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## Haunted Soldiers and the 'Myths' of Basic Training<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

Basic training has long been identified as a privileged site of construction in the production of militarised masculine subjects inasmuch as it occurs once for all soldiers and is the most overt indication that active constitution is indeed necessary. Upon entering the military, recruits offer up their bodies as the primary site of inscription for a militarised masculine identity. Numerous authors have detailed the ways in which a militarised masculine subject comes into being in and through particular gendered discursive and performative practices of basic training. While many understand a militarised masculine identity to be performatively enacted, and as such have no 'fixed' subjectivity, there remains a tendency – through linguistic reifications to a soldier's aggressive, violent and *masculine* characteristics and traits – to ontologically 'solidify' a militarised masculine subject. In this paper I suggest a way of conceptualising militarised masculinity using Avery Gordon's work on hauntings and ghostly matters that avoids mapping 'hard' borders, and reveals the simultaneous 'doing' and 'undoing' of a militarised masculine subject. Focusing on two 'myths' – the myth of asexuality and the myth of discipline – that emerge from, and reinforce the gendered discourses of basic training, I conduct a 'ghost hunt' for the ghosts and spectres that have been exorcised from these myths, the ways in which they return to haunt, and how ongoing militarised violences may be able to be made explicable through them.

### **Introduction**

To state that soldiers are 'made' rather than born is not to stake a new claim. Numerous authors have detailed and unpacked the ways in which militarised masculine subjects are constituted through particular discursive and performative practices. Basic training has long been identified in these discussions as a privileged site of construction in the production of militarised masculine identities. It is then, not the intention of this paper to reproduce this body of work but instead to explore how the *impossibility* of a stable and 'complete' militarised masculine subject may help make ongoing militarised violences explicable. After briefly detailing and discursively unpacking the practices of basic training within the British Army, I suggest a way of conceptualising militarised masculinity that avoids the tendency within the literature to ontologically 'solidify' an always-shifting, always-precarious subjectivity. Using Avery Gordon's work on *ghostly matters* and *hauntings*, a militarised masculine identity will be revealed to be in a state of simultaneous 'doing' and 'undoing'. In effect, the moment a militarised masculine subject is constituted, its impossibility

and precariousness is revealed. While a stable and coherent militarised masculine subject-position is thus revealed as an impossibility, the external effects of this fragile subjectivity remain violently real. It is an attempt to understand and make explicable these violent external effects that the paper then turns. The practices and gendered discourses of basic training that work to produce a militarised masculine subjectivity, rely on, and are reinforced, by particular myths. Focusing on two myths – the myth of asexuality and the myth of discipline – this paper will conduct a ‘ghost hunt’ for the ghosts and spectres that have been exorcised from these myths, the ways in which they return to haunt and how ongoing militarised violences can begin to be made explicable through them.

### **Basic training as a site of construction**

Basic training’s role in the construction of militarised masculine identities has long been noted by both those writing on militarised masculinities, and by soldiers themselves. Occurring only once, at the beginning, basic training is the most overt indication that active constitution is indeed necessary<sup>2</sup>. While this is not to suggest that the conceptualisations of a militarised masculine subject produced in and through basic training, are the sole ‘maps’ of a discursively idealised soldier, basic training is significant in its role as the popularly-conceived start-point of a soldier’s ‘becoming’. Regardless of the arm or section of the British Army a recruit will eventually join, all must complete ‘Phase One’ training; the 14 week-long Common Military Syllabus (CMS). Recruits will then ‘pass out’ and go on to their Phase Two placements respective to the specific arm they intend to join. This is with the exception of the Infantry who complete Phase One and Two training together during the 26 week-long Combat Infantryman’s Course (CIC)<sup>3</sup>.

Phase One training is organised in two, seven week terms. During these 14 weeks a range of activities are undertaken with the aim of transforming a civilian recruit into a (partly trained) British Army soldier (Phase Two training will build upon these skills with regard to a recruit’s specific role). The British Army website<sup>4</sup> details activities undertaken including, ‘personal administration’ (“everything to do with looking after self and kit, in the field as well as in camp”); weapons training (starting on simulators before moving to ranges and field firing exercises); drill (military procedures and movements, such as marching and parading); ‘field craft’ (“basic skills a soldier needs to work and survive in the field. Areas covered include camouflage and concealment, map reading, observation, first aid and defence measures”); fitness (as well as general physical training, exercise is completed through sports, running, gym work, swimming and an assault course); teamwork (‘adventurous training’ comprises of challenging outdoor activities, such as abseiling, kayaking and rock climbing, aimed at improving a recruit’s teamwork and initiative). The course ends – whether it is the 14 week CMS, or the 26 week CIC – with a passing out parade, proclaimed by the British

Army's website as "one of the proudest moments of a soldier's life" (suggesting, at this point, that the individual is indeed a *soldier*, as opposed to a 'civvie').

To make the claim that it is in and through these practices that soldiers are 'made' is not a new claim – writing in 1977, Michel Foucault stated that, "[b]y the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay; an inapt body; the machine required can be constructed"<sup>5</sup> – and it is not my intention here to reproduce the significant body of research that deals with this construction in any great detail in this paper<sup>6</sup>. What the majority of those writing and reflecting – both theorists and past soldiers – on the role of basic training appear to have in common however, is their belief in its transformative effects<sup>7</sup>. A belief that basic training is a 'rite of passage'<sup>8</sup>; a period of "identity reformation"; and the forging of a "new self-identity"<sup>9</sup>, specifically a shift from a civilian identity to soldier identity, from boy to man<sup>10</sup>. There is then, a continuing belief amongst many of those writing on militarised masculinities that something occurs during those 14 or 26 weeks that profoundly changes the recruit and 'makes' him (or her) a soldier.

Such a remoulding of the subject is understood to occur in and through particular gendered – masculinist – discourses of male superiority, dominance and control (and its corollary of 'feminine' denigration). These, in turn, circulate, intersect, and interact with discourses of male bonding (basic training is an exclusively male zone – all female recruits are trained separately in single-sex platoons), and heteronormativity (while openly gay men, as of 2000, can now serve in the British Armed Forces, the "macho ethos of the barrack room" remains with its pin ups, sexually explicit films and bragging of [heterosexual] sexual encounters<sup>11</sup>). It is worth noting at this point that the Army already functions within a gendered regime (and not just the one it constructs), and participates in gendered discourses already going on. Understandings of gender pass both in and out of the Army<sup>12</sup>; bodies of recruits entering basic training are not 'blank canvases' for the Army to work upon, but always already marked by particular discourses of gender<sup>13</sup>.

Emerging from, and reinforcing, these gendered discourses, are particular *myths* of basic training. My use of the term 'myth' in this context refers to the *impossibility* of 'completeness' or 'wholeness' of that which the 'myth' pertains to. It is two of these myths<sup>14</sup> (the myth of asexuality and the myth of discipline), specifically the *impossibility* of these myths' ontological completeness, and the ways in which they make explicable militarised violences, that this paper seeks to deal with. First however, a note on how I conceptualise a militarised masculine subject-position(s).

### **'Filling' militarised masculinity only once**

While those writing on militarised masculinities typically claim that there can be no fixed or stable militarised masculine identity and that there are in fact multiple militarised masculinities, all of

which are relational (both to ‘feminine others’ and to masculinities deemed as ‘subordinate’, for example, the homosexual male), it is my reading that there remains a tendency – not by all authors, but a tendency all the same – to end up inadvertently ontologically ‘solidifying’ a militarised masculine subjectivity. While recognising militarised masculinity as an empty signifier, authors then end up ‘filling’ it only once<sup>15</sup> and ‘fixing’ its identity to attributes and characteristics defined as integral to ‘militarised masculinity’.

R. W. Connell’s use of the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’, and her language of a hierarchy of masculinities<sup>16</sup>, is echoed in much of the literature on militarised masculinities. Within the military it is those roles considered most combat-intensive (for example, fighter pilots, the British Infantry, and special forces such as the SAS) that are commonly associated with dominant, or hegemonic, ‘versions’ of militarised masculinity. By aligning hegemonic militarised masculinity so closely with these combat positions, the identity becomes intimately connected with attributes such as aggression, violence and physical strength, and synonymous with the “idealized warrior ethic”<sup>17</sup>. Although such configurations of hegemonic militarised masculinity represent only a small percentage of the military forces as a whole, as the dominant conception of masculinity within the institution, the military itself comes to be defined, to some extent, by the combat warrior-soldier image. Thus, all masculinities within the military are defined in relation to, or subsumed under, this hegemonic conception of militarised masculinity. Hegemonic militarised masculinity comes to be recognised as ‘real’ or ‘true’ militarised masculinity.

The effects of this linguistic reification of militarised masculinity’s alignment with ‘warrior-soldier’ characteristics is the ontological ‘solidifying’ of the borders of a militarised masculine identity. The reiteration delimits, fixes and treats ‘him’ (for it is nearly always a ‘him’) as ‘real’<sup>18</sup> and ‘knowable’. Despite starting out with the recognition that militarised masculinity is an empty signifier, understandings of a militarised masculine identity come to signify, and then remain ‘fixed’ with identity markers such as, heterosexuality, violence, sexism and aggression. Scholarship on militarised masculinity ends up producing the effects that it names. By inadvertently ‘fixing’ militarised masculinity in these ways alternative configurations of masculinity within the military, and contradictions within the so-called ‘hegemonic’ militarised masculinities, are silenced. It is not that these authors do not recognise the multitude of militarised masculinities in existence<sup>19</sup>, but that by aligning combat-intensive military roles with hegemonic conceptions of militarised masculinity, the configuration is rearticulated and the borders of the subject mapped a little harder.

With the borders of the subject mapped that little bit harder, militarised masculinity’s ability to discard, take on, or co-opt, any number of characteristics is limited, while contradictions within the identity are either made ‘un’-visible (I use the term ‘un’-visible as opposed to invisible to denote

that it is not that such contradictions and paradoxes are not present, it is that they remain obscured through the 'myths' that circulate) or fail to be unpacked. Militarised masculinity begins to then solidify, taking on a more static and fixed conceptualisation, one that cannot reflect the inconsistencies and differences of soldiers' lived experiences.

Now to seemingly contradict myself, it is not that I deny that such characteristics (aggression, sexism, heterosexuality) 'mark' the bodies of militarised masculine subjects, it is just that I want to avoid implicitly mapping 'hard' borders around this always-shifting, always-precarious subject. In order to try and escape this bind, and through an understanding of gendered identities as performative<sup>20</sup>, and Avery Gordon's work on 'ghostly matters'<sup>21</sup>, I suggest a way of conceptualising a militarised masculine subject that is simultaneously in a process of 'doing' and 'undoing'. In effect, the moment a militarised masculine identity is constituted, is performatively brought into 'being' (however, understanding identity as performative means it will always be in a state of 'becoming' rather than 'being'), its impossibility and precariousness is revealed. Such an understanding will allow me explore and unpack particular characteristics that appear central to a discursively idealised militarised masculine subjectivity, while at the same time resisting the temptation of 'filling' the empty signifier 'militarised masculinity' only once and ontologically fixing its boundaries.

While British militarised masculinity may not exist as a single transcendental static identity, for this paper it may be beneficial to speak of a discursively idealised militarised masculine subjectivity. A particular production of a militarised masculine identity that encapsulates attributes and characteristics the military's formal and informal practices (for example, those 'found' in basic training) – and the myths and discourses in and through they emerge – revolve around, and which is used to encourage young men to join up. While in recent years the British Army has begun to put more emphasis on its vocational and (non-military) training opportunities, it remains, first and foremost, to be associated with combat and warfare. Combat-intensive roles such as the Infantry or Special Forces are fore-grounded in the majority of popular representations of the military, and basic training exercises continue to privilege strength and physical endurance as attributes essential for Army life. An 'ideal-type', or discursively idealised, soldier then, refers to a particular set of gendered attributes typically found within the armed forces. There is however no single discursively idealised militarised masculine identity; just as there are multiple versions of a militarised masculine subject, so too are there multiple embodiments of a discursively idealised subject. The 'map' of a discursively idealised soldier can be drawn in multiple ways (and it is in this lack of fixity a discursively idealised militarised masculine identity differs from Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity'). For example, a discursively idealised soldier could be cast in the image of an aggressive and macho Rambo-type character; a calm and technologically-experienced hero; or a highly skilled 'Special Ops' soldier,

working covertly behind enemy lines. Always changing, and occupying multiple subject positions, a discursively idealised soldier is capable of co-opting, and embodying, any number of privileged attributes and characteristics, thus appealing to greater numbers of potential recruits.

### **A methodology of ghosts and hauntings**

In her book, *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon seeks a “new way of knowing”, one that is more “attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us”<sup>22</sup>. Dissatisfied with the inability of the social sciences’ normal methods, and available critical vocabularies, to recognise the “exclusions and the sacrifices required to tell a story as the singularly real one”<sup>23</sup>, Gordon argues that today there is a renewed commitment to blindness within the social sciences and wider society. Gordon claims we remain “blind to only the most shrunken, formal and value-laden official empirical actualities”; blind to “race, class, and gender, already reifications of force and meaning”<sup>24</sup>.

One of the major goals of Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* is therefore to get the reader to “consider a different way of seeing [and therefore knowing], one that is less mechanical, more willing to be surprised”<sup>25</sup>. Gordon insists that there is a need to preoccupy ourselves with what has been lost, how certain individuals, things, or ideas, have been rendered marginal, excluded, or repressed<sup>26</sup>; a way of understanding militarised masculine identities that avoids mapping ‘hard’ borders. A militarised masculine subject must be conceptualised in such a way that makes visible the excess and ‘otherness’ simultaneously produced during its constitution.

In particular, Gordon wants her readers to start recognising the ‘ghostly matters’ – the haunting spectres – that trouble us at every turn. Haunting, Gordon claims, is a constituent feature of contemporary modern life<sup>27</sup>. Gordon uses the term ‘haunting’ to describe the lived ‘reality’ of social lives that fail to be explained by current social and cultural analysis, current ways of ‘knowing’ and understanding. Hauntings refer to the ‘un’-visible and unspoken – but vibrantly ‘real’ and present – socialities that fall outside mapped and fixed social forms. A social form that is haunted, is troubled and disturbed by the haunting. What was once assumed as fixed and fully formed, is made fragile and remains in a continual state of becoming. Hauntings, if we choose to engage with them, have the possibility of radically shifting our knowledge of social forms.

“If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign...that tells you a haunting is taking place”<sup>28</sup>. Ghosts are “one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us”<sup>29</sup>. Ghosts get in the way, haunting what we are trying to study, distracting us from what we were

searching for, and disrupting what we had previously considered known, completed, done with. Haunting, and the appearance of spectres and ghosts, therefore, is a way of notification of what has been concealed is in fact very much present, “interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us”<sup>30</sup>. When conceptualising militarised masculine identities, what may rise up as spectres and ghosts, haunting a discursively idealised conception of that identity? The lived realities of soldiers’ lives – their experiences of pain, fear and doubt; the contradictions and paradoxes of military life – work to trouble and disturb a ‘known’ discursively idealised militarised masculine subject. Representations of a soldier as brave, strong and fearless, an identity attached to fixed forms, are shown to be partial and always incomplete. Spectres and ghosts that give notice to the ways in which these discursively idealised identities are haunted reveal these identities to be always forming, always in a state of becoming.

Haunting is both an announcement of an apparent absence, while simultaneously articulating a ‘seething’ presence; something which “makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time”<sup>31</sup>. It is to these ‘present absences’, ‘un’-visibles, and things that are seemingly not there, that Gordon wishes us to pay attention to in order to reveal the *impossibility* of a stable and complete militarised masculinity. At each moment of constitution, ghostly matters ‘undo’ the making of that very subject. No single attribute or characteristic can signify, or claim to constitute, the identity, ‘British militarised masculinity’, as it is never stable, always shifting, and always coming undone.

The ghost however, does not only haunt, but constitutes as well. Gordon states that haunting is a “constituent element of social life”, and to study social life “one must confront the ghostly aspects of it”<sup>32</sup>. People, objects, experiences and memories that have been excluded and concealed from view in social and cultural analysis, come back to haunt as ghosts and spectres. Simultaneous to the disruptions they cause however, is their centrality to, and constructing of, the very thing (be it identity, memory or social history) they have been expelled from. Ghostly phantom objects “have a determining agency on the ones they are haunting”, making our lives, experiences and memories “just what they are at any given moment”<sup>33</sup>. It is only through the exclusion of particular practices and characteristics that specific conceptions of a discursively idealised militarised masculine identity can be constituted. Only when those that have been expelled and concealed come back as spectres and ghosts to haunt, are the limits and marked borders made visible. These ghostly matters therefore work to construct, and give the impression of stability, the boundaries delimiting a militarised masculine subject. The ghostly haunt, for all its troublesome and disturbing effects, is not an aberration of that which it acts upon, but central to identities and subjectivities that are always relational.

However, if spectres and ghosts have been excluded and concealed – made ‘un’-visible by previous social and cultural analysis – and the ways in which they haunt ignored or gone unnoticed, how do I find them? How do these ‘concealed presences’ become visible to me? Spectres and ghosts, it has already been noted, do not merely haunt; they *make* us and the social realities in which we live. If ghostly matters construct the very social forms that they simultaneously haunt, to search for them is to find them always already there. Thus, in every discourse, ‘performance’ and gesture, which appears closed, finished and cut off from haunting ghosts, there will be spectral presences. Ghostly matters are located at the margins of mapped and ‘completed’ social forms, simultaneously working the borders, giving the impression of stability, and troubling and disrupting these borders by giving notice to what has been hidden, to the excess within.

To search for spectres and ghosts at the margins of an already-mapped militarised masculine subject conjures a whole new way of conceptualising militarised masculinity. This alternative way of understanding counts not only the formal and informal practices of basic training, and the gendered discourses they emerge in and through, but asks questions about permissions and prohibitions, presences and absences. What characteristics are explicitly and implicitly denigrated during the formal and informal practices of basic training? Why is male group nakedness such an integral part of constituting an aggressively heterosexual militarised masculine identity? How do the fetishistic obsessions with domesticity and discipline during basic training prepare a soldier for *disorder* and ‘messiness’ of combat? These ghosts – defamed characteristics, homoerotic practices, ‘feminine’ domesticity – give us notice to the unseen presences in these sites. If we pay attention to these ‘un’-visible presences, alternative stories about a seemingly stable and complete militarised masculine subject will emerge; stories that disconnect a militarised masculine subject from any status of fixity.

To follow ghosts is to pick up where abstractions, such as a stable and coherent militarised masculine identity, leave off. Where ‘fixed’ understandings of militarised masculinity clear up all traces of unruliness<sup>34</sup> outside their understanding, paying attention to ghosts and hauntings actively encourages it. This unruliness will not lead us to an uncomplicated or conclusive place of knowing. It is a methodology of ‘getting lost’<sup>35</sup>, a refusal to delimit the boundaries of a militarised masculine subject. It is then, to basic training, and the myths of asexuality and discipline that circulate, that this paper now turns. Searching for the ghosts and spectres that haunt these myths, and paying attention to the ways in which they make themselves visible, the simultaneous doing and undoing of a militarised masculine subject will be revealed. Searching for the ghostly matters that haunt basic training will not only reveal the *impossibility* of these myths as ontological reality (and thus a discursively idealised militarised masculine identity), but will also help us understand and make sense of ongoing militarised violences (in all their ranges) committed by (and to) British troops.

### The myth of asexuality

Basic training<sup>36</sup> – and the Army more generally – perhaps offers one of the most intensely homosocial environments in contemporary society. An exclusively male environment (despite the majority of Army roles now open to women, Phase One training continues to take place in single-sex battalions), recruits sleep, eat and shower together. Routine, male group nakedness is a persistent feature of the contemporary British Army. While such nakedness, or certainly the level of ‘physical togetherness’, is at its highest during a soldier’s time in basic training (partly because of just how regulated recruits’ timetables are), it is a continuing feature of life in the Army. Woodward and Winter recall one former Royal Marine telling them – taking care to emphasise the completely “routine and non-sexual nature of this nakedness” – that “being naked together with other men is a completely normal part of contemporary British military life”<sup>37</sup>. In this homosocial context, group nakedness is just another body practice (like eating together, wearing the same uniform, or physical training) that works to produce a bonded team of militarised and masculine men<sup>38</sup>. As numerous authors<sup>39</sup> have pointed to, much of the discourse surrounding Army life is concerned with this important bond, or even love, between ‘the boys’. “The bond is one that many soldiers report is stronger than any relationship they had previously experienced, including familial and intimate relations”<sup>40</sup>. There is a sense that recruits have entered a new family, the military family. Theirs is a family of men; a ‘warrior brotherhood’. Such ‘male bonding’ is a ‘doing’ of a discursively idealised British militarised masculine subject. Nakedness in this context represents unity, fraternity, the singularity of male bodies; it serves as an “insistent reminder that the group are ‘one body’; that is, male bodies”<sup>41</sup>. A militarised masculine identity is constructed in and through these practices and the gendered discourses that surround them.

Such ‘male bonding’ and homosociality however, relies upon the exorcism and expulsion of sexuality, specifically *homosexuality*, from the practices of basic training. Homosexuality becomes the ghost that threatens to disrupt and trouble the ‘doings’ of a militarised masculine identity through particular homosocial practices. If constructions of a discursively idealised militarised masculine subject are aggressively heterosexual, it is important that practices of group nudity and ‘soldierly love’ are carefully policed against encroachments of the ghostly homosexual ‘other’. Following on from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who suggests that homosociality is frequently applied to activities such as ‘male bonding’, and “which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality”<sup>42</sup>, homophobia within the British Army (and other homosocial institutions or occurrences of ‘male bonding’) can be understood as marking a boundary between non-sexual male behaviour (a ‘doing’), and sexual male behaviour (an ‘undoing’). As authors writing on militarised masculinities have demonstrated<sup>43</sup>, basic training, and Army life more

generally, is set against a backdrop of heteronormativity and is aggressively heterosexual (think back to the relatively recent ban on openly homosexual soldiers serving, and the “macho ethos of the barrack room”<sup>44</sup>). Such discursive structures operate to expel homosexuality, and mark the intensely homosocial, and at times homoerotic or sexualised, practices of basic training as definitively asexual. Far from being situated on an unbroken continuum, the homosocial and homosexual are instead radically disconnected from one another<sup>45</sup>. Constructed as an asexual site of male bonding, the homosociality of basic training operates as a ‘doing’ of a militarised masculine identity through its expulsion of, and disconnection from, homosexuality.

In constituting a militarised masculine subjectivity through an exorcism of a ghostly and ‘othered’ homosexuality, a violence has always already been committed<sup>46</sup>. For is not denial and expulsion a violence in itself? Expelling homosexuality – and thus all things marked as homosexual, or simply *not* heterosexual – denies a recruit so many possibilities of becoming. For example, a recruit may be marked by homosexuality by any number of ‘non-heterosexual’<sup>47</sup> performances; crying, failing to complete a physical training exercise, or simply by looking ‘effeminate’<sup>48</sup>. While this expulsion of homosexuality is a violence in itself, further violences emerge from it; violences aimed at particular bodies both present in basic training and not present. Violences are committed at the level of denigration of homosexuals (who may, or may not, be present during basic training) in homophobic slang (‘faggot’ is commonly used to describe a recruit who has failed to live up to the [heterosexual] soldierly ideal), while a recruit deemed by his peers to be ‘marked’ by homosexuality may encounter violences; be they verbal or physical. An adjutant of one regiment which had suffered a spate of bullying between recruits, saw that victims tended to be those deemed as ‘effeminate’ (a ‘marker’ of the ghostly and disruptive homosexuality) in appearance or manner<sup>49</sup>. The materiality and gestures of their bodies appeared to signal their potential transgression from the masculine norm of heterosexuality. These ‘doings’ of a militarised masculine identity rely on the assumption that a clear and ‘hard’ border exists between the ‘homosexual’ and the ‘homosocial’ (asexual, and implicitly heterosexual<sup>50</sup>). The violences detailed above can thus be viewed as directed toward those who threaten the idea of a broken continuum of homosociability and homosexuality (for example, the effeminate or gay recruit), or, as Antony Beevor suggests, an “intense fear and loathing which aggressively male groups have of their own homosexual potential”<sup>51</sup>. The idea, that the ‘doing’ of homosociality (asexual male bonding) and ‘undoing’ of homosexuality are not two distinct, symmetrically opposing positions, but are in fact intimately related.

It is not only the expulsion or exorcism of the ghost (homosexuality) that is a violence; a violence is committed in the very attempt of mapping a ‘hard’ border between, asexuality and

homosexuality, of 'doing' a militarised masculine subject and 'undoing' a militarised masculine subject<sup>52</sup>. Just as Sedgwick appeals to us to "hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual"<sup>53</sup>, the boundary between asexual and homosexual performative doings, marked as 'hard' by the myth of asexuality (itself emerging from, and reinforcing, the gendered discourses that produce militarised masculinities), must instead be viewed as soft and porous. A discursively idealised (heterosexual) militarised masculine identity can never simply be in a process of 'doing' or 'becoming' through a recruit's performative asexual and homosocial enactments, as the identity will always already be in a state of 'undoing' as the asexual 'doing' enactments 'leak' through the porous boundary, becoming a (homo)sexual 'undoing'. The myth of asexuality within basic training severs this relation between doings and undoings, and it is through attempts at both marking this separation, and upholding the myth (itself an impossibility) that militarised violences perpetrated by British troops can be made sense of.

Returning then to practices of 'routine', 'non-sexual' nakedness during basic training; in this homosocial context, nakedness constitutes unity, bonding and fraternity between recruits. As a persistent feature of Army life, group nudity is just another body practice that works to produce a discursively idealised militarised masculine identity. Homophobia operates as a boundary-marking device, severing any relation between the homosociability of this nakedness and the (potential) homosexuality of male group nakedness. Such boundary-marking exorcises the 'ghostly' aspects of nakedness ([homo]sexuality). However, group nakedness does not always work to produce militarised masculine subjects<sup>54</sup>; if the naked bodies are simultaneously marked by 'othering' and sexualised discourses, group nakedness can operate to undo particular subjects' masculinity.

In 2003, British soldiers who were part of an operation to stop Iraqi civilian looters from stealing humanitarian aid from the British-run 'Camp Breadbasket' (so-called because of the camp's links with the UN World Food Programme), rounded up suspected thieves and subjected them to physical and sexual abuse. During this abuse Iraqi detainees were beaten with car aerials and wooden sticks; humiliated by being placed in a net and carried round in a forklift truck; and forced to strip naked and participate in sexually humiliating and abusive acts (including being forced to simulate anal and oral sex with one another)<sup>55</sup>, which were then photographed by a number of soldiers<sup>56</sup>. It is in this enforced nakedness that we see the "unhappy echo" of soldiers' own routine and non-sexual nakedness<sup>57</sup>. Unlike recruit nakedness during basic training or on a camp base while on a tour of duty<sup>58</sup>, the nakedness that took place in Camp Breadbasket did not signify togetherness, bonding and asexuality, instead it worked to mark the bodies of Iraqi detainees as 'other' and (homo)sexualised. The ghost of sexuality then has not been expelled from the enactments of

nakedness in Camp Breadbasket. Rather, the abuses – particularly the sexual abuses – took place according to a specifically gendered and sexualised (and raced)<sup>59</sup> script<sup>60</sup>.

As the practice of male group nakedness passes from a 'doing' and through the (porous) border to an 'undoing', the ghosts of (homo)sexuality – ghosts that haunt and disrupt the myth of asexuality – are made visible. These haunting ghosts and spectres however, are always already there in the (asexual) homosocial enactments of male nudity during basic training. It is only that the border-marking 'device' of homophobia operates to make these ghostly matters 'un'-visible. Through implicit and explicit denigration (and fear) of homosexuality, the borders of basic training's homosocial male behaviour is policed, and the continuum of homosociality and homosexuality appears as broken. Homosociality and homosexuality are posited as two distinct symmetrically opposing positions. It is through these border marking practices that the myth of asexuality is sustained. It is however, also homophobia that signals to us the asexual, homosocial practices of basic training are haunted by ghostly and (homo)sexualised spectres. For while it is homophobia that maps a boundary between an asexual 'doing' of a militarised masculine subject, and a (homo)sexual 'undoing', it is also this need to mark a border, the need to mark a division between the homosocial to homosexual, the doing to undoing, which alerts us to the possibility there may in fact be a continuum.

That the acts of violence and humiliation at Camp Breadbasket followed an aggressively homophobic script<sup>61</sup> can begin to be made sense of if we understand them as part of a continuum of the heteronormative and homophobic performative enactments of basic training used to uphold the myth of asexuality; the myth of separating the doing from the undoing. Through practices of male group nakedness in basic training, the bodies of recruits involved are marked as masculine, (homosocially) bonded and heterosexual. Such practices are produced in and through discourses of heteronormativity and homophobia while simultaneously working to reiterate them. As these practices of male group nudity pass from basic training to the site of Camp Breadbasket in Iraq, the ghosts of (homo)sexuality are made violently visible. Already marked by racial and cultural signs of 'otherness', the bodies of Iraqi detainees become a site upon which the ghostly hauntings of (homo)sexuality are played out and revealed. Male group nakedness here is not about asexuality and fraternity, instead, the aggressively homophobic abuse is intensely (homo)sexualised and operates to 'other' the Iraqi detainees along racial, gendered and sexualised lines. The ghost of (homo)sexuality however, is always already present in both sites of male group nakedness. While in basic training the ghost is made 'un'-visible through the boundary-mapping practices of homophobia, during the prisoner abuse at Camp Breadbasket the (forced) nakedness is explicitly marked as (homo)sexualised and is aggressively homophobic. To present these two performances of nakedness

as distinct, symmetrically opposite practices is to fail to pay attention to the ghostly haunts of (homo)sexuality in basic training (and more generally throughout British Army life) , that are made violently visible in Camp Breadbasket.

Failing to pay attention to these ghosts and spectres can lead to a tendency to dismiss the sexualised violences of Camp Breadbasket as the actions of ‘a few bad apples’ or as an unfortunate but understandable effect of the harsh conditions troops are operating under during a tour of duty<sup>62</sup>. While abuses by British troops that both reach the public eye and result in a prosecution, such as those at Camp Breadbasket, remain relatively infrequent, viewing these as exceptional or unrelated to the homosocial and aggressively heterosexual practices of basic training re-inscribes a boundary that works to make ‘un’-visible their connectivity. By considering instead, an unbroken continuum between the ‘harmless’ homosocial behaviour of basic training and the ‘excessive’ and highly sexualised abuses at Camp Breadbasket, particular gendered and sexualised discourses can be seen operating in both sites; discourses that simultaneously work to uphold the myth of asexuality and produce that very same myth. It is in and through the attempts made at maintaining this myth, and the impossibility of a militarised masculine subject ever fully embodying this myth, that we can begin to make explicable the whole range of militarised violences (from the discursive severing of the relation between the asexual and [homo]sexual, to the homophobic language used in the barracks, to the highly sexualised prisoner abuses at Camp Breadbasket)<sup>63</sup>.

### **The myth of discipline**

Discipline is one of the central tenets of the British Army, mentioned no fewer than 15 times in their handbook on ‘Values and Standards’. Discipline is purported to be essential for combat effectiveness and the “primary antidote to fear”. While self-discipline is proclaimed to be the “best” kind of discipline – “innate, not imposed”<sup>64</sup> – Army training aims to instil and strengthen such discipline<sup>65</sup>.

So much of basic training is seemingly structured around this need for discipline; from the rigid timetabling with little free time, and punishments for the minor misdemeanour of running late; ‘personal administration’ and its prescribed routines for the ways in which a soldier washes, shaves and dresses himself; a fetishistic obsession with personal appearance and domesticity; and, of course, hour after hour spent on the drill square – an activity whose place in an operational context has long ceased to be recognised – with movements broken down to their constituent parts and repeated endlessly to shouted commands. ‘Official’ (inasmuch as it appears in MoD literature, or on the British Army webpage) reasoning for military discipline largely centres around the need for disciplined soldiers on the battlefield; “that all soldiers will obey orders, under the worst conditions of war”<sup>66</sup>. That soldiers can wield legitimate violence in part defines them as soldiers<sup>67</sup>. While the

term 'trained killer' is sensationalist and reductive, there remains a degree of accuracy that soldiers, Infantrymen in particular, are trained to close in on the enemy and kill as effectively as possible. Underlying this, there is an implicit assumption that violence that is legitimate is also controlled. Basic training then, teaches recruits the ways in which violence can and should be *legitimately* employed; the ways in which enemy combatants should be killed in a controlled and disciplined manner.

Whether a recruit is experiencing discipline with regard to his appearance, personal belongings, on the drill square or during weapons training, what is being expelled, the ghostly others exorcised, remains the same. For the myth of discipline to be maintained, the ghostly spectres of disorder, messiness, uncontrollability, are those that must be forced out. Upon entering basic training, recruits offer up their bodies as the primary site of inscription for a militarised masculine identity. The surface and appearance of recruits' bodies comes to constitute "a locus of control and strategy for enforcing discipline"<sup>68</sup>, with all aspects of their physical presentation now subject to superiors' inspection and control. John Hockey details the minutiae of ways this discipline can be illustrated; for example, "the requirement for all buttons on uniforms to be turned a particular way, laces in boots to be untwisted, [and that is] to say nothing of the need for clothes to be kept almost pathologically clean"<sup>69</sup>. Boots must be polished and 'bulled' to look like black glass<sup>70</sup>, and the badge on berets positioned to a precise spot and angle<sup>71</sup>. These fetishistic obsessions with the ordering and appearance of the body are mirrored in the levels of anxiety a new recruit may experience with regard to the standard and level of domesticity expected of them within the Army. Clothing and equipment are expected to be kept obsessively clean, beds made in particular ways ('bed blocks'), and "the ritual geometry of locker layout, with every article of kit positioned in a prescribed manner"<sup>72</sup>.

While such preoccupations with appearance or domestic chores may appear paradoxically 'feminine' in the 'masculine' figure of a warrior-soldier, and could be assumed to be an 'undoing', or a haunting spectre of a soldier's feminised 'other', these fetishistic concerns of the domestic are in fact a 'doing' of a militarised masculine subject. Under 'construction' is a very particular masculine subjectivity; one that is strong, brave and trained in weaponry, but also one that is intensely disciplined, and, in particular contexts, can engage in effective, controlled violence. It is this control and effectiveness that is achieved through the expulsion of, not the 'feminine' traits of cleanliness, obedience and domesticity, but through the ghostly haunts of messiness, disorganisation and uncontrollability<sup>73</sup>. A discursively idealised militarised masculine subject is simultaneously organised, smartly turned out and – when needs must – can engage in controlled and legitimate violence, effectively taking out enemy combatants. For so many seemingly oxymoronic traits ('controlled

violence', 'masculine domesticity') to fit together and work to constitute a militarised masculine identity relies on the myth of discipline. The myth of discipline allows a recruit to engage in numerous performances in basic training that may appear as antithetical to the soldiering 'ideal' depicted in popular culture and the recruitment literature, or to what expectations of battle require (for example, the hours spent 'bulling' boots or ironing creases into their uniform), yet maintain 'doing' a militarised masculine subjectivity. It is the myth of discipline that ensures all the contradictory, ambiguous performances of basic training work to constitute a militarised masculine identity. Here it is discipline that maps a boundary between the potentially feminised performances of domesticity and taking care of your appearance, and the 'masculine', soldierly performances of instilling self-discipline and control, ensuring you are fully prepared to head into battle; "[T]he more organised a man is, the easier he will find it to live like a soldier"<sup>74</sup>.

However, it is this myth of discipline, this expulsion of messiness and disorder that is leaky, and the means through which a militarised masculine subject is not only done, but simultaneously undone. For while the discipline of basic training is explained in terms of a preparedness for combat – "[G]ood discipline means that all soldiers will obey orders, under the worst conditions of war"<sup>75</sup> – the battlefield itself is not a site where disorder and messiness can, or have, been expelled. Experiences of war, and decisions made in the midst of combat, are not controlled, neat or ordered. During a tour of duty, the ghostly spectres of messiness and disorder that were supposedly exorcised and policed against during basic training are made visible and haunts the supposedly disciplined and ordered bodies of soldiers.

On an almost absurd level, the pathological cleanliness and fetishistic habits of domesticity that so dominate a recruit's life during basic training are impossible to maintain. In the dusty environments of Iraq and Afghanistan, where sandstorms are common, basic training's expectations of perfectly 'bulled' boots, neatly pressed trousers and particularly washed and shaved bodies, are rendered ridiculous. The ghosts of messiness and disorder exorcised from recruits' bodies through daily routine, inspection and discipline, not only haunt, but take over. Beards and hair grow<sup>76</sup>, soldiers may go days without showering, and the blackness of boots is hidden beneath dust and sand. Rather than the exact placing of regimental badges on uniforms, entire sections of uniforms are discarded in soldiers' attempts to survive the heat of the desert or work on their tans before being deployed back to the UK<sup>77</sup>. The border that marked a disciplined soldierly body, delineating the appearance, movement and how to 'do' and 'become' a soldier during basic training, is shown during a tour of duty to not be hard and static, but soft and 'leaky'<sup>78</sup>. Ghosts that were thought to be expelled through the myth of discipline return at full force, disrupting notions of a controlled and

disciplined soldier, undoing understandings of a militarised masculine identity constituted and completed during basic training.

Ghosts and spectres that were always already there during a recruit's weeks in basic training, but rendered 'un'-visible through the myth of discipline make themselves known in ways that are not limited to the surface of a soldier's body. As mentioned above, the battlefield is marked not exclusively with order and discipline, but is interrupted by, and intersected with, messiness and chaos. The disciplined soldier-recruit, so visible during basic training, is replaced by a soldier taken-over by the ghostly haunts that the myth of discipline once worked to expel. While the experience of battle is often posited at the heart of military life, multiple contradictions are found at this supposed core<sup>79</sup>. An openness and willingness to show emotions such as pain, fear and sadness – emotions largely denied and exorcised by recruits during basic training (think back to the recruits labelled as 'effeminate' or 'homosexual' because of their own demonstrations of these feelings) – are experienced openly on the battlefield. Far from being signs of effeminacy and/or their militarised masculine identity coming 'undone', such expression of emotions, in this context, are expected – "tears are found at the heart of the military experience"<sup>80</sup>, and are evidence of the 'warrior bond' between soldiers. Other 'doings' of the myth of discipline and a militarised masculine subject are similarly inverted during combat. While the myth of discipline and the doings of a militarised masculine identity during basic training rely on rule following, complete obedience and a clear and coherent chain of command, in combat their ghostly 'others' dominate a soldier's experience. During fire-fights while there may be an official chain of command, in the 'heat of battle' it may not be so clear, with communications down and operational objectives no longer clear. Furthermore, medals or military honours awarded for bravery are frequently awarded to those who did not demonstrate rule-following, discipline and control, but those who engaged in risk-taking behaviour; behaviour not necessarily encouraged during basic training<sup>81</sup>. In sites of combat, spectres and ghosts that troubled and disrupted militarised masculinities under production in basic training, leak through the boundary marked by the myth of discipline and instead operate to (re)constitute and (re)inscribe a discursively idealised militarised masculine subjectivity.

Like the homosocial and the (homo)sexual, the 'disciplined' and 'undisciplined' are not two distinct, symmetrically opposing positions, but instead lie on an unbroken continuum. The two positions are related, and the border between them not fixed and hard, but soft, porous and always-shifting. The border itself is haunted and troubled by the same disorder and messiness that the boundary-marking practice of discipline seeks to expel from the bodies of recruits. The boundary is not fixed, complete and ordered, but is ghostly inasmuch as it is porous and undisciplined. While a discursive violence has taken place in and through the incomplete and forced severing of the

relation between the disciplined and undisciplined, the messiness and leakiness of this border also works to produce 'real', material violent effects.

A soldier's unique position in society – sanctioned to wield legitimate violence against particular others, with enough force to even kill – is underwritten by the assumption that this violence is controlled. Basic training and a soldier's ongoing assessment and training throughout their career are assumed to inculcate a soldier with the knowledge, ability and discipline to be able to inflict violence during combat, in a controlled and disciplined manner. The myth of discipline works to mark a border between what is considered to be controlled and disciplined (and by extension legitimate) violence, and uncontrolled and undisciplined (and thus illegitimate) violence. A soldier who gets into a fight while on leave will face disciplinary action if his superiors are informed, however, a soldier will likewise be disciplined for failing to engage in violence ordered by his superiors while in a combat zone, or may be praised for demonstrating a particular 'aptitude' for violence in battle<sup>82</sup>. While such a distinction may appear obvious and the boundary between such acts clear, what is considered legitimate and controlled violence, or illegitimate and uncontrolled violence is not always so 'neat'.

That the boundary between the disciplined and undisciplined is messy and unclear does not simply (re)produce contradictory and paradoxical doings/undings (in the ways particular practices can leak in either direction of the boundary), but also makes unstable the borders tracing the limits of legitimate and illegitimate violence. In the past decade, British troops have been stationed in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and as claims of prisoner abuse, illegitimate troop violence, and mistreatment of civilians have emerged, public debates and enquiries have questioned what is considered 'legitimate' or 'controlled' violence in a warzone, and where<sup>83</sup> a boundary between the legitimate and illegitimate should, or does, lie. At what point after Baha Mousa (who would die as a result of his injuries), a 26-year-old receptionist at Basra's Ibn al-Haitham Hotel, was taken into custody by British troops during a 'routine investigation', and sustained 93 separate injuries, including fractured ribs and a broken nose, did the violence meted out by members of the Queens Lancashire Regiment cross the boundary mapped by the myth of discipline from the controlled to the uncontrolled? At what point did the violence against the nine other men who were seized alongside Mousa, but survived, pass the border separating legitimate and illegitimate violence? Was the verbal abuse legitimate? Being made to dance like Michael Jackson? Being burned, stamped and urinated on, and forced to lie face down over full latrines<sup>84</sup>? A 1972 ban (thus an explicit *delegitimizing* of such practices) on hooding, stressing (forcing detainees to stand in 'stress' positions, for example, with their legs bend and arms out), deprivation of food and sleep, and coercive use of noise, had been

ignored; instead, “conditioning” treatments supposedly used to “soften up” detainees before questioning were deemed necessary<sup>85</sup>. Given that Mousa and the nine other detainees were already hooded, restrained and of little or no threat to those who had captured them, the systematic beatings and abuse they were subjected to fails to appear as controlled or disciplined violence.

The boundaries marked by the myth of discipline that map the unquestioning obedience of basic training, the risk-taking behaviour of combat, and the uncontrolled violences enacted on the body of Baha Mousa and his nine fellow captives, do not signify separate and mutually exclusive sites, but are instead located on a continuum. It is a continuum that the myth of discipline seeks to deny and make ‘un’-visible through its boundary-marking. However, as has been shown, the limits marked, the ways of ‘doing’ a discursively idealised militarised masculine identity, demarcated by the myth of discipline is not fixed by ‘hard’ borders, but can always shift and leak through a soft and porous border. While this means that particular performative and discursive ‘doings’ of a militarised masculine subjectivity can leak through these borders and become an ‘undoing’ (and vice-versa), it also means the control and legitimacy that underwrites the violences soldiers are trained to employ through the myth of discipline, are also subject to ‘leakiness’. The violences enacted on the body of Mousa<sup>86</sup> then, cannot be explained as the actions of ‘a few bad apples’, or the result of “serious failings in army leadership, planning and training”<sup>87</sup> as was stated in a MoD investigation into the affair. In fact, it is through the very bordering practices that the British Army and basic training’s myth of discipline imposes, that such violences begin to be made explicable. It is not that there are serious failings in Army leadership, planning and training, but that, in some ways, these contradictory and paradoxical practices of basic training are *working*. It is through the very particular practices, discourses and myths of basic training that such a subject is produced; a subject who is always already incomplete and fragile, a subject who fails in the very moment of ‘becoming’.

### **A double (successful) failure**

This paper ends with an account of a double failure. A failure on the part of those soldiers within the British Army who fail to ‘be’ or successfully embody a discursively idealised militarised masculine subject, and also a failure on the part of the paper itself; a failure at resisting the demarcation of borders, and a (re)constitution, of a militarised masculine identity. The first failure – that of the soldiers – has been shown in their failure at every moment, in every ‘doing’, to remain within the borders mapped by the myths of asexuality and discipline. There is no neatly marked subject; no clearly defined break between the homosocial warrior-‘brother’, and the (homo)sexualised ‘other’, or between disciplined legitimate violence, and undisciplined, illegitimate violence. The ghost is

always already present, borders will always leak, militarised masculine identities are always been 'undone'.

As an identity that is performatively constructed, a militarised masculine subject is in a continual state of 'becoming'. The second failure then, is that of this paper; a failure to resist (re)constituting a militarised masculine subject. For the moment my research 'speaks'<sup>88</sup> British militarised masculinity (even the use of the term 'British militarised masculinity'), it will construct and delimit the identity in and through the stories I tell<sup>89</sup>. This inevitable continued production of a subject I am trying to deconstruct is what Maria Stern and Marysia Zalewski call an "aporia [that] can never be successfully resolved"<sup>90</sup>. An "untotalisable problem at the heart of the concept", an aporia disrupts a concept's "trajectory, emptying out its fullness, [and] opening out its closure"<sup>91</sup>. It is not only that an aporia can never be successfully resolved but that it can never be known; the only thing an aporia can guarantee is radical uncertainty. This paper, and my own attempts at refusing to trace the borders of a militarised masculine identity, is troubled and haunted by the aporia of the performative production of that identity.

It is however, in its failure to escape performatively (re)enacting a militarised masculine subject that this paper offers two 'successes'. Firstly, my failure to surpass an inherent paradox (to deconstruct and 'undo' a militarised masculine's performative character, but in doing so, performatively (re)enact 'him'), "further disclose[s] the frantic and violent composition of disciplinary demands to produce the impossible: usable sure knowledge"<sup>92</sup>. There is, and can be, no sure way of ever fully 'knowing' or unpacking a militarised masculine subject; in our attempts to do so we inevitably and inadvertently end up (re)constituting 'him' in some way. Secondly, refracted through the conceptual framework of aporias, we might re-imagine this case of 'feminist failure' as bringing possibility. While failing to avoid (re)constituting a militarised masculine subject, by being aware of the restrictions of paying attention to particular sites, particular myths, and telling certain stories, "snags, tears, and portals, inviting alternative paths"<sup>93</sup> are revealed. Understanding militarised masculinity as an aporia ensures it will never have the borders of its identity mapped with hard lines; it will never be closed down, and will remain an unknown. Ensuring only absolute uncertainty, understanding militarised masculinity as an aporia means its deconstruction and unpacking must be an act of repetition and continuous involvement. The ghosts that haunt it will always offer the possibility of a distraction, a diversion, a detour that will lead to an undoing.

Failure then is not "something inherently bad, disappointing [and] poorly executed"<sup>94</sup>. These 'successful failures' will offer no "comforting reassurances", but will instead suggest possibilities for "open-ended conclusions and future[s]"<sup>95</sup>. Failing to close down understandings of what a militarised masculine identity 'is', or how it is 'done', is failure only if measured within parameters set by what

Gordon terms, a 'renewed commitment to blindness'<sup>96</sup>. Outside this commitment are ghostly matters, and complicated ways of knowing; militarised masculinities that are simultaneously done and undone; and the possibility of judging 'failures' as successes through their revelations of the vulnerability of terms such as 'British militarised masculinity', and the possibility of alternative understandings.

### **Failing to conclude**

This paper has sought to address the ways in which the *impossibility* of a stable and 'complete' militarised masculine subject may help make explicable particular militarised violences perpetrated by British troops. Long identified as a privileged site of construction, basic training's performative and discursive structures have been widely discussed as working to construct a militarised masculine identity. However, wanting to avoid the inadvertent ontological 'solidification' and reconstitution of a militarised masculine subject that can occur through the linguistic reification of specific 'soldierly' characteristics and traits, this paper instead conducts a 'ghost hunt' of the myths of asexuality and discipline that emerge through, and reinforce, the gendered discursive structures of basic training. Using Avery Gordon's work on ghosts and haunting, the 'doings' of a militarised masculine identity are revealed to be always already haunted by 'undoings'; troubling and making fragile the subject under construction. Asexual, homosocial male bonding body practices are haunted by the ghostly spectres of (homo)sexuality, while the borders that marked controlled, disciplined and legitimate violence from uncontrolled, undisciplined and illegitimate violence are shown to be soft, porous and leaky. Paying attention to these ghosts, allowing their presences to distract us from our search for a stable, constructed militarised masculine identity, reveals the ways in which a militarised masculine subject is always in a state of simultaneous 'doing' and 'undoing'. There is no clearly demarcated break between a 'making' of a militarised masculine identity and an 'unmaking' of one; they are located on an unbroken continuum, only made to appear as broken through the boundary-marking 'devices' of the myths of asexuality and discipline. Violences enacted on the bodies of Iraqi detainees then, do not mark a failing of discipline or a distinct break with a militarised masculine subjectivity produced in and through the practices of basic training. Rather, it is by paying attention to the always already haunting presence of ghosts in the myths of asexuality and discipline during basic training, that their violently visible enactments become explicable.

I wrote this paper to expose the violences that are enacted when particular borders are (attempted to be) mapped around a militarised masculine subject. However, I found in writing it, that I too returned to this act of 'bordering'; inadvertently mapping lines and demarcating the limits of a militarised masculine identity, and where and how 'he' is constructed. My paper ends up

echoing and engaging in the very violences it critiques. It is then, a defence that this paper ends with. A defence against the perceived failures of what was set out to do; for while the paper marks borders and works to (re)constitute a militarised masculine identity, these borders are 'soft', and the militarised masculine identity never completed, finished, or done with. To finish, I would like to appeal to the reader to search for the ghosts and spectres that haunt this paper, which my own 'blindness' and language have worked to make 'un'-visible. To ask the reader to pay attention to these ghosts, and how they disrupt the boundaries I have mapped, and through the 'snags, tears and portals' that are revealed, take a detour away from the stories I tell.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Cristina Masters, Veronique Pin-Fat and Roisin Read for reading earlier drafts and/or parts of this paper and for their constructive comments. I would also like to thank Ronan O'Callaghan for helping me think through my use of 'aporia'. Any mistakes however, remain my own.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Maja Zehfuss for pointing this out to me.

<sup>3</sup> With direct confrontation with the enemy the expected end-point, Infantry training is more intense than the 14 week Phase One training completed by all recruits. However, while the intensity may differ, the form and content (albeit to a lesser extent) of basic training remain similar (Arkin, William and Lynne R. Dobrofsky, "Military Socialization and Masculinity", *Journal of Social Affairs*, 34:1 [1978], p. 151-68 [p. 157]) across both the CMS and CIC.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Defence (MoD), *Combat Infantryman's Course – Line Infantry* (no date). Available at: [http://www.army.mod.uk/training\\_education/training/18148.aspx](http://www.army.mod.uk/training_education/training/18148.aspx). Accessed on 3 March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> For those who would like to explore this in greater detail please see the references that immediately follow in this section.

<sup>7</sup> As well as the authors below, see also, R. Wayne Eisenhart, "You Can't Hack It Little Girl: A Discussion of the Covert Psychological Agenda of Modern Combat Training", *Journal of Social Affairs* 31:4 (1975), p. 13-23; Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (London: Virago Press, 1997); and, ITV, *Guarding the Queen*, Television documentary film (2007), for discussions on the transformative effect of basic training.

<sup>8</sup> See Arkin and Dobrofsky, "Military Socialization" and John Hockey, "No More Heroes: Masculinity in the Infantry", in Paul R. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London: Praeger, 2003), p. 15-25.

<sup>9</sup> Karner, Tracy, "Engendering Violent Men: Oral Histories of Military Masculinity", in Lee H. Bowker (ed.), *Masculinities and Violence* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 197-232 (p. 215).

<sup>10</sup> See Arkin and Dobrofsky, "Military Socialization"; Hockey, "No More Heroes"; Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army* (London: Routledge, 2007); Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officer's Reading Club: Killing Time & Fighting Wars* (London: Penguin Books, 2009); Ministry of Defence (MoD) recruitment video, *Introduction to ITC Catterick* (no date), found at: [http://www.army.mod.uk/training\\_education/training/18145.aspx](http://www.army.mod.uk/training_education/training/18145.aspx), accessed on 3 April 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Beevor, Antony, *Inside the British Army*, updated edition (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> See Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, for a wider discussion on the ways in which ideas of gender are (re)produced as they circulate round, and in and out of, Army and civilian cultures.

<sup>13</sup> For example, ideas that 'real men' are strong, in control and sexually virile, circulate not just within the Armed Forces but operate in numerous sites throughout society.

<sup>14</sup> While the two myths that are explored in this paper are the myth of asexuality and the myth of discipline, this is not to suggest these are the only myths in circulation in basic training. Other myths that circulate (and this list is by no means exhaustive) may include, the myth of uniformity, 'whiteness' and classlessness.

<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank Veronique Pin-Fat and Cristina Masters for pointing this out to me.

<sup>16</sup> The development of Connell's analysis can be traced in her following works: "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity", *Theory and Society*, 14:5 (1985) (with T. Carrigan and J. Lee); *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); *Masculinities*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002 [1995]); *Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Higate, Paul R., "'Soft Clerks' and 'Hard Civvies': Pluralizing Military Masculinities", in Paul R. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London: Praeger, 2003), p. 27-42 (p. 30).

<sup>18</sup> Stern, Maria and Marysia Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s): Reflections on Feminism and Familiar Fables of Militarisation", *Review of International Studies*, 35:3, p. 611-30 (p. 624).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Frank J. Barrett, "The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy", *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3:3, p. 129-42; Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (London: University of California Press, 1993); and, Higate, "'Soft Clerks'", in particular pay attention to numerous constructions of militarised masculinity.

<sup>20</sup> An identity is performative inasmuch as the subject has "no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), 173). Such an understanding draws on Judith Butler's work on performativity, for a

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fuller discussion of performativity please see Butler's works, 1999 (1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Gordon, Avery, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, new edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1997]).

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. x.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. viii.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 201.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> The idea of a methodology getting you 'lost', or distracting you from what you set out to 'find', is explored by Patti Lather, "Postbook: Working the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27:1 (2001), p. 199-227, and *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), and Marysia Zalewski in, "Distracted Reflections on the Production, Narration, and Refusal of Feminist Knowledge in International Relations", in Brooke A. Ackerly et al., (eds.), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 42-61 respectively.

<sup>36</sup> From herein, the term 'basic training' will be specifically referring to Infantry basic training. While I recognise that by doing this I too will 'map' borders of a militarised masculine subject, the simultaneous 'doing' and 'undoing' of that subject will mean these borders are only 'soft'. I have chosen to focus on Infantry basic training specifically as I want to demonstrate the instability of a militarised masculine identity even when scripted on to a body already marked by discourses integral to popular understandings of an 'ideal-type' soldier (for example, a male recruit joining the primary combat arm of the British Army).

<sup>37</sup> Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> For example please see, Arkin and Dobrofsky, 1978; John Hockey, *Squaddies: Portrait of a Subculture* (Exeter: Exeter University Publications, 1986) and "No More Heroes"; Karner, 1998; Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism & UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*.

<sup>40</sup> Whitworth, *Men, Militarism*, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> For example please see, Arkin and Dobrofsky, 1978; Beevor, 1991; and, Morgan, David H. J., "Theater of War: Combat, the Military and Masculinities", in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (eds.), *Theorizing Masculinities* (1994), p. 165-82.

<sup>44</sup> Beevor, *Inside*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 1-2.

<sup>46</sup> This however, is not to suggest that it is only in constituting militarised masculine subjectivities that such a violence is committed; the 'doings' of all subjectivities involve exclusions.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note at this point that this is not to imply that there can be such a thing as a fixed 'heterosexual practice', or a fixed 'homosexual practice', rather I am trying to bring attention to the ways in which particular 'human' emotions and characteristics can be, and have been, marked as 'homosexual' irrespective of whether a male individual identified as 'heterosexual' has experienced them or not. It is also worth noting that in basic training, and the British Army more generally, it is those practices marked as 'heterosexual' that are implicitly and explicitly privileged and valorised.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, such 'non-heterosexual' practices are commonly associated with the feminine in wider culture; for example, emotionality, weakness, looking feminine.

<sup>49</sup> Beevor, *Inside*, 30.

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<sup>50</sup> While the homosocial practices of basic training are marked as asexual, it is assumed they are performed by heterosexual bodies. Heterosexual bodies are (re)constituted as heterosexual in and through these performatives, while the practices themselves remain asexual in and through their 'doings' by heterosexual bodies. The relationship between the asexual practices and heterosexual bodies then, is co-constitutive.

<sup>51</sup> Beevor, *Inside*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> I recognise that I am in a grammatical bind here. While I want to expose the violences enacted when particular borders between doing and undoing are mapped, simply using the terms 'doing' and 'undoing' suggests a border, and I too end up engaging in the discursively violent practices of boundary-marking. It is then, the border that is the 'ghostly matter' of this paper; it is the spectre of the boundary that haunts, and the impossibility of escaping distinctions.

<sup>53</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> Nor does male group nudity exclusively occur within the military in the production of masculinities. In a number of traditionally 'macho' environments (for example, the all-male competitive sports team), male group nakedness is a routine, 'everyday' body practice.

<sup>55</sup> There have also been claims of sexual assault by those held at Camp Breadbasket. Some of these claims made by Iraqi detainees have since been settled out of court by the MoD, with the MoD now declining to comment on them.

<sup>56</sup> Leigh Day & Co Solicitors news archive, "Camp Breadbasket – five more Iraqi civilians serve claims against MoD following abuse by British soldiers" (8 Aug 2008). Available at: <http://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news-archive/camp-breadbasket-abuse-5-more-iraqi-civilians>. Accessed on: 3 Feb 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Woodward and Winter (2007) refer to the 'Is this the way to Armadillo' video spoof British Infantry troops made (titled on YouTube as "Is this the way to Armadillo" [found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld1DTmXesTo>]) in 2006 while stationed in Iraq, with soldiers in various states of undress throughout the video (74) CHECK REF. The central character of the video is flanked throughout by men to either side of him, and is credited with the name 'Lucky Pierre' at the end of the video. 'Lucky Pierre' is a sexual reference to the middle man, being anally penetrated, in a three-person sexual encounter.

<sup>59</sup> By placing 'raced' in brackets is not to suggest that the racialised aspects of this violence are of any less import than those of the sexualised. In fact, an equally revealing myth of basic training to unpack would be the 'myth of whiteness'. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow me to follow all the ghostly presences that linger and haunt a militarised masculine identity. Both Sherene Razack (*Dark Threats & White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* [London: University of Toronto Press, 2004]) and Melanie Richter-Montpetit ("Empire, Desire and Violence: A Queer Transnational Feminist Reading of the Prisoner 'Abuse' in Abu Ghraib and the Question of 'Gender Equality'", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9:1 [2007], p. 38-59), do excellent raced analyses of racialised discourses surrounding militarised violences (respectively those of Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia in 1993 and of American military police officers during the now infamous Abu Ghraib torture in Iraq in 2004).

<sup>60</sup> Richter-Montpetit, "Empire, Desire and Violence", p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Richter-Montpetit, *Empire, Desire and Violence*, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> General Sir Michael Jackson, the UK's most senior soldier at the time of the sentencing of soldiers charged with the abuses at 'Camp Breadbasket', made a statement quoting that the mistreatments at Camp Breadbasket should be viewed both in terms of the "very small numbers of cases" dealing with allegations of abuse, and the "operational challenge faced by the Army" in Iraq (BBC News, "Army Chief's Statement in Full" [25 Feb 2005]. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4299725.stm>. Accessed on 3 Feb 2011).

<sup>63</sup> This however, is not to suggest that it is only through the myth of asexuality that these violences become understandable. As previously stated, each specific experience of militarised violence will emerge in and through particular discourses, many of them raced, classed, gendered and sexualised in very specific ways. The scope of this paper cannot do justice to the many intersecting and interacting discourses that operate to produce both constructions of a militarised masculine subject and the violent external effects of this fragile identity.

<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Defence (MoD), *Values and Standards of the British Army* (no date). Available at: [http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/v\\_s\\_of\\_the\\_british\\_army.pdf](http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/v_s_of_the_british_army.pdf). Accessed on 23 March 2011.

<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that while the term 'discipline' is used constantly in the Army, the assumptions behind it and what it refers to, are rarely made explicit – what is meant by 'military discipline' is hard to isolate. Hockey lists official interpretations centring on "expectations concerning the recruits' appearance, cleanliness, and

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respect for rank and tradition; but, above all, unquestioning obedience is seen as the lynchpin of military discipline" (*Squaddies*, p. 23).

<sup>66</sup> MoD, *Values and Standards*.

<sup>67</sup> Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p. 104.

<sup>68</sup> Hockey, John, "'Head Down, Bergen On, Mind in Neutral': The Infantry Body", *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*. Available at:

[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3719/is\\_200207/ai\\_n9123834/pg\\_1](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3719/is_200207/ai_n9123834/pg_1). Accessed 16 Dec 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Hockey, "'Head Down".

<sup>70</sup> Beevor, *Inside*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Hockey, "'Head Down".

<sup>72</sup> Beevor, *Inside*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, while cleanliness, domesticity and obedience are typically understood as 'feminine' characteristics, so too can the traits of messiness, disorganisation and uncontrollability. In the rational/emotional binary, it is the emotional that is associated with the feminine, with emotions considered to be messy, disorganised, uncontrollable (think, for example, of the hysterical, irrational woman in Victorian medicine, a legacy that remains today in hysterectomy's etymological roots; the surgical excision of the uterus).

<sup>74</sup> MoD, *Combat Infantryman's Course*.

<sup>75</sup> MoD, *Values and Standards*

<sup>76</sup> In letters to *Soldier* ("Focus on Beards Causes Irritation", February 2011 edition, p. 63), the British Army's official magazine, an exchange took place regarding "scruffy" looking soldiers with "part-grown beards and overgrown locks". The exchange included a number of Army personnel of different ranks and arms. Reasons forwarded for the growth in facial hair in Afghanistan included gaining respect from Afghan elders ("those with a 'voice' in Afghanistan...all have beards"), and the makeshift conditions with only enough water for drinking and cooking.

<sup>77</sup> Patrick Hennessey's memoir of his tours in Iraq and Afghanistan includes a photo of him and two friends sunbathing in their underwear in a logistics base in Southern Iraq (*The Junior Officers'*, p. 142), and numerous references to time spent sunbathing or "tanning" (p. 155) during operations.

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps one of the few practices of discipline that continues to be practiced religiously during a tour of duty is that of looking after personal equipment. However, even then, soldiers are vulnerable to their weapons failing or jamming during fire fights, revealing the haunting ghosts of disorder always already there.

<sup>79</sup> Morgan, "Theater of War", p. 176.

<sup>80</sup> Morgan, "Theater of War", p. 177.

<sup>81</sup> Likewise however, soldiers are punished for not following orders or engaging in risk-taking behaviour when it goes wrong.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Acting Sergeant Dipprasad Pun, a Gurkha fighting in the British Army in Afghanistan, was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross in 2011, the second highest military medal for bravery, for single-handedly fighting off around twelve Taliban insurgents. When his ammunition ran out (all 400 hundred bullets, 17 grenades and one mine), Pun resorted to battering his attackers with a sandbag and his machine gun tripod.

<sup>83</sup> Of course, by asking *where* such a boundary may lie implicitly assumes that such a boundary exists in a static, fixed position. As this paper will demonstrate, attempts at marking and fixing this border is both an impossibility, and makes possible particular militarised violences.

<sup>84</sup> Simpson, Aislinn, "Baha Mousa Inquiry: Video Footage of Soldier Abusing Iraqis Shown", *The Telegraph* (14 July 2009). Found at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/5821206/Baha-Mousa-inquiry-video-footage-of-soldier-abusing-iraqis-shown.html>. Accessed on: 25 March 2011.

<sup>85</sup> Balakrishnan, Angela, "Background: The Killing of Baha Mousa", *The Guardian* (10 July 2008). Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/10/iraq.military1>. Accessed on 25 March 2011.

<sup>86</sup> While the killing of Baha Mousa has been used here as a case in point, ghostly haunts of uncontrollability have been violently visible in a number of cases involving British troops; these include, the abuses at Camp Breadbasket previously mentioned, the alleged drowning of Iraqi teenagers in the Shatt al-Arab canal as punishment for looting, and the beating of Iraqi youths during a street riot in al-Amarah in 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Balakrishnan, "Background".

<sup>88</sup> By 'speaks' I mean to situate a militarised masculine subject in particular contexts and discursive structures. In effect, by 'speaking' British militarised masculinity I am working to bring 'him' into being.

<sup>89</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 619.

<sup>90</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 620.

<sup>91</sup> Burke cited in Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 620.

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<sup>92</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 629.

<sup>93</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 629.

<sup>94</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 620.

<sup>95</sup> Stern and Zalewski, "Feminist Fatigue(s)", p. 629.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 207.