/29/war-fight-cancer-empowering-patient>. And of course, these dynamics were particularly evident in the early framings of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic as a war requiring national warlike mobilisation.

⁶⁰ Marqusee; see also, Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁶¹ Tate and Pearlman, quoted in Nie et al., ‘No More Militaristic and Violent Language in Medicine’, 5.

⁶² On the topic of metaphors and stigmatisation, see Marqusee, ‘I Don’t Need a “war” to Fight My Cancer. I Need Empowering as a Patient’; Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

not to criticise those who use such language *per se* but to illustrate how militarist logics and solutions become embedded to the point of being adopted *non-consciously*.⁶³

Although militarisation is partly about military expansion into civilian spaces however, it is important not to take this argument too far. Howell, for example, warns that in pointing to a ‘movement from a non-militarized (or less-militarized) state to a militarized one’, analyses of militarisation risk undermining CMS scepticism towards the civil-military distinction by implying the existence of some pristine ‘peaceful domain of “normal” or “civilian” politics unsullied by military intrusion’.⁶⁴ The problem here is that analyses of militarization underplay the extent to which liberal democratic societies are ‘always already’ constituted by warlike relations. While nursing has been cited by Enloe as an example of a domain subject to militarization, Howell points out that this overlooks the way in which ‘nursing became a discipline and profession initially through war, and subsequently through war-like relations with the poor’ – something obfuscated by the concept of militarisation.⁶⁵ Given these shortcomings, Howell suggests that scholars should ‘forget militarization’, and proposes the novel concept of ‘martial politics’, which ‘dispenses with the before/after temporality of “militarization” and the assumed separation between military and civilian’, insisting instead upon the ‘indivisibility of war and peace’.⁶⁶

While accepting aspects of Howell’s critique, however, I am unconvinced that it is incompatible with the definition of militarisation as advanced above, or that abandoning ‘militarisation’ for ‘martial politics’ is advantageous. One objection concerns Howell’s apparent conceptualization of war as ontologically a-priori. Shah, for example, has noted that to describe something as being ‘of war’ suggests that we know what war is, and problematically implies its ontological fixity.⁶⁷ However, to understand the constitutive power of war, we also need to explore how war is itself constituted and how this has changed over time. Accordingly, Wegner argues that militarisation is still a valuable concept because it attunes our awareness to myriad, dynamic configurations of military power and how they affect our broader contemporary politics.⁶⁸ Moreover, Eichler argues that ‘martial politics’ potentially underplays the incomplete status of militarised subjectivity as well as its unevenness and ambiguity. In line with the concept of militarism above, then, militarisation isn’t simply expansion or a progression from ‘before’ to ‘after’; rather, it should be understood as a continual and always-incomplete social (re)production of desiring subjects. Although it certainly

⁶³ Indeed, I, myself, have described the deaths of family members in terms of them having ‘lost their fight with cancer’, completely oblivious to the significance of this framing.

⁶⁴ Alison Howell, ‘Forget “Militarization”: Race, Disability and the “Martial Politics” of the Police and of the University’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no. 2 (2018): 118.

⁶⁵ Howell, 129; for the original example cited, see Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 204.

⁶⁶ Howell, ‘Forget “Militarization”’, 121, 118.

⁶⁷ Nisha Shah, in Megan MacKenzie et al., ‘Can We Really “Forget” Militarization? A Conversation on Alison Howell’s Martial Politics’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21, no. 5 (2019): 822.

⁶⁸ Nicole Wegner, in MacKenzie et al., 828–29.

is vital to recognise the embedded and structural nature of militarism understanding militarisation as uneven and incomplete is vital if CMS scholars are to retain any hope of demilitarisation.⁶⁹

Militarism and (In)Security

If militarism and militarisation are fundamentally matters of subjectivation as has been argued above what is it that drives such processes? Scholars have spent considerable effort in documenting the ways in which militarism and or martial politics ‘invade our lives’ and become features of the everyday - particularly during the War on Terror⁷⁰ - but what is it that makes such politics possible? A central argument of this thesis is that such questions might be fruitfully addressed through a reappraisal of the relationship between militarism and security.

As we have already seen, conventional approaches to civil-military relations generally consider military power – and the broader societal nomenclature required to support it – a key means for achieving security for a variety of referents, including the nation-state, region, civilization, human and globe, in the context of a world portrayed as uncertain and dangerous. Accordingly, this literature tends to treat civil-military relations as primarily a question of garnering citizens’ consent for military power by way of a covenant in the social contract tradition: consent which is predicated on the understanding that military power will be used to ensure the security of the nation-state and its citizens.⁷¹ Of course, the applicability of this conceptualisation of civil-military relations is of limited value in contexts where military power operates through authoritarian rule rather than consent; and as we have seen, the notional separation between a military and pristine civilian sphere is not one borne out by reality.

Nevertheless, even if CMS scholars have rejected the suggestion that any such separation exists in practice and sought to problematise the logics of security underpinning it, they have also recognised that the idea of a military covenant and the contractual obligations on different parties that it entails are still ‘socially meaningful’ and taken seriously by liberal subjects themselves.⁷² The notion that the world is threatening and that it is therefore necessary to consent to the preservation of military institutions and use of military power to ensure national and personal survival is one that is remarkably powerful – especially when past sacrifices in the name of

⁶⁹ Maya Eichler, in MacKenzie et al., 826–27 see also Thomas Gregory and Megan MacKenzie’s contributions in the same forum.

⁷⁰ Joanna Bourke, *Wounding the World: How Military Violence and War-Play Invade Our Lives* (Virago, 2015); see also, Enloe, *Maneuvers*; Catherine Lutz, *Homefront: A Military City and the American Twentieth Century* (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 2001); Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁷¹ Basham, ‘Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence’, 33.

⁷² Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 256; on the military covenant, see Sarah Ingham, *The Military Covenant: Its Impact on Civil-Military Relations in Britain* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016); and Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’.

‘freedom’ are added to the equation, with suggestions that, but for military institutions, ‘we’ would not be free or possibly even exist at all. Recognising this, CMS scholars have frequently highlighted the coercive tendencies of militarist practices and discourses and have rightly raised concerns about their proclivity and power to significantly circumscribe meaningful criticism of wars and configurations of military power.⁷³ In the British context, for example, Kelly points to the highly coercive and claustrophobic dynamics of debates around remembrance practices and militarism in media settings. He argues that the public has been disciplined into ‘supporting the troops’ by the British government’s attempt to circumvent criticism of its increasingly unpopular wars, with those who fail to demonstrate deference to the armed forces risking ‘symbolic annihilation’ within the public sphere.⁷⁴ As Millar puts it, then: ‘there is nothing particularly liberal, nor necessarily democratic, about the normative structure of the ‘military contract’.⁷⁵

Kelly’s account is a regular touchstone in the literature on British militarism, providing a theoretically rich analysis – drawing upon social and political psychology - of how debates about the necessity of supporting ‘the troops’ and the need for remembrance play out in practice. However, a key question unaddressed by his analysis concerns what it is that motivates participants to show deferential demeanour in the first place, beyond coercion. This is arguably partly a legacy of an ambiguity in the theoretical work of Goffman from which he draws. As Anthony Giddens – to whom we shall return in Chapter 2– argues: ‘one of the most striking gaps in Goffman’s writing is the *absence of an account of motivation*’.⁷⁶ While the question of motivation arguably does not pose as many problems for Kelly’s analysis due to his focus primarily on news presenters – for whom the need to save face with their employers watching is more of an obvious ‘occupational hazard’, the insufficiency of Goffman’s account of motivation becomes a more acute problem when we move to consider why ordinary citizens are moved by militarist discourses to do even the bare minimum in terms of demonstrating deference. After all, as should be evident from the disregard subjects show for everything from speed limits to self-isolation measures in the context of pandemic flu, people frequently *do not do* the things they are told to do – even when they are recognised to be in the public interest. And even for those who do obey social norms, it is one thing for an individual to go along with remembrance practices in public when to fail to do so might court controversy and ostracism; it is quite another to decide to use one’s limited annual

⁷³ See, for example, Enloe, *Maneuvers*; Roger Stahl, ‘Why We “Support the Troops”’: Rhetorical Evolutions’, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2009): 533–70; Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’; Vron Ware, ‘Can You Have Muslim Soldiers? Diversity as a Martial Value’, in *The State of Race*, ed. Nisha Kapoor, Virinder S. Kalra, and James Rhodes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 135–38.

⁷⁴ Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’; see also Erving Goffman, ‘The Nature of Deference and Demeanour’, in *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, ed. Erving Goffman (New York: Pantheon, 1967), 47–95.

⁷⁵ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 224.

⁷⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 86 (emphasis added).

leave to travel hundreds of miles to attend the funeral of a soldier that one has never met, or to witness the commissioning of a new warship. There seems to be more going on here than merely ‘saving face’.

Notably, militarism seems to be of visceral importance even for many people in polities where threats are perceived increasingly as minimal or far removed from the everyday, and where the ability of militaries to achieve security outcomes has been called into question by recent experiences.⁷⁷ While coercive dynamics are surely part of the reason why people go along with militarism, existing accounts are better at accounting for why and how specific measures have been put in place than they are at establishing why people in liberal democratic societies acquiesce or buy - often literally - into militarist discourses to the extent that they do - seemingly beyond a purely ‘rational’ engagement with their content. Indeed, it is poststructuralist and constructivist IR’s broader lack of a compelling explanation of how discourses resonate and are subsequently embedded within broader ontologies that motivates Solomon’s turn to psychoanalytic approaches in exploring the ‘affective resonances’ of discourses and establishing why subjects persist – despite constant frustration and inevitable failure – with the intensely emotive project of establishing and securing particular modes of subjectivity.⁷⁸ I return to these approaches shortly.

For now, it is important to recognise that questioning motivation in this way is especially pertinent in the context of the growing recognition among some in critical IR, CSS and CMS that the focus of scholarship on the violent and coercive dynamics of war and militarism has led to the development over time of a lacuna of research into the full range of affective experiences characterising them. Penttinen, for example, has argued that the tendency of critical IR scholarship to view power structures and institutions as oppressive, analyse their causes and most visible consequences and establish a field of study around particular negative problems to be addressed, has often occurred at the expense of consideration of a broader range of emotional experiences.⁷⁹ Accordingly, scholars have called in recent years for greater attention to be paid to the wider affective/emotional palette present in subjects’ heterogeneous experiences of war.⁸⁰

In responding to such calls, CMS scholars have pointed to the presence of positive emotions in experiences of war and militarism by exploring, for example, the pleasure soldiers take in

⁷⁷ On the subject of threat perceptions of the British public, see Timothy Edmunds, ‘British Civil–Military Relations and the Problem of Risk’, *International Affairs* 88, no. 2 (2012): 278–80; and Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, ‘Citizens and Security Threats’, 149.

⁷⁸ Ty Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*, Configurations: Critical Studies of World Politics (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), especially 1-25.

⁷⁹ Elina Penttinen, *Joy and International Relations: A New Methodology*, War, Politics and Experience (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 3–5.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis*, 1 edition (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); Penttinen, *Joy and International Relations*.

submission to the state,⁸¹ and experiences of joy in war.⁸² More recently, others have explicitly invoked the concept of desire to explore how militarism becomes attractive to subjects in different ways. As we have seen, Eastwood's definition of militarism as an ideology that promotes 'the formation of desiring subjects', captures the multiple ways, levels of consciousness and enthusiasm at military power may become desired by subjects, encapsulating its coercive and joyful ramifications, and many others in between.⁸³ This allows Eastwood to draw out some of the psychoanalytical dimensions implicit in existing CMS literature – not least feminist IR literature on the centrality of gender and hegemonic military masculinities, as well as structures of race and class in leading subjects to desire militarism, often in ways that do not map neatly onto what a conventional ideological perspective might imply.

What is less clear from Eastwood's article is what it is about the nature of subjectivity more fundamentally that produces desiring subjects. His broader study of Israeli militarism explores this 'subjective predicament' in greater detail, emphasising (in line with Lacan) that desiring individuals are born into a 'symbolic order' which, through language, alienates them from their own desires and channels them through the symbolic which, in turn, 'is characterised by incompleteness.'⁸⁴ However, while this psychoanalytic foundation seemingly paves the way for a broad understanding of anxiety as a pervasive existential condition, in practice Eastwood is primarily concerned with acute episodes of anxiety as 'an unsettling experience[s] of doubt in the consistency of the symbolic order of militarism itself', and the ways in which the reality of war confounds soldiers' expectations of ethical warfare.⁸⁵ This understanding of anxiety as acute crisis is, as we shall see in the next chapter, one shared by many analyses of ontological insecurity. But in that chapter, I will broaden this focus by exploring the pervasiveness of anxiety generated by the everyday suggested by the psychoanalytic work on which Eastwood draws, as well as by broader insights from existential philosophy. And subsequently, I will use this framework to expand the focus from military to civilian subjects.

⁸¹ Jesse Paul Crane-Seeber, 'Sexy Warriors: The Politics and Pleasures of Submission to the State', *Critical Military Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2016): 41–55.

⁸² e.g. Penttinen, *Joy and International Relations*; Julia Welland, 'Joy and War: Reading Pleasure in Wartime Experiences', *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 438–55.

⁸³ Eastwood, 'Rethinking Militarism as Ideology', 48.

⁸⁴ James Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War: Militarism and Morality in Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 34; Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2004), 203–15.

⁸⁵ Specifically, Eastwood draws attention to the role of guilt in Israeli militarism, which functions to individualise responsibility for the failure to realise the desired fantasy object of Israeli militarism – ethical war – thereby keeping a more profound sense of disillusionment and anxiety at bay. Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War*, 165.

While there has been growing scepticism among CSS scholars regarding the positive normative potential of operating through conceptual frameworks of security⁸⁶, understanding how psychological *insecurities* such as feelings of fear and anxiety generate corresponding desires for security and stability remains a pressing concern for scholars of international politics. A recent example working with the concepts of militarism and desire is the work of Victoria Basham. Like Eastwood, Basham is clear that the resonance and appeal of militarism cannot be reduced simply to the pursuit of security in the face of fear of threatening others. Rather, her analysis invokes a broader understanding of *insecurity*, seeking to invert the traditional framing of militarism as a means for achieving security by exploring the ways in which militarism is driven by, and constitutive of, pervasive conditions of ‘everyday insecurity’: ‘it is not just existential insecurity that facilitates war and war preparedness, but the multitude of insecurities that make up everyday life, from needing to have steady employment to wanting to feel part of a social and political community.’⁸⁷ As such, Basham argues that public acquiescence to British militarism ‘can result from fear but also from the desire for an everyday, even if that comes at the cost of other people’s ‘everydays’. This claim especially stems from the centrality of notions of the everyday in discourses about remembrance – the idea that, but for the actions of their (military) ancestors, subjects would not be able to enjoy the everyday freedoms that they take for granted.⁸⁸ By focusing on a broader range of referents of (in)security and exploring the impact of militarism’s violence – conventional and structural – on those gendered, racialized and classed ‘Others’ on the margins of liberal-democratic and international societies, Basham’s analysis usefully illustrates the manner in which ‘liberal militarism’ frequently exacerbates that which its proponents claim it is intended to resolve: insecurity.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ A growing number of CSS scholars have pointed to security’s frequently illiberal associations and totalising, hegemonic logics as an indication that the concept is an unlikely candidate for normative rehabilitation for critical purposes. See, for example, Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Chris Rossdale, ‘Anarchism, Anti-Militarism, and the Politics of Security’ (PhD Thesis, The University of Warwick, 2013), http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/57615/1/WRAP_THESIS_Rossdale_2013.pdf; Vivienne Jabri, ‘Security : Critique, Analysis and Ethics’, in *Ethical Security Studies*, ed. Jonna Nyman and Anthony Burke (London: Routledge, 2016), 17–31.

⁸⁷ Basham, ‘Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence’, 38. Here I interpret Basham’s use of ‘existential insecurity’ as referring to the concerns around invasion and the preservation of territorial sovereignty of traditional military sociology rather than the anxieties considered by existential philosophers – and in which this thesis is particularly interested. This is justified, I think, given Basham’s juxtaposition of the phrase ‘existential insecurity’ with ‘insecurities that make up everyday life’, of which ‘wanting to feel part of a social and political community’ is listed as one. In the next chapter, I will suggest that this latter aspect is the subject of existential anxiety.

⁸⁸ Basham, 40.

⁸⁹ Basham, 40.

Particularly valuable in Basham's analysis is the argument that such outcomes are generated by militaristic desires underpinned by deeper and multifaceted versions of (in)security, emphasising:

that both the desire to belong to a secure, imagined, social and political community, built on gendered and racialized logics, and sheer ambivalence towards military intervention, linked to a desire for a 'worry-free' everyday, are equally constitutive of liberal militarism.⁹⁰

In some ways, these themes of belonging and the everyday seem to point towards desires for ontological security elaborated in the next chapter. The desire 'to belong to a secure, imagined, social and political community' has been the focus of scholars exploring nationhood as resources for ontological security.⁹¹ Compatibilities and overlaps with Giddens' description of ontological security centring on the 'continuity and ordering of events' as a way of bracketing out chaos can also be seen in Basham's emphasis - invoking the work of anthropologist Gerald Sider - on the 'profound, if often taken-for-granted', significance of the everyday:

as an achievement; as those ways in which people work through and against the chaos, rupture and discontinuity that shape their lives to 'try to make and to claim some kind of ordinary - some stability to today, some continuity between yesterday and tomorrow, in some parts of their lives at least'.⁹²

Implied here is that militarism can become desirable as a way of securing an everyday, offering protection from 'chaos, rupture and discontinuity' - or, in the vernacular of this thesis, from pervasive conditions of ontological insecurity - inherent in modern life. And, according to Basham, it is this desire for the everyday which frequently manifests itself as disengaged ambivalence - a desire *not to know* - about ostensibly distant violence, rather than in emphatic enthusiasm about militarism.⁹³

There are, however, some key differences between Basham's account and the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis. Whereas Basham's analysis of emotions and (in)security deals mainly in terms of *fear* rather than anxiety, my thesis argues that foregrounding anxiety can capture dynamics that a prioritisation of fear might miss. I will argue that scholarship on anxiety can

⁹⁰ Basham, 34.

⁹¹ See, for example, Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security', *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-67; Greg Noble, 'The Discomfort of Strangers: Racism, Incivility and Ontological Security in a Relaxed and Comfortable Nation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2005): 107-20; Stuart Croft, 'Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims', *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 219-35.

⁹² Basham, 'Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence', 39 quoting; Gerald Sider, 'Anthropology, History, and the Problem of Everyday Life: Issues from the Field and for Discussion', in *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch-Anthropologische Erkundungen*, ed. Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger, and Michael Wildt (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), 124-25.

⁹³ Basham, 'Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence'; similarly, Anna Stavrianakis has recently described the centrality of 'non-knowledge' and 'systematic not-knowing' to the British government's attempts to justify arms sales in situations that contravene its own regulations. See, Anna Stavrianakis, 'Requiem for Risk: Non-Knowledge and Domination in the Governance of Weapons Circulation', *International Political Sociology* 0 (2019): 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olz030>.

enhance our understanding of the relationship between threats/fear and militarism, by providing a complementary account of what motivates actors to identify threat objects in the first place and why they resonate. This, in turn, can help to problematize the assumed directionality in the relationship between threat and militarism: that identifiable objects of fear lead to insecurity which must be addressed through militarism. As Heath-Kelly has demonstrated, it may instead be the case that underlying anxieties ontologically precede the identification of threat objects, underpinning pathological security-seeking.⁹⁴ On a different level, attentiveness to anxiety can help us to rethink the role that the everyday plays in leading subjects to desire militarism. For Basham, the ‘everyday’ is viewed by subjects as something to be protected from potential insecurity through the entrenchment of military structures at home and deployment of military power in distant lands, with many subjects refraining from questioning the violence of militarism, lest it disrupt normality which keeps chaos at bay. While subjects do frequently desire the modicum of stability and familiarity provided by the everyday, what might be drawn out by paying closer attention to existential philosophy is the manner in which the everyday – to the extent that it is characterised by mundanity - can itself become a source of anxiety in the form of meaninglessness and boredom, to which militarism might respond by reinscribing everyday life with symbolic meaning.

Importantly, several recent studies have begun to investigate the potential of the concept of anxiety to better understand how questions around being and non-being drive processes of militarism and militarisation. Swati Parashar, for example, draws on Krishna’s concept of ‘postcolonial anxiety’⁹⁵ to explore how militarism has been viewed by newly-independent postcolonial states as an important strategy for simultaneously forging distinctive national identities and garnering recognition from other states in the context of systemic norms.⁹⁶ Parashar illustrates how India’s ‘excessive militarism’ did not emerge in the immediate aftermath of independence from the British Empire, but rather as processes of neo-liberal globalization stimulated postcolonial anxieties about being recognised as a modern nation-state. Beyond motivating particular militarised orientations in Indian foreign policy, India’s desire to ‘catch-up’ with the ‘modern’ West through militarism has had profound consequences for subjectivities and everyday routines in Indian society more broadly.⁹⁷

A final example of scholarship exploring militarism through the concept of anxiety can be found in Katharine Millar’s recent study of charitable giving to UK military causes, which she argues is underpinned by particular late modern configurations of liberal militarism and their tendency to

⁹⁴ Charlotte Heath-Kelly, ‘Forgetting ISIS: Enmity, Drive and Repetition in Security Discourse’, *Critical Studies on Security* 6, no. 1 (2018): 85–99.

⁹⁵ Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁹⁶ Parashar, ‘Discursive (in)Securities and Postcolonial Anxiety’.

⁹⁷ Parashar.

generate what she terms ‘civilian anxieties’.⁹⁸ In liberal states, the figure of the combat soldier – over all other members of the armed forces – is traditionally portrayed as the model citizen, ‘linked to the valorised characteristics of Western masculinity, such as autonomy, bravery, self-sacrifice, rationality, and strength.’ This forms one half of the notional civil-military contract described by Elshtain as being based on a gendered logic of protection which envisages ‘Beautiful Souls’ – feminised civilians – as consenting to their protection by ‘Just Warriors’.⁹⁹ This contract is underpinned by gendering masculine of ‘good citizenship’ and the ‘construction of men (and the masculine/ised citizen) as ‘always-already’ soldiers (or potential soldiers).’¹⁰⁰ However, as liberal democracies have moved away from conscription and towards all-volunteer forces in recent times, military personnel are a tiny minority and the wars they fight are increasingly removed from the everyday public experience, which has come to be dominated instead by norms of neo-liberal individualism. One consequence of this decline in national military service, according to Millar, is a ‘differential distribution of risk and obligation (which is gendered, classed, sexualised, and racialised)’ – one which ‘violates the democratic principle of equality without extinguishing the gendered expectation that posits all citizens as liable to defend the whole.’ This, in turn, ‘raises the possibility that civilians may be failing to act appropriately’ – particularly in times of war. Drawing on the work of Kierkegaard, Lacan and Žižek, this possibility is described as generating what Millar terms ‘civilian anxiety’:

[stemming] from the recognition that the subject has of the potential to break the law. It comes less from actual acts of transgression than the realisation of a temptation, or desire, to break the rules, while still abiding by them.¹⁰¹

Moreover, although men were traditionally the subjects of these anxieties and continue to be the implicit referents, the armed forces’ admission in recent decades of subjects not corresponding to the hegemonic norms around the white, heterosexual male – e.g. women and minorities previously marginalised from military service – has rendered ‘civilian anxiety ‘available and applicable to all those who might seek to self-identify with the performance of “good” liberal citizenship and/or hegemonic masculinity/ies.’¹⁰² The tendency of ‘civilian anxiety’ to leave subjects without ‘an ontologically secure citizen identity’, in some ways, brings us full-circle to

⁹⁸ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’.

⁹⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, ‘On Beautiful Souls, Just Warriors and Feminist Consciousness’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no. 3 (1982): 341–48.

¹⁰⁰ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 240; ‘always-already’ is quoted from Deborah Cowen, *Military Workfare: The Soldier and Social Citizenship in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 17.

¹⁰¹ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 225; Slavoj Žižek, ‘Anxiety: Kierkegaard with Lacan’, *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 35 (2007): 179–89.

¹⁰² Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 255–56.

Kelly's work on the psychological coercion at play in contemporary militarism, and contributes a good foundation for better understanding the pressures that civilians experience which push them towards engaging in acts of private patronage and philanthropy to 'support the troops' initiatives.¹⁰³ I return to these practices later in the chapter.

Parashar's and Millar's studies usefully deploy the concept of anxiety in order to reconsider the relationship between militarism and security in different and overlapping ways. Both view anxiety as a fundamentally relational aspect of social life, acknowledging that concerns about (non-)being are frequently tied to recognition dynamics: that attempts to keep anxiety at bay entail seeking the approval of others, or at least being attentive to what we think others think of us. Relatedly, these studies (and Basham's study too) are attentive not only to the role of structure in constituting militarisms, but also to the ways in which structural changes produce different relationships between anxiety and militarism, being liable to change over time. However, both studies raise further questions and provide important openings for further development, particularly in their conceptualisations of anxiety. Parashar, for example, usefully conceptualises anxiety as generating more than simply a desire for stability and a preservation of the status quo, instead pointing to the way in which international hierarchies generate anxieties among those at the margins of international society, manifesting in aspirations to fully-fledged community membership. In advancing this argument, she rightly emphasises the importance of re-centring questions of security and militarism on actors at the margins whose voices are often absent from mainstream discussions. Nevertheless, this conceptualisation of anxiety does raise questions as to how subjects on the inside of the community and nearer the top of international hierarchies may experience anxiety themselves beyond instances of discontinuity and a fear of Others.

My contention is that anxiety is not simply a concern of the marginalised, but one common to existence itself; and as such, it is important to consider how it may bear upon tendencies towards militarism. While Millar provides an account of anxiety that, following Kierkegaard, usefully reconsiders the way in which the 'positive obligation of military service/sacrifice' constitutes subjects desiring of militarism, anxiety is conceptualised rather narrowly as emanating from 'the realisation of a temptation, or desire, to break the rules, while still abiding by them.'¹⁰⁴ This usefully introduces one possible configuration of anxiety and militarism, but it is by no means the only way to think about the two. While Millar views militarism as generating anxieties in the form of possibilities for transgression arising from the subject's free will not to uphold the liberal military contract, this still raises the question of why subjects are drawn to identify with the fictive contract in the first place – one that a broader conceptualisation of anxiety can contribute to

¹⁰³ Millar, 256; Kelly, 'Popular Culture, Sport and the 'Hero'-Fication of British Militarism'.

¹⁰⁴ Millar, 'What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations', 255.

answering. As we shall see in later chapters, desires for meaning and belonging contribute to making vicarious militarism attractive. Moreover, militarism does not always seek to deter transgression, but can also be viewed in different ways as promising to enact transgressive catharsis for multifaceted anxieties, not least feelings of existential boredom in late modernity.

This thesis can therefore contribute to the nascent work on militarism reviewed here by conceptualising insecurity in terms of psychological anxiety pertaining to existential questions around (non-)being, and by developing a theoretical account that views anxieties of various kinds as constituting subjects desiring militarism. Moreover, it will offer a broader conceptualisation of anxiety than those found in existing CMS scholarship. To do this, it will mobilize a concept only fleetingly mentioned in existing CMS scholarship: ontological (in)security. As we have seen, while some of the literature surveyed shares certain similarities with the ontological security literature - or at least certain versions of it - this framework has not been deployed in any detail to consider militarism as conceptualised by CMS scholars. This perhaps reflects the previously identified reticence among CSS and CMS scholars to work through the concept of security, lest they inadvertently reproduce its illiberal logics. However, I will argue that reconceptualising (in)security in line with critical approaches to ontological (in)security can justify thinking about militarism through security-seeking, rather than against it.

Self, Other, and the Limits of Desiring Militarised Subjectivity

As we have seen, militarism is ideological insofar as it involves the imbrication of desiring subjects, and that desire may be motivated by anxieties of various kinds. Desire in this sense encompasses a spectrum of different entanglements with military power, registering at various, and sometimes multiple, levels of consciousness. As Eastwood reminds us, a desire for militarism may fall a long way short of enthusiastic engagement with institutionalised military power. Indeed, Eastwood notes that processes of subjectivation do not always follow simple causal patterns and that the aspect of militarism that one finds attractive is necessarily subjective, which is why Basham calls for scholars to pay attention to the everyday and those areas seemingly unrelated to militarism.¹⁰⁵

Vital and productive though this expanded research agenda is, however, my interest in this thesis is in debates and discourses around remembrance that most subjects would recognise as pertaining to militaries, war, and the privileging of militarised citizenship - although they certainly function at different levels of consciousness and permeate the everyday for many subjects in

¹⁰⁵ Eastwood, 'Rethinking Militarism as Ideology', 48; Basham, 'Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire and Ambivalence'.

Britain.¹⁰⁶ As such, the thesis explores the relationship between anxiety and militarism in producing subjects seeking – consciously/strategically or not – to discursively articulate and bolster claims to their own authentic and authoritative military subjectivities. Beyond this, however, I am particularly interested in the limits of militarised desire: many subjects might well wish to claim military subjectivities as their own, but what are the political intricacies of such desires, and which dynamics of subjectivity impede and complicate this process?

A useful starting point for addressing such questions can be found in feminist and CMS scholarship on the concept of military masculinity.¹⁰⁷ A key observation of this literature is that the privileged position of armed forces – particularly the figure of the masculine warrior – in the social hierarchies of liberal democratic nation-states is underpinned by norms of citizenship that are gendered masculine, racialized white, and classed in ways that place the burden of military labour upon young, working class subjects.¹⁰⁸ The hegemonic figure of the heroic liberal masculine warrior is constituted, in large part, in contradistinction to feminised civilian subjectivity.¹⁰⁹ Whereas the ‘civilian’ is associated with feminized attributes of innocence, vulnerability and fragility, research on military masculinity has highlighted that members of the armed forces are routinely portrayed as the ultimate citizen subjects, ostensibly embodying masculine strength and stoicism and performing actions which are the preconditions that allow for the maintenance of civilian innocence. These figures are mutually constituted by a logic of masculine protection in which, as Elshtain famously described, ‘Beautiful Souls’ are notionally defended by ‘Just Warriors’.¹¹⁰ Thus, as Duriesmith puts it, ‘military men define their masculinity in opposition to civilian men’s perceived lack of bravery, physical strength, and sense of duty’, with imbrication in military institutions becoming a primary method for bolstering one’s socially recognised masculinity through distinguishing the military from the civilian.¹¹¹

While the majority of scholarship on military masculinities has focused on the ways in which the discursive delineations of military and civilian ‘spheres’ are central in articulating military

¹⁰⁶ e.g. Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’; Victoria M. Basham, ‘Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance: The Everyday Geopolitics of the Poppy’, *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 6 (2016): 883–96; Tidy, ‘Forces Sauces and Eggs for Soldiers’.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Enloe, *Maneuvers*; Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American Empire, 1898-2001* (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2012); Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2009); Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country*; Basham, ‘Raising an Army’; Basham, ‘Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance’.

¹⁰⁸ Basham, ‘Raising an Army’, 261; Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’, 254.

¹⁰⁹ Megan H. MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers: The US Military and the Myth That Women Can’t Fight* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3–4.

¹¹⁰ Elshtain, ‘On Beautiful Souls, Just Warriors and Feminist Consciousness’.

¹¹¹ David Duriesmith, ‘Continuing the Conversation: Which Masculinities, Which Wars?’, *Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog* (blog), 5 July 2018, <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/07/05/continuing-the-conversation-which-masculinities-which-wars/>.

masculine subjectivity,¹¹² CMS scholarship has also recognised that it is also produced through endogenous contestation within and between military institutions themselves. Barrett's study of military masculinity, for example, argues that 'hegemonic masculinity is 'relationally constructed through associations of difference' between the three different branches of the U.S. Navy, with each branch emphasising the importance of different (ostensibly) masculine attributes in the face of specific conceptions of femininity.¹¹³ While public perceptions of the armed forces typically concentrate on the hegemonic image of the combat soldier, military masculine subjectivities are negotiated relationally between a wide range of occupations encompassed by the institutions of the armed forces, many of which are non-combat roles. Indeed, Higate argues that the military masculinity of those in combat roles is frequently constructed through contradistinction with those in non-combat roles, who are often looked down upon as 'Hard Clerks and Soft Civvies'.¹¹⁴ Such formulations, as Tidy argues, effectively tie authentic military subjectivity to certain understandings of combat, in the process reinforcing pervasive ontologies of war.¹¹⁵

In between these roles can be found a range of liminal military subjects which are equally important in refining notions of military masculinity. An increasingly prominent example in the British context in recent years is the status of armed forces Reservists who have been described as 'both "special soldiers" and "special civilians" at the same time'.¹¹⁶ However, while this liminality has been regarded by governments as a valuable attribute, this subject position sometimes means that reservists do not enjoy the advantages conferred by full membership of either category. Some Reservists, for example, find that their liminal identities, coupled with the individualized deployment of reservists, means not always being recognised by their regular counterparts as 'full soldiers', and consequently lacking the social networks commonly relied upon to face up to the challenges of deployment. Such challenges tend also to be experienced by the spouses and families of Reservists who cannot always count upon the same social networks as regular armed forces personnel.¹¹⁷ This is no small matter given the extensive reliance of militaries upon the burden-sharing and unpaid labour of families - especially women.¹¹⁸ The split nature of

¹¹² Millar, 'What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations'.

¹¹³ Frank J. Barrett, 'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy', *Gender, Work & Organization* 3, no. 3 (1996): 129.

¹¹⁴ Higate, "'Soft Clerks" and "Hard Civvies": Pluralising Military Masculinities'.

¹¹⁵ Tidy, 'The Gender Politics of "Ground Truth" in the Military Dissent Movement', 100.

¹¹⁶ James Griffith, 'Being a Reserve Soldier: A Matter of Social Identity', *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 1 (2009): 4; quoted in Timothy Edmunds et al., 'Reserve Forces and the Transformation of British Military Organisation: Soldiers, Citizens and Society', *Defence Studies* 16, no. 2 (2016): 128.

¹¹⁷ Edmunds et al., 'Reserve Forces and the Transformation of British Military Organisation', 130; Christopher Dandeker et al., 'Laying Down Their Rifles: The Changing Influences on the Retention of Volunteer British Army Reservists Returning from Iraq, 2003—2006', *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 2 (2010): 279; Christopher Dandeker, Neil Greenberg, and Geoffrey Orme, 'The UK's Reserve Forces: Retrospect and Prospect', *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 2 (2011): 350.

¹¹⁸ Moreover, such reliance is likely to grow considerably as reserve roles become further integrated in regular forces in the UK context. On the gendered and highly unequal division of labour underpinning British reserve forces, see Victoria M. Basham and Sergio Catignani, 'War Is Where the Hearth Is:

their subject positions also presents specific challenges for reservists in their civilian lives. Contrary to government hopes that the reservists would ‘organically disseminate’ military values among the civilian population, Higate et al. note that those Reservists perceiving themselves to be stigmatized by their civilian colleagues as ‘othered’ outsiders sometimes engage in various forms of behaviour described by Goffman as ‘passing’, in which pre-emptive or reactive measures are taken to conceal or withhold significant aspects of their military identities, instead ‘seek[ing] solace ‘in a non-threatening presence or, in the most extreme of examples, a civilian identity.’¹¹⁹

Importantly, military masculine hierarchies have been further complicated by shifting norms and modes of warfare.¹²⁰ Despite the preference of Western governments for small Special Forces-led combat operations in light of growing public unwillingness to countenance large scale ‘boots on the ground’ deployments, these forces are not always regarded positively by other branches of the armed forces. Warren has argued that U.S. Special Forces constitute ‘an Other within the [U.S. national] Self’ because of their willingness to use tactics falling ‘outside the boundaries created by the traditional narratives on the American way of war’.¹²¹ Although such tactics are partially reconciled with U.S. selfhood through public portrayals of Special Forces as the ‘best of the best’, Special Forces have experienced ‘difficulty integrating into the US military establishment, where their underhand and subversive methods likened them to the radical Other.’¹²² Implicit within the observation that U.S. Special Forces are treated with scepticism by other branches of the U.S. armed forces is the idea that this is because they are seen to be transgressing the notional boundaries of ‘good’ American military masculinity. Similar concerns have been raised around the outsourcing of traditionally military roles to the rapidly proliferating private military and security sector over the course of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Ex-military contractors have sometimes been regarded with suspicion by their military counterparts because of their perceived status as mercenaries sometimes acting outside both international law and traditional military masculine norms associated with service and sacrifice in the name of the nation-state.¹²³

Gendered Labor and the Everyday Reproduction of the Geopolitical in the Army Reserves’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no. 2 (2018): 153–71; See also Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

¹¹⁹ Paul Higate et al., ‘Militarization, Stigma, and Resistance: Negotiating Military Reservist Identity in the Civilian Workplace’, *Critical Military Studies* 0, no. 0 (2019): 12–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2018.1554941>; see also Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

¹²⁰ On the socially-constructed and fluid status of ‘combat’, see Katharine M. Millar and Joanna Tidy, ‘Combat as a Moving Target: Masculinities, the Heroic Soldier Myth, and Normative Martial Violence’, *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 142–60.

¹²¹ Stephen Warren, ‘US Special Forces: An Other within the Self’, *Critical Military Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 40–62.

¹²² Warren, 55.

¹²³ For an overview, see Elke Krahnmann, ‘From “Mercenaries” to “Private Security Contractors”: The (Re)Construction of Armed Security Providers in International Legal Discourses’, *Millennium* 40, no. 2 (2012): 343–63; Paul Higate, ‘“Cowboys and Professionals”: The Politics of Identity Work in the Private and Military Security Company’, *Millennium* 40, no. 2 (2011): 321–41; Saskia Stachowitsch, ‘Military

Technological advances such as the rapid proliferation of military drones have also reinforced the preferences of Western policy makers for ‘risk-transfer war’, frequently taking the form of remote bombing campaigns which prioritise the lives of Western military personnel over the safety of civilians in combat zones.¹²⁴ Although human-piloted bombing campaigns over the course of the second half of the twentieth century had raised questions around the place of ‘military’ virtues such as courage and bravery in modern warfare,¹²⁵ a more fundamental challenge to traditional military masculinities has been posed by targeted assassination programmes using drones controlled by pilots safely ensconced in bases thousands of miles from the battlefield. The sensitivity of trends towards what has been described by some as ‘post-heroic’ warfare¹²⁶ can be seen in public controversy over the decision to award drone pilots with campaign medals of equal or superior standing to those awarded to regular forces.¹²⁷ Although such decisions have been defended on the basis of the mental toll of remote lethal warfare on drone pilots, some have nevertheless balked at the suggestion that pilots who are able to return home to their families after a day of remote warfare are as deserving of recognition as conventional combat soldiers on lengthy deployments.¹²⁸ The remote nature of their work means they are regarded as lacking the authenticity of military masculine subjects.

These studies point to the necessity of moving ‘beyond the hegemonic’ study of a singular military masculinity, to consider military masculinities in the plural and their mutual interactions, conditioned by the intersection of gender, race and class.¹²⁹ This task has become more pressing

Privatization and the Remasculinization of the State: Making the Link Between the Outsourcing of Military Security and Gendered State Transformations’, *International Relations* 27, no. 1 (2013): 74–94.

¹²⁴ Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War: Risk-Transfer War and Its Crisis in Iraq* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); see also, Thomas Gregory, ‘Drones, Targeted Killings, and the Limitations of International Law’, *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 3 (2015): 197–212.

¹²⁵ Indeed, Sparrow notes that ‘[c]ritics have been decrying killing at a distance ever since the invention of the crossbow or the sling.’ Robert Sparrow, ‘Drones, Courage, and Military Culture’, in *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics*, ed. George Lucas (London: Routledge, 2015), 382.

¹²⁶ The term ‘post-heroic warfare’ was first advanced in Edward Luttwak’s essay on what he viewed as the promise of technological innovations in lowering the cost of modern warfare - to wealthy Western nations, anyway. Edward N. Luttwak, ‘Toward Post-Heroic Warfare’, *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1995): 109–22; Although the suggestion of a move towards ‘post-heroic warfare’ caused initial anxiety around the viability of established martial masculinities, the concept has been the subject of critical reflection in recent years with some sceptical that such a move has transpired in reality. For a range of such arguments, see Sibylle Scheipers, ed., *Heroism and the Changing Character of War - Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹²⁷ On the U.S. military’s controversial plans to introduce a Distinguished Warfare Medal for drone pilots that would have outranked medals given to regular troops, see Andrea Ellner, ‘The Ethics of Inclusion: Gender Equality, Equal Opportunity, and Sexual Assault in the Australian, British, Canadian, and U.S. Armed Forces’, in *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics*, ed. George Lucas (London: Routledge, 2015), 304; Sparrow, ‘Drones, Courage, and Military Culture’, 380; and Lorraine Bayard de Volo, ‘Unmanned? Gender Recalibrations and the Rise of Drone Warfare’, *Politics & Gender* 12, no. 1 (2016): 58–61.

¹²⁸ For an overview of these debates, see Sparrow, ‘Drones, Courage, and Military Culture’, 385–88; and Christian Enemark, ‘Drones, Risk, and Moral Injury’, *Critical Military Studies* 5, no. 2 (2019): 150–67.

¹²⁹ Amanda Chisholm and Joanna Tidy, ‘Beyond the Hegemonic in the Study of Militaries, Masculinities, and War’, *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 99–102; see also, Paul R. Higate, ed., *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Paul Higate, ‘Drinking Vodka from the “Butt-Crack”’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 4 (2012): 450–69.

in the context of demographic shifts in the composition of armed forces. Perhaps the change with most apparent ramifications for the construction of military masculinities has been the gradual admission of women into armed forces, including combat roles in the past decade. Such moves, along with the end of prohibition upon subjects openly identifying as Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) from serving in Western armed forces, have been driven by broader social trends towards greater inclusivity as well as declining recruitment rates; but they have frequently encountered opposition from some Military grandees on the rather dubious basis that inclusivity compromises operational effectiveness – with such effectiveness almost invariably being defined in masculine terms.¹³⁰ Similar concerns have been raised that recent attempts by the British Army to reinvigorate recruitment by appealing to those outside their traditional young, white, male, working-class recruitment pool signify a dilution of the institution's masculine integrity and war-fighting prowess.¹³¹ In a different way, British attempts to address a 'recruitment crisis' by recruiting soldiers from Britain's former imperial dominions have created anxieties less around the masculinity of soldiers themselves – who are frequently portrayed through deeply orientalist lenses as hypermasculine warriors¹³² – than around what reliance upon mercenary 'military migrants' says about the status of British nationalism and 'good masculine citizenship'.¹³³ Such dynamics add significant complexity to the constitution of military masculinities.

In myriad ways, then, the constitution of military masculine subjectivities operates through distinctions of self and other, which are in turn subject to dynamics of social recognition. And this matters because military subjectivities can bestow significant social capital (not least, authenticity and authority) upon those who are recognised as bearing them – especially those perceived to be higher within militarised hierarchies. Of course, being conferred with social status on the basis that one is seen to conform to a dominant understanding of what it is to be military and masculine is not always experienced positively. The emphasis placed by militarised social recognition dynamics upon a narrow range of hegemonic figures and experiences – e.g. the 'combat warrior', or 'military wife' – can also alienate the intended beneficiaries of militarised

¹³⁰ For overviews of debates about gender and sexual inclusivity in the armed forces, see MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers*; Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State*, especially 90-112.

¹³¹ Matthew Weaver, 'Army Accused of Political Correctness in Recruitment Campaign', *The Guardian*, 10 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/10/army-accused-of-political-correctness-in-recruitment-campaign>.

¹³² Porter, *Military Orientalism*; Notably, such orientalist framings are also deeply entrenched in the Private Military/Security industry. See, for example Paul Higate, 'Martial Races and Enforcement Masculinities of the Global South: Weaponising Fijian, Chilean, and Salvadoran Postcoloniality in the Mercenary Sector', *Globalizations* 9, no. 1 (2012): 35–52; Amanda Chisholm, 'Marketing the Gurkha Security Package: Colonial Histories and Neoliberal Economies of Private Security', *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 4 (2014): 349–72.

¹³³ Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country*; On the use of military participation to stake claims to national belonging, see Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

status who feel that aspects of their lived experiences which do not neatly dovetail with mediatised templates are ignored.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, for individuals and organizations, these hegemonic frames of reference for military masculinity constitute seductive political resources. Joanna Tidy's research into the politics of subjectivity in the U.S. military dissent movements opposing the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, for example, highlights the movement's tendency to rely on the authoritative 'ground truth' of soldiers with direct and seemingly more authentic experiences of war in making anti-war arguments.¹³⁵ Tidy demonstrates that the dissent movement's positioning of the combat soldier as hierarchically superior to the 'desk warrior' leads to a form of resistance which effectively reifies and reinforces gendered military hierarchies and the ostensible relevance of their attendant experiences: close combat is viewed as authentic war and conferring knowledge about what war is 'really like', and participation in non-front line roles as comparatively inauthentic.¹³⁶ Privileging certain war experiences over others in this way enacts significant limitations on the range of voices that can legitimately critique war and circumscribes the basis for legitimate critique by establishing the figure of the masculine combat warrior – and the question of support, framed in the language of the civil-military contract - as the referent/purpose of anti-war criticism. Popular anti-war slogans such as 'support our troops: bring them home' thereby remain faithful to the underlying logic of liberal militarism, with even anti-war groups viewing military masculine subjectivity as an almost irresistibly powerful resource to be worked through rather than challenged.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ With reference to injured combat soldiers experience of the Invictus Games, Cree and Caddick argue that '[b]y hailing veterans as gladiatorial, techno-human warrior subjects, the Invictus narrative constructs an identity from which it may be difficult to escape' Alice Cree and Nick Caddick, 'Unconquerable Heroes: Invictus, Redemption, and the Cultural Politics of Narrative', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 0, no. 0 (2019): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2019.1615707>; Similarly, Cree argues that the phenomenon of 'Military Wives' Choirs has led to 'the lived experiences of the actual women [being] shrouded by the Penelope wife subjectivity' in the name of entertainment. Alice Cree, 'People Want to See Tears': Military Heroes and the "Constant Penelope" of the UK's Military Wives Choir', *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 2 (2020): 235.

¹³⁵ Tidy, 'The Gender Politics of "Ground Truth" in the Military Dissent Movement'; see also Joanna Tidy, 'Gender, Dissenting Subjectivity and the Contemporary Military Peace Movement in Body of War', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 3 (2015): 454–72; On the politics of 'ground truth'. see also Lisa Leitz, 'Oppositional Identities: The Military Peace Movement's Challenge to Pro-Iraq War Frames', *Social Problems* 58, no. 2 (2011): 235–56; Lisa Leitz, *Fighting for Peace: Veterans and Military Families in the Anti-Iraq War Movement* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

¹³⁶ Tidy, 'Gender, Dissenting Subjectivity and the Contemporary Military Peace Movement in Body of War', 104–5, 110–12; This prioritisation of conventional combat experience is despite the fact that, as Millar and Tidy have argued, scholarship on military masculinities has largely overlooked the diversity and social construction of combat. Millar and Tidy, 'Combat as a Moving Target'.

¹³⁷ Tidy, 'Gender, Dissenting Subjectivity and the Contemporary Military Peace Movement in Body of War', 107; See also, Katharine M Millar, "'They Need Our Help": Non-Governmental Organizations and the Subjectifying Dynamics of the Military as Social Cause', *Media, War & Conflict* 9, no. 1 (2016): 9–26.

CMS scholarship has made significant headway in exploring how military masculine subjectivities are constructed and contested among those in different military institutions and in contradistinction to the civilian. The focus here has been on the referents/bearers of militarised subjectivities – usually members of the armed forces community themselves. So, what of the civilian? Millar has argued that the focus of CMS scholarship on military masculinities and their bearers has resulted in comparatively little attention being paid to civilians as meaningful subjects in their own right, beyond '[shoring] up the heroic masculinity of the figurative soldier and the corresponding legitimacy of the (nation) state.'¹³⁸ While it is understandable that researchers seeking to problematize military subjectivities would focus on their most striking manifestations, as Millar argues, the relative absence of the civilian is a curious lacuna given that 'the 'civilian' experience of wartime is far more common than that of 'soldier'.¹³⁹

The specific contribution I want to make in this thesis is to develop our understanding of the ways in which civilian/non-military entities negotiate militarised social hierarchies, given their ostensibly inferior position in them. I will suggest that better understanding the dynamics of such subjectivizing processes will require paying further attention to how selves and others relate to one another. This binary relationship in which a masculine militarised self is typically prioritised over a feminised civilian culture is, as we have seen, a central concern of the military masculinities literature. And to the extent that they have been interested in militarism, IR and critical security scholars have primarily been interested in processes described by Vucetic and Mabee as 'exceptionalist militarism', whereby 'others' are frequently identified as threatening, irrational and deplorable objects of enmity, and juxtaposed with ostensibly innocent and virtuous selves in justifying militarist approaches, in line with the observations of securitization and poststructuralist scholarship more broadly.¹⁴⁰ However, this pre-occupation with pejorative othering has largely occurred at the expense of in-depth consideration of the role played by positive perceptions of others in militarism and international politics more generally.¹⁴¹

Of course, such studies have not been altogether absent; we have already seen several important contributions foregrounding dynamics of attraction and desire in militarism. More broadly, studies of militarisation have highlighted the many ways in which military modes of being are viewed as objects of aspiration – not least because they are marketed as such. Perhaps the most

¹³⁸ Millar, 'What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations', 241.

¹³⁹ Millar, 240.

¹⁴⁰ Bryan Mabee and Srdjan Vucetic, 'Varieties of Militarism: Towards a Typology', *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 1–2 (2018): 100–101; See also David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Rev. ed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Campbell; Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*.

¹⁴¹ Crane-Seeber, 'Sexy Warriors', 42–43.

famous example in CMS scholarship comes from Cynthia Enloe who argued that the militarisation of a can of soup was viewed by marketing executives as a way to appeal children.¹⁴² Changing gender norms in recent decades have also seen militarised branding deployed to discursively re-masculinise work and practices traditionally regarded as feminine. The sale of military-themed diaper bags designed to emulate U.S military ‘combat gear’ is a case in point: if there was any doubt about the gendered dynamics of such products, Tactical Baby Gear markets its products with the slogan ‘ditch the girly diaper bag’ (see Figure 1.1), with media coverage picking up on the gender politics underpinning the marketing strategy: ‘Worried About Diaper-Bag Emasculation? We Have One in Camo’.¹⁴³



Figure 1.1 – ‘Ditch The Girly Diaper Bag’

Beyond the consumption of military-themed items, scholars have also drawn attention to the ways in which embodied military practices are sometimes the basis of popular emulation. McSorley, for example, has pointed to the popularity of ‘military-themed fitness classes’ run by veterans of the British armed forces - marketed as ‘British Military Fitness’ - with members of the British public.¹⁴⁴ As he explains, ‘being military and the ex-soldier’s body have [...] become widely trusted and affectively resonant brands’ and immersive experiences, with pleasure and enjoyment stemming from: ‘[t]he intensities and feelings of physical achievement and togetherness that are generated, the embodied experiences of collective effervescence, of however fleetingly feeling part of something bigger than oneself.’¹⁴⁵ Thus, corporeal participation in military-style training is both marketed and frequently experienced as a way of ‘feeling alive, in a very specific way’ –

¹⁴² Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 1–2.

¹⁴³ ‘Military and Tactical Style Diaper Bags for Dad’, Tactical Baby Gear, accessed 20 March 2020, <https://tacticalbabygear.com/>; Corinne Ramey, ‘Worried About Diaper-Bag Emasculation? We Have One in Camo’, Wall Street Journal, 15 January 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/worried-about-diaper-bag-emasculation-we-have-one-in-camo-1516041982>.

¹⁴⁴ Kevin McSorley, ‘Doing Military Fitness: Physical Culture, Civilian Leisure, and Militarism’, *Critical Military Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2016): 103–19.

¹⁴⁵ McSorley, 114.

one congruent with a 'late modern physical culture that predominantly emphasizes the individual body as a site of self-discovery, self-expression and personal responsibility.'¹⁴⁶

Each of these engagements clearly involves active work on the self: the consumption of military-themed parenting products is aimed at rendering parenting a sufficiently masculine pursuit for male participation; and participation in military-themed fitness activities is viewed as an authentic way of attaining socially-idealised standards of fitness and aesthetics. Notably, however, there are significant limits in each of these associations with militarism. Buying military-themed products may well signify to others adherence to certain hegemonic standards of good citizenship by implying support for 'the troops', but wearing a military diaper bag does not confer the same social cache as being recognised as a member of a military institution. Likewise, while those walking past a British Military Fitness class may admire the participants' athleticism, it seems unlikely anyone other than the veteran instructors themselves would be recognised as authentic bearers of military masculine subjectivities. Indeed, although military-themed fitness programmes allow participants to '[p]retend, just for an hour or so, that [they] are Prince Harry',¹⁴⁷ McSorley emphasises that 'military fitness emerges in and through the heterogeneous entanglement and resonance of multiple military grammars, commercial logics, and contemporary desires and body projects'. As such, participants may participate in military-themed fitness training - and enjoy doing so - despite 'any cognitive reservations that one may potentially hold about "being militarist"', implying that some participants would actively disavow the aspects of military-masculine subjectivities most likely to confer social capital.¹⁴⁸ While these examples are still compatible with the definition of militarism as ideology in so far as they are constitutive of subjects desirous of aspects of organized violence, they largely preserve distinctions between civilian selves and military others in terms of social hierarchies.

And yet, as we have already seen, militarised social hierarchies are constituted in part by civilians: the liberal-military contract traditionally establishes military service and sacrifice in defence of the nation as the highest form of normatively masculine liberal-democratic citizenship. However, returning to Millar's argument, that the majority of British citizens today are civilians rather than soldiers entails a significant amount of 'civilian anxiety' pertaining to the possibility that subjects may be transgressing these hegemonic expectations. Such anxiety is generative of actions through which subjects attempt to demonstrate both to themselves and (in relation) to others that they are authentic national subjects rather than transgressors, thus assuaging feelings of anxiety. In the British and American contexts, Millar argues that these actions typically take the form of

¹⁴⁶ McSorley, 113–14.

¹⁴⁷ Barney Ronay, 'If You Thought the Park Was Just for Football, Think Again', *The Guardian*, 12 May 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/may/12/healthandwellbeing.barneyronay> quoted in; McSorley, 'Doing Military Fitness', 104.

¹⁴⁸ McSorley, 114.

charitable giving aimed at proving subjects' support for 'the troops'. What enables these practices to function as catharsis for civilian anxiety is the reconfiguration of masculine individual subjectivity in neo-liberal late modernity, in which context support for militarism – envisaged as a 'private matter between individuals' - has in some ways supplanted military service as the 'sine qua non' of contemporary liberal democratic citizenship,¹⁴⁹ thus 'resignifying structurally feminized "society" as itself masculine' and blurring the distinction between civilian and military masculine subjectivities.¹⁵⁰ This is because an emphasis on charitable giving performs an inversion of the 'conventional, liberal gendering of the civil-military divide' with the 'heroic (citizen)soldier that undergirds the liberal military contract' becoming subordinate in some settings 'to the empowered, beneficent charitable patron.'¹⁵¹ According to Millar, however, that good masculine citizenship remains ultimately premised upon 'military association' places limitations on the extent to which any civilian anxiety can be addressed, with the effective 'elision of citizenship [doing] little to address the underlying, constitutive connection between masculinity, military service, and citizenship.' Indeed, she notes that the reliance of military charity marketing upon the invocation of civilian anxiety frequently 'raises the spectre that charitable support per se might not be the appropriate form of normative citizenship at all...but a means of evasion.'¹⁵² As such, even patterns of support cannot ever fully resolve feelings of civilian anxiety.

Millar's analysis usefully interweaves the conceptualisation of civilian anxiety with an analysis of subjectivity conditioned by broader structural factors in late modernity. By her own admission, however, this article is the first cut into a larger exploration of civilian subjectivities – one which raises a number of intriguing questions for further development. For example, while it importantly problematizes scholarly attempts to neatly delineate civilian and military masculine subjectivities, in drawing attention to the impossibility of subjects ever truly resolving civilian anxieties it is also implied that there are quite clear limits on civilian claims to *be* military in the same way that members of the armed forces are. Here, the focus is predominantly on what civilian subjects can do in the present to show their support for the armed forces, and the suggestion is that the best they can hope to achieve is to have their support recognised by significant others. However, this raises important questions: are there different ways in which subjects might try to claim authentic

¹⁴⁹ Katharine M. Millar, 'Support Is the New Service: Gendered Political Obligation, the Military, and Collective Subject Formation in International Relations' (PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2016), <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:4cbb21f4-2e5a-4089-b78a-f1d349e8d409>.

¹⁵⁰ Millar, 'What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations', 257.

¹⁵¹ Coincidentally, this inversion which casts private philanthropy as a key tenet of good neo-liberal masculine citizenship is arguably one of the reasons why repeated calls for states to step in to avoid veterans having to turn to charity for their welfare needs in the first place consistently fail to resonate. Millar, 257.

¹⁵² Millar, 257.

militarised subjectivity and, in so doing, overcome civilian anxiety? And how might these challenge the self-other binary in different ways?

One promising area for investigating these questions further in the British context, I will argue in later chapters, consists of the culture and practices of war commemoration and remembrance which have been the subject of a vast array of interdisciplinary interest since the early twentieth century.¹⁵³ This interest has mirrored what Jay Winter has famously referred to as ‘memory booms’ occurring as nation-states sought to tell historically-informed stories about themselves that bolstered fictive kinship and collective identity. In this endeavour, the twentieth century experiences of total war have been particularly important both for the way they encompassed whole societies and for the unprecedented scale of their violence. Regarding the latter, Winter has emphasised the importance of those ‘bearing witness’ to seismic events exceeding human comprehension (i.e. the Holocaust), with trauma conferring authority and authenticity upon survivors to know the realities of modern war. The importance of recording such testimony resided in desires to avoid repeat experiences in the future. And as the generations of primary witnesses to events such as the First and Second World Wars gradually pass into memory, scholars have become increasingly interested in the transmission of victim testimonies through public participation in genealogy as people try to find out ‘who they really are’. As such, this places a greater focus on vicarious dynamics for individuals, corporate and national actors.

Winter’s focus on witnesses is congruent with more recent observations about the importance of authenticity in making powerful and resonant claims about war and militarism. Whereas scholarship on witness testimony has largely focused on victimisation, this thesis focuses attention instead on how actors might identify affirmatively with military ancestors. This interest is, in some ways, closer to a dynamic identified by Tidy in the U.S. military dissent movements for which ‘[t]he figure of the combat soldier as a military masculine referent within the heteronormatively imagined American family provides a vocabulary of authority through which soldiers’ family members dissent.’¹⁵⁴ Importantly, the family members of deceased combat soldiers are viewed as being particularly authoritative because their personal loss is viewed as signifying their shared and contiguous role in blood sacrifice for the nation – something with which it is difficult to argue. Importantly, however, it is the proximity of family members to contemporary soldiers fighting

¹⁵³ See, for example, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War In European Cultural History*, Reissue edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); J. M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Maja Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Natasha Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

¹⁵⁴ Tidy, ‘The Gender Politics of “Ground Truth” in the Military Dissent Movement’, 106.

contemporary wars that is viewed as conferring authenticity. Indeed, many family members are *already* seen as being members of the military community, not least through the increasingly culturally-resonant prism of the 'military family'. One distinctive contribution made by this thesis, therefore, is in further problematising the neat bifurcation of self and other by exploring claims to authenticity made by contemporary civilian subjects – whether individual, collective, or corporate - upon the basis of ancestral links with military personnel of the past.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have situated my thesis within Critical Military Studies, not least because of its focus on the concept of militarism which better captures the myriad, complex ways in which military institutions, processes and power touch the lives of modern subjects than the ideal-type framework prioritised by analyses of civil-military relations. However, a review of CMS scholarship has also revealed two underdeveloped aspects of the literature which I intend to address in this thesis. Firstly, I have argued that while work on militarism has become increasingly attentive to questions of resonance and what it is that motivates people to engage with militarism – particularly by deploying the concept of desire – what underpins such desires is often left underdeveloped. Moreover, to the extent that scholars engage with notions of insecurity as generating desires for militarism, insecurity tends still to be linked to fear of a definite object. The chapter has pointed to nascent work on the concept of anxiety within CMS as a potentially fruitful avenue for providing a more detailed account of how militarism constitutes desiring subjects, but also highlighted the limitations of the flattening conceptualisation of anxiety in these accounts.

Secondly, by engaging feminist scholarship on military masculinities, I have pointed to some of the limits imposed by militarised social hierarchies on desires to become military. However, whereas the majority of work on this subject is concerned with how subjects within or strongly associated with military institutions are both discursively constituted in contradistinction with external civilian subjects and internal military subjects with different claims to authentic masculinity, I have demonstrated the need to better understand the ways in which civilians themselves negotiate such hierarchies. While Millar's emphasis on the importance of practices of charitable giving to military causes in constituting civilian masculinities is an important step, I have suggested that civilians may try to transcend the neat bifurcation between civilian and military through vicarious claims to authentic subjectivity, opening a research agenda into the myriad ways that individuals seek to live through militarism rather than simply becoming military themselves. Identifying some of these modes is the task of the empirical chapters. Before that, however, it is necessary to provide an account of anxiety, insecurity, and subjectivity which addresses the limitations of existing approaches to the question of militarism and motivation. This is the task of the next chapter, to which we now turn.

2. Towards Critical Ontological Security Studies

'Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today, to get through this thing called "life"' – Prince and The Revolution¹

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that psychological insecurity in the form of anxiety has been underexplored by existing CMS scholarship as a motivation behind processes of militarism, militarisation, and desiring militarised subjectivity. My aim in this chapter is to outline an account of subjectivity underpinned by a broader concept of anxiety which provides the foundational conceptual framework from which the thesis proceeds. This account is centred on the concept of ontological security, first advanced by psychiatrist R.D. Laing to make sense of the acute *insecurity* and existential dread experienced by psychiatric patients unable to establish the parameters of their 'being in the world'.² But it is the sociological account of the concept elaborated in the work of Anthony Giddens – especially *Modernity and Self-Identity* – that informs my reading of the concept, as well as being the inspiration for much of the IR scholarship using the concept with which I primarily engage.³

For IR theorists, ontological security's prioritisation of anxiety as motivating behaviour has provided a useful corrective to the fear-based accounts of mainstream IR – one able to capture why identity needs are so often prioritised over physical survival.⁴ And yet as this literature has expanded, it has become less and less possible to talk in terms of a singular ontological security *theory*, instead being an area characterised by significant theoretical, empirical, and methodological pluralism. Its rapid expansion has recently prompted external critique and internal reflexivity as scholars have valuably problematised IR's use of the concept at the level of the state, its

¹ Prince and The Revolution, *Let's Go Crazy*, CD (The Warehouse, St. Louis Park: Warner Bros., 1984).

² R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1990 [First published 1960]).

³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*; For early uses of ontological security in IR, see Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 226–55; Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Brent J. Steele, 'Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War', *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 519–40; Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341–70; Paul Roe, 'The "Value" of Positive Security?', *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 4 (2008): 777–94; Alanna Krolikowski, 'State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Sceptical View', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (2008): 109–33; Ayse Zarakol, 'Ontological (In)Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan (IR)', *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2010): 3–23.

⁴ See, for example, Steele, 'Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity'; Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma'.

conceptualisation of identity, and its tendency to reduce ontological security to a matter of identity security and stability. Drawing upon recent critical advances, this chapter provides an interpretation of Giddens' work that addresses various concerns - not least that ontological security may fetishize identity security in ways that can be co-opted for violent and exclusionary ends - thereby making the case for a Critical Ontological Security Studies that emphasizes dynamism and recognition dynamics.

The chapter is structured in the following way. Part 1 provides an overview of ontological security as articulated by Giddens, connecting it to his account of late modernity and its consequences for how individuals negotiate existential questions and anxieties. Part 2 explores the concept's development and application in IR and Critical Security Studies and a number of prominent critiques before providing an interpretation of the concept featuring some key modifications and caveats based on more recent critical advances in ontological security studies – not least in arguing for a shift in emphasis from a focus on the stability of identity towards the exploration of how self-esteem is constituted and reinforced.

Ontological (In)Security in Late Modernity

'The orderliness of day-to-day life', sociologist Anthony Giddens writes, 'is a miraculous occurrence' – one that takes considerable and continuous social 'work'.⁵ In answering 'even the simplest everyday query, or respond[ing] to the most cursory remark', there is a 'potentially almost infinite range of possibilities open to the individual'.⁶ And yet, under normal circumstances, most people do not experience a paralysis of choice in such scenarios; rather, there are habitual patterns of behaviour to be performed and logics of appropriateness to be adhered to, which are carried out with a degree of automaticity. Inspired by Erving Goffman's work on everyday encounters, Giddens notes how even seemingly mundane situations and exchanges are imbued with existential significance:

A person encountering another on the street shows by a controlled glance that the other is worthy of respect, and then by adjusting the gaze that he or she is not a threat to the other; and that other person does the same.⁷

Knowing how to act, existentialist philosophy has argued, lies in the fact that the human condition is constituted by consciousness and self-awareness; as Hardie-Bick puts it, '[n]ot only are human beings aware of their own awareness, but they are also aware that they are aware of their own

⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 52.

⁶ Giddens, 36.

⁷ Giddens, 47; See also Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New Ed edition (London: Penguin, 1990); Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies In The Sociology Of Interaction* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1961).

awareness'.⁸ It is this self-awareness that allows for the 'reflexive monitoring of action intrinsic to all human activity' and self-control necessary to be able to navigate even the most mundane social situations.⁹ However, self-consciousness not only allows humans to conduct themselves in everyday settings, but also provides for a broader perspective on existence. As such, self-consciousness is janus-faced: it can be the source of life-affirming joy insofar as it allows us to step back from the mundanities of everyday existence and engage with 'the bigger picture'; on the other hand, it exposes us to the harder realities of our existential predicament. The consciousness that enables these everyday interactions also periodically reminds us of their contingency and fragility: that '[o]n the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks'.¹⁰

Following Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Tillich¹¹, Giddens argues that the chaos in question emanates from a range of existential questions concerning being - of selves and others - in time and space. The first question regards 'existence itself' and the 'the struggle of being against non-being' experienced, for example, by infants as they newly encounter aspects of life.¹² The second concerns the 'existential contradiction' stemming from the fact of our embodied consciousness: the idea that 'we are of the inanimate world, yet set off against it', and furthermore, that humans are aware at some level of their mortality. As if coming to terms with our existence and mortality weren't enough, our 'experience of others' also poses the considerable social challenge of dealing with other people, themselves trying to accomplish the same kind of existential work, who we must rely on despite their own fallibility and mortality.¹³ And finally, our consciousness and identification of others also prompts reflexivity about our self-identity – who are we anyway? This is distinct from grappling with reality because it takes on a temporal dimension – how do we make sense of our actions in relation to others from one moment to the next and achieve 'the continuity of self-identity'?¹⁴ Each of these questions in isolation would be preoccupying enough, but together they are profoundly challenging and anxiety-inducing, prompting reflection on fundamental matters of being and non-being.

So how do we 'get through' or 'go on' with life, in the knowledge of our own inescapable existential predicament, without succumbing to existential dread and 'engulfment'? An answer,

⁸ James Hardie-Bick, 'Transcendence, Symbolic Immortality and Evil', *Human Studies* 35, no. 3 (2012): 417.

⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 20.

¹⁰ Giddens, 36.

¹¹ See, for example Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, ed. and trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1954 [1843]); Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. Reidar Thomte, trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson, (Princeton ; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1980 [1844]); Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010 [1927]); Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (London: Collins, 1962 [1952]).

¹² Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 48.

¹³ Giddens, 55.

¹⁴ Giddens, 55.

according to Giddens, is in developing a sense of ‘ontological security’ – described by Laing as a state in which the individual has a ‘sense of presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person.’¹⁵ Whereas the ontologically secure individual enjoys a sense of gratification in social relations, ‘the ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself: the ordinary circumstances of living threaten his *low threshold* of security.’¹⁶ Thus, ontological security has been thought of as the security of self-hood, consisting of ‘the seeking of a consistent self through *time* and *space*, and the desire to have that self *recognized and affirmed by others*.’¹⁷ Read in this way, ontological security is not simply about self-identity, but about self-esteem and therefore dependent on the recognition of significant others.¹⁸

Indeed, ontological security pertains more generally to the security of *being*, concerning ‘the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action’.¹⁹ This is striven for through the social construction of a ‘shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality’, sometimes formalised but often taking the form of ‘common-sense’ and ‘conventional wisdom’ – dynamics at the heart of militarism and militarization.²⁰ For Giddens, such frameworks are key attempts to ‘bracket out [existential] questions about ourselves, others and the object-world’²¹ - and the anxieties they entail – confining them most of the time to the ‘level of unconscious and practical [or non-] consciousness’.²² That actors are, in Skey’s words, ‘more or less able to rely on things – people, objects, places, meanings – remaining tomorrow, by and large, as they were today and the day before’, crucially provides the underpinning ontological basis for a sense of personal mastery and meaningful social agency.²³ As we saw in the previous chapter, however, attempts to delineate ‘common-sense’ are never neutral and frequently serve to entrench deeply gendered, racialised and classed social power relations.²⁴

¹⁵ Laing, *The Divided Self*, 39.

¹⁶ Laing, 42. (Emphasis in original)

¹⁷ Alexandria J. Innes and Brent J. Steele, ‘Memory, trauma and ontological security’, Resende, E. and Budryte, D. (eds.) *Memory and Trauma in International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 15. (Emphases added)

¹⁸ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 38; For literature using this interpretation of ontological security, see Christopher S. Browning, ‘Nation Branding, National Self-Esteem, and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, no. 2 (2015): 195–214; Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 31–47; Dmitry Chernobrov, ‘Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises: Uncertainty, Political Imagining, and the Self’, *Political Psychology* 37, no. 5 (2016): 581–96; Felix Berenskoetter, ‘Anxiety, Time, and Agency’, *International Theory* (Forthcoming).

¹⁹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 92.

²⁰ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 36; Notably, this is informed by Giddens’ structuration theory which emphasises the mutuality of structure and agency. See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

²¹ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 92; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 37.

²² Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 47.

²³ Michael Skey, ‘“A Sense of Where You Belong in the World”: National Belonging, Ontological Security and the Status of the Ethnic Majority in England’, *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 4 (2010): 720.

²⁴ Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele, ‘Engaging the Narrative in Ontological (in)Security Theory: Insights from Feminist IR’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 3 (2009): 523–40.

The individual's access point to this shared framework is through a personalised framework of self-identity: 'a sense of biographical coherence, comprehended by the individual and communicable to others'.²⁵ While routines are 'constitutive of an emotional acceptance of the reality of the 'external world' without which a secure human existence is impossible',²⁶ to address the broader range of existential questions, individuals need to be able to reflexively make sense of actions and events within broader cosmologies and justify them to themselves and others. What enables this is the telling of stories in the form of (auto)biographical narratives. These, in conjunction with our actions, confer a sense of personal and social continuity and establish the parameters for meaningful agency, both of which help to establish direction in one's life – a sense of being embedded in the past and present which provides guidance for future action.²⁷ As such, precisely because of its highly imperfect and selective nature, memory plays a central role in (re)producing ontological security.²⁸ Routines also help to reaffirm the reality of our autobiographical narratives by providing evidence of our self-integrity – of our ability 'to act within the scope of those elements under reflexive control' and live up to socially-ascribed standards of conduct - reinforcing the meaning and predictability of the social world for ourselves and others.²⁹

A sense of ontological security is also crucially dependent on developing a sense of '*basic trust*' in which biographies and routines will be affirmed.³⁰ Giddens notes that the formation of basic trust is a process that (ideally) starts within the 'protective cocoon' of the childhood home which grants the infant protection from the maelstrom of the outside world, allowing for a sustained period of growth through 'creative madness'. This haven of 'unreality' is the setting for the development of 'the interpersonal organisation of time and space,' allowing for the inculcation of the infant into the routines encouraged by the primary caregivers; and by developing awareness of parents as distinct beings, infants begin to establish a sense of their own self-identity 'through the learning of what is not-me.'³¹

The extent to which the child establishes 'basic trust' during childhood is likely to significantly influence their ability to form a broader intersubjective 'web of trust relations'³² as they are

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570903104024>; Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, 01 edition (Vintage, 2020).

²⁵ Stuart Croft, *Securitizing Islam: Identity and the Search for Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 25–26.

²⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 42.

²⁷ Giddens, 35–36.

²⁸ Innes and Steele, 'Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security'.

²⁹ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 24.

³⁰ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 38–39.

³¹ Giddens, 38–42.

³² Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 24.

progressively introduced to the outside world.³³ In modern life, the primary setting for this expansion of the temporal and spatial parameters of social life is the nation-state, replete with its own set of ‘banal’ routines and ‘ecstatic’ performances of nationhood that *contingently* contribute to the stability of individual and collective biographies and social trust more broadly.³⁴ Schools and colleges play an important role in inducting individuals into socially-ascribed norms of personhood and the broader regional and (inter)national ‘home’. But education is also the site of significant social engineering with the state using its reach into children’s lives in order to cultivate a sense of national citizenship, for example, through the inculcation of students into a shared national history and identity, thereby framing students’ place in time as well as space. This is why education has been identified as a particularly important arena for militarization, not least through the formal incorporation of remembrance into the national curriculum and the focus of military recruitment efforts upon school-aged pupils.³⁵

Even the most ideal childhood, however, cannot provide permanent relief from existential anxiety. This is because self-identity is not the work of a moment, but the emergent product of unending reflexive work, and interpersonal trust must be continually (re)established. There is ‘always a fragility as well as a robustness’ to a sense of ontological security, stemming from the knowledge – however sub- or non-conscious – that chaos is only ever a small step away.³⁶ Most famously, this chaos can take the form of ‘critical situations’: ‘radical disjuncture[s] of an unpredictable kind’ which ‘threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalized routines’ and impinge on understandings of ourselves, others and the object world around us.³⁷ These can be acute events such as terrorist attacks ‘affect[ing] substantial numbers of individuals’. But chaos might also be constructed socially through ‘slow burn’ crises, leading to a gradual erosion of a

³³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 38.

³⁴ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1995); Michael Skey, ‘We Wanna Show “Em Who We Are”: National Events in England’, in *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*, ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41–56; Michael Skey, ‘The National in Everyday Life: A Critical Engagement with Michael Billig’s Thesis of Banal Nationalism’, *The Sociological Review* 57, no. 2 (2009): 331–46.

³⁵ On the role of education in inducting young people into national practices of militarised remembrance, see Basham, ‘Raising an Army’; Laura Teague, ‘The Curriculum as a Site of Counter Politics: Theorising the “Domain of the Sayable”’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39, no. 1 (2018): 92–106; On the specific place of education in national commemorations of the centenary of the First World War, see Catriona Pennell, ‘Learning Lessons from War?: Inclusions and Exclusions in Teaching First World War History in English Secondary Schools’, *History & Memory* 28, no. 1 (2016): 36–70; Catriona Pennell, ‘Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours’, *Cultural Trends* 27, no. 2 (15 March 2018): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2018.1453449>; Catriona Pennell, ‘On the Frontlines of Teaching the History of the First World War’, *Teaching History; London*, no. 155 (June 2014): 34–40; Annie Haight et al., ‘Remembrance Day Practices in Schools: Meaning-Making in Social Memory during the First World War Centenary’, *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 0, no. 0 (2019): 1–16.

³⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 26.

³⁷ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 61.

sense of individual or collective being in the world. Here, we might think about intergenerational debates around claims of social malaise, or of foreign policy debates about ‘national decline’.³⁸

Anxiety can also be generated by personal crises, such as bereavements, breakups, traumas resulting from tumultuous life events, mid-life crises, and even crises of faith. Sometimes, anxiety can be generated by our own actions; certain actions and routines can ‘provoke feelings of shame’ if they are dissonant with positively regarded autobiographical narratives - our claims to be who we say we are.³⁹ The intersubjective basis of ontological security means that individuals have not only to establish and live up to their own biographies, but to accomplish this in a world of others trying to do the same. Existential questions that are bracketed out under normal circumstances can quickly be brought to the fore when our self-concepts are challenged by the alternative readings of others. Mis/non-recognition - particularly from significant others - can fundamentally challenge our understandings of who we are. While these can sometimes take minor forms, they can be altogether more serious. For example, to understand how consequential dynamics of recognition can be, one need only observe the devastating impact a lack of recognition of chosen names and pronouns by others can have on transgender persons, and the attendant rise in suicidality recorded in recent years.⁴⁰

Critical situations prompt various strategies for addressing ontological insecurity. One response might be to ‘fall back on the past and reaffirm established routines, (collective) identities and stories’.⁴¹ Alternatively, subjects may view existing narratives and routines as unsustainable in light of new events, instead choosing to ‘[project] an alternative biography of the self perceived as being more suitable for the new situation and in turn establishing a new set of routines and concomitant identity claims supportive of this new position.’⁴² Given the near inevitability of experiencing ‘critical situations’ of various kinds throughout life, the search for ontological security is therefore largely about how one deals with change – a particularly pressing task in the period referred to by Giddens as late modernity.

³⁸ For overviews of both of these topics in IR, see Brent J. Steele and Jonathan M. Acuff, eds., *Theory and Application of the ‘Generation’ in International Relations and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘The Perpetual Decline of the West’, in *The Struggle for the West: A Divided and Contested Legacy*, ed. Christopher Browning and Marko Lehti (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2010), 53–70.

³⁹ Steele, ‘Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity’, 526–27; Roe, ‘The “Value” of Positive Security’, 784; Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, ‘Escaping Security: Norden as a Source of Ontological Certainty’ (Working Paper presented ECPR Conference, Stockholm, 2010), 6, <http://eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/stockholm/SGIR%20Stockholm%20Ontological%20Security%202.pdf>.

⁴⁰ For one’s autobiographical narrative to be questioned by a random other is perhaps difficult enough; but to be denied recognition by one’s primary caregiver can strike a blow to one’s sense of basic trust and safety in the world, and to deprive the individual of their ‘protective cocoon’. Gwendolyn Smith, ‘Calling Transgender Youth by Their Name Dramatically Reduces Their Chance of Suicide’, LGBTQ Nation, 8 January 2019, <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2019/01/calling-transgender-youth-name-dramatically-reduces-chance-suicide/>.

⁴¹ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Escaping Security: Norden as a Source of Ontological Certainty’, 8.

⁴² Browning and Joenniemi, 8.

Late Modernity

Although the intractability of existential anxiety is common to all human life and not limited to any particular society or historical period, the forms that attempts to establish ontological security take are strongly influenced by broader social structures and dominant modes of subjectivity which are specific to certain times and spaces.

Giddens illustrates this by pointing to the very different character of ‘traditional societies’ preceding the ‘enlightenment’ and modernity, in which ‘habit and custom’ were the primary resources for ontological security partly because of the way they ‘distinguish[ed] future, present and past’, thereby ‘restricting the openness of counterfactual futures’⁴³, but also because they constituted dominant modes of subjectivity, bound to relatively (though not entirely) homogenous ontological frameworks that provided answers to life’s fundamental questions.⁴⁴ In the British context, Christianity once formed the ‘shared framework for existence’ for religious subjects under God by addressing fundamental existential anxieties. This framework locates subjects in time through an origins story (Genesis) but also provides some indication as to what awaits us at the end of our earthly existence by ‘inculcating a fear of death, emphasizing the horrors of different types of death and not least of the trepidations of hell’.⁴⁵ Beyond depictions of heaven, hell and purgatory, however, the Bible offers instruction to subjects on how death could be ‘tamed insofar as good life could bring divine salvation.’⁴⁶ Conveniently, such cosmic frameworks were conducive to the construction of very earthly power and authority: ‘Religious authority created mysteries while simultaneously claiming to have privileged access to them’.⁴⁷ Thus, far from mitigating uncertainty, Giddens suggests that religious authorities can more aptly be understood as interpreting and channelling uncertainty in ways bearing heavily upon the experience of the pre-modern subject, and conducive to maintaining the Church’s preferred mode of order and subjectivity through the cultivation of collective ontological security.⁴⁸

These relatively restrictive local and religious norms dominant in traditional life that were initially supplanted during the modern/enlightenment period by the ascendance of the nation-state as the dominant mode of territorial and social organisation have been further relativized in the

⁴³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 48.

⁴⁴ As Giddens notes ‘Although in the larger pre-modern cultures there may quite often have been clashes between rival traditions, for the most part traditional outlooks and ways of doing things precluded other alternatives. Even where there were vying traditions, involvement in a traditional framework was normally quite exclusive: the others were thereby rejected’ Giddens, 194.

⁴⁵ Browning, “‘Je Suis En Terrasse’: Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be’, 7.

⁴⁶ Browning, 7.

⁴⁷ Browning, 7; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 195; Additionally, Seaton notes that ‘[i]nculcation of the fear of death in general encouraged dependence on the consolations of religion and the church which controlled it’ A.V. Seaton, ‘Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (1996): 236.

⁴⁸ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 195.

contemporary period of 'late' modernity. This period is distinguished, for Giddens, by its institutional configuration, with the logics of the Weberian modern nation-state being subordinated to those of neo-liberal globalised industrial capitalism. As well as substantially transforming the governance of nation-states, Neo-liberalism's emphasis on 'economic efficiency, free markets, competition, and personal freedom' has, in turn, been constitutive of novel forms of subjectivity and agency.⁴⁹ For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, late modernity is foremost an era of individualisation which 'compels the self-thematization of biographies'.⁵⁰ The purpose of one's life, *ostensibly* no longer 'given' by one's relation to God or caste, is now a 'reflexive project' outsourced to the individual. Life takes on the character of 'multiple choice', although choices remain significantly constrained by social norms around gender, race and class, and constituted in large part by the drives of capitalism.⁵¹ In this way, the individual subject produced by neo-liberalism is a 'consumer' whose habits are monitored by regimes of surveillance and control. But in line with Foucauldian social theory, the late modern subject is also the 'enterprising self', with individuals and organizations increasingly encouraged to 'brand' themselves according to market logics.⁵² British school pupils are encouraged to develop aspirations and skills in order to make themselves marketable to employers and society more broadly. Importantly, the work of the state is to channel reflexivity through neo-liberal governmentality to ensure, as Strand and Berndtsson put it, that 'a young person's quest for self-fulfilment becomes aligned and compatible with the political project of the neo-liberal state.'⁵³

In addition to being characterised by a distinctive mode of subjectivity, Giddens argues that late modernity is also a 'runaway world', set apart from previous eras by its 'extreme dynamism': 'not only is the *pace* of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its *scope*, and the *profoundness* with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour'.⁵⁴ This dynamism is driven by three general trends. The first is described by Giddens as the 'separation of time and space' which is related to how various measures of time have become unmoored from their traditional links with particular spaces and globalised in a way that makes for a unified framework of time and, importantly, history across the globe.⁵⁵ This has enabled unprecedented – albeit highly unequal – 'global flows' of people and capital. And although crises are a timeless and largely unavoidable aspect of the existential condition, one consequence of time-space

⁴⁹ Sanna Strand and Joakim Berndtsson, 'Recruiting the "Enterprising Soldier": Military Recruitment Discourses in Sweden and the United Kingdom', *Critical Military Studies* 1, no. 3 (2 October 2015): 234.

⁵⁰ Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage, 2002), 24.

⁵¹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 16.

⁵² Peter Miller and Nik Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 8.

⁵³ Strand and Berndtsson, 'Recruiting the "Enterprising Soldier"', 245.

⁵⁴ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 16 (Emphasis in original).

⁵⁵ Giddens, 16.

distanciation is that ‘crises become more or less endemic.’⁵⁶ The increasingly interconnected ‘risk society’ of late modernity exposes subjects to an unprecedented range of risks: ‘crisis situations, even those operating at great distance from the individual [...] have implications for the individual’s life circumstances.’⁵⁷ Whereas in the past someone in Britain might have had relatively little reason to pay attention to events in distant lands, globalized interconnectedness means that events from Washington D.C. to Wuhan can affect one’s local community in profound and cataclysmic ways. This compression of time and space has continued apace with the proliferation of social media. As Davies argues, this technology not only brings an unprecedented range of risks into our social consciousness but also dramatically increases the speed of information exchange, with the consequence that late modern societies, more than in previous eras, (re)act impulsively – and anxiously - to the deluge of news that they are exposed to from all over the world.⁵⁸

Secondly, and related to this expansion of temporal horizons shared by ever increasing numbers of people is the operation of disembedding mechanisms which allow for ‘the ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space’.⁵⁹ These mechanisms take the form of ‘abstract systems’ comprised of symbolic tokens and expert systems. Perhaps the most obvious symbolic token is the passport which embeds the individual in the global nation-state system and ensures that one is always a subject of somewhere and cannot legally be made stateless.⁶⁰ This system of symbolic tokens is underpinned by institutionalised expert knowledge which has, for many, relativized and supplanted religious edict as the primary guidance for how to live. A classic example of an expert system is expert guidance on health and wellbeing. Not only do individuals place their trust in doctors in moments of acute ill health, but also in guidance on lifestyle as a means of maximising one’s chances of health and longevity in a preventative sense. The effect of both symbolic tokens and expert systems is often to extend the scope of trust, for individuals to have confidence in the applicability of their ontological frameworks across greater expanses of time and space. Moreover, the title of one prominent outlet for health guidance in Britain, the BBC’s flagship health advice television programme *Trust Me, I’m a Doctor* is a useful reminder the centrality of trust to such dynamics.⁶¹ By being able to

⁵⁶ Giddens, 184.

⁵⁷ Giddens, 184.

⁵⁸ William Davies, *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), 1–10.

⁵⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 18.

⁶⁰ Of course, this norm has been severely strained by the British government’s withdrawal of citizenship from Britons who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. See, for example Deborah Haynes and Fiona Hamilton, ‘Two Isis “Beatles” Are Stripped of British Citizenship’, *The Times*, 9 February 2018, sec. news, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/two-isis-beatles-are-stripped-of-british-citizenship-7q8f633ks>.

⁶¹ BBC, ‘Trust Me, I’m a Doctor’, BBC, accessed 19 February 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04j9gny>.

invest our trust in experts, aspects of the world beyond our own direct understanding become navigable and less daunting.

However, *Trust Me* is also an interesting reflection of a third key aspect of late modernity: its ‘institutional reflexivity’. Because traditional forms of knowledge have been largely replaced by systems of knowledge production premised on the ‘methodological principle of doubt’, the effect is to undermine claims and aspirations to certainty. As Giddens puts it, ‘[n]o matter how cherished, and apparently well established, a given scientific tenet might be, it is open to revision – or might have to be discarded altogether – in the light of new ideas or findings.’⁶² Consequently, individuals must also increasingly confront the proliferation of multiple and *competing* forms of expertise on the same subjects. Sometimes this takes the form of striking claims made by newspaper headlines, or the spread of fad diets through vlogging. It is to both of these dynamics that *Trust Me* orients its guidance, purporting to go ‘behind the headlines to give the definitive answers to health questions.’⁶³ But what is interesting about the programme is the way in which it exemplifies the radical doubt which underpins medical knowledge. On various issues, the programme seeks to acknowledge diverging views within the ‘scientific community’ by asking two experts of a particular topic – whether it is how much fat is healthy or the safety of antidepressants – for their diverging views on how people should live according to the evidence available. Although some attempt is usually made by the presenter to adjudicate between the two claims, the irony is that neither he, nor most viewers – is qualified to make a judgement. *Trust Me* is therefore subject to the very same dynamics that it purports to overcome: dynamics which have resulted in a general decline of trust in the medical profession across Western societies, perhaps most evident in the growth of the ‘anti-vaxx’ movement in the decades following claims – subsequently refuted – of a link between the MMR vaccine and autism.⁶⁴ And these trends are not limited to medical professions. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, there has been a general decline in public trust of social institutions: a trend to which military institutions have been notable – perhaps even conspicuous – exceptions in Britain and other Western democracies.

⁶² Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 21.

⁶³ BBC, ‘Trust Me, I’m a Doctor’.

⁶⁴ In terms familiar to an ontological security account, Wolfensberger and Wrigley attribute this general decline of trust in medicine to five trends: ‘the discrediting of professionalism, the difficulty of assessing physicians’ trustworthiness, the crisis of modern medicine, the commodification of medicine, and changes of risk perception and risk acceptance.’ Markus Wolfensberger and Anthony Wrigley, *Trust in Medicine: Its Nature, Justification, Significance, and Decline*, Cambridge Bioethics and Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108763479>; On the decline in trust in vaccinations, see Sarah Boseley, ‘Survey Shows Crisis of Confidence in Vaccines in Parts of Europe’, *The Guardian*, 19 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jun/19/survey-shows-crisis-of-confidence-in-vaccines-in-parts-of-europe>; Sarah Boseley, ‘Drop in Vaccination Rates in England Alarming, Experts Warn’, *The Guardian*, 26 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/26/drop-in-vaccination-rates-in-england-alarming-experts-warn>.

The implications of radical doubt are arguably even more profound for the way in which individuals grapple with the broader range of existential questions. While science has allowed for the emergence of frameworks of knowledge that, in some ways, far exceed what preceded them in terms of their depth and complexity, Giddens argues that another key feature of late modernity is that its core institutions are fundamentally ‘internally referential systems’: ones which, as Rumelili notes are oriented towards control, but offer precious little guidance with regard to how best to address existential questions.⁶⁵ Indeed, internally referential systems go further than this, fostering the ‘sequestration’ from public spaces of experiences – e.g. death - that cannot straightforwardly be subjected to late modern control and accordingly threaten to expose the fragility and limits of the modern nation-state. This does not mean that internally referential systems are completely silent on matters pertaining to existential dynamics, but that their engagement with them is, often quite transparently, geared towards neo-liberal logics. For example, as Heath-Kelly argues, for a fee, funeral industries ‘function to efface the spectre of mortality’ from society, primarily as a means for preventing the cessation of ‘normal’ life rather than for encouraging genuine reflection on our existential predicament.⁶⁶

Similarly, where mental ill-health cannot be sequestered within government facilities, modernity’s engagement tends to be driven mainly by economic concerns. In the British context, for example, the National Health Service’s flagship mental health programme, ‘Improving Access to Psychological Therapy’, emerged as a response to a 2006 report by economist Richard Layard which, among other things, advocated increased funding for mental health programmes on the primary basis that it would get people back to work and boost national GDP.⁶⁷ While the economic efficiency argument was not the only motivation for the report, it was recognised that improving mental health as a way of boosting productivity would be the one most resonant within government and effective in overcoming the Treasury’s scepticism.⁶⁸ Finally, internally referential dynamics can also be witnessed in ‘cause-related marketing’ around issues such as cancer awareness, LGBT rights and gender equality. Here, the attempts made by corporate entities to associate themselves with socially progressive causes has led to accusations of ‘pinkwashing’/‘pridewashing’/‘rainbow washing’ to convey the idea that such efforts are insincere and constitute thinly-veiled attempts to hijack fashionable social causes as a means of augmenting brand resonance for commercial/organisational rather than social ends. Especially where

⁶⁵ Bahar Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’, in *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, ed. Bahar Rumelili (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 11.

⁶⁶ Charlotte Heath-Kelly, *Death and Security: Memory and Mortality at the Bombsite* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 12.

⁶⁷ Richard Layard and CEP Mental Health Policy Group, ‘The Depression Report: A New Deal for Depression and Anxiety Disorders’, CEP Special Papers (London: Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, 2006), <http://cep.lse.ac.uk>.

⁶⁸ Laurence Pollock, ‘Mental Health: Fit for Purpose’, *The Guardian*, 18 February 2009, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/feb/18/mental-health3>.

organisations are seen to be engaging in practices that are antithetical to the cause they claim to support (e.g. selling carcinogenic products or having a homophobic organisational culture),⁶⁹ the suspicion is that causes tend to be embraced only superficially, and to the extent that they are profitable.⁷⁰

The Consequences of Late Modernity

The sequestration of, and superficial engagement with, the more intractable and uncontrollable aspects of existence in this way renders late modernity, in Giddens' terms, a 'technically competent but morally arid' environment in which addressing large swathes of the human experience is largely delegated to individuals, for whom – as Giddens explains 'direct contact with events and situations which link the individual lifespan to broad issues of morality and finitude are rare and fleeting.'⁷¹ However, that society does not proffer guidance on existential questions does not mean they go away. As Browning puts it, 'the public sequestering away, ignoring, and effacing of death does not actually directly address individuals' ontological anxieties by fostering a "coming to terms" with death.'⁷² Indeed, a recent survey conducted by Dying Matters – a Britain-based coalition of organisations campaigning for greater public conversation about death and bereavement – found that almost half of respondents said that 'talking about death scared them' while '15% thought talking about death might make it happen.'⁷³ Thus, rather than assuaging anxieties around death, sequestration – coupled with an 'enormous first-hand experiential gap' around death as a result of increasing life expectancy - seems to have intensified

⁶⁹ For critiques of 'pinkwashing' around breast cancer awareness campaigns, see Breast Cancer Awareness, 'Think Before You Pink', available at: {<https://thinkbeforeyoupink.org/>} accessed 20 March 2019; Samantha King, *Pink ribbons, inc: breast cancer and the politics of philanthropy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); for critiques of 'pridewashing' around LGBT causes, see Stephan Dahl, 'The rise of pride marketing and the curse of "pink washing"', available at: {<http://theconversation.com/the-rise-of-pride-marketing-and-the-curse-of-pink-washing-30925>} accessed 20 March 2019; Joe Morgan, 'Gay people plan to protest at Pride in London over it becoming "militarized"', available at: {<https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/gay-people-plan-protest-pride-london/>} accessed 20 March 2019; finally, for critiques of 'pinkwashing' around International Women's Day, see Josie Cox, 'The companies who co-opt International Women's Day should be ashamed | Josie Cox', *The Guardian*, (2019); Nicola Kemp, 'Six marketing lessons for International Women's Day', available at: {<https://www.campaignlive.com/article/six-marketing-lessons-international-womens-day/1337131>} accessed 20 March 2019.

⁷⁰ Such features of late modernity are also visible in the recent turn of the superhero movie genre, as exemplified by the films of Marvel and DC, towards characters whose gender or race are viewed as potentially attracting previously untapped audiences. See, for example, Patty Jenkins, 'Wonder Woman' (Warner Bros., 2017); Ryan Coogler, 'Black Panther' (Walt Disney Pictures, 2018).

⁷¹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 8.

⁷² Browning, "'Je Suis En Terrasse': Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be", 8.

⁷³ Robert Booth, "'Have a Good Cry': Chuckle Brother Takes Aim at the Grief Taboo', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2019, sec. Life and style, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/mar/01/have-a-good-cry-chuckle-brother-takes-aim-at-the-grief-taboo>.

dread and superstition.⁷⁴ Anxieties about non-being more generally are pervasive and still provide the backdrop to life in all of its micro and macro settings.

As we will see in the next chapter, one response to these conditions has been for individuals to rely more heavily upon their own subjective experience and memories to navigate the social world. But individuals still search for guidance on how to negotiate these settings. Giddens argues that the boom of the self-help industry at the end of the Twentieth Century provides clues as to the kinds of existential questions preoccupying individuals - not limited to staying physically alive, but encompassing broader conceptions of the good life, human wellbeing and fulfilment - and the resources used to address them.⁷⁵ One example is provided by the sub-genre of parenting 'manuals', which offer guidance on how best to cultivate trust in the early years that Giddens holds to be key for the development of a sense of ontological security. Yet as with health advice, the bewildering range of material available offers multiple and contradictory, with little way of adjudicating between them, and with suspicion abounding about the commercial motives of the author.⁷⁶

It is perhaps because of the paralysis of choice that such breadth of expertise can induce that traditional symbols and guidance maintain their appeal for some people in late modernity.⁷⁷ In the context of radical doubt and absence of obvious criteria on which to choose between competing advice, traditions such as religion retain paradoxical appeal: 'religion not only refuses to disappear but undergoes a resurgence.'⁷⁸ This is partly because it achieves the appearance of authenticity through its *apparent* longevity:

the past inserts a wide band of 'authenticated practice' into the future [...] tradition creates a sense of the firmness of things that typically mixes cognitive and moral elements. The world is as it is because it is as it should be.⁷⁹

Indeed, Giddens' argument is not so much that traditions disappear altogether, but rather that they are relativized: 'forms of traditional authority become only 'authorities' among others, part of an indefinite pluralism of expertise.'⁸⁰ Thus, they form part of a much larger menu of options from which the individual must choose in line with their own beliefs. And while religion remains important for many people in Britain, in late modernity traditions are reflexive institutions not so much because they are tied to the need to secure particular modes of subjectivity as in the past,

⁷⁴ Kate Woodthorpe, 'Death, Dying and Devolution', IPR Policy Brief (Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath, September 2017), 5, <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/death-dying-and-devolution/attachments/death-dying-and-devolution.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 100.

⁷⁶ Oliver Burkeman, 'The Diabolical Genius of the Baby Advice Industry', *The Guardian*, 16 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/16/baby-advice-books-industry-attachment-parenting>.

⁷⁷ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 22.

⁷⁸ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 195.

⁷⁹ Giddens, 48.

⁸⁰ Giddens, 195.

but because of needing to attract followers in a manner (usually) compatible with broader social rules tied to the state.⁸¹ But what is attractive about traditions is the ways in which they are regarded as being human centred unlike many aspects of modern life. Indeed, philosopher Alain de Botton argues that the reason behind the popularity among Western publics of Eastern religions and philosophies – particularly Buddhism – resides in the way that they seem to be interested in human wellbeing at the same time as Western philosophy has garnered a reputation – however unfairly – as being distant and preoccupied with matters of ‘abstract scholarship’. Where Eastern philosophy is able to offer practices for everyday life, such as meditation and Yoga, western philosophy – contrary to the intentions of its key figures – is often regarded as being an exclusively academic pursuit more concerned with technical matters of ontology than with providing a ‘living resource that could offer council and direction for when a boyfriend has died or someone has been fired’.⁸²

This scepticism towards Western philosophy is perhaps symptomatic of a broader decline of public trust in expertise in Britain and other liberal democracies in recent years.⁸³ One of the issues is that to the extent that expertise has become more specialised, and social problems increasingly exceed the capacities of any one area of specialisation, expertise can appear to some as increasingly impotent in the face of modern life, if not rigged towards favourable outcomes for some at the expense of others. As Giddens describes, ‘There are no authorities which span the diverse fields within which expertise is claimed’.⁸⁴ In other words, unlike deities in traditional societies, in modern society no one person has all of the answers to life’s problems – although this does not stop people looking for such figures. In addition to modern sources of expertise and traditional sources of authority, late modern society is replete with hybrid forms of guidance and reassurance that appear to bridge the gap between traditions and modernity. In Britain, for example, monarchism persists as a modern form of government despite the divine rights to which it once made claim being relativized; and this is arguably a result of the way in which it incorporates representative democracy with the vestiges of tradition. Elsewhere, the popularity of the self-help guidance of psychologist Jordan Peterson is attributable at least in part to the way that Peterson’s status as an academic psychologist – for many of his readers and viewers at least – lends a sense of authenticity and scientific gravitas to his blend of cognitive science and

⁸¹ In this way, late modernity brings into sharper relief something that has always been the case: religions are swept along by broader cultural trends and are often shaped by broader social morality norms more than they shape those norms. Jim Davies, ‘Your Morals and Religious Beliefs Are Linked. But Not in the Way You’d Expect’, World Economic Forum, accessed 19 February 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/religion-does-not-determine-your-morality/>.

⁸² Alain de Botton and The School of Life, ‘Eastern vs. Western Philosophy’, YouTube, 9 May 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKe600qHEAg>.

⁸³ Christopher S. Browning, ‘Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 232–33; Brent J. Steele, ‘Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2019): 325–26.

⁸⁴ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 195.

traditional ideals with their grounding in Kierkegaardian theology, as well as to his broader public offerings, not least his crusade against ‘political correctness’.⁸⁵ From quite different political perspectives, it is striking how public intellectuals such as Brian Cox or Steven Pinker are not merely approached for comment on matters relating to their specific areas of expertise or even their general subject matter, but are regularly asked for their views on broader societal trends. And the idolisation of scientific figures arguably ties in with a more general trend towards what Ashley Hinck describes as ‘fan-based citizenship’, as subjects turn towards popular culture such as Harry Potter and Star Trek for moral and political guidance in the context of declining public trust in traditional political institutions themselves.⁸⁶

Perhaps most strikingly, however, the relativization of knowledge and apparent lack of personal direction provided by late modernity has seen a revival of interest in those more traditional modes of life connecting personal experience to collective identities anchored in time and space. Mainwaring and Clark argue that in the context of the globalization of sport, supporting local football teams takes on renewed significance, with ‘symbols of the ‘past’ mythically infused with timelessness’ providing resources for anchoring the subject’s ontological security in a local, collective and meaningful past.⁸⁷ Similarly, Kinnvall has argued that the discombobulating aspects of late modernity have prompted subjects to seek sanctuary in the ‘picture of security, stability, and simple answers’ provided by more traditional modes of nationalism and national religion.⁸⁸ Recently, of course, resurgent nationalist movements have sought to give expression to such desires through ‘populist’ slogans and sentiments, promising variously to ‘build the wall’ and ‘take back control’. A notable feature of these movements has been their frequent recourse to traditional forms of authority and social hierarchy, not least the ‘authenticated practice’ of particularly conservative forms of militarism and military institutional knowledge and practice, as a way of resisting aspects of late modernity while relying considerably – and ironically – upon others such as ‘big data’.

Before considering militarised responses to late modernity, however, the remainder of this chapter turns to explore the application of ontological security by IR and CSS scholars, and draws upon recent work in order to make certain important conceptual clarifications and caveats that inform the critical conceptual framework used in the rest of the thesis.

⁸⁵ Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Reprint edition (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

⁸⁶ Ashley Hinck, *Politics for the Love of Fandom: Fan-Based Citizenship in a Digital World* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2019).

⁸⁷ Ed Mainwaring and Tom Clark, “‘We’re Shit and We Know We Are’”: Identity, Place and Ontological Security in Lower League Football in England’, *Soccer & Society* 13, no. 1 (2012): 114–20.

⁸⁸ Kinnvall, ‘Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security’, 742.

Ontological Security in IR – Towards Critical Ontological Security Studies

With its focus on the socio-psychological dynamics of everyday encounters, crises and the search for personal wellbeing, Giddens' sociological account of ontological security has unsurprisingly received sustained attention within his own discipline, as well as from work in fields relating to health, social work and psychology.⁸⁹ Notably, however, the last two decades has also seen considerable growth of interest in the concept shown by scholars of world politics in the disciplines of international relations and security studies, going from a rather niche area of inquiry featuring a handful of IR scholars, to having a literature that is almost habitually described as 'growing', 'burgeoning' and 'expanding'. Indeed, Richard Ned Lebow has gone as far as to describe ontological security theory as the 'premier project on identity within the constructivist research agenda.'⁹⁰ And to categorise ontological security theory as a constructivist endeavour is, in some ways, to undersell its useful contributions to poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist debates in IR.⁹¹

How can such growth be explained? What is it about the concept that has attracted such interest? Arguably the central contribution of early works on ontological security in IR - and the main reason that the concept became popular when it did - was in challenging the materialist assumptions of traditional IR approaches concerning the drivers of certain patterns of individual and state behaviour.⁹² Scholars have found particular analytical purchase in the way ontological security revises and modifies realist and liberalist assumptions about fear by invoking *anxiety*: pertaining to questions of being and non-being which, unlike fear, lacks a definite object.⁹³ For Steele, it is anxiety and the drive it stimulates in actors to establish and stabilise self-identity that is key to explaining why nation-states behave in ways that sometimes jeopardise 'physical' survival in order to uphold certain understandings of self-identity and 'honor', and avoid feelings of

⁸⁹ Deborah K. Padgett, 'There's No Place like (a) Home: Ontological Security among Persons with Serious Mental Illness in the United States', *Social Science & Medicine* 64, no. 9 (2007): 1925–36; Laura Huey, *Invisible Victims: Homelessness and the Growing Security Gap* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); William S. Brown, 'Ontological Security, Existential Anxiety and Workplace Privacy', *Journal of Business Ethics* 23, no. 1 (2000): 61–65; Rosemary Hiscock et al., 'Means of Transport and Ontological Security: Do Cars Provide Psycho-Social Benefits to Their Users?', *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment* 7, no. 2 (2002): 119–35; M. Garnett, 'Sustaining the Cocoon: The Emotional Inoculation Produced by Complementary Therapies in Palliative Care', *European Journal of Cancer Care* 12, no. 2 (2003): 129–36.

⁹⁰ Richard Ned Lebow, 'Ontological Insecurity' (Working Paper presented to the King's War Studies Research Seminar Series, King's College London, on 28 January 2014), Accessed 30 September 2014 at <http://keats.kcl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=20729#!topic/research/oI542ucTpgc>.

⁹¹ e.g. Catarina Kinnvall, 'Feeling Ontologically (in)Secure: States, Traumas and the Governing of Gendered Space', *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 90–108; John Cash and Catarina Kinnvall, 'Postcolonial Bordering and Ontological Insecurities', *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 3 (2017): 267–74; Alexandria J. Innes, 'Mobile Diasporas, Postcolonial Identities: The Green Line in Cyprus', *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 3 (2017): 353–69.

⁹² Christopher S. Browning, 'Ethics and Ontological Security', in Nyman, J. & Burke, A. (Eds.), *Ethical Security Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London: Routledge, 2016), 161–62.

⁹³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 43; Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 23; Rumelili, 'Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution', 12.

‘shame’, thus problematising expectations of ‘rational behaviour’ dominant in traditional IR.⁹⁴ Similarly, Zarakol’s work on dynamics of stigmatisation in world politics points to anxiety and ontological insecurity as driving and emanating from the difficult process of maintaining self-identity while gaining acceptance from significant others in the international system.⁹⁵ Simultaneously, a significant body of literature has explored how anxiety and the drive it generates to uphold self-identity contributes to the intractability of longstanding conflicts. For example, the work of scholars such as Mitzen and Rumelili has argued that, despite expressing the desire to end conflicts, states frequently perpetuate conflicts that constitute maladaptive - but politically conducive - forms of anxiety mitigation that reinforce state self-identities.⁹⁶ And recent work has placed ontological security in dialogue with securitization theory to explore how securitizations of threatening others can be attractive for elites and resonant with publics for similar reasons of anxiety avoidance, observable both in specific instances and as a compulsive and repetitive feature of political life.⁹⁷ While self-identity – particularly its frequent construction in contradistinction to depictions of threatening others - has long been of central importance within constructivist and poststructuralist approaches, Rumelili argues that the key contribution of the ontological security framework is in explaining – through the concept of anxiety - *why* it is that actors seek to establish and cling to identities, especially at the expense of material survival.⁹⁸

Something else that is noticeable from this brief survey of ontological security work in IR is the way in which, through the exploration of ‘anxiety’/’dread’/’shame’, ‘stigma’ and ‘honour’, it has contributed to the expansion of the emotional palette within IR at a time when growing interest in emotions within the discipline has given rise to an ‘emotional turn’.⁹⁹ Indeed, the attractiveness

⁹⁴ Steele, ‘Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity’.

⁹⁵ Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹⁶ Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’; Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’; Bahar Rumelili, ‘Identity and Desecuritisation: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 1 (2015): 52–74; Amir Lupovici, ‘Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel’s Unilateral Steps towards the Palestinians’, *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 809–33.

⁹⁷ e.g. Croft, ‘Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain’s Muslims’; Christine Agius, ‘Drawing the Discourses of Ontological Security: Immigration and Identity in the Danish and Swedish Cartoon Crises’, *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 109–25; ML deRaismes Combes, ‘Encountering the Stranger: Ontological Security and the Boston Marathon Bombing’, *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 126–43.

⁹⁸ Bahar Rumelili, ‘Conclusion’, in *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, ed. Bahar Rumelili (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 200.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Neta C. Crawford, ‘The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships’, *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 116–56; Andrew A. G. Ross, ‘Coming in from the Cold: Constructivism and Emotions’, *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 2 (2006): 197–222; Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, ‘Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics’, *Review of International Studies* 34, no. S1 (2008): 115–35; Jonathan Mercer, ‘Emotional Beliefs’, *International Organization* 64, no. 1 (2010): 1–31; Ty Solomon, ‘“I Wasn’t Angry, Because I Couldn’t Believe It Was Happening”: Affect and Discourse in Responses to 9/11’, *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012): 907–28.

of the ontological security framework is at least partly attributable to the manner in which Giddens' 'conceptual vocabulary' integrates many aspects of global politics that have been the subject of other 'turns' in IR. For example, the focus on (auto-)biographical narratives and routines is clearly resonant with the 'narrative' and 'practice' turns respectively. Similarly, in line with the 'aesthetic' and 'new materialism' turns,¹⁰⁰ the work of scholars such as Croft, Steele and Ejdus has recently expanded the focus of ontological security scholarship on textual narratives and discourses to explore the roles played by visual artefacts such as cartoons, bodily and architectural scars, and natural landscapes in ontological security-seeking.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the focus on the how visual and material encounters in the everyday have a bearing on ontological security points to a broader appeal of the concept: namely, its potential to explore macro *and* micro dynamics as well as their intersections. Thus, whereas earlier studies on ontological security in IR were primarily interested in macro level dynamics and events, the recent work of, for example, Croft and Vaughan-Williams, and Innes on the everyday has sought to incorporate and build upon the pioneering insights of early feminist IR scholars to reaffirm Cynthia Enloe's famous observation that the 'personal is international'.¹⁰² Indeed, in exploring the interrelations of micro personal dynamics and macro social processes and systems, this latest wave of ontological security scholarship has in some ways come full circle, by returning to the guiding problematique of Giddens' original project in *Modernity and Self-Identity*. And it is testament to the strength and scope of Giddens' work – as well as an indication of the distinctly sociological direction that critical IR has taken in recent years - that it has been able to inspire such a diverse and timely range of contributions just short of three decades after its publication.

For various reasons, then, ontological security has become prominent within IR and has already exceeded the expectations of sceptics who viewed it as little more than a passing 'intellectual fad' or 'old wine in new bottles'.¹⁰³ This growth has also yielded considerable diversity in how scholars deploy the concept. In this way, we are perhaps moving away from ontological security *theory* (in the singular) towards a realisation of Croft's aspirations for a pluralistic 'ontological security

¹⁰⁰ On the aesthetic and new materialism 'turns' in IR, see Roland Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millennium* 30, no. 3 (2001): 509–33; Roland Bleiker, ed., *Visual Global Politics*, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2018); Roger Mac Ginty, 'A Material Turn in International Relations: The 4x4, Intervention and Resistance', *Review of International Studies* 43, no. 05 (2017): 855–74.

¹⁰¹ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*; Brent J. Steele, *Defacing Power: The Aesthetics of Insecurity in Global Politics*, Reprint edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Brent J. Steele, *Alternative Accountabilities in Global Politics: The Scars of Violence* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012); Filip Ejdus, "'Not a Heap of Stones": Material Environments and Ontological Security in International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2017): 23–43.

¹⁰² Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-Williams, 'Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies "into" the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 12–30; Alexandria J. Innes, 'Everyday Ontological Security: Emotion and Migration in British Soaps', *International Political Sociology* 11, no. 4 (2017): 380–97; For Enloe's main statement of this, see Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

¹⁰³ Rumelili, 'Conclusion', 199.

studies' (hereafter, OSS) which is 'not an offshoot of existing schools of security studies but, rather, a new and valuable sub-field in its own right' – and a fundamentally *transdisciplinary* one. Again, and as he and Vaughan-Williams have argued, such calls have been made in the context of the existential anxiety that has pervaded the discipline of international relations in recent years about its core subject matter.¹⁰⁴ The pluralism of OSS, coupled with the fact that ontological security is no longer the 'new kid on the block' of IR has prompted sustained (and welcome) reflexivity and critique about the concepts at the heart of ontological security and how they have been applied.

While we have already seen some of the positive critical contributions made by ontological security scholarship to our understanding of world politics, more recent reflections have rightly drawn attention to some of the more problematic analytic and normative consequences potentially entailed by certain conceptualisations of ontological security. One example that has been prominent since ontological security's 'second wave' in IR during the mid-2000s' has been hesitancy regarding the tendency of IR scholars such as Mitzen to 'scale-up' the concept to the level of the state, with some arguing that such moves risk making problematic assumptions regarding the experience of emotions by entities lacking consciousness – the 'states can't feel, and therefore, can't be ontologically (in)secure' argument.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, others have been sceptical about the conceptualisation of self-identity in much of the OSS literature in IR. On the one hand, some have questioned the tendency of ontological security theorists to treat identity as a singular and coherent phenomenon.¹⁰⁶ For example, Lebow argues that even if we accept that states are subjects of ontological (in)security dynamics, the insights of other psychologically-oriented work in IR (including his own) emphasise that '[l]ike people, states do not have single identities, but multiple, labile, and often conflicting identifications.'¹⁰⁷ In emphasising this, he and others who have made similar points are surely correct: indeed, such criticisms have been acknowledged and addressed by those within OSS such as Amir Lupovici who argues that certain crisis events bringing two simultaneously held but conflicting understandings of a state's identity into conflict with one another can result in what he terms 'ontological dissonance'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Croft and Vaughan-Williams, 'Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies "into" the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn' See also ; Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, and Colin Wight, 'The End of International Relations Theory?', *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 405–25.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Krolkowski, 'State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Sceptical View'; Roe, 'The "Value" of Positive Security'.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Richard Ned Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 22; David M. McCourt, *Britain and World Power since 1945: Constructing a Nation's Role in International Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 9–11.

¹⁰⁷ Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Lupovici, 'Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps towards the Palestinians'.

A different critique is advanced by Browning and Joenniemi who argue that the tendency of IR work to reduce ontological security to a question of identity is a significant departure from Giddens' original conceptualisation of 'self-identity'. In so doing, they argue that scholars risk missing Giddens' point that self-identity is but one aspect of ontological security-seeking and a historically contingent one at that.¹⁰⁹ They also share a concern expressed by some others that to the extent that ontological security is regarded by IR theorists as primarily being about identity stability, it is at once unfaithful to Giddens' conceptualisation, normatively problematic and ultimately misleading in the way that it seems to fetishize certain conservative pathways to security. For scholars such as Malksoo, Rossdale, and Browning and Joenniemi, not only is ontological security more than simply the security of identity in the singular, but to suggest that stabilising identities is sufficient or desirable for security is to risk implicitly endorsing certain authoritarian policies, and abandoning the scepticism of scholars in critical IR about the (im)possibility of security.¹¹⁰

These observations are valuable and illustrative of a continued healthy dialogue between OSS and its sceptics as well as an important 'critical turn' within OSS itself. In the next section, it is from these critical approaches that I will draw to argue that the challenges outlined above are not insurmountable; rather, they require us to revise certain assumptions about self-identity and anxiety and their interrelationships in order to satisfactorily navigate such challenges and restore the critical promise of OSS.

The 'Critical Turn' in Ontological Security Studies

Rethinking the relationship between self-identity and anxiety begins with considering the way in which humans enter the world. A number of IR scholars have drawn upon a Lacanian reading of subjectivity which holds that humans are 'thrown into the world' - one not of their own making.¹¹¹ The way in which we orient ourselves to the world is through already existing discursive structures. Eberle, for example, emphasises that everything from our name, to our gender, race and nationality is assigned to us – and therefore 'literally foreign to us'.¹¹² The social world into which we enter is hierarchically structured according to parameters of gender, race, and class – categorisations which are mutually constitutive of the so-called 'international system' to which we

¹⁰⁹ Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 31–32.

¹¹⁰ Maria Malksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended": Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security', *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 223–25; Chris Rossdale, 'Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security', *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 369–86; Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 37–40.

¹¹¹ Jason Glynos and David Howarth, 'Structure, Agency and Power in Political Analysis: Beyond Contextualised Self-Interpretations', *Political Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (2008): 164; Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 40.

¹¹² Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 246.

are all subject from birth. We are, therefore, radically social subjects of discourse: rather than there being a core or essence at the heart of identity, ‘the subject is unavoidably enmeshed with the social order’ and is ‘constituted by factors that are “outside” of it in the traditional sense of an “individual level” and a “collective level.”’¹¹³ Rather than an explicit departure from Giddens’ account of ontological security however, invoking a Lacanian reading is more a matter of emphasising a particular reading of it - one that holds that ‘the individual cannot be understood separately and asocially.’¹¹⁴ This, as Browning and Joenniemi argue, allows us to move beyond identity to think instead in terms of subjectivity:

‘Instead of identity being the essence of ontological security, we argue that identity(ies) are better viewed as crucial elements in the self’s attempts at achieving it. Instead of conflating self and identity, ontological security analysis would therefore benefit from analysing how subjects become connected to particular identities and why they articulate identity claims in the way they do.’¹¹⁵

This move from identity to a broader consideration of subjectivity also helps us to rethink the longstanding ‘levels of analysis’ debate in IR. As has already been briefly noted, some of the most prominent interventions in the second wave of ontological security’s deployment in IR sought to demonstrate how the concept could be usefully applied to states and particular branches of the state to problematise existing theoretical approaches in IR.¹¹⁶ This move, however, has not been without controversy. For some, this is because of the objection that states can’t feel like people can because they are not embodied.¹¹⁷ For others, such as Croft and Vaughan-Williams, the concern is less to do with the analytical move of applying the ontological security framework to states than it is with the possibility that such moves might reproduce existing state-centrism in IR and risk underselling the broader potential of OSS in understanding global politics. This is due especially to the manner in which ontological security has been read and incorporated into the discipline of IR through a distinctly ‘IR’ lens – one characterised by a ‘statist ontology’ – which has risked ‘recalibrating the concept of ontological security in a fashion that makes it almost unrecognisable to those who use the framework in other disciplines’ – something that might undercut aspirations for a transdisciplinary ontological security studies.¹¹⁸ They, along with others such as Kinnvall, and Innes have instead sought to apply the concept at the level of individuals-

¹¹³ Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*, 63.

¹¹⁴ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 23.

¹¹⁵ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 32.

¹¹⁶ Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’; Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Anchoring Europe’s Civilizing Identity: Habits, Capabilities and Ontological Security’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 270–85; Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*; Brent J. Steele, ‘Organizational Processes and Ontological (in)Security: Torture, the CIA and the United States’, *Cooperation & Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 69–89.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Roe, ‘The “Value” of Positive Security’; Krolikowski, ‘State Personhood in Ontological Security Theories of International Relations and Chinese Nationalism: A Sceptical View’.

¹¹⁸ Croft and Vaughan-Williams, ‘Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies “into” the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn’, 16.

in societies (nation-states, rather than states), in a manner more in keeping with Giddens' original work.¹¹⁹ However, it is worth noting that Giddens' original account offers explicit endorsement of both approaches. This is because, for Giddens, sociology is fundamentally about the study of society. Following on from this, '[t]he sociologist's 'society', applied to the period of late modernity at any rate, is a nation-state.' In other words, the nation-state is the form that society takes and constitutes the space in which social interaction takes place. However, Giddens also emphasises that nation-states are not simply spaces in which politics takes place:

In the literature of international relations, nation-states are often treated as 'actors' – as 'agents' rather than 'structures' – and there is a *definite justification* for this. For modern states are reflexively monitored systems which, even if they do not 'act' in the strict sense of the term, follow coordinated policies and plans on a geopolitical scale.¹²⁰

Others within IR, such as Steele, have offered sophisticated justifications along similar lines, more recently arguing that over a decade since the main contribution using the 'levelling-up' approach, 'it's time, in short, to move on'.¹²¹ And I would argue that the radically social view of subjectivity advanced by Lacanian-inspired approaches gives us the resources to do so in a manner compatible with Giddens' account of structuration. In particular, we can circumvent such concerns by recalling that there is no true self – states and individuals alike are 'as-if' selves, which are socially constituted and constantly 'in motion'.¹²² While one of the key differences between human subjects and states is that humans are indivisibly embodied beings, as Giddens makes clear, the way in which we make sense of this embodiment is fundamentally social and is as dependent on language as the constitution of our inner mental worlds.¹²³ Moreover, in response to the observation that states cannot feel in the same ways that individuals do, recent work on emotions in IR has questioned how individual emotional experiences actually are, with a growing number of scholars distinguishing between affect and emotion, and the transmission of such emotions as 'circulations of affect'.¹²⁴ Indeed, as Rumelili has argued, while emotions such as anxiety are experienced by individuals, that experience is fundamentally social:

[a]lthough anxieties are experienced individually, the objects of fear, systems of meaning, and standards of morality through which individuals contain anxiety are socially and politically produced. What unleashes

¹¹⁹ Catarina Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); See, for example, Innes, 'Everyday Ontological Security'.

¹²⁰ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 15–16. (Emphasis added)

¹²¹ See for example, Steele, 2008; Steele, 'Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos', 4.

¹²² Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security', 748; Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 24; See also Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 75.

¹²³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 58–60.

¹²⁴ Andrew A. G. Ross, *Mixed Emotions: Beyond Fear and Hatred in International Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 21; Ty Solomon, 'Ontological Security, Circulations of Affect, and the Arab Spring', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 934–58; See also, Karin M. Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice: Agency, Body and Emotion in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, 'Theorizing Emotions in World Politics', *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (2014): 491–514.

anxiety at the individual level, therefore, are disruptions in the political and social processes through which anxieties have heretofore been contained.¹²⁵

According to the anti-foundationalist view of selfhood, therefore, individual and collective identities alike are socially-constituted. For Epstein, ‘actors, whether individuals, groups or states, establish who they are by stepping into particular discursive subject-positions’.¹²⁶ In this way, as Solomon puts it: ‘the individual and the collective levels are not in fact different levels at all but can instead be viewed as interweaving and interdependent registers where no bright line is discernible between the subject and society.’¹²⁷ Indeed, arguably, critics of the ‘levelling-up’ approach risk implying the reality or fixity/coherence of the individual to the extent that they criticise the treatment of states as actors. And as scholars such as Ringmar and Anker have argued, the reason that the ‘anthropomorphization’ of the nation-state is possible is because we use similar conventions and metaphors of coherence and bodily agency to describe human and state subjectivities: Anker, in particular, emphasises the mutual modelling of individual and state sovereignties.¹²⁸ We will return to these anthropomorphic tendencies in the next chapter.

That there is no core or essence to social being, however, does not stop subjects from behaving as if there is. A key theme in existential philosophy is that subjects’ ability to consciously reflect upon their mortality, as well as the lack of any definitive substance at the core of their being, is generative of anxieties around (non-)being.¹²⁹ For Lacanians, the way subjects respond to anxiety induced by their sense of ‘lack’ is through identification with signifiers - i.e. freedom, security, America, Britain – whose very ambiguity allows for a sense of broad collective belonging.¹³⁰ However, attempts to fill the lack through language only compound the issue that they purport to resolve. This is both because linguistic signifiers themselves have no core essence, but also because they can never satisfactorily express the subject’s authentic subjectivity precisely because, as Eberle puts it, ‘the resources upon which we rely for our constitution as subjects—signifiers, scripts, practices—are [...] are properties of orders that long predate us’.¹³¹ In this way, subjects

¹²⁵ Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’, 13–14.

¹²⁶ Charlotte Epstein, ‘Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011): 345.

¹²⁷ Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*, 63; see also, Jonathan Mercer, ‘Human Nature and the First Image: Emotion in International Politics’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9, no. 3 (2006): 297; Christopher S. Browning, ‘Brexit, Existential Anxiety and Ontological (in)Security’, *European Security* 27, no. 3 (2018): 338, 351 (footnote 5).

¹²⁸ In Anker’s words, ‘Identification with state power is also enabled because the categories that define individual agency also often shape American interpretations of state agency. The state is figured as a singular, self-reliant individual, its actions an expression of a sovereign subject.’ Elisabeth Anker, ‘Heroic Identifications: Or, “You Can Love Me Too – I Am so Like the State”’, *Theory & Event* 15, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2012.0008>; see also Erik Ringmar, ‘Metaphors of Social Order’, in *Political Language and Metaphor: Interpreting and Changing the World*, ed. Terrell Carver and Jernej Pikalo (London: Routledge, 2008), 58–60.

¹²⁹ Hardie-Bick, ‘Transcendence, Symbolic Immortality and Evil’, 416.

¹³⁰ Ty Solomon, ‘Attachment, Tautology, and Ontological Security’, *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 1 (2013): 131.

¹³¹ Eberle, ‘Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression’, 246; Epstein, ‘Who Speaks?’, 336.

are alienated by never fully owning the subjectivities that are thrust upon them and the recourse to language to become a recognisable social actor plays its own role in generating a sense of lack: '[w]ith the unavoidable step into the social world, we appear to lose something that is only our own'.¹³² This sense of 'primordial loss' is crucial when it comes to considering the question posed by Solomon about why it is that subjects keep on identifying despite the constant set-backs. The answer, according to a Lacanian approach, is that because this lack is ultimately insatiable, humans are compulsively driven towards upholding cherished subjectivities and self-concepts/signifiers – not least by channelling the desire to compensate for the lack through the identification and pursuit of fantasy objects.¹³³ Fantasmatic narratives promise that self-fulfilment and the realisation of cherished values such as security and freedom, is within our reach if only we can attain the object(s) of our desire. However, such fantasies seldom deliver on their promises: as Eberle puts it, 'no empirical 'object' can ultimately resolve the ontological lack and make us complete again [meaning] our desire is ultimately bound to be unfulfilled.'¹³⁴

Reappraising Anxiety and Stability

This Lacanian-inspired reading of subjectivity and anxiety – particularly of the manner in which late modern subjectivity encourages identifications as a means for addressing anxieties – can help us to reconsider both the possibility and the desirability of the implied conclusions of much existing OSS scholarship. As Browning and Joenniemi have identified, for many scholars applying the ontological security framework to the study of world politics, the emphasis has been on the need for states and organisations to maintain *stable* biographical narratives and routines as a way to avoid succumbing to existential dread.¹³⁵ Such commitments can, of course, be found in the contributions of scholars such as Mitzen and Rumelili, whose work concerns the ontological security conferred by 'stable conflicts', and of Steele, whose early work emphasised the centrality of 'consistent self-concepts'¹³⁶. Accordingly, for Lebow, '[t]he ontological security research program assumes that states, like people, need stable senses of self'.¹³⁷ Similar definitions can also be found in more recent OSS scholarship, with Pratt identifying the crux of ontological security's contribution to social and IR theory as being that 'actors must *secure and maintain* their social

¹³² Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 246; On the alienation of subjectivation within language, see Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 203–15; Lacan, *Écrits*.

¹³³ For Lacanian approaches to fantasies of fulfilment, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997); Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*; Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression'.

¹³⁴ Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 247; see also, Badredine Arfi, 'Fantasy in the Discourse of "Social Theory of International Politics"', *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 4 (2010): 439.

¹³⁵ Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 31–32.

¹³⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, 2–3.

¹³⁷ Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations*, 22.

existence before they are able to do anything else.¹³⁸ This commitment to stability, for some, is precisely what makes ontological security distinctive and coherent; and, for Giddens it is stability that makes social encounters comprehensible and navigable without succumbing to dread. For others, however, this stability criterion is a source of considerable unease, both for theoretical and normative reasons.

The Lacanian approach briefly sketched above can help to challenge this stability criterion in two ways. The first concerns the way in which it places renewed emphasis on the impossibility of a fixed state of ontological security, thereby problematizing attempts to achieve stabilisation through a politics of exclusion and closure. Thinking about the tantalising structures of fantasies that promise to stabilise/restore cherished signifiers and the unattainable objects at their core can help cast light on the compulsive/pathological nature of security-seeking in world politics, such as the obsessive-compulsive tendency to ‘fetishize evil’ that manifests itself in the repeated identification of threat objects to be eliminated¹³⁹ - despite the fact that, as Heath-Kelly has observed, ‘security never seems to make any progress’.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis can contribute to the growing scepticism of CSS scholars concerning the tendency of many attempts to achieve ontological security towards violence. Work exploring securitization as a form of ontological security-seeking has demonstrated the frequency with which such efforts constitute exclusionary striving for singularity – which Kinnvall has termed the ‘securitization of subjectivity’ - by seeking to pin down ambiguous yet cherished signifiers such as nationhood, often resulting in the insecurity of out-groups and in-groups.¹⁴¹ While scepticism towards securitization as a strategy for achieving ontological security has been present within OSS for some time, what the recent critical work on ontological security makes explicit is the need to be reflexive about risks associated with ontological security-seeking, and the necessity of resisting political closure in favour of an explicitly political project which keeps open questions of subjectivity.¹⁴²

The second contribution that critical approaches can make in modifying the aforementioned stability criterion is in encouraging us to reassess the ontological status of anxiety. As the previous examples of securitization demonstrated, anxiety is frequently regarded as something threatening

¹³⁸ Simon Frankel Pratt, ‘A Relational View of Ontological Security in International Relations’, *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2017): 80–81 (emphasis added).

¹³⁹ Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 148.

¹⁴⁰ Heath-Kelly, ‘Forgetting ISIS’, 85.

¹⁴¹ Kinnvall, ‘Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security’, 763; see also, Croft, ‘Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain’s Muslims’; Browning, ‘“Je Suis En Terrasse”: Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be’.

¹⁴² See, for example, Mälksoo, ‘“Memory Must Be Defended”: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonic Security’; Rosedale, ‘Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security’; Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’; Eberle, ‘Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression’.

to be kept at bay. Indeed, because of its amorphous quality, anxiety ‘strives to become fear’ precisely because ‘only fear can be met by courage and protective measures’.¹⁴³ As such, anxiety is highly malleable for both political and commercial purposes, with no shortage of actors in world politics proffering transpositions of anxiety into more tangible fears as a way of selling products or political projects that promise their resolution.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, much recent work in IR has sought to explore the ways in which state elites seek to take advantage of anxieties unleashed by acute crises. For example, Holland and Solomon argue that state actors were in a highly privileged position to manipulate anxiety as a political resource in the instance of 9/11 because they had the means to give expression to shock and anxiety through the incorporation of the events and feelings via narrative framing into broader hegemonic discursive frameworks.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Anker has argued that enunciators seek to fill the ruptures in ontological security created by crisis situations by filling them with melodramatic discourses which narrativize confusing events in order to transpose anxieties into threats.¹⁴⁶ On a slightly different level, Krahmman has recently drawn links between risk and anxiety in Giddens’ framework by demonstrating that private security companies have sought to give expression to anxieties on a more routine basis through the deliberate emphasis of the riskiness of everyday existence, as a means for selling their services.¹⁴⁷ Each of these instances can be viewed as attempts at bracketing anxieties in order to achieve the agency, control, and stability that is at the heart of most readings of ontological security.

Indeed, as Browning and Joenniemi have rightly pointed out, in focusing predominantly on crises and the subsequent attempts at mitigating them – often taking the form of securitization – scholars invoking ontological security tend ‘to focus precisely on instances where healthy basic trust, reflexivity and flexibility are absent.’ Accordingly, these analyses are more concerned with dynamics of *insecurity* than its opposite, with scholars consequently at risk of missing the broader potential of ‘ontological security’s analytical insight for IR.’¹⁴⁸ In this way, it is fair to say that IR scholars have devoted much more attention to some aspects of the ontological security ‘story’ than others. If, for Laing, ontological security is about having a ‘sense of presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person’, then it is on the last part of the formulation – what Heath-Kelly describes as ‘questions of identity consolidation’ - that

¹⁴³ Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’, 12.

¹⁴⁴ See also, Jim Marlow, ‘Governmentality, Ontological Security and Ideational Stability: Preliminary Observations on the Manner, Ritual and Logic of a Particular Art of Government’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 2 (2002): 241–59.

¹⁴⁵ Jack Holland and Ty Solomon, ‘Affect is what states make of it: articulating everyday experiences of 9/11’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2:3 (2014), pp. 262–77.

¹⁴⁶ Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Elke Krahmman, ‘The market for ontological security’, *European Security*, 27:3 (2018), pp. 356–73.

¹⁴⁸ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 35–36.

theorists have focused, arguably to the neglect of the preceding statements and their attendant ontological questions.¹⁴⁹ And in many analyses, this continuity is striven for and achieved through keeping anxiety at bay. This emphasis is, in some ways, understandable given the terminology that Giddens, drawing primarily on Laing, uses – e.g. ‘dread’, ‘chaos’, ‘engulfment’ – to describe anxiety and the challenges it poses to the individual. Such terms, as Browning and Joenniemi argue, are suggestive ‘of people struggling to hold it together psychologically’, and just barely ‘manag[ing] everyday life without slipping into existential anxiety.’¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Giddens’ invocation of such language and imagery leads Rumelili to argue that he both ‘understates the role of anxiety as a pervasive feature of human existence’ and ‘overlooks the ambivalence and positive potential in anxiety’.¹⁵¹ In line with Kierkegaard (from who Giddens draws), Rumelili conceptualises anxiety as pervasive and containing the potential for freedom and ‘ontological insecurity not as an absolute, extreme state, but as a relative one, where anxieties that can no longer be contained by existing social and political processes are unleashed in varying ways and to varying degrees.’¹⁵²

While it is certainly true that Giddens comes close to suggesting this binary view of anxiety and ontological (in)security at times, there are multiple reasons for believing that he does recognise the pervasiveness and positive potential inherent in anxiety. As we have already seen, it is notable that he should draw upon Kierkegaard’s conceptualisation which is characterised by its ambivalence: anxiety is both challenging and liberating. Similarly, it should also be remembered that Laing’s work (which was most influential in Giddens’ articulation of ontological (in)security) was broadly concerned with destigmatising mental illness by demonstrating that existential anxiety is a universal experience that underpins a spectrum of schizoid behaviour on which we can all find ourselves. It is this spectrum that he is referring to when he states: ‘there is a comprehensible transition from the sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world.’¹⁵³ Moreover, as Browning and Joenniemi have argued, an alternative reading of Giddens indicates that he recognises anxiety’s pervasiveness and its fundamental ambivalence, which prevents ontological security becoming synonymous with the search for stability.¹⁵⁴ On the one hand, Giddens understands anxiety as ‘the natural correlate of dangers of all types’, being frequently associated with negative events that provoke unpleasant feelings of distress and discomfort. On the other hand, however, he points out that it is also anxiety that ‘helps mobilise adaptive responses and novel initiatives.’¹⁵⁵ Indeed, in the formation and maintenance of self-

¹⁴⁹ Laing, *The Divided Self*, 39; Heath-Kelly, *Death and Security: Memory and Mortality at the Bombsite*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 43.

¹⁵¹ Bahar Rumelili, ed., *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2015), 11.

¹⁵² Rumelili, 12.

¹⁵³ Laing, *The Divided Self*, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 43.

¹⁵⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 13.

identity and a sense of ontological security, Giddens places considerable emphasis on creativity, or ‘the capability to act or think innovatively in relation to pre-established modes of activity’. As he describes:

If routine is a central element of the autonomy of the developing individual, it follows that the practical mastery of how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life is not inimical to creativity, but presumes it and is presumed by it.¹⁵⁶

Thus, anxiety is not simply the undesirable product of crises, and therefore something to be avoided or suppressed. Rather, it is the motivation for creativity that attends to a broader set of existential questions. In fact, Giddens goes as far as to suggest that ‘[a] creative involvement with others and with the object-world is almost certainly a fundamental component of psychological satisfaction and the discovery of ‘moral meaning’.¹⁵⁷ Thinking about anxiety in this way casts ‘critical situations’ in a new light. Divorces and breakups are given by Giddens as instances of personal crisis necessitating the articulation of new identities (especially in instances where the subject’s identity had become fused with that of the partner through the signifier of the ‘couple’); but Giddens also points out that such instances often offer individuals new and exciting possibilities for dynamism through the rearticulation and actualisation of the self.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, while bereavements or near-death events experienced by individuals can be profoundly upsetting and destabilise one’s sense of certitude and safety in the social world, by reminding subjects of their mortality, such events can serve as a kind of ‘existential shock therapy’, operating as a ‘useful catalyst for major life changes’ and positive reassessment of one’s priorities.¹⁵⁹

With anxiety seen this way, to think of ontological security as purely a matter of stability is to deprive Giddens’ framework of its emphasis on dynamism – of the ‘trajectory’ of a sense of self that is ‘constantly in motion’ in an effort to adapt to the ever fluid conditions of late modernity.¹⁶⁰ Importantly, however, this adaptation is not simply an attempt at perpetual stabilisation: just as the pursuit of physical security can jeopardise ontological security (and vice versa), Giddens recognises that while some stability can be beneficial, it can also ultimately threaten a sense of ontological security in a number of ways. Most obviously, stable self-identities can sometimes be constituted by processes or attachments that are inherently harmful. This may take the form of abusive relationships which have become the classic example of maladaptive or ‘pathological’ ontological security-seeking for the way they demonstrate the costs of a failure to develop basic trust.¹⁶¹ Alternatively, personal narratives that are overreliant on the stability of routines may be

¹⁵⁶ Giddens, 41.

¹⁵⁷ Giddens, 41.

¹⁵⁸ Giddens, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Yalom (2008), p. 30, quoted in Hardie-Bick, ‘Transcendence, Symbolic Immortality and Evil’, 417–18.

¹⁶⁰ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 70; Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 38.

¹⁶¹ Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’, 347; This point also underpins Rumelili’s argument about why some states appear to prefer the ontological stability

those most susceptible to inevitable crises. As Steele puts it, ‘those who are seemingly most certain in their sense of identity are the ones most likely to have the world come crashing down in crisis.’¹⁶² A final way in which stability can provoke ontological *insecurity* in late modernity is by threatening ‘personal meaninglessness’ through feelings of boredom or stasis.¹⁶³ Browning and Joenniemi argue that too much emphasis on identity stability as a bulwark against anxiety can blind us to the ways in which rigid identities and their attendant routines can themselves lead to a sense of ontological insecurity insofar as they are felt by individuals/societies to lack meaning or relevance in the face of unfolding events.¹⁶⁴

Ontological Security, Recognition and Self-Esteem

Recognising that routines and stability can be sources of ontological insecurity can help us to recalibrate our understanding of what ontological security is about for Giddens. As Browning and Joenniemi argue, ontological security is not simply about being able to ‘go on’, but is also about the pursuit of ‘authentic resolute being’ which channels anxiety through reflexive engagement with leading a *meaningful* life.¹⁶⁵ This engagement consists not simply of establishing a sense of continuity, but in striving for self-esteem by addressing the other existential parameters that Laing referred to - feeling ‘real, alive, [and] whole’. The search for ontological security is frequently the search for a ‘narcissistic consistency’ through upholding ‘positive self-conceptions’ rather than simply ‘consistent’ ones.¹⁶⁶ Because judgements around what it means to be real, alive and whole and what behaviours might satisfy these criteria are inevitably the products of, and subject to, social recognition, Browning argues that ontological security revolves around social status as much as self-identity.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of ‘distinction’, Chernobrov has argued that subjects generally wish to be recognized as positively or virtuously ‘distinctive’, with ‘exclusivity and symbolic rarity’ being key to the satisfaction experienced by the bearers of

provided by intractable conflicts over ‘peace anxieties’ generated by processes of conflict resolution. See, Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’.

¹⁶² Steele, ‘Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos’, 18.

¹⁶³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 43–44.

¹⁶⁵ Browning and Joenniemi, 43–44.

¹⁶⁶ One caveat here, of course, is that this does not stop subjects from sometimes being their own worst critics, with low self-esteem resulting from perfectionist tendencies – something with which many academics will relate. Chernobrov, ‘Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises’, 587.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Browning, ‘Nation Branding, National Self-Esteem, and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity’; Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’.

particular traits. Thus, subjects wish to be desirable in ways that ‘inspire imitation while remaining unreachable’ – classic objects of fantasy.¹⁶⁸

Distinctive social status might come in different forms and be pursued at multiple levels of abstraction. As we have seen, research in ontological security studies has noted the importance of group belonging – most notably, national belonging – to establishing a broader sense of ‘home’ in the world in which one’s autobiographical narratives and routines will be recognized and agency affirmed. While group identities can occasionally be constructed without much regard for the external social environment, scholarship in OSS and beyond has demonstrated that positive collective distinctiveness frequently is constituted by group members ‘employ[ing] narratives of difference or similarity from others’ to reinforce autobiographical narratives and bolster self-esteem through favourable social comparison.¹⁶⁹ Put differently, positive distinction frequently involves hierarchical dynamics which are particularly evident in declarations of relative national or civilizational superiority compared to external others.¹⁷⁰

Despite pretensions to internal group homogeneity – particularly pronounced during moments of national crisis in the form of calls for people to unite - national collectives are, as Browning and Joenniemi argue, ‘also bound by their differences and the existence of complementarities between different identities on the inside whereby the other appears simultaneously as both other and like.’¹⁷¹ While there is nothing inevitable about the configuration that such differences take, however, it is notable that most national collectives today are constituted by internal hierarchies with citizenship governed by norms around gender, race, class, religion, and, of course, one’s participation in and support for organizational violence and militarized blood sacrifice in the name of the state. Certainly, this is where the focus of the majority of OSS scholarship has resided, at the expense of more positive relations of difference – a point to which I return in the next chapter.

Sometimes the recognition of certain subjects as more authentic and committed group members than others is not so much courted as bestowed. Frequently, however, hierarchies form the basis for entrepreneurial subjectivity with some subjects seeking to attain social recognition through performances which show them to be closer to cherished signifiers. In late modernity, the desire for positive and distinctive self-concepts is ironically channelled through the cultivation of a personal brand which is typically heavily reliant on capitalist mass consumption, making meaningful distinctiveness difficult to establish. This helps to illuminate a key point: namely, that

¹⁶⁸ Chernobrov, ‘Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises’, 588.

¹⁶⁹ Chernobrov, 588; See also, Skey, “‘A Sense of Where You Belong in the World’”; Croft, ‘Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain’s Muslims’.

¹⁷⁰ For discussions of hierarchical and civilizational dynamics in world politics respectively, see Ayse Zarakol, ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Christopher S. Browning and Marko Lehti, eds., *The Struggle for the West: A Divided and Contested Legacy*, Routledge Critical Security Series (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁷¹ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘From Fratricide to Security Community’, 493.

when subjects turn to traditional patterns of life such as religion and the nation-state, it is not just stability they are seeking, but familiar ways of achieving authentic and meaningful self-esteem. This, I will argue in the next chapter, is why in many liberal democracies the mythologised figure of the white, heterosexual, male and masculine combat soldier has been restored to the top of citizenship hierarchies over the course of the War on Terror, with militarised subjectivity – particularly its exclusive and intensely hierarchical dynamics - being desirable both to those who wish to become soldiers, and a rallying symbol around which supporters can reassert the nation and their patriotism.

Before turning to explore such dynamics, however, it is important to briefly reflect upon the normative implications of the reconceptualization of anxiety and ontological security sketched above. Casting anxiety as janus-faced is undoubtedly a more accurate depiction of the myriad experiences it generates, and crises can be moments imbued with positive potential for self-actualisation. However, it is important for scholars to recognise that this is only contingently the case and remain reflexive about the subtle ways in which anxiety can be channelled in neo-liberal late modernity. Of course, we have already seen how anxiety's political malleability can be seized upon by actors for normatively problematic purposes which prioritise the wellbeing of some over others.¹⁷² But it is important also to be mindful that the neo-liberal subject is also the *resilient* subject, with crises frequently being framed by resilience discourse as opportunities for personal development and growth along the lines of entrepreneurial selfhood. As such, even the most personal tragedies can be relentlessly subjected to market ends. Most insidiously, of course, neo-liberal governmentality can provoke feelings of personal guilt for failing to realise internalised social expectations around productivity and capitalising on opportunities for self-actualisation. This has been brought into sharp relief by the COVID-19 pandemic during which various career coaches have attracted criticism for suggesting that not using lockdown as an opportunity for personal growth reflected a lack of motivation and deeper personal failings, thereby prioritising self-entrepreneurship over mental wellbeing.¹⁷³ In this way, it is possible to see how ontological security might be co-opted by resilience frameworks. If OSS is to realise its critical potential, therefore, it is necessary for scholars to remain vigilant and critical towards such instrumentalization.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Naomi Klein, for example, has rightly critiqued the ways in which doctrines of 'disaster capitalism' have seized upon human and natural disasters as a way of advancing the interests of mainly Western capital at the expense of those whose lives have been upended and displaced by such disasters. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2008).

¹⁷³ See, for example, Kiran Misra, 'Why You Should Ignore the Pressure to Be Productive during Lockdown', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/24/productivity-in-coronavirus-lockdown>.

¹⁷⁴ I am grateful to Brent Steele, Jakub Eberle and Christopher Browning for drawing this to my attention.

In addition to the risk of ontological security being co-opted by internally referential dynamics of late modernity, however, it is also important to consider the consequences of rethinking ontological security as the pursuit of positive self-concepts and social status. Moving away from an emphasis on identity-stability as key to keeping anxiety at bay is certainly a necessary step in maintaining OSS' critical purchase insofar as stability can become synonymous with securing and closing the subject. But ontological security-seeking as self-actualisation can also have a 'dark' side of its own.¹⁷⁵ Notions of authenticity, wholeness and unity have historically been at the centre of many deeply repressive authoritarian political projects, underpinned by ideas around fate, destiny and predetermination which enclose the myriad possibilities of political subjectivity by implying that there is a single way in which subjects should, were always intended to, and are entitled to, live. As we have seen, fantasies of authentic fulfilment are also often attractive precisely because they are politically exclusive – and exclusionary. The aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum, for example, saw numerous invocations of 'the will of the people' by those 'Leavers' campaigning for Britain's exit from the European Union, but this singular 'will' was to the exclusion of the significant 'Remainer' minority who voted otherwise. Interestingly, this example is also illustrative of how desires to live authentically can lead to the destabilization of the lives of others, thus bringing stability and self-esteem into tension with one another.

All of this is to say that unlike in traditional and emancipatory approaches to security, there is no automatic normative presumption in favour of ontological security *per se*. Just as Rumelili argues that '[a]ny stable social relationship or situation may be a source of ontological security; violent conflicts, domination, discrimination, and exclusion as well as peaceful coexistence, equality, and inclusion,¹⁷⁶ so too can all of these relationships be the objects of fantasies for authentic living according to Eberle.¹⁷⁷ Rather, the role of the critical OSS scholar is to be reflexive and aware of these myriad possibilities and to resist the darker forms that ontological security-seeking behaviour can take. And beyond the irony of authentic living being channeled through mass production in late modernity, the Lacanian-inspired approach outlined above is particularly well placed to help us in this critical endeavour, not least by emphasizing the essentially illusory promise of ultimate fulfilment, completion, and authenticity at the heart of fantasies. As we will see in the next chapter, war and militarism have periodically been seductive routes for seeking personal and national self-actualisation, though such fantasies are often confounded by reality.

¹⁷⁵ Christopher S. Browning, 'Ethics and Ontological Security', in *Nyman, J. & Burke, A. (Eds.), Ethical Security Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London: Routledge, 2016), 171; Brent J. Steele, 'To the Dark Side Once More: Ontological Security, Certainty and Violence' (Presented at 'Ontological Security in World Politics', Lund University, 2013).

¹⁷⁶ Rumelili, 'Conclusion', 197.

¹⁷⁷ Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 246–47.

Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated a conceptual framework for understanding subjectivity by drawing upon a Giddensian account of ontological security situated within the structural specificities of late modernity. What this framework contributes that is particularly valuable for this thesis is an explanation of how existential anxiety - in its various guises – motivates behaviour and attachment: one which complements the ideological account of militarism explored in chapter 1. Having provided an overview of the ways in which the ontological security ‘story’ has been usefully incorporated and applied in IR over the past three decades, the second half of this chapter has drawn on recent critical advances in OSS to respond to a number of important critiques pertaining to IR’s ‘levelling up’ of the concept, its conceptualisation of identity, and its tendency to reduce ontological security to a matter of identity security and stability. This chapter has emphasised that anxiety is not simply the preserve of critical situations but is endemic to late modernity, not least in the form of meaninglessness emanating from the systemic sequestration of experience. And following recent critical interventions, I have argued that ontological security is about self-esteem and social recognition in the context of social hierarchies. Most studies of ontological security and hierarchy in IR focus on how states, groups and individuals develop their identities in ways that enable them to look down upon denigrated others. Here we can reintroduce an important question from the previous chapter relating to Millar’s work on civilian anxiety: if civilians are lower in the national hierarchy because they lack military credentials, then how might they traverse this hierarchy? Millar’s answer is to say that the best civilians can do is to demonstrate their support as true patriots, usually through effusive displays of philanthropy. But this method is limited, as we have seen, because it is fundamentally unable to challenge the boundaries between civilian selves and military others. The contention of this thesis is that subjects increasingly do challenge this boundary in other ways. To understand why and how this is the case, we require novel tools and approaches. The remainder of this thesis is devoted to making the case for the concept of vicarious identification being just such a tool.

3. Vicarious Life: Boredom and Militarised Transgression in Late Modernity

Introduction

So far, this thesis has argued that CMS scholarship might be advanced in two ways. The first was by developing a deeper account of motivations underpinning desiring military subjectivity – one engaging with a broader conceptualization of existential anxiety. This was addressed in Chapter 2, which provided a reading of ontological (in)security emphasizing the importance of personal meaning, self-esteem, and social recognition in the pursuit of late modern entrepreneurial subjectivity. The second area identified for further investigation was around the ways in which civilian subjects attempt to negotiate militarized social hierarchies and, in so doing, attain a modicum of the authentic and authoritative subjectivity associated with military subjectivity, as well as its exclusive social capital. The aim of this chapter – and indeed the remainder of this thesis – is to demonstrate that one such method is by collapsing the boundaries between self and other in order to live vicariously through militarism and military subjectivity. Such strategies are interpreted as high-stakes ontological security-seeking strategies functioning as attempts to transcend structural and situational anxieties in late modernity – not least existential boredom.

The chapter proceeds according to the following structure. Section 1 engages with nascent work on ‘vicarious identity’ which has sought to move ontological security studies beyond its preoccupation with pejorative Othering by exploring instances in which the distinctions between self and other are collapsed. One prominent target for vicarious identification has been the nation-state, but Section 2 demonstrates that the resources offered for ontological security by vicariously identifying with the nation-state have been profoundly influenced by structural aspects of late modernity which have emptied out meaning, leading to feelings of existential boredom – understood as the perception of ‘meaningless agency’.¹ Section 3 then explores the ways in which militarism and war have been viewed as resources for restoring a masculinized vision of the nation’s vicarious potential and personal meaning. Section 4 demonstrates that such processes have been at work in contemporary Britain, with the nation’s military past being central to official and unofficial attempts to revitalize a Britishness perceived as becoming less meaningful and cohesive. This focus on the past, I argue, has paved the way for subjects to live through the militarized past – especially through genealogical connections with it. Section 5 details the thesis’

¹ Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War: A Suggestive Essay’, *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011): 1788.

central project in exploring such dynamics and their ontological security politics over a period of pronounced national anxiety and outlines a methodological framework for the case study chapters to follow.

Vicarious Identification

As we have seen, scholars of ontological security have found the concept useful for exploring how subjects attempt to secure their sense of being through the cognitive ordering of time and space and the development of stable and positive self-concepts. Recent interventions have noted that the search for self-esteem frequently centres on articulating ‘positive distinction’ vis-à-vis Others.² Much OSS scholarship in IR has critiqued the normatively problematic tendency for individual and group self-articulation to rely upon discursive juxtaposition with maligned others, often through processes of securitization. Especially since 2001, OSS scholars have used the securitization framework to investigate how Muslim populations have been constructed as Others threatening to Western nations.³ More broadly, the assumption of self-prioritization has been used to explain the apparent intractability of specific longstanding antagonisms (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) as well as persistence of broader security dilemmas in world politics.⁴

While this work has contributed valuably to understanding how ontological security-seeking can lead to violent exclusions, it is important to remember that otherness is not limited to articulations of external threat, but is also frequently constructed in more nuanced and positive ways.⁵ As Browning and Joenniemi argue, however, the fixation of OSS scholarship upon processes of Schmittian ‘Othering’ has largely occurred at the expense of investigations of a broader range of self-other configurations.⁶ Of course, there are several notable exceptions to this trend, mostly emanating from broader readings of ontological security as pertaining to stability *and* self-esteem.⁷ For example, Berenskoetter argues that relations of friendship between groups contributes to a sense of ontological security by locating the actors in space and time not only in relation to what they are not, but also what they are similar and equal to.⁸ And whereas most OSS scholarship

² Chernobrov, ‘Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises’.

³ e.g. Noble, ‘The Discomfort of Strangers: Racism, Incivility and Ontological Security in a Relaxed and Comfortable Nation’; Croft, *Securitizing Islam*; deRaismes Combes, ‘Encountering the Stranger: Ontological Security and the Boston Marathon Bombing’.

⁴ Rumelili, ‘Ontological (in)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution’; Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’.

⁵ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Escaping Security: Norden as a Source of Ontological Certainty’, 9; See also Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 39–44; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁶ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘From Fratricide to Security Community’, 492.

⁷ Browning and Joenniemi, ‘Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity’, 43–44; Chernobrov, ‘Ontological Security and Public (Mis)Recognition of International Crises’, 587.

⁸ Berenskoetter, ‘Friends, There Are No Friends?’

emphasizes instances in which the self is prioritized over others, Zarakol has applied Goffman's concept of 'stigmatisation' to demonstrate how various states have come to internalise the assessments made by Western states of their perceived comparative inadequacies (e.g. not being 'Western' or 'developed' enough), which is constitutive of these states' problematic attempts to reassert themselves in international hierarchies.⁹ Like Parashar's argument outlined in Chapter 1 then, Zarakol demonstrates that states sometimes accept the unfavourable appraisals of other states.¹⁰

Finally, Browning and Joenniemi argue that scaling-up ontological security to the level of nation-states has risked overstating their internal homogeneity. As they note, however: 'while elements of sameness and homogeneity can be important, communities are also critically brought together by their differences and by the *existence of complementarities between different identities on the inside*'.¹¹ Their example is the Norden security community which brings together multiple nation-states through 'shared identities' rather than 'common ones', in the relative absence of external security concerns.¹² Everyday life is similarly constituted by myriad actors that play different, symbiotic roles in constituting the collective. Key debates central to national life – for example, whether one is a 'dog' or a 'cat' person – *require* the existence of difference to preserve the debate rather than calling for homogeneity. And as was argued in Chapter 1, military and civilian subjectivities are similarly characterised by their symbiotic difference.

The argument of this chapter, however, is that even these differences are frequently *obfuscated* by practices whereby different parts of the community seek to live vicariously through the experiences of others.

Vicarious Identity/Identification

To explore such dynamics, Browning et al. have developed a conceptual framework around the notion of 'vicarious identity', referring to the 'processes by which actors (individuals, groups and states) gain a sense of self-identity, purpose and self-esteem through riding on (and appropriating) the achievements and experiences of others.'¹³ In this way, vicarious identity is distinguished from 'vicarious experience' which refers to the necessary dependence that subjects have upon the testimony and information of others as a way of navigating social life. For Browning, the difference between vicarious experience and identity can be understood through the distinctive pronouns deployed in each phenomenon: 'whereas stories of vicarious experience are rendered

⁹ Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*.

¹⁰ Parashar, 'Discursive (in)Securities and Postcolonial Anxiety'.

¹¹ Browning and Joenniemi, 'Escaping Security: Norden as a Source of Ontological Certainty', 10 (Emphasis added).

¹² Browning and Joenniemi, 'From Fratricide to Security Community', 505.

¹³ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 3.

in the third person, using the pronouns “she,” “he,” “they,” stories of vicarious identity are narrated in the first person, using the pronouns “I,” “me,” “we”.¹⁴ Unlike vicarious experience, then, vicarious identity entails a degree of ‘identity fusion’ with another.¹⁵ Another key concept in this framework is *vicarious identification*. Whereas vicarious identity refers to the ‘appropriation of an other’s identity, experiences and actions as if they were one’s own’, *vicarious identification* more specifically describes ‘attempts to establish and legitimize a vicarious identity’.¹⁶ The key distinction here is that while vicarious identity is the outcome, vicarious identification can be understood as the myriad social discursive tactics used by subjects to bring it about. One such tactic is the use of first-person pronouns, but these are frequently bolstered by a range of further practices to which we shall return later.

The outline above suggests that vicarious identity is something positive that subjects actively seek out, but a caveat is necessary here: not all vicarious identity is positive, intentional, or even conscious. This becomes clear when we consider the impact of secondary experiences upon subjects. Horsdal, for example, notes that while stories might affect us emotionally, they allow subjects to ‘experience dangerous and life-threatening incidents’ from a safe distance and ‘acquire a large narrative repertoire of lived experience, way beyond what we could possibly assemble in our individual lives.’¹⁷ However, as we have seen, emotions are inextricably linked with identity, and identifying with a character from a story may well leave a lasting impression on a subject’s self-perception.¹⁸ This is the argument of the literature on vicarious traumatization, which has explored the ways in which ‘[t]herapists who work with victims may find their cognitive schemas and imagery system of memory [...] altered or disrupted by long-term exposure to the traumatic experiences of their victim clients.’¹⁹ These experiences do not simply generate knowledge or

¹⁴ Neal Norrick, quoted in Browning, “‘Je Suis En Terrasse’: Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be’, 251; See also Neal R. Norrick, ‘Narratives of Vicarious Experience in Conversation’, *Language in Society* 42, no. 4 (2013): 385.

¹⁵ For the social psychology on ‘Identity Fusion’, see William B. Swann et al., ‘Identity Fusion: The Interplay of Personal and Social Identities in Extreme Group Behavior’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96, no. 5 (2009): 995–1011; William B. Swann Jr. and Sanaz Talaifar, ‘Introduction to Special Issue of Self and Identity on Identity Fusion’, *Self and Identity* 17, no. 5 (2018): 483–86; Martha Newson, Michael Buhrmester, and Harvey Whitehouse, ‘Explaining Lifelong Loyalty: The Role of Identity Fusion and Self-Shaping Group Events’, *PLOS ONE* 11, no. 8 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0160427>; Martha Newson, ‘Football, Fan Violence, and Identity Fusion’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 54, no. 4 (2019): 431–44; Swann Jr. and Talaifar, ‘Introduction to Special Issue of Self and Identity on Identity Fusion’.

¹⁶ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 15.

¹⁷ Marianne Horsdal, quoted in Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, 4–5; Marianne Horsdal, *Telling Lives: Exploring Dimensions of Narratives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 26–27.

¹⁸ Joshua M. Ackerman et al., ‘You Wear Me Out: The Vicarious Depletion of Self-Control’, *Psychological Science* 20, no. 3 (2009): 326–32.

¹⁹ I. Lisa McCann and Laurie Anne Pearlman, ‘Vicarious Traumatization: A Framework for Understanding the Psychological Effects of Working with Victims’, *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 3, no. 1 (1990): 132; See also, Gertie Quitangon and Mark R. Evces, eds., *Vicarious Trauma and Disaster Mental Health: Understanding Risks and Promoting Resilience*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2015); For examples of vicarious trauma affecting researchers of genocide, see Ivana Maček, ed., *Engaging Violence: Trauma, Memory and Representation*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2014).

sympathy: practitioners may begin to feel as if the traumatic experiences of their clients are happening to them. Indeed, some vicarious relationships only become apparent to subjects in retrospect.²⁰

Having noted that some people unconsciously develop negative vicarious identity, it is worth stating that my interest in this thesis is primarily with vicarious identifications that can be traced through discourse. The language of strategy also points to a deeper issue of motivation: why would anyone want to vicariously identify with another?

One answer proffered by recent IR scholarship is that vicarious identifications function as part of wider ontological security strategies as subjects attempt to navigate late modern life.²¹ Some of the ways in which vicarious identification can reinforce a sense of ontological security can be identified by briefly examining some of the classic targets for vicarious identification. One common example is parents living through their children's educational, artistic, and especially sporting exploits. What appears to motivate such dynamics is that as parents own horizons rapidly narrow in early adulthood, their children have access to opportunities that are no longer open to themselves.²² With subjects in the majority of cases having resigned themselves to the idea that they are probably not destined for Olympic greatness, their children's sporting endeavours provide a second chance to experience success. This illustrates that vicarious identification is often a strategy for compensating for a perceived *lack* at the heart of subjectivity. Browning et al.'s Lacanian-inspired approach emphasizes that lack is to be understood as referring to a 'primordial loss' of some imagined wholeness.²³ This dimension of loss is important because it generates drive for restoration through the attainment of objects of desire. But it is also central to allowing

²⁰ For example, when reflecting upon a period of depression and psychological therapy following the conclusion of his racing career, former Formula One driver Damon Hill described the realization that much of his career had in retrospect been influenced by the trauma of his father Graham Hill's death in a plane crash: When I look at what drove me to keep trying to get to F1 and what happened when I finally got there, I find it difficult to separate out a 'pure me', carving out my own authentic career, from the wounded boy determined to relive his father's life in order to put right that shocking loss. During my career I was always confused about whether I was authentically a racing driver or someone tasked with a mission to complete before I could become my true self.' Notably, Hill also described depression as 'a mental indicator of the need to change things; a sign that our life is being appropriated by others or blocked by wrong choices.' Damon Hill, *Watching the Wheels: My Autobiography* (London: Pan, 2017), xvii–xviii.

²¹ Again, although talking in terms of ontological security-seeking 'strategies', it is important to emphasise that for Browning et al. vicarious identification can operate at different levels of consciousness. They note that while 'the potential of subjects to consciously and strategically opt for vicarious identities should not be discounted out of hand' it is also the case that 'a relationship of vicarious identification can become normalized through routinized practices that at times results in vicarious identification becoming something of an intuitive (pre)disposition.' Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 28–29.

²² Eddie Brummelman et al., 'My Child Redeems My Broken Dreams: On Parents Transferring Their Unfulfilled Ambitions onto Their Child', *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 6 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0065360>.

²³ Slavoj Žižek, quoted in Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 25; See also Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 14; Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 246.

subjects to perceive the attributes with which they are identifying as part of their *own* inner potential. As Browning et al. put it:

the target of vicarious identification is generally valued not for who (or what) they are as such, but for the values and possibilities they are seen to represent, ideals assumed to be already innate potentials residing within the subject itself, yet unable to flourish on their own.²⁴

While the example of parents living through their children points to the vicarious extension of agency, vicarious identifications can also confer a sense of meaning and purpose for the individual. For example, the parent might effectively become their child's sporting coach, whether invited or not. And their child's sporting success might also confer esteem among the parent's peer group with others admiring their parenting style – whether deservedly or not.

These dynamics can be seen even more vividly in identifications with entitative social groups – those groups perceived as more than an aggregation of their members, being 'organized, structured, hierarchical, cohesive and distinctive.'²⁵ As Hardie-Bick argues, entitative groups are seen as particularly attractive targets for identification because they provide members with a sense of belonging, feelings of power and offer the chance to improve their social status' – all significant in the search for ontological security.²⁶ Sports teams are prominent examples of entitative targets for vicarious identification. Fan identification with sports teams, of course, allows fans an extended sense of agency and to 'Bask in Reflected Glory' (BIRGing) - commonly signified by fans use of collective first-person pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' to describe team success.²⁷ As Tarver notes, however, BIRGing is only one aspect of fandom's offering to the individual, and it fails to explain 'why fans do all that they do.' As she explains: 'If a fan is missing either team loyalty or team success, BIRGing should not be available. Yet a great many fans are followers of notoriously unsuccessful teams.'²⁸ And this raises the question, 'why fans would engage in the everyday (noneuphoric) practices of fandom at all', given the high costs of sports fandom and paucity of success.²⁹ Tarver's answer to this is reached by interpreting sports fandom as a 'practice of subjectivization' whereby the 'sports fan comes to understand herself as a particular sort of person by virtue of her participation in [ritualized] practices, which enable their subjects to imbue

²⁴ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 27.

²⁵ James Hardie-Bick, 'Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence', *Oñati Socio-Legal Series* 6, no. 4 (2016): 1038; See also Donald T. Campbell, 'Common Fate, Similarity, and Other Indices of the Status of Aggregates of Persons as Social Entities', *Behavioural Science* 3, no. 1 (1958): 14–25.

²⁶ Hardie-Bick, 'Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence', 1039.

²⁷ Robert B. Cialdini et al., 'Basking in Reflected Glory: Three (Football) Field Studies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34, no. 3 (1976): 366–75.

²⁸ Erin C. Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 26.

²⁹ Notably, this question touches upon the same issue that I raised in Chapter 1 relating to why anyone would travel hundreds of miles using their own annual leave to attend a military funeral of someone they had never met. Tarver, 26.

their lives and self-concepts with new layers of meaning.³⁰ This interpretation points to the contribution of vicarious identification with sports teams to subjects' sense of ontological security. Not only do identifications offer fans access to intense, quasi-religious experiences which allow them to feel 'alive', but they establish bonds of kinship with fellow fans which partially compensate for the loss of primary bonds in late modernity.³¹ As such 'sports fandom, in its everyday details, is one of the primary ways in which fans tell themselves who they are – and, just as importantly, who they are not.'³² This pertains to the way in which fans' social status is constituted by distinguishing themselves not only from those of other clubs, but also with other fans of the same team, with self-proclaimed 'true fans' hierarchically distinguishing themselves from newcomers and 'glory hunters'.

For IR scholars, the target for vicarious identification of greatest interest has been the nation-state.³³ Of course, there is nothing new about claiming that individuals achieve a sense of belonging in their membership of nation-states. However, as Browning argues, attentiveness to the vicarious nature of this relationship can help to cast further light on the ways in which the nation becomes an attractive domain for ontological security-seeking:

citizens often develop a vicarious relationship with their nation, enhancing their own sense of individual ontological security and self-esteem, and salving their own anxieties, by living through the achievements and experiences of the broader group.³⁴

This is particularly visible in national sporting endeavours - sharing much in common with more general sports fandom, but also extending to the hosting of prestige events such as the Olympic Games which allow subjects to experience a sense of vicarious pride. As we shall see later in the chapter, however, the nation's military exploits are also a significant site for vicarious identification.

Although not using the concept of vicarious identification explicitly, Elisabeth Anker's Freudian-inspired approach suggests that conditions of 'unfreedom' in late modernity are central in motivating subjects to vicariously identify with state actions as a way of:

³⁰ Here, she draws from Foucault in defining a 'subjectivizing [practice] [...] by which individuals both subordinate themselves to a discipline and, by virtue of it, achieve a sense of their own identities.' Tarver, 27; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 192.

³¹ Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 26–27; On Primary and Secondary Bonds, see Hardie-Bick, 'Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence', 1035; Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969).

³² Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 21.

³³ Although Browning has also explored vicarious identifications with 'Western' civilisation in the aftermath of the December 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Browning, "'Je Suis En Terrasse': Political Violence, Civilizational Politics, and the Everyday Courage to Be'.

³⁴ Browning, 'Ethics and Ontological Security', 165.

undoing late modern and neoliberal experiences of powerlessness, specifically for those people shaped by individualism's expectations of freedom. Figurations of individualism actually set the conditions for the expansion of state power through the fantasy that this power is an extension of each individual's own.³⁵

On Anker's reading, then, state power becomes a proxy for subjects' individual aspirations for freedom and agency, particularly at times when those aspirations are frustrated by the everyday conditions of existence. Indeed, as Hardie-Bick notes, a similar argument can be found in the work of Erich Fromm who argues that the conditions of late modernity can lead to problematic – though not always conscious – attempts to 'escape personal responsibility and resolve self-uncertainty by strongly identifying with something or someone who is conceived as being powerful.'³⁶ Moreover, such identifications are made possible, in part, by the anthropomorphising of states, with the subjectivities of the nation-state and the liberal individual modelled on one another and articulated in similar terms.³⁷

In these accounts, then, the nation-state becomes a site for ontological security-seeking not only for achieving the sense of stability and continuity that Giddens holds to be vital for allowing individuals to 'go on', but also for broadening the spatial parameters of the subject's *sense of agency*. Entailed here is not simply an extension of being in the world, but, in a sense, *beyond* the world: 'vicarious identity [...] can offer the individual the prospect of immortality, surpassing death by contribution, in some small way, to something bigger and historically significant that will endure long after one's own physical expiration.'³⁸ As such, nationhood is an example of what Ernest Becker referred to as an 'immortality project', designed to deny death through both its sequestration in daily life and the generation of 'symbolic immortality'.³⁹ As we shall see, the extent of one's contribution is closely bound to appraisals of social status; and the nation-state – like other entitative groups – contributes to ontological security by providing meanings and social hierarchies conducive to the pursuit of certain kinds of status and self-esteem. The means by which these are claimed are discussed later in the chapter.

³⁵ Anker, 'Heroic Identifications'.

³⁶ Hardie-Bick, 'Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence', 1040; Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*.

³⁷ Anker, 'Heroic Identifications'.

³⁸ Browning, 'Ethics and Ontological Security', 165.

³⁹ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (Souvenir Press, 2011); On symbolic immortality, see also Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1996); Irvin D. Yalom, *Love's Executioner: And Other Tales of Psychotherapy* (London: Penguin, 1991); Jean-Louis Drolet, 'Transcending Death during Early Adulthood: Symbolic Immortality, Death Anxiety, and Purpose in Life', *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 46, no. 2 (1990): 148–60.

Vicarious identification can, then, contribute to the search for ontological security by providing a sense of meaningful belonging and entitative agency allowing for experiences of vicarious pride, and by conferring status and self-esteem in the context of hierarchical social order. Importantly, however, as Browning et al. note, ‘it can also entail vulnerabilities and potentially create avenues for new anxieties’.⁴⁰ This is because vicariously identifying with the actions of targets who are ultimately beyond subjects’ own control can - to the extent that such actions do not conform to social logics of appropriateness or bolster self-concepts - render identifying subjects vulnerable to feelings of shame by association. To briefly return to the domain of sport, while success can lead fans to BIRG with their team, the negative feelings stemming from defeat can generate a range of different behaviours.⁴¹ For some, match losses prompt attempts at ‘Cutting Off Reflected Failure’ (CORFing)⁴² - the opposite of BIRGing - consisting of ‘practice[s] of disidentification’ such as fans ‘switch[ing] from “we” to “they” or some other third-person mode of description when moving from discussions of team victories to discussion of a defeat.’⁴³ As Tarver points out, however, “highly-identified” fans maintain we discourse even in cases of team defeat’, often with reference to team history, with longstanding loyalty and tenacious commitment used to convey particularly authentic fandom in explicit contradistinction with those CORFing who are pejoratively described as not ‘real fans’.⁴⁴

These dynamics are visible in vicarious identifications with the nation-state although their normative implications are slightly different. As Steele argues, those instances in which ‘agents of states express discursive remorse for something in their nation’s past’ - for example, the colonial displacement and subjugation of indigenous peoples - demonstrate that subjects can ‘feel ashamed of the actions of their in-group even when they personally were not responsible for those actions’; they also ‘[suggest] that individuals take both the good and the bad with “being part of a group”’.⁴⁵ Notably, in reflexive modernity the range of past actions exposed to scrutiny has increased exponentially, increasing the risks of vicarious identification. However, exposure to shame stemming from vicarious identification with nation-states can also lead to normatively problematic strategies. The slipperiness of certain vicarious identifications becomes particularly apparent, for example, when the issue of colonial reparations to indigenous peoples arises. Just as corporate entities seek to

⁴⁰ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 47.

⁴¹ Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 51.

⁴² Daniel L. Wann, ‘Understanding the Positive Social Psychological Benefits of Sport Team Identification: The Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model’, *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 10, no. 4 (2006): 272–96.

⁴³ Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 51; Cialdini et al., ‘Basking in Reflected Glory’.

⁴⁴ Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 51–52.

⁴⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, 54–55 (Emphasis in original).

shield themselves from vicarious liability for the unsanctioned actions of their employees, some subjects disavow their connection with the community's past - despite being the beneficiaries of its legacy. With regard to colonial reparations, while past leaders such as Winston Churchill are frequently portrayed in terms of British quintessence - thus rendering them tempting targets for vicarious identification as representing 'us' - such portrayals engage only selectively with the views and actions of such figures. Churchill's racism is routinely elided in vicarious identification by the suggestion that historical figures cannot be judged by modern standards, thus suggesting that 'he' is not 'us'.⁴⁶ And yet, an uncomfortable parallel with the castigation of CORFing by loyal sports fans is that those drawing attention to the unpalatable legacies of such figures can be accused of 'Britain-hating' or 'self-hating',⁴⁷ with reflexivity seen to jeopardise broader vicarious identifications.

Vicarious identifications, then, confer both benefits and vulnerabilities to the late modern entrepreneurial subject. What the examples above also illustrate is that, as with the ontological security-seeking strategies explored in Chapter 2, vicarious identification concerns social status and is therefore subject to recognition dynamics: put differently, it is inherently political. Of course, some vicarious identifications - such as those with the nation-state - are actively encouraged as ways of binding diverse communities together. Citizens are routinely urged to vicariously identify with the nation by showing support for national sports teams and personalities during international tournaments - and, as we shall see shortly, the armed forces during and outside of war. In addition to *vicarious identity* and *identification*, then, it is possible to discern strategies of *vicarious identity promotion*,⁴⁸ which will be a key concept throughout the thesis. Like other ontological security-seeking strategies, the promotion of vicarious identification can be politically-conducive, with identification with particular leaders promoted as a way of engaging with the nation's authentic essence.⁴⁹

While some identifications are encouraged, however, as Browning et al. note, the social character of vicarious identification also entails a more fundamental vulnerability: namely, that others may refuse to recognize claims to vicarious subjectivity. This vulnerability stems from the notion that, while subjects are assumed to have 'telling rights' over their first-person experiences, this is not

⁴⁶ For an example of this logic, see Andrew McKie, 'Andrew McKie: Do Not Judge Churchill Because History Will Judge You Too', *The Herald*, 15 February 2019, <https://www.heraldsotland.com/opinion/17434981.andrew-mckie-not-judge-churchill-history-will-judge/>.

⁴⁷ Tom Harris, 'The Left Think It's Rebellious to Hate Churchill, but It Just Shows How Little They Understand Britain', *The Telegraph*, 14 February 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/02/14/left-think-rebellious-hate-churchill-just-shows-little-understand/>.

⁴⁸ Browning et al.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth R. Anker, *Longing for Sovereignty: Power and Violence in Trump Era*, YouTube (The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Centre for American Studies and Research (CASAR), American University Beirut, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCg9NIKmErk>.

always the case for claims which involve living through others.⁵⁰ As such, the invocation of first-person pronouns may be insufficient to establish authentic ‘telling rights’ and is frequently supplemented by several other authentication strategies. One linked to broader ontological security-seeking strategies is the articulation of (auto)biographical narratives and performance of routines ‘emphasizing a sense of shared home, culture, community, history and parallel/equivalent experiences, and not least a sense of commitment to the relationship.’⁵¹ A subject’s commitment to the target of vicarious identification can also be conveyed ‘demonstrations of sufficiently detailed knowledge’ and ‘displays of emotion’. Both strategies can be seen in sport, with fans’ ‘dedication to learning individual pitching statistics’ and intense emotional displays of ‘unmitigated joy [and] despair’ apparently demonstrating their authentic connection and commitment.⁵² Most significantly for this thesis, however, are attempts to establish authentic vicarious subjectivity through the articulation of familial ties.⁵³ While in many instances such ties are essentially fictive, in others, genealogical connections come to the fore and may provide the basis for authoritative ‘epistemic rights’.

While authenticating strategies can bolster claims to vicarious identity, Browning et al. argue that even their most effective deployment carries no guarantee of social recognition. This is because vicarious identifications, like the identifications explored in Chapter 2, are inevitably subject to the (non-)recognition of (significant) audiences, include the targets of the vicarious identification, and broader communities with sufficient status to act as gatekeepers. The potential for claims to vicarious identity to be rejected, according to Browning et al., stems from the radical (inter)dependence of subjects upon the symbolic order of master signifiers through which subjects make sense of their place in the world through an order that is shared with many others. This order consists, for example, of categories such as gender and race and crucially establishes boundaries and logics of appropriateness, including who is legitimately allowed to claim particular signifiers. As they argue, claims to vicarious identify with certain signifiers are liable to be rejected to the extent that they are seen to undermine the overall symbolic order.⁵⁴ Their given example is the case of American civil rights activist Rachel Dolezal, who was accused of ‘cultural appropriation’ and of playing ‘blackface’ when her white parents exposed her born ethnicity.⁵⁵ While Dolezal insisted that her vicarious identification as black was authentic – drawing upon a range of the aforementioned strategies for establishing such claims – her behaviour was viewed by many as being an especially egregious display of white privilege that appropriated ‘highly

⁵⁰ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 29; Norrick, ‘Narratives of Vicarious Experience in Conversation’, 386.

⁵¹ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 35–36.

⁵² Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*, 25.

⁵³ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 30; Norrick, ‘Narratives of Vicarious Experience in Conversation’, 390.

⁵⁴ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 33–34.

⁵⁵ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, 9.

emotive understandings of the violence and racism characteristic of the experience of Black Americans over centuries, which it was argued she could not possibly understand.’ Dolezal’s whiteness, and the fact that she could effectively opt out of blackness at any time, made proving any commitment to the identity difficult. As Browning et al. explain however, this act of ‘debordering’:

was instinctively felt by many as transgressing established normative limits [...] challenging the ‘commonsense’ and hegemonic moral, cultural and symbolic order, an order premised on hierarchized notions of identity, but also one through which people gain a sense of ontological security as a result of the way even subaltern and lower status identities in hegemonic discourses are understood as natural and given and therefore a source of stability and ordering.⁵⁶

Beyond destabilising, however, Dolezal’s perceived violation of the symbolic order was also viewed as undermining the ‘telling rights’ of black Americans that were based on lived experiences of racial discrimination, and the limited exclusive social capital conferred by those experiences in testifying to the reality of racism and campaigning for social justice. Of course, discerning where the boundary lies in such matters is often difficult because of the arbitrariness of authenticity. In line with the Lacanian view of subjectivity as radically decentered, Johnson notes that ‘[b]ecause the concept of Blackness has no essence, “black authenticity” is overdetermined – contingent on the historical, social, and political terms of its production.’⁵⁷ Moreover, pointing to subjects’ reliance on a shared social order ultimately means as Browning et al. (drawing on Ahmed) put it, to the extent that all identifications essentially involve ‘passing for something that you are not in reality. [...] *all* identities are [...] vicarious.’⁵⁸ As Johnson clarifies, this is not to say that there are not good reasons for policing the boundaries of the authentic; after all, ‘authenticating discourse enables marginalized people to counter oppressive representations of themselves.’⁵⁹ However, it reminds us that such judgements are *political* rather than objective ones.

While the basis on which claims to vicarious identity are liable to be rejected varies with each case, in some cases the distinction made is ostensibly clearer cut. While subjects are encouraged to identify with the nation’s exploits at a general level – not least as a way of achieving their subordination to the power structures of the community - identities that are perceived as occupying esteemed positions within national hierarchies and conferring exclusive social capital are the subject of considerable sensitivity. One example closely related to the topic of this thesis concerns attempts to ‘pass’ as military. For example, Higate and Manchanda have explored the phenomenon of ‘Walter Mitty Hunting Clubs’ comprised of serving and former soldiers who seek

⁵⁶ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, 33–34.

⁵⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

⁵⁸ Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 37; See also Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 128.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 3.

to expose those marching in military parades who either have no personal military experience, or have embellished their military careers by wearing medals that they did not earn.⁶⁰ Here, then, the issue of is one of merit; but it also concerns the devaluing effect that ‘Walter Mittys’ have on the broader exclusivity of awards for valour. In the words of Gareth Johnson MP who introduced a Parliamentary bill to outlaw such passing, it ‘completely undermines genuine heroes’.⁶¹ While such ‘passing’ generates ontological insecurity among those identifying with militarised master signifiers, non-recognition of vicarious identities can also lead to ontological insecurity among identifying subjects. For example, when the BBC attempted to contact exposed ‘Walter Mittys’, ‘several spoke of their deep shame and said they had contemplated suicide.’⁶²

While this example might, at first glance, be seen to illustrate the fairly straightforward distinction made between identifying with the nation at a general level and the prohibition on claiming more specific vicarious military subjectivity, in reality the issue is somewhat more complex. Indeed, Johnson’s proposals to outlaw civilians ‘passing’ as military made a specific exception for ‘people who wear medals won by relatives, to honour their memory’.⁶³ Not only was such behaviour not seen as taboo, but has been the subject of positive media coverage in recent years. At a special service in November 2018 to mark the centenary of the Armistice that ended the First World War, the Crucifer of Westminster Abbey, Andy MacKinder wore the medals his grandfather had received for his service during the war, including participation at Gallipoli, the Somme, and Passchendaele. When interviewed by the BBC about the personal significance of the medals and asked what his grandfather would think about him wearing the medals at the event, MacKinder said:

I hope he’d be very proud – I’m sure he would be. [...] he never spoke about the war during his life, and he never wore these medals unfortunately – so whether it would cause him, you know, some more problems, I don’t know. He went through his whole life - as did many other who fought in the First [World] War - really not able to talk about it because of all the horrors.⁶⁴

What is interesting is that, far from being accused of ‘passing’ by wearing medals that his grandfather had never personally worn, his family connection was seen as legitimizing a display of vicarious pride, with news anchor Sophie Raworth commenting: ‘How poignant to be able to

⁶⁰ Paul R. Higate and Nivi Manchanda, ‘Exposing Fake Heroes as a Moment of Militarisation? The Walter Mitty Hunting Club and the Protection of Valour’ (11th Pan-European Conference on International Relations (European International Studies Association), Barcelona, 16 September 2017).

⁶¹ Gareth Johnson MP, quoted in Jon Kelly, ‘The “Walter Mittys”: Why Do Some People Pose as Heroes?’, BBC News, 25 November 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38085998>.

⁶² Kelly.

⁶³ Kelly.

⁶⁴ Andy MacKinder, in BBC, ‘Clip from World War One Remembered: Westminster Abbey’, *World War One Remembered: Westminster Abbey* (London: BBC1, 10 11/11 2018), <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/clip/155260?bcast=127878487>.

wear your grandfather's medals today of all days.'⁶⁵ Here, then, the boundaries between the acceptable and the taboo were blurred.

This section has outlined the main tenets of vicarious identity (promotion) and vicarious identification – understood here as responses to ontological insecurity. While some vicarious identifications with (military) subjectivities remain highly controversial and subject to policing on grounds of suspected inauthenticity, others are largely affirmed as uncontroversial. Later in this chapter I will explore why this is the case, arguing that civilians have been encouraged to form vicarious military subjectivity as a way of engaging with militarism on an emotional level. Before expanding on this, however, Sections 2 and 3 of this chapter explore the changing role of the nation-state in providing resources for ontological security in late modernity considering why and how *militarism* at a more general level has been periodically attractive as a way of vicariously reconnecting with the nation, thus contributing an account of why (militarized) vicarious identifications may appeal at some moments more than others. In the next section, I argue that anxieties around meaninglessness generated by neo-liberal subjectivity have prompted a turn back to conservative and militarized conceptions of state and individual subjectivities.

Late Modernity and Existential Boredom

As we saw in Chapter 2, the configuration of late modernity has had profound implications for how individuals and groups attempt to achieve ontological security. The nation-state – both as a community and a reflexive actor in its own right - has, likewise, been profoundly shaped by these dynamics. While remaining a primary site for ontological security-seeking, the subjectivity of nation-states themselves and the roles they play in the generation of ontological (in)securities have changed considerably over time. As Browning and Joenniemi argue, Nineteenth century Herderian conceptions of nationhood centring on 'the requirement to be able to identify a distinct culture, language and organic environment' were later supplemented by the 'additional criteria of territorial sovereignty (i.e. statehood), without which a nation would never be understood as fully complete or an equal member of the society of nations.'⁶⁶ Statehood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has transitioned from 'a preoccupation with territorial sovereignty in a threatening environment of Hobbesian anarchy, to an enhanced emphasis on the market and the demands of the competition state.'⁶⁷ Thus, the dominant modality of statehood has changed from being driven by international military competition to a greater emphasis on markets and 'nation-branding'.

⁶⁵ Sophie Raworth, in BBC.

⁶⁶ Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 41.

⁶⁷ Browning and Joenniemi, 41.

These changes have been driven in part by the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism and facilitated by the ‘space-time distancing’ of modernity. Of course, these are *relative* changes in emphasis rather than a categorical break with the past. The result of the entrenchment of market logics and structures is neither the diminution of state power, nor the decline of the nation-state as the dominant mode of subjectivity in world politics, so much as a reconfiguration of its power: as Karl Polanyi once put it ‘[l]aissez-faire was planned’.⁶⁸ Moreover, because state subjectivities are modelled on, and *mutually constitutive of*, the individual citizen subject, changes in state subjectivities not only affect how states relate to one another but have also fundamentally transformed the role that the state plays in the governance of citizens, with profound consequences for the lives of individuals and groups.⁶⁹

While the nation-state persists as the dominant mode of social organisation - one continually brought into being through a series of ‘banal’ or ‘everyday’ practices such as the use of currency and partaking in daily rituals - more overt nationalistic displays are largely confined to ‘national days’: royal weddings and deaths; elections; and as we shall see, Remembrance Days.⁷⁰ Traditional aspects of nationalism continue to provide part of the shared framework for existence; but their partial subordination in late-modernity to the commercial imperatives of the ‘market state’ means that they have assumed a hybrid status which largely delegates answering existential questions to individuals through processes of individualisation and commercialisation. These internally-referential systems influence the ‘everyday’ experiences of subjects, and their profoundly unsettling consequences for the performance of subjectivities have been of considerable interest to OSS scholars. For example, Kinnvall has explored how a capricious global financial system based on mobile capital and precarious employment has generated acute insecurity for many subjects across the globe.⁷¹ The unsettling impact of late modernity on established ways of life, and the apparent reluctance of states to intervene in market forces, can lead to widespread feelings of distress and *powerlessness*.

Scholars have also been increasingly attentive to the pervasive ways in which the industrialisation and mass production of late modernity have disrupted traditional frameworks of meaning and undermined resources for ontological security. Kustermans and Ringmar argue that while the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century is often nostalgically depicted as a period of

⁶⁸ Karl Polanyi, *Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 147.

⁶⁹ Ringmar, ‘Metaphors of Social Order’; Anker, ‘Heroic Identifications’.

⁷⁰ Skey, ‘We Wanna Show “Em Who We Are”’: National Events in England’; John Poulter, ‘ReMembering the Nation: Remembrance Days and the Nation in Ireland’, in *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*, ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 57–72.

⁷¹ Kinnvall, ‘Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security’; Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security*. See also, Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

political and entrepreneurial dynamism, and technological and social progress, such accounts are fundamentally at odds with broader experiences of ‘dislocation and loss’: ‘to many people the pace of change was simply too quick. The very [parameters] of social life were shifting and the traditions of the past no longer provided guidance for the future.’⁷² This description is intelligible in terms of ontological (in)security in late modernity, emphasising that the disorientation generated by the sheer pace of industrial change was compounded by the relativization of religious frameworks in the context of ascendant enlightenment thought. As they put it:

according to Nietzsche’s pronouncement in 1882, God just died. If there was no God, everything would surely be permitted? Yet this new permissiveness was not experienced as a new sense of freedom but often instead as a new kind of meaninglessness.⁷³

Thus, for many, the novel modes of subjectivity generated by industrialisation were deeply unsettling and alienating. Not only did industrialisation generate feelings of engulfment and powerlessness in the face of external social forces, but it also unleashed feelings of existential *boredom*.

While ‘boredom’ carries flippant connotations of ‘long meetings, lectures, or waits in train stations’, Kustermans and Ringmar argue that existential boredom refers to a more fundamental ‘experience of meaningless agency’ that is distinguishable from powerlessness: ‘It is not so much the inability to get things done, or the lack of efficient causal agency, as the experience that what one gets done is without much import.’⁷⁴ In ontological security terminology, a bored person knows what they are doing but lacks a satisfactory answer of what existential purpose the task serves. Boredom is also different from anomie – a lack of social norms: ‘one can be bored in a society replete with social norms, especially when those norms are seen as lacking in transcendental meaning’.⁷⁵ While there *are* social norms in late modernity, then, even subjects with *stable* identities and a sense of agency may still perceive their agency to be meaningless.⁷⁶

Finally, as seen in Chapter 2, while emotions are experienced by individuals, they are fundamentally social in character. Accordingly, Kustermans and Ringmar argue that existential boredom is not simply experienced by individuals but is politically significant when these experiences are shared by large numbers of people and ‘aggregate into a ‘public mood’.⁷⁷ Following Rahn et al. they define public moods as ‘diffuse affective states, having distinct positive and negative components, that citizens experience because of their membership in a particular

⁷² Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1781–82.

⁷³ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1782.

⁷⁴ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1778.

⁷⁵ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1778.

⁷⁶ And whereas boredom has always existed - ‘previous societies had their bored noblemen and courtiers’ – it has been ‘universalised and democratised’ in late modernity: a period which, unlike its predecessors, is constitutive of subjects who ‘expect to be engaged and entertained.’ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1776.

⁷⁷ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1779.

community'.⁷⁸ What distinguishes public moods from individual dispositions is that they are 'socially and historically situated [...] facts about society rather than about individuals; moods are brought on by cultural triggers.' Moreover, much like the concept of anxiety, moods do not have a referent object: 'mood is not about something in particular but instead it predisposes us to see the world in a certain fashion and to relate to it in a certain way.'⁷⁹ And while not a condition shared by all, they are typically generated by structural aspects of social life, making 'boredom [...] a transnational mood.'⁸⁰

Concerns around existential boredom have been prominent in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. As Browning and Joenniemi have argued, 'the globalization of liberal capitalism has also played into this, at least insofar as liberal capitalist commodification is experienced as fundamentally uninspiring.'⁸¹ But it can also be observed in employment trends. The late modern state increasingly outsources key existential questions through neoliberal governmentality to the 'entrepreneurial self'; and a key domain in which the liberal individual is supposed to orient their personal brand is the job market. However, there has been a trend in late-modern economies towards the creation of increasingly dull and apparently meaningless employment, described by David Graeber as 'bullshit jobs'.⁸² A 2013 survey found that, of the 12,000 [American] professionals surveyed, 'half said they felt their job had no "meaning and significance," and an equal number were unable to relate to their company's mission'. This trend has not been isolated to the United States alone: 'A recent poll among Brits revealed that as many as 37% think they have a job that is utterly useless.'⁸³ Of course, meaningless employment does not necessarily entail meaningless existence. However, given the centrality of employment to late modern subjectivity, having a job that one believes is pointless can exacerbate such feelings.

Another consequence of capitalism, therefore, is that individuals can feel like marginal players in other people's entrepreneurial endeavours, thereby generating feelings of existential boredom. Remarking on the discrepancy between progressive narratives of modernity as agentic and the altogether more common 'unofficial story' replete with experiences of boredom and powerlessness, Kustermans and Ringmar note: "[t]he world may be man-made', the unofficial story tells us, 'but not by people like us'.⁸⁴ All of this has been brought into sharp relief, of course, by the gathering pace of automation across the global economy, heralding an uncertain future for

⁷⁸ Rahn et al. quoted in Kustermans and Ringmar, 1779; Wendy M. Rahn, Brian Kroeger, and Cynthia M. Kite, 'A Framework for the Study of Public Mood', *Political Psychology* 17, no. 1 (1996): 31–32.

⁷⁹ Ringmar 15; see also N. Carroll, 'Art and Mood: Preliminary Notes and Conjectures', *The Monist* 86, no. 4 (2003), pp.521–555.

⁸⁰ Kustermans and Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom, and War', 1779.

⁸¹ Browning and Joenniemi, 'Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity', 44.

⁸² David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

⁸³ Rutger Bregman, 'A Growing Number of People Think Their Job Is Useless. Time to Rethink the Meaning of Work', World Economic Forum, accessed 30 January 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/04/why-its-time-to-rethink-the-meaning-of-work/>.

⁸⁴ Kustermans and Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom, and War', 1777.

human beings in a world in which they may become economically superfluous. This concern is pressing because subjects have been encouraged to view the worthiness of their identities largely through the lens of their economic productivity or ‘workism’; but what these surveys point to is that work is *already* dull and meaningless for many.⁸⁵ It is not simply that neo-liberal capitalism leads to the material destabilising of existence, then, but that it offers little in the way of guidance on how to live meaningful lives. Boredom remains the ‘fundamental mood’ of our age.⁸⁶

At this point, it is reasonable to ask: what is the significance of boredom and meaninglessness for international politics? As we have seen, OSS scholars have argued that late modernity’s discontents are paradoxically generative of a return to more traditional modes of subjectivity as individuals and collectives turn to ‘authenticated practice’ for existential guidance. These might include religion and other pastimes which seemingly hark back to simpler times and provide a renewed sense of significant temporal and spatial situation.⁸⁷ Significantly, individuals and collectives often turn back to the *nation-state* – particularly nostalgic visions of national identity based on conservative notions of authority and hierarchy. An intersubjectively idealized past and one’s subjective experience come to play key roles in efforts to rearticulate a special connection to the community. And the exclusivity of identities is often striven for through the ‘securitization of subjectivity’ – the search for one stable narrative – frequently excluding internal and external ‘Others’.⁸⁸ Anxieties matter, then, not only because they cause discomfort, but because that discomfort frequently leads to *action*. And scholars of world politics should care about existential boredom because it frequently moves subjects to ‘dream dreams of transgression’; of ‘escap[ing] from our present condition’.⁸⁹ While public moods such as boredom are not neatly causal:

they may explain why other factors – ‘the real causes’ – turned out to be efficacious. A public mood provides a disposition which, while never determining an outcome, nevertheless determines the range within which likely outcomes will fall.⁹⁰

As such, ‘[p]ublic moods are real and they make a difference to political outcomes’, being similar to ‘affective atmospheres’ in providing the preconditions for a narrative to resonate.⁹¹ Moreover, moods such as boredom are enabling, being conducive and malleable to political projects around

⁸⁵ Derek Thompson, ‘Workism Is Making Americans Miserable’, *The Atlantic*, 24 February 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>.

⁸⁶ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1776.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Kinnvall, ‘Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security’.

⁸⁸ Kinnvall, 763.

⁸⁹ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1782–83.

⁹⁰ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1790.

⁹¹ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1790; See, for example, Jack Holland and Ty Solomon, ‘Affect Is What States Make of It: Articulating Everyday Experiences of 9/11’, *Critical Studies on Security* 2, no. 3 (2014): 262–77.

the nation-state promising to deliver transcendence and transgression – sometimes taking deeply regressive forms.

Boredom and (Vicarious) Militarism

Importantly for this thesis, boredom has frequently been channelled through impulses to militarism. This can be seen, for example, in Vagts' account of the origins of mass (mainly European) militarism in the eighteenth century when 'the old rationalism of the enlightenment' was being supplanted by nostalgic appeals to a romanticised past – not least classical civilization and the Crusades of the Middle Ages - aimed at obfuscating the 'drab realities of war' and reinvigorating the nation-state with a mythical and heroic past.⁹² While the restoration of the military to 'a high social position and moral value' was partly a reactionary move instigated by ex-soldiers disillusioned by civilian disdain for soldiers, it also played into broader narratives around cultural decline and the need for moral restoration in the face of a modernity, increasingly experienced as dissatisfying.⁹³ As Vagts notes, the most vocal proponents of romantic militarism were 'the Tory, or conservative forces, [who] strove to re-erect what Edmund Burke called the state of the "knights and saints," and sought mass support through its romantic appeals.'⁹⁴ Notably, such appeals were frequently amplified by 'bourgeois civilian writers', many of whom had never experienced war first-hand but engaged with it on a vicarious level, not least through calling on their children's generation to fight.⁹⁵

Although mass public sentiment towards militaries was not homogenous, appeals to romanticized militarised nationalism were especially resonant with those 'who had learned to feel the horrors and uncertainties of industrialization', and who, having sought meaning and belonging in the membership of 'societies, clubs, and party organizations', now turned to militaries as 'the embodiment of certain, usually conservative, desires': 'the desire for survival [...]; the desire for discipline and command, for employs not immediately concerned with material profit, and the corresponding forms of organization – a hierarchy, coupled with the desire for comradeship.'⁹⁶ The ceremonial functions of militaries, Vagts notes, became particularly important 'in a world [becoming] increasingly secularized'.⁹⁷ Desires for militarism were not solely focused on military institutions but manifested in the broader militarization of societies, with militarism providing inspiration for everything from the pageantry of religious and non-religious institutions alike to

⁹² Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, 17–18.

⁹³ Vagts, 18, 20.

⁹⁴ Vagts, 17.

⁹⁵ Indeed, Vagts - himself a captain in the German military during the First World War - is especially scathing of Thiers, describing him as 'the pint-sized bourgeois who had never seen military service.' But he also criticises works of military history which 'have been written with polemical purpose for the justification of individuals or armies and with small regard for socially relevant facts.' Vagts, 21, 23.

⁹⁶ Vagts, 22.

⁹⁷ Vagts, 21.

the organizational models of industrial capitalism.⁹⁸ These examples usefully illustrate the diversity of methods through which militaristic desires could be satisfied. While some would opt for the first-hand experience of military life with its (ostensible) structure, adventure, and sense of belonging, for many more, vicariously identifying with militarism – not only the armed forces, but militarized social institutions more broadly - became a way of re-engaging with a revitalized nation.

While the turn to militarism often focused on the ceremonial, however, for Kustermans and Ringmar, the combination of modern boredom and the perceived authenticity of heroic warfare provided the international preconditions in which calls for war could resonate in the years preceding the First World War.⁹⁹ The loss of traditional ontological frameworks and the ascendance of social structures both promising and frustrating the agency of liberal individuals led subjects – enabled by rising literacy rates and the proliferation of print media depicting romantic military exploits - to dream of militarized transgression.¹⁰⁰ These vicarious experiences, they argue, eventually paved the way for enthusiastic enlistment during the war. Such sentiments were especially common among young people who often perceived war as offering ‘everything the nineteenth century, in its drawn-out tedium, had denied them. War was going to [...] restore a sense of agency to their limbs and lives.’¹⁰¹ Again, while not a ‘direct cause’, boredom played an important ‘permissive’ role, with war portrayed ‘as a possible solution to a deep-seated [...] social malaise.’ Accordingly, unlike the vicarious experiences enabled by militarised literature offering temporary transgression from individual boredom, desires underpinning participation in the national war effort demonstrated significant vicarious identification with the collective, visible in the hope that ‘not only the bored agent, but also society as such, [would] transcend themselves.’¹⁰²

Of course, not everyone was enthusiastic about the war. Much recent historiographical work has debunked myths of a pervasive ‘spirit of 1914’ characterized by war enthusiasm.¹⁰³ Indeed, Kustermans and Ringmar’s later work clarifies that enthusiasm for the war was mainly limited to ‘intellectuals, artists, city-dwellers and university students’,¹⁰⁴ for whom the prospect of war

⁹⁸ Vagts, 21.

⁹⁹ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’.

¹⁰⁰ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1777, 1783.

¹⁰¹ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1785.

¹⁰² Kustermans and Ringmar, 1778.

¹⁰³ Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany*, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Erik Ringmar, “‘The Spirit of 1914’: A Redefinition and a Defence”, *War in History* 25, no. 1 (2018): 47; Similarly, Kustermans ascribes such sentiments to ‘not “the young” in toto but a particular segment of the young [...] [who] were mainly young city-dwellers, university students and intellectuals.’ Jorg Kustermans, ‘Boredom and Violence’, in *Boredom Studies Reader*, ed. Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 173.

represented ‘a heroic, manly enterprise, which would take them far away from the routines of modern life and provide them with opportunities to assert themselves.’¹⁰⁵ Such myths originated from attempts by conservative war enthusiasts before and at the time of the war’s outbreak to project homogenous collective emotions onto populations whose views were, in reality, considerably more ambivalent and diverse. Kustermans notes that Agathon’s claim that the majority of French youth longed for war was based on a survey of a small elite group of conservative students which attempted to shape broader opinion rather than faithfully representing it.¹⁰⁶ Similar dynamics can be seen in representations of mass public gatherings upon the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. While demonstrations by the war’s enthusiasts seem to have been outnumbered by anti-war marchers and gatherings of the curious, this did not stop government and media from representing them as evidence of broad public support for the war. And despite the diverse motivations behind public gatherings, ‘as reporting imposed a narrative of communal emotion upon public assemblies, intellectuals, leaders, and other advocates of war circulated narratives about the impressive “enthusiasm” Europeans exhibited during August 1914.’¹⁰⁷ This narrative became hegemonic for much of the twentieth century.

That war enthusiasm *per se* was not widespread, however, is arguably less important than the fact that government attempts to invoke nationalist sentiment *did resonate*. Framings of the war in terms of redemptive sacrifice became politically mainstream from an early stage, with even comparatively liberal politicians such as David Lloyd George affirming its redemptive qualities as a salve to social malaise:

the stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation – the high peaks we had forgotten, of Honour, Duty, Patriotism, and clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again; but as long as the men and women of this generation last, they will carry in their hearts the image of those great mountain peaks.¹⁰⁸

Lloyd George demonstrated that it was possible to recognize the war as a ‘scourge’ at the same time as viewing it as an opportunity for moral restoration and for a generation to prove itself worthy of a place in history.¹⁰⁹ Subjects did not necessarily have to be enthusiastic about the war

¹⁰⁵ Ringmar, “‘The Spirit of 1914’”, 45.

¹⁰⁶ Kustermans, ‘Boredom and Violence’, 173–74.

¹⁰⁷ Todd H. Hall and Andrew A. G. Ross, ‘Rethinking Affective Experience and Popular Emotion: World War I and the Construction of Group Emotion in International Relations’, *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1366.

¹⁰⁸ David Lloyd George, quoted in Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998), 149.

¹⁰⁹ As King notes, ‘It became a commonplace that the war was having a positive moral impact through the opportunity it provided to rise above the mundane concerns of peacetime life, and through the suffering which it inflicted (though by no means everyone agreed). Proponents of this view believed that

itself in order to experience it as deliverance from boredom through a renewed sense of national identity, collective belonging and personal purpose – not least amidst an ‘ecstasy of community’¹¹⁰ and significant vicarious ‘we’ feeling. While the war’s violence provided cathartic transcendence for only a small number of combatants, for those on the ‘home front’ it was this broader range of vicarious experiences – e.g. the excitement of being involved in world-changing events, the sense of belonging - that provided for a sense of agentic renewal.¹¹¹ What predisposed people to engage with the war was not so much an appetite for violence but culturally diffuse militarized and masculinised ontologies. Moreover, while some have argued that the romanticism contained within these transgressive fantasies of heroism were soon largely dispelled by combatants’ experiences of total war,¹¹² sacrificial logics not only endured but intensified over the course of the war, sustaining the violence by justifying further sacrifice as a way of ensuring that the dead did not die in vain, as Watson and Porter have demonstrated.¹¹³

If the war’s outcome was perceived by many subjects within the warring nations as socially reinvigorating in the short-term, it could not provide permanent deliverance from boredom. As Kustermans and Ringmar put it, ‘There was still no new sense of direction and no restoration of agency.’ Rather, life had largely returned to the patterns that had preceded the war, only this time compounded by economic depression. In this context, ‘little by little, the horrors of the Great War were ignored and warfare once again came to be romanticised.’¹¹⁴ Recollections of the war, focusing less on its traumatic aspects and more on ‘the selfless sacrifices of fellow soldiers and their intense sense of camaraderie’, were once again highly-resonant.¹¹⁵ And as Ross and Hall note, representations of the ‘spirit of 1914’ as a moment of national unity and resolve would be reified and deployed by governments as the existential standard against which successive generations were measured.¹¹⁶

This rehabilitation of war matters precisely because the same conditions that proved so conducive to the First World War would contribute to the Second. If the experience of the ‘victors’ was of ennui, the post-war experience for the defeated was a doubly bitter pill to swallow, with the signing of the armistice signifying betrayal of the dead, national humiliation and a return to pre-

there was a spiritually constructive side to the war which would restore the nation or the world to a state of moral health.’ King, 149.

¹¹⁰ Roland Stromberg, quoted in Ringmar, “‘The Spirit of 1914’”, 44 (footnote 84).

¹¹¹ The diversity of responses to the war is notably consistent with the broad definition of militarism advanced in Chapter 1.

¹¹² For Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘[m]odern trench warfare was not heroic [...] it restored no sense of agency’ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1786.

¹¹³ Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, ‘Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of Sacrifice in the First World War’, *Historical Research* 83, no. 219 (2010): 146–64.

¹¹⁴ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1786–87.

¹¹⁵ Kustermans and Ringmar, 1787–88.

¹¹⁶ Hall and Ross, ‘Rethinking Affective Experience and Popular Emotion’, 1368.

war boredom. Indeed, for one German veteran of the First World War, discontent with the capitalist *status quo ante* was almost as preoccupying as the loss of the war itself:

As a young scamp in my wild years, nothing had so grieved me as having been born at a time which obviously erected its Halls of Fame only to shopkeepers and government officials. The waves of historic events seemed to have grown so smooth that the future really seemed to belong only to the “peaceful contest of the nations” ... This development seemed not only to endure but was expected in time (as universally recommended) to remodel the whole world into one big department store. ... Why couldn't I have been born a hundred years earlier?¹¹⁷

The veteran in question was Adolf Hitler, who had found his experience as a frontline soldier during the war to be the most compelling of his life and an *authentic* relief from the stultifying conditions of pre-war Europe. Indeed, these experiences would inform his subsequent political efforts to ‘replicate the ethos of the trenches on a national [and] a pan-European, level.’¹¹⁸ What made such a project possible was the pervasiveness of anxieties around meaninglessness, in conjunction with feelings of (mainly economic) powerlessness, constituting a widely-shared and febrile public mood – one highly susceptible to the rise of illiberal national sentiments. In this context, Nazism’s central discursive project of ‘reconcil[ing] nostalgia for the era preceding the supposed fall of 1789 with a radical leap forward, meant to transcend the ‘decadence’ of modernity’, could resonate.¹¹⁹ Despite the First World War’s catastrophic human cost and failure to deliver European societies from feelings of social malaise, selective processes of remembrance and forgetting, coupled with the fantasmatic discourses of various nationalisms rapidly worked to rehabilitate war’s allure as a salve for modernity society once again.

War and Militarism in the 21st Century

The 21st Century has, of course, seen profound transformations of warfare – not least, moves away from conscription towards all-volunteer forces, and the replacement of total war with asymmetric and technological ‘spectator-sport’ warfare.¹²⁰ Despite these differences, perceptions of war and militarism as uniquely authentic and meaningful remain hegemonic tropes within many societies. Certainly this is how the experience of modern war continues to be typically ‘sold’ through recruitment campaigns problematically presenting organized violence as providing unique opportunities for self-actualization.¹²¹ More pertinently for this thesis, however, war is also

¹¹⁷ Adolf Hitler, quoted in Ishay Landa, ‘The Magic of the Extreme: On Fascism, Modernity, and Capitalism’, *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 33, no. 1 (2019): 55.

¹¹⁸ Kustermans and Ringmar, ‘Modernity, Boredom, and War’, 1788.

¹¹⁹ Adolf Hitler, quoted in, Landa, ‘The Magic of the Extreme’, 52.

¹²⁰ Colin McInnes, *Spectator-Sport War: The West and Contemporary Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

¹²¹ Strand and Berndtsson, ‘Recruiting the “Enterprising Soldier”’; For analysis of recent British military recruitment campaigns, see Rhianna Louise and Emma Sangster, ‘Selling the Military - A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Recruitment Marketing in the UK’ (London: ForcesWatch and Medact, 2019),

sold in such terms to the broader domestic audiences through mediatized representations, such as the genre of military autobiographies which typically depicts a soldier's escape from a life of boredom into a world of combat adventure. Joining the armed forces as a way of transcending the limited horizons of one's local environment (the 'dead end town') and upbringing is a recurrent leitmotif of the genre.¹²² Autobiographies, as Welland notes, reproduce familiar understandings of war through terms such as 'honour, glory, excitement, the existential test, becoming, manhood, hell.'¹²³ These aspects are consistent with the broader concept of ontological security, providing not only predictability but also moments of feeling whole, alive, and singular, ostensibly unparalleled by peace time experiences. Even as research has demonstrated that boredom is ironically a pervasive feature of many military experiences, then,¹²⁴ hegemonic accounts of war and militarism continue to promise transcendence from the discontents of modernity.

Importantly, such understandings have also continued to be conducive to broader political projects in recent decades. One significant example is American neoconservatism - ascendant during the 1990s' and 2000s' - which warned that liberal societies' prioritisation of individual self-interest - not least through the promotion of 'hedonistic' and 'nihilistic' culture - over broader notions of civic virtue rendered them susceptible to corruption and decadence, as well as 'destructive and debilitating pluralism' with the nation becoming insufficiently meaningful to bind society together.¹²⁵ As a remedy to this, neoconservatives emphasized the importance of restoring civic virtue and the ideals of the American republic through a socially-compelling 'national interest', functioning to reinvigorate and intertwine personal and national virtue.¹²⁶ They also emphasised the universal appeal of American values as ones that all nations ideally should live by. As such, both national virtue and global order required 'a commitment to ideals, to the meaning of the nation in a heroic sense capable of mobilizing individuals to virtuous action' in the public sphere domestically, and foreign policy internationally' - to be pursued through the maintenance of U.S. global hegemony and promotion of 'liberal values'.¹²⁷ However, standing in the way of the triumph of American virtue were (ostensibly) a range of domestic adversaries in the form of

<https://www.medact.org/2019/resources/reports/selling-the-military-a-critical-analysis-of-contemporary-recruitment-marketing/>.

¹²² Rachel Woodward, "'Not for Queen and Country or Any of That Shit...': Reflections on Citizenship and Military Participation in Contemporary British Soldier Narratives', in *War, Citizenship, Territory*, ed. Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 363-84.

¹²³ Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Reprint edition (PublicAffairs, 2014), 3; Welland, 'Joy and War', 439; On the broader features of the military autobiography genre, see Rachel Woodward and K. Neil Jenkins, *Bringing War to Book: Writing and Producing the Military Memoir* (Springer, 2018).

¹²⁴ Victoria M. Basham, 'Waiting for War: Soldiering, Temporality and the Gendered Politics of Boredom and Joy in Military Spaces', in *Emotions, Politics and War*, ed. Linda Åhäll and Thomas Gregory, 1st ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 128-40.

¹²⁵ Michael C. Williams, 'What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005): 313.

¹²⁶ Williams, 309-10.

¹²⁷ Williams, 317.

Liberal and Realist elites promoting decadence who are discursively pitted by neoconservatives against ordinary Americans in a ‘culture war’, and also a range of foreign enemies implacably opposed to U.S. and ‘Western’ civilization. As Williams notes, neoconservatism operates through logics of victimization: ‘[j]ust as ‘average’ Americans are victimized by a culture that systematically misunderstands them and attacks their lifestyle and values, so too America is victimized by a world that is irrationally, decadently, or perfidiously hostile towards it.’¹²⁸ Of course, the identification of foreign threats formed the basis for fantasies of American fulfillment, ultimately culminating in the U.S. led War on Terror, with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular prosecuted under the auspices of democracy promotion – enabled by the public mood generated by the September 11th 2001 terror attacks upon New York and Washington D.C. – inspired, ironically, by al Qaeda’s own diagnosis of ‘Western decadence’.¹²⁹

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the neoconservative project that underpinned them, have been the subject of numerous critiques in the past two decades. Some have argued that the ‘War on Terror’ failed on its own terms, with its war-framing setting unrealistic expectations of national victory and regional democratisation. Far from delivering (inter)national security, two decades of conflict have resulted in greater regional insecurity; instead of victory, the ‘War on Terror’ has become, ‘a vague catch-all phrase for a military campaign against moving targets and goalposts, with no end date and no conceivable way to declare victory.’¹³⁰ As Subotic and Steele argue, the ambiguous outcomes of this war – particularly the inability to achieve victory – have generated significant ontological insecurity in the U.S. and elsewhere regarding its sense of agency and viability as a hegemon. Such anxieties have been compounded by the ethically problematic methods used to conduct the war – particularly the use of torture and targeted assassinations using remotely-controlled drones, and the diminution of domestic civil liberties through increased surveillance.¹³¹ These are perceived by critics as having squandered the U.S.’ moral authority as hegemon, jeopardised global order, and betrayed the values and ideals that the war claimed to be advancing, to the point that some neoconservatives have felt compelled to disavow the continuing war as a neoconservative project.¹³² Finally, in a variation on the aforementioned anxieties about technology rendering modern war ‘post-heroic’, military officials have grown concerned about the impact of counterinsurgency upon military masculinities. While some have been skeptical

¹²⁸ Williams 2007, 117

¹²⁹ Jason Burke and Kareem Shaheen, ‘Bin Laden’s Disdain for the West Grew in Shakespeare’s Birthplace, Journal Shows’, *The Guardian*, 1 November 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/01/newly-released-journal-confirms-osama-bin-laden-visited-the-west>.

¹³⁰ Jelena Subotic and Brent J. Steele, ‘Moral Injury in International Relations’, *Journal of Global Security Studies* 3, no. 4 (2018): 387.

¹³¹ Subotic and Steele, ‘Moral Injury in International Relations’.

¹³² See, for example. Francis Fukuyama, ‘The Neoconservative Moment’, *The National Interest*, 1 June 2004, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/the-neoconservative-moment-811>; Francis Fukuyama, ‘After Neoconservatism’, *The New York Times*, 19 February 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/19/magazine/after-neoconservatism.html>.

about the move towards what Kilcullen has described as ‘armed social work’,¹³³ others have expressed dissatisfaction with asymmetric warfare, viewing it as inferior to the ‘great power’ contests of America’s past. One anonymous Department of Defense official stated that ‘real men fight real wars’ – the suggestion being that fighting ‘lesser opponents’ had led to the atrophy and emasculation of American martial prowess.¹³⁴

And yet, even as the war on terror eroded domestic civil liberties and gradually unleashed feelings of ontological insecurity, it is notable that opposition never approached levels sufficient to prompt a change of policy. Indeed, from an early stage, proponents of the War on Terror were able to cultivate significant public support, not least by marshalling vicarious identification with the nation. Anker hints at such dynamics in her study of why U.S. citizens acquiesced to the introduction of distinctly illiberal security and surveillance practices after September 11th, 2001 that they might otherwise have been expected to oppose on grounds of civil liberties and constitutional rights. While some accounts had explained this public acquiescence in terms of propagandistic manipulation or as ‘a desire for security [having] engulfed the desire for freedom during a time of shock and fear’, Anker instead argues that citizens identified with violent performances of state power as a proxy to compensate for their relative feelings of powerlessness and restore a sense of meaningful personal agency. As she explains:

For a “post-9/11 American political subject” – a subject who supported, even relished, intensifications of dramatic and violent state power – *the expression of state action may have seemed to be an extension of one’s very own action*. For political subjects who are shaped by liberal individualism’s heroic expectations of mastery, yet who experience dependence, exploitation, constraint, and fear on a regular basis, the strength demonstrated by bold state actions was a model.¹³⁵

In line with the theoretical framework outlined above, Anker’s argument explains how vicarious identification can lead to entitative ‘omnipotence through interdependence’ which may effectively supersede reservations about violent expressions of power. Even as the War on Terror imperilled lives and liberties across the globe, it crucially provided militarised transgressive catharsis for feelings of powerlessness at home, complementing pervasive revenge sentiments.¹³⁶

On a different level, although the war failed in its stated objectives, perhaps what is most pertinent for this thesis is that, for many (but not all), these wars and the discourses that constituted them

¹³³ David Kilcullen, ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review*, no. May-June (2006): 138.

¹³⁴ Nicholas Schmidle, ‘Trump’s Pentagon Tries to Move on from the War on Terror’, *The New Yorker*, 19 January 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-pentagon-tries-to-move-on-from-the-war-on-terror>; Micah Zenko, ‘America’s Military Is Nostalgic for World Wars’, *Foreign Policy*, 13 March 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/13/americas-military-is-nostalgic-for-great-power-wars/>.

¹³⁵ Anker, ‘Heroic Identifications’ (Emphasis added).

¹³⁶ Mario Gollwitzer et al., ‘Vicarious Revenge and the Death of Osama Bin Laden’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 5 (2014): 604–16.

did lead to a renewal in conservative nationalism addressing concerns around meaninglessness and culture. The anxiety generated by the September 11th 2001 attacks saw a dramatic reinvigoration of militarised patriotism promoted by neoconservatives that had already begun to resonate in the 1990s', culminating in broad (though far from unanimous) public rallying around 'the troops' during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As Kustermans and Ringmar note, for some young Americans raised on media representations of violence and facing limited opportunities in their immediate environment, enlisting in the military represented an opportunity to escape personal boredom through participation in national struggle.¹³⁷ For many more, however, calls to 'support our troops' became the answer to the sense of personal and social malaise, providing opportunities for Americans to vicariously reconnect with nationalism reinvigorated with a renewed sense of civic virtue and moral purpose.¹³⁸ For example, Silvestri argues that the 'surprise homecoming' videos posted to YouTube by U.S. soldiers and their families (and later promoted by the Department of Defense) which became popular over the War on Terror's duration did so because they invited viewers to participate in a 'vicarious sacrifice' by sharing in emotionally-laden experiences and proving their commitment to the national cause through the expression of tears.¹³⁹ Similarly, Clark describes how certain practices associated with 'supporting the troops' invited a sort of 'vicarious sacrifice':

For contemporary US children, flag-frosted cakes and cannon firings, roast marshmallows and graves, came to be linked elementally and unquestioningly to values of flag, nation, sacrifice, and freedom. In the company of their family, and in the unencumbered open air of summertime, children in essence associated their personal liberty (to play and live freely) with a kind of vicarious, sacrificial act: the bodily courage necessary to withstand auditory startle. [...] It is as if children are given a vicarious taste of the courage required by exposure to the sounds of war, which coincides with a sense of liberation and unencumbered action. Kids themselves are living enactments of the ritual's core paradox of sacrifice and liberty.¹⁴⁰

Together, these studies provide snapshots of ways in which publics are encouraged to perform national belonging through vicarious identification with militarism. Notably, the vicarious dynamics of surprise homecomings assumed progressively greater significance in the absence of a definitive outcome in the War on Terror. Silvestri notes that the videos provided temporary distraction from, and a 'cathartic "quick fix"' for, the anxieties generated by morally ambiguous wars.¹⁴¹ And for Steele, reunion videos represent attempts to compensate for anxieties generated

¹³⁷ Kustermans and Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom, and War', 1788–89.

¹³⁸ On the reinvigoration of U.S. militarism over the course of the 'Global War on Terror', see for example, Stahl, 'Why We "Support the Troops"'; Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced By War*, Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹³⁹ Silvestri, 'Surprise Homecomings and Vicarious Sacrifices'.

¹⁴⁰ Cindy Dell Clark, 'Summer, Soldiers, Flags, and Memorials: How US Children Learn Nation-Linked Militarism from Holidays', in *The War of My Generation: Youth Culture and the War on Terror*, ed. David Kieran (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 51–52.

¹⁴¹ Silvestri, 'Surprise Homecomings and Vicarious Sacrifices', 109.

by the U.S.' adoption of 'forever wars' and apparent inability to deliver victory, '[serving] a 'closure' function for US ontological security akin to the ticker-tape or victory parades of the past.¹⁴² Moreover, such videos also lend themselves to populist logics, turning to trusted institutions – e.g. family, military, the home – to re-establish a sense of control and closure in the context of perceived elite failure, even as they expose myriad late modern anxieties.

Contemporary British Militarism

Similar discourses and initiatives promoting public support for 'the troops' are a common feature in the national life of the focus of this thesis, Britain. Beyond consistently high public approval ratings for the armed forces evidenced by opinion polling, one does not have to venture too far to find public displays of such support.¹⁴³ Military charity symbols such as the Royal British Legion 'Poppy' and the Help for Heroes charity bracelet have become almost ubiquitous features of everyday, political, cultural and sporting life. Britons have shown support by undertaking charity bike rides and marathons to raise money for military charities; even corporate culture is getting in on the act, with companies actively encouraging staff to engage in public fundraising spectacles¹⁴⁴ Beyond charity, the public is encouraged to engage with Armed Forces Day events: some travel hundreds of miles to attend events in the official host city, such as military parades and flypasts, billed as 'fun for all the family'; others display bunting in their gardens and host street parties. And once the party is over, they might return home to find salutations to the armed forces in some of Britain's most popular television programmes such as *Top Gear*, *Doctor Who* and *Strictly Come Dancing*.¹⁴⁵

While a child born in the early 2000s' could be forgiven for thinking that these demonstrations of public support are essentially timeless, this is actually not so. Rather, scholars have understood them as products of systematic efforts to boost the public standing and presence of the armed forces as a way of offsetting growing public ambivalence towards the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in which they were engaged.¹⁴⁶ From the nadir of the US-led war in Iraq in 2006, officials began to harbour fears of a Vietnam-style public backlash against soldiers, driving urgent efforts by politicians, and third sector organisations to enshrine the idea of a Military Covenant between the military and the British public. Whatever one's individual misgivings about the wars, Britons were told, now was the time to 'support the troops'. And respond they did. By 2012, the British Social Attitudes survey found that 83% of respondents had a 'high or very high opinion' of those

¹⁴² Steele, 'Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos', 332.

¹⁴³ Dixon, 'Warrior Nation', 26–27.

¹⁴⁴ It is not uncommon to see individuals and groups undertaking sporting challenges within department stores.

¹⁴⁵ Åhäll, 'The Dance of Militarisation'.

¹⁴⁶ Kelly, 'Popular Culture, Sport and the 'Hero'-Fication of British Militarism', 724–25.

returning from the highly unpopular wars.¹⁴⁷ As Gribble et al. noted, the British public separated support for ‘the troops’ from the unpopularity of the conflicts they were engaged in.¹⁴⁸ And while Edmunds has argued that ‘the positive image of the military [...] focuses more on the individual serviceman or woman than on the armed forces as an instrument of national defence and security’, these initiatives were ultimately fairly successful at shielding not only the troops but the institutions of the armed forces from criticism, and in sustaining the war.¹⁴⁹ In this context, criticism of the armed forces has become almost taboo.

What is remarkable about contemporary public support for the armed forces is that it is qualitatively unprecedented. Unlike the United States which has long publicly celebrated participation in the armed forces by focusing on notions of ‘service’ and ‘sacrifice’, McCartney notes that the British armed forces ‘never enjoyed a strong bond of understanding with the public’, due mainly to the declining footprint of smaller professional forces.¹⁵⁰ Thus, while this period saw the revival of ‘the language of patriotic sacrifice and heroism’,¹⁵¹ the fact that Britain does not have a sustained history of effusive support for the armed forces in isolation from the conflicts in which they have been involved raises the question of why such language resonated with the British public to the extent that it did. One answer is that calls to separate the ‘men from the mission’ succeeded on their own terms, with the public recognising the importance of support in the context of the ongoing wars.¹⁵² However, the public’s ability to avoid conflating ‘the troops’ and the wars they were fighting does not explain why calls to support military *institutions* resonated.

Accounting for militarism’s resonance requires considering both the content of calls to vicariously identify with the armed forces and the broader political context in which they were made. By 2006, military officials began to publicly express concern at what they perceived as a growing civil-military gap. The incoming head of the British Army, General Sir Richard Dannatt gave an interview in which he discursively shifted responsibility for Britain’s unpopular wars from the military onto the British government, noting: ‘I hope the British people never forget that our

¹⁴⁷ Rachael Gribble et al., ‘The UK’s Armed Forces: Public Support for the Troops but Not Their Missions?’, in *British Social Attitudes: The 29th Report*, ed. Alison Park et al. (London: NatCen Social Research, 2012), 138, http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/media/13421/bsa29_full_report.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Gribble et al., 152.

¹⁴⁹ it is important to remember that to the extent that there has been public criticism of the legitimacy and conduct of the conflicts in which Britain has been engaged – most visible in the Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq War - it has been predominantly aimed at government and civil servants rather than individual soldiers or the institutions of the armed forces themselves. Edmunds, ‘British Civil–Military Relations and the Problem of Risk’, 279; Dixon, ‘Warrior Nation’, 36; See also Anthony King, ‘The Afghan War and “Postmodern” Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 1–25.

¹⁵⁰ Helen McCartney, ‘The Military Covenant and the Civil–Military Contract in Britain’, *International Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2010): 420; James Burk, ‘The Decline of Mass Armed Forces and Compulsory Military Service’, *Defense Analysis* 8, no. 1 (1992): 45–59.

¹⁵¹ Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country*, 267.

¹⁵² Sarah Ingham and Christopher Dandeker, ‘The Covenant We Must Protect from the Lawyers’, Parliamentary Brief Online, 24 June 2010, <http://www.parliamentarybrief.com/2010/06/the-covenant-we-must-protect-from-the-lawyers>.

soldiers are doing what the Government requires them to do.¹⁵³ At the same time as promoting public sympathy for the armed forces, however, Dannatt portrayed them as the purveyors and guardians of declining national values, stating that '[w]hat I would hate is for the Army to be maintaining a set of values that were not reflected in our society at large: courage, loyalty, integrity, respect for others; these are critical things'.¹⁵⁴ In this way, rather than appealing to a 'rational' contractual calculus, Dannatt's intervention appealed at the level of values and emotions, subtly paving the way for vicarious identification. Similarly, when Colonel Mendonca declared in a *Daily Mail* article in 2007 that '[i]f we continue denigrating our fighting men and women the future [of] Britain is in peril', the asymmetric character of the wars in which Britain was engaged coupled with a relatively benign geopolitical environment meant that he was necessarily referring less to Britain's territorial integrity than its sense of ontological security.¹⁵⁵

This framing of 'support the troops' was particularly significant because such calls were made at a moment of acute anxiety in British society about national values and cohesion. Especially after the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks on London, such anxieties centred on the compatibility of multiculturalism with the cohesiveness of the British community. The willingness of British subjects to visit violence upon their fellow citizens, Croft notes, fuelled concerns that 'homegrown' terrorism was the result of declining identification with the nation, to the extent that 'the sense of Britishness [had] come to be understood not only by the political elite, but also more widely in society, as something in crisis'.¹⁵⁶ As he explains:

The narrative of a collapse of traditional Britishness [...] and the emptiness that has followed is assumed to have contributed to physical insecurity [...] the lack of resources provided to individuals for their ontological security at the national level has led some to look elsewhere for that provision.¹⁵⁷

Such concerns were similar to those advanced by American neoconservatives that the nation had become insufficiently compelling to sustain social cohesion. Such ontological insecurities were soon compounded by the 2007/8 global financial crisis and events in its aftermath which were interpreted as further signals of social malaise. Of course, it saw a precipitous decline in trust in financial institutions, manifesting in public disdain for the perceived avarice of 'bankers' which

¹⁵³ Sir Richard Dannatt, quoted in Sarah Sands, 'Sir Richard Dannatt : A Very Honest General', Mail Online, 12 October 2006, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-410175/Sir-Richard-Dannatt--A-honest-General.html>.

¹⁵⁴ This argument would later crystallise in the notion of a 'military ethos'. Sir Richard Dannatt, quoted in Sands.

¹⁵⁵ Col. Jorge Mendonca, 'If We No Longer Respect Our Fighting Men and Women, the Future of Britain Itself Is in Peril', Mail Online, 3 October 2007, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-485306/If-longer-respect-fighting-men-women-future-Britain-peril.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 177.

¹⁵⁷ Croft, 183.

was portrayed as having cast the nation into turmoil.¹⁵⁸ But the crisis also resulted in greater national sensitivity to broader instances of financial impropriety, with the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal further eroding already low levels of public trust in political institutions.¹⁵⁹ And the years before and after the 2010 general election saw this cast of ‘villains’ expanded, with political and media advocates of ‘economic austerity’ in the context of a global recession apportioning blame for the crisis to ‘benefit scroungers’, ‘illegal immigrants’, and to bored and disengaged youth.¹⁶⁰ As well as identifying the culprits responsible for Britain’s predicament, these discourses advocated a quasi-puritanical moral repurposing through metaphors about the nation needing to ‘live within its means’ and calls from (then) Prime Minister David Cameron for a ‘Big Society’ to restore social ties.¹⁶¹ By 2011, however, such was the decline in social trust and the individualisation of responsibility that the British Social Attitudes survey openly questioned whether the nation possessed sufficient communitarian sentiments to fill such a gap:

The democratic and religious ties that used to bind continue to creak. [...] Less engaged or willing to make sacrifices for the common good during challenging times, the British public perhaps increasingly sees it as the responsibility of the individual to get through. If that’s true, what hope for the Big Society?¹⁶²

Anxieties around a ‘decline of Britishness’ led to significant debate over how to restore the ties that bind. While Prime Minister Gordon Brown had attempted to articulate a ‘new Britishness’ around the foundational moment of the Second World War and the progressive values and institutions that had emerged in its aftermath, this task was complicated on two fronts. Firstly, although there was widespread agreement that Britishness had once been significant and valuable but was now in decline, there was no consensus on what Britishness was at the time or had been in this imagined past.¹⁶³ Secondly, as Croft argues, despite attempts to craft an inclusive Britishness that steered clear of exclusionary dynamics, the rise of ‘home-grown’ terrorism

¹⁵⁸ Lawrence White, ‘British Public Don’t Trust Banks 10 Years after Crisis, Survey Finds’, Reuters, 17 August 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-banks-idUKKBN1L11EL>.

¹⁵⁹ Lucy Lee and Penny Young, ‘Politics’, in *British Social Attitudes: The 30th Report*, ed. Alison Park et al. (London: NatCen Social Research, 2013), 69.

¹⁶⁰ In the case of the latter, Jorg Kustermans noted ‘one observer of the London riots of 2011 stated, when called upon to explain the violent event, that “there is a kind of level of boredom and alienation and just not a commitment to the values that have kept society to some degree, you know cohesive for many years.” My point here is emphatically not that the poor urban youth’s boredom actually explains an event of such complexity as the London riots – or that it adequately explains a process like young Muslims’ violent radicalisation, as has similarly been suggested – but only to show that the association is being established and that these types of narratives typically reproduce the disapproving discourse of boredom.’ Kustermans, ‘Boredom and Violence’, 176.

¹⁶¹ ‘Cameron Calls for Government to “live within Its Means” in Return to Thatcherite Values’, Evening Standard, 19 May 2008, <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/cameron-calls-for-government-to-live-within-its-means-in-return-to-thatcherite-values-6638360.html>; Howard Gibson, ‘Between the State and the Individual: “Big Society” Communitarianism and English Conservative Rhetoric’, *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 40–55.

¹⁶² ‘British Social Attitudes 28’ (London: NatCen Social Research, 2011), xx.

¹⁶³ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 173–75.

somewhat tempered public appetites for inclusivity and diversity, with broader articulations of Britishness being constructed in contradistinction with a discursively constructed and homogenized ‘British Muslim Community’.¹⁶⁴

Against this backdrop, Dannatt and Mendonca’s public calls to ‘support the troops’ *resonated* in the context of pervasive anxieties around the (non-)vitality of British values, providing a serendipitous reference point for the articulation of the ‘new Britishness’. Elusive British values could ostensibly find embodied representation in armed forces personnel who came to be portrayed by many (including Brown himself, and his Prime Ministerial successor) as the ‘Best of British’, often in explicit contradistinction with terrorists, bankers, and the broader range of discursive villains identified above.¹⁶⁵ Over this period, the ‘military ethos’ – itself characterized by a vague list of attributes difficult to distil in any uncontested way – came to stand in for elusive British values, with ‘support the troops’ initiatives promoted as a means for reinforcing national subjectivity - and militarised ontological security - more broadly.¹⁶⁶ At a moment of heightened anxiety about national identity and social cohesion, militarism became a central pillar of ‘muscular liberalism’, promoted as a panacea for addressing myriad social problems - ranging from poor educational discipline and violent radicalisation, to seemingly intractable political stalemates - by reconnecting subjects to a reinvigorated – *remasculinised* - nation.¹⁶⁷

Beyond symbolism, however, these initiatives have also promoted greater public recognition of a more tangible *contribution* made by the armed forces to national life, reminding subjects of their existential debt to those who ostensibly keep them safe. This strategy, as Millar argues, deploys highly coercive subjectifying dynamics which deliberately foment ‘civilian anxiety’ over their existential debt in order to position support for militarism as an obligatory aspect of ‘national citizenship’.¹⁶⁸ Even as this discourse generates anxiety among civilian subjects, however, it offers them opportunities to salve it, and the possibility of climbing the militarised social hierarchy by being recognised as ‘supporting the troops’ (though never supplanting ‘the troops’ themselves), predominantly through familiar modes of ‘conscience capitalism’ including the purchase of

¹⁶⁴ Croft, 198.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Haigh, “Supporting Our Troops”: Ontological (In)Security, British Militarism and the Case of Fusilier Lee Rigby’ (9th Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Giardini-Naxos, Sicily, 2015).

¹⁶⁶ For an overview, see Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’.

¹⁶⁷ For an overview of the use of the military in educational initiatives see Basham, ‘Raising an Army’; Edward Malnick, ‘Government Considers Backing “military Ethos” in More Schools’, *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/04/01/government-considers-backing-military-ethos-schools/>; For an example of a proposal to use the armed forces for counter-radicalisation, see Mark Phillips, ‘Redefining the Military’s Role in Domestic Security’, in *A Question of Security: The British Defence Review in an Age of Austerity*, ed. Michael Codner and Michael Clarke (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2011); For an example of a proposal to use ‘soldier-statesmen’ to resolve Britain’s political stalemates, see Bagehot, ‘Britain’s New Generation of Soldier-Statesmen’, *The Economist*, 30 August 2018, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2018/08/30/britains-new-generation-of-soldier-statesmen>.

¹⁶⁸ Millar, “‘They Need Our Help’”.

militarised commodities and charitable giving to military causes.¹⁶⁹ In combination, civilian anxiety and the practices used to assuage it offer subjects respite from the mundanity of late modernity and anxieties around national subjectivity, by reinscribing everyday civilian life with meaning and promising to bring ‘us’ together again.

But at a time when only a minority of Britons believed that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were enhancing either those countries’ or Britain’s security,¹⁷⁰ claims of a military contribution to security were arguably reliant upon the references to past events in which Britain’s armed forces had ostensibly ensured its survival. Indeed, politicians over the past decade have made a point of referring to the armed forces - ‘*past and present*’.¹⁷¹ The reference point (implicit or explicit) for many such invocations of the past was often the ‘foundational’ experience of contemporary British national identity, WW2, with its hegemonic narration as the ‘the good war’ in which Britain was ‘heroic and stoic’ in the fight for freedom standing in stark contrast to the difficult place of WW1 in the national imaginary.¹⁷² It is no coincidence, therefore, that flypasts by WW2-era aircraft have become a staple at Remembrance and Armed Forces Day events, deployed as a way of reminding citizens of the armed forces role as the nation’s ultimate rescuers at moments of crisis. And a relatively benign and tranquil geopolitical environment towards the end of the 2010s’ – and the consequent dearth of opportunities for the armed forces to demonstrate their role in security provision - saw a turn towards what Ware refers to as ‘disaster militarism’, with the armed forces being deployed increasingly frequently to provide support in the aftermath of terrorist attacks and assistance with flood relief efforts.¹⁷³ By the time the armed forces were deployed to provide event security for the 2012 Olympic Games after private security contractors G4S became unable to fulfil their contractual obligations, the armed forces had been comprehensively restored to the heart of discourses of Britishness - powerfully symbolized by their central role in raising the British flag in the stadium during the Games’ opening ceremony.

¹⁶⁹ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’.

¹⁷⁰ In the case of the Iraq War, by 2007 an ICM poll found that ‘while 5% thought Britain was a safer place since the Iraq war, 55% said they felt the country was less safe’. And by the official end of British combat operations in Afghanistan in October 2014, a BBC poll found that 42 per cent of respondents thought that the war there had made the UK less safe, with only 14 per cent agreeing that it had made the UK safer, and 39 per cent perceiving no real difference. See, respectively, ‘Third “Think Iraq War Was Right”’, BBC News, 20 March 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6467147.stm>; ‘Last British Troops Leave Helmand’, BBC News, 27 October 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-29784195>; For an overview of British public opinion towards these wars, see Dixon, ‘Warrior Nation’, 26–27.

¹⁷¹ Haigh, “‘Supporting Our Troops’: Ontological (In)Security, British Militarism and the Case of Fusilier Lee Rigby’.

¹⁷² Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 132.

¹⁷³ Vron Ware, ‘Disaster Militarism’, openDemocracy, 3 March 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/disaster-militarism/>.

Exploring Vicarious Military Subjectivity

So far, we have explored how vicarious militarism – often referencing an idealized past - has been deployed to rejuvenate nationalism and reinforce emotional attachments to the nation. However, this only captures one aspect of the complex and political nature of vicarious militarism. Although military values and institutions are commonly proffered as solutions to social problems, it is important to remember that military subjectivities are relatively exclusive and subject to hierarchical dynamics. To be recognised as the bearer of authentic military subjectivity is to be conferred with authority to testify as to what war and social life is ‘really like’ drawing on an experiential ‘ground truth’. Moreover, some subjectivities such as the combat soldier are deemed to be more authentic and authoritative than those in behind-the-scenes roles. Accordingly, Tidy argues that the ‘ground truth’ bestowed upon bereaved family members of deceased combat soldiers is especially sought after by anti-war dissent movements because they are recognised through their relation to the dead as authoritative subjects that are difficult for others to dispute - even as drawing upon them ironically reinforces the militarised hierarchies underpinning war.¹⁷⁴

Unsurprisingly, the prestige and authority conferred by military subjectivities can be attractive to entrepreneurial civilian subjects seeking to establish distinctive claims to belonging. However, the exclusivity of such subjectivities – which of course makes them desirable in the first place - imposes limits on the ability of civilian subjects to achieve desired military subjectivity without joining the armed forces themselves. Indeed, militarism is notably sustained by subjectivating dynamics positioning civilians as hierarchically inferior to members of the armed forces. The maintenance of such hierarchies necessitates that civilians demonstrate their citizenship through ‘deference’ and support for those who fight on their behalf.¹⁷⁵ These dynamics, Millar argues, stimulate gendered ‘civilian anxieties’ around the good masculine subject, which motivate subjects to demonstrate their loyalties and ‘always already’ willingness to participate in national sacrifice.¹⁷⁶ While activating anxieties, however, militarist discourses simultaneously offer subjects a way to assuage them through socially-sanctioned practices such as charitable giving that affirm national hierarchies. These can also take forms pertinent to vicarious identification such as the consumption of ‘military homecoming’ videos.¹⁷⁷

Although these activities partially keep anxiety at bay by demonstrating one’s commitment to the nation, arguably they do little to confer military subjectivity upon civilians, instead reinforcing categories of military ‘others’ and civilian ‘supporters’. In the remainder of this thesis, however, I will argue that some civilians now seek – and are encouraged – to move beyond support by

¹⁷⁴ Tidy, ‘The Gender Politics of “Ground Truth” in the Military Dissent Movement’, 106.

¹⁷⁵ Kelly, ‘Popular Culture, Sport and the ‘Hero’-Fication of British Militarism’.

¹⁷⁶ Millar, ‘What Do We Do Now? Examining Civilian Masculinity/ies in Contemporary Liberal Civil-Military Relations’.

¹⁷⁷ Silvestri, ‘Surprise Homecomings and Vicarious Sacrifices’.

articulating claims to authentic military subjectivity by vicariously identifying with ancestral or personal military connections. The total wars of the twentieth century are particularly important because their pervasiveness means that subjects living in contemporary Britain are more likely to have ancestral connections with the nation's military exploits than with modern armed forces. And as we have seen, the experiences of the two World Wars are also important because of their intersubjective and intertextual resonance, still constituting a key cultural 'reference point'.¹⁷⁸ As such, past wars are seen to matter in ways different to modern ones and confer different social capital, with the First and Second World Wars frequently regarded as the ultimate conflicts and generating particularly exclusive subjectivities – e.g. 'the greatest generation'/'the few' – in a way that modern conflicts simply do not live up to. Building on the observation that militarised subjectivities are tied to particular kinds of war and combat, a second contribution of this thesis is in arguing that military masculine hierarchies operate not only in the present, but across time. Authenticity may not simply depend on whether someone is in a combat role or not, but on which war they fought in with experience of WW2 conceivably conferring more social capital than, for example, service in Britain's less popular conflicts.

The thesis advances existing scholarship on vicarious identification at the societal level by moving beyond the level of fictive kinship to take seriously the ontological security resources provided by more conventional kinship, which remain underexplored by IR.¹⁷⁹ Vicarious militarized subjectivities, I argue, not only serve self-identity purposes, but also frequently confer social recognition in the form of 'epistemic rights' upon their bearers as authoritative voices about war. However, given the exclusivity of military subjectivities, I also explore the dynamics of political contestation over such claims, and the basis on which they are accepted or rejected by others.

To develop this understanding, the thesis explores the politics of vicarious military subjectivity by predominantly focusing on practices of British war commemoration between 2014-18, though including contextual reflections from the preceding decade. This immediately raises two questions: why war commemoration; and why this period? The answer to the first follows on from the insights gleaned by the previous discussion concerning the importance of Britain's past wars as a reference point for contemporary militarism and its ambivalent consequences. The contention of the thesis is that the broader footprint of these wars raises the chances of ancestral military connections in a way that makes the past a tempting resource for those seeking to claim authentic national belonging and a modicum of military subjectivity by way of vicarious connections. As for the second question, 2014-18 is a particularly pertinent period for this study because war commemoration was at the forefront of public awareness in the context of a four-year programme of commemorations marking the centenary of the First World War – including

¹⁷⁸ Martin Shaw, 'Still the Key Reference Point: The Second World War, the International System and Contemporary Warfare', *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 3 (2015): 285–89.

¹⁷⁹ Haugevik and Neumann, *Kinship in International Relations*.

numerous initiatives promoting vicarious military subjectivity with ancestral participants in the war. As explored in the next chapter, however, unlike WW2, culturally diffuse British associations of WW1 with futility and the victimhood of its participants meant that it was not inevitable that the centenary would bolster vicarious subjectivities affirming the war's worthiness. In this way, Britain's past is seemingly a mixed bag as a resource for ontological security: but for systematic efforts to rehabilitate the war's image, the centenary could so easily have been the source of anxiety rather than vicarious pride.

The temporal framing of the centenary commemorations is also useful because they intersected with a period of relative anxiety about British national identity. This anxiety has continued to be expressed in domestic debates about the vitality of 'Britishness' as a kind of national character; but it has also manifested in broader debates about Britain as an entitative actor in a world of other nation-states and non-state actors.¹⁸⁰ Notably, 2014 marked the ambivalent conclusion of Britain's war in Afghanistan and the inauguration of a period of contraction for the armed forces amid ongoing fiscal austerity and continued political reluctance to commit to risky and unpopular ground wars, leading some commentators to lament the decline of British military power – often without acknowledging its very recent failures.¹⁸¹ This period has even seen the continued viability of the United Kingdom called into question. Hay and Payne have described the 2014 referendum on Scottish Independence and the 2016 referendum on British withdrawal from the European Union as constituting a 'Brexistential crisis', with a decision to leave the EU likely to lead to calls for a second referendum on Scottish independence in the aftermath of the 2014 'No' vote, and questions over the status of Northern Ireland's shared border with the Republic of Ireland.¹⁸² Thus, at a moment of profound ontological insecurity around British militarism and identity, Britain was focusing on an aspect of its military past which was deeply divisive and about which many were equally ambivalent.

While both referenda were contested over competing visions of Britain's place in the world vis-à-vis significant others (e.g. the European Union and the United States - especially after the 2016 election of US President Donald Trump), they have also given more mainstream expression to longstanding 'domestic' anxieties about self-articulation and thrust them to the forefront of British domestic politics. A particularly noteworthy example has been the increasingly high-profile concern over what has become known as 'political correctness'. A common trope in many 'Western' nations over the past three decades to pejoratively describe changing social norms around permissible behaviour and language primarily relating to gender and race, the concept has

¹⁸⁰ Oliver Daddow, 'GlobalBritain™: The Discursive Construction of Britain's Post-Brexit World Role', *Global Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2019): 10.

¹⁸¹ Patrick Porter, *Blunder: Britain's War in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 220.

¹⁸² Colin Hay and Anthony Payne, 'The "Brexistential" Crisis to Come?', *SPEERI* (blog), 5 May 2015, <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2015/05/06/brexistential-crisis-come/>.

become a leitmotif in Britain deployed at different times – including the aforementioned period of crisis since 2006 - to express different anxieties.¹⁸³ In its more mundane iterations, it has often been accompanied by a concern with society becoming overzealous in seeking to protect citizens from everyday risks through the development of an ‘health and safety’ culture as a way of mitigating a perceived ‘compensation culture’.¹⁸⁴ What discourses of ‘political correctness’ and ‘health and safety gone mad’ have in common is the idea of emasculated/constrained agency that ostensibly runs contrary to the promise of liberal individualism and sovereignty.¹⁸⁵

Concerns around constrained agency have been expressed frequently over the ‘War on Terror’, taking various forms. As Croft, for example, argues, ‘political correctness’ was frequently described by many as having gone too far in light of the escalating threat of terrorism, with it often being implied that ‘PC’ culture had led paralysed the nation’s ability to defend itself.¹⁸⁶ Beyond such fears, print and social media have frequently been outlets for expressions of anxieties about the UK becoming a ‘Muslim country’, perhaps most commonly seen in – almost always false - stories alleging the curtailing of traditions around Christmas.¹⁸⁷ Anxieties over political correctness also featured in early conservative press coverage of the commemorations of the First World War centenary, with commentators such as Boris Johnson expressing concerns that Britain might not sufficiently commemorate the war for reasons of ‘political correctness’ – primarily for fear of offending Germans.¹⁸⁸ However, the theme of political correctness has been further foregrounded in British culture by the Brexit referendum. The ‘Leave’ campaigns, for example, talked in terms of cutting Brussels’ ‘red tape’ and ‘taking back control’ – particularly of law-making and immigration policy.¹⁸⁹ The campaigns drew upon decades of public (mis)conceptions about the undemocratic imposition of EU rules and regulations at the expense of British sovereignty. But it was also visible in the rhetoric of key members of the Leave campaigns such as Boris

¹⁸³ Anna Mikhailova, ‘Political Correctness Has Gone Too Far and “Exceeds Common Sense”, Three Quarters of Britons Say’, *The Telegraph*, 23 August 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/08/23/political-correctness-has-gone-far-exceeds-common-sense-three/>.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, ‘20 Things Banned by “mad” Health and Safety Rules, from Dodgems to Doormats’, *Telegraph.co.uk*, 26 May 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/20-things-banned-by-mad-health-and-safety-rules-from-dodgems-to/>.

¹⁸⁵ Anker, *Longing for Sovereignty*.

¹⁸⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 187.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Was Christmas Tree Removed to Avoid Muslim Offence?’, BBC News, 20 December 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42425627>.

¹⁸⁸ Boris Johnson, ‘Germany Started the Great War, but the Left Can’t Bear to Say so’, *The Telegraph*, 6 January 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10552336/Germany-started-the-Great-War-but-the-Left-cant-bear-to-say-so.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Gordon Rayner and Christopher Hope, ‘Cut the EU Red Tape Choking Britain after Brexit to Set the Country Free from the Shackles of Brussels’, *The Telegraph*, 28 March 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/27/cut-eu-red-tape-choking-britain-brexit-set-country-free-shackles/>; ‘Why Vote Leave’, Vote Leave, accessed 19 August 2020, http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html.

Johnson and Nigel Farage whose popularity was attributed by voters to their apparent authenticity to ‘tell it like it is’ – a direct rebuke to ‘the PC brigade’.¹⁹⁰

Such concerns have found renewed expression in the context of profound social change - one which has seen greater reflexivity about the ways in which certain structural social biases – for example, around gender, sexuality, race, disability, and class – are linked to negative lived experiences of trauma and discrimination. In addition to a greater awareness of trauma, this has led to the emergence of movements situated around specific identity characteristics - e.g. LGBTQ rights, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo – aimed at highlighting particular lived experiences and striving for social justice.¹⁹¹ This ‘identity politics’ has also seen greater sensitivity around vicarious identification with such subjectivities, particularly to the extent that such appropriations are seen to diminish the limited social currency of those seeking restorative justice.¹⁹² As in the Dolezal case, those perceived to be outside the identity group in question have increasingly been urged to desist from opining about or claiming to understand embodied experiences that their corporeal form does not allow. While many have embraced these trends positively, for some critics of these social movements, the rapid change in the currency conferred by their lived experiences has been a cause for consternation. The platforming of the lived experiences of non-white subjects and the social capital with which they have been conferred have been perceived by some as challenging the hegemony and social capital of white heteronormative identity.¹⁹³ In the language of this thesis, ‘identity politics’ is seen by some as undermining the gendered and racialised symbolic order on which they depend for their sense of ontological security.

In this context, it is notable that militarism has come to be viewed by such critics as the last bastion free from ‘political correctness’, where martial institutional imperatives trump equal opportunities agendas – despite the fact that the armed forces have actually been anxious to move

¹⁹⁰ Adam Bienkov, ‘Channel Four Allegations Reveal a Darker Side to Boris Johnson’, politics.co.uk, 20 November 2014, <http://www.politics.co.uk/blogs/2014/11/20/channel-four-allegations-reveal-a-darker-side-to-boris-johns>.

¹⁹¹ On the history of each of these movements, see respectively Brian Thompson, ‘The History Of Pride Month And What It Can Teach Us About Moving Forward Today’, Forbes, 1 June 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianthompson1/2020/06/01/the-history-of-pride-month-and-what-it-can-teach-us-about-moving-forward-today/>; Aleem Maqbool, ‘Black Lives Matter: From Social Media Post to Global Movement’, BBC News, 10 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53273381>; Anna North, ‘7 Positive Changes That Have Come from the #MeToo Movement’, Vox, 4 October 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/4/20852639/me-too-movement-sexual-harassment-law-2019>.

¹⁹² The term ‘Identity Politics’, as Garza notes, ‘was first coined by Black feminist Barbara Smith and the Combahee River Collective in 1974. Identity politics originated from the need to reshape movements that had until then prioritized the monotony of sameness over the strategic value of difference.’ Alicia Garza, ‘Identity Politics: Friend or Foe?’, Othering & Belonging Institute, 24 September 2019, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/identity-politics-friend-or-foe>.

¹⁹³ This is most clearly seen in the use of the phrase ‘All Lives Matter’ in response to the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, which is seen to belittle the experiences of racial discrimination experienced by people of colour. Emily Lawford, ‘Why Is Saying “all Lives Matter” so Controversial?’, Evening Standard, 1 June 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/why-shouldnt-say-all-lives-matter-a4456686.html>.

with these social trends rather than against them.¹⁹⁴ However, it does raise the possibility that vicarious military subjectivity might be seen by some - but not all - as a way to rearticulate exclusive racially-coded subjectivities in a context where such experiences are seen to confer powerful social capital.

Research Methodology

Having established the research puzzle and timeframe for analysis, it is necessary to outline the methodological approach employed and how the chosen methods fit with the ontology and aims of the thesis. The theoretical framework developed in the previous chapters draws from critical constructivist and poststructuralist scholarship in Critical Military Studies, Ontological Security Studies, and social psychological work on vicarious identity. Each of these literatures is notably focused on (auto)biographical identity narratives and the articulation of subjectivities, entailing a commitment to interpretivism.¹⁹⁵ Rather than seeing the world as an objective reality to be ‘mined’ for facts, interpretivism emphasises that ‘language is constitutive of the social world surrounding us’.¹⁹⁶ My aim therefore is to provide a qualitative interpretation of how subjects of various kinds make sense of the world around them and their place in it through vicarious militarism. The constitutive role of language entails that the primary method for accomplishing this is discourse analysis, defined as ‘a method to analyze these spoken, sign-based, or any other significant semiotic markers that provide meaning to the social world surrounding us’.¹⁹⁷ Importantly, discourse not only consists of linguistic text: as Howarth argues, ‘it is possible to treat all data as text’, with visual texts such as images and objects also crucial to making sense of the social world.¹⁹⁸

This thesis is inspired most significantly by the ontological and methodological assumptions of poststructuralist discourse analysis. These include an insistence on the inseparability of discourse from its political context, and the necessity of interpreting texts in relation to broader social power structures.¹⁹⁹ As Howarth notes, in seeking to understand the origins, functions, and/or

¹⁹⁴ This can be seen in recent British armed forces recruitment campaigns which have sought to demonstrate institutional awareness and accommodation of difference along the lines of gender, race, religion, age, class and mental health. Louise and Sangster, ‘Selling the Military - A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Recruitment Marketing in the UK’.

¹⁹⁵ Rumelili, ‘Conclusion’, 199–200.

¹⁹⁶ Can E. Mutlu and Mark B. Salter, “‘Introduction: The Discursive Turn’”, in *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Can E. Mutlu and Mark B. Salter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 118.

¹⁹⁷ Mutlu and Salter, 118; See also Bleiker, *Visual Global Politics*.

¹⁹⁸ David Howarth, ‘Applying Discourse Theory: The Method of Articulation’, in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, ed. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 336; see also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

¹⁹⁹ Jason Glynos and David Howarth, ‘The Retroductive Cycle: The Research Process in Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis’, in *Discourse, Culture and Organization: Inquiries into Relational Structures of Power*, ed. Tomas Marttila (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 113–14.

consequences of certain discursive phenomena, poststructuralist approaches to discourse analysis are fundamentally ‘problem-driven’. Central to this is an ontology emphasising that researchers are not external to the discourses and context in which such problems are found; nor do such problems exist independently of the researcher. Rather, research problems are partly brought into being by being named and defined as problems by the researcher in the first place. What sets the ‘problem-driven’ approach apart from ‘method’ or ‘theory’ driven approaches is the notion that ‘the conduct of discourse analysis is only meaningful within a particular social and political theory, alongside its core ontological assumptions and overall political purposes.’²⁰⁰ Significantly, while discourse analysis is sometimes described as an inductive method – i.e. one in which analyses of problems are subsequently used to build theory - unlike deductive approaches that begin with theoretical hypotheses which are subsequently tested through data analysis – as Miller and Brewer note, social research is seldom comprised of ‘distinct stages of deduction, induction or abduction, but a combination of *all three*, often going on simultaneously.’ Furthermore:

Ideas for research will come partially from the researcher's conceptual knowledge, partially from their personal experiences and perhaps partially from intuition. There will be false starts and backtracking. Proposed hypothetical explanations will be modified in the light of preliminary results or discussion, perhaps leading to the collection of further data.²⁰¹

This ‘retroductive cycle’ underpins discourse analysis, requiring researchers to continually ‘articulate’ their ontological assumptions, method, and empirical data in reflexive dialogue with one another, to ensure that none biases the interpretation produced.²⁰² The distinctive ontology governing retroductive reasoning – especially the socially-embedded and context-specific nature of social research - entails a cautious approach to knowledge claims. Because ‘explanations in the social sciences are inextricably tied to the subjects they purport to cover’ - subjects characterised by fragility to the extent that they are contingent and reflexive - poststructuralists generally seek to provide explanations of events and phenomena after they have happened without assuming the generalisability of such findings over time or across difference contexts.²⁰³ Finally, owing to the ontological specificities of the definition of research problems and the fact that interpretations ‘represent only one possible way of ordering the facts and descriptions’, research findings adopting such an approach are inevitably ‘contingent and contestable’.²⁰⁴

Poststructuralist approaches to discourse analysis have been usefully brought to bear on myriad problems in IR and Security Studies. One particularly influential work in OSS adopting this process-tracing approach is *Securitizing Islam*, in which Stuart Croft applies Lene Hansen’s

²⁰⁰ Howarth, ‘Applying Discourse Theory’, 318–22.

²⁰¹ Robert L. Miller and John Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research*, vol. 1 (London: Sage, 2003), doi: 10.4135/9780857020024.

²⁰² Howarth, ‘Applying Discourse Theory’, 326–27; Glynos and Howarth, ‘The Retroductive Cycle’, 121.

²⁰³ Glynos and Howarth, ‘The Retroductive Cycle’, 117.

²⁰⁴ Howarth, ‘Applying Discourse Theory’, 321.

poststructuralist framework for discourse analysis to understand the emergence and diffusion of the 'New Terrorism' and 'New Britishness' discourses in British society after the 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks and the identity work performed by the securitization of Islam.²⁰⁵ Croft explores this by analysing texts for a range of 'linked and differentiated' signifiers which work to narratively distinguish and distance the self from a range of Others cast as threatening or undesirable.²⁰⁶ In line with the commitments of poststructuralist discourse theory, he emphasises the importance of reading such texts in broader social and historical contexts to understand how securitizing discourses emanate from specific crisis events, move through society, and are repetitive features of (British) politics. Such a task necessitates the selection of sources that allow the researcher to reconstruct the 'metanarrative discourse of the British elite.'²⁰⁷ In addition to analysing traditional objects of discourse analysis, such as government and opposition discourse and media coverage of these debates, Croft's interest in how securitization discourses have been reproduced, co-produced and routinised within British society at the level of the everyday leads him to follow Hansen in also examining (popular) 'cultural representations', the interventions of 'non-governmental organisations and academia', and the intertextual interplay between these different sites and broader discourses of British national identity.²⁰⁸

Croft's study provides a useful way of articulating my own methodological approach, both through its differences and similarities with the thesis at hand. Although this chapter has demonstrated a convergence of interest between my work and Croft's in terms of discourses of British national identity, the first key difference is that my approach to it is through discourses of war commemoration and the concepts of militarism and militarisation rather than securitisation. Beyond the obvious difference of subject matter, this distinction also points to the different purpose of the discourse analysis. As Howarth argues, discourse analyses tend to fall into three categories: 'the analysis of meaning in texts (semantics), the role of rhetoric in bringing about certain effects, and the construction and role of subjectivity (pragmatics).'²⁰⁹ Of course, this is a question of *emphasis* rather than categorical distinction, and many analyses (including this thesis) incorporate all three strategies to some extent. While this is certainly the case for Croft, the prominence of securitization theory in his work – with its focus on the significance of speech acts in constituting security problems – nevertheless means that 'the role of rhetoric in bringing about certain effects' is the dominant logic throughout. It is important to note that the concept of militarisation developed in Chapter 1 does not necessarily aim at process-tracing in the same linear way. Indeed, the thesis is partly interested in vicarious identity promotion, the broader objective

²⁰⁵ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*; Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 1–92.

²⁰⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 94–97; this strategy is ultimately derived from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

²⁰⁷ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 99.

²⁰⁸ Croft, 100–101; Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 59–64.

²⁰⁹ Howarth, 'Applying Discourse Theory', 341.

of the thesis is to explore different manifestations and functions of vicarious military subjectivity - and their contestation - within broader discourses of war commemoration rather than on their linear emergence and marginalisation of other discourses. The aim is to produce an interpretation that (in Howarth's words) '[renders] visible phenomena previously undetected by dominant theoretical approaches.'²¹⁰

A second point of distinction between my approach and Croft's is that whereas he and other securitization scholars are focused on how selves are reinforced through the discursive construction of threatening others (through linked and differentiated signifiers), this thesis explores an inversion of this relationship: namely, those instances in which the distinction between civilian selves and military others is *collapsed*. As we have seen, many of the traceable indicators of vicarious identification are linguistic. While collective first-person pronouns (e.g. we, us, our) are particularly telling, vicariousness can also be indicated in more subtle ways: expressions of pride, familial connections with others more closely aligned with the target of vicarious identification, and displays of dedication to them can all be read as strategies for establishing vicarious identity. Moreover, in line with the conceptualisation of images as texts that cannot be understood outside language (even if they have extra-discursive affective dimensions²¹¹), the analysis also reads images and their manipulation as attempts at vicarious identity promotion by constructing vicarious proxies through which anxieties might be assuaged and fantasies might be realised. This focus does not preclude being attentive to the reinforcement of vicarious identities through the articulation of difference; however, I am primarily focused on instances in which the boundaries between self and other have been blurred.

Given the pervasiveness of vicarious identity and the expansiveness of the discursive terrain on which this thesis operates – namely, war commemoration - it is necessary to consider where vicarious military subjectivity might be found and how to delimit the scope of the study. The strategy chosen has been to focus upon public discourse around, and engagement with, the initiatives of Britain's largest military veterans' charity, the Royal British Legion (RBL).²¹² Founded in 1921 and the aftermath of the First World War, the RBL provides charitable welfare support to soldiers and their families, raising funds through the sale of red poppies worn as symbols of remembrance, thus entwining its welfare functions with practices of war commemoration. Today, it has become established as the (self-proclaimed) 'national champion of remembrance', with its 'Poppy Appeal' at the centre of efforts to engage the public with the nation's history through

²¹⁰ Howarth, 321.

²¹¹ See, for example, Solomon, "I Wasn't Angry, Because I Couldn't Believe It Was Happening"; Holland and Solomon, 'Affect Is What States Make of It'.

²¹² The RBL's fundraising capacity is unparalleled in the military charity sector being more than double its nearest peer, SSAFA. Lucy Fisher and George Greenwood, 'Armed Forces Charities Sit on Reserves of £275 Million', *The Times*, 28 October 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/armed-forces-charities-sit-on-reserves-of-275-million-5r9dgb0gt>.

discourses emphasising the obligations of national subjectivity. As such, it is not only the most recognisable veterans' charity but also the most trusted with the Poppy Appeal being voted the UK's most trusted brand in 2015.²¹³ Moreover, its infrastructure and brand power enable it to communicate regularly with large audiences across a range of media, and have made it one of the most prominent organisations involved in the First World War centenary commemorations - a regular touchstone throughout the thesis.²¹⁴ However, the centrality of the RBL's Poppy Appeal and emblem to British war commemoration also makes the annual controversy around the poppy a useful site for exploring the broader invocations of, and *contestation* over, vicarious military subjectivity. Using controversy and crisis as methodology in this way is particularly germane for exploring the permutations of vicarious identification for ontological (in)security because, as Skey notes, 'ontological security can be best evidenced when it is either absent or threatened.'²¹⁵

One of the apparent challenges of researching ontological (in)security concerns the impossibility of divining intentions and establishing the extent to which an identity or view is genuinely held.²¹⁶ Clearly, such concerns are particularly sensitive when the representation in question is a vicarious one that might be perceived by others as thinly instrumental. As Pratt notes, the problem is that while researchers generally:

assume that actors communicate their authentic beliefs and feelings in *some* reliable way [...] the possibility always remains that the "self" on display amounts to a deliberate misrepresentation—one designed to convey a false image of who the actor is and what they want.²¹⁷

An equally problematic aspect of (auto-)biographical narratives is that subjects 'tend to retrospectively organize their actions into a more coherent, consistent, and deliberate set of thoughts, feelings, and choices than was in fact the case.'²¹⁸ Psychological research has also observed a tendency for individuals' stories to change over time at a subconscious level, particularly in the context of other narrations.²¹⁹ While the thesis explores accusations of passing

²¹³ 'The UK's Most Trusted Brands: Who Tops The Pile?', LBB Online, 2014, <https://www.lbbonline.com/news/the-uks-most-trusted-brands-who-tops-the-pile>.

²¹⁴ As such, even some of the larger organizations involved such as the Imperial War Museum – leading the centenary – cannot expect to reach as many as some of the RBL's most high profile initiatives. For example, the Tower of London's 2014 Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red exhibit based on the RBL's Poppy symbol was seen by around five million visitors, compared the Imperial War Museum's official annual visitor figure of around 915,000. 'Tower of London: Final Poppy Is "Planted"', BBC News, 11 November 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-30001177>; 'England's Tourist Attractions See Rise in Visitor Numbers with Farms the Fastest Growing Attraction' (Visit England, 5 August 2015), https://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/annual_attractions_survey_2014_2_0.pdf.

²¹⁵ Skey, "'A Sense of Where You Belong in the World'", 721.

²¹⁶ Steele, *Alternative Accountabilities in Global Politics*, 57–58.

²¹⁷ Pratt, 'A Relational View of Ontological Security in International Relations', 79–80.

²¹⁸ Pratt, 179; See also Charles Tilly, 'The Trouble with Stories', in *The Social Worlds of Higher Education: Handbook for Teaching in a New Century*, ed. Bernice Pescosolido and Ronald Aminzade (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1999), 256–70.

²¹⁹ Christopher French, 'Explainer: What Are False Memories?', *The Conversation*, accessed 30 January 2019, <http://theconversation.com/explainer-what-are-false-memories-49454>; Giuliana Mazzoni, 'The

and inauthenticity, this interest is primarily analytic, consisting of mapping debates around vicarious military subjectivities rather than passing normative judgement. This choice was partly motivated by the previous observation about the impossibility of divining intentions. Moreover, any suggestion that actors are wrong to try to ‘pass’ as military subjects might risk effectively reifying military subjectivities. Instead, just as Eastwood suggests that conceptualizing militarism as ideological makes it a useful tool of critique not for delineating boundaries, but for testing how they are social constituted in discourse,²²⁰ my intention in developing the concept of vicarious military subjectivity is not to cast judgement on vicariousness from a pre-ordained list of parameters, but to interrogate where boundaries lie. This is the politics explored by the thesis.

Sources

With the object of the discourse analysis established, it is necessary to reflect upon the approach to compiling an archive of source material. Although I have distinguished my aim of mapping different kinds of vicarious military subjectivities and their contestation at different discursive levels of discursive from Croft’s focus on process-tracing, it is important to note that the selection of a broad range of sources from multiple discursive levels of British society which allows Croft ‘to trace the contours of the [securitizing] meta-narrative and the extent to which it has become normalized throughout society [...] and routinized in everyday life’ is commensurate to the task of studying vicarious militarism in two aspects.²²¹ The first is the way that he combines Hansen’s four strategies for tracing security metanarratives – official government discourse, ‘wider policy debate including opposition and media’, popular culture representations, and ‘marginal political discourses’ – with a greater attentiveness to the micropolitical (re-)production of security discourses and their dissemination in ‘virtual communities’.²²² The second regards Croft’s broadening of the relevant range of source material, necessarily drawing upon a wide range of unsolicited or ‘non-reactive’ data to provide a thick description of securitizations.²²³ This strategy usefully avoids certain thorny methodological issues relating to the potential of methods such as interviews to unintentionally prime research subjects to think about vicarious identity in particular ways.²²⁴ By opening the door to a potentially limitless range of source material, however, it renders

“real You” Is a Myth – We Constantly Create False Memories to Achieve the Identity We Want’, *The Conversation*, accessed 30 January 2019, <http://theconversation.com/the-real-you-is-a-myth-we-constantly-create-false-memories-to-achieve-the-identity-we-want-103253>; Robert Nash, ‘Are Memories Reliable? Expert Explains How They Change More than We Realise’, *The Conversation*, accessed 30 January 2019, <http://theconversation.com/are-memories-reliable-expert-explains-how-they-change-more-than-we-realise-106461>.

²²⁰ Eastwood, ‘Rethinking Militarism as Ideology’.

²²¹ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 100.

²²² Croft 99-101, Hansen 59-64

²²³ Howarth, ‘Applying Discourse Theory’, 335.

²²⁴ It is important to emphasise that the decision to rely upon non-reactive data was one motivated by pragmatism rather than any incompatibility between reactive data and the study of vicarious identity. Indeed, relying upon non-reactive data carries its own analytic and normative limitations: certain vicarious

questions about the selection criteria for source material especially pressing. Although broadly endorsing Hansen's criteria that appropriate sources must feature a 'clear articulation' of the discourse relating to identity, be authoritative, and 'widely read',²²⁵ Croft's interest in the (re-)production of security discourses at the level of the everyday ('not something that is of itself widely read') crucially leads him to argue for relaxing the 'widely read' criterion on the basis that everyday practices can yield important insights into pervasiveness of security discourses. '[T]he way in which jokes are constructed', he notes, 'can be a powerful representation of the ways in which identity constructions are shared among those who live their lives beyond the elite.'²²⁶ Such an approach is also a useful corrective to the tendency noted by Hamilton for IR scholars of popular culture to predominantly focus on blockbuster cultural outputs at the expense of the everyday culture.²²⁷

This approach is highly pertinent to the focus of this thesis on exploring the myriad ways in which vicarious military subjectivity is promoted, invoked (mainly by civilians), and contested at multiple levels of abstraction, which has necessitated collecting a wide range of primary and secondary textual data. The starting point for this exercise was an exploratory period of desk research concentrating on the centenary initiatives of the RBL and their role in vicarious identity promotion. Sources of data included the RBL website, its digital centenary initiatives, and the websites of branding houses collaborating with the RBL on digital and television advertising campaigns. Subsequently, this data was augmented by gathering further complementary data around the RBL's centenary initiatives and its broader place in public life – including advertising campaigns by the RBL's corporate partners and other organisations invoking remembrance. Additional sources included traditional sites for discourse analyses including government documents and speeches, documents from digital archives, and newspaper coverage and commentary. As we will see in Chapter 6 especially, despite the decline of newspaper sales in recent years, print media continues to play a prominent role in representing and actively shaping British public opinion, including through the promotion and contestation of vicarious military subjectivity.²²⁸ It has been necessary, therefore, to draw from a range of mainstream print media

dynamics that may only emerge over longer iterative interactions may remain hidden, not least how subjects critically reflect upon, justify, and defend vicarious discursive tactics – an agentic right of reply of which subjects are deprived through non-reactive approaches. The use of critical methodologies situated around data derived from group interviews may provide interesting avenues to explore such dynamics; but they are not the focus of this research which has emphasized breadth in its sourcing of data. My thanks to Victoria Basham for prompting me to reflect on this.

²²⁵ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 82–88.

²²⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 103.

²²⁷ Caitlin Hamilton, 'Exploring the Potential of the Popular Culture and World Politics Agenda: Actors, Artefacts and the Everyday', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 4 (2019): 575–76.

²²⁸ While sales of newspaper print copies have dropped by two-thirds in the last two decades, their move online coupled with their role in reflecting and driving international current affairs make them a useful resource for tracing national debates. Freddy Mayhew, 'UK National Newspaper Sales Slump by Two-Thirds in 20 Years amid Digital Disruption', *Press Gazette*, 26 February 2020,

outlets representing a broad ideological spectrum to maximise the insights gained into the politics of vicarious military subjectivity. While the thesis periodically draws upon quantitative social survey data where possible to convey the pervasiveness of vicarious dynamics in discourses of British militarism, quantitative claims about how different demographics engage with vicarious military subjectivity are beyond its scope.

One of the most significant developments for this study's methodology has been the 'widespread proliferation of [...] digital technology, and the expansion of the Internet' which, as Crilley notes, has 'fundamentally altered global communication.'²²⁹ The 'new media ecology', comprised of social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, has become a key medium through which events are interpreted and political discourse, including foreign and military policy (and war commemoration) is produced and consumed²³⁰ - one popular with political agents for the way in which it 'bypass[es] traditional channels of communication' and media representations.²³¹ Beyond simply providing another important domain in which politics is performed, however, social media has also influenced modes of social expression and subject formation. As Crilley argues, one of the defining features of social media is its promulgation of visual culture - something that can be seen in the millions of photos, 'memes' and 'gifs' shared across social media every day.²³² The latter example also points to the ways in which visual texts, in Dean's words, frequently deploy humour to 'shore up political identities, affiliations and the antagonisms associated with them' by inviting 'the viewer into identifying with them, either by agreeing with the political sentiments expressed therein, or by finding them funny (or not).'²³³ Of course, humour is not the only strategy: visuality might be deployed to promote outrage or, as we will see in this thesis, vicarious pride. For Crilley et al., it is the ability of 'digital images' to 'project themselves into the symbolic universe of understandings, emotions and purposes that inform

<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/uk-national-newspaper-sales-slump-by-two-thirds-in-20-years-amid-digital-disruption/>.

²²⁹ Rhys Crilley, 'Where We At? New Directions for Research on Popular Culture and World Politics', *International Studies Review*, 7, accessed 9 December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa027>.

²³⁰ See, for example, Constance Duncombe, 'Twitter and Transformative Diplomacy: Social Media and Iran-US Relations', *International Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2017): 545-62; James Brassett, Christopher Browning, and Muireann O'Dwyer, 'EU've Got to Be Kidding: Anxiety, Humour and Ontological Security', *Global Society* 0, no. 0 (29 October 2020): 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2020.1828298>; Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca L. Stein, *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Rhys Crilley, 'Like and Share Forces: Making Sense of Military Social Media Sites', in *Understanding Popular Culture and World Politics in the Digital Age*, ed. Laura J. Shepherd and Caitlin Hamilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 51-67; Susan T. Jackson et al., 'Forum: Militarization 2.0: Communication and the Normalization of Political Violence in the Digital Age', *International Studies Review*, accessed 9 December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa035>.

²³¹ James Brassett and Christopher Browning, 'Social Media Europe and the Rise of Comedy in Global Politics', *E-International Relations*, 14 October 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/10/14/social-media-europe-and-the-rise-of-comedy-in-global-diplomacy/>; On the notion of a 'new media ecology', see Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 2.

²³² Crilley, 'Where We At?', 7; Jonathan Dean, 'Sorted for Memes and Gifs: Visual Media and Everyday Digital Politics', *Political Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (2019): 255-66.

²³³ Dean, 'Sorted for Memes and Gifs', 259.

people's political behaviour' that makes them the 'instrument of choice for political actors to capture the attention of online publics.'²³⁴ As such, the content disseminated on Twitter and YouTube by commercial and political actors – including the RBL and key figures in the Brexit campaigns - becomes invaluable data for exploring the different ways in which vicarious military subjectivity is invoked and promoted, as well as their reception by audiences.

Although allowing unprecedented insight into the construction and reception of political discourse, however, the sharing of memes and gifs points to the way in which the 'new media ecology' has dramatically blurred the boundaries between the producers and consumers of content. This is epitomised by the genre of YouTube 'reaction videos' with consumers uploading recordings of their real-time reactions to popular culture content such as TV adverts. In addition to providing rich insights into the affective reactions of their subjects, the videos also exemplify the novel public platform provided by social media to ever greater numbers of subjects and their political views, expressed in increasingly diverse ways – something that has significant implications for the question of what or who counts as a relevant object of analysis. Of course, this does not mean that elites no longer matter: digital technology tends to reproduce broader political structures and inequalities; it also furnishes political and commercial actors with new tools which consolidate their power.²³⁵ As such, social media accounts of those with large numbers of followers remain key objects for this analysis, precisely because of their relative visibility and influence on political discourse. Nevertheless, the growing potential for non-elites to influence, disrupt, and contest elite representations of events through a particularly influential Tweet or video necessitates the study of a broader range of social media users to explore how debates around vicarious military subjectivity are shaped by non-elite influences.

However, because of my particular interest in how civilian subjects invoke, receive and contest vicarious military subjectivity, the thesis also shares Croft's emphasis on exploring everyday sources which are not 'widely read', but nevertheless provide relevant and interesting examples of militarised vicarious identification and identity promotion relating to the different cases and levels explored by the empirical chapters. As Epstein argues, the Lacanian approach to discourse analysis, which '[casts] the focus upon what the actors say, and what they achieve in doing so' is particularly useful to such a task, because it 'leaves the analysis open to appraising the specifics of the case and avoids having to decide a priori who constitutes the relevant actors in that issue-area.' Rather, the pertinent question is 'who speaks' and what can their utterance tell us about the discourse – an especially useful approach in the age of social media.²³⁶ Sometimes, the insight can stem from a micro-political Twitter interaction that otherwise receives little attention; in other

²³⁴ Rhys Crilley, Ilan Manor, and Corneliu Bjola, 'Visual Narratives of Global Politics in the Digital Age: An Introduction', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 5 (2020): 630.

²³⁵ Crilley, 'Where We At?', 6–7.

²³⁶ Epstein, 'Who Speaks?', 342–45.

instances, such as Amazon reviews of remembrance-themed merchandise, the insights centre on an extended narration of an item's meaning which illuminate vicarious dynamics in accounts of personal subjectivity. Whether or not a text is influential is less pertinent than what it can tell us about the varieties, functions, and politics of vicarious militarism.

Approach

Having outlined the variety of sources drawn on, some reflection is required on how this data was used. As Howarth argues, the required approach to data gathering largely depends on the specific nature of the research problem. For 'narrowly defined' topics, for example, he argues that it may be appropriate to 'collect an exhaustive corpus of primary documents', whereas a 'representative sample' might suffice for constructing a persuasive analysis on a slightly broader topic. For 'more extensive and open-ended research project[s]', however, attaining a representative sample may be neither feasible nor necessary, with illustrative examples sufficing to demonstrate certain phenomena at work and the diversity of the examples instead suggesting the social diffusion of the research object.²³⁷ This thesis falls into the latter category, sharing Gaskell's emphasis on 'exploring the range of opinions [and] the different representations of the issue.'²³⁸ And although Lacanian ontology of the thesis points to the fact that different levels of analysis are in fact not so different given that they are all subjects of discourse, the thesis nevertheless develops three case studies focusing on different levels of analysis in order to demonstrate the culturally-diffuse and diverse manifestations of vicarious militarism. In accordance with the poststructuralist ontology outlined above, and as Lai and Roccu emphasise, a case study is 'not [...] a natural setting existing independently, but [a] 'theoretically constructed object' – one constituted over the duration 'of the whole research process.'²³⁹

The case studies were constructed retroductively through several data gathering strategies. The first included the use of Google and Factiva searches for sources relating to a range of events and controversies surrounding the RBL and the poppy that could supplement the preliminary research. The results of these prompted the decision to focus on a case relating to the First World War Centenary (Every One Remembered) exploring vicarious identity promotion and identification primarily at the individual level, controversies surrounding commercial invocations of vicarious military subjectivity allowing for greater exploration of social interaction and contestation around vicarious dynamics, and a final case expanding the analysis to an event prompting militarised attempts to live through national sporting representatives at the level of

²³⁷ Howarth, 'Applying Discourse Theory', 337.

²³⁸ George Gaskell (2000), quoted in Skey, "'A Sense of Where You Belong in the World'", 722; see also George Gaskell, 'Individual and Group Interviewing', in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (London: Sage, 2000), 41.

²³⁹ Daniela Lai and Roberto Roccu, 'Case Study Research and Critical IR: The Case for the Extended Case Methodology', *International Relations* 33, no. 1 (2019): 75, 79.

geopolitics (the 2011 and 2016 FIFA Poppy Controversies). Once the case study topics had been established, additional Twitter searches were conducted from October to November (the period when remembrance routinely rises to the level of national discourse) each year between 2015 and 2019 to map the contours of the various debates under examination and the role of vicarious identification therein. The sources included individual, organisational, and topical/satirical accounts. Finally, in line with the poststructuralist emphasis on the socially-embedded nature of the researcher in social discourse, it is important to acknowledge that while many sources used in this thesis were found through proactive data-gathering, others - such as the Great Western Railway First World War Roll of Honour on Platform 5 at Exeter St. Davids train station - were more accurately 'encountered' by the researcher rather than actively sought.²⁴⁰ Of course, this partly relies upon the researcher maintaining what Enloe describes as a 'sceptical curiosity' towards the social world around them;²⁴¹ but it is also indicative of the role of embeddedness and serendipity in supplementing the formal data gathering.

The research objective of gathering a selection of examples illustrating the different forms and functions of - and contestations over - vicarious military subjectivity in British war commemoration rather than a representative sample also extended to the handling of the individual sources themselves. My approach is notably more flexible than other approaches to social media analysis in its handling of the source material. For example, the work of Chatterje-Doody and Crilley on the affective dimensions of the social media activities of Russian state broadcaster RT takes a more quantitative approach to data gathering by focusing on a small number of videos and gathering a representative sample of comments and other pertinent reactions traceable through analytic data, which is then interpreted through a coded content analysis.²⁴² While this approach has the advantage of being able to construct a representative picture of audience reactions to particular initiatives (as befits a study of the effectiveness of RT social media in deliberately fomenting affective audience engagement), it would have been an impractical one for a project with the broad theoretical and empirical scope of this thesis. Rather than provide a representative study of audience reactions to each individual source, the approach is to provide thick description of the content (including 'their intertextuality with other linguistic, aural, and musical signifiers'²⁴³) of a diverse range of texts, such as Twitter memes, YouTube

²⁴⁰ Indeed, the *Critical Military Studies* journal features an 'encounters' section, emphasising that '[e]ncounters with military power can happen in the most unusual and unexpected places.' Sarah Bulmer and Alexandra Hyde, 'An Introduction to Encounters', *Critical Military Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 79.

²⁴¹ Enloe, 'The Recruiter and the Sceptic', 7.

²⁴² e.g. Rhys Crilley and Precious N. Chatterje-Doody, 'Emotions and War on YouTube: Affective Investments in RT's Visual Narratives of the Conflict in Syria', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 5 (2020): 713-33; Precious N. Chatterje-Doody and Rhys Crilley, 'Making Sense of Emotions and Affective Investments in War: RT and the Syrian Conflict on YouTube', *Media and Communication* 7, no. 3 (2019): 167-78.

²⁴³ Crilley, Manor, and Bjola, 'Visual Narratives of Global Politics in the Digital Age', 631; see also Katja Freistein and Frank Gadinger, 'Populist Stories of Honest Men and Proud Mothers: A Visual Narrative Analysis', *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (2020): 224-25.

videos or Amazon product reviews, and of a selection of relevant comments responding to them. Combining a close reading of a broad range of sources can contribute novel insights into the myriad forms, functions, and contestations around vicarious military subjectivity, and how these relate to the broader political-discursive context.

Finally, the thesis emphasises that the ‘messiness’ and complexity of social world²⁴⁴ necessitating, as Squire notes, that our research objectives, theoretical dispositions, and methods be part of an ‘on-going and flexible process’ of research continuing throughout the project.²⁴⁵ Accordingly, the concepts of vicarious militarism and vicarious military subjectivity were the results of the reflexive interpretation of the sources outlined above and/through existing concepts from CMS and OSS. The social-situatedness of the researcher within the discourses and broader context being examined is crucial in making such judgements. Similarly, as Wæver argues, given the impossibility of ever exhausting the range of texts and views on any particular case, the researcher’s familiarity with ‘the language [and] history of the country, and a rather broad spectrum of its culture and politics’ becomes crucial to determining when an adequate range of views on a particular theme has been analysed.²⁴⁶ While, the case study approach helps to narrow the range of sources required, the point at which enough sources have been analysed is a practical matter of *judgement* rather than measurement – in this case, it was the stage at which additional sources added little novel insight into vicarious military subjectivity.²⁴⁷ The exploratory intent of the project has entailed focusing on a number of cases in qualitative depth rather than making and testing any claims about how representative they are of society at large. For the same reason, while drawing on Lacanian-inspired approaches throughout, I have stopped short of providing a full-blown Lacanian analysis to allow for a greater range of empirical insights. Instead, the thesis has been loosely structured to correspond to different levels of analysis, with Chapters 4 and 5 exploring the focusing on the individual and corporate levels which are then drawn together with the geopolitical international level in Chapter 6. It is to these empirical chapters that we now turn.

²⁴⁴ John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

²⁴⁵ Vicki Squire, ‘Attuning to Mess’, in *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Can E. Mutlu and Mark B. Salter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 40.

²⁴⁶ Ole Wæver, ‘European Integration and Security: Analysing French and German Discourses on State, Nation, and Europe’, in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, ed. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 40–41.

²⁴⁷ Wæver also refers to the “‘the opposite burden of evidence’” which goes as follows: “I claim that on the basis of my reading of the debate in country X, the discursive structure looks like this . . . If you show me a text I have not included, it should be possible for me to read this text through the structure I have constructed. If not, my reading of the debate needs to be revised.” Ole Wæver, ‘Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy: Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory’, in *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States*, ed. Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 42.

4. 'Every One Remembered'? War Commemoration, Genealogy and Vicarious Military Subjectivity

Introduction

One of the most famous pieces of British war propaganda is a recruitment poster issued by the British government in 1915 to encourage subjects to enlist in the armed forces during the First World War. The poster in question features a 30-40 year old man sat in an armchair, with a young girl (his daughter) on his lap reading what is presumably a history book, and a young boy (his son) playing with toy soldiers and cannons at his feet.¹ The infamous caption reads as a question from the daughter to her father: 'Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?' This poster, like many others produced over the course of the war, worked to shame eligible men into enlisting by casting doubt on their masculinity. In the context of the first total war of its kind, the poster's depiction of a scene of comforting, everyday domesticity was intended as a rebuke: while YOU sit in armchairs and your children are able play with toy soldiers, real soldiers are giving their lives, and YOU should be there with them. That the question comes from the man's daughter is intended to emasculate those not living up to hegemonic gender roles, as an act of emasculation. On another level, the young boy playing with toy soldiers represents what is ostensibly the 'natural attitude' of patriotic masculinity, always preparing for war even if too young to participate. 100 years after the war, this chapter argues that that efforts were under way not to shame non-participants, but to celebrate ancestral participation.

And yet, the First World War's (WW1) status in British collective consciousness did not render such endeavours straightforward. This is because since the second half of the twentieth century, and in contrast with the Second World War (WW2) which has served as modern Britain's 'chosen trauma', the First World War has come to be associated with futility, horror and recklessness thanks to a culturally pervasive mythology.² The figure of the soldier - with which the war is often

¹ 'Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War?', A British Recruitment Poster', The British Library, accessed 14 August 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/daddy-what-did-you-do-in-great-war>.

² Here, Todman defines 'a myth [as] a belief about the past held by an individual but common to a social group [...] reducing the complex events of the past to an easily understood set of symbols. Their social function is to ease communication. Rather than explain exactly what occurred each time we refer to a huge historical event like the Great War, we develop myths which sum up what is commonly supposed to have happened and which we can rely on others understanding.' Importantly, then, Todman emphasises that 'the modern myth of the war has its origins in events and emotions at the time. It is a distortion, not a fabrication.' Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), xiii, 221.

associated - is routinely portrayed as the victim of a 'pointless, bloody and badly led [war].'³ And scholarship in recent decades challenging some of the oversimplifications and distortions comprising the war's 'negative mythology' has had only a limited impact on public understandings, with attentiveness to issues of remembrance and memory extending far beyond the academy.⁴

Thus, Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement that 2014 would mark the beginning of four years of centenary commemorations of WW1 that would '[say] something about who we are' prompted national debates about who or what would be commemorated and how.⁵ And while many scholars tentatively welcomed the centenary as an opportunity for public engagement and education, some were circumspect about its potential to transmit nuanced accounts of the war to the public at large, recognizing that anniversaries can reinforce as well as revise dominant interpretations.⁶ On the eve of the centenary, for example, Helen McCartney warned that a number of factors might preclude public receptiveness to more nuanced interpretations of the war. In addition to historians having to compete with myriad other actors – many with a stake in the war's negative mythology – for attention, three further trends informed McCartney's conclusion. The first was the burgeoning genealogy industry that encouraged subjects to engage with the war through an 'empathetic individualized approach to family history' – one typically emphasising the victimhood of the soldier figure.⁷ The second was a growth of interest in the 'psychological costs of war', with public overestimations of the prevalence of mental illness amongst WW1 and modern soldiers further solidifying their image as non-agentic victims. Finally, McCartney argued that this 'soldier-victim' figure was central to efforts to separate contemporary soldiers from Britain's unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, not least in practices and discourses of remembrance implicitly and explicitly linking Britain's recent wars to WW1, thereby reinforcing the soldier-victim image of the WW1 soldier and stripping contemporary soldiers of agency by association. For these reasons, McCartney concluded that the centenary may serve to perpetuate the war's negative mythology and the depiction of the WW1 as a 'brave but powerless victim.'⁸

³ Helen B. McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain', *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2014): 303.

⁴ Todman, *The Great War*, xii.

⁵ David Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans', GOV.UK, 11 October 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-imperial-war-museum-on-first-world-war-centenary-plans>.

⁶ See, for example, Catriona Pennell, 'Popular History and Myth-Making: The Role and Responsibility of First World War Historians in the Centenary Commemorations, 2014-2018', *Historically Speaking* 13, no. 5 (2012): 11–14; Huw Strachan, 'First World War Anniversary: We Must Do More than Remember', *The Telegraph*, 11 January 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/9795881/First-World-War-anniversary-we-must-do-more-than-remember.html>; Dan Todman, "'Did They Really Die for Us?'" in *Do Mention the War: Will 1914 Matter in 2014?*, ed. Jo Tanner (London: British Future, 2013), 17–21, http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BRF_Declaration-of-war-report_P2_Web-1.pdf.

⁷ McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain', 315.

⁸ McCartney, 315.

This chapter does not deny that McCartney's concerns were valid: some projects of the 14-18 centenary *did* reinforce aspects of the war's mythology – not least those pertaining to the war's horror, psychological costs, and poor leadership.⁹ It does, however, argue that some of the most prominent centenary initiatives contributed to a revisionist account of the war's meaning and the agency of the soldier more similar to the hegemonic national discourse that emerged in the war's aftermath than the mythology that gradually displaced it in the second of the twentieth century. Moreover, it argues that processes of vicarious identity promotion have been central to these moves. In order to substantiate this claim in a way that engages each of McCartney's concerns, this chapter focuses on two of the Royal British Legion's (RBL) flagship centenary initiatives: the 2015 'LIVE ON' rebranding campaign, and the 2014 'Every One Remembered' genealogy project. As a modern-day veterans' charity and the 'national custodian of remembrance' with origins in the aftermath of WW1, the RBL has a stake in the narration of both the WW1 soldier and modern soldiers. Moreover, its status as one of the largest and best-resourced charities in Britain, coupled with its public image as 'apolitical' and one of Britain's most trusted brands, makes it one of the most influential actors in the commemorations.¹⁰

The chapter begins by tracing the origins of contemporary practices of British war commemoration to the First World War, and charts the war's changing meaning in British culture up to the beginning of the Centenary when the negative mythology had already begun to lose its hegemonic status. Despite the insistence of Sir Huw Strachan that the commemorations should not be 'Remembrance Day writ large'¹¹, the chapter argues that the RBL's involvement ensured that remembrance was indeed its dominant framing. Contrary to McCartney's concern that remembrance discourse might reinforce WW1's negative mythology, the chapter argues that the centenary coincided with a period during which the RBL was attempting to alter perceptions of the soldier moving *away* from the victimhood trope. This led to the problematic reincorporation of the WW1 soldier into the agentic framework of heroic military sacrifice and contributed to the war's public rehabilitation in a way that distracted from the potential for ontological insecurity inherent in the (re)examination of the politics of the conflict. This enabled - and was reinforced by - the promotion of genealogy as the primary means for engaging an increasingly temporally

⁹ Indeed, the decision of a group of anti-Brexit campaigners to call their campaign 'Led by donkeys' was suggestive of the continuing contemporary resonance of a popular phrase used to describe and understand WW1's mismanagement. Harriet Sherwood, 'Led By Donkeys Show Their Faces at Last: "No One Knew It Was Us"', *The Observer*, 25 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/25/led-by-donkeys-reveal-identities-brexit-billboards-posters>.

¹⁰ 'Brand Watch: The Royal British Legion', 7 January 2014, <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/brand-watch-royal-british-legion/communications/article/1224269>; Annette Rawstrone, 'Cancer Research UK Named Best Charity Brand of 2014', *Third Sector*, accessed 26 June 2020, http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/cancer-research-uk-named-best-charity-brand-2014/communications/article/1309460?utm_source=website&utm_medium=social; 'The UK's Most Trusted Brands: Who Tops The Pile?', *LBB Online*, 2014, <https://www.lbbonline.com/news/the-uks-most-trusted-brands-who-tops-the-pile>.

¹¹ Strachan, 'First World War Anniversary: We Must Do More than Remember'.

distant public with the centenary on personal and emotional levels. Rather than emphasising themes of victimhood, the RBL's attempts at vicarious identity promotion encouraged subjects to take vicarious pride in their ancestors' (and other related persons') military participation and accomplishments, and use it as a basis for integrating the nation's military history in their personal and family biographies, thereby rendering vicarious military subjectivity a resource for ontological security. After providing a critique of such practices, I turn to explore how the commodification of remembrance has been oriented towards promoting consumption that promises to bolster the consumer's authenticity by vicariously augmenting their militarised subject positions.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is worth briefly reflecting on how the main case study of this chapter fits in with the broader transdisciplinary literature on digital war commemoration. Social researchers have been highly attentive to the ways in which the emergence of digital technologies have transformed social relations through the constitution of a 'new media ecology'.¹² For some scholars, this ecology has entailed a 'new memory ecology', ushering in a 'third memory boom' characterised by new forms of social consciousness and attendant anxieties.¹³ One example has been the opportunities ostensibly offered by these technologies for digital immortality, and the anxieties generated around the sustainability and vulnerability of 'digital afterlives'.¹⁴ On a different level, and given the centrality of Halbwachs' notion of 'collective memory' to contemporary Memory Studies,¹⁵ scholars have been particularly intrigued by the impact of digital technology on collective experiences. This interest centres on both the unifying capacity of technology to bolster collective (national) identities, and its democratising and fragmentary qualities that potentially enable counter-hegemonic memorialisation and even augur the 'end of collective memory' – and collective identity – altogether.¹⁶ Accordingly,

¹² Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *War and Media*, 2; Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies', *Memory Studies* 9, no. 3 (2016): 348–57.

¹³ Steven D. Brown and Andrew Hoskins, 'Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology: Mediating and Remembering the 2005 London Bombings', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 2, no. 2 (2010): 87–107; Andrew Hoskins, ed., *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4; See also Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *War and Media*.

¹⁴ James Braman, Alfreda Dudley, and Giovanni Vincenti, 'Death, Social Networks and Virtual Worlds: A Look Into the Digital Afterlife', in *Proceedings of the 2011 Ninth International Conference on Software Engineering Research, Management and Applications* (SERA 2011, USA: IEEE Computer Society, 2011), 186–92, <https://doi.org/10.1109/SERA.2011.35>; Jed R. Brubaker, Gillian R. Hayes, and Paul Dourish, 'Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning', *The Information Society* 29, no. 3 (2013): 152–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2013.777300>; Debra J. Bassett, 'Who Wants to Live Forever? Living, Dying and Grieving in Our Digital Society', *Social Sciences* 4, no. 4 (2015): 1127–39; Debra J. Bassett, 'Ctrl+Alt+Delete: The Changing Landscape of the Uncanny Valley and the Fear of Second Loss', *Current Psychology*, 22 September 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-0006-5>.

¹⁵ Although this is not a move that all agree with. See, for example, Sarah Gensburger, 'Halbwachs' Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary "Memory Studies"?', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 4 (2016): 396–413; For Halbwachs' seminal work, see Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

¹⁶ Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), 85–109; Thomas Birkner and André Donk, 'Collective Memory and Social Media: Fostering a New Historical Consciousness in the Digital Age?', *Memory Studies* 13, no. 4 (2020): 367–83.

scholarship on digital war commemoration has sought to understand how pre-existing commemorative pathways such as genealogical engagement with the two World Wars have been influenced and enabled by digital technology – especially by numerous online archives and forums designed for the purpose.¹⁷ Scholars have also been attentive to the new forms of war commemoration enabled by digital media, such as the ‘live tweeting’ of significant war anniversaries and other historical events on social media sites such as Twitter as if they were happening now, to provide a newly immersive and engaging experience.¹⁸

The case study in this chapter focuses on the more traditional genealogical forms of engagement augmented by digital technology, with my analysis largely restricted to exploring vicarious identity promotion in the Every One Remembered campaign, website, and profiles rather than interaction between users. It also addresses debates about digital immortality and the viability of collective memory by exploring how upholding the symbolic immortality of ancestors has been promoted to foster vicarious identifications with the nation conducive to fundraising. Although recognising the significance of genealogical engagement with the history of the two World Wars – especially the First – to personal and collective identities and its tendency to emphasise *military* experiences of war at the expense of others, historiographical and memory studies scholarship has not generally engaged with scholarship on militarism or military subjectivities to consider the deeper structural or psychological significance of genealogical engagement. Closer to this interest is recent IR scholarship on the commemoration of contemporary wars – particularly the War on Terror – exploring how the militarised framings of digital projects memorialising the deaths of contemporary military personnel have circumscribed the parameters of legitimate debate and criticism.¹⁹ However, while emphasising the increasingly participatory nature of digital war commemoration, these studies have devoted less attention to the questions of why civilian

¹⁷ Indeed, the ‘Every One Remembered’ project explored in this chapter was but one of the many digital genealogy projects that have been established around the First World War in the past two decades. For work exploring these other projects, see Dan Todman, ‘The Internet and the Remembrance of the Two World Wars’, *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 5 (2010): 76–81; Silke Arnold-de-Simine, ‘Between Memory and Silence, between Trauma and Nostalgia, between Family and Nation: Remembering the First World War’, in *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, ed. Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 143–62; James Wallis, ‘Great-Grandfather, What Did You Do in the Great War?’, in *Remembering the First World War*, ed. Bart Ziino (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 21–38; Michael Roper and Rachel Duffett, ‘Family Legacies in the Centenary: Motives for First World War Commemoration among British and German Descendants’, *History and Memory* 30, no. 1 (2018): 76–115.

¹⁸ See, Tom Sear, ‘Dawn Servers : Anzac Day 2015 and Hyperconnective Commemoration’, in *War Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Brad West (London: Routledge, 2016), 69–88; Rhys Crilly, Marie Gillespie, and Alistair Willis, ‘Tweeting the Russian Revolution: RT’s #1917LIVE and Social Media Re-Enactments as Public Diplomacy’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 354–73; Shanti Sumartojo, ‘Tweeting from the Past: Commemorating the Anzac Centenary @ABCNews1915’, *Memory Studies* 13, no. 4 (2020): 400–415.

¹⁹ For examples of this literature, see King, ‘The Afghan War and “Postmodern” Memory’; Maja Zehfuss, ‘Hierarchies of Grief and the Possibility of War: Remembering UK Fatalities in Iraq’, *Millennium* 38, no. 2 (2009): 419–40; Nataliya Danilova, ‘The Politics of Mourning: The Virtual Memorialisation of British Fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan’, *Memory Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 267–81.

subjects are drawn to militarised commemoration or what they get out of genealogical engagement. Finally, neither IR nor Memory Studies scholars have addressed the vicarious dynamics at play in such engagement, and their possible relevance in addressing broader feelings of militarised ontological insecurity. This chapter bridges the divides between these two literatures by exploring the contemporary political relevance of living vicariously through military ancestors, arguing that the promotion of vicarious identification is a central strategy in discouraging critique that could lead to ontological insecurity.

The First World War and British War Commemoration in Perspective

The First World War has come to be understood by many Britons through a culturally diffuse mythology emphasising the war's futility, horror and the betrayal of the brave British 'Tommy' by hapless generals. However, as extant historiography has argued, this was not the prevailing interpretation among the war's contemporaries. Although divisive from the outset, the war was sustained in significant part by the widespread public belief that both the war and the sacrifices it entailed were both necessary and justified. Indeed, Watson and Porter note that not only did many of its participants see the sacrifice as worthwhile in the name of freedom, but that as the war progressed and losses mounted, honouring the sacrifice of the dead increasingly became a key justification for the war's continuation.²⁰ Notable artefacts such as John McCrae's poem, 'In Flanders Fields', actively urged readers to persevere with the war effort to make the sacrifice worthwhile and to preserve the symbolic immortality of the dead through victory: the war must be won *because* so many lives had already been lost.²¹ This language also came to form the dominant discursive framework for practices of remembrance emerging after the war, with national and local war memorials invoking the language of 'national identity, loyalty, bravery and personal sacrifice in the service of justice, liberty and dignity'.²² Its establishment as the frame of reference was, as Todman argues, the outcome of complex social negotiation, becoming dominant because it matched the prevailing mood of the time and was functional in addressing the challenges of commemorating the dead and serving the needs of the living in the aftermath of a war that had affected a broader demographic than Britain's previous wars.²³ It assuaged

²⁰ Watson and Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved', 156–62.

²¹ James Fox, 'Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present', in *Cultural Heritage Ethics: Between Theory and Practice*, ed. Constantine Sandis (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2014), 23; notably, a similar 'sacrifice trap' has been prominent in recent arguments for the continuation of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and the Arabian peninsula. See, for example, Trevor McCrisken, 'Justifying Sacrifice: Barack Obama and the Selling and Ending of the War in Afghanistan', *International Affairs* 88, no. 5 (2012): 993–1007.

²² Todman, *The Great War*, 131.

²³ Jennifer Iles, 'In Remembrance: The Flanders Poppy', *Mortality* 13, no. 3 (2008): 201–21; Michael Heffernan, 'For Ever England: The Western Front and the Politics of Remembrance in Britain', *Ecumene* 2, no. 3 (1995): 293–323.

government anxieties around the willingness of subjects to sacrifice again in the future²⁴, but also responded to concerns around social cohesion in the Empire itself, both by providing an ontological framework in which death was rendered meaningful for the sake of the bereaved and by sequestering death through time-limited practices that allowed for the continuation of normal life the rest of the year.²⁵

Beyond the content of remembrance discourse, achieving a tone that satisfied the perceived psychological needs of the state, surviving veterans and the bereaved, proved more challenging. Todman argues that while the official end of the war and the first anniversary of the Armistice were viewed by government and many surviving veterans as celebrations of victory and personal survival, it was the aspects of these commemorations that incorporated the dead, such as the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, that resonated with the public, becoming sites of pilgrimage for those whose loved ones had not returned.²⁶ Although the popularity of memorials emphasising death raised government concerns that it might have an undesirable effect on the public's relationship with what was seen as a great victory, by the end of the 20s' the perceived needs of the bereaved had taken priority over the living to the extent that the celebratory behaviour witnessed in the war's aftermath became proscribed, being viewed as disrespectful to those still grieving.²⁷ Nevertheless, the perception that remembrance discourse '[consoled] those bereaved by the war' meant that for several decades questioning the war's validity was effectively taboo.²⁸

The gradual orientation of remembrance towards commemoration of the dead took place in the context of the growing material need of the living. Despite soldiers being promised 'homes fit for heroes' by government, veteran welfare was essentially considered a matter of private beneficence, with numerous small organisations being formed over the course of the war to address the needs of returning soldiers. By 1921, this improvised social safety net was under unprecedented strain against the background of economic recession, disproportionately high levels of veteran unemployment, and a general shortfall in government veteran welfare provisions.²⁹ Some veterans even disrupted commemorations at the Cenotaph, protesting 'perpetual homage to the dead veteran when surviving ones were receiving such little help.'³⁰ This context prompted the

²⁴ Andrew Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK: "A Truly National Commemoration"?', *The Round Table* 103, no. 2 (2014): 156.

²⁵ Todman, *The Great War*, 57.

²⁶ Todman, 50–53; for a complementary account of the politics of the cenotaph, see Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 60–72.

²⁷ Todman, *The Great War*, 51–57.

²⁸ Todman, 131–32.

²⁹ Todman, 130.

³⁰ Indeed, as Reid notes, 'this was no one-off: unemployed ex-servicemen were to demonstrate at armistice ceremonies throughout the 1920s.' Fiona Reid, 'From First Remembrance Day to Remembrance Today', *HistoryExtra*, 9 May 2012, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/from-first-remembrance-day-to-remembrance-today/>.

formation of the British Legion - an amalgamation of four smaller organisations campaigning for veterans' welfare – in the same year. Although primarily intended to provide material support for veterans and their families, as Garnett and Weight note, in truth it was motivated by a 'combination of altruism towards, and fear of, the working class' – particularly in light of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia – seeking to avert class struggle and demands for social change by 'bring[ing] officers and men together in one body' and reminding them of their valued place in national life.³¹ The Legion pursued both of these aims by selling silk red poppies – inspired by McCrae's aforementioned poem – as a symbol of remembrance for killed and surviving British soldiers, and to raise funds for living veterans and their families. The poppy quickly became the main method through which Britons engaged with remembrance, and deployed remembrance discourse to remind the public of their existential debt to soldiers as a way of courting donations. From this stemmed the RBL's dual-role: offering welfare support for veterans of the British armed forces, past and present, and acting as the (self-appointed) 'national custodian of remembrance', keeping alive the memory of the dead and living, and the discourse of remembrance upon which its fundraising efforts depended – a function it has performed with its annual Poppy Appeal and promotion of remembrance initiatives during the month of November ever since.³²

WW1's positive associations with sacrifice in the defence of freedom remained widespread – though not dominant - until after WW2. This period saw WW1-era remembrance discourse and practices formally extended to WW2 with many local and national memorials from the former subsequently updated to reflect the latter experience, suggesting the equivalence of the two wars and the sacrifices of their participants.³³ In reality, however, they began to fare quite differently in the collective imagination from this time onwards. For example, Todman notes that WW2's smaller death toll meant that its memorialization tended to be channeled in more practical ways than had been the case with WW1 – not least through the formation of the welfare state.³⁴ Moreover, MacLeod and Inall argue that 'the political relevance of remembering the 'war to end all wars' was undermined by the renewal of conflict between 1939 and 1945', with WW1-era remembrance discourse's Christian framing of sacrificial redemption resonating much less strongly with the more pessimistic public mood after 1945, resulting in a decline in participation until the 1980s.³⁵ By contrast, the 1950s' onwards saw a stream of ebullient popular culture outputs casting WW2 as the foundational reference point for 'contemporary Britishness', with its narration as 'the good war' in which Britain was 'heroic and stoic whether in the face of evil, war

³¹ Mark Garnett and Richard Weight, *Modern British History: The Essential A-Z Guide*, New Ed edition (London: Pimlico, 2004), 76.

³² Iles, 'In Remembrance'; Basham, 'Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance'.

³³ Jenny Macleod and Yvonne Inall, 'A Century of Armistice Day: Memorialisation in the Wake of the First World War', *Mortality* 25, no. 1 (2019): 56.

³⁴ Todman, *The Great War*, 58–60.

³⁵ Macleod and Inall, 'A Century of Armistice Day', 64, 49.

or austerity' and 'not morally conflicted', providing many of the 'social facts' vital to Britain's self-identification as a liberal democratic nation.³⁶ At the same time, the generational decline of those who had experienced WW1 first or even second hand, and who had been the subjects of the remembrance discourse's ultimately affirmative take on the war, meant that by the 1970s and 80s subsequent generations were left with a commemorative framework that emphasised the war's death toll which, in combination with a series of cultural outputs, led to the war's association with death, waste and trauma becoming dominant.³⁷

The late 1980s also marked the beginning of what Winter termed the 'second memory boom', seeing a renewed interest in history and personalised commemoration around the figure of the victim, enabled by an increasingly educated citizenry with the leisure time and disposable income to devote them.³⁸ Although he did not use the term himself, Todman's account of what motivated such interests centring on 'the dislocation of identity attendant in the modern world' is certainly suggestive of anxieties intelligible through the framework of ontological (in)security:

The rapid pace of change has removed individuals from the countries, communities and social backgrounds in which their parents existed and they were raised. [...] The world seems more and more uncertain. Facing these challenges, people work harder to seek stability and an affirmation of identity in the past.³⁹

In line with the theoretical framework of this thesis, we might add the stultifying aspects of life in late modernity, in which the search for existential meaning is increasingly subordinated to the impersonal imperatives of consumerism and global capital, to this list of challenges. Significantly, Todman argues that these anxieties have manifested themselves in attempts to establish '[a]n imaginative connection with past people or events – particularly with members of our own families – [which] allows us to tell ourselves powerful stories about who we are and reinforce our sense of self.'⁴⁰ Expressed through the conceptual framework of this thesis, anxieties in late modernity led to a desire for vicarious identification. But what kinds of stories did/do we tell about ourselves, our ancestors and the war itself? Todman argues that the particular fascination with death in the second 'memory boom' was motivated by subjects wishing to find a connection in keeping with interpretations of their broader historical context: 'Looking back on a century that seems particularly full of violence and tragedy, do we perhaps want a violent, tragic event in

³⁶ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 132.

³⁷ Important aspects of this interpretation could, of course, be viewed as resonating with increasingly critical public attitudes towards war during the 1960s' and 70s', particularly in the context growing scepticism and anxiety about the Vietnam War and around the possibility of nuclear war. It is conceivable, therefore, that this context contributed to the ascendance of WW1's negative mythology. I am grateful to Trevor McCrisken for bringing this to my attention. Todman, *The Great War*, 221, 225–27; McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain', 303.

³⁸ Jay Winter, 'Notes on the Memory Boom: War, Remembrance and the Uses of the Past', in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, ed. Duncan Bell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 60, 67–69.

³⁹ Todman, *The Great War*, 70.

⁴⁰ Todman, 70.

our own past? Is this a way to seek entry to a global community of suffering?⁴¹ Thus, while vicarious ancestral links with WW1 offered subjects ‘a chance to participate in the national heritage’, Todman argues that while some certainly did derive feelings of pride from their ancestors’ war participation, its dominant negative mythology had led to WW1 becoming a cautionary tale for many Britons seeking to understand their place in the increasingly impersonal and bureaucratic structures of modernity and industrialised warfare.⁴² As McCartney notes, such individualised and decontextualized readings would be reinforced instrumentalised by the burgeoning family history industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century in order to foster emotional – and commercially lucrative - engagements with genealogical research.⁴³

While remembrance practices experienced renewed popularity in the 1980s and 90s, these too took on more personalised emphasis, focusing in particular on the personal stories of WW2 soldiers and various significant anniversaries around that war.⁴⁴ Practices such as the two minutes silence and wearing a poppy assumed more individualised meanings in the absence of imperatives for national unification.⁴⁵ But although the practices themselves remained associated with WW1, for these younger generations the linguistic signifiers at the centre of remembrance discourse relating to ‘sacrifice’ in the name of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ – increasingly referred to WW2.

British War Commemoration during the War on Terror

From 2001 onwards the RBL’s welfare and remembrance activities assumed renewed relevance in the context of Britain’s participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the ‘war on terror’. Soldiers and their families would require greater material support, particularly in the context of a perceived government shortfall in adequately resourcing the wars.⁴⁶ The smaller demographic of Britons affected directly by the Afghanistan and Iraq military deployments, coupled with the general unpopularity of the wars themselves, prompted intensive cross-societal efforts to promote public support for ‘the troops’. The primary method for accomplishing this was by discursively distancing the armed forces from the conflicts in which they were engaged through the sympathetic portrayal of ‘the troops’ as ‘heroic victims’ prepared to sacrifice their lives for Britain but variously victims of misguided/’unwinnable’ wars, and/or poor political leadership.⁴⁷ It was also commonly emphasised that the cost of Britain’s safety was borne by a

⁴¹ Todman, 67.

⁴² Todman, 68.

⁴³ McCartney, ‘The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain’, 304–7.

⁴⁴ Macleod and Inall, ‘A Century of Armistice Day’, 59–61.

⁴⁵ Macleod and Inall, 61–62.

⁴⁶ McCartney, ‘The Military Covenant and the Civil–Military Contract in Britain’, 411.

⁴⁷ Rachel Woodward, Trish Winter, and K. Neil Jenkins, ‘Heroic Anxieties: The Figure of the British Soldier in Contemporary Print Media’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 211–23; Ingham and Dandeker, ‘The Covenant We Must Protect from the Lawyers’; Helen McCartney, ‘Hero, Victim or

broader armed forces community, including ‘military families’ and ‘military wives’ who made very real sacrifices every day.⁴⁸ Opposition to the wars was effectively neutralised by discourses urging public support for the armed forces and their families who had not chosen for them to be there.

As McCartney argues, emphasising the passive victimhood of soldiers by absolving them of agency and responsibility proved a highly-effective method for bypassing criticism of the conflicts by ‘keeping the public engaged with the armed forces while they [fought] unpopular wars’, with support for the armed forces consequently undiminished even as the wars themselves became increasingly unpopular.⁴⁹ Dominant interpretations of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as ‘unnecessary or unwinnable’ and ‘badly prosecuted’ have also invited problematic comparisons with WW1, not least its reputation as a ‘futile and mismanaged’ conflict.⁵⁰ Comparisons of the wars have in turn led to the mythologised tragic victim figure of the WW1 ‘Tommy’ becoming the reference point for understanding the plight of modern soldiers. To the extent that such comparisons are suggestive of the equivalent victimhood of WW1 and modern soldiers, McCartney rightly argues that they are not only ‘mutually reinforcing for the victim image of the [modern] soldier’, but also perpetuate mythological interpretations of WW1 as futile and of its participants as passive victims.⁵¹ For McCartney, this ‘imaginative link’ between Britain’s recent wars and WW1 has been particularly evident in the extension of remembrance discourses and practices to modern conflicts, thus ‘linking recent military deaths symbolically with those of the First World War.’⁵² Cited examples include the addition of names of the dead of recent conflicts to war memorials originally established after WW1, the prominence of modern veterans in official ceremonies in 2009 marking the passing of the last ‘WW1 Tommy’ Harry Patch, as well as the Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett’s war memorial becoming the focal point for impromptu public vigils along the route taken by corteges repatriating soldiers’ bodies.⁵³ Indeed, concern among government and military officials that the ‘mawkish’ focus on death and the symbolic value of the armed forces in such spectacles might tarnish broader public understandings of the war and harm troop morale eventually contributed to the repatriations being re-routed to avoid Wootton Bassett as a way of sequestering death resulting from war and the associated negative publicity.⁵⁴ While acknowledging that ‘commemorative rituals provide a space for multiple interpretations’, McCartney argues that, in the context of the WW1’s negative mythology, the

Villain? The Public Image of the British Soldier and Its Implications for Defense Policy’, *Defense & Security Analysis* 27, no. 1 (2011): 45–47.

⁴⁸ On the importance of military families, see King, ‘The Afghan War and “Postmodern” Memory’; Basham, ‘Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance’, 888; Cree, ‘People Want to See Tears’.

⁴⁹ McCartney, ‘The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain’, 311–12.

⁵⁰ McCartney, 314.

⁵¹ McCartney, 314.

⁵² McCartney, 312.

⁵³ McCartney, 312.

⁵⁴ Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Fry quoted in K Neil Jenkins et al., ‘Wootton Bassett and the Political Spaces of Remembrance and Mourning’, *Area* 44, no. 3 (2012): 362; see also, Dixon, ‘Warrior Nation’, 25.

commemorative linkages between the past and present in these practices tended to ‘solidify the image of the soldier-victim in both conflicts.’⁵⁵

While this concern is certainly valid, however, the incorporation of modern veterans into the framework of remembrance also enabled a range of more positive meanings about their status which complicate the soldier-victim image. In order to promote charitable giving for armed forces personnel, the RBL has folded modern veterans into remembrance discourse which, as Millar argues, suggests ‘that the duty of commemoration and remembrance accrues from a more enduring, structural relationship’ – one underpinned by ontological claims about the role and necessity of heroic military sacrifice.⁵⁶ This structural relationship – which has found more explicit expression in recent years in the notion of a ‘military covenant’, consisting of an ostensibly timeless contract between the armed forces, government and public⁵⁷ - crucially inscribes the figure of the soldier with both *agency* and *motive*, uniformly depicting personnel as having volunteered their lives for the nation, asking only for public support in return. Beyond emphasising the need to remember veterans as objects of pity, or as worthy objects of support because of their symbolic value, remembrance discourse highlights the obligation to support soldiers because of their causal significance: that ‘they’ keep ‘us’ safe, and, but for their actions, ‘we’ would not exist/be free. These more positive associations have always been available alongside more sombre and negative ones in remembrance discourse. As we shall see in the next section, however, they have increasingly been foregrounded by a tonal shift in remembrance towards celebratory campaigns which, in Basham’s words, have ‘conjoined the long-standing narrative of the poppy as one of sacrifice [...] with the veneration of serving military personnel.’⁵⁸

This tonal shift has been consonant with ‘support the troops’ initiatives which have promoted greater public recognition of the *contribution* of the armed forces to national life, reminding subjects of their existential debt to those who ostensibly keep them safe. As we saw in Chapter 3, however, at a time when only a minority of Britons believed that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were enhancing either those countries’ or Britain’s security, claims of a military contribution to security were heavily-dependent upon references to past events in which Britain’s armed forces had been key to its survival. And the specific reference point (implicit or explicit) for many such invocations of the past has usually been the ‘foundational’ experience of WW2, with its hegemonic narration as the ‘the good war’ in which Britain was ‘heroic and stoic’ in the fight for freedom standing in

⁵⁵ And the protracted nature of the conflicts – without any discernible end in sight - in which British armed forces were engaged contributed significantly to this victim linkage, contrasting markedly with the jingoistic press coverage of the armed forces’ ‘victorious’ return to Britain after the short and relatively decisive Falklands War. McCartney, ‘The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain’, 312.

⁵⁶ Millar, “‘They Need Our Help’”, 13.

⁵⁷ For an extensive analysis of the origins and evolution of the ‘Military Covenant’ in British civil-military relations, see Ingham, *The Military Covenant*.

⁵⁸ Basham, ‘Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance’, 885.

stark contrast to the difficult place of WW1 in the national imaginary.⁵⁹ However, attempts to rehabilitate the armed forces by folding them into remembrance and ‘support the troops’ discourses have increasingly blurred the boundaries between particular wars. This is visible in Tidy’s study of the marketing of military-themed ‘vintage nostalgia’ products, sold as a way for the public to support veterans. While the evocative experience of WW2 remains a key reference point for marketing such products, Tidy notes that marketing also draws upon discursive frameworks in which ‘[a]ll wars – past, present, and future – are conflated within imaginations of a nostalgically omnipresent “good war”: a hybrid of World Wars One and Two.’⁶⁰ Such marketing, therefore, homogenises experiences of war and militarism in a manner allowing for the compression of the diverse events and soldiers of WW1, WW2 and Britain’s modern conflicts into a single discursive framework of heroic military sacrifice.

Trott has suggested that this has even extended to the rehabilitation of the WW1 soldier image, arguing that attitudes towards WW1 soldiers expressed in reader and media reviews of the autobiographies of the last British veterans of WW1 as far back as 2008 seemed to have been influenced by the contemporary ‘cult of the soldier’.⁶¹ Whilst not discounting the possibility that this might be the result of improved knowledge, a tendency for individuals to see what they wished to see, and then emphasise those aspects of the war and soldiering accordingly was noted.⁶² A 2013 British Future report on public attitudes to the (then) upcoming centenary reached a similar conclusion when reflecting on the findings of a YouGov poll which asked respondents about their attitudes to the war, its participants and their commemoration. The survey found public ambivalence towards WW1 with 51% of respondents refusing to castigate it as futile, while a narrow plurality of respondents (35%) rejected the notion that it was a ‘just war’. This ambivalence was in stark contrast to attitudes towards the war’s participants, with 82% of respondents agreeing that “[t]he centenary of the Great War is an important reminder that we are forever in the debt of those who died to protect the British way of life”, and 87% agreeing with a statement citing the high human cost of the war as evidence that ‘[t]he cost of peace and freedom is high’.⁶³ This cognitive dissonance, evident in the substantial numbers of respondents unwilling to describe the war as worthwhile but willing to attribute their freedom to the sacrifices of the soldiers themselves, was explained by the report as resulting from the lack of basic knowledge that many respondents appeared to have about the war, particularly evident in many respondents’

⁵⁹ Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 132.

⁶⁰ Tidy, ‘Forces Sauces and Eggs for Soldiers’, 227.

⁶¹ Vincent Andrew Trott, ‘Remembering War, Resisting Myth: Veteran Autobiographies and the Great War in the Twenty-First Century’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 4 (2013): 338–39.

⁶² Trott, 338–39.

⁶³ Jo Tanner, “Routes to Remembrance” in Jo Tanner, Ed., *Do Mention the War: Will 1914 Matter in 2014?*, in *Do Mention the War: Will 1914 Matter in 2014?*, ed. Jo Tanner (London: British Future, 2013), 23, http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BRF_Declaration-of-war-report_P2_Web-1.pdf.

confusion over which events occurred during WW1 and WW2.⁶⁴ But it also demonstrated what Trott had hinted at – that in the absence of knowledge about particular wars, subjects are liable to compensate for gaps in knowledge about particular conflicts with scripts drawn from the homogenous framework of heroic sacrifice, and seemingly find it difficult to think outside this framework.

While Tidy rightly argues that the blurring of past and present in this way might pave the way for uncritical approaches to the WW1 centenary, however, what is notable is that the invocation of a “hybrid” war means that WW1 is seldom invoked on its own terms, with its contentious meanings elided by its grouping with WW2. Similarly, while practices of remembrance draw on much of the iconography of WW1, the expansion and recent change in tone of remembrance means that these annual occasions serve, as Poulter notes, as times at which the nation can be ReMembered from a variety of reference points, with none being the explicit focus.⁶⁵ The centenary, therefore, constitutes an intriguing event because it ostensibly focuses public attention onto a specific conflict that has a difficult place in the national imaginary and is often marginalized because of this fact. In this way, it could be viewed as an opening into the homogenised figure of the soldier which could threaten the narrative’s integrity. But the centenary could also be used more opportunistically to rehabilitate the image of the soldier in a manner commensurate with the RBL’s modern charity activities. I will argue that the RBL appears to have recognised this, by placing strong frameworks on the ways in which visitors engage with the war through its centenary initiatives.

LIVE ON – The Centenary and Symbolic Immortality

The homogenized language of remembrance had largely papered-over public debates about WW1’s contested legacy, more often referring to WW2. But as the centenary of WW1 approached, anxieties that had hitherto lain dormant were stimulated once more. These centered on whether Britain would mark the war’s centenary, and if so, what it was that would be commemorated. The first question was answered when British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a four-year programme of commemorations would commence in 2014. In outlining the necessity of commemorating the war, Cameron emphasised the ‘scale of sacrifice’ involved, the ‘impact of the war’ on Britain and the world, and the war’s importance as a ‘matter of the heart’, with the its ‘emotional connection’ making it a ‘fundamental part of our national consciousness’.⁶⁶ Perhaps unsurprisingly given the aforementioned memory boom, public sentiment broadly agreed, with a Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) survey

⁶⁴ Tanner, 23.

⁶⁵ Poulter, ‘ReMembering the Nation: Remembrance Days and the Nation in Ireland’.

⁶⁶ Cameron, ‘Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans’.

finding that '[n]early nine out of 10 of the British public [...] feel that we should mark it.'⁶⁷ However, the question of *what* would be commemorated proved much more divisive. As Andrew Mycock notes, while some were concerned that the centenary might portray the war - hitherto associated by many with horror and futile tragedy - in glorified or jingoistic terms, however, others on the right of British politics worried that political correctness - in the form of deference towards 'The Germans' - coupled with the war's mythology, might frustrate desires for a sufficiently patriotic commemoration of the war.⁶⁸ And Cameron's vision for 'a truly national commemoration' was an object of particular concern for those who worried that the commemorations might be instrumentalised for heading off devolved nationalisms in Scotland ahead of the 2014 independence referendum, and in Ireland where the war has dissonant relevance.⁶⁹

Despite Cameron's insistence that government would 'play a leading role' in the commemorations, the public divisions and sensitivities around the war complicated this task substantially. Of course, it did fund various educational initiatives, but these were experienced unevenly across the constituent nations of the UK.⁷⁰ Otherwise, the government's strategy for navigating the politically-fraught meanings of the centenary consisted of 'provid[ing] leadership and encouragement in organising commemorative acts while not dictating the themes of commemoration itself.'⁷¹ Central to this strategy was framing the centenary in terms of *remembrance*, which would, in Cameron's words, 'be the hallmark of our commemorations.'⁷² In justifying this focus, Cameron invoked words written by Second Lieutenant Eric Townsend a week before his death in September 1916: "But for this war I and all the others would have passed into oblivion like the countless myriads before us [...] but we shall live for ever in the results of our efforts."⁷³ For Cameron, remembrance as a way of preserving the symbolic immortality of the dead constituted '[o]ur duty'.⁷⁴ Noting the Government's reluctance to 'insist on a particular narrative' however, the Government's special representative for the centenary, Andrew Murrison MP, claimed that remembrance would serve as an apolitical framework for the

⁶⁷ Strachan, 'First World War Anniversary: We Must Do More than Remember'.

⁶⁸ Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK', 156–57.

⁶⁹ For more detailed discussions of the national politics of the commemoration, see, for example, Catriona Pennell, 'A Truly Shared Commemoration?', *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 4 (2014): 92–100; Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK'; Keith Jeffery, 'Commemoration in the United Kingdom: A Multitude of Memories', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2015): 562–67.

⁷⁰ Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK', 158; Pennell, 'Learning Lessons from War?'

⁷¹ Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK', 161.

⁷² Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans'.

⁷³ Eric Townsend, quoted in Cameron; For the full letter, see Laurence Housman, *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* (Philadelphia, PA: Pine Street Books (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 277–79.

⁷⁴ Cameron, 'Speech at Imperial War Museum on First World War Centenary Plans'.

commemorations ‘making no judgment about fault, right or wrong, or indulging in any jingoistic sentiment’.⁷⁵

As we have seen, remembrance has always been intensely political, rendering the government’s ostensibly a-political stance somewhat disingenuous. But this framing did mean that the government could maintain the *pretence* that it was taking a back seat in the commemorations by unofficially delegating the central task of the centenary to a range of quasi-independent organisations. One was the BBC, which framed its coverage of the commemorations in terms of remembrance from the outset - the advert launching its centenary programming (narrated by news presenter Huw Edwards) stated ‘[t]hose who did so much for us are now all gone: we can’t shake them by the hand; we can’t look them in the eye and say ‘thank you’. But we can remember.’⁷⁶ Another was the custodian of national remembrance, itself, the RBL. With its origins in the aftermath of WW1, the centenary was an opportunity for RBL to further its remembrance work – and it did this through numerous initiatives. But rather than depicting the WW1 soldier as the tragic victim of a hostile war, it used its unparalleled authenticity and authority to frame the war and its participants in more positive and heroic ways. Just as the RBL’s public image as ‘apolitical’ had been useful in advancing contemporary military agendas, it would also be useful for pushing a militarised reading of the war.

But the RBL’s participation in the commemorations was conditioned by several contextual factors relating to its *dual-role* as custodian of remembrance and charity providing support for modern veterans. The centenary coincided with a period of anxious introspection for the RBL regarding the relative lack of public awareness of the RBL’s welfare functions. This was fuelled by the proliferation of a large number of new military charities over the course of Britain’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq competing over the finite resource of public donations against the challenging backdrop of the 2008 financial crash⁷⁷ - factors ultimately contributing to a fall of 3.3 million pounds in donations to the RBL between 2011 and 2012.⁷⁸ Although the RBL remained the largest veterans’ welfare charity by some distance over the course of the ‘War on Terror’,⁷⁹ -

⁷⁵ Andrew Murrison MP, quoted in ‘The First World War Centenary in the UK’, 156.

⁷⁶ Visually, the advert surveyed from various angles a field containing a series of reflective WW1 Tommy silhouette sculptures - such silhouettes being a central trope in modern remembrance. The voiceover was set to the soundtrack of a male voice choir sombrely humming the melody of the WW1 anthem, ‘Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag, and Smile, Smile, Smile’. ‘BBC: WW1 Centenary’, Shots, 4 August 2014, <https://www.shots.net/news/view/84761-bbc-ww1-centenary>.

⁷⁷ Andrew Mumford, ‘Veteran Care in the United Kingdom and the Sustainability of the “Military Covenant”’, *The Political Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (2012): 820–26; Gribble et al., ‘Public Awareness of UK Veterans’ Charities’.

⁷⁸ Seb Joseph, ‘The Royal British Legion Elevates Marketing to Make Poppy Brand a “Symbol of Hope”’, *Marketing Week*, 3 November 2014, <https://www.marketingweek.com/2014/11/03/the-royal-british-legion-elevates-marketing-to-make-poppy-brand-a-symbol-of-hope/>.

⁷⁹ ‘Royal British Legion Continues Its Reign as UK’s Dominant Military Charity’, *Charity Financials*, accessed 28 November 2018, <https://www.charityfinancials.com/charity-financials-insider/royal-british-legion-continues-its-reign-as-uks-dominant-military-charity-1738.html>.

playing a correspondingly significant in shaping public attitudes - its place in relation to youthful charities such as Help for Heroes explicitly focused on the welfare of veterans of Britain's latest wars seemed unclear. Indeed, the RBL was aware that it had an image problem – of public *misrecognition* - in relation to its dual-functions, with Director of Marketing for the RBL, Gary Ryan, explaining in 2014 that:

We're very well known for our remembrance activity but we're not so well known for the welfare work that we do [...] It's really important that we not only address those older people but also make ourselves relevant to younger audiences and become not just a symbol of remembrance but also one of hope.⁸⁰

Similarly, Colonel Angus Taverner characterised the RBL's predicament as a predominantly *generational* one: '[t]o the modern generation, the RBL is seen as the charity of World War One and Two [...] It's seen as being for the old boys, not the 25-year-olds who have just come home.'⁸¹ This had, in the RBL's view, necessitated a change of strategy in order to engage younger generations that have sometimes had a more distant relationship with remembrance. And the scheduled withdrawal of the majority of British forces from Afghanistan in 2014 added urgency to the task of reminding the public that soldiers needs would continue even as the war itself faded into memory.

Finally, in addition to challenging perceptions of *who* counted as veterans, the RBL was by 2014 aware of the pitfalls of the culturally-pervasive depiction of armed forces personnel as victims. While media portrayals of soldiers as the victims of wars contributed to them being absolved of public blame for Britain's unpopular wars, the RBL's report on the findings of its 2014 Household Survey noted that they had also resulted in the 'pervading myth that serving and ex-Service personnel are 'mad, bad and sad' i.e. that most suffer mental health problems, that many veterans end up in prison or sleeping rough on the streets, and that many are suicidal.'⁸² The report noted that while this was a resonant myth, it overrepresented the number of veterans suffering from mental ill-health, adding that such 'myths are pernicious because they may harm the employment prospects of military personnel when they seek work in the civilian world.'⁸³ Thus, by 2014 the RBL was acutely aware of the need to rehabilitate the figure of the British soldier, and to ensure that resonant fundraising campaigns did not actively hamper its welfare work.

⁸⁰ Joseph, 'The Royal British Legion Elevates Marketing to Make Poppy Brand a "Symbol of Hope"'.
⁸¹ Dora Allday, 'Slipping into the Rear-View Mirror?: How Important Is the Poppy in 2017?', SW Londoner, 10 November 2017, <http://www.swlondoner.co.uk/slipping-rear-view-mirror-important-poppy-2017/>.

⁸² The Royal British Legion, 'A UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community' (London: The Royal British Legion, 2014), iv, https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/rbl_household_survey_report.pdf?sfvrsn=5bcbac4f_4.

⁸³ The Royal British Legion, iv.

Recognition of the need to improve public awareness of the veteran community and its needs, as well as the need to partially rehabilitate the RBL's own public image resulted in a rebranding campaign which launched in 2014 to promote the RBL's new 'strapline' – 'LIVE ON – to the memory of the fallen and the future of the living'.⁸⁴ This rebranding was envisaged as 'a simple and memorable way' to integrate the RBL's dual-functions in order to draw greater attention to its service provision for living veterans, to challenge public perceptions of remembrance as being primarily about the dead.⁸⁵ Coinciding with the beginning of the centenary, prominent in the narration of the shift of emphasis signified by the rebranding was the RBL's own origin in the aftermath of the First World War. For example, its 'Our Brand' webpage stated: 'The Legion was founded by veterans after the First World War. A century on from the start of that conflict, we're still helping today's Service men and women, veterans, and their families in almost every aspect of daily life.'⁸⁶

The theme of continuity was similarly evident in the 2015 Poppy Appeal, for which the RBL launched a print and digital advertising campaign called 'Portraits behind the poppy'. This consisted of a set of monochrome photos of British soldiers of the First World War taken in 1915, juxtaposed with photos of veterans of Britain's recent conflicts created with the same camera technology used to make the originals, and taken by a descendant of the original photographer.⁸⁷ The images, both in their 'still' form and in the context of several videos, received wide public exposure and became the subjects of an art exhibition.⁸⁸ While the campaign was aimed at reinforcing the RBL's work as a veterans' charity ('This juxtaposition reminds audiences that The Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal supports both the Armed Forces men and women of the past, and those of today'), the use of vintage photos of WW1 soldiers in their relative youth was also aimed at challenging the public associations of veterans with elderly, white men.⁸⁹

What is intriguing about these images is the subjectivities that they are used to articulate. The most obvious effect of the 'antique' or 'vintage' feel of the photos is to imbue the figures with a

⁸⁴ Chris Simpkins, 'Live on - To the Memory of the Fallen and the Future of the Living', The Royal British Legion in Somerset, 2014, <http://counties.britishlegion.org.uk/counties/somerset/live-on>.

⁸⁵ 'Our Brand', The Royal British Legion, accessed 29 November 2018, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/our-brand/>.

⁸⁶ 'Our Brand'.

⁸⁷ Y&R London, *The Royal British Legion - 'Portraits Behind The Poppy'* (London, 2015), <https://www.adforum.com/creative-work/ad/player/34525413/portraits-behind-the-poppy/the-royal-british-legion>.

⁸⁸ Y&R London.

⁸⁹ Y&R London; A survey commissioned by the RBL found that 'the public most commonly associate Remembrance, the poppy and the Legion's work with the First and Second World Wars and elderly veterans. Just over a third of those surveyed identified Remembrance with thinking about those who are currently serving.' 'Poppy Appeal 2016: The Legion Asks the Nation to "Rethink Remembrance"', The Royal British Legion, accessed 30 November 2018, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/community/news/poppy-appeal/poppy-appeal-2016-the-legion-asks-the-nation-to-rethink-remembrance/>.

sense of tradition, or what Giddens refers to as ‘historicity’.⁹⁰ Given that the image of the modern veteran itself lacks sufficient public familiarity, the juxtaposition of the past and present serves to confer authenticity upon modern veterans that is conventionally associated with older veterans. The antiqued images work to constitute the modern soldiers as veterans through being vicariously identified with their forebears. Similar dynamics have been deployed in subsequent campaigns. The 2016 Poppy Appeal, for instance, encouraged the public to ‘Rethink Remembrance’ with a series of videos in which ‘a story of conflict or injury is told through the eyes of a Second World War veteran, but at the end a twist is revealed.’⁹¹ As the captions following the video testimonies reveal, the ‘twist’ is that these are not their own experiences (‘This is not Roy’s story’), but those of younger veterans who are subsequently visually and textually introduced to the viewer.⁹² Again, the public’s unfamiliarity with modern veterans is perceived to necessitate that others (at least initially) speak their stories for them - changing perceptions of who counts as a veteran is achieved vicariously through association with the subjective authenticity of the WW2 veteran.



Figure 4.1 - Portraits behind the Poppy

The juxtaposition of the images of modern soldiers with the photos of WW1 soldiers in ‘Portraits behind the Poppy’ also implies the equivalence of the two soldier figures. Both are disconnected

⁹⁰ Giddens defines ‘historicity’ as the ‘use of history to make history’. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 243.

⁹¹ ‘Poppy Appeal 2016’; Liz Jackson, ‘Is Remembrance Only for Older Veterans?’, 27 October 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37789795>.

⁹² The Royal British Legion, *Rethink Remembrance: I Was Taught That Soldiers Don’t Discuss Feelings*, YouTube, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9Jrm26I2O0>.

from their respective historical contexts, suggesting that they are essentially the same figure, just from different times. Doing so blurs the very different motivations, experiences and feelings of the figures towards their respective contexts and conflicts. Consequently, not only is the present historicized in these images, but understandings of the past may be altered in the process. This, of course, is the crux of McCartney's concern that using the mythologised image of the WW1 Tommy as a culturally-resonant template for casting modern soldiers as similarly tragic non-agentic victims might perpetuate the problematic mythology of WW1.⁹³ As we have seen, however, it was precisely this passive victim trope that the RBL was trying to move away from in 2014. Thus, what we see in 'Portraits' is the opposite of victimisation. By folding WW1 soldiers into a broader, ahistorical account of soldiering, the RBL's portrayals risk problematically reinscribing the figure of the WW1 soldier with agency that is in keeping with contemporary political (and commercial) requirements - a tendency to which I return later.

Crucially, recasting the WW1 soldier as agentic in line with modern soldiers allows the modern subjects of the photos to vicariously identify with the WW1 veterans as their counterparts in a way that allows for expressions of pride. In a 'behind the scenes' video about the creation of the images, upon seeing his own photo one of the modern veteran participants remarks that it 'makes me feel like part of British military history – it's just a privilege to be able to be a part of something like that'.⁹⁴ There appears to be a vicarious relationship with the past at work, in which the modern veterans perceive their military identities in a new light as part of longstanding tradition. This idea also appears to have been at the core of the 2014 Ministry of Defence project, 'Operation: Reflect', which sought to connect current armed forces personnel with their predecessors by sending soldiers on a series of visits to WW1 battlefields.⁹⁵ No longer synonymous with victimhood, the WW1 soldier was now a viable object for vicarious identification, so that modern soldiers might more completely and authentically integrate their personal narratives into the history and tradition of a broader agentic collective. Significantly, this framing of the soldiers and the war paved the way for broader civilian vicarious identification with soldiers too.

'Every One Remembered'

This emphasis on personal and family connections has similarly been at the forefront of the RBL's centenary initiatives, and has been particularly evident in its flagship centenary programme 'Every

⁹³ McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain', 312–14.

⁹⁴ *The Story behind the Poppy: Behind the Scenes*, YouTube (The Royal British Legion, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCpyv-6pFyg>.

⁹⁵ Frank Gardner, 'Today's Troops Reflect on World War One', BBC News, 10 November 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29957683>.

One Remembered'.⁹⁶ Launched as a joint initiative with the CWGC in 2014, Every One Remembered's aim was to encourage the public to commemorate each of the 1.1 million British and Commonwealth soldiers killed during the First World War, through an online memorial and database described by the RBL as its 'greatest act of remembrance during the [...] centenary.'⁹⁷ The cited inspiration for the project was '14-year-old Gemma' who, after visiting to a war cemetery in Belgium, wrote to the RBL to say 'I know that not everyone can be remembered as individuals, but I felt it was a shame for some people to have dozens of poppies and crosses while others had no one left to remember them.'⁹⁸ Correspondingly, the project's stated intention was to 'ensure every fallen hero from across the Commonwealth is remembered *individually*' with the project envisaged as a way for subjects 'to keep alive the memory of those who died in the First World War' – to preserve the symbolic immortality of the corporeally dead.⁹⁹ Here, collective memory of the dead was portrayed as something fragile and in need of protection, both by its custodian, the RBL, and by the British public, without whom the dead may die a second symbolic death.

The project thus invited visitors to engage with the website on a number of different levels: the simplest being to create a memorial for a suggested individual – someone who had not yet been remembered – and to 'plant' a virtual poppy on an interactive map. On a deeper level, visitors were encouraged to remember someone connected to them by searching the integrated CWGC database for biographical details such as images, place of residency, occupation etc. Moreover, visitors were encouraged to contribute to these details where they could by uploading pertinent documents and adding detail to biographical accounts, as a way of 'helping future generations to remember'.¹⁰⁰ This was in line with the project's broader emphasis on the importance of engaging younger generations and inducting them into practices of remembrance so that they too could 'carry the torch' (in the spirit of Moina Michael's 'We Shall Keep the Faith') into the future.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ The Royal British Legion, 'Every One Remembered - Home', Every One Remembered, accessed 1 August 2015, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/>; The project was originally titled 'Every Man Remembered' which was said to also '[incorporate] Every Woman Remembered, dedicated to the 800 women in the records of the CWGC who died in the First World War.' The change to 'Every One Remembered' occurred in August 2017. Graham Martin, 'Remembering the Commonwealth Victims of the First World War', Third Force News, 28 July 2014, <https://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/remembering-every-one-of-the-commonwealth-victims-of-the-first-world-war>.

⁹⁷ 'WW1 Remembrance Database Launched', *BBC News*, 28 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-28519247>.

⁹⁸ The Royal British Legion, 'About Every One Remembered', Every One Remembered, accessed 21 June 2020, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/about/>.

⁹⁹ The Royal British Legion (Emphasis added).

¹⁰⁰ The Royal British Legion.

¹⁰¹ Indeed, the intergenerational aspect of the centenary was also emphasised more widely, too, with the SSAFA charity calling for 'the public to help keep the nation's history alive by sharing their family stories and photos from The Great War' after research it had commissioned into public knowledge of the war in 2018 found 'that Millennials aged 18 to 36 have very little knowledge of World War One and the devastating events that surrounded it, compared to previous generations.' Noting that 'Millennials are the first generation who may not have known a family member who lived or fought during the Great War', SSAFA Director, Justine Baynes urged 'families across the country to share their stories with the younger

The television advert for the campaign featured a young Caucasian girl poignantly asking, 'because if I don't remember him, who will?'¹⁰² Finally, as in all of the RBL's activities, fundraising featured prominently with a 'donate' button visible at the top of all pages of the 'Every One Remembered' website, and those creating memorials encouraged to leave an optional donation – for which they would receive a commemorative certificate. Thus, visitors were reassured that with their participation, 'every one of them will be remembered.'¹⁰³

However, as one of the advertising agencies tasked with the project's promotion recognised, the length of time that had elapsed since the war and difficulty of relating to the mythical figure of the WW1 soldier posed significant challenges for engagement: 'how do you help people in the 21st century connect to those who lived in such different times, so long ago?'¹⁰⁴ The chosen method was a high-profile advertising campaign centring on different ways of *identifying* with the soldiers which corresponded to the different levels of engagement offered by the website. One branch of the campaign sought to engage younger generations by tapping into celebrity culture through a 'celebrity brand campaign' without any official endorsements, which consisted of a series of print and digital adverts which 'killed' some of Britain's most beloved celebrities by featuring their names in large sombre print above birth and death dates.¹⁰⁵ The twist was that these 'obituary' style adverts actually commemorated their WW1 namesakes - the purpose being to encourage subjects to 'relate to soldiers even if they are not directly related to someone.'¹⁰⁶ The adverts were strategically placed for maximum impact with their target audience: 'Andy Murray, for example, alongside a Wimbledon story and Harry Styles in the online Entertainment and Culture pages.'¹⁰⁷ And vicarious identity promotion featured prominently here, with the campaign asking the public to put themselves in their own namesakes' shoes. As one article reporting on the campaign strikingly led with, 'You're dead. You died a hundred years ago in world war 1!'¹⁰⁸ The effect, as one of the agencies noted, was that people – including some of the named celebrities - 'shared the stories [on social media] *as though they were their own*', encouraging others to engage in ways that allowed for similarly strong emotional vicarious identifications: '[b]y asking people to

generations – so that they will be forever celebrated and never forgotten.' SSAFA, The Armed Forces Charity, 'SSAFA Launches Campaign to Keep the Nation's History Alive - Cobseo', Cobseo: The Confederation of Service Charities, 25 April 2018, <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/ssafa-launches-campaign-keep-nations-history-alive/>.

¹⁰² 'Every Man Remembered', catalyst2, 27 August 2014, <https://www.catalyst2.com/blog/every-man-remembered/>.

¹⁰³ The Royal British Legion, 'About Every One Remembered'.

¹⁰⁴ 'Every Man Remembered, Maxus / Royal British Legion', Media Week Awards, accessed 10 October 2019, <https://www.mediaweekawards.co.uk/finalists/every-man-remembered-4/>.

¹⁰⁵ 'Royal British Legion / Everyman Remembered', VMLY&R United Kingdom, accessed 14 October 2019, <https://london.yr.com/work/royal-british-legion-everyman-remembered/>.

¹⁰⁶ 'PR Campaign of the Week: 'RIP Harry Styles - Every Man Remembered by the British Legion', London PR Agency, accessed 14 October 2019, <http://www.londonpragency.com/pr-campaign-of-the-week-rip-harry-styles-every-man-remembered-by-the-british-legion/>.

¹⁰⁷ 'Royal British Legion / Everyman Remembered'.

¹⁰⁸ 'Every Man Remembered, Maxus / Royal British Legion'.

find their namesakes who fell in world war 1, we created powerful emotional connections between people who had no real connection.¹⁰⁹

Celebrities were also central to a second part of the campaign, which consisted of images of famous personalities such as Baroness Karen Brady and Lord Julian Fellowes holding photos of soldiers killed during the war personally connected to them in some way. While West Ham United Chairperson Karen Brady was pictured holding a photo of former West Ham player Sergeant Major Frank Cannon, others such as Julian Fellowes were pictured holding photos of family relatives from the war, pointing to a genealogical route to engagement with ‘Every One Remembered’.¹¹⁰ These thicker forms of engagement centring on local and personal ties were also the focus of the aforementioned televised advert which featured modern subjects in a variety of everyday settings, holding sepia photos of WW1 British soldiers. Each person was connected to the soldier in the photo in a different way, conveyed by a voice over (e.g. ‘he was the same age as me when he died’/‘she was from my village’/‘before he went off to war, he worked right here’/‘my great-uncle’).¹¹¹ The idea here was to ‘[show] the country that every one of us has something in common with a fallen soldier from 100 years ago’, and to use that similarity as a basis for establishing emotional connections with the soldier through different forms of vicarious identification.¹¹²

Militarised Genealogy and Vicarious Military Subjectivity

The different aspects of the campaign proved highly effective, attracting ‘4 million website page views’ – enough to crash the ‘Every One Remembered’ website on its first day – and prompting over ‘300,000 acts of Remembrance with more than 60% of those from people below 24 years old’.¹¹³ And much of this success was attributed to the ways the campaign made the WW1 military personnel *emotionally resonant* with younger generations. However, as we have seen, there was nothing inevitable about the content of the emotional connection made. To recap, McCartney’s point in 2014 was that genealogy projects prior to the centenary essentially attempted to do the same thing by encouraging individuals to emotionally engage with their ancestors through WW1’s dominant framing as a tragic, futile and uniquely horrific war. ‘Every One Remembered’ attempted similar framing, but drew upon a different emotional palette, allowing for vicarious identifications more in line with the RBL’s broader efforts to rehabilitate the war and its

¹⁰⁹ ‘Every Man Remembered, Maxus / Royal British Legion’ (emphasis added).

¹¹⁰ ‘World War One: Every Man Remembered Database Launched’, BBC News, 28 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-28519247>.

¹¹¹ *Conrad. P - Every Man Remembered TV Advert*, accessed 21 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvAvQGqMbr0>.

¹¹² ‘Every Man Remembered - The Royal British Legion/Y&R’, we love ad, accessed 13 October 2019, <http://www.welovead.com/en/works/details/c14wesqzn>.

¹¹³ ‘Royal British Legion / Everyman Remembered’.

participants. Mindful of the continuing public sensitivity around the commemorations, the advertising campaign was notably restrained in expressing any normative claims about the war or its participants, choosing instead to emphasise the importance of remembrance. This is not to say that the campaign was agnostic about the content of remembrance; rather, it shaped engagement with the project on a tonal level. As one PR website remarked of the adverts: ‘The subject is a little heavy, but the adverts are not in the slightest bit gloomy, and the biography given at the bottom of the advert gives the feeling of a celebration of the soldiers’ efforts.’¹¹⁴

The ‘Every One Remembered’ website, on the other hand, more assertively framed the meaning of the war and its participants, stating that ‘[m]ore than one million Service men and women gave their lives in the First World War so that future generations could live theirs’.¹¹⁵ Similar framing was evident in the memorial interface too. Unless visitors registered with the website to leave personalised messages, they had to choose a message from a drop-down menu of six pro-forma options. Three of the messages – ‘At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them’/ ‘We will remember them. Today. Tomorrow. Forever.’/ ‘May you live in our hearts forever’ – relied on more subtle framing by invoking the empty signifier-laden vernacular of state remembrance, which, without appearing to insist upon any particular meaning, nevertheless carried significant ideological coding. Altogether less subtle were the remaining three messages – ‘Thank you to all who lost their lives to save our countries. You will always be remembered’/ ‘Thank you for serving our country. We appreciate your efforts and bravery to keep us safe’ / ‘I wish I had known you and had a chance to thank you for everything you gave to us who survive you.’¹¹⁶ Notable here was the treatment of agency, with the words ‘serving’ and ‘gave’ implying that the lives of those killed were given consensually and freely. Furthermore, all three phrases suggested soldiers’ (and ostensibly the state’s) motivations: ‘to save our countries’/‘to keep us safe’/for our survival. Beyond motives, the war itself was reinscribed as a just and necessary conflict, to which we could ostensibly trace ‘our’ freedom and security. These moves worked in concert to convey the existential debt owed by modern generations to British soldiers killed during WW1 whose lives, far from being wasted in a futile war, were the ‘price’ of the ‘our’ freedom, the implication being that both their sacrifices and the war were worthwhile. And to the extent that the soldiers were intertwined with the nation, Younger generations were viewed as the vicarious conduits through which not only (or mainly, even) the individual soldiers’ symbolic immortality might be recognised, but the nation’s too.

Of course, each of these agentic and causal claims is contested. Absent from these accounts, for example, was any recognition of conscription or the often coercive social pressure to conform to

¹¹⁴ ‘PR Campaign of the Week: ‘RIP Harry Styles - Every Man Remembered by the British Legion’.

¹¹⁵ The Royal British Legion, ‘Every One Remembered - Home’.

¹¹⁶ The Royal British Legion, ‘Every One Remembered - Remember’, Every One Remembered, accessed 15 January 2015, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/remember/>.

militarized masculinities highlighted by Gullace.¹¹⁷ Even for those who volunteered, the gendered and racialized context in which they did so complicates matters, not least the framing of the participation of colonial troops in the language of ‘contribution’ which, as Ware argues, often belie the legacies of colonial oppression that drove such participation.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, Todman questions whether ‘they’ really died for ‘our’ ‘freedom’, noting that while many ‘joined up to defend a set of liberal values’, many others regarded ‘gender and racial equality as potentially dangerous side effects of the conflict rather than desirable outcomes.’¹¹⁹ And Watson and Porter note that the language of heroic sacrifice was often deployed to ‘paper over’ alternative urges – especially revenge - that would be regarded as less compatible with self-concepts.¹²⁰ Similarly, the causal narrative at the centre of remembrance discourse has been a particular site of contestation over the course of the centenary.¹²¹ The application of the homogenised language of remembrance here re-inscribes the figure of the soldier with agency that conforms to contemporary political and fundraising imperatives, but is only *contingently* true, and potentially as misleading as the victimhood trope.

Although problematic, the framing of the war in the language of heroic military sacrifice also worked to promote vicarious identification with the military dead. Portraying them as willing contributors to a justified and worthwhile war emphasised the national dimension and, in so doing, promoted not only expressions of gratitude (to service ‘our’ existential debt) but also expressions of pride. Particularly where the soldier being commemorated was a family relative, it was implied that visitors could *feel proud* at being part of a family unit who had contributed to the national story. Some expressed this through a single pro-forma message or some hybrid combination of the different options, but expressions of pride were particularly evident in the personalised commemorations. For example, one anonymous message read: ‘[r]emembering our great uncle Thomas Hogan. A true hero to all his family.’¹²² Some messages even alluded to a broader military contribution made by their families. Mick Symes noted on his great-grandfather Fred Ward’s page (as if in dialogue with Ward) that ‘[y]ou would never know that your son Claude

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Nicoletta F. Gullace, ‘The “White Feather Girls”: Women’s Militarism in the UK’, openDemocracy, 30 June 2014, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nicoletta-f-gullace/white-feather-girls-womens-militarism-in-uk>; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹¹⁸ Vron Ware, ‘How Multiculture Gets Militarized’, openDemocracy, 17 September 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/vron-ware/how-multiculture-gets-militarised>; For an extended discussion of ‘militarised multicultural’ and the recent attempts by minority ethnic groups to use the centenary to stake a claim to national belonging, see Vron Ware, ‘From War Grave to Peace Garden: Muslim Soldiers, Militarized Multiculture, and Cultural Heritage’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 10, no. 4 (2017): 287–304.

¹¹⁹ Todman, “‘Did They Really Die for Us?’”, 19.

¹²⁰ Watson and Porter, ‘Bereaved and Aggrieved’, 162–63.

¹²¹ For discussions of the centenary politics of WW1’s causal significance, see Mycock, ‘The First World War Centenary in the UK’, 156–57; Jeffery, ‘Commemoration in the United Kingdom’, 563–64.

¹²² ‘Anonymous’, on the profile of ‘Officer’s Steward 1st Class Thomas Joseph Hogan’, Every One Remembered, accessed 9 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/2866237/>.

also gave his life in a later war’, adding that ‘Father & son both died patriots, in the service of their country, I never got to meet them but they hold a huge spot in my heart and that of our entire family, we are proud of them both.’¹²³ Returning briefly to the ‘Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?’ recruitment poster, then, while subjects are increasingly unlikely to have first-hand authentic military subjectivity, a sustained ancestral military contribution may provide them with the resources to answer the posters question and to claim vicarious military subjectivity.¹²⁴

Other memorials demonstrated the integration of the remembered into biographical self-narratives and routines. On the profile of John Travers Cornwell, for example, Nick Cornwell-Menzies wrote ‘I have planted a poppy for a distant relative who died for his country, and linked it with an important place in my life.’¹²⁵ And some memorials provided insights into elaborate real-world practices. Noting that ‘Private John Corney Benson is being proudly remembered by his family’, Carl Milburn’s message also suggested that Benson had become the subject of family pilgrimage: ‘[w]e are proud to have had as many close relatives as possible visit the Tyne Cot memorial where he is remembered. We will also be attending this years remembrance commemorations on 11 November 2017 at the Menin Gate and also Tyne Cot Memorial.’¹²⁶ Indeed, such real-world practices were not limited to direct family members, but even extended to the ‘adoption’ of non-related soldiers. On the profile of Private William Herbert Adams, Linda Hanney wrote:

I am not blood related to William (Bert) Adams although I discovered his grave at our local cemetery and have adopted him as family and often put flowers on his grave its the least i can do as after all he made the ultimate sacrifice for everyone dying at a young age not even marrying or having children of his own he died at 23 and wish to thank William and all the young men of his generation who gave their lives for our freedom.¹²⁷

Hanney’s adoption of Adams is an expression of the need to attend to ‘our’ existential debt; but it might also be read as being founded upon a deeper form of engagement in which Hanney feels a responsibility to live the life that Adams was never able to (‘marrying or having children’). Visitors are encouraged to treat these stories not simply as artefacts of vicarious experience, but as resources for vicarious identification which provide lessons about who ‘we’ are, as if they were

¹²³ Mick Symes, on the profile of ‘Petty Officer Stoker Fred Ward’, Every One Remembered, accessed 13 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/3038989/>.

¹²⁴ Noting this is not necessarily to imply strategic instrumentality on the part of those identifying with their ancestors. Many vicarious identifications do not occur at the level of conscious awareness, with subjects feeling that such connections are genuine and legitimate – and being recognised accordingly by others.

¹²⁵ Nick Cornwell-Menzies, on the profile of ‘Boy 1st Class John Travers Cornwell’, Every One Remembered, accessed 9 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/355594/>.

¹²⁶ Carl Milburn, on the profile of ‘Private John C. Benson’, Every One Remembered, accessed 9 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/844771/>.

¹²⁷ Linda Hanney, on the profile of ‘Private William Herbert Adams’, Every One Remembered, accessed 23 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/2758262/>.

'our' own. In these memorials, individual and family biographies are frequently interwoven into the national bibliography, in a way that reinforces national subjectivity. The effect of vicarious identification is to provide an extended narrative of where we came from and who we are - one that injects a sense of the extraordinary into the mundanity of late modernity.

The Ethics of Militarized Vicarious Identity Promotion

While highly resonant, the promotion of vicarious military subjectivity raises a number of pressing ethical concerns. One is that now that the WW1 generation has passed into memory, the RBL and others are freer than ever to speak on their behalf without consent. Of course, even while the last surviving veterans of the war still lived, some had raised concerns about attempts to make one or two veterans the representatives of a generation for the political purposes of projecting onto them a homogenised national story.¹²⁸ As problematic as this was, however, the 'witness' status of these veterans at least granted them the authenticity to add complexity to hegemonic narratives. And even as the uniqueness of these experiences came increasingly to be moulded to fit the culturally pervasive and resonant mythologies of the war in their later years, their public profiles afforded them the ability to make critical heterogeneous interventions/correctives to the more jingoistic attempts to invoke the war for contemporary national purposes.¹²⁹ Now they are dead, representation of the war and its participants is increasingly left to groups such as the RBL. Representations, as Hutchison argues, are inescapably constitutive of social life, 'play[ing] a key role in translating ostensibly individual experiences into a phenomenon able to be understood by many.'¹³⁰ Because of this fact, representations are *intensely* political – and no less so as the events and their participants pass beyond living memory into imagination. The RBL's decision to focus public remembrance efforts on those who died *during the war itself* is particularly significant in this regard; after all, the dead tell no tales, and focusing upon them circumvents the more dissonant accounts left by the last surviving veterans such as Harry Patch, who famously described the war as 'organised murder'.¹³¹

Moreover, what the RBL *does* with this symbolic resurrection of the dead is both significant and troubling. As we have seen, the reincorporation of WW1 veterans into the homogenised discursive framework of modern remembrance performed by 'Portraits' and 'Every One Remembered' is problematic to the extent that it risks replacing one simplistic mythology of WW1

¹²⁸ On this, see Eleanor Bavidge, 'The Public Private: The Last Veteran', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 225–36.

¹²⁹ Trott, 'Remembering War, Resisting Myth', 332–36.

¹³⁰ Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 111.

¹³¹ Harry Patch, quoted in Tracy McVeigh and Mark Townsend, 'Harry Patch, Britain's Last Surviving Soldier of the Great War, Dies at 111', *The Observer*, 25 July 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/26/world-war-one-veteran-harry-patch-dies-aged-111>.

with another. This is compounded to the extent that they foster emotional vicarious identification with the dead by ‘naming’ the emotions visitors are expected to feel, thereby circumscribing the kinds of engagement condoned.¹³² Of course, the excerpts above are included as illustrations of the kinds of vicarious engagements on display in ‘Every One Remembered’ rather than as evidence sufficient to make any causal claim about the influence of the project’s framing upon visitors or a representational claim regarding how the ‘majority’ of visitors engage with it. To be clear, it is not being argued that there is no diversity or resistance in the memorials. Some, such as Christine Llewellyn-Reeve’s on the profile of Private V Wilson, *do* question the value of the war, while seeking to honour the sacrifice of those involved in the conflict: ‘Musical, talented, handsome a life wasted [...] We salute you for your sacrifice but not the war.’¹³³ Nor is it being suggested that there is no potential in ‘Every One Remembered’ for more nuanced *historical* engagement with the war. As McCartney rightly notes, when ‘widespread knowledge of the war is fading and the majority of the population has only a vague grasp of its history, genealogical research provides an accessible route to learning about the war.’¹³⁴ Rather, what is of concern is that such heterogeneity is discouraged by a powerful framework which, to invoke Holland and Solomon’s phrase, ‘nam[es] affect as emotion’ and primes visitors in how they should feel about the dead.¹³⁵

A related concern is that the compression of WW1 military personnel into the hegemonic and homogenising discursive framework of heroic military sacrifice on which ‘Every One Remembered’ is founded may be discouraging reflection on the war *altogether*. This concern is brought into sharper relief when one considers some of the messages left on the profile of Wilfred Owen – perhaps Britain’s best known war poet whose work is a mainstay of the British secondary education curriculum and is famous for its musings on the horror and futility of war, as well as exposing as ‘the old lie’ of any claims as to the honour of patriotic blood sacrifice. While a number of the messages acknowledged and lauded this dimension of Owen’s life (Patricia A Mooney, for example, wrote “Thank you for challenging "the old lie, dulce et decorum est....”¹³⁶), some of the other memorials slipped into invoking the very language of sacrifice that Owen repudiated. An anonymous contributor wrote, ‘[t]he honesty of your poetry is what makes it so incredible. Thank you for your work and your sacrifice’; and similarly William Sanders wrote ‘You were a good poet

¹³² Holland and Solomon, ‘Affect Is What States Make of It’, 265.

¹³³ Christine Llewellyn-Reeve, on the profile of ‘Private V. Wilson’, Every One Remembered, accessed 10 March 2016, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/1597143/>.

¹³⁴ McCartney, ‘The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain’, 305.

¹³⁵ Holland and Solomon, ‘Affect Is What States Make of It’, 273; The effect here is reminiscent of the ‘homecoming’ videos noted in Chapter 3, in which (as Steele puts it) ‘the group manufactures the response of the child for their own security; they depend upon the response even though the child had no say in authorizing it.’ Steele, ‘Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos’, 334.

¹³⁶ Patricia A. Mooney, on the profile of ‘Lieutenant Wilfred Edward Salter Owen’, Every One Remembered, accessed 18 October 2019, <https://www.everyoneremembered.org/profiles/soldier/336417/>.

and also a good soldier like many others who kept our country safe without your bravery and many others, we [wouldn't] be here today without you and all the soldiers who fought in WW1. Thank You.¹³⁷ Both thus acknowledged his poetic contribution at the same time as affirming the worthiness of his sacrifice, and in the latter case, the war. This slippage is arguably promoted by homogenised remembrance discourse, which, rather than narrating WW1 as a distinct event, incorporates all wars into a single discourse as if they were essentially the same. In the aforementioned context of a lack of public knowledge and evident confusion in distinguishing between different wars, 'unthinking remembrance' becomes a seductive way for subjects to fill the gaps in their knowledge of WW1 with knowledge or mythology derived from more recent or familiar conflicts characterised by affective rather than critical engagement.¹³⁸

Finally, beyond circumventing critical historical engagement with WW1 itself, the scripted quality of 'unthinking remembrance' may have significant consequences for contemporary public engagement with matters of militarism and war. The RBL uses the idea that the war affected everyone to emphasise the importance, relevance, and accessibility of remembrance through the family, local connections and namesakes. EMR encourages visitors to view their ancestors as willing contributors to a national cause of which we are all ostensibly the beneficiaries, and their family as a military family. Combined with a general cultural reluctance to speak ill of the dead – especially relatives – this move may generate further depoliticising empathy for the modern military family that has been one of the most effective barriers to critique of modern wars.¹³⁹ People behave as they are expected to, conforming to well established scripts that they have seen in action many times before. The homogenised discursive framework of remembrance exacerbates this, with support for contemporary forces personnel often presumed to be a logical consequence of support for WW1 soldiers. The fundraising aspect of the project relies on this connection – after all, donations are unequivocally about helping today's soldiers. While visitors may wish to pay their respects without endorsing the war and subsequent wars, the way in which the past and present are blurred within discourses of remembrance renders the discourse increasingly brittle and thus susceptible to be securitised. If to criticise the war is seen to denigrate the troops, then the parameters for critical engagement with war are considerably narrowed if we cannot regard conflicts differently.

¹³⁷ 'Anonymous' and William Sanders, on the profile on 'Lieutenant Wilfred Edward Salter Owen'.

¹³⁸ See, for example, McCartney, 'The First World War Soldier and His Contemporary Image in Britain', 304–207.

¹³⁹ See, for example, King, 'The Afghan War and "Postmodern" Memory', 21; Basham, 'Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance', 888; Åhäll, 'The Dance of Militarisation', 164–65.

Beyond the First World War: Commodified War Commemoration as Militarized Vicarious Identity Promotion

'Every One Remembered' provides an interesting insight into the specific politics of the centenary commemorations and the ways in which people have been encouraged to engage. But it is also a manifestation of broader shifts in commemorative culture over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One such shift, as we have seen, has been the trend towards increasingly widespread and *personalised* commemoration. Winter argues that this is the result of profound educational and economic transformations towards the end of the twentieth century:

Changes in higher education had fundamental effects not only on the skill composition of the labour force, but also on the stock of cultural capital circulating in society as a whole. By the 1990s there was a larger population of university-educated people than ever before. Their demand for cultural products of many different kinds was evident. What might be described as the industry of culture was in an ideal position for massive growth. The market was there; the target population for cultural products was there; and after two decades of retrenchment, state support for 'heritage' or le patrimoine was there, with greater or lesser degrees of generosity.¹⁴⁰

And, following Alan Milward, Winter adds that the memory boom has 'happened in part because both the public and the state have the disposable income to pay for it', and more strikingly that 'affluence has helped turn identity into a commodity, to be consumed by everyone during her (increasingly ample) leisure time.'¹⁴¹ Reframed in the terms of this thesis, the economic and cultural processes of this period saw a shift in the dominant mode of subjectivity towards the neo-liberal individual founded on entrepreneurial selfhood. Thus, as well as the seismic events of two World Wars driving a need to remember in order to uphold prevailing understandings of the national self, during this period individual subjects also had the time increasingly to explore questions around their own selfhood – to ask, 'who am I?' To Winter's analysis that the memory boom was the result of increasing leisure time and disposable income, we might add that it has also been fuelled by the stultifying aspects of life in late modernity, in which the search for existential meaning is increasingly subordinated to the imperatives of global capital.

In such a context, it is little wonder that subjects have intensified searches for meaning and purpose. Perhaps counterintuitively – even paradoxically - however, this drive to personalised commemoration has come increasingly to be channelled through yet more consumption, and in ways that, even as recently as 2006 when he was writing, would have been unfamiliar to Winter. One place in which this trend has been particularly conspicuous is in the evolution of the RBL's remembrance initiatives centred on the symbol of the red Earl Haig Poppy (hereafter referred to as 'the poppy')– sold every November as part of the Poppy Appeal. As we saw earlier in this chapter, this symbol emerged in the aftermath of the First World War, with silk poppies being

¹⁴⁰ Winter, 'Notes on the Memory Boom: War, Remembrance and the Uses of the Past', 68.

¹⁴¹ Winter, 68; see also, Alan S. Milward, "Bad Memories", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 April 2000, 8.

sold in the United States before the idea arrived in Britain, ultimately being adopted by the RBL in 1921. For most of its history, a paper version comprised of two red petals and a green leaf was sold for a small donation – usually at least £1 – the idea being that individuals would buy a new one each year. From these humble origins, recent years have seen what the RBL itself has described as a ‘movement towards customised poppies’; or as Rawlinson termed it, ‘Pimp my poppy’.¹⁴² This phenomenon became the subject of media attention in 2010 when a growing number of celebrities appeared on popular TV talent shows such as *The X-Factor* and *Strictly Come Dancing* wearing increasingly elaborate poppy brooches – ‘flowers crafted from crystals and with a price-tag to match’ produced by high-end fashion designers.¹⁴³

As well as allowing for the incorporation of remembrance into a showbiz aesthetic, this trend towards ‘glitzy’ poppies inspired numerous imitators, including a number of celebrity and fashion bloggers - including former Blue Peter presenter Anthea Turner - who produced ‘how to’ guides for those looking to ‘pimp’ their own traditional paper poppies for a fraction of the price.¹⁴⁴ From this point onwards, the RBL sought to meet this wider demand for customised and personalised poppies, producing a number of metal and enamel poppy brooches at more affordable prices.¹⁴⁵ By 2019, the RBL invited customers to ‘find your poppy’, with a selection of over forty different types of brooches of different shapes and sizes, many being special editions commemorating different conflicts and specific contributions such as those of ‘Codebreakers’ and the ‘Women of WW2’.¹⁴⁶ This did not include the numerous other items of poppy-themed jewellery sold, or the vast range of pins featuring the poppy next to the crests of individual regiments and even football teams, which broadened the customisation of commemoration by allowing consumers to make vicarious connections not only with their local regiments but also their local (or not so local) sporting favourites.¹⁴⁷

The idea of a personal and authentic connection is central to modern commemorative culture, and is catered to in ways which go beyond simple design. This can be seen in the production of

¹⁴² Kevin Rawlinson, ‘Pimp My Poppy: A Charity Symbol Reinvented’, *The Independent*, 2 November 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pimp-my-poppy-a-charity-symbol-reinvented-2122620.html>.

¹⁴³ Rawlinson.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Anthea Turner, ‘Pimp Your Poppy’, *AntheaTurner.Com* (blog), 10 November 2011, <https://www.antheaturner.com/pimp-your-poppy/>; and Georgina Maria Anderson, ‘Pimp My Poppy!’, *Maria’s Gaga* (blog), 3 November 2010, <http://mariasgaga.blogspot.com/2010/11/pimp-my-poppy.html>.

¹⁴⁵ While the RBL endorsed the celebrity products on the grounds that they were usually auctioned off – often for large sums of money - after their TV appearances with proceeds being donated to the RBL, it might have been expected that the RBL would be more cautious when it came to rolling such products out to the wider public for the reason that brooches did not need to be bought every year. However, the higher prices, in combination that people would want the ‘new season’s’ poppy apparently outweighed such considerations. Maysa Rawi, ‘Flower Power: “Blinged-up” Poppies Have the X Factor as Sales Set to Reach £40million’, *Mail Online*, 8 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2059021/X-Factor-Strictlys-bling-Remembrance-Day-poppies-Sales-set-reach-40m.html>.

¹⁴⁶ See, ‘Poppy Pins & Brooches’, *Poppy Shop UK*, accessed 20 August 2019, <https://www.poppyshop.org.uk/collections/poppy-pins-brooches>.

¹⁴⁷ I return to the subject of vicarious identification with sporting subjects in chapter 6.

various special edition poppy pins to commemorate specific battles during the First and Second World Wars. For example, in 2016, the RBL launched its ‘Somme 100’ pin to mark the centenary of the battle of the same name. Created by TMB Art Metal, the 19,240 pins – one for every soldier killed on the first day of the battle – were crafted by hand, featuring petals ‘[m]ade from British artillery shell fuses found by farmers on the Somme’ and a centre of red enamel mixed with ‘earth from along the 1st July 1916 British front line’.¹⁴⁸ Both these aspects were portrayed as making for a unique connection with the landscape of the war: ‘the pins have the very essence of the battlefield the men fought upon, died upon, and that many still lie at peace beneath, in their creation’.¹⁴⁹ In addition to this dimension, the pins were also packaged with a certificate commemorating one of the British soldiers killed on the day by individual name. TMB Art Metal designer, Christopher Bennett, described it as ‘the first poppy that allows you to wear and carry a piece of history with you at all times’ and ‘a subtle and tasteful tribute that can be worn by anyone, all year round’.¹⁵⁰

Of course, whether making poppies out of the remnants of artillery shells used to kill and maim others in war really constitutes a ‘tasteful’ act of remembrance in keeping with the spirit of peace and reconciliation that some take to be the most important function of war commemoration, is a debatable point.¹⁵¹ But what seems clear is that this appeal to history *resonated* with customers. Not only was this evident in the fact that the first batch of pins sold out within hours of launching, but could also be seen in customer reviews of the product. ‘Zin’, for example, wrote ‘When you buy this, you not only contribute to the British Legion, you purchase a small piece of history’.¹⁵² Similarly, ‘Rosebud’ described it as ‘an authentic memento of WW1 and one which I am proud to wear’¹⁵³; ‘Ed’ meanwhile explained: ‘I am giving this one to my son, who at 19 would have been of the age when many of the soldiers would have died. I will buy another for my daughter. Lest we forget’ – thus enacting the aforementioned vision of an intergenerational commemoration.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ TMB Art Metal, *SOMME 100 CENTENARY EDITION - Poppy Pins & Cufflinks*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wE2tdJ-EYwY>; Or as a Daily Express article less delicately put it: John Ingham, ‘Somme Centenary Poppies Will Contain REAL BULLETS from the Battlefield’, Daily Express, 28 June 2016, https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/666185/Battle-of-the-Somme-centenary-poppies-contain-part-of-battlefield-anniversary-charity-RBL?_ga=1.152019513.1448788142.1459503493.

¹⁴⁹ TMB Art Metal, *SOMME 100 CENTENARY EDITION - Poppy Pins & Cufflinks*.

¹⁵⁰ Ingham, ‘Somme Centenary Poppies Will Contain REAL BULLETS from the Battlefield’.

¹⁵¹ This impression was also left by the choice of Wagner’s ‘Ride of the Valkyries’ as the soundtrack to the casting the TMB Metal Art commemorative poppies. See, TMB Art Metal, *SOMME 100 CENTENARY EDITION - Poppy Pins & Cufflinks*.

¹⁵² ‘Zin’, ‘Customer Review: A Small Piece of History’, Amazon.co.uk, 15 December 2016, https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/customer-reviews/R3RQVRXRKQYCCM/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B01LZPGBJT.

¹⁵³ ‘Rosebud’, ‘Customer Review: Somme Poppy 1916’, Amazon.co.uk, 22 November 2016, https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/customer-reviews/R16K8696MKNE3J/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B01LZPGBJT.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Ed’, ‘Customer Review: Amazon Package Moved Me to Tears’, Amazon.co.uk, 14 November 2016, https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/customer-reviews/R16K8696MKNE3J/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B01LZPGBJT.

Others focused on the certificate commemorating a soldier killed in the battle, with some of the comments on a thread on the Royal British Legion's Facebook page about the pin hinting at similar processes of 'adoption' to those promoted by EMR. 'Vikki Kelly', for instance, wrote '[w]hen I received mine i instantly wanted to learn more about who mine was dedicated too'; 'Mick McBride' went even further writing 'I found my soldier and my wife's soldier and we are going to France this month and will be paying our respects to him.'¹⁵⁵ This move to discover the soldier's story can be read as an attempt to preserve his symbolic immortality, but it is also a process of discovery which brings the centenary to life for the reviewer – sufficient, apparently, to warrant a pilgrimage to the soldier's grave in France.

For others, however, this more distant, 'adopted' vicarious connection is less compelling and satisfying than personal family connections. 'Graham Harris' for example, commented that 'I would have liked the certificate commemorating my grand-father (Private Alfred Harris of the Borders Regiment) who also died on that day. If someone has received this particular certificate, would they be prepared to do a swap?'; and similarly, 'Judith Jeffrey' stated: 'I am looking for one in the name of Frederick Charles Jeffrey. What a shame there are not more people who have thought to try to swap!'¹⁵⁶ Here, personal family connections are seen to be more significant than unrelated ones, ostensibly providing for a more authentic connection with the war. And the desire to swap certificates in the hope of obtaining those of family members does not appear to have been isolated to only these users: such requests were apparently sufficiently common that, by the time of the launch of its special edition D-Day 75 pin (featuring an enamel centre made from sand gathered from Gold Beach) in time for the D-Day 75 commemorations in 2019, the RBL felt it necessary to inform customers that '[u]nfortunately, we are unable to create personalised certificates for this pin.'¹⁵⁷ This desire for connection through consumption is, as has already been suggested, a manifestation of broader social dynamics relating to increased affluence in late modern society. But what else does the desire to 'swap' certificates tell us? If these family connections are already known to the consumers, what would be the added value of having a certificate? Partly, it is simply a matter of possession – of bringing the certificate back to its rightful place. But the idea that it is the family's rightful inheritance also raises the possibility that it could be a matter of recognition, of having one's ancestor's military exploits and contribution *officially recognised* as part of a larger national project – recognition that adds authenticity and legitimacy to claims to vicarious identification.

¹⁵⁵ 'Vikki Kelly' and 'Mick McBride', respectively, 'Royal British Legion - Posts', Facebook, 26 May 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialPoppyLegion/posts/i-have-received-my-somme-100-poppy-pin-and-very-pleased-with-it-however-it-came-/1049852631758930/>.

¹⁵⁶ 'Graham Harris' and 'Judith Jeffrey', 'Royal British Legion - Posts'.

¹⁵⁷ 'The Royal British Legion D-Day 75 Lapel Pin', Poppy Shop UK, accessed 19 September 2019, <https://www.poppyshop.org.uk/d-day-75-lapel-pin.html>.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that efforts by the RBL and others to engage the public throughout the centenary have relied upon fostering and exploiting emotional connections with Britain's 20th century wars and their soldiers – not least through processes of vicarious identity promotion. The RBL's centenary campaigns played a central role in avoiding potentially anxiety-inducing critiques of WW1 by building on the implicit rehabilitation of the WW1 soldier performed by homogenising 'support the troops' discourses from 2006 onwards. Explicitly pointing to the shared lineage of WW1 and modern soldiers, the RBL framed the centenary primarily as an opportunity to express gratitude to the dead of WW1. To this end, subjects were encouraged to vicariously identify with deceased WW1 armed forces personnel through a decontextualized and homogenised discourse of heroic military sacrifice as a way of assuaging boredom and civilian anxiety. These centenary initiatives have, in turn, relied upon a reframing of the war's history: one that has discouraged critical reflection upon not only the specific history of the First World War, but also on ontological questions relating to war and militarism more broadly. Thus, although the war's meaning had been the subject of contestation at the beginning of the centenary commemorations in 2014, the theme of gratitude was so embedded by 2018 that when the RBL launched a campaign urging the public to say 'Thank You' to the 'First World War generation' with an advert asking rhetorically 'what else is there to say?',¹⁵⁸ it sparked no significant public controversy.

As I have argued, however, there was always *a lot* more to say about such a complex event. And while many centenary actors have appraised the commemorations positively for their sensitive and non-divisive public engagement at a time of political turmoil,¹⁵⁹ others such as Strachan have lamented that 'the proposal to use the war as a way of encouraging pupils to discuss the rights and wrongs of war more generally, and its place in the international system, was not taken up', perhaps suggesting that acceptability had been achieved by ducking the difficult moral questions arising from the war.¹⁶⁰ In light of the purported agnosticism of the broader 14-18

¹⁵⁸ 'Royal British Legion Artwork Gives Thanks to WW1 Generation', BBC News, 3 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-45057461>.

¹⁵⁹ The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report on the centenary described the commemorations as a 'hugely successful' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 2017-19 (Westminster: House of Commons, 16 July 2019), 2, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcmds/2001/2001.pdf>; In declaring the commemorations a 'spectacular success', Sir Anthony Seldon emphasised the success of negotiating the turbulent political climate: 'It was all the harder because it was against the background of Brexit. There were many discordant noises off, yet we steered clear of political difficulty. We were a unifying point for the nation all the way through.' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Oral Evidence - Lessons from the First World War Centenary, HC 2001', House of Commons, 26 March 2019, Q8, <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/lessons-from-the-first-world-war-centenary/oral/98740.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Hew Strachan, quoted in Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Lessons from the First World War Centenary', 8, Para 21.

commemorations towards the war's politics, this chapter has pointed to the particularly problematic legacy of the RBL's rehabilitation of the war in a manner conducive to the promotion of vicarious military subjectivity. It might be argued here that given one unsatisfactorily simplistic account has been replaced by another, nothing has really been lost or gained. Aside from their historical (non-)fidelity, however, Todman emphasises that myths can perform valuable functions in national life providing shorthand ontological reference points for understanding what the world and war are like.¹⁶¹ That the negative mythology of the war is no more or less accurate than that which it replaced in some ways matters less than the important role it has played in the national discursive repertoire: namely, constituting a useful counterpoint to the more stridently jingoistic attitudes towards, and collective memorialisation of, the Second World War. As Todman himself put it at the end of the centenary, '[p]eople being sad about war and saying war was bad is good',¹⁶² and if we are seeing the decline of a negative mythology which contained such lessons, we might come to regret the loss of a vital discursive resource.

Of course, although the focus of this chapter has been on the RBL, it is important to emphasise that the militarised rehabilitation of the war's meaning has involved many actors including government, the BBC, and other military charities which have promoted similar genealogical engagement with the centenary. However, the status of the RBL as the *de facto* custodian of national remembrance - and one of the centenary's most prominent actors - also arguably confers particular responsibilities to promote public reflection not only upon armed force personnel but the wars in which they participated too. And whereas the RBL's own narration of its history explicitly emphasises 'the need to *prevent* further sacrifice by reminding the nation of the human cost of war and to work actively for peace,'¹⁶³ the initiatives explored in this chapter suggest that the RBL has largely eschewed this message in favour of a more militaristic fetishization of sacrifice. For some, of course, the ends of providing welfare for military personnel in dire need justify the means; and, put simply, sacrifice *sells*. Without wishing to denigrate its valuable charity work, however, this chapter disagrees with this calculus, highlighting some of the problems associated with instrumentalising history for the purposes of upholding the militarized subjectivities, on the back of which such work is funded.¹⁶⁴ The RBL's instrumentalism and power

¹⁶¹ Todman, *The Great War*, 223.

¹⁶² Dan Todman, quoted by @QMULHistSoc, "“People Being Sad about War and Saying War Was Bad Is Good” - @daniel_todman", Twitter, 19 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/qmulhistoc/status/1064560546039717889>.

¹⁶³ 'Our History', The Royal British Legion, accessed 24 December 2016, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/our-history>; This account borrows heavily from Harding's account, though does not reference it directly. See, Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith: The Royal British Legion (1921-2001)* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2001), 10.

¹⁶⁴ Although the configuration of welfare provision for veterans in Britain has deservedly been the subject of critique in recent years. In particular, some have criticised the delegation of what might be expected to be a governmental responsibility to a patchy charity network. For an overview, see Mumford, 'Veteran Care in the United Kingdom and the Sustainability of the "Military Covenant"'

relative to other organizations participating in war commemoration pose significant obstacles for moving beyond remembrance and promoting public reckoning with Britain's history.

Finally, although this chapter has focused mainly on vicarious identity promotion throughout (but not limited to) the centenary, it also raises questions as to the broader social attraction and function of vicarious military subjectivity. In the remaining chapters, I will argue that it confers a kind of social capital which is routinely – sometimes strategically, but often non-consciously – deployed by bearers to bolster claims to legitimate and authentic military subjectivity in invoking wars for various ends that might otherwise raise eyebrows. The subjects in questions might be individuals; but they might also be corporate entities – to which we now turn.

5. Remembrance Inc: Corporate Vicarious Identification and the Business of War Commemoration

Introduction

The previous chapter explored some of the ways in which vicarious military subjectivity has been promoted by government and charities through remembrance initiatives, and has resonated with subjects, not least because of the resources it provides for British subjects in the turbulent period of late modernity. The focus was primarily upon how individual subjects are encouraged to make sense of, and stake public claims to, their place in the gendered and racialised social order through ancestral/local military connections. However, it is not only individual subjects who have been encouraged in this regard; organisations and corporate entities have also increasingly been implicated in vicarious militarism through the specific initiatives of the centenary and in remembrance more generally. The mastheads of national and local newspapers are adorned with poppies during November, and television programmes demonstrate their loyalty to the cause with presenters and guests being encouraged – and, to some degree, expected – to wear poppies in October and November. Shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* even feature remembrance tributes incorporated into the dance set-pieces, and behind the scenes clips showing the presenters, professional and amateur dancers participating in ‘Poppy Appeal’ collections in everyday settings.¹ And businesses more generally have ‘badged’ themselves with the poppy, both through official activities and charitable initiatives undertaken by staff either ‘in house’ or in the local community to raise funds for the Royal British Legion’s (RBL).

This chapter explores attempts to establish corporate vicarious military subjectivity, paying close attention to the ways in which corporate actors have sought to bolster their connections to militarism – and have frequently been actively encouraged by the RBL (and other military charities) – to search their history for connections to past wars. Corporate partnerships have been a central pillar in the RBL’s fundraising strategy and have been particularly attractive to corporate actors looking to shore-up their subjectivity and commercial viability in the context of late modern suspicions around meaninglessness and inauthenticity. While some claims to vicarious military subjectivity are accepted as natural and legitimate, however, others become the subject of intense contestation for the ways they are perceived to transgress the boundaries of acceptability and militarised social hierarchies.

¹ Åhäll, ‘The Dance of Militarisation’, 154–55.

In order to unpack the politics of vicarious militarised subjectivity, I explore the participation of a number of different commercial entities, including FirstGroup and Sainsbury's, in initiatives led by the RBL over the course of the centenary commemorations of the First World War, paying particular attention to how their advertising and branding campaigns invoked vicarious connections to confer militarised authenticity upon their activities and corporate identities. These cases allow us to see the intensely political nature of such claims. In certain instances (explored in Section 1) the appropriation and adoption of symbols by corporate entities passes virtually unnoticed; in others, however, they become the subject of passionate criticism for transgressing the unofficial boundaries of taste (explored in Section 2). This has led to criticisms from members of the armed forces and the wider public of the RBL's stewardship of remembrance, and to ridicule of the culture over which it has presided, which I explore through an examination of the @GiantPoppyWatch Twitter feed. However, as Section 3 illustrates, other vicarious identifications have led to criticisms regarding perceived transgressions of a different kind: some, despite their architect's best intentions, are seen to be insufficiently respectful in a way that mocks the traditions of remembrance; others meanwhile are seen to be violating military masculine hierarchies constituted around the figure of the soldier. Such transgressions lead to official and unofficial attempts to police militarised subjectivities in a number of different ways, as demonstrated through case analyses of the England Rugby team's vicarious appropriation of the Victoria Cross emblem for its kits, and similar appropriations by the nationalist far-right.

The Royal British Legion and Corporate Vicarious Identity Promotion

The militarisation of British high streets in the past two decades has been advanced, in no small part, by the military charity sector which has been keen to engage in various corporate partnerships in order to embed militarist narratives in the everyday lives of British citizens and to raise funds. Whittington's sugar was sold in several major British supermarkets featuring the distinctive brand of *Help for Heroes*, and clothing company Cotton Traders continues to sell *Help for Heroes* branded clothing.² Likewise, visitors to *Moto* motorway service stations across Britain in 2013 would probably have noticed posters advertising *Help for Heroes* as its charity of the year – a relationship that has continued ever since.³ And the RBL has been no exception to this trend: in light of its aforementioned attempts to rebrand in the context of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and their aftermath, official corporate partnerships have become an increasingly prominent aspect of the RBL's business model. At the time of writing, some of the key official partnerships included those with the confectioners Cadbury, coach company National Express, high street store Marks

² 'Help For Heroes Clothing', Cotton Traders, accessed 11 June 2020, <https://www.cottontraders.com/help-for-heroes/>.

³ 'Why We Work with Help for Heroes', Moto Motorway Services, 14 April 2016, <https://moto-way.com/2016/04/why-we-work-with-help-for-heroes/>.

and Spencer, online auction site eBay, and retailer Amazon Smile.⁴ Such partnerships are, of course a highly-effective way for the RBL to disseminate its message and corporate brand, as well as to raise vast sums of money for its charitable work through company and individual initiatives. For example, a page dedicated to a case study of its corporate partnership with Marks and Spencer claims that the relationship has raised over six million pounds since 2009, through a combination of RBL merchandise sales, staff fundraising, and through micro-donations from purchases made using the ‘Sparks Card’.⁵ Such partnerships are a long way removed from the RBL’s former public associations with village fete-style stalls in supermarkets and town centres, staffed by elderly veterans.

The RBL also recognises the symbiotic quality of such partnerships and the commercial appeal of its ‘Poppy Brand’ to corporate entities wishing to benefit by association and promote their public image. Accordingly, the RBL website places particular emphasis on its status as ‘one of the UK’s most trusted charity brands, with the Poppy Appeal standing out as the best known national charity campaign’, which it portrays as making it ‘uniquely placed to create *mutually beneficial partnerships that meet the business needs of our corporate partners* and deliver life-changing support for the Armed Forces community.’⁶ In addition to billing such partnerships as opportunities to perform ‘corporate social responsibility’ through support for the RBL’s work (‘support an emotive cause that impacts your local community’ / ‘[m]ake a difference to the Armed Forces community and their families’), emphasis is placed on what the RBL can offer businesses in their commercial endeavours. As the ‘Partner with us’ webpage outlines, ‘a cause related marketing partnership with us *can help increase sales, build customer loyalty, retain or recruit customers, and differentiate your brand in a competitive marketplace*’, reminding potential clients that ‘[m]ost customers agree that, price and quality being equal, they are more likely to buy a product or service associated with a cause they know and care about.’⁷ Of course, the list of organisations that have recognised the potential of, and sought to benefit from, the commercial benefits of ‘proudly’ displaying the poppy in their windows during November is by no means limited to those with official partnerships with the RBL, but an official partnership confers the RBL’s authentic approval.

In order to facilitate these benefits, the RBL promises that partners can ‘[b]enefit from an experienced national account management team’ and ‘[e]ngage with our supporters and Members through our extensive communication network that includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and a range of newsletters and magazines.’ Beyond boosting commercial attractiveness to customers

⁴ ‘Our Partners’, The Royal British Legion, accessed 11 June 2020, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/partner-with-us/our-partners>.

⁵ ‘M&S’, The Royal British Legion, accessed 11 June 2020, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/partner-with-us/our-partners/m-s>.

⁶ ‘Our Partners’, accessed 3 July 2019, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/partner-with-us/our-partners> (Emphasis added).

⁷ ‘Our Partners’ (Emphasis added).

in order to directly sell products, the highlighted benefits of partnership with the RBL include the improved ability to '[a]ttract and retain customers *and staff*' as well as the promise of team-building through such relationships:

With a host of innovative, inclusive fundraising ideas and unique opportunities to get involved with our welfare work and Remembrance, *we can inspire and motivate your staff*. From bike rides to bake sales, and pub quizzes to our annual football tournament, we have something to suit everyone.⁸

The implication here, then, is that subjects are more likely to want to work for organisations that have an ethos of 'corporate social responsibility' compatible with their own sense of ontological security, and that engagement in charity work is more likely to foster staff loyalty. Arguments about the potential contribution of cause-related marketing initiatives to staff retention and motivation clearly speak to the point elaborated in earlier chapters regarding the existential boredom and ontological *insecurity* that pervades much employment in late modernity, as well as the fluidity of the job market.

What is clear from the RBL's promotion of corporate partnerships is that commercial entities seek to construct and maintain branded identities as a way of upholding the positive self-concepts of employees and courting positive customer recognition. Moreover, in line with the observations of Giddens and the more recent contribution of Steele to the literature on organisational ontological security, the way in which this takes place is not dissimilar to the process of identity construction for individuals and states.⁹ Indeed, to the extent that individual and national subjectivities are performed through patterns of consumption and have increasingly taken inspiration from corporate branding – particularly in the age of social media – the boundaries between these subjectivities are increasingly porous.¹⁰ And in order to fashion a brand that is attractive to both employees and customers, commercial entities have indeed sought to be associated with the symbolism of remembrance to be seen as showing respect, and as being a vital part of a culture of remembrance by enabling the commodified participation of customers.

To a certain extent, of course, there is a focus on modern day veterans. The promotion of corporate vicarious identification through partnerships with the RBL is very much in keeping with the novel emergence of the 'military covenant' from the mid-2000s onwards, explored in the previous chapter, often being discursively tied to the commitments to which various collective entities have subscribed under the 'Community Covenant' and 'Corporate Covenant' initiatives. But establishing commercial ties with war commemoration also renders the past a resource for

⁸ 'Partner with Us', The Royal British Legion, accessed 4 July 2019, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/partner-with-us> (Emphasis added).

⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 15–16; Steele, 'Organizational Processes and Ontological (in)Security: Torture, the CIA and the United States'.

¹⁰ See, for example, Browning, 'Nation Branding, National Self-Esteem, and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity'.

articulating authenticity. Such partnerships dovetail neatly with trends towards ‘retro-branding’ with businesses seeking to soften their images by deploying or tying in with vintage nostalgia.¹¹ As one branding website puts it:

In an age that’s plagued by impersonal digital connections, nostalgia allows brands to leverage the optimistic feelings that come with a walk down memory lane. References to the past help to humanise brands, creating that sense of alignment that we all feel when we think about our past.¹²

This can be read as the commodification of the search for ontological security, selling consumers a feeling of comfort and continuity. Vintage nostalgia such as the ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ merchandise phenomenon based on a WW2-era propaganda poster carries a message promoted as an ethos for the navigation of tumultuous late modernity.¹³ And by association, it is assumed that ‘Companies that utilize retro branding can easier establish brand recognition by appearing experienced and good-natured.’¹⁴

The added value of association with the RBL is not limited to being seen to support current troops but consists also of being able to highlight an organisation’s connection with, and sustained participation in, militarism through the ages. This becomes particularly evident in the commemoration of specific wars such as the WW1 centenary. For example, the RBL website describes how Ben and Toby Stubbs - directors of home fragrance company Heart of the Country – entered into partnership with the RBL to create and sell 36,500 ‘Painted Poppy Scent Sachets’ (‘each representing a single day that passed since the end of the First World War on the 11th November 1918’), with one pound from each sale being donated to the RBL.¹⁵ The initiative came about because the brothers ‘felt personally connected’ to the centenary commemorations. As Ben Stubbs explained:

So many of us including Toby and I have great grandparents and great uncles who fought, died or survived and families that gave everything in the Great War. We owe them everything we have today and they should never be forgotten. We couldn’t be more proud as a company to be working with The Royal British Legion.¹⁶

Recognisable here is the notion seen in the previous chapter of an existential debt owed to ancestors, therefore implying the vicarious military contribution of the company to national life.

¹¹ See Stephen Brown, Robert V. Kozinets, and John F. Sherry, ‘Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning’, *Journal of Marketing* 67, no. 3 (2003): 19–33.

¹² ‘Nostalgia in Marketing: Why Millennials Crave Memories’, Fabrik Brands, 24 October 2017, <https://fabrikbrands.com/nostalgia-marketing/>.

¹³ Owen Hatherley, ‘Keep Calm and Carry On – the Sinister Message behind the Slogan That Seduced the Nation’, *The Guardian*, 8 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/08/keep-calm-and-carry-on-posters-austerity-ubiquity-sinister-implications>.

¹⁴ ‘Retro Branding - Vintage Revival Instills a Sense of Nostalgic Well-Being in Consumers’, Trendhunter, accessed 24 July 2020, <https://www.trendhunter.com/protrends/retro-branding>.

¹⁵ ‘Heart of the Country’, The Royal British Legion, accessed 5 July 2019, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give/partner-with-us/our-partners/heart-of-the-country>.

¹⁶ ‘Heart of the Country’.

But the acknowledgement of such personal inspiration for the initiative also works to ‘soften’ or humanise the brand by emphasising that it represents a family business having shared in national experiences of sacrifice and suffering.

Great Western Railway

We can also see this softening through vicarious identification at work in businesses more prominent in public life too. For example, the centenary commemorations rather serendipitously coincided with a period of rebranding for train operator First Great Western which was at the time seeking to retain the Greater Western rail franchise in a Department for Transport competition scheduled for 2013 that ultimately never took place.¹⁷ The most striking elements of the rebranding, officially launched in 2015 (though it had been phased in in the three preceding years), were the renaming of First Great Western as ‘Great Western Railway’ and the creation of a new GWR logo on a ‘dark holly green’ livery.¹⁸ This heralded a return to what the railway had been called from 1833-1948 – prior to nationalisation - and a livery ‘[referencing] the hue of the original engines which ran on the GWR.’¹⁹ The designer behind the initiative, John Rushworth, explained that ‘[w]e wanted to make sure that it was delivered as a modern, contemporary railway company, relevant to rail travel and travellers today, but obviously one that was conscious of its history.’²⁰ At the centre of that history was GWR’s chief engineer from 1835-1859, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, whose name is commonly associated with the zenith of 19th Century British engineering and industrial greatness and whose works have attained the status of democratic heritage and national treasures.²¹

What is striking about this exercise is the almost seamless claim made by FirstGroup to be the same company as Brunel’s GWR, with the lines between past and present becoming increasingly blurred. Not only was Brunel claimed as its ‘illustrious founder’, but its re-branding announcement referenced GWR’s ‘182-year-old heritage’ - as if it had not ceased to exist with

¹⁷ Nathalie Thomas, ‘Government Refuses to Compensate Firms in Scrapped Great Western Rail Franchise Bid’, *The Telegraph*, 31 January 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/transport/9838842/Government-refuses-to-compensate-firms-in-scrapped-Great-Western-rail-franchise-bid.html>.

¹⁸ ‘Great Western Railway — Story’, Pentagram, accessed 5 July 2019, <https://www.pentagram.com/work/great-western-railway-1/story>.

¹⁹ Mark Sinclair, ‘The Rebirth of the Great Western Railway’, *Creative Review*, 24 September 2015, <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/the-rebirth-of-the-great-western-railway/>.

²⁰ John Rushworth, quoted in Sinclair.

²¹ Brunel’s name still holds significant cache in the 21st century, coming second only to Winston Churchill in a 2001 public poll conducted by the BBC of the *100 Greatest Britons*, and featuring prominently in the opening ceremony of the *London 2012 Olympic Games*. Andrew Clennell, ‘Churchill Wins BBC Battle of Britons’, *The Guardian*, 25 November 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/nov/25/bbc.artsandhumanities>; Henry Porter and Annabel Davidson, ‘The Olympic Opening Ceremonies: Danny Boyle Explains Britain to the World, and to Itself’, *Vanity Fair*, 28 July 2012, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/daily-news/2012/07/olympic-opening-ceremonies-danny-boyle-britain>.

nationalisation in 1948.²² Moreover, marketing materials played upon Brunel's status as a national treasure to suggest that the 'un-brand' was a selfless, democratising act on the part of FirstGroup to restore the railway's heritage for 'the people'.²³ In this vein, the announcement poster declared:

At FirstGroup, we recognise that this railway *truly belongs to the region it serves*. So we've taken the unprecedented step for any brand in any industry. We've removed ourselves from the livery. With this comes the commitment to not act as a franchise. But rather, as a proud custodian, whose responsibility it is to reinvigorate the west by returning the rail service to its former glory.²⁴

Not everyone was impressed by such claims, however. In 2016, the Advertising Standards Authority banned the 'The railway belongs to the region it serves' advert on the grounds that it was misleading and might lead consumers to wrongly believe that GWR is a publicly-owned company.²⁵ And Comedian and commentator David Mitchell criticised FirstGroup for claiming Brunel as its founder given that the company he founded 'was bought in 1948 by the British state, a purchaser that continues to own and maintain the railway he designed', describing '[t]he adoption of the name of [Brunel's] famous company, which actually built the railway, by one which merely profits from it [as] an act of breathtaking cheek'.²⁶ Nevertheless, the GWR re-branding exercise usefully illustrates some of the dynamics of vicarious pride discussed earlier at play in corporate settings, not least through the company's claims to identification with Brunel, portraying itself as the custodian of his legacy and ambition. This restoration of pride through the disavowal of toxic brands and re-association with admired public figures has been viewed as a useful way of rehabilitating a rail franchise in the context of growing public disapproval of, and declining trust in, the privatised rail sector.²⁷

A further aspect of GWR's past that became salient over the course of the First World War centenary was the company's involvement in the war. In addition to the railways being central to the mobilisation and conduct of the war effort, 2,545 GWR workers who enlisted (or were enlisted) in military service during the war were killed in battle. GWR was no exception to the

²² 'First Great Western Becomes Great Western Railway as Part of Historic Re Brand', GWR, 20 September 2015, <https://www.gwr.com/about-us/media-centre/news/2015/september/first-great-western-becomes-great-western-railway-as-part-of-historic-re-brand>.

²³ Mike Oughton, 'Great Western Railway "Unbrand"', *Mike Oughton* (blog), accessed 27 July 2019, <http://mikeoughton.com/great-western-railway/>.

²⁴ Oughton (Emphasis added).

²⁵ Gwyn Topham, 'Train Operator's Adverts Banned for Suggesting Service Owned by Public', *The Guardian*, 30 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/mar/30/train-operators-adverts-banned-owned-by-public-gwr-great-western-railway>.

²⁶ David Mitchell, 'The Train Company That Has Ideas above Its Station', *The Guardian*, 3 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/03/firstgroup-great-western-railway-advertising-standards-poster>.

²⁷ Particularly in light of disruption and fare increases, with some opinion polls even finding a majority supporting re-nationalisation. See, for example, '70% Want End to Rail Privatisation', *RailUK* (blog), 13 September 2012, <https://www.railuk.com/rail-news/70-want-end-to-rail-privatisation/>; Harry Carr, 'Majority of Brits Back Rail Nationalisation, Sky Data Poll Shows', *Sky News*, 2 January 2018, <https://news.sky.com/story/majority-of-brits-back-rail-nationalisation-sky-data-poll-shows-11193313>.

post-war commemorative boom, with these losses and the contribution made by the company to the war effort through the blood sacrifice of its employees being commemorated in various ways across the GWR network. These included the ‘Great Western Railway War Memorial’ at Paddington station unveiled on Armistice Day in 1922, consisting of a prominent bronze statue of a World War 1 soldier reading a letter from home, situated by the original entrance to the station and mounted on a sealed plinth containing a roll of honour of the names of GWR workers killed in the war.²⁸ Other such rolls of honour were placed on platforms in stations across the GWR network, as reminders in the everyday experiences of passengers of the price paid by the company and its employees, and have remained there ever since.²⁹

In some ways, the centenary commemorations of these events quite neatly dovetailed with FirstGroup’s attempts at rebranding in order to offset mounting public criticism towards rail franchises, and were instrumentalised as part of broader efforts to draw on the past as a way of softening the company’s public image. Of course, First Great Western was engaged in commemoration even prior to the rebranding (and the centenary) in line with the promotion of the military covenant. In 2014, for example, FGW announced that 100 of its 119 power cars would be ‘wearing their poppy with pride on Armistice Day’, with the number chosen to represent the beginning of the centenary.³⁰ The announcement touched upon the importance of remembering the sacrifice and commemorating the dead, but did so in relatively general terms that were non-specific to the company. In noting that ‘the railways played such an important part in the First World War, transporting both supplies and soldiers to and from the front line’, the language employed was again general and distant, not referencing the company’s sense of self *directly*.³¹

FirstGroup’s approach to the centenary and GWR’s military heritage evolved over several years and in line with the re-branding. For example, at around the same time as FirstGroup was introducing its rebranding of FGW as GWR in November 2015, it unveiled a specially commissioned locomotive, named after ‘Harry Patch’ – the last British survivor of the First World War who died in 2009. Along with the customary poppies and the recognisable silhouettes of ‘Tommies’, the ‘specially designed livery’ featured ‘the words from Laurence Binyon's Ode to

²⁸ ‘Great Western Railway Paddington’, Imperial War Museums, accessed 28 June 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/11358>.

²⁹ For example, Rolls of Honour can be found on Platform 3 of Bristol Temple Meads station and Platform 5 of Exeter St. Davids station. ‘Great Western Railway Roll Of Honour WW1 (at Bristol Temple Meads Station)’, Imperial War Museums, accessed 3 July 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/3161>; ‘Great Western Railway Roll Of Honour WW1’, Imperial War Museums, accessed 3 July 2019, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/46043>.

³⁰ ‘FGW Commemorates Centenary of the First World War’, GWR, 10 November 2014, <https://www.gwr.com/about-us/media-centre/blogs/2014/november/fgw-commemorates-centenary-of-the-first-world-war>.

³¹ ‘FGW Commemorates Centenary of the First World War’.

Remembrance.³² In 2016, the locomotive (along with another named ‘The Royal British Legion’) was subsequently chosen as the site on which to promote the launch of the RBL’s ‘Poppy People’ campaign – a recruitment drive for volunteers to assist with the November Poppy Appeal. In order to emphasise the particular relevance of GWR, a *Teignmouth Today* article described how on launch day the train would be ‘largely manned by GWR staff who are in fact veterans who served in the Armed Forces’ – thus emphasising with greater clarity the company’s (vicarious) contribution to the military life of the nation.³³

By the end of the commemorations – the centenary of the Armistice – the completed rebrand enabled the newly-badged GWR to draw upon the military legacy of the old GWR as a way of interweaving organisational branding/identity with war commemoration. Numerous events were held across the GWR network to mark this final flourish of the centenary, but the flagship event on Friday 9th November – a ceremony to commemorate the GWR employees killed during the First World War, held at Paddington Station beside the aforementioned statue – is illustrative of some of these intersections. The focal point of the event, as reported in various local press outlets, was the ‘unveiling of a special Intercity Express Train featuring the names of all 2,545 men who worked for the GWR and were killed during the war.’³⁴ As one description of the initiative explained:

the full train was given a distinctive design, stretching along all nine carriages and including the driving cabs at either end. It included details of where each fallen employee worked for the company, their rank, regiment, where they were killed and where they are either remembered or buried. One hundred names were chosen to feature pictures and more details of their story.³⁵

Alongside the Armistice livery, the event also marked the unveiling of an updated Roll of Honour commissioned ‘after GWR researchers discovered more engineers, labourers, solicitors, carriage cleaners and apprentices from across the railway company’s network who fought and died in the

³² ‘WW1 Harry Patch Locomotive Unveiled by Great Western Railway’, BBC News, 6 November 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-somerset-34745930>; ‘Great Western Railway Names Train after Last Survivor of the Trenches, Harry Patch’, GWR, 6 November 2015, <https://www.gwr.com/about-us/media-centre/news/2015/november/great-western-railway-names-train-after-last-survivor-of-the-trenches>.

³³ Nick Knight, ‘GWR Gives a Prestigious Platform to Launch the Royal British Legion’s Poppy People Campaign’, *Teignmouth Post*, 6 September 2016, <http://www.teignmouth-today.co.uk/article.cfm?id=103960&headline=GWR%20gives%20a%20prestigious%20platform%20to%20launch%20the%20Royal%20British%20Legion%E2%80%99s%20Poppy%20People%20%20campaign§ionIs=news&searchyear=2016>.

³⁴ Newsroom, ‘GWR Honours WW1 Fallen Workers with Specially Commissioned Armistice Train’, *West Sussex County Times*, 12 November 2018, <https://www.wscountytimes.co.uk/news/gwr-honours-ww1-fallen-workers-specially-commissioned-armistice-train-220685>.

³⁵ Newsroom.

war 100 years ago.³⁶ This was to be displayed ‘in a permanent location at the station.’³⁷ Both the train and the Roll of Honour were described in the local press as constituting ‘a tribute to their heroic sacrifice’ that ‘immortalised’ the soldiers.³⁸ The event itself consisted of the train pulling into Platform 1 to be met by a selection of the relatives of those being commemorated, accompanied by the soundtrack of the Wessex Male Voice Choir singing songs of remembrance. This was followed by a traditional remembrance ceremony and the laying of poppy wreaths at the Great Western Railway War Memorial.

The news coverage of the event emphasised the emotional dynamic of the events for these relatives, particularly for Dawn Lewis and Rachel Leigh – the great-nieces of Lance-Corporal Allan Leonard Lewis, V.C. and Flight Sub-Lieutenant Harold Day, D.S.C. respectively, after whom the train was newly jointly-named. For example, wearing the medals of her great-uncle (including his posthumously awarded Victoria Cross), Lewis described how ‘[t]oday, for me, is a culmination of a year of pride – well, a lifetime of pride, really, because I always knew about his achievements [...] When the train pulled in [...] I actually had a little tear.’ Similarly, Leigh explained the emotions prompted by the sight of the train for herself and her family members:

As the train pulled in, I have to admit there were tears down my cheeks – I just couldn’t, you know... – a cousin of mine saw the names being put on yesterday and he just said it was one of the most emotional days of his life.³⁹

Of course, by themselves such emotional displays make for good public relations in humanising companies and projecting an image of community-spiritedness. But in conjunction with the GWR rebranding, the event also seems to work on an additional level to blur the lines between the past and present. For example, in explaining the aim and significance of the Armistice train project, project leader and designer Paul Gentleman said: ‘I wanted to create thousands of one-line stories and I think we’ve achieved that. We picked out 100 of *our former employees* and gave more detailed descriptions and added photos next to their names.’⁴⁰ Here we can see how the rebranding obfuscates once again the fact that the GWR of the past and the rebranded First Great Western are entirely separate entities, allowing for use of the tell-tale vicarious pronoun ‘our’ to imply that those being commemorated and those doing the commemorating are part of a shared lineage.

³⁶ Daniel Angelini, ‘GWR Pay Tribute to Workers Killed during First World War with Specially-Designed Train’, Swindon Advertiser, 10 November 2018, <https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/17214852.gwr-pay-tribute-to-workers-killed-during-first-world-war-with-specially-designed-train/>.

³⁷ ‘GWR Honours WW1 Fallen Workers with Special Armistice Trains’, The Military Times, 9 November 2018, <https://www.themilitarytimes.co.uk/history/gwr-honours-ww1-fallen-workers/>; Broadcast Exchange, *GWR Honours WW1 Fallen Workers with Specially Commissioned Armistice Train*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdQIAeuFqZQ>.

³⁸ Angelini, ‘GWR Pay Tribute to Workers Killed during First World War with Specially-Designed Train’.

³⁹ BroadcastExchange, *7988 GWR Armistice Train B-Roll 1080i*, Vimeo, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/299871450>.

⁴⁰ Angelini, ‘GWR Pay Tribute to Workers Killed during First World War with Specially-Designed Train’.

This narrative device was echoed by the GWR representative at the event, Matt Golton, who explained that:

we've got a lot of relatives that we've tracked down from those employees who died in the First World War. We want them to be proud that *we still remember* their relatives; we want them to know that we recognise the significance of what it meant for their families and [we're] pleased that *Great Western still, all these years later, remembers its own men.*⁴¹

Again, the implication is that 'we' are all part of the same continuous company that 'still, all these years later, remembers its own men'. And added to this is the suggestion of how this should be channelled – GWR wants relatives of the dead to be proud that the company is acting as the custodian of their memories by keeping their names alive. Galton reiterated this invocation of vicarious pride, further stating '2,545 Great Western Railway employees gave their lives in the First World War. We're remembering them as *Great Western colleagues because we're proud of them.*'⁴² Gone is the distant and general language about the overall contribution of the railways to the war, replaced by warmer vicarious language of shared lineage and pride. This move is largely only sustainable because of the rebranding – the suggestion of similitude would not have been so effective if the company still carried the baggage of its 'First' branding. It is the linguistic slipperiness of two distinct entities with precisely the same name being discussed interchangeably that allows for pride in being part of a company which has historically made contributions to national military efforts. Except, of course, as Mitchell noted earlier, the company for which present-day GWR employees work has made no such contributions, because it is not the same company. Nevertheless, the branding enables it to pass GWR's legacy as its own and through its own corporate partnerships with the RBL, is able to claim continuous corporate vicarious military subjectivity.

Corporate Vicarious Military Subjectivity and Controversy

While various critics were annoyed about how FirstGroup shamelessly traded upon the engineering legacy of Brunel, notably, its appropriation during the centenary of the legacy of GWR workers killed during World War I attracted no negative public attention. Arguably, this was both because the branding was seamless – it was able to claim such initiatives as relating to the company's own identity - and perhaps because FirstGroup was not perceived as *directly benefitting commercially* from its commemorative or remembrance initiatives. This is not to suggest, however, that what we might think of as attempts at forming and utilising corporate militarised subjectivity have been without controversy; to the contrary, this has become an area of increasing

⁴¹ Broadcast Exchange, *GWR Honours WW1 Fallen Workers with Specially Commissioned Armistice Train*.

⁴² BroadcastExchange, *7988 GWR Armistice Train B-Roll 1080i*.

sensitivity even as commemorative culture has evolved and expanded into new domains over the past two decades.

One of the most prominent examples of controversy regarding corporate engagement with remembrance and commemoration over the course of the centenary concerned a television advert run by supermarket Sainsbury's in the run up to Christmas in 2014, based on the story of the 1914 Christmas Truce on the Western Front during the First World War.⁴³ The central narrative of the advert begins with a British soldier huddled in a snowy trench on the Western Front (with artillery fire audible in the background) on Christmas Eve 1914, receiving and opening a package from home to reveal a picture of a young woman and the gift of a chocolate bar. The soldier and his comrades suddenly hear German soldiers in the opposing trenches singing the carol 'Stille Nacht' (or 'Silent Night'). The British soldiers then join in singing the carol, building to a rousing chorus of British and German voices in unison. The advert then cuts to the next morning and the British soldier gazing at a robin – quintessentially associated with Christmas – perching on the barbed wire adorning the trench. The soldier then puts his head above the trench parapet and emerges without a weapon, with his hands raised in peace. He is seen by a German soldier through a periscope who, fearing an attack, sounds the alarm, prompting his fellow soldiers to scramble for their rifles.⁴⁴ Another British soldier, asleep until this point, wakes up hearing the commotion and calls out "Jim? Jim!!!" to the central protagonist, trying to stop his apparently suicidal act. Just as the German line is prepared to fire, the periscope operator calls "halt", informing his comrades that the soldier is unarmed. He then mimics the British soldier's action by emerging from the trenches with his hands raised. In the next shot, their colleagues are seen following them (without weapons) across 'No Man's Land' with the two armies meeting in the middle. Jim and the German periscope operator ('Otto') exchange names, a handshake, and Jim shows Otto the photo of the young woman, before joining the football match between the armies that has achieved almost mythical status in British narrations of the war. A brief period of joyful abandon is brought to an abrupt halt when artillery is heard once more in the distance. Before returning to their respective trenches, Jim returns Otto's trench coat – which he had taken off to use as a make-shift goal post for the football match – and they exchange a final handshake, wishing each other 'Happy Christmas'. Upon returning to his trench, Otto feels something in his coat pocket and finds that Jim has given him the chocolate bar and he looks towards Jim's trench with gratitude. Meanwhile, Jim opens a tin revealing a rather forlorn looking trench biscuit and smiles to himself. The screen

⁴³ Ringan Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion, *1914 | Sainsbury's Ad | Christmas 2014*, YouTube, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWF2JBb1bvM>.

⁴⁴ This detail is fraught with political significance given that testimonies from British soldiers involved in the truce generally point to the Germans as the instigators of the truce, being the first to leave their trenches and extend Christmas greetings to their British counterparts. Newsroom, 'Story of the Christmas Truce a Century On', *Yorkshire Post*, 22 December 2014, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/story-christmas-truce-century-1828004>.

then cuts to a caption reading ‘Christmas is for sharing’, before revealing the Sainsbury’s logo.⁴⁵ Tying in with this, replicas of the antique chocolate bar featured in the advert were sold in Sainsbury’s stores in December 2014 for £1 with profits going to the RBL.⁴⁶

The advert is undeniably moving, and much of the largely laudatory press reaction upon its release pointed to its emotional power. For example, Amy Duncan of the *Metro* acknowledged that the narrative arc would ‘cue lots of lumps in throats and stifling back tears’.⁴⁷ Likewise, *The Telegraph* described it as ‘moving’ and ‘heart-warming’.⁴⁸ Of course, emotions are not coincidental to such endeavours, but central components of advertising strategies more broadly designed to resonate with the public. We have also already seen how emotions are particularly central in attempts to engage subjects in militarist discourses, and this advert was particularly affective and effective, being viewed more than 1.8 million times on YouTube in its first 24 hours, and over 21 million times by 2020.⁴⁹ A New York Post article suggested that the advert’s success could partly be attributed to its effectiveness in ‘tapping into the [British] national mood’⁵⁰ – a view shared by Dr Don Parker who noted its ‘perfect’ timing to coincide with the 14-18 centenary commemorations and following soon after the ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’ event in which 888,246 ceramic poppies representing every British military fatality in World War I progressively filled the moat at the Tower of London.⁵¹

A look at the over 13,000 comments left by viewers of the advert on the YouTube video also suggests that viewers get similar emotional fulfilment from the video as the aforementioned ‘homecoming’ videos discussed by Silvestri and Steele.⁵² For example, ‘Punydoctor’ said ‘I come back to this every year, and I cry my heart out. It's simply the most beautiful ad I've ever seen!’

⁴⁵ Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion, *1914 | Sainsbury's Ad | Christmas 2014*.

⁴⁶ ‘Sainsbury’s Selling 5,000 British Legion Chocolate Bars an Hour’, ITV News, 14 November 2014, <https://www.itv.com/news/update/2014-11-14/sainsburys-selling-5-000-british-legion-chocolate-bars-per-hour/>.

⁴⁷ Amy Duncan, ‘Sainsbury’s Christmas Advert 2014 Is Basically Just a Rehash of Paul McCartney’s Pipes of Peace’, *Metro News*, 13 November 2014, <https://metro.co.uk/2014/11/13/sainsburys-christmas-advert-2014-is-basically-just-a-rehash-of-paul-mccartneys-pipes-of-peace-4946776/?ito=cbshare>.

⁴⁸ Telegraph Video, ‘Watch: Sainsbury’s Moving 2014 Christmas Advert Recreates WW1 Truce’, *The Telegraph*, 13 November 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/christmas/11227807/Watch-Sainsburys-moving-2014-Christmas-advert-recreates-WW1-truce.html>.

⁴⁹ Melissa Thompson and Rod McPhee, ‘Sainsbury’s Christmas Advert 2014: Moving Great Tribute or Cynical Commercial?’, *Mirror Online*, 13 November 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/sainsburys-christmas-advert-2014-moving-4625887>; Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion, *1914 | Sainsbury's Ad | Christmas 2014*.

⁵⁰ Associated Press, ‘The WWI-Inspired Christmas Ad That Has Enraged Brits’, *New York Post*, 21 November 2014, <https://nypost.com/2014/11/21/the-wwi-inspired-christmas-ad-that-has-enraged-brits/>.

⁵¹ Dr Don Parker, quoted in Thompson and McPhee, ‘Sainsbury’s Christmas Ad’; For more information on ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’, see ‘Tower of London Remembers’, Historical Royal Palaces, accessed 30 July 2020, <https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/tower-of-london-remembers/#gs.c4ncty>.

⁵² Silvestri, ‘Surprise Homecomings and Vicarious Sacrifices’; Steele, ‘Welcome Home! Routines, Ontological Insecurity and the Politics of US Military Reunion Videos’.

(Liked by 1.4K others).⁵³ Not only do acknowledgements of tears function as evidence of participation in a vicarious sacrifice, but such performances are routinized through repeated viewing: ‘Sophie Bird’ in 2018 noted ‘Yet again I’m watching it and I still sob everytime, still remains the best Christmas ad’ and ‘Scottish Maniac 2’ writes ‘April 9th 2019 and still watching. So amazing.’⁵⁴ Notably, the advert has also been the subject of a number of predominantly American ‘viewer reaction’ videos from YouTubers where real time footage of viewers’ emotional reactions to the advert adds further evidence of their vicarious sacrifices.⁵⁵ And there are also similarities with the ways homecoming videos are policed in terms of how they should be watched and acceptable reactions. For example, ‘trycoldman23’ writes ‘I remember getting that ad in 2014. **No skipping allowed**’ (Liked by 3.7K others) – which emphasises the sacrificial dimension of the test of difficult viewing – and ‘Nick777’ seeks to police acceptable emotional responses by suggesting that ‘whoever disliked this has no heart’.⁵⁶ Indeed, for some, this advert was the pinnacle of various genres. ‘Lee Nicholson’ claims that ‘[t]his will forever be the best Christmas advert. Truest expression of the meaning of Christmas that can be portrayed through a tv.’⁵⁷ ‘The DankFather’ goes further saying ‘[t]hey will never be able to beat this advert’, and Sainsbury’s frequently comes in for significant praise from users, with ‘Alex Smith’ commenting ‘[b]rilliant. Best thing to come out of Sainsburys’.⁵⁸

It is fair to say, then, that many viewers received the advert intensely positively, interpreting it as a moving tribute. But while the emotional resonance was powerful with some, Robert Foley described the advert’s impact as having ‘really touched a nerve in the British population’ – sometimes in quite negative ways.⁵⁹ Comedian and presenter Russell Brand, for example, made his own reaction video in which he balked at the way in which it played on British sentimental attachments (‘football, love, chocolate – is nothing sacred?!’) in order to bolster Sainsbury’s commercial appeal:

You sick, evil, twisted geniuses [laughs] at Sainsbury’s [...] perhaps look at using these resources of emotion and unity that we have as human beings for something other than driving people into the supermarket. [...]

⁵³ ‘Punydoctor’ (2017) Re: Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion, 1914 | *Sainsbury’s Ad | Christmas 2014*.

⁵⁴ ‘Sophie Bird’ (2018) and ‘Scottish Maniac 2’ (2019) Re: Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion.

⁵⁵ For some examples of this genre, see The Postmodern Family, *Choked Up: Sainsbury’s 2014 Christmas Advert*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1PG9qlK1VQ>; Devon DaVinci, *The Christmas Truce of 1914 REACTION | DaVinci REACTS*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAXit-5AghQ>; American Mum, *1914 Sainsbury’s Ad Christmas 2014 REACTION*, YouTube, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7MNxPB6zA>; Lightning Bliss, *Lightning Bliss Reacts: 1914 Sainsbury’s Ad - Christs 2014*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xZXQGBXyB8>.

⁵⁶ ‘trycoldman23’ (2019) and ‘Nick777’ (2019) Re: Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion, 1914 | *Sainsbury’s Ad | Christmas 2014*.

⁵⁷ ‘Lee Nicholson’ (2019) Re: Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion.

⁵⁸ ‘The DankFather’ (2019) and ‘Alex Smith’ (2019), Re: Ledwidge and The Royal British Legion.

⁵⁹ Robert Foley, quoted in Associated Press, ‘The WWI-Inspired Christmas Ad That Has Enraged Brits’.

Their whole objective is to get you go down the supermarket and spend some money. That can't be right can it?⁶⁰

Similarly, Ally Fogg of *The Guardian* was unequivocal in his view that 'the ultimate objective here is to persuade us to buy our tinsel, our crackers and our sprouts from one particular supermarket.'⁶¹ Such objections were shared by some of the 823 complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority, 'object[ing] to the use of an event from the First World War to advertise a supermarket'.⁶² Arguably, the particularly competitive dimension of the Christmas advert genre reinforced such perceptions with the advert being seen as an attempt to 'out-do' rival retailer John Lewis' whose own contender centred on a love story between penguins Monty and Mabel. One newspaper review's description of the advert as 'a 4-minute 'f*** you' to John Lewis and Monty the penguin' did little to allay suspicions around the advert's intent.⁶³

A spokesperson defended the advert against these suspicions at its launch, describing it as one manifestation of Sainsbury's longstanding commitment to the RBL: '[o]ur 2014 Christmas campaign has been created in partnership with The Royal British Legion as the latest expression of a 20 year relationship with them.'⁶⁴ Indeed, in 2014 alone the advert was just one aspect of an expansive advertising campaign including the sale of a variety of RBL themed products such as reusable bags featuring the iconic Earl Haig poppy, as well as giving shoppers the option of 'rounding-up' their shopping bills, with the difference being donated to the RBL.⁶⁵ And while Sainsbury's acknowledged the lingering sensitivity around the war, it nevertheless sought to justify the advert on the basis that it not only had the permission of the RBL to make the advert, but was developed in collaboration with respected and *authoritative* parties: '[w]e recognise the Christmas truce is an emotive and cherished story... which is why we have worked with the Legion and experts to ensure we tell it with authenticity and respect.'⁶⁶ Thompson and McPhee in *The Mirror* explained that this sensitivity and authenticity could be seen in the way in which Sainsbury's

⁶⁰ Russell Brand, *The Trews VS The Sainsbury's Xmas Advert: Russell Brand The Trews (E214)*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SLV2yNhhgU>.

⁶¹ Ally Fogg, 'Sainsbury's Christmas Ad Is a Dangerous and Disrespectful Masterpiece', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/13/sainsburys-christmas-ad-first-world-war>.

⁶² ASA News, '2014's Most Complained about Ads', Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), 20 February 2015, <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/2014s-most-complained-about-ads.html>.

⁶³ Christopher Hooton, 'Sainsbury's' Trenches-Based Christmas Advert Is like a 4-Minute "f*** You" to John Lewis', *The Independent*, 13 November 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/sainsburys-trenches-based-christmas-advert-is-like-a-4-minute-f-you-to-john-lewis-9857588.html>.

⁶⁴ John Thompson, 'Store Wars for a Cause? Sainsbury's, Waitrose and John Lewis Add Charity Dimension to Christmas Campaigns', UK Fundraising, 19 October 2014, <https://fundraising.co.uk/2014/10/19/store-wars-cause-sainsburys-waitrose-add-charity-dimension-christmas-campaigns/>.

⁶⁵ In 2016, Sainsbury's also spray painted poppies onto various bays in its car parks to raise awareness of the Poppy Appeal. Stephanie Linning, 'Poppies Are Spray Painted onto Car Park Bays at Sainsbury's Stores across the Country to Raise Awareness of This Year's Appeal', *Mail Online*, 7 November 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~/article-3911258/index.html>.

⁶⁶ Sainsbury's spokesperson, quoted in Thompson and McPhee, 'Sainsbury's Christmas Ad'.

‘used real letters and diaries and consulted historians at the Imperial War Museum and the British Legion’ to create the advert’s narrative and ensure historical accuracy in terms of the set – which consisted of ‘authentically re-constructed trenches’ - uniform, and prop design: ‘a biscuit seen in a British soldier’s mess tin was made to a First World War recipe of water, flour and salt while the chocolate bar’s logo is the one used by Sainsbury’s in 1914.’⁶⁷

Claims to authenticity also extended to the people involved in the creation of the advert. For example, *The Mirror* article noted that the advert was directed by Ringan Ledwidge, whose great uncle had been killed at the 1917 Battle of Passchendaele and ‘paternal grandfather fought in both world wars’.⁶⁸ As we have already seen, such familial links can often constitute vital currency in legitimising certain claims to acceptability, and this instance is no exception. Indeed, Sainsbury’s produced a video detailing how the advert had been made in which Sainsbury’s Head of Brand Communications Mark Given emphasised Ledwidge’s ‘huge emotional connection with the project and the script.’⁶⁹ For instance, having detailed how Ledwidge had initially been ‘intimidated by the sensitivity of the subject’, the article subsequently diffused the unease through a quote from Ledwidge himself declaring that ‘[t]he message is wonderful. I think people forget Christmas is about sharing. What a powerful way to do that and pay respect to the guys who fought.’⁷⁰ The notion subtly articulated here to readers was that it was okay to enjoy the advert because the filmmaker himself had authentic and authoritative vicarious military subjectivity through identification with his great uncle and grandfather and not only approved of the advert but had created it. Vicarious subjectivity was also at the fore in the *Mirror*’s interview with the owner of film prop company ‘Khaki Devil’ which ‘operates the Suffolk trenches where filming took place’ purpose-built for more ‘historically accurate’ representations by the film and television industry.⁷¹ In the interview, Taff Gillingham reassured readers that: ‘[i]f we think somebody is making a programme that’s disrespectful we just won’t be part of it. We’ve turned down plenty of stuff in the past.’⁷² In addition, Gillingham reinforced his own view that it was acceptable by invoking his experience of working with soldiers: ‘The Christmas truce is something very close to my heart and there’s no way we would’ve done it if it was insulting to the old boys. And all the old boys I knew... I think they would have loved it.’⁷³ In claiming to know what the ‘old boys’ would have thought of the advert, Gillingham was reinforcing his own subjectivity and claim to authenticity through vicarious identification with his military customers.

⁶⁷ Thompson and McPhee.

⁶⁸ Thompson and McPhee.

⁶⁹ Sainsbury’s, *The Making of 1914 | Christmas Ad | Sainsbury’s*, YouTube, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jx3pQWbysmM>.

⁷⁰ Ringan Ledwidge, quoted in Thompson and McPhee, ‘Sainsbury’s Christmas Ad’.

⁷¹ Thompson and McPhee; ‘Trench Locations’, Khaki Devil, 22 December 2015, http://www.khakidevil.co.uk/portfolio_item/locations.

⁷² Taff Gillingham, quoted in Thompson and McPhee, ‘Sainsbury’s Christmas Ad’.

⁷³ Gillingham, quoted in Thompson and McPhee.

Returning to the initiative itself, one might have expected that RBL involvement would have at least partially shielded Sainsbury's from criticism. Indeed, RBL fundraising director Charles Byrne explicitly endorsed the advert, describing himself impressed by the 'attention to detail that's gone into the historical research' and the resulting historical fidelity of the piece, adding that 'proper respect has gone into it.'⁷⁴ But he also provided implicit defence of the decision to sell a replica of the chocolate bar featured in the advert – made in Ypres, with profits going to the RBL – when he emphasised the importance of the campaign for modern veterans - '[t]his campaign is particularly important – 100 years on from the 1914 Christmas truce, it remembers the fallen while helping to raise vital funds to support the future of living.'⁷⁵ But beyond being dismayed by the instrumentalism of the war for consumerist ends, both Brand and Fogg's reservations about the adverts related to the aesthetic sensibility of the advert's depiction of the First World War trenches. Brand, for example, both acknowledged and abhorred the beauty of the film, declaring himself 'outraged by how good it is and to what end – it's so brilliant, so beautifully-crafted, so lovely.'⁷⁶ Similarly, while acknowledging that the 'breathtaking' cinematography and the advert's 'startling array of emotional depth' made it 'on its own terms, a masterpiece', Fogg took issue with the advert's aesthetically-pleasing depiction of the war, noting:

Somewhere close to 40 million young men were killed, lost or mutilated in the First World War. Sainsbury's has all but dressed them in a sandwich board. Donating profits to the Royal British Legion from the sale of the special chocolate bar that appears in the advert doesn't change that.⁷⁷

In Fogg's view, then, the ends did not justify the means, which in this case consisted of glossing over the destructiveness and violence of the war: 'The film-makers here have done something to the first world war which is perhaps the most dangerous and disrespectful act of all: they have made it beautiful.'⁷⁸ And significantly, it was not simply Sainsbury's coming in for criticism, but the RBL too, with some feeling that the altruistic ends did not justify the militarised means.

'They can't do that!' Militarised Subjectivity more broadly

Although the case of the Sainsbury's advert and chocolate centred on a moment of specific sensitivity in the British collective memory/imaginary – not least disagreements over how the war should be understood and logics of appropriateness governing the usage of this aspect of history, the deeply-divided reaction to this can be read as indicative of growing sensitivity around war commemoration and the RBL's stewardship of remembrance more generally. One point of particular sensitivity has been the change of tactics in how the RBL 'does' remembrance – of

⁷⁴ Charles Byrne, in Sainsbury's, *The Making of 1914 | Christmas Ad | Sainsbury's*.

⁷⁵ Charles Byrne, quoted in Thompson and McPhee, 'Sainsbury's Christmas Ad'.

⁷⁶ Brand, *The Trens VS The Sainsbury's Xmas Advert*.

⁷⁷ Fogg, 'Sainsbury's Christmas Ad Is a Dangerous and Disrespectful Masterpiece'.

⁷⁸ Fogg.

which the Sainsbury's advert is a prominent example – and accompanying change in tone and message around war commemoration from solemnity to more effusive displays of nostalgic and sentimental support, discussed earlier in the chapter.

As these trends have evolved over the past decade, public criticisms regarding the perceived commodification of remembrance on the back of a highly-selective and sanitised narration of specific wars and the institution of war more generally have grown in prominence. For example, in 2010, six former soldiers wrote an open letter to the *Guardian* newspaper criticising the RBL for 'subverting Armistice Day' and the 'Never Again' sentiment associated by many with remembrance more generally:

A day that should be about peace and remembrance is turned into a month-long drum roll of support for current wars. This year's campaign has been launched with showbiz hype. The true horror and futility of war is forgotten and ignored.⁷⁹

Again, the objections centred on the marked change in tone of the Poppy Appeal, with one of the letter's signatories Ken Lukowiak expressing concern that '[t]his year's poppy appeal is too showbizzy, too much glamour and glitz. It's like they are turning on the Christmas lights in Regent Street' – a perception fuelled in part by the RBL's decision to open the 2010 Poppy Appeal with a performance by band *The Saturdays*.⁸⁰ But the bigger concern was that this change in tone heralded a change in message regarding the meaning and purpose of remembrance. As another signatory Ben Griffin explained: 'We are concerned that people are trying to take ownership of the poppy for political ends. It is almost as if they are trying to garner support for our boys and any criticism of the wars [in Iraq and Afghanistan] is a betrayal.'⁸¹ Of course, the letter was particularly powerful because it came from soldiers themselves, whose military subjectivity was perceived as carrying extra authenticity and authority because of their first-hand experiences of war. Accordingly, the wars and conflicts that each soldier had been involved with were listed next to their names, to further authenticate their viewpoints by conferring them with what 'ground truth'.⁸² As if to acknowledge the particular power of the soldier's own views and accounts of remembrance, a *Guardian* article about the letter sought the views of other soldiers to establish whether the view expressed in the letter was simply that of a few ex-military malcontents. Accordingly, it cited an 'elderly RAF veteran with his cardboard tray of paper poppies outside a Sainsbury's in Kent' who said of the Poppy Appeal: 'It's a wonderful cause, but it's all getting a

⁷⁹ Ben Griffin et al., 'Letter: Poppies and "Heroes"', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/05/poppies-and-heroes-remembrance-day>.

⁸⁰ Ken Lukowiak, quoted in Stephen Bates, 'Poppy Appeal's Original Aims Being Subverted, Veterans Complain', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/05/poppy-appeal-subverted-veterans-complain>.

⁸¹ Ben Griffin, quoted in Bates.

⁸² Griffin et al., 'Letter: Poppies and "Heroes"'; On 'Ground Truth', see Tidy, 'Gender, Dissenting Subjectivity and the Contemporary Military Peace Movement in Body of War'.

bit – what's the word? – excessive: a bit wallowing. I wouldn't like to say so openly though.⁸³ Such testimony is, of course, especially powerful, demonstrating not only that other veterans are uncomfortable with the Appeal, but that even those selling poppies have their own reservations which they do not feel comfortable in voicing publicly.

The RBL response was very much in line with the views expressed elsewhere in controversies around remembrance. For example, RBL spokesperson Robert Lee denied that the campaign was politicising remembrance, claiming that '[t]here is nothing in our appeal or campaigning which supports, or does not support, war: we are totally neutral. We are not a warmongering organisation. We don't have a position on war in Iraq or anywhere else.'⁸⁴ In addition, he deflected blame for the wars away from the RBL by saying '[t]hese boys don't send themselves to Iraq – that's a decision for the politicians', thereby activating the trope of reckless and uncaring politicians through the language of 'our boys' – with the women of the armed forces apparently overlooked. In contrast to the stereotypical figure of the avaricious politician with ulterior motives, Lee reminded readers of the ostensibly apolitical end⁸⁵ to which the Poppy Appeal was aimed:

We help 160,000 cases a year, servicemen and women and their families. We represent widows at inquests, we fight for compensation for victims who have lost limbs. We are in there, up to our elbows dealing with the cost of conflict.⁸⁶

Here, Lee was subtly invoking the RBL's own kind of 'ground truth', suggesting that the organisation is uniquely positioned to recognise the scale of the end which justifies the means. The suggestion that '[w]e are in there, up to our elbows' might be read as a subtle metaphor referencing the dominant cultural imaginaries of the First World War 'Tommy', getting 'stuck in' on the frontline while wading through the mud and squalor of the trenches of the Western Front. Finally, while acknowledging that the RBL had a responsibility to the nation to safeguard the memory of the fallen and the symbolism of the poppy, Lee emphasised that it had had to change with the times in order to engage new audiences: 'We are the national custodians of remembrance but we are living in contemporary society. Not everything we do with the poppy appeal has to be static and serious, or conducted with a frown.'⁸⁷ Here, again, the suggestion was that the ends justified the means.

Not everyone has been convinced by such defences, however, with controversy continuing to surround the RBL's custodianship of remembrance in the past decade. A 2015 report published

⁸³ Anonymous, quoted in Bates, 'Poppy Appeal's Original Aims Being Subverted, Veterans Complain?.'

⁸⁴ Lee, quoted in Bates.

⁸⁵ As Millar has argued, altruism is often (wrongly) perceived as apolitical by the public, and military charities frequently position their subjectivity using the charity angle. See, Millar, "They Need Our Help".

⁸⁶ Lee, quoted in Bates, 'Poppy Appeal's Original Aims Being Subverted, Veterans Complain?.'

⁸⁷ Lee, quoted in Bates.

by Veterans for Peace UK, for example, questioned ‘whether the Royal British Legion is still suitable to be the “national custodian of Remembrance”.⁸⁸ Suggesting it was not, the report pointed to the corporatisation of the ‘poppy brand’:

its trivialising and absurd Poppy Balls and Poppy Rocks Balls, and the demeaning and disrespectful way they have depicted the “remembrance” of war - the girl bands [a reference to *The Saturdays* who launched the Poppy Appeal again in 2013], the Swarovski crystal poppies, the miniskirts, the dancing poppymen, the Poppy ketchup, the dog name tags, the “I Love Poppy” t-shirts.⁸⁹

Partly, the objection was about taste; but the argument was also that the poppy’s commodification was indicative of an ‘increasingly coercive and militarised presentation of remembrance’.⁹⁰ The report criticised the RBL’s 2014 charity single – Joss Stone’s cover of Eric Bogle’s ‘No Man’s Land’ – for omitting three stanzas from the original containing critical reflection on the war’s meaning, thereby ‘sentimentalising a song which once had a powerful anti-war sentiment.’⁹¹ This was viewed as part of a broader attempt to sanitise war and bolster ‘support the troops’ sentiment through closer collaboration with the armed forces and the careful deployment of ‘verbal poppies’: ‘empty signifiers’ capable of making it nearly impossible to criticise any particular wars without criticising soldiers past and present.⁹² The report also criticised the increasingly ‘heavy-handed[ness]’ of remembrance discourse – termed ‘Poppy Fascism’ by news presenter Jon Snow – and of the RBL in enforcing its trademark and reporting people filmed burning the poppy to the police.⁹³ Finally, it concluded that the RBL must sever its links with the arms trade – which had been encouraged to vicariously appropriate the symbol, yet seemingly stood to profit from *more* rather than less war – apologise for its ‘crude and inappropriate’ commodification of the poppy and remembrance, and demanded that the RBL ‘de-brand’ itself in order to ‘return the poppy to us as a symbol both of personal remembrance and shared ritual.’⁹⁴

It is not only former soldiers who have grown uncomfortable with remembrance in 21st century Britain. Particularly as the poppy symbol has become increasingly ubiquitous and its usages ever more extravagant, and as members of the general public have come to experience or perceive ‘poppy fascism’ in public life and their own everyday lives, a growing number of people have

⁸⁸ Rod Tweedy, ‘My Name Is Legion: The British Legion and the Control of Remembrance’ (London: Veterans for Peace UK, 2015), 1, http://vfpuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/my_name_is_legion-web.pdf.

⁸⁹ Tweedy, 21.

⁹⁰ Tweedy, 2.

⁹¹ Tweedy, 2–4.

⁹² Tweedy, 19–20.

⁹³ Tweedy, 2.

⁹⁴ There was some confusion in this suggestion that the poppy should be returned to ‘us’, given that elsewhere it is argued that it had never done so previously: ‘[a]s their website notes, McCrae’s poem “inspired” the manufacture of the original “red silk poppies”: the Poppy symbol was always rooted in the verses of “In Flanders Fields”. Its vengeful and inappropriate imperative to “take up our quarrel with the foe” and to carry on the fight was therefore written into the bloody roots of the poppy from the start.’ The implication here is that the poppy’s origins in the poetry of McCrae meant that its featuring in remembrance had always been militarised. Tweedy, 21, 8.

begun to express concerns about the direction of remembrance, with some even turning away from the symbol altogether. For example, one 2017 poll of public attitudes towards the red poppy conducted by *Consumer Intelligence* found that while around 80% of respondents planned to wear a red poppy, 11% of respondents said they would not, and that a further 9% were unsure. Among this 20%, the most common reason given for their objection or hesitancy was that ‘they feel bullied into supporting the appeal.’⁹⁵

Some, then, have voted with their feet. At the same time, social media has provided an alternative forum for the expression of concerns about – and performance of resistance towards – the perceived corporatisation, commodification, militarisation, and coercion around the poppy, which have become routine sites of controversy in British public discourse in recent years. One such outlet has been a Twitter account called ‘Poppy® Watch’ (@GiantPoppyWatch) which has, since 2016, invited users to submit photos of particularly egregious examples of poppy-usage pushing the boundaries of taste, encountered in everyday British life particularly during October and November.⁹⁶ The account’s nearly 40,000 followers (at the time of writing) have made the account a subject of media interest, with a BBC Trending article describing the account as ‘post[ing] outlandish and often giant-sized uses of the poppy, giving them mocking "ratings" out of 10’.⁹⁷ The significance of the rating was explained by the account’s creator:

You've got town councils around the country covering buildings in poppies, hanging them from lampposts, sticking life-size 'Poppy Mannequins' onto park benches like they're waiting for the Chelsea Flower Show judges to come round and give them a score. So I started giving them scores.⁹⁸

Its creator also explained that the parody account was intended to ‘highlight the absurdity and obscenity of what's happened to Remembrance Day’ by being ‘a showcase of the insincere’.⁹⁹ As the ‘®’ (for ‘Registered Trademark’) in the account’s name suggests, many of the targets for ridicule are the various commercialised uses of the poppy that seem to violate the traditional logics of appropriateness and taste governing the symbol’s usage and remembrance discourses. Many of the transgressions are unofficial, including the image of a lingerie shop’s window display adorned with poppies, which ‘Poppy® Watch’ mockingly captioned: ‘LADIES! Get him in the mood for some #SexyRemembrance by slipping into some lingerie from this shop which is probably helping the #Fallen because it has some poppies in the window, right? 7/10.’¹⁰⁰ A

⁹⁵ Tom Flack, ‘One In Five Doubt They Will Wear A Poppy This Year’, *Consumer Intelligence*, 1 November 2017, <https://www.consumerintelligence.com/articles/one-in-five-doubt-they-will-wear-a-poppy-this-year>.

⁹⁶ ‘Poppy® Watch (@giantpoppywatch)’, Twitter, accessed 21 July 2019, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch>.

⁹⁷ Anisa Subedar, ‘Has the Core Message of the Poppy Appeal Been Diluted?’, *BBC Trending* (blog), 11 November 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-41930507>.

⁹⁸ ‘GiantPoppyWatch’ quoted in Subedar.

⁹⁹ ‘@GiantPoppyWatch’, quoted in Subedar.

¹⁰⁰ @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘LADIES! Get Him in the Mood for Some #SexyRemembrance by Slipping into Some Lingerie from This Shop Which Is Probably Helping the #Fallen Because It Has Some

similarly withering caption accompanies a photo of pepperoni on a Tesco pizza arranged to depict a poppy: '[n]othing gets you in the RembrancingSeason spirit quite like the mouthwatering aroma of a freshly baked PoignantPoppy&PepperoniPizza! 🍕 It's the most wonderful time of the year! 8/10.'¹⁰¹ The disparaging comparison to the commodification of Christmas is also made on the picture of a lorry decorated with a remembrance-themed mural, the words 'Lest we forget' featuring the silhouettes of soldiers, aircraft and warships past and present against the backdrop of a poppy field. In this case, the caption compares the lorry to the festive truck featured in the Coca-Cola Christmas advert, with a caption that replaces 'holidays' with 'Poppy Day': '🎵 Poppy Day is coming, Poppy Day is coming, Poppy Day is coming, Poppy Day is coming 🎵 14 SLEEPS TO GO! #buzzing #poppytruck'.¹⁰² But like the Veterans for Peace report, 'Poppy® Watch' also takes aim at the RBL's own attempts at commodification. In addition to mocking the RBL's sale of 'Poppy Onesies', for example, another piece of fundraising memorabilia that attracted a mocking response was a replica of a 1918 Infantry Trench Whistle, produced and sold by the RBL especially to commemorate the centenary:

🎵 Whistle while you war! 🎵 This was the last thing many #Fallen heard before they were cut in two by enemy fire! So what better way to celebrate Poppy®Season than loudly blowing the WarWhistle™ whenever you see a traitor not wearing a Poppy®?¹⁰³

As the word 'traitor' might indicate, another aim of the posts is to draw attention to - and mock - the increasingly extravagant lengths that people will go to in order to show their respect and the extent to which poppy wearing has come to be seen as a 'loyalty test'. One example of the bizarre excess of remembrance culture in 21st century Britain include a toaster spray-painted sunset-orange/yellow and overlaid with a stencilled black silhouette of a soldier kneeling next to a cross, prompting the 'Poppy® Watch' to remark: '[w]hy remembrance just once a year when you can "toast" the #Fallen every single morning? 9/10.'¹⁰⁴ Others responded with puns of their own

Poppies in the Window, Right? 7/10pic.Twitter.Com/IDQ4nXZo0F, Twitter, 9 November 2017, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/928751557742661632>.

¹⁰¹ @GiantPoppyWatch, 'Nothing Gets You in the RembrancingSeason Spirit Quite like the Mouthwatering Aroma of a Freshly Baked PoignantPoppy&PepperoniPizza! It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year! 8/10 Credit: @biglhistpic.Twitter.Com/An8Lfs70rM', Twitter, 5 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1059572248632274944>.

¹⁰² @GiantPoppyWatch, 'Poppy Day Is Coming, Poppy Day Is Coming, Poppy Day Is Coming, Poppy Day Is Coming 14 SLEEPS TO GO! #buzzing #poppytruckpic.Twitter.Com/Qj52vziIcY', Twitter, 29 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1057012845056024577>.

¹⁰³ @GiantPoppyWatch, 'Whistle While You War! This Was the Last Thing Many #Fallen Heard before They Were Cut in Two by Enemy Fire! So What Better Way to Celebrate Poppy®Season than Loudly Blowing the WarWhistle™ Whenever You See a Traitor Not Wearing a Poppy®? WhistleWatcher: @BrendonHopepic.Twitter.Com/QVnQxrsxlt', Twitter, 2 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1058283843571142658>.

¹⁰⁴ @GiantPoppyWatch, 'Why Remembrance Just Once a Year When You Can"toast" the #Fallen Every Single Morning? 9/10 Credit: This Popped up on the Facebook Feed of @danbownespic.Twitter.Com/G3sD1tkg3d', Twitter, 14 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1051493548661624834>.

based on some of the most famous sayings of remembrance such as ‘lest we forget’ (‘Yeast we forget’¹⁰⁵/ ‘SunBLEST we forget’¹⁰⁶) and ‘At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them’ (‘At the going down of the toast, and in the morning, we will remember them’¹⁰⁷). Another example included a front drive and garden ‘featur[ing] sandbags and scrap wood assembled to mimic a First World War trench — topped by a sign reading, "No man's land" with an arrow pointing away’, as well as ‘[t]wo uniform-clad mannequins - one standing guard at the trench and the other in a respectful pose beside a grave adorned with poppies’.¹⁰⁸ While *The Sun* newspaper praised the ‘sombre trench décor’, ‘Poppy® Watch’ cast doubt on any claim to respectful solemnity adopting a jocular tone to describe it: ‘WOAH! Now THIS is what you call the Home Front! Putting the mortar into bricks and mortar! Incredible Remembrancing from this PropertyPatriot! 11/10’.¹⁰⁹ This set the tone for many of the responses, with contributors mocking the tableau by mimicking the outraged tone of others who *do* view the Poppy and remembrance as a loyalty test, and use social media as a way of shaming public figures who ostensibly do not meet the required standards. For instance, ‘Russell George’ questioned the ‘11/10’ rating, arguing: ‘only gets an 11/10 if he occasionally strafes the visitors taking photos with mustard gas for a truly authentic atmosphere’¹¹⁰ ‘Red Robbo’ similarly mocked it for not going nearly far enough: ‘Pathetic. When I made my no-man's-land home I levelled my entire house, replacing it with rubble, thigh-deep mud and endless gunfire. I am tweeting from a trench I excavated in my neighbour's flowerbed.’¹¹¹

These tactics of mocking ‘one-upmanship’ are well-honed through the account’s efforts to satirise the ‘loyalty test’ aspect of modern remembrance by parodying the disproportionate rage and criticism levelled at those who don’t wear poppies, do not wear *enough* poppies, or else are perceived as wearing them incorrectly. This is seen in the frequent juxtaposition of images of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn – criticised by the parts of the right-wing press for (amongst other

¹⁰⁵ @NeillyBoyle, ‘Yeast We Forget’, Twitter, 15 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/NeillyBoyle/status/1051943153723432963>.

¹⁰⁶ @NiallMcAdie, ‘SunBLEST We Forget’, Twitter, 14 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/NiallMcAdie/status/1051494382816415744>.

¹⁰⁷ @johnnaaaaaaaaa, ‘At the Going down of the Toast, and in the Morning, We Will Remember Them’, Twitter, 14 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/johnnaaaaaaaaa/status/1051497937191211008>.

¹⁰⁸ Neal Baker, “‘Halloween-Style’ Remembrance Day Front Garden Display Divides the Internet”, *The Sun*, 31 October 2018, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7626183/halloween-remembrance-day-front-garden-display/>.

¹⁰⁹ @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘WOAH! Now THIS Is What You Call the Home Front! Putting the Mortar into Bricks and Mortar! Incredible Remembrancing from This PropertyPatriot! 11/10pic.Twitter.Com/8boWRRhqmK’, Twitter, 31 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1057617360083918849>.

¹¹⁰ @FECareersIAG @FECareersIAG, ‘Only Gets an 11/10 If He Occasionally Strafes the Visitors Taking Photos with Mustard Gas for a Truly Authentic Atmosphere’, Twitter, 31 October 2018, <https://twitter.com/FECareersIAG/status/1057618073191174144>.

¹¹¹ @Orwell_Fan_Fan, ‘Pathetic. When I Made My No-Man’s-Land Home I Levelled My Entire House, Replacing It with Rubble, Thigh-Deep Mud and Endless Gunfire. I Am Tweeting from a Trench I Excavated in My Neighbour’s Flowerbed.’, Twitter, 31 October 2018, https://twitter.com/Orwell_Fan_Fan/status/1057619713424011265.

things), bowing insufficiently when laying a poppy wreath, wearing only a small poppy lapel pin to the cenotaph service, and wearing an insufficiently respectful raincoat – with images of far-right activists wearing the symbol while performing Nazi salutes: ‘DISGUSTING! Corbyn should’ve worn a nice big Poppy like THESE respectful patriots!’ The point being made is that the size of poppy worn provides little indication of the sentiment behind it. The aim of ‘Poppy® Watch’, the page’s founder emphasises, is neither to disrespect military personnel, nor to discourage poppy-wearing, but to provide a forum for questioning and critiquing the contemporary social function of remembrance, and what classifies as respectful.¹¹² Interestingly, it is this boundary of respect that is an equally sensitive issue for some of the symbol’s most vocal advocates, albeit from a very different perspective and enforced in less light-hearted ways. Proponents have had their own issues with some of the ways in which the poppy has been deployed in recent years; and yet, as the approval of some of the more extravagant examples of poppy usage listed above suggest, it can sometimes be difficult to discern precisely where the boundary between good and poor taste in remembrance lies for the poppy’s more outspoken advocates. In a context in which mannequins covered from head to toe in poppies, remembrance-themed Christmas adverts, and pop concerts to launch the Poppy Appeal are commonly passed as respectful, what could reasonably be considered ‘beyond the pale’? As it turns out, the answer was small, blue, furry, and had a voracious appetite.

Policing of Contested Gendered Militarised Hierarchies

In 2016, the BBC was heavily criticised for allowing, *Sesame Street*’s ‘Cookie Monster’ to wear the poppy during the puppet’s appearance on BBC flagship chat show, *The One Show*. Some of this criticism came from familiar sources: Poppy® Watch gave pictures of the Cookie Monster wearing the poppy a ‘9/10’ with the caption ‘ME REMEMBER FALLEN’ parodying what the Cookie Monster showing respect in his own voice might sound like.¹¹³ The account’s owner and many others identified the episode as fitting a broader pattern of questionable practices around the poppy. Some twitter users speculated about the thought process and exchange between the programme’s producers that had led to this being deemed appropriate. For example, comedian Dara O’Brian suggested that it might have been an act of subversion aimed as satirising ‘poppy fascism’: ‘I am choosing to regard this as satire, and thus genius.’¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, ‘MrWoodo’ read it as an indication as to the extent of ‘poppy fascism’: ‘[t]he One Show put a poppy on a felt

¹¹² Subedar, ‘Has the Core Message of the Poppy Appeal Been Diluted?’

¹¹³ @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘ME REMEMBER FALLEN! <https://t.co/5bipVfUe99>’, Twitter, 7 November 2016, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/795710802280017920>.

¹¹⁴ Dara O’Brian, quoted in Sara C. Nelson, ‘BBC Accused Of “Poppy Fascism” After Cookie Monster Dons Paper Flower’, HuffPost UK, 8 November 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/bbc-accused-of-poppy-fascism-after-cookie-monster-dons-paper-flower_uk_5821bbc1e4b09d57a9a9f359.

puppet in case you were wondering how absurd the poppy fascism has got.¹¹⁵ Along similar lines ‘Gareth Simkins’ wrote ‘[t]he extraordinary thing is that someone clearly thought it was a good idea - and no-one had the nerve to say ‘er, hang on’.¹¹⁶ And imagining how the conversation unfolded, ‘Antony Shepherd’ tweeted: “‘We can't put a poppy on a muppet! That's stupid!' / 'If we don't, the Mail, Express and Sun will have our guts for garters, so just do it!'”¹¹⁷

Whether subversive in intent or not, what might have surprised these commenters was that each of these outlets (and other parts of the right-wing press) *did* heap opprobrium onto the BBC producers – precisely for allowing the Cookie Monster to wear the poppy. The *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, and *The Sun* each published articles about the appearance, foregrounding quotes branding the decision ‘disgraceful’ and quoting one tweet which read: ‘[t]hey are trivialising the sacrifice of millions.’¹¹⁸ Again, this reaction might seem surprising given the apparent acceptability of, for example, poppy-wearing football mascots and poppy-themed dog collars sold by the RBL itself. Indeed, Poppy® Watch suggested as much in tweeting images of the Cookie Monster wearing the poppy alongside those of Simon Cowell wearing one while dressed as a Mummy on *The X-Factor* talent show – the point being that the latter had attracted no similar press criticism.¹¹⁹

Ironically, as some of the tweets branding it an instance of ‘poppy fascism’ suggested, this perceived transgression was likely prompted by the increasingly coercive climate around the poppy, generated in no small part by these papers. The expectation that public figures wear the symbol is taken particularly seriously by television channels who routinely encourage presenters and guests alike to wear the symbol. The drive to do so becomes comprehensible when we consider the media and public reaction towards those not wearing poppies. Channel 4 presenter Jon Snow is perhaps the most prominent example, famously receiving significant public criticism in 2006 after refusing to wear the poppy while on air in order to preserve his journalistic integrity. Similarly in 2014, ITV news presenter Charlene White was subjected to gendered and racial abuse

¹¹⁵ ‘MrWoodo’, quoted in Nelson.

¹¹⁶ @GarethSimkins, ‘@giantpoppywatch The Extraordinary Thing Is That Someone Clearly Thought It Was a Good Idea - and No-One Had the Nerve to Say “Er, Hang On”.’, Twitter, 8 November 2016, <https://twitter.com/GarethSimkins/status/795812657500667905>.

¹¹⁷ @AntonyShepherd, “‘@giantpoppywatch ‘We Can’t Put a Poppy on a Muppet! That’s Stupid!’ ‘If We Don’t. the Mail, Express and Sun Will Have Our Guts for Garters, so Just Do It!’””, Twitter, 5 November 2017, <https://twitter.com/AntonyShepherd/status/927130297942052864>.

¹¹⁸ Keiligh Baker, ‘BBC Slammed for “disgraceful” Decision to Pin Poppy on Cookie Monster’, Mail Online, 8 November 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~/article-3916416/index.html>; Rory O’Connor, ‘The One Show Slammed for Pinning Poppy to Cookie Monster’, Daily Express, 9 November 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/730570/The-One-Show-poppy-Cookie-Monster>; Emma Lake, ‘BBC Accused of “trivialising Sacrifice of Millions” after Pinning Poppy on COOKIE MONSTER during One Show Appearance’, The Sun, 8 November 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2141351/bbc-accused-of-trivialising-sacrifice-of-millions-after-pinning-poppy-on-cookie-monster-during-one-show-appearance/>.

¹¹⁹ @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘ME REMEMBER FALLEN! 🤔😭😭 @SimonCowell #xfactor #undead #spooky #respect #poppy #solemn #lestweforget #industrialkilling #funny 🤔😭😭’ <https://t.co/UBII4t6B78>, Twitter, 4 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/1058873683270422529>.

as a result of her decision not to wear a poppy for much the same reasons, with some on social media even calling her national citizenship into question.¹²⁰ Even those intending but unable to wear the symbol have come in for criticism: in November 2015, actress Sienna Miller provoked consternation on social media for appearing on the BBC's *Graham Norton Show* without a poppy.¹²¹ Miller later explained that she had been wearing one but had to remove it because it had begun to rip her 'crepe paper' dress.¹²²

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the aforementioned criticism of Jeremy Corbyn, political figures have been especially wary of falling foul of the press, leading to some instances of apparent over-compensation such as the Conservative Party retrospectively photo-shopping a poppy onto an image of David Cameron – a move for which he subsequently became the subject of much media and public ridicule, such as the tweet in Figure 5.1 below.¹²³ Given the controversy generated when people do not wear the poppy, one might expect proponents to approve of the near uniformity with which public figures wear the symbol. Counterintuitively, however, rather than experiencing such ubiquity as satisfying, some proponents of the poppy have questioned the authenticity of the yearly spectacle in which most are seen to be wearing the symbol, suspicious that some public figures are wearing it superficially or as a fashion accessory, rather than out of a more pure and profound sense of duty. Alluding to the significant social clout of the poppy, for example, Ingham postulates that '[t]he unseemly annual race by those in the public eye, particularly politicians, to wear a poppy as early as possible is less to do with the cause of Forces' welfare but more about being perceived to care – and by implication to care more than those who delay'.¹²⁴ Similarly, in pondering the 'mission creep' of remembrance from November to ever earlier starts in October, Douglas Murray of the Henry Jackson Society argued that the phenomenon was another manifestation of 'poppy one-upmanship' aimed at catching out politicians of rival parties: 'it is not because they want to wear them for as long as possible. It is because they hope that a politician from one of the other parties will be found not wearing one.'¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Joel Cooper and Graeme Brown, 'Newsreader Responds after Wave of Abuse for Not Wearing a Poppy', Birmingham Mail, 3 November 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/showbiz-tv/newsreader-forced-respond-after-wave-15368495>.

¹²¹ Natalie Corner, 'Sienna Miller Slammed for Not Wearing Poppy on Graham Norton', Mirror Online, 1 November 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/sienna-miller-slammed-not-wearing-6746083>.

¹²² Press Association, 'Sienna Miller: Criticism for Not Wearing Poppy "a Little Extreme"', The Guardian, 6 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/06/sienna-miller-criticism-not-wearing-poppy-extreme>.

¹²³ Frances Perraudin, 'No 10 Ridiculed after Adding Poppy to David Cameron Facebook Picture', The Guardian, 2 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/nov/02/poppy-photoshopped-david-ferguson-facebook-picture>.

¹²⁴ Ingham, *The Military Covenant*, 105.

¹²⁵ Paul Callan and Douglas Murray, 'Should It Be Compulsory to Wear a Poppy?', Express.co.uk, 9 November 2011, <https://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/282565/Should-it-be-compulsory-to-wear-a-poppy>.



Figure 5.1: David Cameron Poppy Art¹²⁶

As was argued in chapter 3, ascertaining the authenticity and sincerity of a professed identity or belief is methodologically fraught, and no easier in the public realm. This challenge is, somewhat ironically, exacerbated by the climate of coercion around the symbol – partially fuelled by the reasonably widespread perception that rather than conferring additional social capital, the symbol should be worn as a *minimum* price of citizenship. For example, *This Morning* chat show guest John Smith – the son of Second World War veteran Harry Leslie Smith who had written publicly of his intention never to wear the symbol again in opposition to its militarisation¹²⁷ - remarked that ‘for me, it doesn’t feel right *not* to wear the poppy’.¹²⁸ And while 29% of respondents to a Consumer Intelligence poll on poppies said that they felt it should be compulsory to wear one in the run up to remembrance events, for others who believe that people should wear the symbol, the idea of enforcement is either antithetical to remembering those who sacrificed themselves for freedom, or insufficiently authentic because it lacks feeling.¹²⁹ To be clear, people of the latter view still vehemently believe that all should wear the poppy, but that they should *want* to wear

¹²⁶ Beaubodor, in Emma Glanfield, ‘David Cameron Is Ridiculed after Downing Street Is Caught out PHOTOSHOPPING a Poppy onto His Facebook Picture... and Internet Jokers Have a Field Day’, Mail Online, 2 November 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3300735/Downing-Street-caught-using-FAKE-sized-poppy-David-Cameron-s-Facebook-picture.html>.

¹²⁷ Harry Leslie Smith, ‘This Year, I Will Wear a Poppy for the Last Time’, *The Guardian*, 8 November 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/08/poppy-last-time-remembrance-harry-leslie-smith>.

¹²⁸ John Smith, in *This Morning, Is There Too Much Pressure to Wear a Poppy?*, YouTube (ITV Studios, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2_4M1By4AU (emphasis added). Indeed, this interview featuring John and Harry Leslie Smith is interesting example of the contingency of vicarious identification, with John stating that he felt his father had earned the right not to wear he by virtue of his military service, whereas as a civilian he felt a duty to wear it because he had not served in the same way.

¹²⁹ Flack, ‘One In Five Doubt They Will Wear A Poppy This Year’.

one. Murray expressed this by, on the one hand, claiming that there are ‘few things so disrespectful or ignorant as those people who cannot be bothered to wear a poppy in the days leading up to Remembrance Day’, and on the other arguing that:

if someone forces a poppy on you – or persuades you to wear one for the show of it – then not only have you not made that act of private charity, you are wearing it for the wrong reasons. you are wearing it for yourself instead of for our heroes.¹³⁰

In other words, it is the feeling that matters – subjects must *want* to wear the poppy. And to the extent that, as argued by Davies, public discourse is increasingly weaponised and conducted on a war footing,¹³¹ compulsory compliance is seen as a hollow victory; for some, satisfaction is derived from the power to compel non-poppy wearing ‘opponents’ to submit totally by being made to see that they were wrong in the first place and acquiesce wholeheartedly to the hegemonic discourse. Of course, the matter of submission and acquiescence is further complicated by the polyvalence of the poppy, ostensibly representing a number of different moral and ontological commitments on a spectrum, to the extent that without textual elaboration (whether spoken or written), we cannot discern anything particular about what the symbol ‘means’ or why people wear it. And there is a sense in which, rather than assuaging anxieties around the national self, the poppy’s ubiquity may paradoxically generate ontological *insecurity*: its popularity may generate suspicions around authenticity: that poppies are being worn superficially or for the wrong reasons; and the realisation of the poppy’s hegemony might be seen as coming close to resolving fantasies of national fulfilment, leading to attempts at distancing which keep desire alive.¹³²

What distinguishes these attempts to police the poppy from the Poppy® Watch reservations is that they are aimed at policing the exclusivity and priority of militarised subjectivities over civilians ones as a way of securing social order rather than serving as a point for genuine critical reflection on questions of war, peace and militarism. Put differently, disapproval of vicarious militarism is not always aimed at jingoism, but is sometimes about policing militarised hierarchies. Such sensitivities are not limited simply to the poppy, but concern militarised subjectivities more broadly. For example, Higate and Manchanda have drawn attention to the phenomenon of subjects attempting to pass as veterans at military parades and gatherings as a way of basking in

¹³⁰ Callan and Murray, ‘Should It Be Compulsory to Wear a Poppy?’

¹³¹ Davies, *Nervous States* especially Chapters 5 and 7.

¹³² Such anxieties may contribute to greater scrutiny not only over whether subjects wear poppies or not, but whether they wear them in the ‘right way’ - despite the RBL repeatedly clarifying that the only requirement is to ‘wear it with pride’. ‘Remembrance Poppy: Controversies and How to Wear It’, BBC Newsbeat, 10 November 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/41942346/remembrance-poppy-controversies-and-how-to-wear-it>; They may also be behind the routinised controversy regarding alternative symbols of remembrance, such as the ‘white poppy’ whose vilification by media coverage frequently identifies it as a threat in a way that keeps fantasies of fulfillment around the poppy alive. Aletha Adu, ‘Lest We Forget: What Is a White Poppy and How’s It Different to the Red Poppy?’, *The Sun*, 11 November 2019, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7580861/white-poppy-different-red-gold-detail-remembrance-peace/>.

reflected glory, and the corresponding rise of so-called ‘Walter Mitty Hunting Clubs’ which attempt to identify, confront and expose those individuals as frauds.¹³³ Once again we can see how there is a perception that militarised subjectivity can confer social status and benefits, and this is a hierarchy which is guarded.

Commercial Appropriation of Military Symbols

It is not only unscrupulous individuals who are policed according to militarised social hierarchies, but also organisations who have in some ways sought to bask in the reflected glory of the broader symbolism of militarism. Of course, as we have already seen, group identification is frequently encouraged through official partnerships. But sometimes unofficial uses of symbolism can be seen as transgressing norms governing militarised social hierarchies. In 2014, for example, the England Rugby Team incorporated the Victoria Cross (VC) into its kit design in the form of an embossed background, apparently intended as a gesture of respect to mark the centenary of the First World War. It is not difficult to see why the VC – the highest British military award for valour - would be a tempting symbol for a sport so closely wedded to hypermasculine notions of heroism, bravery, physical toughness and fortitude.¹³⁴ The move sparked controversy, however, when the Victoria Cross Trust claimed that the symbol had been used without its permission – a move which Trust Chairperson Gary Stapleton said had ‘touched a raw nerve with a lot of people’.¹³⁵ The problematic element appeared to be that none of the proceeds from kit sales were to be donated to military charities, with Stapleton saying that “[u]sing that symbol, you have got to look at it in what context. In the context that they are making money off the selling of the shirts, that’s highly inappropriate”.¹³⁶ In other words, what was important was that by failing to link the use of the symbol with explicit support for causes of the charities concerned, the RFU did not appear to have given proper recognition to the targets of vicarious identification and referents of the symbol. This was not the end of the story however. Soon after the story emerged in media reports, the RFU entered into talks with the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association, who later endorsed the use of the emblem, accepting the RFU’s apology and

¹³³ Higate and Manchanda, ‘Exposing Fake Heroes as a Moment of Militarisation?’

¹³⁴ Indeed, the RFU had looked to war commemoration for vicarious inspiration before. In 2007, the England Rugby Union World Cup squad toured the Somme battlefield and Thiepval memorial. While partly about paying tribute to ‘England rugby internationals [who] died on The Somme’, the visit served a motivational purpose: ‘[t]he intention is to add an extra dimension to their preparations and to boost their national pride’. Not only was an ancestral connection implied, but that militarised inheritance was being deliberately invoked as a way of unlocking further sporting potential. Charlotte Bradshaw, ‘Rugby Stars to Pay Respects to War Dead’, Lancashire Telegraph, 2 September 2007, <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/1658691.rugby-stars-pay-respects-war-dead/>.

¹³⁵ Gary Stapleton, quoted in Guardian staff and agencies, ‘RFU Apologises for Use of Victoria Cross on New England Kit’, The Guardian, 17 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/sep/17/rfu-attacked-disrespectful-victoria-cross-england-kit>.

¹³⁶ Gary Stapleton, quoted in Guardian staff and agencies.

insistence that it had meant no offence by using the symbol. Moreover, the Association noted that

Given that we, as a nation, are now commemorating the centenary of the First World War, and the sacrifices made by so many during that period, the Association feels that the RFU's decision to incorporate a Victoria Cross-inspired motif within the design of the new England shirt is a subtle, and fitting, mark of respect for those who went above and beyond.¹³⁷

Thus, the RFU had been co-opted into charitable support through the unwelcome publicity generated by its unauthorised use of the symbol. Entering into talks with the RFU allowed the VC and GC Association to establish further links and means of promoting its work, whilst simultaneously allowing the RFU to save face. An initially unwelcome use of the symbol was rendered acceptable once the controversy had allowed the Association to ensure that the symbol did the work that the Association intended.

While ensuring acquiescence to the VC and GC Association's fundraising and charitable work was clearly a key factor in making the RFU's continuing use of the symbol appropriate, also important was delineating the comparative positions of military and sporting heroisms and masculinities within the social hierarchy – sporting heroism arguably being the next most prevalent in British society. Central in the Association's justification for approving the use of the symbol was the highlighting of historical ties between the military and rugby, with the Association's Chairman noting that 'Strong links have always existed between the game of rugby and the military.'¹³⁸ Indeed, media coverage of the compromise also noted such connections, mentioning Arthur Harrison as the 'only rugby international to be awarded the Victoria Cross', bestowed posthumously after he lost his life in [...] the First World War', and noting England coach, Stuart Lancaster's apparently authentic commitment to rugby's history, having 'created the Arthur Harrison Award, where England coaches select a winner after every match for the player producing the best defensive performance.'¹³⁹ Such emphases could be read as subtly affirming the authenticity of ancestral links to legitimise the team's use of the symbol. Following on from this, the association also justified the relationship on the basis of the essential compatibility of the RFU and the armed forces: '[t]he RFU's core values of teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship sit well with the military's core values of loyalty, integrity, courage, discipline, respect and selfless commitment.'¹⁴⁰ Whilst this worked to emphasise similarity and compatibility of the two organisations, what was particularly notable was the way in which the attribution of

¹³⁷ Major Peter Norton GC, quoted in Andrew Baldock, 'England Rugby Kit: Victoria Cross Association about-Turn on Use of Emblem on £90 Shirt', *The Independent*, 19 September 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/rugby/rugby-union/england-rugby-kit-victoria-cross-association-about-turn-on-use-of-emblem-on-90-shirt-9744049.html>.

¹³⁸ Major Peter Norton GC, quoted in Baldock.

¹³⁹ Baldock.

¹⁴⁰ Major Peter Norton GC, quoted in Baldock.

distinct values to each organisation worked to delineate and distinguish military and sporting masculinities. Whereas the RFU was identified with more generic values (teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship) the military values (loyalty, integrity, courage, discipline, respect and selfless commitment) are more specific and exclusive. Implied here is the idea that despite the similar the language used to describe the two categories of hero, there crucially remains a distinction between the two. This example also demonstrates some of the limits on how military 'branding' can be deployed, though this is admittedly an extreme example given that the Victoria Cross is the highest British military honour.

Although the poppy is viewed as a more democratic symbol than military medals, and there is (as we shall see later) a general presumption in favour of its public uses, its status as the registered trademark of the RBL has nevertheless prompted efforts to curtail its unauthorised use – especially by those using it for purposes of which the RBL disapproves. For example, in 2017 the 'Poppy Truck' – the same one later mocked by Poppy® Watch - attracted the attention of the RBL when its owner Christine Langham – who used 'her 44-ton poppy-covered articulated lorry to raise money for armed-forces charities including the Royal British Legion' – attempted to trademark 'Poppy Truck' and 'Team Poppy', 'to prevent "unscrupulous" businesses taking advantage'.¹⁴¹ While thanking Langham for her support, the RBL argued that trademarking the terms might imply a formal relationship with the RBL where none existed.¹⁴² The RBL threatened legal action against Langham, urging her to relinquish the trademarks – a move that led Langham and a petition in her defence (which attracted over 8,000 signatures) to accuse the RBL of employing 'bully boy tactics' against a patriotic citizen wishing to do her bit.¹⁴³ In a similar fashion to the RFU's usage of the Victoria Cross, the matter was resolved following talks between the truck's owner and the RBL.¹⁴⁴ An RBL audit of Langham's accounts absolved her of accusations of fraud, Langham and a joint statement was released, confirming Langham's surrender of the trademarks in question in exchange for 'an "In-Support Agreement" with the Legion authorising her to continue to fundraise for the Legion using the Poppy Truck'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Christine Langham, quoted in Rebecca Cooney, 'Royal British Legion in Dispute over "Poppy Truck"', Third Sector, 2017, http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/article/1443070?utm_source=website&utm_medium=social.

¹⁴² Cooney.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Alexandra Wood, 'Royal British Legion Threatens "Poppy Truck" Woman with Legal Action', inews.co.uk, 15 August 2017, <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/royal-british-legion-threatens-poppy-truck-woman-legal-action-85092>; Billy McLelland, 'Help Protect The Poppy Truck and Trademark against Organisations That Use Bully Tactics.', Change.org, 2017, <https://www.change.org/p/theresa-may-mp-help-protect-the-poppy-truck-and-trademark-against-organisations-that-use-bully-tactics>.

¹⁴⁴ Cooney, 'Royal British Legion in Dispute over "Poppy Truck"'.
¹⁴⁵ Newsroom, 'Poppy Truck in the Clear after Owner Strikes Deal with Royal British Legion', Yorkshire Post, 14 February 2018, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/poppy-truck-clear-after-owner-strikes-deal-royal-british-legion-588781>.

While the motives of Langham and others accused of trademark infractions around the poppy appear to have been well-intentioned and sympathetic to the RBL's aims¹⁴⁶, it is notable that unscrupulous commercial uses of the poppy have proliferated in recent years, with numerous stories emerging of attempts at profiteering on the resale of limited edition items (including the 'Somme 100' poppies discussed in Chapter 4),¹⁴⁷ and a burgeoning illegal trade in counterfeit poppy merchandise.¹⁴⁸ This problem was perceived to be sufficiently prevalent to prompt a joint initiative by the RBL, the Intellectual Property Office and the Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit 'to crack down on the rogue traders making money from the fake Remembrance goods.'¹⁴⁹ As well as urging the public to 'look out for counterfeit goods in the shape, or bearing the image of, the RBL's familiar two-petal red poppy, or Poppy Scotland's four-petal poppy in Scotland', a press release provided 'top tips' for discerning the difference between official and fraudulent merchandise.¹⁵⁰

The Far-Right and the Poppy

Perhaps more concerning for the RBL than the proliferation of counterfeit poppies, however, has been the symbol's appropriation by organisations on the far-right of British politics. For example, groups such as the British National Party, the English Defence League and Britain First have often placed wreaths at local war memorials during November and have sought to vicariously identify with military causes, portraying themselves as paramilitary organisations aimed at protecting the armed forces.¹⁵¹ This raises questions as to whether such attempts are genuine

¹⁴⁶ Noteworthy is also the case of Phyllis Ramage, who knitted and sold poppies on eBay as a way of raising funds for the RBL who was reported by the RBL for trademark infringement. Natalie O'Neill, 'Woman Who Knitted Poppies in Aid of Royal British Legion Accused of Breaching Copyright', Times Series, 25 November 2012, <https://www.times-series.co.uk/news/10068425.edgware-woman-who-knitted-poppies-in-aid-of-royal-british-legion-accused-of-breaching-copyright/>.

¹⁴⁷ Several of the brooches were found listed on eBay at around £400 - more than ten times their original value. Imogen Robinson, 'Shameless Sellers Flog Limited Edition Golden Poppies for More than 10 Times Original Value - Mirror Online', Mirror Online, 3 July 2016, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/shameless-sellers-flog-limited-edition-8343226>.

¹⁴⁸ 'Barry Downs Caught Selling Fake Remembrance Day Poppies', BBC News, 14 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-46211894>; Oprah Flash, 'Fake Poppies Seized from off Licence - and Destroyed', Birmingham Mail, 13 November 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/fake-poppies-seized-licence-destroyed-15410126>; 'Manchester Bogus Poppy Products Haul Seized from Wholesaler', BBC News, 2 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-46077739>.

¹⁴⁹ Intellectual Property Office, 'British Public Urged to Be Aware of Poppy Merchandise Scams', GOV.UK, 26 October 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-public-urged-to-be-aware-of-poppy-merchandise-scams>.

¹⁵⁰ Intellectual Property Office; National newspapers also ran features on how to spot counterfeit remembrance poppies. See, for example, Georgina Laud, 'Remembrance Day 2018: How to Spot FAKE Poppy Appeal Red Poppies', Express.co.uk, 5 November 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1041170/remembrance-day-2018-fake-poppies-how-to-spot-fake-poppy-appeal>.

¹⁵¹ For example, following the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013, former leader of the English Defence League Stephen Yaxley-Lennon led a protest at the scene in Woolwich and later stated 'We're passionate about our armed forces. The EDL was created in defence of our armed forces, we will

or thinly strategic; but perhaps what is most significant is that such appropriations were commonly *perceived* as opportunistic rather than heartfelt. Fox argues that such groups have ‘appropriated the poppy as a symbol of militant nationalism’, seeing it as a way of interweaving their own organisational aims into the tapestry of the nation’s military history, and vice versa.¹⁵² In addition to aiding their own group identifications with militarism however, far-right groups have recognised that the diffuse status of war commemoration and ‘support the troops’ discourses in British society present opportunities for the groups’ engagement with the wider British public, particularly as social media has evolved in the last decade and a half. Unlike other military paraphernalia that far-right groups - such as Britain First - draw upon for their various identities, Foxton explains that war commemoration is more palatable to the general public:

Of course, there’s not a huge market for fascist fashion – “marine green” jackets and polo shirts and the like – to most of the decent people Britain First are selling to. Hence, they’ve started to use a symbol more usually associated with the Royal British Legion, the poppy.¹⁵³

‘Britain First’ has been particularly adept at deploying the poppy across its social media to engage ever larger numbers of users. Sometimes, it posts images of prominent members photographed with usually unwitting members of the armed forces community. In 2015, for example, it posted an image of two members of Britain First alongside two school-age Sea Cadets – unaware of the men’s affiliation - selling poppies in Nottingham. The image caption suggested that the men were ‘guarding’ the Cadets in order to ‘protect poppy sellers from abuse by Islamists’, as part of a broader Britain First ‘Protect the Poppy’ day.¹⁵⁴ The intention was both to benefit from visual association with the armed forces, and to portray Britain First as defenders of a cherished national symbol. The majority of Britain First’s poppy-themed output has capitalised on people not knowing who or what Britain First is: the most successful – and notorious – method of engagement has been the creation and dissemination of remembrance-themed memes, described by Mayne as ‘sharebait’.¹⁵⁵ Britain First ‘sharebait’ typically consists of images of poppies (often alongside the Britain First logo) captioned with statements that are commonplace in ‘official’ remembrance discourse, conveying sentiments with which many Britons would find it difficult to disagree. For example, in 2014 Britain First posted a meme on Facebook – shared more than

continue to defend our armed forces.’ Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, quoted in Brian Whelan, ‘Are British Soldiers Joining the English Defence League?’, Channel 4 News, 19 July 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/edl-reborn-how-anti-muslim-group-appeals-to-soldiers>.

¹⁵² Fox, ‘Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present’, 27–28.

¹⁵³ Willard Foxton, ‘The Loathsome Britain First Are Trying to Hijack the Poppy – Don’t Let Them’, The Telegraph, 4 November 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/11207973/The-loathsome-Britain-First-are-trying-to-hijack-the-poppy-dont-let-them.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline Mortimer, ‘Britain First Accused of Using Two Schoolgirls for Anti-Islam Propaganda’, The Independent, 8 November 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britain-first-told-to-take-down-facebook-images-of-cadet-schoolgirls-they-were-claiming-to-protect-a6726066.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Philip Mayne, ‘The Politicisation of the Poppy: The Misuse of the Poppy by the Far Right’, HuffPost UK, 8 November 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/philip-mayne/poppy-remembrance-day-britain-first_b_8490286.html.

133,000 times - consisting of a poppy superimposed on a Union Flag background with a caption inviting users to 'Press 'SHARE' to pin a poppy to your wall and show your respect'.¹⁵⁶ Another from the same year consisted of Britain First logo and motto ('Taking Our Country Back') superimposed on the corner of an image of a field of poppies, with the caption 'WE WILL REMEMBER THEM'.¹⁵⁷ Britain First was able to use memes conveying culturally hegemonic sentiments around remembrance and militarism more broadly as affective hooks for the often unwitting dissemination of far-right memes by greater numbers of people. As one commentator put it, 'when the photo shows a brave D Day veteran with the words "We will remember them", people share it without looking where it came from'.¹⁵⁸ Sharebaiting proved a highly effective strategy for Britain First's expansion into the public domain, both because of social media's emphasis on instant reaction and its reliance on algorithms generating a snowball effect of similar content. As Foxtan puts it: '[a]s soon as you like or share these images, you'll see more of them – Britain first usually post 20 or so images with provocative titles on them a day'.¹⁵⁹ These tactics have been attributed to Britain First's ability to cultivate a growing following. In 2014, around 500,000 Facebook users 'liked' the Britain First Facebook page, giving the group an 'estimated reach of 20 million people – a third of the UK'.¹⁶⁰ A year later, this following had grown to over 978,000 likes; and by the time the group was banned by Facebook in 2018, it had acquired more than 2 million likes – considerably more than either the governing and opposition parties.¹⁶¹

The RBL has frequently objected to the far-right's attempts to 'politicise' the poppy, also taking exception to Britain First's use of the trademarked symbol in the production of its own poppy-themed merchandise.¹⁶² Other military causes that have been 'adopted' by far-right groups have taken a similar stance, attempting on various occasions to prevent far-right nationalist groups from appropriating symbols for their own ends. While the English Defence League set up a number of *Just Giving* pages in the aftermath of the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013 to raise money for Help for Heroes, it was excluded from official remembrance ceremonies and ostracized by military charities, with Help for Heroes refusing to accept the EDL's donations and working to close the pages.¹⁶³ Both examples demonstrate ways in which uses of 'remembrance'

¹⁵⁶ Lizzie Dearden, 'Britain First Accused of "hijacking" the Poppy Ahead of Remembrance Day', *The Independent*, 5 November 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britain-first-accused-of-hijacking-the-poppy-ahead-of-remembrance-day-9841107.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Dearden.

¹⁵⁸ Jade Wright, 'Why Britain First Are Nothing to Do with D Day, and You Should Think Twice before Sharing on Facebook', *Liverpool Echo*, 6 June 2014, <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/news-opinion/jade-wright-says-think-twice-7230185>.

¹⁵⁹ Foxtan, 'The Loathsome Britain First Are Trying to Hijack the Poppy – Don't Let Them'.

¹⁶⁰ Foxtan.

¹⁶¹ Mayne, 'The Politicisation of the Poppy'; Alex Hern and Kevin Rawlinson, 'Facebook Bans Britain First and Its Leaders', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2018, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/facebook-bans-britain-first-and-its-leaders>.

¹⁶² Foxtan, 'The Loathsome Britain First Are Trying to Hijack the Poppy – Don't Let Them'.

¹⁶³ John Hall, 'Woolwich Terror Attack: Help for Heroes Rejects All Donations Linked to English Defence League', *The Independent*, 28 May 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home->

and ‘support the troops’ narratives have been policed to preserve their integrity and exclusivity. And as public awareness of ‘sharebaiting’ and Britain First’s neo-fascist leanings has grown – partly due to articles warning of attempts to ‘hijack’ the poppy – some have pointed out the irony inherent in far-right groups claiming to be patrons of war commemoration, with their ideology viewed by many as antithetical to the cause in which British soldiers of the two World Wars ostensibly gave their lives.¹⁶⁴ This incompatibility of the far-right and the armed forces was also the central focus of an intervention by (then) Home Secretary Amber Rudd who criticised what she described in 2017 as a ‘concerted attempt in recent years by far-Right groups to hijack some of our, much respected and indeed loved, British symbols and institutions for their own warped ideals’, adding that the ideologies of the far-right ‘could not be further from the values that underpin our Armed Forces: those of integrity, respect for others, and having the bravery to do the right thing.’¹⁶⁵ Once again, militarised subjectivities and hierarchies were being guarded, and Rudd’s claim that the far-right was the complete antithesis of the values of the armed forces, while true at an institutional level, was slightly complicated by evidence that the armed forces has been a prominent source of recruits in recent years.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the processes of vicarious identification and vicarious identity promotion explored at levels pertaining mainly to individual and family subjects in the previous chapter have been scaled-up in recent years to the level of corporate and group entities. Such vicarious relationships with the RBL and with the participants of past wars have, for obvious reasons, been attractive to corporate entities looking to curry favour with increasingly sceptical consumers; but they have been enabled as part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the RBL and other charities which view corporate partnerships as a vital pillar in fulfilling their objectives. As was argued in the case of First Great Western’s rebranding, sometimes such corporate attempts to establish claims to vicarious military subjectivity attract no negative attention. In other cases, the RBL’s explicit approval is sometimes enough to shield companies from criticisms regarding their use of military history and claims to ‘be’ military. However, that the RBL’s custodianship of remembrance has itself increasingly been criticised means that its endorsement is not always

[news/woolwich-terror-attack-help-for-heroes-rejects-all-donations-linked-to-english-defence-league-8634258.html](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/11/far-right-groups-trying-hijack-poppy-saysamber-rudd/).

¹⁶⁴ Dearden, ‘Britain First Accused of “hijacking” the Poppy Ahead of Remembrance Day’.

¹⁶⁵ Amber Rudd, ‘Far-Right Groups Are Trying to Hijack British Symbols and Institutions for Their Own Warped Ideals’, *The Telegraph*, 11 November 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/11/far-right-groups-trying-hijack-poppy-saysamber-rudd/>.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Whelan, ‘Are British Soldiers Joining the English Defence League?’; Billy Briggs, ‘The Enemy within: Army Deploy Anti-Terrorist Strategies to Find Far-Right Radicals in the Ranks’, *The Sunday Post*, accessed 24 July 2020, <https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/the-enemy-within-army-deploy-anti-terrorist-strategies-to-find-far-right-radicals-in-the-rankschiefs-use-counter-intelligence-and-specialist-interventions-to-identify-neo-nazi-symp/>.

sufficient to divert criticism and ridicule from what some view as a marked cultural departure from appropriate commemoration.

The various controversies over poppy (non-)wearing demonstrate that ‘appropriate commemoration’ is itself subject to significant contestation with various ontological (in)securities at stake. The moralising tone of attempts to promote individual and corporate poppy-wearing has provoked deep anxieties especially among public figures about being condemned and shamed for being caught without one. For others, this pressure has provoked anxieties regarding the effacing of freedoms that are ostensibly the focus of British war commemoration. And even for those who regard poppies as the *sine qua non* of national belonging - for humans, if not for muppets – and view refusal to wear a poppy as a sign of social malaise, the achievement of uniformity can paradoxically result in palpable dissatisfaction. Pressure to conform with remembrance discourse, along with the impossibility of divining individual motivations for compliance, stimulates anxieties around (in)authenticity, and suspicions of superficial instrumentality. The aim of this chapter has not necessarily been to adjudicate between claims of (in)authenticity – academics are scarcely better equipped to pass judgement on the thorny question of motivation than anyone else. Some cases explored in this chapter demonstrate a strategic awareness on the part of corporate actors, but this does not necessarily exclude the possibility of genuine and authentic sentiments motivating identifications. Instead, the aim has been to emphasise their political and contested nature.

Finally, this chapter has hinted at a tension between aspirations to uniform inclusivity in remembrance as a way of satisfying desires for homogenous belonging, and impulses to preserve the integrity and exclusivity of military subjectivities, thereby reinforcing masculinised social hierarchies situated around the figure of the combat soldier. This was particularly evident in reactions to the RFU’s appropriation of the Victoria Cross symbol, which prompted efforts to reinforce the boundary between sporting and military masculine subjectivities. The next chapter explores these dynamics in more detail, exploring how their inversion has led to national sports teams becoming the vicarious outlets for national anxieties and catharsis at the geopolitical level.

6. 'Poppy War': Brexit and Vicarious National Re-Assertion During the 2011 and 2016 FIFA Poppy Controversies

Introduction

So far, this thesis has demonstrated that vicarious identification with the militarised past, whilst frequently being promoted, has also been subject to considerable policing to preserve the integrity of militarised and masculinised social hierarchies. The England Rugby team's appropriation of the Victoria Cross on its kit illustrated particular sensitivities around the social distinctions drawn between military and sporting subjectivities, with sporting heroes discursively constructed as hierarchically-inferior to the 'real heroes'. In this chapter, however, I argue that controversy over another national squad kit's use of a war commemorative symbol can help illustrate different logics and sensitivities. When football's governing body FIFA refused the England men's team's request to wear the Royal British Legion poppy in its November 2011 home fixture against Spain on the basis that it would contravene FIFA's prohibition on political symbols, it caused significant public consternation despite the team never having previously worn the symbol.

While sometimes interpreted as a simple question of players being (un)able to demonstrate personal respect for Britain's war dead, this chapter argues that the controversy and its re-run in 2016 were imbued with greater ontological significance than immediately apparent. With the poppy having become a focal point for broader anxieties around national identity, FIFA's decision to prevent the England team from wearing the symbol generated ontological insecurities by challenging the poppy's increasingly prevalent function as a proxy for broader national self- and geo-political (re-)assertion. Focusing on the discursive and aesthetic representations of both controversies, I argue that ontological insecurities were channelled by media coverage framing the England team as vicarious proxies for the nation in a metaphorical 'war' with FIFA. Following the structure of a Lacanian fantasy of fulfilment¹, vicarious identification with an England team wearing poppies was portrayed as necessary to national self-actualisation, and was enabled by temporarily suspending discursive boundaries between sporting and military subjectivities, with the former described using militarised terminology usually reserved for military veterans. As was noted in Chapter 2, Lacanians argue that fantasies are narrative structures that bind subjects to signifiers and partially compensate for a sense of 'ontological lack' by reinforcing subjects' sense of selfhood, thereby 'function[ing] as a protecting mechanism that prevents us from being

¹ For recent work on fantasies of fulfilment and ontological security, see Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*; Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression'; Heath-Kelly, 'Forgetting ISIS'; Browning, 'Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment'.

overcome by anxiety'.² However, the intractable nature of existential anxiety and the inability of language to adequately convey any authentic 'essence', mean that even the most compelling fantasy cannot offer complete relief from feelings of lack. In line with this reading, while vicarious identification with poppy-wearing footballers was portrayed as necessary to preserving national ontological security, any existential relief provided was only partial and temporary.

The chapter proceeds in the following way. Section 1 traces the poppy's evolving significance as a symbol of national self-expression over a period during which ontological insecurities around British – and English - national self-articulation have increasingly been instrumentalised and brought into mainstream politics by the Brexit referendum. Section 2 explores the symbol's growing prominence in domestic football since the early 2000s' and attempts by clubs and institutions to establish vicarious military subjectivity by emphasising connections to the two World Wars. Section 3 then explores the England team's discursive construction as vicarious proxies for national self-expression in the face of FIFA's 2011 refusal to allow the poppy, and ambivalent reactions to the eventual compromise permitting the symbol on armbands. Finally, lingering dissatisfaction with this compromise is identified as an expression of pathological security-seeking which ultimately paved the way for a re-run of the 2011 controversy in 2016. Some themes from the 2011 controversy took on renewed significance in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, with the controversy becoming a proxy for broader contestations over Britain's geopolitical future.

Anxiety and Transgressive Self-Articulatory Desire in Contemporary British Politics

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, various military charities and political figures have resisted the far-right's appropriation of the poppy, viewing their ideologies as antithetical to its meaning. However, as Fox puts it, the far-right's adoption of the poppy suggests that the symbol's 'ideological reverberations have spread far beyond debates about the legitimacy of individual conflicts; they have come to invade and influence the many faultlines elsewhere in British society.'³ Far-right groups have frequently portrayed themselves as quasi-paramilitary defenders of the armed forces and the poppy: indeed, the EDL was formed in 2009 in reaction to a protest held by now-proscribed Islamist group 'Muslims Against Crusades' in Luton at a military 'homecoming' parade.⁴ Importantly, such protests were viewed by EDL activists not simply as an insult to the armed forces, but as symptomatic of something much broader: namely, the 'Islamification' of Britain, and the impotence and unwillingness of 'elites' - ostensibly hamstrung

² Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression', 246; Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin, 1977), 41.

³ Fox, 'Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present', 27–28.

⁴ 'Soldiers at Luton Homecoming March "Branded Killers"', BBC News, 4 January 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/beds/bucks/herts/8439541.stm>.

by ‘political correctness’ - to prioritise and express national identity. The resulting ontological insecurity led one of the movement’s founders to remark that ‘enough was enough’ and urge national reassertion.⁵

Over the intervening period, the symbol has become a proxy in far-right discourse for the expression of a much broader sense of victimisation and anxiety. For example, activists have variously alleged that ‘Muslims are offended by poppies’ and ‘want poppies banned’. Britons, they claim, are being prevented from wearing the poppy by a ‘politically-correct’ agenda threatening other cherished institutions too such as Christmas and even cultural Christianity – which tends in such discourses to be a crude racialised synonym for the white ethnic majority.⁶ Correspondingly, the poppy has come to be framed by far-right discourse as a symbol of – predominantly *English* - ‘militant nationalism’.⁷ In a similar manner to flying the St George’s flag - which also garnered associations with far-right nationalism throughout the 2000s’ and 2010s’ – wearing one is increasingly portrayed not just as an act of respect, but a transgressive and defiant act of national self-expression in the face of perceived political correctness.⁸ Increasingly, such meanings are not confined to far-right circles but have proliferated more widely on social media. ‘Staunch Philamena’, for example, tweeted ‘[i]f offended by the poppy please feel free to make your way to the border’; and similarly ‘Stephanie Sylvester’ writes ‘For those offended by the wearing of the poppy Go home!’⁹ Implicit in these comments is the idea that those ostensibly opposing the poppy are not true Britons or members of the community. These are not isolated examples.

Some, of course, have continued to resist such narratives. One ‘viral’ 2015 Facebook post criticised such claims as attempts to foster Islamophobia, insisting that ‘[n]o one is offended by poppies’.¹⁰ However, resistance to the poppy’s more nationalistic associations has been

⁵ Murray Wardrop, ‘Nine Rioters Arrested after “Luton Protest Turned Violent”’, *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5380132/Nine-rioters-arrested-after-Luton-protest-turned-violent.html>.

⁶ The Wanderer, ‘The Myths about Poppies and Muslims’, *Resisting Hate, Building Bridges*, 10 November 2017, <https://resistinghate.org/the-myths-about-poppies-and-muslims/>.

⁷ Fox, ‘Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present’, 27–28.

⁸ Reflecting on its cultural connotations, David Barnett notes: ‘Being overly fond of the English or British flags these marks you out as a certain type of person’: You fly the flag, you’re a close-our-borders, take-back-control, I’m-not-racist-but Brexiteer who brushes away a tear at the first strains of the national anthem. [...] You fly the flag, you’re a bulldog-tattooed, shaven headed, there’s-no-black-in-the-Union-Jack sports casual yomping around London fuelled by cheap lager and steak bakes, demanding the release of the English Defence League’s jailed founder Tommy Robinson.’ David Barnett, ‘Is Flying a St George’s Flag an Act of Patriotism or a Symbol of All That Is Bad about England?’, *The Independent*, 18 June 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/st-georges-flag-patriot-england-world-cup-cars-racism-jingosim-brexiteer-a8398376.html>.

⁹ ‘Staunch Philamena’ and ‘Stephanie Sylvester’, quoted in Sarah Ann Harris, ‘Remembrance Day Poppies Aren’t Really Offending Anyone’, *HuffPost UK*, 29 October 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/10/29/remembrance-day-poppies-really-offending-people_n_8416692.html.

¹⁰ Jez Hunt, quoted in Alexander Sehmer, ‘The Facebook Post about Muslims and Poppies That Explains Why No One Is Offended by Poppies’, *The Independent*, 28 October 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/mans-facebook-post-about-muslims-and-poppies-proves-surprise-hit-online-a6711571.html>.

complicated by seismic changes in British and international politics more broadly – signified by the June 2016 vote for the UK to leave the European Union, and the election of Donald Trump as US President in November 2016 - which have increasingly blurred the lines between the ‘far-right’ and the newly-emergent ‘alt right’. Although the far-right has largely been disavowed by mainstream politicians in Britain, crucially, many of its nativist ideas and discursive tactics have fuelled British politics’ shift to the right, and the ascendance of politicians with broader appeal such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. The latent potential of anxieties at the heart of far-right discourse pertaining to victimisation, engulfment, sovereignty, and self-articulation was recognised and exploited by pro-Brexit campaigns to considerable effect, melodramatically depicting Britain – and by vicarious extension, Britons – as the victim(s) of overbearing EU bureaucracy that had (ostensibly) diluted British democracy and eroded its sovereignty.¹¹ Through this highly-resonant narrative, the EU came to be popularly associated with such an expansive litany of social ills that virtually anyone who wished could view their various upheavals as being represented by this depiction of national victimhood – and many did. The response provided by ‘Brexiters’ to this bleak vision of an enfeebled nation, as Browning has argued, was a Lacanian fantasy that urged voters to ‘take back control’, with a vote for Britain’s speedy departure from the EU portrayed as the way to restore British democracy and sovereignty, and to achieve national fulfilment.¹²

Of course, Brexit cannot be dismissed simply as a far-right endeavour, drawing as it did upon a broader tradition of conservative thought. Indeed, for the staunchly Eurosceptic ‘European Research Group’ within the Conservative Party, Brexit represented the culmination of long-held ambitions to extricate Britain from the EU in order to realise a libertarian vision of Britain as a deregulated bastion of global free trade.¹³ As Browning argues, the Brexit referendum brought elite Eurosceptic ‘aspirations for global free trade deals’ into temporary alliance with the ‘desires for economic protectionism and (indigenous) workers’ rights which informed many Leave voters’ preferences’ – manifesting in two Leave campaigns – Vote Leave (the official campaign) and Leave.EU.¹⁴ For both campaigns, ‘Brexit’ served as an ‘empty signifier’, able to encapsulate any and all visions that viewed departure from the EU as vital to restoring national and personal sovereignty; but each concentrated on different aspects:

¹¹ Here, I am invoking Elisabeth Anker’s conceptualisation of melodrama as a ‘political discourse [which] casts politics, policies, and practices of citizenship within a moral economy that identifies the nation-state as a virtuous and innocent victim of villainous action. It locates goodness in the suffering of the nation, evil in its antagonists, and heroism in sovereign acts of war and global control coded as expressions of virtue.’ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 1–2.

¹² Browning, ‘Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment’, 234.

¹³ Ben Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere: Wider Still and Wider* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 13–19.

¹⁴ Browning, ‘Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment’, 237.

The ‘official’ campaign group ‘Vote Leave’, tended to focus on economic arguments. In contrast, the unofficial ‘Leave.EU’, which was more closely aligned to UKIP, put enhanced emphasis on immigration and was behind the emotive and arguably racist ‘Breaking Point’ poster, which Vote Leave actually criticised.¹⁵

Whereas Leave.EU was more direct in fomenting anxiety around many of the classic far-right issue areas (e.g. immigration/multiculturalism, political correctness, bureaucracy), Vote Leave tended to address immigration in mainly ‘dispassionate and technocratic terms about the effects of migration on communities, jobs and services, a language [reproducing] liberal notions of decency and rationality’, alluding only obliquely to ‘a more transgressive rhetoric of racism and prejudice.’¹⁶ In combination, the two ‘mutually supportive’ campaigns maximised the appeal of Brexit for a broader constituency: Vote Leave’s allusions served as a ‘dog-whistle’ for those seeking a more transgressive Brexit, while creating ‘sufficient ambiguity for people to feel they could still respectably vote ‘leave’, even though they may have been at least partially motivated by the transgressive elements of the Leave.EU campaign.’¹⁷

Brexit, then, served to bring hitherto marginal concerns around immigration and sovereignty into the ‘respectable’ mainstream. Suspicions that the campaign had fomented nationalist/nativist anxieties were confirmed even before the referendum, with the murder of MP Jo Cox by constituent, Thomas Mair, who was heard by witnesses during the attack to declare ‘Britain first’ and ‘make Britain independent’.¹⁸ The referendum’s aftermath also saw a marked increase in racial abuse and the abuse of non-British nationals, with many reporting feeling unsafe for the first time in their lives.¹⁹ And Leave’s narrow victory also emboldened press outlets that had been most vocal in calls for Brexit, and who increasingly adopted authoritarian language, for example, invoking a notably singular ‘will of the people’ and going as far as to denounce High Court justices as ‘enemies of the people’ following a judgement that was perceived to put a brake on Brexit.²⁰ By 2018, journalist Tom McTague noted that ‘Britain has been radicalized by Brexit’, likening the polarised atmosphere of its aftermath to a ‘revolution’.²¹

¹⁵ Browning, 231–32.

¹⁶ Browning, 231.

¹⁷ Browning, 231; Daniel Wincott, ‘Brexit Dilemmas: New Opportunities and Tough Choices in Unsettled Times’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2017): 684–85.

¹⁸ ‘Thomas Mair: The Man Who Murdered MP Jo Cox’, *BBC News*, 23 November 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-38071894>.

¹⁹ Browning, ‘Brexit, Existential Anxiety and Ontological (in)Security’, 345–46; This also appears to be part of a sustained trend, with figures published by the Home Office in 2019 showing that ‘The number of hate crimes reported to police has more than doubled since 2013’. Notably, while this rise was partly attributed to increased reporting and improved recording, ‘there were spikes after events such as the referendum on Britain’s EU membership and terrorist attacks in 2017’, and the Home Office admitted that ‘[p]art of the increase over the last year may reflect “a real rise” in hate crimes’ Ben Quinn, ‘Hate Crimes Double in Five Years in England and Wales’, *The Guardian*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/15/hate-crimes-double-england-wales>.

²⁰ On this tendency to invoke the ‘will of the people’, see Albert Weale, *The Will of the People: A Modern Myth* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018).

²¹ Tom McTague, ‘British Jacobins on the March in Brexit Revolution’, *POLITICO*, 16 September 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/boris-johnson-brexit-fantasy-explained-britain-perpetual-revolution/>.

Just as concerns about national self-articulation have become *the defining issue* of the political agenda over this period, the poppy has become a mainstream site of contestation for such concerns. Although attempts to police the poppy's use have not gone away, far more prevalent national and local press reports documenting outrage at instances in which poppy-wearing has *ostensibly* been banned. These include schools pupils being banned from wearing oversized knitted poppies,²² fast-food outlets preventing employees from wearing poppies,²³ retailers allegedly banning RBL volunteers from selling the symbols in their stores,²⁴ and poppy stickers being banned from police vehicles.²⁵ Although such allegations usually turn out to be false or overstated, the poppy routinely serves as a proxy for national self-articulation, ostensibly threatened by 'political correctness.'

If the poppy is viewed by some as the subjugated victim of a broader British national malaise, it has also been portrayed as a response to it. For example, the launch of a 'Poppy Hijab' in 2014 – intended to commemorate the military contribution made by Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus of Britain's Empire during WW1 – was promoted by the *Daily Mail* as "The poppy hijab that defies the extremists".²⁶ 'Urging' Muslims to show their support, the article drew criticism for stereotyping Muslims as 'extremists', with Sofia Ahmed refusing to 'wear the "Poppy Hijab" to

²² 13-year old Courtney Dougal was asked to remove her knitted poppy that was larger than permitted by school rules. Tanveer Mann, 'Schoolgirl, 13, Ordered to Remove Poppy Because It's Too Big', *Metro*, 6 November 2018, <https://metro.co.uk/2018/11/06/schoolgirl-13-ordered-to-remove-poppy-because-its-too-big-8109869/>.

²³ While former KFC employee Stephen Colquhoun claimed he had been 'sacked' for wearing the symbol, KFC later clarified that this was part of a broader prohibition on wearing badges and pins in kitchen areas in order to meet food hygiene standards. The Mail declared: 'Father-of-one asked to remove remembrance flower for 'health and safety' Emma Glanfield, "'KFC Sacked Me for Wearing a POPPY'": Fast Food Worker Claims', *Mail Online*, 12 October 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3269083/KFC-sacked-wearing-POPPY-Fast-food-worker-claims-fired-refusing-remove-remembrance-symbol-health-safety-reasons.html>.

²⁴ In 2014, for example, the Taunton branch of the Morrisons supermarket was accused by a customer of banning RBL volunteers from selling poppies inside the store, leaving an elderly veteran to sell the symbols outside in the cold. Morrisons later clarified that this was a misunderstanding, with the RBL volunteers having been offered a position inside the store but opting to stand outside instead. 'Morrisons Apology after Elderly Poppy Seller Left in Cold in Taunton', *BBC News*, 27 October 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-somerset-29783263>.

²⁵ Although the *Express* quoted Col. Richard Kemp who described the ban as 'having the stench of political correctness all over it', the British Transport Police clarified: 'we were concerned that stickers placed on some of our cars were not official Poppy Appeal merchandise. [...] Because of concerns regarding where the money for these stickers was ending up, we took the decision to not place these Poppy stickers on BTP vehicles.' Joe Duggan, 'Poppies BANNED from Police Vehicles as "Stench of Political Correctness" Hits', *Express.co.uk*, 13 October 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1031017/remembrance-day-poppy-poppies-british-transport-police-banned>.

²⁶ Jack Doyle, 'The Poppy Hijab That Defies the Extremists: British Muslims Urged to Wear Headscarf as Symbol of Remembrance', *Mail Online*, 30 October 2014, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2813500/The-poppy-hijab-defies-extremists-British-Muslims-urged-wear-headscarf-symbol-remembrance.html>.

prove I'm not a Muslim extremist'.²⁷ Similarly, Chris Allen viewed it as part of a broader trend towards Muslims' national belonging being called into question in the context of the ongoing 'war on terror'.²⁸ More specifically, the poppy hijab was an example of what Vron Ware has termed 'militarised multicultural', with membership of the national community for minority groups increasingly being predicated on, and sought through, displays of support for and connection with the armed forces - including by vicariously identifying with the exploits of ancestors who fought in the British Empire's armies during the two World Wars.²⁹ Just as the empty signifier of 'immigration' would be used by the Leave campaigns during the Brexit referendum as code alluding to a transgressive racialized politics, the poppy and its associated discourses for some carried their own racial connotations.³⁰ The symbol became 'a focus for patriotic sentiments that cannot easily be expressed in other ways', while its ambiguity preserved its mainstream appeal.³¹

Of course, war commemoration and the national self-expression signified by the poppy have also been invoked in arguments around Brexit itself.³² In November 2014 - two years prior to the referendum - former UKIP leader and key Brexiteer Nigel Farage visited the 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' poppy exhibit at the Tower of London. Farage was deliberately 'pictured with tears in his eyes' by the press - a performance that might be read as a 'vicarious sacrifice', with tears intended to convey Farage's authentic emotional connection with British militarism.³³ He tweeted a quasi-Churchillian picture of himself looking upon the exhibition, describing it as a 'fitting tribute to those who died protecting our freedoms', adding: '[o]f course no country has copyright on courage but Poppy monument is for people of this country & our allies to remember

²⁷ Sofia Ahmed, 'No, I Won't Wear the "Poppy Hijab" to Prove I'm Not an Islamic Extremist', *The Independent*, 4 November 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/no-i-wont-wear-the-poppy-hijab-to-prove-im-not-an-extremist-a6720901.html>.

²⁸ Chris Allen, 'The Poppy Hijab Is Just Islamophobia with a Floral Motif', *NewStatesman*, 11 March 2014, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/11/poppy-hijab-just-islamophobia-floral-motif>.

²⁹ Ware, 'From War Grave to Peace Garden'; See also, Ware, 'How Multiculture Gets Militarized'.

³⁰ See, for example, Robert Fisk, who referred to it directly as 'racist', invoking vicarious identification with his father's WW2 experience and subsequent disavowal of the poppy in justifying his own refusal to wear it. Robert Fisk, 'The Poppy Has Become a Symbol of Racism - I Will Never Wear One Again', *The Independent*, 3 November 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/poppy-symbol-of-racism-never-worn-one-never-will-robert-fisk-remembrance-day-first-world-war-second-a7394976.html>.

³¹ Fox, 'Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present', 29.

³² Indeed, the collective war efforts commemorated by the poppy have been viewed as vital resources for meeting the challenges presented by the Brexistential crisis. Much of the framing of the First World War centenary's importance as a national event was generated by the perceived need to preserve the United Kingdom with the referendum on Scottish Independence scheduled for just after the commencement of the commemorations in 2014. For opponents of Independence, Scotland's contribution to the shared wartime experiences of the Union served as particularly strong resources in arguments for keeping the Union together by pointing to the shared destiny of the 'home nations'. On this dimension of the politics of war commemoration, see Mycock, 'The First World War Centenary in the UK', 159; Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere*, 45-46; Nataliya Danilova and Kandida Purnell, 'The "Museumification" of the Scottish Soldier and the Meaning-Making of Britain's Wars', *Critical Military Studies* 0, no. 0 (19 October 2019): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2019.1677042>.

³³ Georgia Graham, 'Nigel Farage Wipes Tears from His Eyes as He Visits Poppy Memorial', *The Telegraph*, 4 November 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/11207880/Nigel-Farage-wipes-tears-from-his-eyes-as-he-visits-poppy-memorial.html>.

and thank our dead.³⁴ Thus, it was not only Britons who should be showing gratitude to ‘our’ war dead for their freedom, but other nations ostensibly indebted to British courage too.

This framing would set the tone for the Brexit campaign to come, with key campaign figures even invoking their own personal connections. Indeed, Director of Special Projects for Vote Leave, Lee Rotherham (@DrBrexit) gave a family link to such exploits pride of place in his Twitter bio: “Brexit evangelist” [...] G[rand]/father liberated Pompeii in WW2.³⁵ It is difficult to imagine a reason for giving this piece of apparent trivia such prominence, other than to showcase Rotherham’s vicarious identification with his grandfather as a way of basking in the reflected glory of his war time experience, thus bolstering claims to particularly authentic national subjectivity. The campaign also drew explicit parallels between the struggle for freedom during the hybrid ‘good war’ of WW1 and WW2, and the ‘Leave’ campaign for ‘independence’ from the EU. As Shipman describes:

On 8 November 2015, Remembrance Sunday, the official Leave.EU Twitter feed tweeted: Freedom and democracy. Let’s not give up values for which our ancestors paid the ultimate sacrifice’ alongside a picture of a sea of ceramic poppies in the moat at the Tower of London. [Leave.EU activist, Andy] Wigmore said, ‘People just went mad for that, they really went for us – and it worked.’³⁶

These parallels continued to be drawn after the referendum, when the negotiations between Britain and the EU were routinely described through war metaphors. When the German CEO of Airbus, Tom Enders, described the UK Government’s handling of Brexit a ‘disgrace’, warning of potentially dire consequences for businesses, Conservative MP Mark Francois accused Enders – who he noted had been ‘a German paratrooper in his youth’ – of ‘teutonic arrogance’, adding ‘My father Reginald Francois was a D-Day veteran he never submitted to bullying by any German, neither will his son.’³⁷

Pro-Brexit arguments invoking specific related individuals have been supplemented by more general invocations of WW1 and WW2. A particularly vivid example emerged in 2017, amid negotiations around a ‘divorce bill’ to be paid by Britain to the EU upon its exit. Given the Leave campaigns’ central argument that leaving the EU would mean not sending money to ‘Brussels’ which could instead be spend on public services like the NHS, the possibility of further payments was deeply unpalatable to Brexiteers. In October/November 2017, various memes (Figure 6.1) appeared on social media featuring images of the cenotaph in London surrounded by poppy

³⁴ Nigel Farage, quoted in Graham.

³⁵ Lee Rotherham (@DrBrexit), Twitter, accessed 26 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/drbrexit?lang=en>.

³⁶ Tim Shipman, *All Out War: The Full Story of Brexit*, Revised, Updated edition (London: William Collins Non Fiction, 2017), 412 Thanks to Francesca Melhuish for bringing this to my attention.

³⁷ Tom Enders and Mark Francois MP, quoted in Judith Mischke, ‘Airbus Chief: “Don’t Listen to the Brexiteers” Madness’, POLITICO, 24 January 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/airbus-brexiteers-dont-listen-to-madness/>.

wreaths, captioned ‘BREXIT DIVORCE BILL? ALREADY PAID IN FULL!’ and ‘We owe Europe nothing! Europe owes us!’³⁸ Brexiteers were calling in ‘their’ war debts, arguing that ‘we’ owed nothing to the EU because ‘we’ had paid for ‘their’ freedom. Considering that, as Smith notes, ‘[v]ery few members of the generation that fought in and endured the war survive today’,³⁹ such claims are necessarily premised on vicarious identifications – that ‘we’ is a national ‘we’ that extends temporally into the past beyond the limits of individual existence.



Figure 6.1 – Brexit Divorce Bill Cenotaph Meme

In noting the prominence of the poppy and war commemoration in debates about Brexit, two important caveats apply. Firstly, according to the limited quantitative data available on regional variation in attitudes to the poppy, the symbol’s polyvalence defies any simple correlation between attitudes to the symbol and the Brexit vote.⁴⁰ While the poppy and the World Wars are key reference points for Brexiteers, ‘Remainers’ have similarly invoked the Second World War to

³⁸ @Geezajay2013, ‘We owe Europe nothing! Europe owes us!’ (26 October 2017), tweet and image quoted in @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘What Better Way to Honour Those Who Fought against Mindless Right-Wing Nationalism in Europe than to Use Their Deaths as Currency in Brexit Negotiations? 1 Fallen = €1.13 <https://t.co/Xn73xd3wn9>’, Twitter, 11 November 2017, <https://twitter.com/giantpoppywatch/status/929390722897367041>.

³⁹ Christopher Smith, ‘Brexit Is Not World War II – Politicians Should Stop Comparing Them’, The Conversation, 14 February 2019, <http://theconversation.com/brexit-is-not-world-war-ii-politicians-should-stop-comparing-them-111286>.

⁴⁰ See, for example, research by Consumer Intelligence demonstrating that despite a decline in Britons wearing the poppy, its polyvalent appeal is significantly broader than pro-Brexit sentiment. Flack, ‘One In Five Doubt They Will Wear A Poppy This Year’.

suggest that Brexit is a betrayal of the values for which British forces fought.⁴¹ One response to the aforementioned Leave.EU tweet read ‘glad my relatives fought for your right to chat utter shite’.⁴² And when the Poppy® Watch Twitter account mocked the ‘Brexit Divorce Bill’ meme, it did so with the sardonic caption: ‘What better way to honour those who fought against mindless right-wing nationalism in Europe than to use their deaths as currency in Brexit negotiations? 1 Fallen = €1.13.’⁴³ Thus, the use of vicarious military subjectivity in the Brexit debate is far from one-sided.⁴⁴

The second caveat is that concerns about political correctness and self-expression around the poppy are not entirely new. In 2001, reporter Robert Fox described a BBC decision to ‘ban’ its World Service presenters from wearing the poppy – a decision that had been taken to avoid confusing its largely global audience – as ‘an insane example of political correctness’.⁴⁵ Refuting the BBC’s justification that the poppy was not recognised globally, the RBL argued that it was ‘the international symbol of remembrance’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, sensitivity around the poppy has grown considerably in the last 10 years, and has further intensified in post-Brexit Britain. While Brexit may have provided a new context for the deployment of the symbol as one of self-expression, it did not *cause* this meaning as such; rather the complex dynamics that underpinned the Brexit vote and the general shifting of the political sphere to the right have also swept remembrance and poppy discourse along with them, resulting in pronounced changes in the norms around the symbol. And nowhere are these changes more evident than in the poppy’s incorporation in football.

⁴¹ See, for example, John Lubbock, ‘If You Voted to Leave the EU, Don’t Bother Wearing a Poppy’, *The Independent*, 9 November 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/eu-leave-vote-remembrance-sunday-dont-bother-wearing-a-poppy-a8043711.html>; Indeed, Matt Hancock MP who would go on to become Health Secretary in Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservative government elected in 2019 had previously criticised Johnson’s move to suspend Parliament in order to expedite Britain’s departure from the EU, stating ‘To prorogue parliament would be a betrayal of the value for which those men fought’ Lowenna Waters, ‘This Old Clip of Matt Hancock Talking about “suspending Parliament” Now Looks Utterly Ridiculous’, *indy100*, 28 August 2019, <https://www.indy100.com/article/matt-hancock-resign-proroguing-parliament-brexit-boris-johnson-9082211>.

⁴² ‘t o m’ (@td_rules), quoted in Jack Sommers, ‘Remembrance Sunday Outrage As Leave.EU Deletes “Shameful” Tweet Linking War Dead’s Sacrifice To Brexit’, *HuffPost UK*, 8 November 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/08/remembrance-sunday-leave-eu-tweet_n_8503930.html.

⁴³ @GiantPoppyWatch, ‘What Better Way to Honour Those Who Fought against Mindless Right-Wing Nationalism in Europe than to Use Their Deaths as Currency in Brexit Negotiations? 1 Fallen = €1.13’ <https://t.co/Xn73xd3wn9>.

⁴⁴ Notably, while these are often representational claims, on the 75th anniversary of D-Day in June 2019, more than 100 veterans – including some of the last surviving WW2 veterans – published an open letter in the *Independent* warning that peace is ‘fragile’, and endorsing a second referendum on Britain’s EU membership – the implicit aim being to overturn the result. ‘Letters: As Veterans, We Know How Fragile Peace in Europe Can Be, and How Crucial a Final Say on Brexit Really Is’, *The Independent*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/d-day-brexit-final-say-referendum-veterans-75th-anniversary-a8945901.html>.

⁴⁵ Robert Fox, quoted in Matt Born, ‘BBC Defends Ban on TV Presenters Wearing Poppies’, 3 November 2001, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1361358/BBC-defends-ban-on-TV-presenters-wearing-poppies.html>.

⁴⁶ Royal British Legion spokesperson, quoted in Born.

Football and the Poppy

Leicester City claims to be ‘the first ever Club to mark Remembrance Day with a specially themed fixture’ - a 2nd November 2003 Premier League match against Blackburn Rovers. An article on the match’s tenth anniversary noted with palpable pride, that ‘[s]ince then the tradition of Remembrance fixtures with the embroidered poppy shirts, started by Leicester City ten years ago this week, has spread nationwide.’⁴⁷ This pride was echoed in an online fan forum in 2011 with ‘marko’ noting that ‘[e]very team in the Premier League will be sporting one this week. Nice to know that a Leicester idea has helped such a worthy cause.’⁴⁸ Leicester fans were not the only ones to speculate as to whether ‘their’ team had been the first to wear poppies. A thread on a Heart’s FC fan forum similarly asked, ‘Were We first to put the poppy on the shirt’, speculating that ‘we’ were the progenitors of the initiative in Scotland.⁴⁹ Though they were early starters - featuring the emblem in a 9th November 2003 fixture – some contributors expressed unease regarding any competitive aspect to remembrance, with ‘Debtor’ asking: ‘is it right to be scoring points over poppies?’. Similarly, ‘hughesie27’ argued that ‘asking if we were first suggests that we have bragging rights or are better than other teams’, insisting that ‘it shouldn’t be the focus.’⁵⁰ By 2012, such qualms had given way to more light-hearted takes, with ‘Shaggy2’ commenting on another thread: ‘Does this makes us "The first to wear the poppy?" Take that Hibs!!! [...] it's right that it should have been Hearts. Proud.’⁵¹ Once again, ‘us’ having led the way on the poppy was viewed as a source of vicarious pride.

These initiatives attained broader significance in November 2009 when *Sportsmail* columnist Charles Sale launched a campaign to encourage all Premier League teams to wear poppies. This sudden imperative was explicitly linked to Britain’s rapidly deteriorating war in Afghanistan: ‘This year’s Remembrance Day will have added poignance after the horrific death toll this week in Afghanistan.’⁵² Whereas the aforementioned fans viewed their team’s support for remembrance as a positive source of pride for going beyond what was required, Sale’s campaign ‘named and shamed’ teams for not wearing poppies, stating: ‘Our war heroes deserve better.’⁵³ As well as

⁴⁷ ‘TWH: Remembrance Fixture Anniversary’, LCFC.com, 6 November 2013, <https://www.lcfc.com/news/428985>.

⁴⁸ ‘marko’ (2011), Re: ‘marko’, ‘Poppies on Shirts’, FoxesTalk, 5 November 2011, <https://www.foxestalk.co.uk/topic/77697-poppies-on-shirts/>.

⁴⁹ Jamie_the_Jambo, ‘Were We First to Put the Poppy on the Shirt’, Jambos Kickback, 14 November 2010, <https://www.hmfckickback.co.uk/index.php?/topic/82642-were-we-first-to-put-the-poppy-on-the-shirt/>.

⁵⁰ ‘Debtor’ and ‘hughesie27’ (2010) Re: Jamie_the_Jambo.

⁵¹ ‘Shaggy2’ (2012), Re: ‘TheMaganator’, ‘Remembrance Poppy Shirts’, Jambos Kickback, 11 July 2012, <https://www.hmfckickback.co.uk/index.php?/topic/115236-remembrance-poppy-shirts/>.

⁵² Charles Sale, ‘Then There Were Two: Bolton Join the Poppy Parade - Unlike United and Liverpool’, Mail Online, 6 November 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1225639/And-Bolton-join-poppy-parade--unlike-Manchester-United-Liverpool.html>.

⁵³ ‘Sportsmail Comment: Liverpool and Manchester United - It’s Still Not Too Late to Wear the Poppy with Pride’, Mail Online, 5 November 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1225390/Sportsmail-comment-Liverpool-Manchester-United-Bolton--late-wear-poppy-pride.html>.

appealing to the teams, the campaign sought to instrumentalise fan loyalties by stating: ‘There were 12 sides sporting poppies. Do you want *your* team to honour Britain's soldiers?’⁵⁴ Here, the campaign exploited the fact that while vicarious relationships may allow for a sense of pride, they may also render subjects vulnerable to vicarious *shame*. In an article titled ‘Poppy Power!’, Sale claimed ‘[t]he strength of football fans’ reaction to Sportsmail naming the poppy 12’ had been central to the acquiescence of 6 further teams to the cause between November 3rd and 5th.⁵⁵ This enabled Sale to characterise the remaining clubs as being out of step with the ‘the vast majority of top-flight clubs’⁵⁶ and ‘in stubborn defiance of public opinion.’⁵⁷ The ‘will of the people’, readers were told, was being defied by refuseniks.

Following Bolton Wanderers’ acquiescence, the *Mail* issued a further call to Liverpool and Manchester United stating ‘it's still not too late to wear the poppy with pride’. The article focused on United, pondering why ‘the world’s biggest club’ refused to wear the symbol. That the club was ‘now owned by Americans’ was noted, perhaps seeking to cast doubt on its commitment to the national community. But it also appealed directly to United’s Manager Sir Alex Ferguson as ‘a man with a deep sense of history and tradition’ to ‘prevail over the bureaucrats at his club who are refusing to see sense.’⁵⁸ In a final effort on 7th November, the *Mail* published an article titled ‘Our soldiers are being killed in Afghanistan. We should ALL wear a poppy, says Spurs boss Harry Redknapp’, lauding Redknapp’s ‘powerful message’ as a ‘fitting tribute’ in the context of mounting British casualties.⁵⁹ Showcasing what the *Mail* regarded as Redknapp’s exemplary conduct was an unsubtle attempt to emphasise United’s isolation over the issue not only from other football clubs, but with the broader sporting world, claiming that its campaign has ‘spread to rugby as the [New Zealand] All Blacks and Wales announced they will be wearing poppies on their shirts’.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁴ ‘Sportsmail Comment’ (Emphasis added).

⁵⁵ Charles Sale, ‘Poppy Power! Now Only Three Premier Clubs Are Refusing to Back Sportsmail’s Campaign to Honour Our Heroes’, Mail Online, 5 November 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1225325/Poppy-power-Now-Premier-clubs-refusing-Sportsmails-campaign-honour-heroes.html>.

⁵⁶ Charles Sale, ‘Charles Sale: Poppies Growing on Premier League Clubs’, Mail Online, 4 November 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/article-1225069/Charles-Sale-Poppies-growing-Premier-League-clubs.html>.

⁵⁷ Sale, ‘Poppy Power! Now Only Three Premier Clubs Are Refusing to Back Sportsmail’s Campaign to Honour Our Heroes’.

⁵⁸ ‘Sportsmail Comment’.

⁵⁹ Arindam Rej, ‘Our Soldiers Are Dying in Afghanistan. We Should ALL Wear a Poppy, Says Spurs Boss Harry Redknapp’, Mail Online, 7 November 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1225883/Our-soldiers-killed-Afghanistan-We-ALL-wear-popy-says-Spurs-boss-Harry-Redknapp.html>.

⁶⁰ There was also an Anglospheric dimension to poppy-wearing here: ‘The captain of the original All Blacks team, Dave Gallaher, was killed at Passchendaele, and team manager Darren Shand said: “The team feel it is important to honour the role of New Zealanders who died in World War One, and particularly the number of All Blacks who died.” Darren Shand, quoted in Rej.

comparison with rugby invoked the masculinised rivalry between the two sports, with football's detractors frequently declaring it inferior in masculinised sporting hierarchies than rugby.⁶¹

After ignoring the *Sportsmail* campaign in 2009, Liverpool confirmed that it would wear the symbol in 2010, leaving the *Mail* to focus its efforts on securing United's participation with an article titled 'A simple message to Manchester United: Why won't you wear the poppy with pride?'. Reiterating that 'United are maintaining their stance in defiance of public opinion', its 2009 decision to face 'Chelsea on Remembrance Sunday at Stamford Bridge in poppyless shirts' was described as 'upsetting Chelsea Pensioners in the stands.'⁶² This claim was never substantiated; nonetheless, it was a resonant sentiment at a time when the armed forces were revered in British culture. Also powerful was an infographic (Figure 6.2), titled 'Will your club wear a poppy' - again, the use of a vicarious 'your' addressed fans directly - showing which teams had worn the poppy in the previous year, and their intentions for 2010. In addition to ranking teams for past conduct ('wore poppies with pride'/ 'bowed to pressure of Sportsmail's campaign'/ 'refused to wear a poppy'), this worked to emphasise Manchester United's relative isolation on the issue. Having emphasised the work it already did with the armed forces - 'we do not feel a poppy on the shirt would add to our contribution' - and noting that 'staff and officials will be wearing them as usual and we are confident we are doing the right thing', United announced the next day that its kit would bear the symbol.⁶³

⁶¹ Although the construction of footballers as feminised next to rugby masculinities is a transnational phenomenon, in the British context this hierarchical positioning has been reinforced by significant class rivalries, with football being perceived as a working class sport, and rugby a sport associated with elite public schools. On these respective points, see Mark Falcoux, 'Oceania: Football at the Pacific Periphery', in *Routledge Handbook of Football Studies*, ed. John Hughson et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 445–56; E. G. Dunning and K. G. Sheard, 'The Rugby Football Club as a Type of "Male Preserve": Some Sociological Notes:', *International Review of Sport Sociology* 8, no. 3 (1973): 6–7; Stacey Pope, "'It's Just Such a Class Thing": Rivalry and Class Distinction between Female Fans of Men's Football and Rugby Union', *Sociological Research Online* 20, no. 2 (2015): 145–58.

⁶² Luke Benedict, 'A Simple Message to Manchester United: Why Won't You Wear the Poppy with Pride?', *Mail Online*, 28 October 2010, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1324698/A-simple-message-Manchester-United-Why-wont-wear-poppy-pride.html>.

⁶³ Manchester United Spokesperson, quoted in Sale, 'Poppy Power! Now Only Three Premier Clubs Are Refusing to Back Sportsmail's Campaign to Honour Our Heroes'.



Figure 6.2 – ‘Will Your Club Wear a Poppy?’

2010 was the first year when all 20 Premier League teams wore poppies. Rather than the end of the matter, however, it marked the beginning of a new era of hypervigilance towards the poppy in sport, with much of the press and public discourse around the symbol taking on a more coercive tone. By 2012, for instance, the *Mail* noted that not only would all Premier League teams ‘wear the poppy with pride’ on Remembrance Day, but that unlike in 2010 when the poppy designs had varied from team to team, they would ‘display a uniform poppy design on their shirts for the first time’.⁶⁴ Uniformity has, of course, historically been highly seductive to many authoritarian causes, insofar as it conveys the appearance – however problematic or illusory – of a singular voice, purpose and destiny. Above all, uniformity’s contribution to feelings of belonging is in signifying *conformity*: the (apparently) willing subordination of the individual to the collective. This idea lies at the heart of contemporary poppy politics, which arguably has a great deal more to do with compelling people to wear the poppy in order to achieve uniform spectacles, rather than protecting the right of people to remember according to their own beliefs.

The expectation that footballers should ‘pay their respects’, and the intensity with which uniform poppy-wearing is ‘policed’, has led to intense scrutiny of those who have been unwilling to conform. Since 2012 Northern Irish footballer James McClean has repeatedly attracted media and public criticism (including verbal abuse and death threats) for refusing to wear the poppy because of objecting to the role of the British armed forces in Northern Ireland during the 1970s’ and

⁶⁴ Mark Alford, ‘All 20 Premier League Clubs Will Wear the Poppy with Pride on Remembrance Day’, *Mail Online*, 2 November 2012, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2227120/All-20-Premier-League-clubs-wear-poppy-pride-Remembrance-Day.html>.

80s'.⁶⁵ For similar reasons, with its connections to Irish Catholicism, the poppy has been a deeply divisive symbol for fans of Scottish team, Celtic FC, some of whom protested against players wearing the poppy through stadium walkouts, banners, chants, and through the dissemination of anti-war literature during 'remembrance fixtures': actions aimed at disrupting the pristine veneer of the spectacle. As Kelly argues, media coverage of these protests 'utilised vernacular usually reserved to report terrorists', illustrating the power of the militaristic 'discursive formation' central to modern remembrance:

those who deviate from a position of dogmatically 'supporting the troops' by turning attention to questions of policy and ideology are likely to be symbolically annihilated in a joint ceremonial ritual that reinforces dominant ideas of patriotic citizen to be juxtaposed with unpatriotic 'outsider' and/or deviant.⁶⁶

What Kelly articulates so vividly here can be understood in the conceptual framework of this thesis as attempts to 'securitize subjectivity' by establishing a singular logic of appropriateness.⁶⁷ In this context, even teams committed to the poppy have been caught out by the shifting goalposts of contemporary remembrance. Whereas remembrance kits were formerly reserved for fixtures closest to Armistice Day/Remembrance Sunday, recent years have seen remembrance symbolism deployed earlier, with the period of 'remembrance' expanding each year. In 2016, for example, Southampton F.C. were singled out by the *Daily Express* as 'the only club not to sport their Remembrance strip' during a 6th November fixture; two years later, it was deemed newsworthy that Tottenham Hotspur did not wear a poppy for a 29th October home match.⁶⁸

Again, this climate of sensitivity around the poppy raises questions around (in)authenticity. Despite various press outlets claiming that any footballer wearing a poppy does so always 'with pride', the coercive culture around the symbol prevents us from ever really divining genuine sentiments. As Hann asks: 'when the 18 players of a football team's matchday squad are presented with shirts with the poppy emblazoned on them how much respect are they really paying?'⁶⁹ Rather than passing judgement on players, the point was that the unknown role played by footballers in the decision to wear poppies raises the possibility that in most instances – '[t]hey

⁶⁵ Nick Stromberg, 'Why Doesn't James McClean Wear a Poppy on Remembrance Weekend?', *The Independent*, 5 November 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/why-james-mcclean-doesnt-wear-poppies-west-brom-remembrance-poppies-appeal-a8037391.html>.

⁶⁶ Kelly, 'Popular Culture, Sport and the 'Hero'-Fiction of British Militarism', 732–34.

⁶⁷ Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security', 763.

⁶⁸ Ben Pringle, 'Picture Special: Premier League Clubs Honour Remembrance Day with Poppy Badges on Shirts', *Express.co.uk*, 7 November 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/pictures/sport/8924/Remembrance-Day-popy-Premier-League-kit-shirt-sportgalleries>; See also Greg Johnson, 'The Reason Why Spurs Didn't Wear a Poppy on Their Shirts against Wolves', *football.london*, 4 November 2018, <https://www.football.london/tottenham-hotspur-fc/tottenham-hotspur-didnt-wear-popy-15369281>.

⁶⁹ Michael Hann, 'Wearing a Poppy Is Only Meaningful If It's Voluntary', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/01/wearing-popy-meaningful-voluntary-footballers>.

are simply doing what is expected of them'.⁷⁰ Indeed, media outlets are arguably largely indifferent to what footballers think unless they disrupt the spectacle or can be brought into its service.⁷¹ For Hann, then, 'in choosing not to wear the poppy, [McClean] has thought more thoroughly about its meaning than the 359 other Premier League players who do sport it in the matches this weekend.'⁷² Similar arguments may apply to Serbia and Manchester United player Nemanja Matic who, in 2018, announced that he would not wear a poppy because it served as a 'reminder of an attack that I felt personally as a young, frightened 12-year old boy living in Vrelo, as my country was devastated by the bombing of Serbia in 1999.'⁷³ Matic's case raised another issue: given that in 2015/6 'two-thirds of players in the Premier League were non-English', it was perhaps unreasonable to expect 'most Premier League footballers to feel any connection to Britain's war dead'.⁷⁴ Despite the RBL's insistence that the 'poppy is a universal symbol of Remembrance and hope',⁷⁵ its international recognition remains limited. It is one thing, then, to make players wear the symbol out of respect for British customs; it is quite another to suggest that they do so proudly.

Clubs themselves have objected to this culture on the basis of (in)authenticity. Notably, Manchester United's initial refusal to adorn its kits with poppies was not because of any objection to the symbol but because it was felt that it would not add anything to their existing work with armed forces charities. Whilst acknowledging football clubs' 'great work behind the scenes', however, the *Mail* insisted that 'the greatest mark of respect to the men and women who died as war heroes would be to wear poppies, playing in a league broadcast to 211 countries and 77 million people outside the UK.'⁷⁶ Even once United agreed in 2010 to wear the symbol, they refuted this logic, pointedly stating that '[o]ur work with the armed forces is not something that we shout about. [...] *we don't do it to get media attention.*'⁷⁷ The *Mail* and United, then, approached authenticity in very different ways: whereas for United, actions spoke louder than words and

⁷⁰ Hann.

⁷¹ See, for example, this 2014 article featuring premier league stars explaining why they're proud to wear the symbol. Sam Cunningham, 'Why We're Wearing the Poppy! Nolan, Terry, Carrick, Redgrave and More Explain What It Means to Them', Mail Online, 8 November 2013, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2492995/Premier-League-stars-explain-theyre-proud-wear-poppy.html>.

⁷² Hann, 'Wearing a Poppy Is Only Meaningful If It's Voluntary'.

⁷³ Nemanja Matic, quoted in Ciaran Kelly, 'Nemanja Matic Explains Why He Didn't Wear Poppy in Man Utd vs Bournemouth', Manchester Evening News, 11 November 2018, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/man-utd-nemanja-matic-poppy-15373516>.

⁷⁴ Hann, 'Wearing a Poppy Is Only Meaningful If It's Voluntary'.

⁷⁵ Royal British Legion Spokesperson, quoted in Jessica Green, 'City School Axes Plan to Sell White Poppies after "indoctrination" Row', Birmingham Live, 16 October 2017, <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/city-school-axes-plan-sell-13770600>.

⁷⁶ 'Sportsmail Comment'.

⁷⁷ Manchester United spokesperson, quoted in 'Manchester United to Wear Poppies on Remembrance Day after Complaints', Manchester Evening News, 30 October 2010, <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/manchester-united-to-wear-poppies-on-remembrance-901904> (Emphasis added).

remembrance was not something to be used for point-scoring, for the *Mail*, authenticity was fundamentally about self-expression – a matter of being loud and proud in vividly reasserting national self-identity. It is ironic, therefore, that while various British press outlets have been at the forefront of attempts to portray the poppy as a symbol threatened everywhere by political correctness, those same outlets have responded by establishing a culture of compulsion around the poppy, one which Fox rightly suggests might itself be considered a form of ‘political correctness’.⁷⁸ It could even be construed as ‘the very thing that the *Mail* and the *Sun* profess to despise’ – namely ‘*virtue-signalling*’.⁷⁹

Football Remembers’ and the WW1 Centenary

Given increased sensitivities around (in)authenticity, football clubs have sought to broaden and deepen their military connections. This broadening is visible in the increasingly detailed ‘poppy-themed’ remembrance itineraries issued by Premier League teams each year since 2009, featuring initiatives such as themed kits, military guards of honour, and the laying of wreaths at remembrance fixtures.⁸⁰ Moreover, like the corporate entities discussed in Chapter 5, teams have increasingly sought to demonstrate deeper historical relationships with the armed forces, especially in relation to the two World Wars. Already a trendsetter in wearing the poppy, Scottish team Hearts was also an early starter in integrating the poppy into the team’s own history. A 2007 article noted that the team would wear ‘a commemorative strip in honour of the *club’s* war dead’, adding that ‘[t]he special shirt will bear on its sleeve the names of the seven players who fell during WW1 and will also have an embroidered poppy on its front.’⁸¹ Here, remembrance was not only oriented towards national commemoration, but about the club’s *own* military contribution to the war effort. The article emphasised Hearts being ‘the first football club in Britain to enlist for action in November 1914’, and its participation in the Battle of the Somme, even hinting at the team’s martial prowess: ‘[McCrae’s] Battalion was credited with achieving the most advanced penetration of the enemy line anywhere on the front that day’. And there was another dimension to the heroism of the club’s participation: ‘[J]ike George Burley’s side two years ago, the side had won it’s opening eight league fixtures and was tipped to win the league before making the ultimate sacrifice.’ That the team had sacrificed a league title through its war effort was deemed highly significant: ‘[t]here can be little doubt that not only in results but in sheer spirit and worth they

⁷⁸ Fox, ‘Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present’, 29.

⁷⁹ Hann, ‘Wearing a Poppy Is Only Meaningful If It’s Voluntary’.

⁸⁰ Notably, team-specific poppy pins have become the subject of inter-team rivalries in recent years. Dave Robson, ‘Why Doesn’t Middlesbrough FC Have Bespoke Poppy Appeal Badge - When Newcastle and Sunderland Football Clubs Do?’, Teeside Live, 31 October 2018, <https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teeside-news/doesnt-middlesbrough-fc-bespoke-poppy-15349845>.

⁸¹ Douglas Walker, ‘Hearts to Wear Poppy on Their Strips 002’, Deadline News, 8 November 2007, <http://www.deadlinenews.co.uk/2007/11/08/hearts-to-wear-poppy-on-their-strips/> (Emphasis added).

were the best.⁸² This framing enabled vicarious pride as a resource for ontological security, both for fans with the team, and also for players with their club ancestors, thanks to the subtle comparison of the 1914 Hearts team and ‘George Burley’s side two years ago’.⁸³

The centenary of the First World War has brought club histories into much sharper focus and have seen similar initiatives become much more widespread. In 2016, for example, Manchester United’s stadium displayed a roll of honour and other billboards featuring the names of club players who had been killed through military service - allowing for a sense of vicarious pride for fans and staff alike.⁸⁴ At a time when late modernity has rendered Premier League football particularly capricious and globalised, with teams sometimes perceived to have moved away from their historical roots,⁸⁵ claims to vicarious military subjectivity are conceivably useful to larger teams in providing resources for fans’ ontological security – not least a sense of historical significance, stability, and connection to particular locales.

For others, the historical connections made salient by the centenary served as a catalyst for renewed debates about club identities. In 2017, a Daily Record article revisited Celtic FC’s refusal to wear the poppy during its November fixture against St Johnstone. The ‘great irony’ of the match, it noted, was that the new ‘record undefeated run’ set by Celtic against St Johnstone had originally been ‘set by Willie Maley’s team during the First World War’: ‘Some of those legends would subsequently be sent to the front line where they gave their lives for a cause the current team didn’t recognise during the record-breaking win over St Johnstone.’⁸⁶ Here, Celtic and its supporters were being shamed for failing to remember ‘one of their own’, even quoting the view of ‘the grandson of one such fallen Hoops hero’, Jim Frew. While congratulating the team on breaking his grandfather’s record, Frew invoked his ancestry to bolster his subjective authority in

⁸² Walker.

⁸³ As Alex Massie notes, however, there was also a darker side to the story of Hearts’ and footballers’ participation in the war involving gendered social shaming: ‘When war was declared in August 1914, the football season was already under way. As men rushed to arms, many questioned why football was continuing. Parliament debated the question. Letters were written to the press - the Edinburgh Evening News published one, signed ‘A soldier’s daughter’, which suggested that ‘while Hearts continue to play football, enabled thus to pursue their peaceful play by the sacrifice of the lives of thousands of their countrymen, they might accept, temporarily, a nom de plume, say “The White Feathers of Midlothian”’. Alex Massie, ‘Brave Hearts Cut down in Their Prime’, *The Guardian*, 13 November 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2005/nov/13/hearts>.

⁸⁴ Ben Pringle, ‘Pictures: Poppies and Memorials at Old Trafford as Man United Honour Remembrance Day’, *Express.co.uk*, 10 November 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/sport/football/730991/Poppy-Old-Trafford-Manchester-United-Remembrance-Day-former-player-sportgalleries>.

⁸⁵ On this point, see Ed Mainwaring and Tom Clark, “‘We’re Shit and We Know We Are’”: Identity, Place and Ontological Security in Lower League Football in England’, *Soccer & Society* 13, no. 1 (2012): 107–23; On football’s structural transformation in ‘late-’ or ‘post-modernity’, see Anthony King, *The End of the Terraces: The Transformation Of English Football*, Revised edition (London: Leicester University Press, 2002); Anthony King, ‘After the Crunch: A New Era for the Beautiful Game in Europe?’, *Soccer & Society* 11, no. 6 (2010): 881.

⁸⁶ Sports Hotline, ‘Celtic Slammed for Not Wearing Poppies... by One of Their Own Fans - Hotline’, *Daily Record*, 6 November 2017, <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/celtic-slammed-not-wearing-poppies-11476854>.

expressing his disappointment that ‘on the day Celtic beat the record he helped to set, none of the players or management team wore poppies to honour the sacrifice of my grandfather and thousands like him.’⁸⁷ Frew further shamed Celtic by comparison with their match opponents, ‘whose players and manager did wear the poppy with respect’ – a sentiment echoed by John McMillan who remarked that Rangers FC ‘put on a magnificent display in tribute to the fallen at Ibrox on Saturday.’⁸⁸ In these ways, vicarious identification has been instrumentalised to bolster existing subjectivities and to contest disputed ones.

The centenary has also been used by the Premier League, Football Association (FA), and the English Football League (EFL) to illustrate the ostensibly politically-transcendent power of football. Its flagship 2014 collaboration with the British Council called ‘Football Remembers’, used the 1914 Christmas Truce – the event depicted by the aforementioned Sainsbury’s advert – as a way for clubs and communities to engage with the centenary. Outlining its motivation, Executive Producer of the project for the British Council, Virginia Crompton explained that:

in 1914 the British government recognised the power of football to motivate the nation. The Football Association responded and wrote to all players encouraging them to sign up. If they volunteered, their fans would volunteer. We have tapped into the same vein, [...] this time, creating an opportunity for learning and remembrance.⁸⁹

‘Football Remembers’ launched in May 2014 with an education pack sent to 30,000 schools, featuring a competition to design a new Christmas Truce Memorial to be unveiled by The Duke of Cambridge at the National Memorial Arboretum in December 2014.⁹⁰ It also consisted of a week of professional and grassroots commemorative matches, featuring teams ‘posing for a combined pre-match photo to remember the solidarity shown on the battlefields 100 years ago’, with participants encouraged to ‘upload pre-game photos to social media with the hashtag #footballremembers.’⁹¹ Each photo was intended to be a ‘moment in history’ to be ‘preserved for future generations’ on a website - albeit one that was defunct by the time of writing in 2020.⁹² To emphasise the moment’s significance and the continuation of football’s WW1 lineage, some of the photos submitted were subsequently edited to appear ‘black and white’ or ‘sepia’ in tone, thus imbuing them with faux-historicity.⁹³ ‘Football Remembers’ sought - in line with the trend towards more uniform participation in remembrance generally – to portray football and

⁸⁷ Jim Frew, quoted in Sports Hotline.

⁸⁸ Jim Frew and John McMillan, quoted in Sports Hotline.

⁸⁹ Virginia Crompton, ‘Football Remembers’, *DCMS Blog* (blog), 9 December 2014, <https://dcmsblog.uk/2014/12/football-remembers/>.

⁹⁰ ‘Football Remembers: Celebrating 1914 Christmas Truce Match’, BBC Sport, 7 December 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/30347813>.

⁹¹ ‘Football to Remember The Christmas Truce 100 Years On’, The FA, 5 December 2014, <http://www.thefa.com/news/2014/dec/05/football-remembers-launches>.

⁹² ‘Football To Honour 1914 Christmas Truce Centenary This December’, Middlesbrough FC, 2 December 2014, </news/football-to-honour-1914-christmas-truce-centenary-this-december>.

⁹³ ‘Football Remembers’.

remembrance as a unified spectacle transcending politics. Pretensions to apoliticality, however, were indicative of an eagerness to avoid the Truce's politics, rather than the absence of such dynamics – not least the politics that had led soldiers of various nations to the Western Front in the first place, and the politics that would only hours later see the killing resume.

The 'I' in 'Team' - The Vicarious Geopolitics of the 2011 FIFA Poppy Controversy⁹⁴

We have seen how football fans are encouraged to vicariously identify with clubs and players, whose behaviour is both an opportunity to 'bask in reflected glory' by living through their triumphs, and a potential vulnerability insofar as misdemeanours can reflect poorly on fans and negatively impact their sense of ontological security. However, national teams are arguably even more visceral objects for vicarious identification because they are representatives of the *nation* in a way that transcends club loyalties, conventional fandom, and often even eludes consciousness. As Michael Billig famously reflected in *Banal Nationalism*: 'If a citizen from the homeland runs quicker or jumps higher than foreigners, I feel pleasure. Why, I do not know.'⁹⁵ Accordingly, attentiveness to vicarious identity can help us to understand that the conduct of national teams is not simply a question of affirming the hegemonic norms of remembrance at home, but also about how they represent 'us' – on the international stage. This representational dynamic, of course, must be understood in the context of the complex subjectivity of footballers, who are simultaneously lauded for their 'heroic' sporting exploits, and unflatteringly portrayed as 'overpaid, over-rated, flamboyant, flashy and pampered with their showbiz lifestyles', and as feminised and ill-disciplined.⁹⁶

The importance of national teams' representational function should also be read in the context of greater public sensitivity around representation more broadly. For some, improved democratic representation remains a key focus – exemplified by sporadic campaigns for more proportional electoral representation,⁹⁷ as well as calls for the establishment of a devolved English parliament.⁹⁸ For others, however, desires for representation have been channelled as much through vicarious identification with various prominent public figures as they have through the ballot box.

⁹⁴ This title is inspired by Erin Tarver's book of the same name on the identity politics of sports fandom Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity*.

⁹⁵ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 175.

⁹⁶ Indeed, as Whannel notes, these unflattering portrayals have even been understood as representing a deeper social malaise: not least, 'the decline of morality, the crisis of masculinity, the decline of Britain, and the threat to family values.' This is somewhat ironic given their representation function at the national level. Garry Whannel, 'Mediating Masculinities: The Production of Media Representations in Sport', in *Sport and Gender Identities: Masculinities, Femininities and Sexualities*, ed. Cara Carmichael Aitchison and Sheila Scraton (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.

⁹⁷ These reached their zenith in 2011 with a national referendum on the A.V. voting system. See, for example Ryan Gallagher, 'The AV Referendum Debate: A Timeline', openDemocracy, 4 May 2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/referendum-debate-so-far/>.

⁹⁸ On the salience of 'politicised Englishness', see Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere*, 28–30.

Sometimes the two are mutually reinforcing. As Anker has argued, while U.S. President Donald Trump's claims to represent the 'left-behind' white working-classes are eminently contestable, his ability to actually improve their lives materially is of secondary importance to some of his supporters than his personification of power, expressed through symbolically-laden acts in defiance of 'political correctness'.⁹⁹ Trump thus acts as an outlet for the vicarious realisation of fantasies of transgression and control. Notably, certain British personalities such as Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage, and Katie Hopkins (who made a career out of making highly-controversial statements about welfare and immigration, and by declaring 'I don't care' about criticisms levelled at her¹⁰⁰) perform similar vicarious functions. While constituting sources of outrage and ontological insecurity for many, these figures are perceived by their supporters as the embodiments of transgressive power against a system routinely portrayed as *actively-rigged* against them, thus acting as vicarious catharsis for ontological insecurities.

The remainder of the chapter argues that the England football team has also become a target for vicarious identification over this period and in line with growing anxieties about individual and collective self-expression, both at the domestic level and on the world stage.¹⁰¹

England v Spain (12 November, 2011)

The development of such vicarious relationships in line with pervasive anxieties was illustrated in 2011 when the English FA made a request to football's international governing body, FIFA, for the England men's team to be allowed to wear kits featuring the poppy during its fixture with Spain at Wembley Stadium on November 12th. England's request – along with those of the Scottish and Welsh FAs - was denied on 6th November on the grounds that the symbol would contravene its prohibition of 'political, religious, commercial, personal messages' on kits.¹⁰² After Sports Minister Hugh Robertson wrote to FIFA urging it to reconsider, insisting that the poppy was 'not religious or political in any way', FIFA refused again on 8th November, arguing that the

⁹⁹ Elisabeth R. Anker, *Longing for Sovereignty: Power and Violence in Trump Era*, YouTube (The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Centre for American Studies and Research (CASAR), American University Beirut, 10 April, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCg9NIKmErk>.

¹⁰⁰ Katie Hopkins, quoted in Heather Saul, 'Katie Hopkins Urged to Apologise for Dehumanising Column Comparing Refugees to "cockroaches" after Independent Campaign', *The Independent*, 3 September 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/katie-hopkins-urged-to-apologise-for-dehumanising-column-comparing-refugees-to-cockroaches-after-10484400.html>; On Hopkins' cultivation of a 'pantomime villain' image, see Paul Bleakley, "'Love Me or Hate Me – I Don't Care": Katie Hopkins, Celebrity Big Brother and the Destruction of a Negative Image', *Continuum* 30, no. 4 (2016): 419–32.

¹⁰¹ In this analysis, I focus mainly on the England team for reasons of space and because it typically receives the most press attention, with coverage of the other 'home nations' being secondary. As Croft notes, '[f]or the English, the national football team has been in practice the only national institution, given the decline in congregations at the Church of England', and the England team's representational function may have been particularly sensitive in the aftermath of an event fuelled in no small part by English nationalism. Croft, *Securitizing Islam*, 112.

¹⁰² 'War Veterans Unhappy over Fifa's Poppy Ban', BBC Sport, 5 November 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/15606557>.

symbol's presence risked 'jeopardising the neutrality of football' and opening the 'floodgates' to similar requests from other nations. It also suggested alternative approved forms of commemoration such as a pre-match period of silence.¹⁰³

This refusal generated significant consternation at different levels of British society. At the time, however, this reaction was surprising because England had never previously felt the need to wear the symbol during their international fixtures. As Gibson explains:

When England drew with Sweden in a forgettable 1-1 draw in a friendly at Old Trafford in 2001, on the day before Armistice Day, there were [...] no poppies. Nor was there any outrage. Similarly the last time England played on 11 November itself – a tremendous 4-1 victory against Yugoslavia in Belgrade in 1987 [...] none of the players sported armbands or poppies.¹⁰⁴

Outrage at England not being allowed to wear a poppy during international fixtures is therefore, in Gibson's words, 'a very modern phenomenon'.¹⁰⁵ What prompted the change of attitude in 2011? When FIFA itself asked the FA why it was so important that the team wear poppies now when it had not previously done so, an FA spokesperson cited 'a greater focus [...] given to the level of support and respect shown by the national teams', noting the aforementioned trend towards domestic clubs wearing poppies.¹⁰⁶ Others suspected the FA of opportunistically courting the controversy, accusing it of 'shamefully exploiting [the] Poppy Appeal' to distract from its own public failings and alleviate intense media scrutiny of England captain John Terry in the light of accusations that he had racially-abused fellow player, Anton Ferdinand.¹⁰⁷ Having recently achieved the *appearance* of unity around the poppy in 2010, FIFA's objection to the poppy on the basis that it was 'political' – being a largely pejorative term in British culture, connoting partisan motives – was particularly incendiary. The subsequent campaign to ensure England wore the poppy could therefore be viewed as the logical extension of the *Sportmail* campaign around domestic football.

However, that the episode involved the *national* team also drew some different political sensitivities and vicarious dynamics to the forefront of public discourse. Especially prominent was indignation at being 'told what to do' by FIFA – an international organization that was at the

¹⁰³ 'Fifa Reject England's Poppy Request', *The Independent*, 8 November 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/fifa-reject-englands-popy-request-6258962.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Owen Gibson, 'Common Sense Is the First Casualty of This Tedious Poppy Row', *The Guardian*, 3 November 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2016/nov/03/common-sense-popy-armistice-day-england-scotland>.

¹⁰⁵ Gibson.

¹⁰⁶ FA Spokesperson, quoted in Jason Burt, 'Fifa Backs down and Allow England Players to Wear Poppies on Black Armband against Spain', 9 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8879577/Fifa-backs-down-and-allow-England-players-to-wear-poppies-on-black-aramband-against-Spain.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Eurosport, 'FA Shamefully Exploiting Poppy Appeal', Eurosport UK, 10 November 2011, https://www.eurosport.co.uk/football/fa-shamefully-exploiting-popy-appeal_sto4712950/story.shtml.

time and afterwards embroiled in highly-public corruption scandals.¹⁰⁸ Several commentators defended the decision, arguing that despite its deserved reputation for corruption, FIFA was right to uphold the laws of the game.¹⁰⁹ For others, however, FIFA's corruption made its decision to prevent the England team from wearing poppies under the pretence of rule-enforcement an irredeemably hypocritical act.¹¹⁰ Conservative MP Tracey Crouch suspected discrimination, stating "I think this is just an opportunity for Fifa to kick the English FA."¹¹¹ Similar suspicions were voiced by President of the Football League, Lord Mawhinney: 'FIFA don't like England and our relationship with them over the past couple of years has been very bad.'¹¹² Whether the move was the manifestation of 'anti-English' bias is less important than the fact that some *believed* that it was.

If casting FIFA as a corrupt foreign power interfering with British war commemoration was already laden with geopolitical symbolism, FIFA's handling of the incident did little to dispel such analogies. In justifying the decision by arguing that permitting England's request might set a precedent that others may try to exploit in the future, a FIFA spokesperson asked 'What would happen if England played Germany around the time of Remembrance Sunday, for example?'.¹¹³ Perhaps predictably, the *Daily Mail* seized upon this reference to the Second World War declaring: 'Poppy ban on England kit enforced 'in case we upset Germans''.¹¹⁴ FIFA's chosen example had turned a technical/legal point into a question of competing identities that could in turn be used to portray the incident as a matter of settling old scores – of needing to stand up to 'the Germans' in order to remind them who won 'Two World Wars and one World Cup'. This was underscored

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Glover of the Daily Mail put it more strongly when he objected to 'being dictated to by a dysfunctional body of foreign bureaucrats.' Stephen Glover, 'Morally Tainted Bureaucrats, and Why There Is Nothing Political about a Poppy on a Football Shirt', Mail Online, 10 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2059653/FIFA-row-There-political-popy-football-shirt.html>.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Paul Wilson, 'It Is Not a Travesty If England Do Not Wear Poppies for the Spain Game', The Guardian, 9 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2011/nov/09/england-poppies-spain-game>.

¹¹⁰ Charles Sale and Nick McDermott stated that 'The decision will further discredit FIFA, which has faced numerous corruption allegations in recent years and seen two of its executives depart following a bribery scandal.' Charles Sale and Nick McDermott, 'Outcry as England Stars Are Banned from Having a Poppy on Their Kit', Mail Online, 4 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2057863/England-stars-banned-having-popy-kit.html>.

¹¹¹ Tracey Crouch MP, quoted in 'MPs Tracey Crouch and Hugh Robertson Join Football Poppy Debate', Kent Online, 9 November 2011, <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/mps-tracey-crouch-and-hugh-rober-a70000/>.

¹¹² Lord Mawhinney, quoted in Charles Sale, 'Players WILL Honour War Heroes as FIFA Cave in... but Why Still No Poppy on the Shirt?', Mail Online, 9 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2059623/England-wear-popy--FIFA-down.html>.

¹¹³ FIFA spokesperson, quoted in Laura Williamson, 'England Poppy Ban in Case "We Upset the Germans"', Mail Online, 6 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2058356/England-popy-ban-case-upset-Germans.html>.

¹¹⁴ Williamson.

by concerns that ‘political correctness’ might prevent England from self-expression ‘in case we upset [the] Germans.’

But precisely *whose* self-expression was being prevented was often an ambiguous matter. Ostensibly, the controversy revolved around the England players themselves being allowed to wear poppies in the match. Significant coverage was given to England midfielder Jack Wilshere’s Tweets supporting the campaign for the team to wear poppies. The first emphasised that this was a matter of national pride: ‘England team should wear poppies on Saturday. It’s the nation’s tradition and it would be disrespectful not to! #ENGLISHANDPROUD.’ The second, meanwhile, invoked militarised ancestry to add vicarious authenticity to this view: ‘My Great Granddad fought for this country in WW2 and I’m sure a lot of people’s grandparents did so #WearThePoppy.’¹¹⁵ The *Mail* also lauded players Ashley Cole and Theo Walcott for their support and leadership in wearing football boots adorned with small specially-embroidered poppies. How individual these acts actually were was more difficult to establish given that supplier Nike had added poppies to all of its boots for the match.¹¹⁶ Given that Nike promised to make ‘a donation to the Poppy Appeal and players will donate their boots for the British Legion to auction’, it seems likely that this was as much a Nike exercise in cause-related marketing as it was an initiative undertaken at the instigation of the players themselves – a view corroborated by the *Mirror* which remarked that ‘eyebrows are sure to be raised at the commercialisation of the symbol by a high-profile brand.’¹¹⁷

Despite genuine support among some of the England players for wearing poppies, the views of the players themselves featured mainly as a peripheral concern in coverage of the controversy. Opinions were showcased to the extent that they affirmed the hegemonic narration of the controversy, but those not expressing a view on the subject were *presumed to be supportive*. Indeed, the supportive tweets, along with the fact that 9 players were pictured wearing the boots during training provided sufficient appearance of unity to prompt the *Mail* to claim that ‘Fabio Capello’s troops are already paying tribute to Britain’s fallen heroes with poppies on their boots’.¹¹⁸ This tendency to homogenisation was recognised by Simon Kelner in *The Independent*, who noted the

¹¹⁵ Jack Wilshere, quoted in Mirror Football, ‘Wilshere Calls on FIFA to Relent on Poppy Ban’, Mirror Online, 8 November 2011, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/arsenal-england-midfielder-jack-wilshere-3313251>.

¹¹⁶ The article noted that ‘Scott Parker, James Milner, Glen Johnson, Adam Johnson, Danny Welbeck, Gabriel Agbonlahor and Joleon Lescott will also wear the boots, by Nike.’ Rik Sharma, ‘Flower Power! Walcott and Cole Lead England’s Poppy Appeal with Specially-Made Boots for Wembley’, Mail Online, 10 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2059907/Poppy-appeal-Theo-Walcott-Ashley-Cole-wear-poppies-embroidered-boots-Wembley.html>.

¹¹⁷ Mirror Football, ‘See Pictures of England Stars’ Special Poppy Boots’, Mirror Online, 10 November 2011, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/pictures-nike-poppies-boots-worn-3313373>.

¹¹⁸ Notably, this metaphor was slightly complicated by Capello’s Italian nationality Sportsmail, ‘Terry Steps Back into England Spotlight as Capello’s Troops Back Poppy Appeal’, Mail Online, 10 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2059805/John-Terry-England-spotlight-Fabio-Capello-troops-poppies-appeal.html>.

problematic focus of coverage on whether *England as a team* would be allowed to wear the symbol - with the beliefs of individuals subordinated to the collective - asking what would happen if any of the players were to demur:

surely, if it came down to it, it should be left up to individual players whether they want to wear a shirt with a poppy or not. And would it be too much to hope that anyone who didn't wear one would find their wishes respected?¹¹⁹

The concept of vicarious identification helps clarify that the collective in question was not simply the team, but the *nation* it was seen to represent – with the singular team allowing those identifying with the nation a more straightforward sense of vicarious attachment. The occlusion of dissonant voices was central to this homogenising move, in turn permitting a degree of flexibility regarding the referent object of the discourse. This vicariousness was alluded to by a *Eurosport* article criticising the FA for instrumentalising remembrance, which featured a satirical paraphrasing of the content of Hugh Robertson's letter appealing the initial FIFA decision: "Dear FIFA, please let *Our Boys* wear poppies. When you said 'no' the first time maybe you didn't realise *we* really, really, really want to wear them. This is not political. Yours, a politician."¹²⁰ Clearly observable here is the slippage between appealing to FIFA to 'let Our Boys wear poppies' and shortly after noting that 'we really, really, really want to wear them', which effectively collapses the distinction between them and us. This raises the possibility that the England football team served in this episode as a vicarious outlet for broader expressions of self-articulation.

The choice of the term 'Our Boys' to describe the England team was significant because it is a phrase that is usually applied to soldiers themselves and had particular associations at the time with soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. This wording cast the FIFA controversy as analogous with a war, with the England team on the frontline as vicarious proxies for 'our' national self-expression. Of course, in this case, both the nod towards vicarious dynamics revealed by the reference to 'we' and 'Our Boys', function as satire with the use of the upper case intended to lampoon the perceived jingoism of the FA's and Robertson's stance. It refuses to take the controversy seriously on the terms of its instigators, instead ridiculing any comparison to actual war. Rather than the author themselves vicariously identifying with the England team, here vicariousness is inferred as a basis for ridiculing the perceived narrative strategies of others. However, the passage's humour relies for its resonance on being read intertextually in the context of non-ironic takes, such as the team being casually referred to by the *Mail* as 'Capello's troops'. Interestingly, what these metaphors demonstrate is the suspension of the normal reticence towards equating sporting and military heroism: in the context of metaphorical war, policing

¹¹⁹ Simon Kelner, 'It's Remembrance Day, Not Mandatory Poppy Day', *The Independent*, 10 November 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/its-remembrance-day-not-mandatory-poppy-day-6259776.html>.

¹²⁰ *Eurosport*, 'FA Shamefully Exploiting Poppy Appeal' (Emphasis added).

militarised social hierarchies was deemed less important when the footballers could stand in psychologically as vicarious proxies for the soldiers themselves.

The casting of the footballers as proxies for soldiers was reinforced by frequent press invocations of the views of (some) war veterans. Much of this coverage portrayed the decision to ban the England team from wearing the symbol as a personal slight to veterans - albeit one imbued with geopolitical significance too. The *Mail* quoted the former honorary General Secretary of the Normandy Veterans Association, Peter Hodge MBE who described it as ‘absolutely crucial that England wear a poppy on Remembrance weekend’ adding: ‘[w]e should not allow Fifa to dictate to us about our traditions. We fought for freedom, and that includes the right to wear a poppy.’¹²¹ Here, Hodge interpreted FIFA as dictating to ‘us’ who had ‘fought for freedom’ – and not just ‘ours’: ‘from D-Day onwards they fought and helped restore freedom for millions of people around the world.’ His successor at the Normandy Veterans Association, George Batt – a WW2 veteran quoted by the *Guardian* claimed: ‘if it wasn't for us blokes Fifa wouldn't be here. They wouldn't be playing football.’¹²² On Hodge’s and Batt’s readings, then, the game of football and *freedom itself* were British bequests to an indebted world; and these gifts had earned Britain – and the England team - the right to an expansive freedom to do as it pleased. Conservative MP and former Army officer Patrick Mercer stated that the England team ‘should be allowed to wear national symbols whenever they want, and that includes the poppy, and no foreign organisation should tell us otherwise.’¹²³

However, in a similar manner to coverage of the England players themselves, although reports gave a substantial platform to veterans, the range of views represented was largely restricted to those who conformed to controversy’s dominant narration. This meant that a handful of individuals were portrayed as representative of broader veteran opinion, thereby imposing the impression of uniformity on a heterogenous group. ‘War veterans unhappy over Fifa's poppy ban’ declared one *BBC* article on the subject, while another in the *Guardian* led with ‘Fifa ban on England's poppy kit condemned by war veterans’.¹²⁴ This constructed unanimity was reinforced by other tactics deployed to represent veterans in the controversy. In addition to quoting various individual veterans themselves, the *Mail* described how ‘Pat Mallis, the secretary of the Reconnaissance Corps Association, said many of her members who are now in their 80s and 90s

¹²¹ Peter Hodge MBE, quoted in Sale and McDermott, ‘Outcry as England Stars Are Banned from Having a Poppy on Their Kit’.

¹²² George Batt, quoted in Press Association, ‘Fifa Ban on England’s Poppy Kit Condemned by War Veterans’, *The Guardian*, 5 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2011/nov/05/fifa-ban-popy-england-spain>.

¹²³ Patrick Mercer MP, quoted in Sale and McDermott, ‘Outcry as England Stars Are Banned from Having a Poppy on Their Kit’.

¹²⁴ ‘War Veterans Unhappy over Fifa’s Poppy Ban’; Press Association, ‘Fifa Ban on England’s Poppy Kit Condemned by War Veterans’, *The Guardian*, 5 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2011/nov/05/fifa-ban-popy-england-spain>.

would be angered by the ban’ – although no direct quote from Mallis was provided.¹²⁵ The article also inferred how veterans more broadly may have viewed the controversy. A photo of an elderly man creating poppy wreaths was captioned: ‘It is likely that Tommy Horsecroft, who has worked at the British Legion Poppy Factory for 25 years, won’t be too happy with Fifa’s ruling.’¹²⁶ Here, ‘it is likely’ was doing a considerable amount of discursive ‘heavy-lifting’, with speculation standing in for Horsecroft’s own opinion entirely.

Veterans were not the only ones portrayed as having taken FIFA’s decision personally; similar dynamics could be seen in political representation of public opinion on the issue. When Tracey Crouch MP raised the issue in parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron echoed Robertson’s earlier description of the poppy as a symbol of ‘national pride’: ‘This is *not an issue of left or right* [...] *We all wear the poppy with pride*, even if we don’t approve of the wars people were fighting in.’¹²⁷ He added that ‘I think the honourable lady not only speaks for the *whole house* but in fact the *whole country*, [in] being completely baffled and frankly angry [at] the decision made by Fifa.’¹²⁸ Thus, it was the ontological security of the country as much as the football team that was at stake; and the ‘whole country’, according to Cameron, was united in outrage at the decision. Or was it? Certainly, it was not difficult to find evidence of subjects outraged at the decision; but such sentiments were not universal. For example, a poll on the *Guardian’s* website asking ‘Are Poppies Political?’ found that of 3401 respondents, 53% thought that the poppy *was* political, while 47% thought it was not.¹²⁹ This division was perhaps unsurprising given the *Guardian’s* left-leaning readership. But even a similar poll on the right-leaning *Telegraph’s* website found that 27.6% of readers felt that FIFA’s stance was justified (72.4% disagreed).¹³⁰ While a majority felt that England should be allowed to wear the poppy, there was no unanimity to speak of.

As the controversy progressed, both sides doubled down on their positions. On 8th November, just as Sports Minister Robertson had hinted that he would support any national footballing associations deciding to defy the ruling, FIFA threatened to abandon the match if the England

¹²⁵ Sale and McDermott, ‘Outcry as England Stars Are Banned from Having a Poppy on Their Kit’.

¹²⁶ Sale and McDermott.

¹²⁷ Prime Minister David Cameron, quoted in Jamie Jackson, ‘England to Wear Poppies on Armbands as Fifa and FA Reach Compromise’, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2011/nov/09/england-poppies-arambands-fifa-compromise> (emphases added).

¹²⁸ Cameron, quoted in *Telegraph* staff and agencies, ‘England v Spain: Prime Minister David Cameron Calls Fifa Poppy Ban “Appalling Decision”’, 9 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8878433/England-v-Spain-Prime-Minister-David-Cameron-calls-Fifa-poppy-ban-appalling-decision.html>.

¹²⁹ ‘Are Poppies Political?’, *The Guardian*, 10 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/poll/2011/nov/10/poppies-political-fifa?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>.

¹³⁰ For this poll, no figures on response rates are available. This is just one more example of a quantitative data gap in the study of public attitudes to the poppy. ‘England v Spain: Is Fifa’s Stance on Poppies Justified?’, *The Telegraph*, 8 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8877374/England-v-Spain-Is-Fifas-stance-on-poppies-justified.html>.

kit featured poppies.¹³¹ With the FA having apparently exhausted avenues for further appeal, attention turned towards viable alternative acts of commemoration.¹³² The *Telegraph's* football correspondent Henry Winter, for example, called for England to 'play by [FIFA President] Sepp Blatter's rules but still turn Wembley into a field of poppies.' While the match was presented as an opportunity to 'play for the nation's heroes', this seemed secondary in Winter's vision to making a statement about the controversy:

Forget the shirts; let's place cards on every seat that England fans hold up to form a giant poppy mural. [...] Let's deck the hoardings with poppies, even the corner-flags and balls. Let's show the world some *poppy power*. And let's invite Blatter.¹³³

Articulated here, then, was a fantasy: one oriented towards asserting the geopolitical power of the poppy in the face of external intervention. And the purpose of inviting Blatter was to 'mock' him by demanding his participation in the spectacle of national remembrance:

let's turn Wembley into a venue of legends and poppies. Let's hang them [the poppies, presumably] from the arch, use an arlight to paint a poppy in the night sky. *Let's demand Blatter wears one*. Let's turn the whole occasion into a celebration of the Armed Forces.¹³⁴

While Blatter's participation would vicariously realise the poppy's power, the symbol itself could also become one of victory: 'let's urge England players to wear a poppy-emblazoned T-shirt under their shirt, to be unveiled in the unlikely event of an England goal.'¹³⁵ And remembrance was intended less as a solemn spectacle than as a show of national power to resist others and force their submission to 'our' will.

Although not matching the levels of Winter's vision, the FA had made plans to do everything it could to mark the occasion. Scoreboards and advertising hoardings around the stadium would bear poppies, and poppies would be sold throughout the stadium. Armed forces personnel would also be present as part of the presentation party and through the 'Tickets for Troops' scheme which had received 500 tickets for the match. The team's training kits and anthem jackets would feature the poppy, and a poppy wreath would be on the pitch during the national anthems after

¹³¹ Jamie Jackson, 'Fifa Tells Referee to Call off England Game If Players Wear Poppies', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2011/nov/08/sports-minister-fifa-england-popy-ban>.

¹³² England Under-21 team manager Stuart Pearce stated 'We would have like to have done it as an organisation and a country, but the powers that be say they don't want us to do it. [...] That is the end of it, but it will not diminish what is in my heart and the respect for those who have given their lives for this country.' Sportsmail, 'Cameron Gives England Players Green Light to Defy FIFA Ruling on Poppies for Wembley Clash', *Mail Online*, 9 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2059467/FIFA-popy-ban-David-Cameron-happy-defy-ban.html>.

¹³³ Henry Winter, 'England v Spain: Let's Play by Sepp Blatter's Rules but Still Turn Wembley into a Field of Poppies', 8 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8878003/England-v-Spain-lets-play-by-Sepp-Blatters-rules-but-still-turn-Wembley-into-a-field-of-poppies.html> (Emphasis added).

¹³⁴ Winter (Emphasis added).

¹³⁵ Winter.

which a one-minute silence would be observed. During the match itself, the England players would wear black armbands. The FA had even produced shirts featuring embroidered poppies in case FIFA reversed its decision at the last minute.¹³⁶ RBL Director-General Chris Simpkins gave these initiatives his approval, praising the FA for its cooperation and stating: ‘we are satisfied England will enter the competition knowing they've shown proper respect for our Armed Forces.’¹³⁷

Despite the RBL emphasising that ‘[t]here are other ways to honour the poppy than wearing it on a shirt’, however, for others, anything less than the players – their vicarious representatives – themselves wearing the poppies would symbolise the FA’s capitulation and betrayal. The *Evening Standard* led with the headline: ‘Football Association admit defeat in row over poppies’.¹³⁸ Similarly, the *Daily Mail* described the FA as ‘ready to concede defeat in their bid for England to wear the poppy’, contrasting this with the position taken by David Cameron who was described as ‘sticking the boot into FIFA.’¹³⁹ By this stage, Prime Ministerial aides were briefing that Cameron would support any of the team who wished to defy the ban, though they emphasised that ‘it was a matter for players to decide for themselves’.¹⁴⁰ Cameron’s stance was echoed by several press outlets who issued their own calls for England to show defiance. A *Telegraph* editorial, for instance, accused FIFA of ‘breathhtaking arrogance’ for failing to allow the England team to wear this ‘cherished symbol of national pride’ (notable, once again, was the description of the poppy as a symbol of *pride* rather than solemn remembrance), before ‘[urging] the teams to ignore Fifa and wear the poppies anyway to honour our war dead.’¹⁴¹ ‘If the FA is fined’ it noted, then ‘it should send the cheque to the Royal British Legion.’

Indeed, press coverage itself began performing small anticipatory acts of defiance. The *Mail*, for example, published two articles featuring photos of England players ‘wearing’ poppies that had been photoshopped onto their England jerseys. The photos – of Frank Lampard and Theo Walcott – were respectively captioned ‘Pride of a lion: How Frank Lampard would look with the

¹³⁶ The anthem jackets would be auctioned to raise funds for the RBL afterwards. Sportsmail, ‘Cameron Gives England Players Green Light to Defy FIFA Ruling on Poppies for Wembley Clash’.

¹³⁷ Chris Simpkins, quoted in ‘Football Association Admit Defeat in Row over Poppies’, *Evening Standard*, 9 November 2011, <http://www.standard.co.uk/sport/football/football-association-admit-defeat-in-row-over-poppies-6366350.html>.

¹³⁸ ‘Football Association Admit Defeat in Row over Poppies’.

¹³⁹ Sportsmail, ‘Cameron Gives England Players Green Light to Defy FIFA Ruling on Poppies for Wembley Clash’; Cameron had himself made the poppy the subject of international controversy a year earlier when he and others in an official visit to China refused a request to remove the symbol because of the poppy’s association with the opium trade and Opium Wars. James Chapman, ‘David Cameron Rejects China Request to Remove “offensive” Poppies’, *Mail Online*, 10 November 2010, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1328311/David-Cameron-rejects-China-request-remove-offensive-poppies.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Prime Ministerial spokesperson, quoted in Press Association, ‘Prince William Calls on Fifa to Overturn Ban on England Shirt Poppies’, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2011/nov/09/david-cameron-outrageous-popy-ban>.

¹⁴¹ *Telegraph* View, ‘Poppy Folly’, *The Telegraph*, 8 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/8877153/Poppy-folly.html>.

poppy on his shirt' (Figure 6.3) and 'Role model: How Theo Walcott would look with the poppy on his shirt - but Fifa are so far refusing to allow the design'.¹⁴² Beyond stating the obvious, the photos arguably also enacted a broader transgressive geopolitical fantasy. While time remained for FIFA to change its mind, the photos worked to portray England wearing poppies as a virtual *fait accompli* – as tantalisingly just beyond 'our' reach, if only FIFA did not stand in 'our' way, and 'we' were willing to grasp for it. If the England team – and those living vicariously through it – was going to be denied wearing the symbols on the pitch, then the *Mail* attempted to provide catharsis for anxieties around national self-articulation through its own small act of defiance. The photos subtly worked to partially fulfil the desires expressed by figures such as former England player George Cohen – part of the 1966 World Cup-winning team – to '[put] two fingers up to FIFA'.¹⁴³ In retrospect, it is ironic that photoshopped poppies, which only four years later would be subjected to ridicule by the *Mail* when added by the Conservative Party to a photo of David Cameron, now served as symbols of defiance when applied to England players.¹⁴⁴



Figure 6.3 – Frank Lampard Photoshopped Poppy

In the event, those calling for poppies to be allowed on the England kit would get their wish – *almost*. On 9th November, a compromise was reached between FIFA and the FA whereby England would be allowed to wear poppies on black armbands instead of their shirts, thereby upholding

¹⁴² See, respectively, Matt Barlow, 'Let Us Honour Our Heroes: Desperate England Plead with FIFA to Do U-Turn on Poppies', Mail Online, 7 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2058707/England-plead-FIFA-U-turn-poppy-decision.html>; Sale and McDermott, 'Outcry as England Stars Are Banned from Having a Poppy on Their Kit'.

¹⁴³ George Cohen, quoted in Jeremy Wilson, 'England v Spain: Fabio Capello's Team Plan Own Remembrance Day Tribute after Fifa Ignore Poppy Pleas', The Telegraph, 8 November 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/8877926/England-v-Spain-Fabio-Capello-team-plan-own-Remembrance-Day-tribute-after-Fifa-ignore-poppy-pleas.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Glanfield, 'David Cameron Is Ridiculed after Downing Street Is Caught out PHOTOSHOPPING a Poppy onto His Facebook Picture... and Internet Jokers Have a Field Day'.

the laws of the game and allowing the nation to express itself vicariously through the team. The agreement came on a day which, in addition to featuring a protest by the EDL on the rooftop of FIFA's headquarters in Zurich, saw last minute written appeals to FIFA from both David Cameron and the Duke of Cambridge Prince William. The *Sun* quoted a 'senior Royal source' who said of the Prince: 'As a serving officer in the Armed Forces, who has lost friends and ancestors to conflict, he was particularly incensed.'¹⁴⁵ The decision to ban England from wearing poppies was, then, experienced by Prince William as an affront to his vicarious self-expression, and William had written in his capacity as President of the FA to 'express his dismay about the decision' and to state his 'strong view is that the poppy is a universal symbol of remembrance, which has no political, religious or commercial connotations.'¹⁴⁶

The compromise was received positively by many of the official parties to the controversy: Prince William who was said to be 'happy with this resolution', while an aide noted that the Prime Minister viewed it as 'a sensible way forward.'¹⁴⁷ The RBL, likewise, voiced its approval: 'the armband will do nicely'.¹⁴⁸ Others, however, were less magnanimous in their tone. The *Mirror* portrayed the compromise as 'Prince William's poppy victory', marking the conclusion of a metaphorical 'battle he was determined to win': 'Prince William didn't pull any punches.'¹⁴⁹ Similarly, while quoting more conciliatory voices, Charles Sale nevertheless celebrated 'FIFA's great poppy climbdown'.¹⁵⁰ The article also featured a photo [Figure 6.4] of England player Darren Bent wearing a t-shirt produced by kit manufacturer Umbro - for sale to the general public with proceeds being donated to the RBL - bearing the Three Lions emblem of the England football teams with the 10 roses normally interspersed between the lions replaced with 10 poppies. The photo - accompanied by the caption: 'England striker Darren Bent celebrated the FIFA climbdown over poppies last night by posing in a special T-shirt' - was intended to convey

¹⁴⁵ The Sun, 'Poppies Ban off as Wills Raps Blatter', The Sun, 9 November 2011, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/896843/poppies-ban-off-as-wills-raps-blatter/>.

¹⁴⁶ St James' Palace spokesperson, quoted in Press Association, 'Prince William Calls on Fifa to Overturn Ban on England Shirt Poppies'.

¹⁴⁷ St. James Palace spokesperson and Downing Street spokesperson, quoted in Duncan Larcombe, 'Prince William Forces FIFA Climbdown on Wearing Poppies', The Sun, 10 November 2011, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/898154/prince-william-forces-fifa-climbdown-on-wearing-poppies/>.

¹⁴⁸ Royal British Legion spokesperson, quoted in Simon Garner, 'Poppy Row: Fifa Back down to Allow Special England Black Armbands', Metro, 9 November 2011, <https://metro.co.uk/2011/11/09/popy-row-fifa-back-down-to-allow-special-england-black-armbands-213749/>.

¹⁴⁹ Mirror.co.uk, 'Prince William's Poppy Victory as Fifa Chiefs Are Forced to Back down', Mirror Online, 10 November 2011, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/prince-williams-popy-victory-as-fifa-90602>.

¹⁵⁰ These included former England goalkeeper Peter Shilton who stated 'I'm pleased there's been some sort of compromise because it is very important to the country that we remember those who died for us in wars'. Peter Shilton, quoted in Sale, 'Players WILL Honour War Heroes as FIFA Cave in... but Why Still No Poppy on the Shirt?'

jubilant towards England's victory over FIFA: if this was a 'poppy war', then the tabloid press wanted to make clear who had won.¹⁵¹



Figure 6.4 - The England Poppy T-Shirt

While taking credit for what it characterised as FIFA's capitulation, however, the *Mail* stopped short of expressing *emphatic* satisfaction at the outcome. Significantly, the headline of Sale's article read: '[p]layers WILL honour war heroes as FIFA cave in... but why still no poppy on the shirt?'¹⁵² It also quoted former England captain Ray Wilkins who expressed disappointment that the true object of desire had not been achieved: '[w]e should have a poppy on the shirt, never mind on an armband.'¹⁵³ Similarly, while *The Sun* emphasised the adversarial triumph of British royalty over 'stubborn soccer fatcats' ('Poppies ban off as Wills raps Blatter'), the 'Deck' line - '... but England must wear symbol on black armband' - reminded the reader that this was a bittersweet triumph.¹⁵⁴ These caveats sowed seeds of doubt: was this truly a satisfactory outcome? Had victory *really* been achieved? Although the photo of Darren Bent could be interpreted as a celebration of victory, it could also be read as projecting a fantasy of *what might have been*. The symbolism of incorporating the formerly prohibited poppy into the emblem of the England team was unobvious – poppies and remembrance were integral to 'our' national identity and part of who 'we' are. Their presence on

¹⁵¹ Sale.

¹⁵² Sale.

¹⁵³ Ray Wilkins, quoted in Sale.

¹⁵⁴ The Sun, 'Poppies Ban off as Wills Raps Blatter'.

the t-shirt served as a metaphor for the poppy as part of the fabric of the nation – a fantasy of fulfilment still denied by FIFA. Finally, the photo constituted - in a similar fashion to the photoshopped poppies - an act of defiance in the face of what some perceived as a foreign power's frustration of England's expression of self-articulation: one that readers were encouraged to participate in by purchasing the t-shirt themselves.¹⁵⁵

Poppy War' Redux: The 2016 FIFA Poppy Controversy

Ultimately, the controversy surrounding the 2011 match was highly significant in a way that the match itself – a lacklustre 0-1 England defeat by Spain - was not. As per the FA's promises, the poppy was visible throughout the stadium, but did not dominate proceedings. By contrast, the controversy prior to the match set an unofficial precedent around the geopolitical importance of both the poppy and the national football team as outlets for vicarious self-expression and sensitive focal points for the contestation of multiple and competing ontological insecurities. The incident would lead to renewed efforts to 'securitize subjectivity' aimed at establishing a sense of unified national selfhood through the identification of threatening others who might frustrate British fantasies of fulfilment. As Heath-Kelly has argued, attempts at bolstering ontological security in this manner frequently rely upon the pathological identification of 'enemy figurations as harbingers of catastrophe' to preserve the integrity of the narrative:

the functionality of securitisation is that of endlessly deferred gratification. The relationship between security actors and their threat object is fetishised; enemy objects serve as temporary manifestations within a libidinal economy, needing to be endlessly replaced by another such object.¹⁵⁶

As soon as one object of securitization begins to lose its discursive resonance - and even before the threat has been resolved - it tends to be replaced by another more compelling one.¹⁵⁷ This 'compulsion to experience the self as insecure' is the reason why '[s]ecurity never seems to make any progress.'¹⁵⁸ Although Heath-Kelly's focus is on the repetitive identification of violent extremist groups as existential threats to state security, similar dynamics are visible in poppy politics. As seen earlier, local media coverage of instances in which poppies have been allegedly prohibited have become such routine features of annual remembrance coverage that they are branded by some commentators as contrived.¹⁵⁹ But the Lacanian-inspired reading of security as

¹⁵⁵ Sale, 'Players WILL Honour War Heroes as FIFA Cave in... but Why Still No Poppy on the Shirt?'

¹⁵⁶ Heath-Kelly, 'Forgetting ISIS', 87.

¹⁵⁷ Heath-Kelly's focus here is on security discourses around groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS. Heath-Kelly, 'Forgetting ISIS'.

¹⁵⁸ Heath-Kelly, 85.

¹⁵⁹ In levelling such criticisms, some have pointed to what they see as the inauthenticity of 'synthetic' or 'phoney poppy apoplexy'. Respectively, see Alex Massie, 'The Great Poppy War of 2011', *The Spectator*, 9 November 2011, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2011/11/the-great-poppy-war-of-2011/>; Marina Hyde, 'Spare Us the Phoney Poppy Apoplexy', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2009/nov/05/poppy-appeal-premier-league> These

‘endlessly deferred gratification’, in which subjects’ ‘drive’ to avoid the ontological insecurity that would stem from the attainment of inevitably unsatisfying fantasy objects leads them to construct new threat objects allowing for the experience of the self as ‘insecure’, but nevertheless *alive* and *in motion*, similarly helps to explain the function of such stories.¹⁶⁰ Controversies are, to certain readers, reassuring in so far as they constitute the rhythmic routines of the nation, providing occasions for reasserting the vitality of the polity.

While it is unsurprising that the FIFA controversy triggered similar behaviour at the (inter)national level with regards to both the England team and the poppy, few could have anticipated quite how soon the national team would be made the subject of (in)security once again. Following the November 9th compromise, but before England had even taken to the field on November 12, some media outlets had already identified the next threat to national self-articulation. On November 11, the *Mail* and *Daily Express* published stories about an EU initiative encouraging the national sports teams of member-states to incorporate the European flag alongside national emblems into team kits and sporting events, explicitly referencing the context of the FIFA controversy.¹⁶¹ The *Mail* article titled ‘After Fifa poppy fiasco, the latest bright idea from Brussels? EU flag on England shirts’, tapped into similar anxieties by implying that ‘Eurocrats’, like FIFA, were actively seeking to infringe upon Britain’s national sporting self-expression by ruling that ‘*our* sporting heroes should wear the EU flag on their national team shirts.’¹⁶² It also noted the report’s recommendation that the EU flag appear at sporting events, with the article listing ‘the FA Cup Final, the Ashes series, Wimbledon and the British Grand Prix’ as quintessentially British institutions likely to be the subject of strong emotional attachments.

Despite acknowledging that the initiative was at the discretion of member states to implement, both articles implied that this concession had been forced by an ‘outcry’ from Eurosceptic MEPs, viewing the proposals as ‘the latest example of Brussels attempting to impose itself on Britain’s way of life.’¹⁶³ Objections centred on the report’s call to use sport as a way of fostering a pan-

criticisms may be partially correct insofar as much media coverage does seek to deliberately foment ontological insecurity as a way of boosting readerships, but those feelings of the readers themselves are often difficult to dismiss as fake – that readers’ anger and outrage may conceivably be unjustified or misplaced doesn’t necessarily mean that the feelings themselves are any less real.

¹⁶⁰ Heath-Kelly, ‘Forgetting ISIS’, 90–91; On the concept of ‘drive’, see Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 165–70.

¹⁶¹ Kirsty Walker, ‘After Fifa Poppy Fiasco, the Latest Bright Idea from Brussels? EU Flag on England Shirts’, Mail Online, 11 November 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2060167/EU-flag-England-shirts-The-latest-bright-idea-Brussels.html>; Alison Little, ‘Now Eurocrats Want to Fly Their Flag at Olympics’, Express.co.uk, 11 November 2011, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/283046/Now-eurocrats-want-to-fly-their-flag-at-Olympics>.

¹⁶² Notably, bureaucracy was emphasised despite the report being passed by democratically elected members of the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education. Walker, ‘After Fifa Poppy Fiasco, the Latest Bright Idea from Brussels? EU Flag on England Shirts’ (Emphasis added).

¹⁶³ Walker.

European identity, with UKIP MEP Paul Nuttall taking particular exception to ostensible attempts to subordinate national identities to a regional European one: '[a]thletes are proud to play for England or run for Great Britain, they have no love or allegiance to the EU so why should they be pushed to wear this flag of occupation on their jerseys?'¹⁶⁴ The initiative was especially provocative because 'foisting the EU flag on major contests' was seen as the EU telling 'us' what to do in 'our' own country.¹⁶⁵ These objections to symbolic 'occupation' were shared by Conservative MEP Emma McClarkin: '[t]he European flag means nothing to our fans and we do not want it anywhere near our teams' shirts. Nor do we want it flying over Wembley, Lord's or Wimbledon.'¹⁶⁶ The *Express* also portrayed the initiative as a cynical attempt by the EU to piggy-back on British sporting achievements – 'a blatant bid to hijack the 2012 Olympics.'¹⁶⁷ As well as objecting to any infringement on national identities and territory, both the *Express* and Nuttall were outraged that the EU might vicariously appropriate 'our' sporting exploits as its own.

This coverage helps to contextualise the 2011 FIFA controversy as fitting into a broader politics characterised by ontological insecurity in which routinized controversy has functioned to temporarily shore up chronically insecure national selfhood. The poppy had become a key reference point for these anxieties in the run up to the Brexit vote. Thus, just 5 months after the UK narrowly voted to leave the EU, few were surprised when the poppy was once again the subject of national controversy. Nevertheless, given the outcome of the 2011 controversy, when FIFA rejected a request in 2016 for the England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland men's football teams to be allowed to wear poppies on armbands as they had done in 2011, the subject of controversy was unexpected.

England v Scotland (11 November, 2016)

In some ways, the controversy unfolded along similar lines to the 2011 incident. FIFA's Secretary General, Fatma Samoura, like her predecessor, insisted upon the need for consistency in the application of the sporting regulations, claiming that the 2011 compromise did not apply in this case because the matches to be played over the period would be qualification matches for international tournaments, unlike the 2011 friendlies.¹⁶⁸ The reaction was also similar to the 2011 controversy, characterised by the consternation of politicians, veterans and sports personalities towards FIFA, and calls for defiance. FIFA was accused of hypocrisy and 'cold-blooded'

¹⁶⁴ Of course, there was an irony evident in Nuttall's choice of phrasing: subjects living in the UK frequently *do* switch between different identifications in different sporting contexts, apparently without many issues. Paul Nuttall MEP, quoted in Little, 'Now Eurocrats Want to Fly Their Flag at Olympics'.

¹⁶⁵ Little.

¹⁶⁶ Emma McClarkin MEP, quoted in Little.

¹⁶⁷ Little.

¹⁶⁸ 'England & Scotland FAs to Defy Poppy Ban despite Fifa Sanction Threat', BBC Sport, 2 November 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/37853386>.

insensitivity for failing to permit the poppy.¹⁶⁹ Prime Minister Theresa May described the refusal as ‘utterly outrageous’, taking particular displeasure at Britain being told what to do by an international organisation which had only a year before been mired in a corruption scandal, telling the House of Commons, ‘[b]efore [FIFA] start telling us what to do, they jolly well ought to sort their own house out.’¹⁷⁰ Additionally, May echoed her predecessor in denying that the poppy was political in any way, stating that ‘we want our players to be able to wear those poppies’.¹⁷¹ Once again ‘we’ were living through ‘our’ players.

However, certain themes that were present in 2011 took on new significance in the context of the Brexit, with some viewing the controversy through the lens of the politics around Britain’s exit from the EU. Much of the press and political reaction portrayed the incident as another example of Britain being dictated to by foreign bureaucrats, with comparisons between the FIFA and the EU now drawn closer to the surface.¹⁷² As James Moore noted in the *Independent*, the broader subtext of much of the reaction was clear: ‘Fifa and the EU, they’re just the same. They’re trying to do our proud nation down. Let’s get rid of the lot of them!’¹⁷³ This sentiment was compounded by the content of FIFA’s refusal which, as in 2011, had the unintended effect of adding insult to injury. In justifying the decision, Samoura noted that ‘Britain is not the only country that has been suffering from the result of war. The only question is why are we doing exceptions for just one country and not the rest of the world?’¹⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, Samoura’s comments were interpreted by the *Daily Express* as implying that ‘Britain’s war dead are not special enough to warrant poppy armbands’ - particularly inflammatory at a moment of national ontological insecurity around Britain’s global status.¹⁷⁵ Such anxieties were compounded by FIFA’s perceived inconsistency

¹⁶⁹ Jack Royston, Lynn Davidson, and Tess De La Mare, ‘3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match’, *The Sun*, 31 October 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/2088817/fury-as-cold-blooded-fifa-chiefs-ban-england-and-scotland-players-from-wearing-poppies-on-shirts-during-world-cup-qualifying-match/>.

¹⁷⁰ Prime Minister Theresa May, quoted in ‘Fifa Poppy Ban “utterly Outrageous” Says Theresa May’, *The Telegraph*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/02/fifa-popy-ban-utterly-outrageous-says-theresa-may/>.

¹⁷¹ Theresa May, quoted in Owen Gibson, ‘England and Scotland Players to Defy Fifa and Wear Poppies in Armistice Day Match’, *The Guardian*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/02/england-players-to-defy-fifa-ruling-and-wear-poppies-in-armistice-day-match>.

¹⁷² As Moore observed of one Leave.EU tweet about the controversy: “‘Lift the Poppy Ban, Fifa! Let Us Honour Our War Dead,’” Leave.EU said, over a collage of the home nations’ flags with a poppy in the left hand corner and the Leave.EU logo in the bottom right.’ James Moore, ‘Brexiters Are Making Fifa’s Point for Them by Politicising the Poppy’, *The Independent*, 4 November 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/remembrance-day-poppies-arron-banks-leaveeu-politicisation-eu-a7397161.html>.

¹⁷³ Moore.

¹⁷⁴ Fatma Samoura, quoted in Richard Conway, ‘England v Scotland: Fifa Says Poppy Ban Reports a “Distortion of Facts”’, *BBC Sport*, 11 November 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/37941626>.

¹⁷⁵ Alice Foster, ‘Who Is the FIFA Boss behind Poppy Ban? Samoura Scoffs UK “not Only Country” to Suffer War’, *Express.co.uk*, 3 November 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/sport/football/728388/Fatma-Samoura-who-is-Senegalese-FIFA-secretary-general-behind-popy-ban-football>.

over political symbols, with various media outlets noting that the Republic of Ireland team had worn a special kit commemorating the 1916 Easter Uprising, without objection from FIFA. This compounded latent suspicions that FIFA was discriminating against the British teams, with one *Sun* headline asking, ‘why it is OK to commemorate the Easter Rising but not the Battle of the Somme?’¹⁷⁶

While *The Sun* criticised FIFA for frustrating ‘a rare chance to unite in tribute to the war dead at a home international’ – other critics suggested that FIFA’s slight was particularly egregious because it too was a subject of remembrance discourse.¹⁷⁷ James Bond actor, Sir Roger Moore, for example, noted that ‘Fifa’s president is Swiss, its ex-president was also Swiss. They’ve been neutral for 400 or 500 years, so they don’t have any feelings about what it means to be killed or invalidated by war.’¹⁷⁸ Emphasising FIFA’s Swiss location was to insinuate that it was the beneficiary of freedoms that it had not ‘done its bit’ to protect. *The Sun* further expanded the poppy’s constituency, claiming that FIFA was forgetting ‘the great debt *the world* owes to footballers who were killed or injured fighting for freedom in two World Wars.’¹⁷⁹ Similarly, Falklands War veteran Simon Weston argued that because WW1 was a ‘global conflict fought by global nations against one or two countries because of the evil those countries were spreading’, the poppy was a universal symbol in which all nations could find meaning because the wars it commemorated had been fought on their behalf.¹⁸⁰ RBL Director-General, Charles Byrne, echoed this, claiming that ‘the red poppy is an international symbol worn around the world.’¹⁸¹ In reality, as Fox argues, the poppy’s British symbolism only ever resonated in a number of ‘Anglosphere’ nations - precisely because it became a British symbol of victory through sacrifice, which largely

¹⁷⁶ Jack Royston, ‘Poppy Cock-Eyed: As the Poppy Farce Continues, We Ask Why Is It OK to Commemorate the Easter Rising but Not the Battle of the Somme?’, *The Sun*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2104914/fa-popy-farce-why-it-is-ok-to-commemorate-the-easter-rising-but-not-the-battle-of-the-somme/>.

¹⁷⁷ Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare, ‘3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match’.

¹⁷⁸ Sir Roger Moore, quoted in Alain Tolhurst, Jack Royston, and Lynn Davidson, “Sort Your Own House out”: Theresa May Slams Fifa’s “Utterly Outrageous” Poppy Ban and Says England Players Should Be Free to Recognise Those “Who Gave Their Lives”, *The Sun*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2096593/theresa-may-slams-fifas-utterly-outrageous-popy-ban-and-says-england-players-should-be-free-to-recognise-those-who-have-given-their-lives/>.

¹⁷⁹ Martin Phillips, ‘Score Heroes: FIFA Officials’ Ban on Poppies from Being Worn on England Shirts Is a Slur on Brave Men Who Fought for Us in Two World Wars’, *The Sun*, 1 November 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/2096983/fifa-officials-ban-on-poppies-from-being-worn-on-england-football-shirts-is-a-slur-on-brave-men-who-fought-for-us-in-two-world-wars/>.

¹⁸⁰ Simon Weston, quoted in Royston, ‘Poppy Cock-Eyed: As the Poppy Farce Continues, We Ask Why Is It OK to Commemorate the Easter Rising but Not the Battle of the Somme?’

¹⁸¹ Charles Byrne, quoted in ‘Fifa Poppy Ban: Royal British Legion Demand Football Chiefs Lift Controversial Block’, *Express.co.uk*, 4 November 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/728949/Royal-British-Legion-demand-football-chiefs-lift-popy-ban>.

excluded the defeated.¹⁸² There is, however, an intriguing historical circularity in the poppy being deployed as a universal symbol in 2016, because ‘we’ won two World Wars.

While some viewed FIFA’s decision as deliberate discrimination against authentic British self-expression, not all shared this interpretation. FIFA itself denied accusations of inconsistency, with its disciplinary committee subsequently investigating and fining the Republic of Ireland team for the aforementioned incident.¹⁸³ Moreover, FIFA refuted the claim that it had ‘banned’ the symbol, clarifying that it had “reiterated” to the FAs that “only the independent disciplinary committee can decide” if the rules have been broken and what sanction should apply.¹⁸⁴ Domestic commentators also noted the irony of the British FAs protesting rules that they had themselves had a disproportionate role in making. While enforced by FIFA’s quasi-independent disciplinary committee, the laws of the game are made by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) – an organisation ‘comprised of the four British football associations [...] with one vote each, and FIFA, covering the remaining 207 national associations, with four votes. Passing a motion requires a three-quarters majority.’¹⁸⁵ As one blogger noted, British FAs having decision-making power equal to 207 other footballing nations and an effective veto over policies with which they disagree made the “how dare these pesky foreigners tell us what to do?” rhetoric look more than a little bit thin.¹⁸⁶

Even some critics of FIFA’s governance nevertheless emphasised that it was right to enforce the IFAB rules. As David Conn put it: ‘whisper it – you have to, beneath the barrage of furious indignation, bad temper, even declarations of “war”, from the prime minister down, over our gentle symbol of peace – but Fifa has a point about poppies.’¹⁸⁷ For prominent ‘Remainer’, Alastair Campbell, this specific dimension of the controversy provided a slightly different subtext. Writing in pro-remain magazine *The New European*, Campbell described the negative reaction as ‘all of a piece with the brutish, insular and intolerant post-referendum country we are in danger of becoming’, regarding it as an expression of Brexiteers’ desire to reassert Britain’s place at the top of the international order while seeking to extricate it from the order’s rules.¹⁸⁸ The irony in

¹⁸² Fox, ‘Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present’, 24.

¹⁸³ ‘FAI Fined by FIFA for Display of Easter Rising Symbol on Ireland Shirts’, RTE, 19 December 2016, <https://www.rte.ie/sport/soccer/2016/1219/839938-fai/>.

¹⁸⁴ FIFA spokesperson, quoted in Conway, ‘England v Scotland’.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Overview’, International Football Association Board (IFAB), accessed 6 December 2019, <https://www.theifab.com/overview/overview>.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas G. Clark, ‘Theresa May’s Display of Synthetic Poppy Outrage’, *Another Angry Voice* (blog), 3 November 2016, <https://anotherangryvoice.blogspot.com/2016/11/theresa-mays-display-of-synthetic-poppy.html>.

¹⁸⁷ David Conn, ‘Home Countries’ FAs Seeing Red over Poppies Could Have Been Avoided’, *The Guardian*, 19 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2016/dec/19/home-countries-fa-seeing-red-fifa-over-poppies-could-have-been-avoided>.

¹⁸⁸ Alastair Campbell, ‘Sorry, but Fifa Are Right about the Poppies, Says Alastair Campbell’, *The New European*, 11 November 2016, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/sorry-but-fifa-are-right-about-the-poppies-says-alastair-campbell-1-4773047>.

such aspirations, in Campbell's view, was that they risked undermining the cause for which those who fought during the Second World War ostensibly sacrificed themselves:

It is as though we want to fight to be allowed to remember our war dead in whatever way we want. But we forget the reason they died; just as so many seemed to forget why the EU came into being in the first place – to bring together in peace and prosperity great European nations whose history is largely defined by wars between them.¹⁸⁹

Here, then, the dead were vicariously invoked in defence of a different geopolitical vision; a 'rules-based' international order with European identity and values at its core.

In addition to criticism of FIFA's perceived interference in national remembrance, one further prominent Brexit theme incorporated into coverage of the 2016 FIFA controversy was the notion of betrayal from *within*. While present in some of the 2011 controversy, such sentiments had only emerged later in the episode when it appeared that the FA may go along with FIFA's ruling. By 2016, however, betrayal featured from the outset in media coverage. One headline published by the *Sun* on October 31st prominently declared '3 Lions led by donkeys'.¹⁹⁰ This was a play upon the phrase 'Lions led by donkeys' – a popular shorthand since the second half of the twentieth century, conveying a mythological understanding of the brave First World War Tommy as having been let down or betrayed by the callousness and/or foolhardiness of their military leaders. Combining the England team's 'nickname' – 'The Three Lions' – with this phrase conveyed the idea of the controversy as a metaphorical war, once again casting the England men's football team as militarised vicarious proxies for 'us', as well as decrying the FA's betrayal of its brave troops.

As in 2011, however, exactly *who* had been betrayed and *how* was often ambiguous. There were suggestions that the team itself had been let down, and press outlets once again highlighted the views of players and officials consonant with the dominant narrative of national outrage, such as England manager Gareth Southgate, who said that the poppy was 'part of our identity as a nation'.¹⁹¹ This time, however, in line with growing anxieties about 'poppy fascism' some voices dissented from this view. As well as expressing concern that the incident had 'commercialised the poppy', pundit and former England player Danny Mills expressed concerns that the wishes of England players had been largely overlooked in the controversy: 'what if an England player doesn't want to wear that poppy? He may well be vilified; he may well have personal reasons for that [stance], so I think it's very much a personal choice.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Campbell.

¹⁹⁰ Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare, '3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match'.

¹⁹¹ Gareth Southgate, quoted in Conway, 'England v Scotland'.

¹⁹² Danny Mills, quoted in Conway; This view was notably glossed over by tabloid press coverage of the issue, with the *Daily Star* instead focusing ridicule upon Mills' suggestion that England players who wished could wear a poppy as a temporary tattoo on their hands as a way of showing respect while adhering to the laws of the game. Harry Kemble, 'England v Scotland: Ex-Prem Star's Bizarre Solution to

To the extent that the opinions of footballers themselves did feature, they were often given less prominence than war veterans, who were, as in 2011, frequently invoked in opposition to FIFA's decision. The aforementioned *Sun* article continued the war metaphor by claiming that veterans had taken particular offence at the FA's handling of the situation: '[v]eterans trained their guns on the FA as the body looked poised to cave in to Fifa's poppy demands.'¹⁹³ As well as the analogous casting of the FA as the British government to FIFA's EU, this phrasing also subtly invoked the negatively resonant language of appeasement – synonymous in British culture with the placation of Hitlerian fascism. Accordingly, when the article encouraged 'patriotic readers to let them know of their anger' by signing a petition started in conjunction with RAF veteran John Nichol to 'allow the England and Scottish players to wear their poppy with pride', Nichol himself stated that '[t]his is a chance to show how much we as a society care about the work these heroes do — and we cannot let Fifa or the FA diminish that.'¹⁹⁴ Thus in addition to casting the public as another constituency that stood to be betrayed by the decision, their anger was addressed to both FIFA as foreign interlopers *and the FA* who might possibly let 'us' down.

Despite early claims of its 'betrayal', the FA had written to FIFA weeks before *The Sun* first broke the story declaring the England team's intention to follow the precedent it believed had been set in 2011 with the armband compromise. And when FIFA reiterated the laws of the game, the FA stated on November 2nd its intention to proceed as originally planned.¹⁹⁵ Despite this consistent stance, the form that defiance would take became the object of intense scrutiny, centring on lingering dissatisfaction with the 2011 compromise which, in the *Sun*'s words, saw the poppy 'relegated off players' shirts and worn on black armbands instead'.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, the paper described Simon Weston, as having 'told the [FA] to swallow any potential fine rather than sacrifice the commemoration of British troops for a *second time*'.¹⁹⁷ The claim that this would be the *second time* that war commemoration had been sacrificed by the FA was significant in denying the 2011 compromise as adequate to the realisation of national self-articulation. This dissatisfaction was vividly portrayed in a photo (Figure 6.5) published in another *Sun* article on 2nd November. The photo showed England captain Wayne Rooney, with a poppy photoshopped onto his kit between the England crest and manufacturer's logo - in the same way as it had been in the *Mail* in 2011 – with a smaller photo of the armband compromise worn by England in 2011, superimposed in the bottom right-hand corner. Two lines of text were superimposed on the image: one read 'what FA

Poppy Row Is Absolutely Bonkers', *Dailystar.co.uk*, 4 November 2016,

<https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/poppy-debate-danny-mills-england-17057315>.

¹⁹³ Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare, '3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match'.

¹⁹⁴ John Nichol, quoted in Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare.

¹⁹⁵ Gibson, 'England and Scotland Players to Defy Fifa and Wear Poppies in Armistice Day Match'.

¹⁹⁶ Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare, '3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match'.

¹⁹⁷ Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare (emphasis added).

decided’ and was accompanied by an arrow pointing to the armband solution; the other read ‘what we want’, with its own arrow pointing to the photoshopped poppy at the centre of Rooney’s shirt. This time, readers were told, only poppies on shirts would do; anything less would amount to betrayal by the FA.



Figure 6.5 – *The Sun’s* Poppy Demand

Others, such as former Chelsea footballer Jason Cundy, went even further in suggesting how the FA should defy FIFA:

I’d stick two fingers up at FIFA. I would go one step further: [...] we have a crest – I would embroid[er] a poppy in that crest. There are roses in there, why not – if the FA want to take it one step further, and actually say ‘you know what, we’re going to take control of our crest: this going to be our future’ – I would change that; I would put a poppy on there and I’d like to see them try to stop that.¹⁹⁸

Here, Cundy was articulating what the *Mail* had depicted in 2011 with the image of the Umbro t-shirt bearing the England emblem with its roses replaced by poppies. And the symbolism once again portrayed the poppy – and its militarist associations – as an inseparable part of the nation, with the image serving as an act of defiance and a fantasy of what would be possible if only ‘we’ were free to act as we wished without foreign interference and the FA selling ‘us’ short.

Notably, the FA had chosen the armband solution to minimise the chances of England being docked points which might jeopardise the team’s chances of qualifying for the World Cup. Whilst it was attempting to act in the best interests of fans, striking was how frequently the compromise was described by some fans as letting them down. FIFA’s perceived slight certainly did invite further thinly veiled comparisons with Britain’s alleged victimisation by the EU, with ‘John’ from

¹⁹⁸ Good Morning Britain, *England and Scotland to Defy FIFA Poppy Ban* | *Good Morning Britain*, YouTube, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMclstqOtg0>.

Swindon's comment on a *Mail* article - '[y]et another non entity telling us what we can and can't do in our Country' - 'liked' 4080 times.¹⁹⁹ Often, however, the target for public opprobrium was the FA, variously accused of betraying 'the fans',²⁰⁰ the nation, and war veterans – including the military contribution made by footballers of the past. 'Big Stevo' for instance, commented:

Sickening considering hundreds of players and team-mates joined up together as 'Pals battalions' during the great war...there are many grounds with war memorials to former players who gave their lives in the service of their country.... [...] the FA should be ashamed of themselves.²⁰¹

Such discontent was frequently accompanied by calls for the FA to 'stand up' for England. For some, such as 'Steve Barnes' this was a point of principle, even comparing resistance with Britain's wartime exploits: 'DISGUSTING - it is time to stand up and fight for what is right - just like our ancestors did who lay before us.'²⁰² The message in such comments was clear: England was being dictated to by a foreign power and the FA must, as a matter of national pride, stand up for its team and resist FIFA.

However, precisely what 'standing up' entailed in practice varied considerably. An exchange on the *Daily Mail* website demonstrated disagreements about how far the FA should be willing to go. Some viewed the controversy as sufficiently meaningful as to merit England boycotting the match – no small matter in a nation where football is sometimes described as the 'national religion'. For others, however, the preferred form of resistance was for the teams to wear poppies during the match, without heed to the risk of being docked points.²⁰³ While 'winter is coming' implored the FA to '[j]ust ignore FIFA and wear them anyway. What are they going to do', others such as 'J. Edgar Dustpan' felt the potential penalty was not worth risking: '[s]uppose they give us a points deduction and we fail to qualify. Would you be happy with that outcome 'because our players got to wear a poppy on TV for 90 minutes'?'²⁰⁴ This response generated a negative response ('liked' 4 times and 'disliked' 52 times); and 'bluenose' like many others did not care for this suggestion: 'J Edgar: spoken like a true coward.' (liked 41 times, disliked 0 times).²⁰⁵ Visible in such exchanges is the way in which showing defiance in face of perceived external interference came to be portrayed as an act of courage, with the possibility of England being docked points and

¹⁹⁹ 'John, Swindon', Re: Thomas Burrows and Richard Spillett, 'FA Bosses Say They Will Defy FIFA's Ban on Poppies', Mail Online, 2 November 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~/article-3897266/index.html>.

²⁰⁰ 'Rebecca Rose', for example, wrote: 'FA stand up for your countries or FA will just stand for F*** All. Betray your country once and you'll do it again and again and again. Hang your heads in shame and you had better run if you see any fans.' See, 'Rebecca Rose' Re: Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare, '3 Lions Led By Donkeys: Fury as Cold-Blooded Fifa Chiefs Ban England and Scotland Players from Wearing Shirts during World Cup Qualifying Match'.

²⁰¹ 'Big Stevo' Re: Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare.

²⁰² 'Steve Barnes' (2016) Re: Royston, Davidson, and De La Mare.

²⁰³ Burrows and Spillett, 'FA Bosses Say They Will Defy FIFA's Ban on Poppies'.

²⁰⁴ 'J. Edgar Dustpan' Re: Burrows and Spillett.

²⁰⁵ 'bluenose' Re: Burrows and Spillett.

consequently failing to reach the World Cup constituting a vicarious sacrifice that the whole nation would share in as a point of principle.

The team's transgressive participation in the match would also allow fans to play their part in the spectacle. As it became clear that neither side would back down, the match day build-up focused on how fans planned to make a statement through their individual and collective acts of remembrance. One *Mirror* article showcased the lengths to which Scottish fans travelling to Wembley had gone to show defiance to FIFA, featuring photos of Scottish flags and supporters clothing embossed with poppies and remembrance leitmotifs such as 'lest we forget'.²⁰⁶ This was aided by commercial opportunism, with retailer, JD Sports, selling England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland football jerseys ahead of the fixtures with poppies appended at their centre – much as the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* had fantasised.²⁰⁷ It was not apparently enough that the fans could wear poppies – they demanded vicarious expression through the national team, without which claims to geopolitical agency may be brought into question. This generated a kind of vicarious feedback: if fans could not live through their players as they so desired, then their players would have to live through fans wearing the idealised jerseys on their behalf. And this was promoted by the English FA itself, with fans attending the match at Wembley, arriving to find t-shirts bearing poppies on their seats for them to wear during the match.

England and Scotland eventually defied the rules by wearing poppy armbands during their uneventful fixture, incurring fines – though not the feared points deduction – from FIFA shortly afterwards. Although the English FA announced its intention to appeal its £35,000 fine at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, updated guidance on Law 4 issued by FIFA in 2017 meant that the fine would never be paid.²⁰⁸ The guidance effectively legalised kits adorned with symbols 'commemorating a significant national or international event', on the proviso that the consent of the opposing team and match organisers was secured. This development led the *Telegraph* to declare 'The Poppy War is over'; it did not, however, prevent the tabloid press and some fans

²⁰⁶ Matt Lawless, 'Scotland Fans Mark Armistice Day Tributes with Poppy Flags in London Ahead of England Game at Wembley', *Mirror Online*, 11 November 2016, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/scotland-fans-mark-armistice-day-9238835>.

²⁰⁷ This move was particularly significant for Welsh and Northern Irish fans in light of the decision of their respective FAs not to wear poppies in order to avoid being docked points which might jeopardise the nation's qualifying campaigns – a much greater risk than for the England team which historically tends to coast through its qualifying campaigns. In this light, the commercial availability of Welsh and Northern Irish jerseys emblazoned with poppies became a means by which fans could, in the face of their FAs' perceived cowardice, express themselves and achieve some semblance of cathartic fulfilment. Jonny Bell, 'IFA U-Turn on Poppy Ban for Northern Ireland Fans Team Shirts', *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 November 2016, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/ifa-u-turn-on-poppy-ban-for-northern-ireland-fans-team-shirts-35204195.html>; See also Patrick Gysin, 'Another Fine Mess: Wales Will Not Wear Poppies during World Cup Qualifier for Fear of Being Fined by Fifa', *The Sun*, 11 November 2016, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/2162700/wales-will-not-wear-poppies-during-world-cup-qualifier-for-fear-of-being-fined-by-fifa/>.

²⁰⁸ Mark Slater, 'FA Claims Victory in Poppy Row over Players Wearing Commemorative Poppies as Fifa Backs down on Ban', *The Independent*, 25 September 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/football-poppy-ban-fa-fifa-a7965206.html>.

from baulking at the requirement that England would have to seek FIFA's permission.²⁰⁹ Although it briefly seemed that gratification would again be deferred, however, even critics such as Charles Sale were largely placated when the German team itself not only consented to England wearing poppies,²¹⁰ but agreed to wear poppies themselves. President of the German Football Association, Reinhard Grindel 'positively welcome[d] the decision' adding that poppies 'are not about political propaganda in any way'.²¹¹ While the presence of the aforementioned 'Christmas Truce' statue outside the stadium reinforced this apolitical conciliatory tone, however, the poppy's increasingly common political associations with national reassertion meant that, for some at least, both teams wearing poppies symbolized a geopolitical victory – even if the match itself was a draw.

Conclusion

I have argued that at stake in both FIFA controversies around the poppy was much more than the liberty of England players themselves. I have argued that both the public reaction to FIFA's decisions and press outlets' recourse to war metaphors in constructing the controversies can be understood as manifestations of, and responses to, growing ontological insecurity since the mid-2000s' over questions of national identity and self-expression. Such anxieties have frequently coalesced around the poppy, as visible in the growing sensitivity around the symbol in domestic football, and its prominence in public debate around Brexit. These anxieties were stimulated by FIFA's 2011 and 2016 reluctance to allow the symbol, leading to the England men's team being cast as the nation's vicarious proxies, and poppy-wearing framed as a matter of national self-articulation. Importantly, such dynamics were enabled by media portrayals' temporary suspension of discursive distinctions between military and sporting subjectivities.

The chapter has contributed to the thesis by exploring the broader functions of vicarious identifications with the nation's past military exploits in justifying multiple geopolitical stances.

²⁰⁹ This deferred gratification - echoing 2011 and 2016 - was reflected in the headline of a Daily Express article stating 'England WILL wear poppies for Germany game - but had to ask permission from FIFA' Vickiie Oliphant, 'England WILL Wear Poppies for Germany Game - but Had to Ask Permission from FIFA', Express.co.uk, 31 October 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/873526/Poppies-England-football-team-wembley-FIFA-popy-ban-remembrance-sunday-2017-armistice-FA>; And a Daily Mirror pointed to fan 'disgust' expressed on Twitter at having to ask FIFA's permission to wear the symbol. Matt Lawless, "'Absolutely Disgusting": Fans Furious as England Forced to Ask Permission to Wear Poppies against Germany', Mirror Online, 30 October 2017, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/england-request-permission-fifa-wear-11433501>.

²¹⁰ Charles Sale, 'FIFA to Allow England to Wear Poppy against Germany as They Come to Their Senses over Annual Controversy', Mail Online, 24 September 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/article-4915524/FIFA-allow-England-wear-popy-against-Germany.html>.

²¹¹ Reinhard Grindel, quoted in Jack Austin, 'Germany to Join England in Wearing Poppies on Their Armbands Ahead of Armistice Day', The Independent, 8 November 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/england-germany-poppies-black-arambands-armistice-day-wembley-friendly-a8043471.html>.

Particularly notable has been the tendency for some to deploy the symbolism of the poppy not only to assert their superior authenticity over other citizens, but in order to assert claims to Britain's privileged *geopolitical* subjectivity over other nations and organisations, and a concurrent right for Britain to exempt itself from international rules. While the experience of two World Wars remains a focal point in British discourse for the *global* power and rights some Britons believe it confers, what is significant is the extent to which many other nations have already moved on.²¹² No matter how much social capital a particular act might confer, one cannot keep trading on it forever without risking being perceived as parochial; and with Britain's 2020 departure from the EU, Britons may be about to find out just how limited that currency is across the world.

A further contribution has been to apply the thesis' conceptual framework to understanding how vicarious militarism in war commemoration also involves living through those in the present – in this case, the England football team's display of defiance. Here, it has also highlighted the highly problematic politics of instrumentalising players without due regard for their own personal views. Notably, it has been beyond the chapter's scope to consider the different significances of the poppy controversies to the other nations of the United Kingdom, but given continuing anxieties about the viability of the Union itself, the evolution of the poppy's meaning as a symbol of national self-expression is likely to continue to be highly relevant, and its differing meanings across the British Isles ripe for further study. The potential of the conceptual framework advanced by this thesis in understanding vicarious militarism is a subject of greater reflection in the thesis conclusion, to which we now turn.

²¹² On an anecdotal level, when I presented a paper about the poppy at the British International Studies Association conference in 2019, a delegate who had grown up in South Africa remarked upon how marginal the experiences of the two World Wars was to its national discourse.

7. Conclusion

'Tradition' and 'heritage' – its dead people's baggage; quit carrying it.'

"Did you make it up?"

- *"No, it was passed on to me-"*

"Pass it back."

Doug Stanhope¹

Stanhope's brief rejoinder to the sketch with which this thesis began (see Introduction) illustrates one person's frustration with vicarious identification, as well as the hope that we might cast off tradition as 'dead people's baggage'. However, what we have seen in this thesis are some of the key reasons why vicarious identifications are attractive to subjects of different kinds, and why Stanhope's desire for his imagined companion to disavow their subjective inheritance is unlikely to be realized any time soon.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is twofold. Firstly, it summarises the main argument of the thesis and its theoretical and empirical contributions. Secondly, it points to several additional questions beyond those that it has been possible to address fully in this thesis. This forms the basis for reflection upon how the study of vicarious militarism in war commemoration might be broadened and deepened in scope, particularly in exploring how vicarious identification could equally inform a kind of vicarious anti-military subjectivity. While the politics of war commemoration provides a rich avenue for future study in its own right however, the final task of the chapter is in emphasizing that the scope for exploring 'vicarious militarism' is broader still, suggesting three potentially fruitful avenues for such a study.

The thesis began by observing that while vicarious dynamics in the politics of British war commemoration have become increasingly visible and the subject of popular reflection, IR and CMS scholars, with a few notable exceptions, have not devoted significant attention to vicariousness in world politics. The aim of the thesis, then, was to address dynamics that have largely remained 'hidden in plain sight',² by exploring the motivations behind, and stakes of, vicarious invocation of a military past. To this end, I have contributed a theoretical framework

¹ From 'National Pride', in Milton Lage, *Doug Stanhope: No Refunds*, DVD, Documentary, Comedy (Levity Productions, 2007).

² Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 58.

drawing upon, and further developing, scholarship in the fields of Critical Military Studies (CMS) and Ontological Security Studies (OSS).

Chapter 1 began by unpacking the research question through debates around militarism and militarization, pertaining to the imbrication of subjects desiring military power in myriad ways. While noting the significant contributions of CMS scholarship to understanding military power, the chapter identified two areas for further development. The first was an account of motivation that identified the underpinnings of militarised desire. Here, I pointed to the hitherto largely undeveloped potential of conceptualizing insecurity not in the conventional ‘physical’ sense, but as *existential anxiety*, for understanding what drives subjects to desire militarism. Secondly, by exploring scholarship on militarised subjectivity and military masculinities, the chapter pointed to the limits of desiring military subjectivity imposed by the hierarchical nature of social order – especially for civilians, whose navigation of militarised social hierarchies has received only limited scholarly attention. While agreeing with Millar that subjects are motivated by ‘civilian anxiety’ to engage in support for ‘the troops’ which serves to reinforce the boundaries between civilian ‘selves’ and military ‘others’, I argued that CMS scholarship has paid insufficient attention to alternative ways in which civilians might claim military subjectivity that transcend the boundaries of self/other, suggesting vicarious dynamics as a fruitful avenue for research.

Chapter 2 addressed the first area by turning to the literature on ontological (in)security to provide an account of motivation and subjectivity. Whereas ontological security has become, for many IR scholars, a useful way of conveying the high stakes of maintaining identity stability, I have argued that this interpretation risks dramatically curtailing its broader analytical purchase. To make this case, I provided close readings of Giddens’ and Laing’s foundational texts on the concept, as well as an overview of a recent wave of critical scholarship drawing upon a Lacanian-inspired reading of the subject as radically de-centered. This reading emphasised that aspirations to identity stability are not only dangerous but fail to recognize the always incomplete nature of subjectivity. Moreover, it argued that anxiety is not only unleashed by critical situations - manifesting in attempts to re-establish stability - but is also generated by feelings of existential meaninglessness in late modernity, leading to countervailing attempts to lead a meaningful existence. Of course, such endeavours are inescapably social, entailing that ontological security is not simply the search for stability, but the search for self-esteem and social recognition in the context of hierarchical social order. Negotiating hierarchies is partly about establishing one’s social belonging; but it also frequently involves articulating distinctive claims to authentic subjectivity.

The preoccupation of both CMS and OSS with pejorative othering has largely deflected attention away from questions of how subjects relate to one another more positively, and even seek in certain cases to dissolve the boundaries between self and other. Chapter 3 sought to address this lacuna by contributing to nascent work on ‘vicarious identity (promotion)’ in IR. It did so by

developing the concepts of *vicarious militarism* and *vicarious military subjectivity* to understand the myriad ways in which militarism is sustained by civilian subjects living through military ones – past and present. In line with the account of late modernity developed in Chapter 2, claims to vicarious military subjectivity were interpreted as attempts to mitigate anxieties around meaninglessness by imbuing an everyday that is perceived to be existentially lacking with ontological significance. Historically, militarism has been portrayed as the solution to the perceived social malaise and emasculation of modern life. The militarization of British society during the War on Terror has been no exception, simultaneously fomenting ‘civilian anxiety’ and portraying support for militarism as a way of assuaging ontological insecurities by vicariously re-engaging with the nation’s authentic essence. And the emphasis of such discourses on the idealised experiences of the two World Wars – coupled with the lack of lived military experience - has encouraged Britons to engage with genealogical connections to articulate vicarious military subjectivities. Thus, the thesis advances scholarship in CMS and Ontological Security Studies by making a theoretical contribution that moves beyond conventional bifurcations of self and other, to explore identity convergence. It also contributes novel insights about the temporal dimensions of military subjectivities.

The remaining chapters primarily functioned to substantiate this theoretical argument; but they also tell a bigger story about the role of war commemoration in a particularly tumultuous period for British politics, providing a range of empirical insights. To illustrate the centrality of an idealized military past to contemporary narratives of national identity, Chapter 4 explored efforts during the Centenary to rehabilitate the image of the First World War - a war that has typically served as the cautionary tale of modern war’s futility and tragedy. These efforts both enabled, and were reinforced by, the promotion of militarised vicarious identification, which became a key public engagement strategy during the Centenary. Crucially, they resonated with ontological security-seeking strategies: ancestral connections were incorporated into autobiographical narratives and routines, providing descendants with a sense of vicarious military subjectivity that mitigated feelings of personal meaninglessness. In addition to exploring the political functions of vicarious identity promotion, the chapter also contributed to historiographic debates about the place of the First World War in British culture. Whereas scholarship prior to the centenary had argued that prevailing cultural understandings of the war reproduced themes of futility, horror, and reckless waste, I have suggested that efforts to rehabilitate the war may have resulted in a shift towards interpretations more conducive to militarism – not least vicarious pride. This argument also contributes to nascent projects on Critical Security History and the role of kinship in IR, providing greater understanding of how hegemonic ontologies of security are mediated

through the macro and micro-political transmission of historical understanding – not least, through genealogical connections.³

As we have also seen, however, invocations of ‘ancestral’ connections have not been the preserve of individuals; corporate organisations too have turned to the past as a way of responding to growing anxieties and consumer skepticism in late modernity. Although previous scholarship has explored the corporate use of militarised nostalgia to sell products,⁴ what the approach to vicarious identification has added to these is a novel focus on corporate claims to have actually played a part in an idealized military past and how such claims influence the ontological security of those identifying with, for example, Great Western Railway and the England men’s Rugby Team. The key move of Chapter 5 was to explore the highly-contested nature of such claims given the relatively exclusive status of military subjectivities. Accordingly, the perceived appropriation of commemorative symbols associated with militarism can be the cause of unease, whether stemming from concerns around taste and even militarization, or a desire to maintain the discursive boundaries between civilian and military subjectivities. In this context, individual or organizational ties with past military exploits are routinely invoked to demonstrate authentic connections with militarism, and to legitimise appropriating particular symbols.

Finally, Chapter 6 argued that vicarious military subjectivity matters because it frequently forms the foundation upon which claims to privileged geopolitical subjectivity are based. As anxieties have grown around Britain’s place in the world, and the viability of the Union itself, the poppy emblem has become a locus for debates around national self-expression. Poppy-wearing has been portrayed as a way of reinforcing a sense of homogenous national identity at home, and a way to remind the world of the debt ostensibly owed to Britain due to the two World Wars. These meanings and functions were particularly evident when ostensibly challenged by FIFA’s 2011 and 2016 refusals to allow the England men’s football team to wear poppies, leading the controversy to be framed as a question of national self-assertion in the face of foreign diktats – particularly resonant in the light of growing Euroscepticism among the British public that led ultimately to the 2016 Brexit vote. In addition to individual and corporate vicarious military subjectivities drawing upon the nation’s past, the chapter analysed mediatized constructions of the England team as a vicarious proxy for the nation. The controversy became a metaphorical war over British geopolitical self-articulation, with national ontological security at stake. This framing saw the temporary suspension of distinctions between military and sporting heroisms to allow ‘our’

³ On Critical Security History, see Steele, ‘Critical Security History and Hiroshima’; Donnelly and Steele, ‘Critical Security History’; On Kinship in IR, see Haugevik and Neumann, *Kinship in International Relations*.

⁴ Tidy, ‘Forces Sauces and Eggs for Soldiers’; Susan T. Jackson, ‘“Selling” National Security: Saab, YouTube, and the Militarized Neutrality of Swedish Citizen Identity’, *Critical Military Studies* 5, no. 3 (2019): 257–75.

geopolitical representatives to uphold national identity through the defiant display of a symbol associated with events upon which broader claims to geopolitical subjectivity depended.

Overall, these chapters applied the thesis' conceptual framework at multiple levels, demonstrating the centrality of vicarious military subjectivity to contemporary British politics. What the thesis provides is a more detailed understanding of militarism's emotional resonance, suggesting that symbols such as the poppy are at the heart of symbolic order upon which many depend for their social capital and sense of *ontological security*. Despite many genealogical connections being treated as natural and broader pretensions to the apolitical status of remembrance, this thesis has demonstrated that vicarious identifications are *always already* intensely political. In the process, it has touched upon some problematic functions of the vicarious politics of remembrance. One is the tendency of organisations to promote militarised vicarious identification by foreclosing more critical reflection upon Britain's national past and present – not least its deeply gendered and racialized power relations. A consequence of this is the tendency to deploy vicarious military subjectivity as social currency, as a debt to be called in for geopolitical gain, which perpetuates colonial imaginaries. Such invocations problematically instrumentalise other subjects in the present, in ways that presume their assent for militarised agendas and deny them agency.

Where Next? A Research Agenda for the Study of Vicarious Militarism

Having summarized the main arguments and contributions of the thesis, the remainder of the chapter acknowledges some of the unanswered questions raised by it as a means to outlining several potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

Firstly, it is clear that the subject matter remains as relevant in 2020 as it was during the 2014-18 First World War centenary and is unlikely to diminish any time soon. Since 2018, national attention has already turned to commemorations marking the 75th anniversaries of D-Day and VE Day in 2019 and 2020 respectively.⁵ Indeed, such is the contemporary public compulsion for commemoration – of wars, terrorist attacks, or disasters - that at times it feels as if one is replaying the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in real time.⁶ And while these more recent events have lacked the numerical significance of the centenary, their significance has derived from their billing

⁵ The latter had particular resonance at a time when many Britons were confined to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the 'Blitz spirit' serving as a frequent reference point for resilience in the face of national emergency. On this phenomenon, see Sylvia Jaworska, 'Talk of War in COVID-19 Coverage May Be Hiding Testing Failings', *Connecting Research* (blog), 21 April 2020, <https://research.reading.ac.uk/research-blog/talk-of-war-in-covid-19-coverage-may-be-hiding-testing-failings/>.

⁶ Heath-Kelly has referred to the recent trend towards memorialising terrorist attacks as 'memorial overload' Charlotte Heath-Kelly, 'Why Refusing to Build Memorials for Terror Attacks Is a Bold Political Statement', *The Conversation*, 6 July 2016, <http://theconversation.com/why-refusing-to-build-memorials-for-terror-attacks-is-a-bold-political-statement-61556>.

as some of the final opportunities for the ‘greatest generation’ to tell their own stories and for the nation to thank veterans directly. As the Second World War generation gradually passes into individual and collective memory, the imperative of remembrance is likely to be emphasised more stridently by those with political interests in the war’s narration. Indeed, the 2014-18 commemorations have already been viewed by some as a rehearsal for the centenary of the Second World War in 2039-45.⁷ Given that all participants of the war will be dead by the centenary, this will likely once again place emphasis on genealogical and *vicarious* engagement.

One avenue for development is therefore to explore how practices of vicarious identification in war commemoration change over time. In Chapter 4, for instance, I briefly noted the Royal British Legion’s sale of an ever-growing range of Poppy brooches commemorating specific events, regiments, or endeavours. These are, of course, responsive to subjects’ attempts to achieve ontological security by conveying distinctiveness and personal connection with those commemorated – even if they ironically channel such impulses through *mass* consumption. However, this trend is also suggestive of the increasingly expansive nature of commemorative culture, incorporating a growing range of experiences. Military experiences previously overlooked, either because they were undertaken in wars that did not reach the level of public awareness, or were felt to be insufficiently near the ‘tip of the spear’ of warfare, are now increasingly the subject of recognition.⁸ Poppies commemorating ‘codebreakers’ and the ‘Women of WW2’ have seemingly broadened the basis for articulating vicarious military subjectivity. While such moves may valuably broaden understandings of war beyond the figure of the combat soldier, however, there is a risk that they may effectively transform ever more diverse occasions into opportunities to reaffirm militarised hierarchies. This risk has been compounded by the RBL’s recent decision to broaden remembrance to commemorate emergency services and the victims of terrorism – the former being particularly pertinent in light of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Thus, there is a need for scholarship to be attentive to the range of subjectivities that might form the basis for future claims to vicarious military subjectivity.

⁷ Lucy Buckerfield and Steve Ballinger, ‘The People’s Centenary: Tracking Public Attitudes to the First World War Centenary 2013-2018’ (London: British Future, 2019), 24.

⁸ This can also be seen in calls in 2014 for a National Defence Medal to be awarded to veterans who never saw ‘active service’. Christopher Hope, ‘Millions of Veterans Who Never Saw Action Should Get a Medal, MPs to Hear’, *The Telegraph*, 9 November 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11213611/Millions-of-veterans-who-never-saw-action-should-get-a-medal-MPs-to-hear.html>.

⁹ ‘Red Poppies to Mark Civilian Victims of War and “Acts of Terrorism”’, *BBC News*, 16 October 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-50068785>; While events such as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and discourses around the heroism of medical staff might be seen as paving the way for civilian heroism to challenge the hegemony of military heroism, notable is the extent to which the military have still been deliberately positioned at front and centre of the efforts, and also of the initiatives to show gratitude. This was evident, for example, in the national coverage of the NHS fundraising efforts of WW2 veteran Captain (Subsequently Major Sir) Tom Moore and the military flypasts choreographed to coincide with his 100th birthday. ‘Coronavirus: RAF Flypast for Captain Tom’s 100th Birthday’, *BBC News*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-52453194>.

Perhaps the most obvious way of developing the study of vicarious military subjectivity is through comparative analysis across different local, national, regional, and cultural contexts. Jay Winter's study of the evolution of European national cultures of war commemoration over the Twentieth Century provides one possible template for such a study.¹⁰ But this thesis has hinted at a number of other comparative avenues. Chapter 6, for example, briefly noted that there may also be a Commonwealth dimension to war commemoration around the poppy, providing an interesting opportunity to explore vicarious identification along cultural as well as national lines. But it is also crucial to broaden the study of vicarious militarism in war commemoration beyond Eurocentric and Anglocentric concerns altogether, to explore myriad configurations and experiences of vicarious military subjectivity.

In addition to exploring vicarious military subjectivity across different contexts, however, there is a pressing need to consider the alternative possibilities and political trajectories of vicarious identification with military ancestors. This thesis has demonstrated that vicarious military subjectivity has, for example, been invoked by different actors to both justify and oppose Brexit, thereby affirming the authenticity and authority of military subjectivities. However, as the late twentieth century hegemony of negative interpretations of the First World War illustrates, there is nothing inevitable about vicarious *pride* (as opposed to anger or regret) being the dominant emotion derived from genealogical connections with war. Rather, what preserves war commemoration's broad appeal as a basis for militarised vicarious identification is the deliberate reproduction of homogenised, and sanitised narrations of Britain's wars and history, shorn of their complexity and violence.¹¹ There are some, however, who resist their ancestors' incorporation into such frameworks. Journalist Adam Ramsay, for example, tweeted: 'My great grandfather was blown to pieces on the first day of Ypres [...] and he didn't die for my freedom or yours. He died for the "honour and glory" of a genocidal empire.'¹² Notably, such vicarious identifications are sometimes negatively appraised and rejected by others as politicizing family

¹⁰ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.

¹¹ Maja Zehfuss, 'Hierarchies of Grief and the Possibility of War: Remembering UK Fatalities in Iraq', *Millennium* 38, no. 2 (2009): 419–40; See also Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Reprint edition (London ; New York: Verso Books, 2006); Of course, this is not to say that some do not take pride in the more violent aspects of their ancestors' military participation. For example, two of the family members invited by Great Western Railway to the unveiling of a special commemorative train explicitly linked their pride to their ancestor's combat prowess. Dawn Lewis, for example, said 'Allan crawled forward without instruction single-handedly... he just took a few grenades and a rifle. He bombed the posts, he injured six and then he took them all back with his rifle.' And Great-niece of Flight Sub-Lieutenant Harold Day, Rachel Leigh noted 'by the time he died in February, he shot down 11 [planes], so he was always known as an "Ace" pilot.' Of course, in this latter instance, violence occupied a secondary role next to aerobatic skill. But it is not difficult to see how a pacifist might regard such exploits in an altogether different light. See BroadcastExchange, *7988 GWR Armistice Train B-Roll 1080i*, Vimeo, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/299871450>.

¹² @AdamRamsay, 'My Great Grandfather Was Blown to Pieces on the First Day of Ypres - 11 November, 1914, as It Happens. He Looked Remarkably like This, and He Didn't Die for My Freedom or Yours. He Died for the "Honour and Glory" of a Genocidal Empire. <https://t.co/S5u1uPZxfC>', Twitter, 9 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/AdamRamsay/status/1060777940542255104>.

members. One response to Ramsay read: ‘Don't understand why you should bring your grandfather into what is a legitimate modern debate. He had his reasons to be there, whatever you think about it today. You diminish him.’¹³ Such questioning stands in stark contrast to the frequency with which vicarious military subjectivity is affirmed by others, suggesting that attempts to claim vicarious anti-military subjectivity by invoking ancestral war participation might not receive equal recognition.

The uneven recognition of different claims to vicarious subjectivity suggests a need to further investigate the parameters influencing this. While the thesis alluded to the role played by gender, race, and class in rendering vicarious military subjectivity an important resource for bolstering an insecure sense of belonging,¹⁴ a thorough investigation of how intersectional characteristics attenuate dynamics of vicarious identification has been beyond its scope. More must be done to explore how and why such factors – as well as (dis)ability and age - influence a subject's proclivity to engage in vicarious identification, and also their reception by others. Such questions are arguably especially important at a time of increased public debate about questions of race, generated by the murder of American George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis in 2020. The global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement at the time of writing in 2020, has placed greater focus on the historical roots of contemporary racism, manifesting in greater scrutiny of Britain's colonial past and present – including the experiences of the two World Wars and the racial prejudice of wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.¹⁵ Debates over the memorialization of such figures – particularly in the form of public statues – will inevitably see vicarious subjectivity invoked by campaigners pointing to the oppression of ancestors in campaigning for statues removal, and by the statues' advocates whose vicarious military subjectivity depends upon narratives eliding the inconvenient racial dynamics of the events they portray. Importantly, this is not just a question of proclivity to invoke ancestral connections, but also concerns how such characteristics might influence tendencies to anthropomorphize the state, understand history as homogenous, and view the subjects of statues as representative of the prevailing mood of the day.

¹³ @davidgmwilson, ‘@AdamRamsay: Don't Understand Why You Should Bring Your Grandfather into What Is a Legitimate Modern Debate. He Had His Reasons to Be There, Whatever You Think about It Today. You Diminish Him.’, Twitter, 10 November 2018, <https://twitter.com/davidgmwilson/status/1061074062481465344>.

¹⁴ Ware's work on ‘militarised multiculturalism’ explored in Chapter 6 hints at how the social capital conferred by ancestral military participation is utilized by subjects whose sense of national belonging is undermined by government and media securitizations. See, Ware, ‘From War Grave to Peace Garden’.

¹⁵ Alex Hudson, ‘How Has Winston Churchill Become a Central Figure in the British Black Lives Matter Debate?’, Newsweek, 17 June 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/churchill-statue-black-lives-matter-protest-1511361>.

While this thesis has focused specifically upon vicarious identifications with the military exploits of ancestors, vicarious militarism is not limited to matters of war commemoration. Indeed, one promising avenue for future research might be to invert these genealogical dynamics to explore intergenerational militarised vicarious identifications concerning older subjects living through younger ones. A striking feature of contemporary British society is that support for militarism and militarised solutions is consistently higher among the over-60s' than younger cohorts. This is particularly evident in the conspicuously high support among this cohort for the re-introduction of compulsory national service for young adults.¹⁶ One explanation for this is the general tendency for subjects to become more conservative in outlook as they age – a trend aligning with the expectations of Terror Management Theory which correlates conservatism with mortality salience.¹⁷ While mortality salience provides a partial explanation, the conceptual framework of this thesis suggests that it may be compounded by a particularly acute form of 'civilian anxiety' specific to generations growing up after the Second World War. An intriguing avenue for further research concerns the possibility that growing up in a deeply militarised society but lacking their own formative lived military experiences on which to stake a claim to authentic military subjectivity has contributed to subjects projecting their civilian anxiety onto younger generations, in the form of support for national service. The intriguing possibility here, then, is that rather than passing back their militarised inheritance, some might be passing it forward.

Attentiveness to vicarious dynamics, however, might also help to explain the sustained *inability* of British military recruiters to meet their targets in recent years.¹⁸ The irony is that although military careers continue to be portrayed in transcendental terms and held in high esteem, they are pursued by only a small minority of Britons; for most others, the relationship with militarism is *vicarious*. In addition to raising the possibility that vicarious military subjectivity is replacing the real thing, this might lead us to reappraise the function of media normally regarded as contributing to

¹⁶ Jonn Elledge, 'National Service Is Mainly Considered a Great Idea by Those Who Will Never Have to Do It', *NewStatesman*, 30 April 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/04/national-service-baby-boomer-conscription-army-generation-millennials>.

¹⁷ Steve Taylor, 'The Politics of Ageing', *Psychology Today*, 24 June 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/out-the-darkness/201806/the-politics-ageing>; For an outline of Terror Management Theory, see Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, 'Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 29, no. C (1997): 61–139; Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2015).

¹⁸ 'Strength of British Military Falls for Ninth Year', *BBC News*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49365599>; Frances Perraudin, 'UK Army Combat Units 40% below Strength as Recruitment Plummet', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2019, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/09/uk-army-combat-units-40-below-strength-as-recruitment-plummet>.

recruitment efforts, such as video games.¹⁹ While certainly promoting militaristic ontologies to which many players may ascribe, the immersive experiences provided by blockbuster titles such as the Call of Duty series may replicate war in a way that increasingly satisfies desires to experience the thrill without the risk of participation in actual wars. Put differently, those who might previously have enlisted may now find that they can get their militarised kicks *vicariously*, with games counterintuitively *hindering* recruitment activities. Ironically, the very technological advances designed to make the experiences authentic and engrossing for military purposes may contribute to this. Advances in VR have resulted in unprecedented immersion, and multiplayer online modes enable friends to experience a ‘band of brothers’ sense of camaraderie – without the danger of death and dismemberment, thus potentially blunting recruitment efforts. Paying attention to vicarious dynamics could thus pave the way for scholars to rethink the relationship between militarism and war preparedness in intriguing ways.²⁰

The presence of opportunities for virtual violence does not necessarily mean that subjects do not live vicariously through real violence, however. Indeed, the discussion of subjects living through the England team as ‘troops’ in a metaphorical ‘war’ raises questions about how some might also live through real soldiers and acts of transgressive violence. One interesting site for exploring such questions is public debate around allegations of human rights abuses by British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan which has, in recent years, seen outrage at earlier military transgressions ‘largely displaced by outrage over attempts to investigate them.’²¹ There have been striking parallels in such debates with the FIFA controversies, particularly visible in concerns that political correctness means that soldiers cannot do their job anymore for fear of prosecution.²² Similarly, some have objected to British forces ostensibly being held to a higher standard than those they are fighting, with the suggestion that Britain’s enemies are deliberately exploiting ‘our’ sense of fair play, and enjoying themselves (in a Lacanian sense) at ‘our’ expense.²³ The conceptual framework advanced in this thesis might contribute to understanding such concerns and subsequent efforts to exempt armed forces from human rights law as pertaining to anxieties

¹⁹ On the military recruitment function of video games, see James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military - Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press Inc, 2001); Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010), 106–12; Nick Robinson, ‘Militarism and Opposition in the Living Room: The Case of Military Videogames’, *Critical Studies on Security* 4, no. 3 (2016): 255–75.

²⁰ Joseph Haigh, ‘Militarism and War Preparedness in Tension? Reflections on the British Armed Forces “Recruitment Crisis” through the Lens of Vicarious Militarism’ (ISA Workshop on War Preparedness, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 7 February 2020).

²¹ Samira Shackle, ‘Why We May Never Know If British Troops Committed War Crimes in Iraq’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 2018, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/07/british-troops-war-crimes-iraq-historic-allegations-team>.

²² Amy Southall, ‘Marine A Is a Victim of Political Correctness, Says Author and Former Spy Frederick Forsyth’, talkRADIO, 22 December 2016, <https://talkradio.co.uk/news/marine-victim-political-correctness-says-author-and-former-spy-frederick-forsyth-1612228199>.

²³ Eberle, ‘Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, Transgression’, 253–55; On the concept of ‘jouissance’ or ‘enjoyment’, see Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 25, 54; Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 197–99.

around British national self-expression. One troubling possibility meriting further investigation is the possibility that not only legal military force but transgressive acts of violence in contravention of international humanitarian law have served as outlets for vicarious catharsis.²⁴

In this thesis, I have explored the pervasiveness of vicarious identity in contemporary British militarism specifically and the attractions of vicarious military subjectivity to anxious late modern subjects. Perhaps the most important questions concern the normative limits of vicarious identification: what are the ethical implications of living through military others? Although I have raised concerns around instrumentalizing the dead and the living which require further exploration, I have deliberately avoided passing judgement about matters of (in)authenticity. This has been motivated by an ethico-political commitment to critiquing militarism and avoiding reifying the status of military subjectivities. But it has also been informed by the Lacanian argument that the idea of an authentic essence to being is illusory in the first place – that *all* identity, to some extent, is vicarious.²⁵ Authenticity, then, is fundamentally unobtainable. Nevertheless, it can lead to intensely problematic politics, and is therefore to be resisted. My central contribution to such resistance has been to expose the political and contested character of claims to vicarious military subjectivity – especially those that are not commonly regarded as controversial. Rather than advocating moves to develop a prescriptive ethics of vicarious identity then, the aim has been to promote greater reflexivity around such dynamics and provide the basis for future normative reflections.

I will close with a provocation of my own. This thesis has pointed to the way in which societies have repeatedly turned to militarism as a salve to the discontents of late modernity; and yet, it has also been demonstrated that it seldom provides any lasting solution to existential anxiety. Indeed, the irony of the militarised subjectivities with which some vicariously identify to extend their agency is how limited and *limiting* they are in terms of addressing existential anxiety. Perhaps, then, it is time to rethink the ways in which we relate to - and *live through* - others. Perhaps we need different ways of valuing and being in the world: ones that challenge societal compulsions towards vicarious militarism.

²⁴ One case that deserves more attention in this regard is the striking public and media support for British Royal Marine Sgt Alexander Blackman who was filmed on killing a captive wounded Taliban insurgent in 2011 and subsequently prosecuted. Notably, this support existed even prior to the emergence of mitigating evidence concerning Blackman's diminished mental health at the time of the incident. Cahal Milmo, 'Sgt Alexander Blackman: The Case for and against the Royal Marine Who Murdered a Wounded, Unarmed Taliban Fighter', *The Independent*, 18 September 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sgt-alexander-blackman-the-case-for-and-against-the-royal-marine-who-murdered-a-wounded-unarmed-10508375.html>.

²⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 203–15; Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations*, 19; Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 126.

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