

## **Aversions to Masculine Excess in the Private Military and**

### **Security Company and their Effects:**

### **Don't Be a "Billy Big Bollocks" and beware the "Ninja!"**

Paul Higate

University of Bristol

© Paul Higate

**School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies**

**University of Bristol**

**Working Paper No. 08-12**

Paul Higate is a Reader in Gender and Security at School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies at the University of Bristol. His research has been concerned with the gendered culture of the military, in particular military masculinities. Relatedly, he has worked on issues of SEA in peacekeeping missions, the transition from military to civilian life and most recently, Private and Military Security Companies. He is editor of *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* and numerous articles. He is currently a Fellow of the ESRC/AHRC Global Uncertainties Programme with a project entitled: Mercenary Masculinities Imagine Security: The case of the Private Military Contractor'. He can be contacted at [paul.higate@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:paul.higate@bristol.ac.uk)

## **Aversions to Masculine Excess in the Private Military and Security Company and their Effects: Don't Be a "Billy Big Bollocks" and beware the "Ninja!"**

Paul Higate

University of Bristol

### **Abstract**

Critical gender scholars of PMSCs have used the term 'remasculinization' to capture the implications of the industry's pluralisation of military and militarized masculinities in ways intended to provide legitimacy for the industry and in turn, to render it attractive to potential clients. Drawing on participant observation of a training course in the US designed for potential contractors aspiring to work in the armed Close Protection role, this paper considers instructor narratives of the 'professional' versus the 'Billy Big Bollocks' or 'Ninja' noted to undermine the industry through his hypermasculine approach to security work. I conclude by showing how these narratives play a role in legitimating the wider industry through their focus on who - or which kind of masculinity - has the right to use violence. Implicit in these narratives is the inevitability of the industry and its use of violence that overlooks the geopolitical relevance of PMSCs in their wider sense.

## Introduction

Growing interest in Private Military and Security Companies (PMSC) from critical scholars of gender has seen a number of these commentators engage the concept of remasculinization in their analysis. This concept has been considered discursively in respect of company websites and focused on the U.S, related work has considered remasculinization at the level of state policy and ideology. Taken together, these contributions illuminate private security's reinvigoration of masculinity in ways that reposition it as the prime guarantor of security in relation to the alleged feminisation of the armed forces over the last two decades or so.

Through foregrounding the close links between power and masculinity as they are inflected by market dynamics in a sphere of growing importance to the governance of conflict and its aftermath, this literature throws light on particular aspects of the industry's gendered terrain through raising the question of how far, and in what kinds of ways it can be conceived of as a site/sight of remasculinization. Set against this backdrop, I also use a gender sensitive approach but in the current paper, apply it to contractor's practices on the ground - or more specifically, the classroom. This hitherto unconsidered learning environment represents an analytically significant aspect of the industry since it provides insights into a social environment within which individuals are prepared for employment as contractors. Perhaps more importantly, it also demonstrates that remasculinization can be a process of conscious strategy *and* part-unintended outcome of gendered and national identity, where the mercenary figure is found to be distasteful at the level of manly sense of self. Taking a step back, internal struggles around masculine identity in the case of armed contractors help legitimize an industry based ultimately on the potential for, and actual use of violence.

## **Structure of Paper**

This paper is structured around three main sections. The first provides a brief overview of the remasculinization thesis, where state level and discursive perspectives reveal the importance of remasculinization for the legitimacy of the industry, as it reconstitutes and recuperates masculinity's authority in both ideological and policy terms. Discussion then shifts to the methodological approach where background details of field-research are provided. Third, this leads into the empirical material, where the metaphors of 'Billy Big Bollocks' and 'Ninja's' are used to capture training instructor's binary framing of the professional and his oppositional hypermasculine other, distinctions configured to large degree through the American versus British masculine archetype. Consideration of this empirical material follows where I focus on convergence and divergence with the remasculinization thesis, as well as argue that in the final analysis, self-referential intra-masculine rivalries play their own role in the militarisation of security since they proceed from the unquestioned, intuitively held belief that violence is inevitable. A brief conclusion follows.

## **PMSCs and Remasculinization**

Drawing on Susan Jefford's (1989) use of the concept in her groundbreaking book *Remasculinization of America*, Saskia Stachowitsch highlights the term's sensitivity to the means by which the project of patriarchy is revived through signs, symbols and popular culture. These combine in specific ways to help re-establish the 'dominance of men and masculinity in American culture' (Stachowitsch, 2012:7). Stachowitsch then turns to feminist

theories of the state to make sense of the gendered aspects of neo-liberal restructuring and the strategic importance of private military labour (Stachowitsch, 2012). Here, the concept of remasculinization is used to underscore women's relative exclusion from PMSCs, a sector noted to 'impede gender equality policies ... [and in so doing] reconstruct masculinist ideologies' (Stachowitsch, 2012:2). In this way, women's overall status and rights is eroded as a consequence of military privatization where masculinity is reanimated as 'the efficient guarantor of national security' (Leander, 2006; Stachowitsch, 2012:12). This observation is reminiscent of Judith Hicks Stiehm's and Iris Marion Young's earlier work on masculinity and protection, argued to have an enduring relevance in the contemporary sphere of the PMSC within the context of a Kabul based security company (Higate, 2012).

While the revival of masculinity's authority at the level of the state and military privatization is significant, Joachim and Schneiker complement state level analysis through a gendered decoding of PMSC websites argued to propagate a pluralised hybridization of privatized masculinities. Given that these websites may function as the primary interface with customers and company market share, their gendered framing is of considerable analytical significance. Here, dominant constructions of acceptable and normalizing 'benchmark' masculinities in the form of the professional, ethical warrior hero are considered (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012:2-3; 2012a). Explanations for these gendered constructions lie in all three categories of institutional isomorphism identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), demonstrated empirically in the case of white Western former special forces veterans as well as those who trade on the 'Ghurka' label in order to generate an income within the industry (Chisholm, 2012). More broadly, these commodified representations are characterised by a widely held aversion to the mercenary archetype since [he] is ultimately bad for business (Via, 2010;

Higate, 2012a; Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, 2012a; Leander, 2012; Stachowitsch, 2012:10). Rather, market driven processes commodify competing forms of masculinity in-line with company's presumptions around client's preference for expertise and professionalism in their risk [man]agers (Leander, 2006, 2012). This is more than a matter of pluralising masculinities in occupational terms as noted in national state militaries (Morgan, 1994; Barrett, 1996; Higate, *et al*, 2003), but rather within the context of the market place can be seen to be key to the survival of companies offering niche, securitizing masculinities. Here, PMSCs gendered contours follow a pattern established since the end of the Cold War and the relative crisis of Western militaries legitimacy. These historical shifts stimulated the emergence of softer, more sophisticated and palatable masculinities often dovetailing with national, state military identity (Whitworth, 2004; Duncanson, 2009). Set against the backdrop of aid's increasing securitization (Duffield, 2001), these modes of masculinity can be seen as hybridised forms of the warrior archetype, fusing the ability to conduct peacekeeping operations with compassion, whilst simultaneously embodying the capacity to respond with force when necessary. In turn, these shifts in military and militarized masculinities have helped to create the gendered and humanitarian logics within which PMSCs have evolved (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012b). Scholarly contributions examining the PMSC industry through state and labour market policy and company website thereby underscore the regenerative mutability of masculinity in this sphere as, phoenix-like, it seeks (and largely attains) authority in private security such that PMSCs

‘derive their growing importance not solely from being effective force multipliers [an industry justification for privatization], but also because they are effective masculinity multipliers’ (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 17-19).

Guided by these critical gender scholar's insights, the current paper seeks to deepen and broaden understandings of remasculinization in the industry. Through its ethnographic and empirical approach focused on training student contractors in the role of armed Close Protection (CP) officers, following discussions provides an original contribution to a literature that has yet to engage directly with contractor's social practices on the ground, together with how these might speak to the wider legitimacy of the industry. First, some words on method.

### **Methodology: Field Research**

The field research on which this paper is based was carried out in the U.S in the summer of 2011. Here, I attended a training course for potential contractor's employment in hostile regions in the role of the armed CP officer working within a Personal Security Detail (PSD). Put in lay terms, the most significant aspect of this body-guarding course turned on the attainment of safety, proficiency and accuracy in the use of a number of weapons systems (the AK 47, Ouzi, various pistols, sniper rifles and so forth) used extensively during training with live ammunition. It also taught a wide range of skills argued to be vital for the security of clients. These included: specialised walking formations designed to protect clients, response drills when under attack, the identification of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), security surveys of hotels and other buildings, drills for extricating clients from vehicles when threatened and the compilation and use of route cards integral to the secure movement of clients by road. Crucially, it also provided the opportunity to develop a close rapport with

fellow students who were seeking employment in the industry, though this paper deals specifically with the two instructors on the programme.

As a student enrolled on all aspects of the course, I was required to reach the same standards as my peers. Since I was integrated fully into the programme, and partly because of my own background in the military, I quickly built a comfortable relationship with the student group, further strengthened through time spent eating, socializing and swimming together in the hotel facilities, and on a regular basis when shopping for food at the local supermarket. The all-male group of 13 students were drawn from the European and American continents, ranged in age from mid-20's to early 50's, were educated to different levels (one held a PhD), and had a mix of military, law enforcement and civilian backgrounds. Many of the former had seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, while the latter had neither knowledge nor the pre-requisite weapons skills considered relevant for work as an armed contractor. I kept a detailed fieldwork diary, recorded in note form in the classroom where it was legitimate to write in one's course book, and in more detail on return to the hotel at the end of the sometimes lengthy working day. Once back in my room, and after completing written work set by the instructors, I turned my attention to the field notes. Applying a gender sensitivity to the data, and drawing on a mix of deductive and inductive approaches characteristic of the grounded theoretical method of data generation and analysis, it became clear that the instructors (two British, former military men in their early 50's that I shall call Rich and Ken), relied heavily on narratives of masculinity in their discussions about security – specifically the binary of professional versus cowboy in respect of contractor competence. As the course progressed and the volume and depth of data focused on instructor narratives increased, further analysis

began to reveal patterns of gender talk invoking remasculinization. This gender talk is now considered.

*(Man)aging the Fine Line between Arrogance and Confidence*

Unlike the professional activities of an academic for example, the work of security professionals is often perceived both implicitly (Young Pelton, 2006) and explicitly (Higate, 2012b) through its embodied dimensions. From door bouncers tasked to control entry to, and maintain order in night-time venues (Monaghan, 2004), through to the stereotypical, pumped-up Blackwater guard, security contractors have become synonymous with hypermasculine presentations of self, as a form of security through intimidation (Schumacher, 2006). In stark contrast to these explicit modes of embodied masculinity where brain might be seen as subordinate to brawn, we were told repeatedly on the course that security was ‘a thinking man’s game’ where, ‘unlike the U.S approach’ according to Rich, ‘everyone can do everyone else’s jobs. We want to see flexibility ... you need to adapt ... think on your feet’. This way, it was possible to keep the job ‘varied’ and ultimately be an ‘ambassador for the profession ... since you won’t get bored’. Important as it was to be ‘switched on, think ahead and ... strive for the highest standards’, we were also reminded in the very strongest of terms that use of weapons ‘was *not* glamorous in the slightest’. To further reinforce this point, it was stated with considerable solemnity by Rich that ‘the best weapon we have ... [points to his head] ... is this’, and that we should exercise ‘humility’ in our security work through using *both* our ‘heads and our hearts’. At this juncture we were asked to raise hands if we had children and/or partners (the majority did), and to reflect on how we would feel if they were killed by a ‘trigger-happy’ contractor. Framed in this way, the ethos of security work demanded on the one hand, utter proficiency in the use of weapons, while on the other, frowned on the actual

use of these weapons since armed contractors had in their hands the power of life and death. This power, it was argued, could feed the arrogance of some operatives who made life difficult for local people ‘because they can ... and they fucking-well do’, as Rich put it. He then invited us to contemplate the fine line between ‘arrogance and confidence’, where exercise of the former was harmful to the mission, and the latter, something to which we should aspire ‘every single working day’ as the hallmark of a ‘true professional’. While the student group was encouraged to be confident, considerate, and set about their work with humility and modesty, these narratives were invariably conveyed with a tangible sense of frustration in relation to particular others working in security devoid of such attributes. These demeaned individuals ‘gave the industry a bad name’ because of their ‘sheer incompetence’ revealed to the instructors when attending training courses at the school. Not only did they serve as the primary foil against which professionalism was constructed, but most strikingly as we now see, both instructors invoked these men in terms of an aberrant hypermasculinity.

### *Ninjas and Roly Polies: Ironies of Hypermasculinity*

While ‘the Americans’ were seen as the most likely to demonstrate forms of deviant hypermasculinity in tension with professional approaches to security work, perhaps aware of the need to strike some balance in the classroom for the benefit of the American student cohort, Rich also made references to ‘the SAS’ [Britain’s Special Air Service] stating that ‘some of them are idiots ... and can be just as bad!’ However, though elite soldiers and law enforcement officers from both the U.S and UK came within his critical orbit, Rich tended to concentrate on the former using such derogatory words as ‘retards’ and ‘sheep’ to describe what he saw as their inability to ‘think on their feet ... it’s beyond them’ he told us. He also

argued that they followed each other ‘blindly ... using methods that are counterproductive ... and just plain stupid’, going on to say ‘it’s like they’ve had their fucking brains removed!’ Rich was passionate during these moments and would often apologise for outbursts that flowed from his belief that security was a ‘craft’, where one is always learning, refining and honing skills to the highest possible standards. ‘If anyone comes through that door and ... can show me how to do it better, I’ll do it ... I am willing to learn, I want to learn’ (‘I am still waiting’, Rich told us). Commenting further on incompetence, deep unease was expressed at those who presented themselves in light of ‘what they *had* done or who they *had* been ... they are all has-beens’ he stated with contempt. Grounding his by now visceral sense of chagrin of those who traded on their previous status but had ‘nothing to offer the industry’, he drew attention to the wider culture in the U.S ‘where everyone’s a has-been ... look at their bumper [fender] stickers ... “Nam Veteran, Gulf Veteran, US Marine Corps Veteran ... I don’t give a fuck what you’ve done, show me what you can do *now*’, he told us. During these sometimes protracted monologues – most evident in the classroom prior to departing for the firing range - the American students in the group were somewhat muted and on no occasion did they question Rich’s strongly held opinion on these matters. Consequently, this appeared to reinforce the instructor’s belief that those with service in the American military (numerous veterans were present in the class) had been indoctrinated into an enduring and strictly hierarchical system that crushed any sense of agency. For Rich, this meant they were unable to challenge, or even contribute constructively to decisions made further up the chain of command, but in reality these individuals were almost certainly intimidated by the instructor stood before them, alongside the extent to which questioning might jeopardize their chances of succeeding on the course. Yet, one domain within which the much demonised American contractor was seen to excel, albeit in ways that stood as a salutary lesson of how not to

approach security work was captured in the explicitly gendered metaphors used by Ken and Rich referring to an unknown, though illustrative number of American contractors, law enforcement officers and military veterans. With some irony, these men were labelled ‘Ninja’s’ and ‘Billy Big Bollocks’ and it is to these instructor narratives that discussion now turns.

### *Beware the Ninja...*

Framed in sardonic terms, Rich made repeated references to the Ninja’s that had completed earlier courses, and in so doing invoked a cultural trope familiar to many in the class. The Ninja figure was popularised in 1984 through a comic book entitled *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, leading to an animated TV series and associated merchandise that has gained widespread appeal. Ninja Turtles (or Ninja’s for shorthand), are known for their battling good with evil through martial arts techniques learned from an anthropomorphic rat, their *sensei* (master). Ninja’s are superhumanly athletic, made possible by their animated status, with the early comics argued to depict a good deal of violence considered unsuitable for children. Whether or not the instructors were aware of the deeper roots of the word Ninja is unclear, but by some coincidence, the Ninja was a mercenary or covert agent in feudal Japan who specialised in unorthodox warfare and also open-combat (Ratti and Westbrook, 1991). Either way, the Ninja label derived its particular trivialising status from the cartoon-like and infantilising sense in which those deemed as such were constructed. Substantive examples were given throughout the duration of the course including most notably, the operational procedures of particular American Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Teams. One morning while receiving instruction in the course gymnasium on basic self-defence, including

how to resist an individual with a pistol trained at the back of one's head in a hostage situation, Rich described particular 'moves' made by members of a SWAT team who had attended the school for a week's training a few months prior. Barely concealing his mocking disdain, he painted a somewhat humorous, yet ironic picture of the ways in which prior to contact (the moments leading up to the drawing of one's weapon and shots being fired), the SWAT team would perform a highly choreographed series of forward rolls or 'roly polies' across the floor. After these elaborate roly polies, they would pop up and assume a crouching position with pistol drawn, ready to engage the enemy. Another similarly 'ridiculous' ritual he discussed, concerned the Secret Service PSD teams who jog alongside the U.S President's vehicle as it processes through crowds. One lunch time, Ken played a training video of a well-known U.S private security training company showing an operative rolling on his back and firing his weapon under a vehicle. Finally, was mention of the American and Israeli Secret Services who confront threats to their (highly distressed) clients by wrestling them to the ground while, with weapon drawn, they respond to contact. Each of these examples was systematically critiqued by both Rich and Ken. For example, questions were raised over the operational rationale for jogging alongside a limousine that has 5" thick military grade armour, doors that weigh as much as Boeing 757 cabin doors, its own oxygen system, tear gas, and smoke grenades. What value is added to the security of the President by these sunglass wearing individuals? The most obvious limitation of firing a weapon under a vehicle underscores a point made earlier around 'collateral damage' since, as Rich put it 'you can't see who the fuck you are shooting at ... and run the risk of rounds ricocheting off the underside of the car!' Similarly, why roll across the floor prior to using one's weapon when such a procedure provides the enemy with (an albeit moving) target, and at the same time impedes contractor's response time? The instructors argued instead for his or her *removal*

from the threat as paramount, in contrast to exposing them to further risk during the moments in which less-than competent CP officer's may fumble for their weapon while their client is restrained underneath them. Though there are complexities here regarding an infinite number of potential scenarios and the most appropriate tactical response, the instructors noted how threats to clients were *not* 'military situations' that required an unthinking return of fire, but rather, demanded a qualitatively *different* and 'smarter' reaction. Here, staying and fighting should be seen as the last course of action rather than the first. Taken together, these 'lessons in incompetence' served to graphically illustrate the triumph of security's performative dimensions (exemplified in the Ninja metaphor), over those of operational effectiveness and 'common bloody sense'.

How then did the instructors explain the tensions between performance and this questionable practice? Why were these (according to Rich and Ken, mainly American) men apparently devoid of common sense? It was at this point that gendered understandings augmenting the frivolous, masculinised Ninja's gave rise to the metaphorical figure of Billy Big Bollocks. That he relied on hypermasculine security practice revealed his status as a 'weak man ... who had something to prove', in the words of Ken and in turn are suggestive of a form of compensatory masculinity desperate to reaffirm its manly self (Kimmel, 1997).

*Don't be a Billy Big Bollocks!*

Second only to the penis, the bollocks (a euphemism for testicles) are an irrefutable masculine cue. The oft-heard jibe that 'your balls are not big enough' is addressed to those men perceived to fall short of an acceptable masculinity, or in the case of women, masculinity will always remain out of their reach since they are not in possession of the male reproductive organs. Interestingly then, the derogatory narrative used by the instructors

subverts this dominant trope through supplanting it with reference to an *excess* of masculinity – balls that are ‘too big’, and as such, a further instance of the condemnatory mercenary narrative. Thus, closely bound up with the Ninja metaphor, the student group were frequently reminded of the characteristics of Billy Big Bollocks - aspects of embodied identity and social practice that should be avoided at all costs, or at least downplayed if at all possible. Here, the operational rationale for effecting a security persona that deflected rather than drew attention to itself, turned on the enemy’s identification of the ‘real’ (ie operational) reason for one’s presence in a hostile region. It was also linked in the mind of Rich to the intra-masculine dynamic of competition between differing modes of manhood where ‘pumped-up bodies’ might be interpreted as a provocative ‘come on’ in those stereotypically macho contexts characteristic of ‘seriously dangerous [South American] countries’. Frequenting by Rich and Ken for the purposes of CP work for a client located in a particular South American city, this region was often invoked in regard to its exemplary levels of violence noted further below. In an allied sense we were told that ‘tattoos are stupid ... they don’t frighten the enemy one bit [since] these guys have been fighting wars for thousands of years ... what is needed is confidence.’ Rich then rolled up his sleeve to expose a number of tattoos that he ‘got done when he was a young lad’ and that he now ‘regretted’. Further examples used to underscore the operational futility of excessive iterations of masculinity included the ‘big muscle bound idiots coming on the course’, many of whom were believed to have achieved their extreme size through the use of steroids, and/or long periods working out in the gym. These hypermasculine symbols undermined the low-key professional approach, could threaten operations and ultimately the safety of the client. ‘From the moment you land [at the airport]’, Ken informed us

‘the bad guys are clocking [watching] you ... this is even more likely if you turn up in a tight fitting t-shirt with bulging muscles and tattoos up yer” arms ... for fuck’s sake don’t advertise yourself’

Students who had attended earlier courses were also mentioned. Rich described one of them as ‘so large that he could barely lift himself from the ground’ after firing from a prone position on the range. With his disproportionately large biceps limiting movement, another student struggled to hold a pistol straight out in front of him - ‘he was a monster of man’, we were told. ‘When you’re that size, you can’t run, you can’t be agile ... and you make a great target’ Rich noted, and to illustrate a further characteristic of increased vulnerability characteristic of this muscle-bound physique, stated with a wry smile that ‘bullets travel far quicker through muscle than fat!’ Developing the theme of Billy Big Bollocks around the use of weapons as sign of weakness indicated above, was the tendency for some contractors to ‘flag [point at] people with their weapons ... they are fucking idiots ... they are aggressive, don’t care and are just motivated by money’, argued Rich. With this in mind, he relayed the story of an American military officer who had told the instructors that his rules of engagement provided for the shooting of *anyone* carrying a weapon, no matter what the circumstances (even if the weapon did not have a ‘mag’ [magazine] on, and was being carried in a non-threatening manner). ‘This’ stated Rich was ‘totally crazy ... a weapon is a reminder *not* to use it ... just as much as body armour creates a false sense of security’. What was needed was ‘respect for the locals ... not aggression and intimidation.’ On the wall of the course coffee area were 15 or so black and white and colour photographs depicting grisly images from the South American country the instructors regularly worked in. These showed decapitated bodies, dismembered heads and other scenes of death and mutilation. One

showed five bodies hanging from the steel frame of a child's swings in a non-descript, inner-city play area. We were asked to gather round these images. Rich and Ken were present, and pointing to the photographs, the former stated 'if you think you're a tough guy then we'll get you to [names the country] ... you couldn't make the brutality up ... kids and all ... these people are barbarians'. The aim of this moment was to reinforce the by-now, well rehearsed observation that security was not the place for bravado and big men, but rather was a highly skilled occupation to be treated with great respect. Put succinctly, those who thought CP work or body guarding glamorous, and the ideal site to deploy an (arrogant) hypermasculinity were, as Rich put it to the amusement of the student group, 'well "ard [tough] ... not!'

The Billy Big Bollocks metaphor contained a final, explicitly gendered component. This concerned Rich's respectfully framed reference to his 'old mum' who, he stated repeatedly on the firing range, 'can shoot better than the lot of yer!' He made much of this retort – usually accompanied with a joke or two - and sought to publicly criticise those who failed to hit the target through the twin tropes of femininity and old age. Given the prevailing status of those with this doubly-disadvantaged identity, through invoking his old mum, Rich positioned (incompetent) men as sub-masculine in relation to an elderly woman, who by implication should barely be able to hold, let alone use a weapon proficiently. In sum, unlike the well documented observations drawn from military and militarized settings where women and gay people exist as the ubiquitous subordinate foil, in the current field-research, evidence of this narrative was limited, and replaced with running commentary on the perils of excess masculinity as prime indicator of cowboy, or rogue contractor status.

## Discussion

In general terms, these findings resonate with Joachim and Schneiker's (2012) contribution in their analysis of PMSC websites where they developed three typologies of masculinity: pathologization, masculinization and feminization. Most striking in the current data was the extent to which Rich and Ken pathologised the aberrant other through narratives of the hypermasculine Ninja, or Billy Big Bollocks. Through criticising those perceived to be less than professional, the instructors replicated wider traits in the industry noted on company websites and beyond that

‘devalue the masculinity of other security actors, such as conventional military forces, mercenaries and even other PMSCs, by depicting them as weak, incapable, ineffective and immoral’ (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012:6/17).

In contrast, and central to the industry's remasculinizing narratives that potential clients may find appealing, is Rich and Ken's implicit construction of the exemplary protector figure. This resonates with a bourgeois rationalist masculinity equipped with ‘superior intellect and personal integrity [which is] valued over physical strength or bravery’ (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, citing Hooper, 2001: 98). The invitation to reflect on our connection with loved ones who might be killed through the incompetence of trigger happy contractors, can be read as an instance where compassion and empathy – more typically understood as feminised traits - were invoked as key facets of professional practice ‘upgraded’ to further legitimize contractor masculinity (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 78). While the field research elicited findings that broadly mirror the industry's wider attempts to constitute professionals

of certain kinds through differentiating themselves from the archetypal cowboy, in certain respects, the current findings also depart from this general theme. For example, unlike company websites that framed the expertise of their operatives alongside superior technology (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 71), Ken and Rich stressed the importance of operating effectively even when drastically *under-resourced*, hence the need to develop skills in a wide range of weapons ‘coz you never know what [weapon] you’re gonna’ get given in these places ...’. Previous field research by the author echoes the importance of adaptability, where it is imperative that contractors make the best of what limited means they have to hand. In the words of a former New Zealand special forces manager in a private company, ‘we want guys who can go anywhere in the world with only a passport and \$5000 ... and just get on with it’. And, in contrast to companies who are pitching to a global market through narratives of omnipotence and unlimited capacity (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 86), the instructors were very clear about what could be realistically achieved with modest resources. They were cautious about over-selling themselves and selected only those jobs deemed manageable; the notion that they cared ‘for the whole world’ was anathema, unlike the message conveyed through a number of PMSC websites (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 81). It is through these observations that we note the *differences* between the presentation of masculinities in the market for force through company websites in contrast to their empirical manifestation on the ground (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012a: 9) in this particular instance. However, what of the implications of the instructor’s narratives for wider questions of PMSCs legitimacy?

### *Remasculinization and the Effects of the Professionalism Narrative*

The findings included above provide for numerous lines of original enquiry. Amongst others, these could include an interrogation of the historical and cultural conditions that make

possible the degrading of U.S military and militarized masculinity by the British in the context of the PMSC and national militaries. While this topic is dealt with elsewhere (Higate, 2012a), the current paper takes its cue from Anna Leander's (2012) work on the jurisgenerativity of Codes of Conduct (CoC) in the industry since her observations have analytical utility for instructor narratives in regard to their constitutive dimensions (Leander, 2012: 92).

Though their otherwise sophisticated lexicon on all matters relating to violence was indisputable, Rich and Ken's use of the word was notable in its absence and mirrors wider trends to be found in International Relation's scholarship (Thomas, 2010). Indeed, the bedrock of their respective identities and material existence turned on their ability to deploy violence when required (in their case to protect a South American client), as well as to instruct others in a craft requiring humility, dedication and integrity nested within a modest masculine self. In this way, we might read their practices as tantamount to an informal process of (industry) regulation, to argue for the appropriate bodies and minds through which particular gendered beings can legitimately exercise violence in order as they put it, 'to lift the industry up'. Framed in these terms, the authority of the remasculinization narrative was derived from the implicit assumption that the existence of violence – an ever present threat to be countered by CP Officer in line with their bourgeois rational masculine ethic - was a given. Violence is the norm rather than the exception. As an unavoidable tenet of everyday social relations, what really matters is *who* (or what form of masculinity) has the right to deploy practices intended to kill and injure others in the name of client protection. Seen against the backcloth of the wider industry then, invocations of Ninja's and Billy Big Bollocks served to normalise the privatization of security by self-referential distraction rooted in a gendered-doctrinal binary; violence's illegitimate (hypermasculine) proponents, versus

those superior others who respond with due professionalism (Leander, 2012: 100). That these narratives were infused with humour, self-deprecation and irony may well have helped to reinforce their persuasiveness on a subordinate student group keen to learn from expert instructors imbued with the kudos of military masculinity (Belkin, 2011). In microcosm, and in parallel to CoC's within the wider industry, these classroom narratives:

‘produce distinctions among respectable and non-respectable firms ... [in turn, these] generate a misrecognition of the overall increase in the weight of military professionals; respectable or not’ (Leander, 2012: 105).

Yet, unlike the case of ArmorGroup employees, remasculinization in the current example turned on highlighting rather than obscuring ‘disorder and uncertainty’ in the conflict context (Leander, 2012: 103), underscored in the violent images we were encouraged to view and reflect upon. To put this differently, a key incentive for the student group to develop a professional approach to security work was to acknowledge the potential chaos of the operational context, through developing a contingent masculinity imbued with the capacity to adopt and adapt *in the right way*. This moment of quintessentially British remasculinization called forth a subtle, understated, restrained, tempered and contemplative masculinity (Paris, 2000; Plain, 2006; Rose, 2005) noted in other militarised contexts (Nagl, 2002; Aylwin-Foster, 2005) and invoked those attributes pointing to ‘gender and nation as unchanging essence’ (Dawson, 1994: 11). That these masculine traits were conveyed persuasively through the instructor’s charisma (especially Rich) also helped divert attention from the legitimacy and overall inevitability of the industry as an instrument of militarization (Leander, 2012: 92). In this way, Rich intuitively manoeuvred students within a social universe of his own making through engaging the affective and embodied dimensions of identity, the (appropriate) use of violence and two imagined communities of contractors

comprised of either big men or modest men. To which should we subscribe? How far could we reject his seductive promise to attain an ontologically secure identity in respect of the latter? Seen in this way, instructor narratives turned on a politics of gender within the charismatic dimension of leadership. This is defined by Max Weber through the use of (1) passion, (2) the appropriate distance to assess people/situations (professionals versus Ninja's and Billy Big Bollocks and their over-response) and (3) articulated with a sense of due responsibility (Adair-Totef, 2005: 197). Conceived of in positivist terms, the influence of charisma as an integral element of (informal) industry regulation is 'irrational' yet remains key to processes of remasculinization in the current example. Charisma is the imperceptible social quality of interaction that while existing beyond quantification, nonetheless inheres with powerful transformative effects (Adair-Totef, 2005). And it is the ethnographic rather than discursive or state-level data moment derived from face-to-face interaction that leads me to argue *not* that these narratives were derived from a rational, instrumental, business strategy driven by profit margin as in the case of company website construction of masculinities (Joachim and Schneiker, 2012: 81), but rather from a strongly held sense of professionalism lodged deep within the embodied and emotional realms. Thus, it is not only that military professional and national identity gets commodified in the sphere of private security in ways that have utility for increasing market share, but also that this gendered practice is part-*unintended* outcome of the ultimate desire to distance oneself from the persistent mercenary stereotype at the level of masculine self identity. This is a question of how particular men position themselves in dense social relations that turn – as they see it – on matters of life and death and how they wish to be seen as contracting selves of specific gendered and raced kinds.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to develop the remasculinization thesis as it pertains to the PMSC industry through drawing on the contributions of Stachowitsch and, in particular Joachim and Schneiker. Guided by original field research conducted with a training company run by two British, former military men in the U.S, it revealed the centrality of the national dimension, where in its American guise, it was argued to provide for excesses of masculinity in ways that signalled contractor incompetence. These excesses symbolised in the metaphorical figures of the Ninja and Billy Big Bollocks, were offset with the gendered architecture of professionalism residing in a quintessentially British militarized masculinity. In moving from the micro-interactional context, I also argued that these social processes contributed towards the affirmation of a consensual world view for those involved and more widely – that violence is normal and natural and it is to questions of who might have the authority to exercise it that occupied centre stage. Given the recent proliferation of interest in PMSCs from critical scholars of gender, it might be worth asking how far and in what kinds of way this scholarship may also in some instances help to legitimate an industry through its problem solving approach, noted most obviously in work dealing with gender mainstreaming in the industry, but also with relevance to questions of policy and gender equitability in this sphere. Much of this scholarship is concerned with the problems of PMSCs rather than PMSCs as a problem in the current, increasingly marketised security governance landscape.

## **Bibliography:**

Adair-Toteff, C. (2005) 'Max Weber's Charisma' *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 5:189-204.

Aylwin-Foster, N. (2005) 'Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations', *Military Review*, November-December, 2005: 1-15

Barrett, F. (1996) 'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3(3): 129-142.

Belkin, A. (2011) *Bring me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American Empire 1898-2001*. London: Hurst/Columbia.

Chisholm, A. (2012) 'The Silenced and Indispensables: Subaltern Men in Private Security' *International Journal of Feminist Politics*, [forthcoming].

Dawson, G. (1994) *Soldier Heroes. British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge.

DiMaggio, P. J. and Powell, W. W. (1983) 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', *American Sociological Review*, 48(2): 147-160.

Duffield, M. (2001) *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed: Press.

Duncanson, C. (2009) 'Forces for Good: Narratives of Military Masculinity in Peacekeeping Operations', *International Journal of Feminist Politics*, 11(1): 63-80.

Higate, P. [ed] (2003) *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*. Greenwood: Praeger.

Higate, P. (2012) 'Cat Food and Clients: Gendering the Politics of Protection in the Private Militarised Security Company' in J. Mathers [ed] *Handbook on Gender and War*. London: Edward Elgar [forthcoming].

Higate, P. (2012a) 'Cowboys and Professionals': The Politics of Identity Work in the Private and Military Security Company', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 40(2): 321-341.

Higate, P. (2012b) 'The Private Militarized Security Contractor as Geocorporeal Actor' *International Political Sociology*, [forthcoming].

Joachim, J. and Schneiker, A. (2012) '(Re)Masculinizing Security? Gender and Private Military and Security Companies' in Linda Ahall and Laura J. Shepherd (eds.) *Gender, Agency and Political Violence*. Basingstoke. Pp. 70-92.

Joachim, J. and Schneiker, A. (2012a) 'Of 'True Professionals' and 'Ethical Hero Warriors': A Gender Discourse Analysis of Private Military and Security Companies' *Annual Conference of International Studies Association, San Diego*.

Joachim, J. and Schneiker, A. (2012b) 'New Humanitarians? Frame Appropriation through Private Military and Security Companies', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 40(2): 365-388.

Kimmel, M (1997) *Manhood in America. A Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [third edition]

Leander, A. (2006) 'Privatizing the Politics of Protection: Military Companies and the Definition of Security Concerns', J. Huysmans, Andrew Dobson and Prokhovnik Raia [eds], *The Politics of Protection: Sites of Insecurity and Political Agency*, London, Routledge.

- Leander, A. (2012) 'What do codes of conduct do? Hybrid Constitutionalization and militarization in military markets', *Global Constitutionalism*, 1: 91-119.
- Monaghan, L. (2004) 'Doorwork and Legal Risk: Observations from an Embodied Ethnography'. *Social Legal Studies*, 13(4) 453-480.
- Morgan, D. (1994) 'Theater of Combat: The Military and Masculinities', in H. Brod and M. Kaufmann [eds.] *Theorizing Masculinities*. London: Sage.
- Nagl, J. A. (2002) *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Paris, M. (2000) *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture 1850-2000*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Plain, Jill. (2006) *John Mills and British Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ratti, O. Westbrook, A. (1991), *Secrets of the samurai: a survey of the martial arts of feudal Japan*, Tuttle Publishing.
- Schumacher, G (2006) *A Bloody Business: America's War Zone Contractors and the Occupation of Iraq*. New York: Zenith Press
- Stachowitsch, S. (2012) 'Military privatization and the remasculinization of the state: Making the link between the outsourcing of military security and gendered state transformations' *International Relations* [forthcoming].
- Thomas, C. (2010) 'Why don't we talk about "violence" in International Relations?' *Review of International Studies*, 37(04): 1815-1836.
- Via, S. (2010) 'Gender, Militarism, and Globalization: Soldiers for Hire and Hegemonic Masculinity' in Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via (eds.) *Gender, War, and Militarism*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger: pp. 42-53.
- Whitworth, S. (2004) *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping*, London: Lynne Rienner.

Young-Pelton, R. (2006) *Licensed to Kill: Hired Guns in the War on Terror*. London: Crown Publishers.