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Putting 'Mercenary Masculinities' on the Research Agenda

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Abstract:

Private Military Security Companies (PMSC) have come increasingly to supplant the activities of regular, national militaries - most notably in such contexts as Iraq and Afghanistan. Though a wide scholarship has addressed questions of legitimacy, regulation and control of PMSCs, critical commentators on gender have almost entirely overlooked the masculinised cultures of these private firms, the majority of which employ former military personnel. This is surprising since masculine norms, values and cultures shape private contractors security practices and can be used to explain human rights abuses, as well as the everyday ways in which these men imagine security. In these terms, the key critical issue concerns what is missed when masculinity is ignored in analyses of PMSCs, a question that is taken up in this working paper within the context of a potential research agenda for this topic of research.

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Paul Higate

Contractors Creed

I am a U.S. contractor. I look out for myself, the operators to my left and right, and no one else.
I will always take advantage of the fact that I can finally tell military officers to pound sand,
and will do so at every opportunity.
I am my country's scapegoat, the "plausible deniability" warrior,
and I love it.
Less than $700 dollars a day is unacceptable.
I am trained to eat thing that would make a billy goat puke,
but will refuse anything less than 60 dollars per diem because
I am greedy. I care not for ribbons and awards for valor.
I do this job for the opportunity to kill the enemies of my country,
and to finally get that boat I've always wanted.
I will be in better shape that 99% of the active duty personnel, although this is not hard. I will equip myself with the latest high speed gear, and will trick out my M4 until it weights more than 24lbs, not because

it works better, but because it looks cool in the photographs.
I will carry more weapons, ammunition, and implements of death on my person that an infantry fire team, and when engaged I will lay waste to everything around me.
In any combat zone, I will always locate the swimming pool, beer, and women, because I can.
I will deploy on my terms, and if it ever gets too stupid,
I will simply find another company that pays more.

- cited in *Licensed to Kill* by Robert Young Pelton, (2006), New York: Three Rivers Press. Originally taken from an e-mail circulated on contractor channels.

Introduction

Though there is little new in the existence of 'guns for hire' or 'mercenaries' for more critically inclined commentators, few predicted the extent to which private military contractors would come to both supplant and complement the activities of regular military personnel in the contemporary period. The occupation of Iraq puts this into sharpest focus with the number of private military contractors estimated to be close to 200,000 in comparison to the 160,000 uniformed personnel of national militaries occupying the country (Scahill, 2007). The dramatic burgeoning of the private security sector has led commentators to describe it as the 'new business face of warfare in the contemporary period' (Mandel, 2002; Avant, 2005; Kinsey, 2007; Singer, 2005) underscoring its significance both now and almost certainly into the future. Drawing on the labour of men (and rather less women) from a range of countries (Maclellan, 2006), this multi billion dollar industry has become a key component in the management of conflict and its aftermath (Holmqvist, 2005).

Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) should be seen as a critical subject of political enquiry as they engage international relations, domestic politics, and national/international legislative systems within the context of both ethical and moral questions concerning the use of violence. Companies are involved in: the security of convoys, close protection of dignitaries, security sector reform, provision of logistical and support functions to military peacekeeping operations and combat operations. Curiously, however, scholars working within the fields of Political Science, Critical Security Studies, Law and Gender Studies have almost entirely overlooked the importance of *masculinity* in their analyses of this sector (for a focus on women see Schultz and Yeung, 2005). What do we miss when masculinity is ignored in analyses of PMSCs? It is not simply that PMSCs have become increasingly important to how conflict is managed, but crucially - in contrast to regular militaries - their activities remain largely unregulated and their personnel almost entirely unaccountable. When seen alongside the perpetration of human rights abuses by a not insignificant number of private military contractors - including most notoriously the shooting of 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians in Najaf in September 2007 (Tavernise, 2007), it is possible to suggest that PMSCs represent a key moment of (re)masculinisation in the contemporary period. It is for this reason that the curiosity of critical scholars of gender should be sparked since the mobilisation of thousands of men trained in violence who go on to work in spaces of legal exception is a unique phenomena that

can, at times, exacerbate the insecurity of those vulnerable populations forced to host them.

There are few if any arenas that demonstrate 'the potent … connections between violence, power and sex … in the post 9/11 "manly moment"' (Eisenstein, 2007: 161) as explicitly as those that concern the largely unregulated privatisation of force. Through suggesting future lines of enquiry around a unique and vibrant site of (militarised) masculinities that constitute the employee component of the PMSC sector, this article hopes to lay the foundations for a research agenda that recognises the centrality of masculinities to both the personal and professional social practices of its male employees. Depending on one's normative intentions, findings from these kinds of enquiry can be used to argue for tighter regulation of the industry, or in a more radical sense, to its incremental dissolution. My own position – though somewhat unlikely in the current period of neo-liberal and U.S.-driven geo-political dominance - is to argue that PMSC involvement in direct combat and combat support should be outlawed. Reasons for this are numerous but include primarily the ways that 'Mercenary assistance…means that the use of force continues to be prioritised as a decisive means of bringing war to an end as opposed to developing less bloody forms of conflict resolution' (Richards, undated: 1).

Not only does co-opting the profit motive into security work of this kind shape the conditions of possibility by which conflict is negotiated, but in a related sense, assumes an immanent logic that is difficult to escape.. The quest for a peaceful world is harmed by increasing the number of private military contractors who – by no means perfect – remain outside the regulatory mechanisms of state militaries who in relative terms have constrained the actions of men of violence over many decades. How might we begin to challenge this unregulated form of militarization?

Background

A constellation of forces underpin the 'rise and rise' of PMSCs. These include the dominance of post-cold war free markets that have fuelled a strong tendency to outsource traditional government functions. Simultaneously, national militaries have been downsized, thereby providing a large number of (mainly) men trained in 'the legitimate discharge of violence' ripe for recruitment by well-paying PMSCs (Holmqvist, 2005). It has also been noted that 'massive arms stocks have become available to the open market' (Singer, 2005: 54) in ways that exacerbate intra-state conflict. Further, there has been a 'decline of local state governance' in ways that provide for greater overall insecurity around borders, markets, and central bureaucratic authorities (Singer, 2005: 55). As a consequence the relative inability for national militaries to respond to insecurity compounds a cycle of instability that in turn feeds into the ultimate demand for mercenaries and PMSCs. In the case of the occupation of Iraq, the Pentagon outsourced contracts worth many millions of dollars for firms who were able to carry out roles normally conducted by national militaries. A key reason for this was the unexpected emergence of a well-organised and determined insurgent presence who fuelled insecurity (Singer, 2008).

The state's monopoly on violence in the form of large standing armies is something of an anomaly when seen historically and it has been argued that hiring soldiers to fight battles is as 'old as war itself' (Singer, 2005: 19). In these terms the rise of PMSCs

should not be seen as exceptional. Other factors fuelling the demand for the services of private security contractors include the mass demobilisation of national military troops in one area that have then gone on to be involved in conflict in 'weaker states' within the context of a recurring supply and demand cycle (Singer, 2005: 38). 'For profit' soldiering has also been connected to other forms of business as noted today in the multiple services offered by firms that can include expertise in combat, training and logistics. However, it should be noted that Finally, the term 'mercenary' is shrouded with negative connotations. Rather than being allied to a 'noble' cause underscored by the links between citizenship and service (in the U.S. military for example), employment as a (private) soldier tends to turn on individualised financial gain. Closely linked to the term mercenary are other, popularised notions of 'soldiers of fortune', 'adventurers' or (military) 'filibusters'. In all of these examples it is men who are the topic of concern and masculinity that is engaged, though rarely acknowledged in explicit or analytical terms.

The study of PMSCs has remained largely dominated by questions relating to their legitimacy in the market place at the expense of a curiosity around their deeply gendered characteristics. The continued silence on the gendered aspects of these hegemonic masculine institutions (Kronsell, 2005) leaves many key questions unanswered including those that turn on how best to regulate the industry for less critical commentators or how to develop the nature and kind of pre-deployment training that contractors should receive. After all, an understanding of the masculinised worlds of PMSCs should be a prerequisite of their transformation since how private military contractors go about their work is largely a question of their manly or macho culture. Set within the context of a number of journalistic and scholarly resources focusing on male private military contractors, this working paper sets out potential lines of enquiry around the links between masculinity and PMSCs. Its intention is to spark imaginative engagement with a little understood and highly gendered element of the private sector that has tended to pass beneath the critical radar of gender scholars.

Masculinities: Definitions and Concept Development

The gender scholar Jeff Hearn (1996) has urged caution when using the concept of masculinity. Not only is masculinity prone to reification such that it is often assumed that it has the capacity to 'control' men's social practice, but it has also tended to be used in a somewhat ethnocentric sense in ways that have largely overlooked cultural difference (although see Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Cleaver et al, 2002). Although it is important to recognise diversity in masculinity through pluralizing the term - from masculinity to masculinities (Morgan, 1992, 1994) – questions might then be raised about exactly what kinds of social practice are being referred to. Masculinity should not be seen as a 'thing', but rather as a fluid process engaging gender identity that is open to a degree of interpretation according to the social and cultural contexts in which it is played out. In these terms it is often more appropriate to refer to the practices of specific men rather than some vague, trait-driven notion of masculinities that are unlikely to be found in 'an empirically existing man' (Macinnes, 1998). As a minimum analytically credible definitions of masculinity should include the following: acknowledgement of the tendency for material and discursive inter-relational power to accrue to masculinity (Brittan, 1985) in regard to the feminine as well as marginal or subordinate masculinities (Connell, 1995); the embodied

dimensions of masculinity (Seidler, 1997); and the idea that masculinity is something that is precarious and has necessarily to be reiterated through specific ritualised performances (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). In a more substantive sense in regard to the military arena (one that would seem most likely to illuminate the masculine world of the private security contract), gender scholars have discussed: plurality in military masculine identity (Barrett, 1996; Higate *et* al, 2003); how masculinity can be used to explain the links between war, soldiers and masculinity (Arkin and Dobrofsky, 1978; Goldstein, 2001); the use of violence between military men (Wither, 2004; Polusny and Murdoch, 2005); the excessive use of violence by military peacekeepers against civilians and their sexual exploitation and abuse of minors (Razack, 2004; Whitworth, 2004; Higate, 2007); the sexual exploitation and abuse of women by private military/security men (Gumedze, 2007); and the subordination of women linked to the military (Harrison, 2003; Morris, 1996; Kasinksy, 1998; Pershing, 2003; Spak and McCart, 2004). Further, with one eye on the multinational context of PMSCs, Connell (2005: 85) claims that 'actual research on men and masculinities in transnational arenas is still rare' and also that understanding and acting on the links between men, masculinities and violence can be used to help promote peace. Put crudely, this diverse scholarship falls within the critical men's studies canon as it has the normative intent to reconfigure masculinity in ways that limit its negative impact. Here, as Vic Seidler (1997) has argued, men may experience hardship in the name of masculinity, as well as inflict suffering on others deemed subordinate in order to sustain a particular gender order. In these terms, whilst men could at times be seen as 'victims' of their masculinity, they should also be seen as cognizant of and responsible for damaging social practices. Though critique has been levelled at the work of masculinity scholars more broadly, even going so far (somewhat spuriously) to say that masculinity studies has colluded with male violence (McCarry, 2007), the field remains vibrant both empirically and theoretically and is well suited to an analyses of 'mercenary masculinities'.

With regard to future enquiry focused on male security contractors' social practices, my first suggestion is that the concept of military/militarised masculinities is developed into *privatized military masculinities*. Hitherto, scholarship on military masculinities has succeeded in denaturalising the practice of military men, most often within the context of the state institution of their respective armed forces. Privatised military masculinities may open the way for a more nuanced line of enquiry that can be used to interrogate the (apparently) different value systems (public/private) shaping preparations for and the carrying out of instrumental violence. This concept is now considered from a range of different perspectives along which future lines of enquiry might unfold.

Privatised Military Masculinities: Identity and the Political

Developing an analytical sensitivity to the identity work of these men can throw light on their unique and diverse inner worlds through revealing the norms, values, attitudes and rituals that constitute everyday realities in both professional and personal contexts. As the journalist and writer Robert Young Pelton puts it in direct reference to contractors of the US firm *Blackwater*: 'The ultimate moral leash on these people is on how they view themselves not on how other people view them' (Pelton, 2006: 6) It is not enough, however, to consider identities in their immediate social context as privatised military masculinities articulate closely with the geopolitical, not least the

ways that the discourses around the 'war on terror' shape their manly performances and world views. For this reason, it is important to examine some of the ways in which traces of both distant and local political events emerge in the identities of these men. To do this, it is useful to draw on the so-called 'man question' literature that has been developed in recent years by gender scholars working within International Relations (IR). This scholarship is informed by the critical men's studies approach touched on earlier, although it emphasises macro analyses (Parpart and Zalewski, 1998; 2008). Given that gender and IR scholars generally agree that masculinity is 'an integral … feature of the worldwide structure of diplomatic, military and economic relations' (Connell, 2008: ix), PMSCs provide an exemplary context in which to integrate the micro-practices of masculinity with the 'higher level' concerns of IR. Of particular interest is the intersectionality of security contractor masculinities with 'the war on terror' and the quasi-military masculine/privatised/corporate (Hooper, 2001; Griffin, 2007) spheres in which they are employed. Equally applicable to the current scholarship on PMSCs, and set within the context of scholarship on the 'US as Empire', Catherine Lutz has called for ethnographic rather than political economic approaches that would '[r]eshape [the field] in more adequate, less economistic forms, make the human face and frailties of imperialism more visible and … make challenges to imperial practice more likely' (Lutz, 2006: 593).

This might lead us to ask numerous questions focusing on those aspects of private military contractor social practices that embody traces of the geopolitical. How might these vary between different nationalities? Is it possible to identify those particular media or other resources that find expression in the masculine identities and performances of private military contractors? In these terms, the actions of a Nepalese, North American or British male security contractor in respect of imagining the insurgent 'other'- and how this will shape his response to particular incidents -- is a matter of neither abstract structure nor individual action. Rather, the nexus linking identity with the social practices of these individuals are emergent properties of their company's cultural norms, broader political events and how, taken together, these speak to his identity as a contractor. Given that this theoretical approach engages everyday identity and the international as they articulate with one another, it also addresses IR's relative neglect of qualitative and ethnographic methods (Tucker, 2008). Not only is it epistemologically unsustainable to bracket out the everyday from the international, but integrating these (typically) reified 'levels' has the capacity to show how it is within 'the small details of people's lives that lurk some of the most potent geopolitical forces by which the geopolitical is translated into being' (Thrift, 2000: 380, 384). How might we theorise the articulation of the everyday with the geopolitical? Even within the context of ground-level, everyday descriptions of private military contractors of the company *Blackwater*, it may be possible to draw out the ways that masculine identities are brought into being with reference to broader political events. Consider the following observations as noted by the journalist Robert Young Pelton after he had spent some considerable time living with these men in their compound in the Green Zone:

> T-boy stands off by himself "zoning", as he calls it, staying focused on the dangerous return trip to the Green Zone. T-Boy looks like he has adopted a style of generic death – black helmet, black shirt, black mask, black goggles, with a large skull and crossbones chalked on the back of his amor vest and

> another drawn on his Kevlar helmet. All the gear covers the skull tattoos. (Pelton, 2006:8)
>
> A former LA cop from a tough inner-city beat, Miyagi speaks in a cool-guy Latino riff … short with a salt and pepper beard, his weapons and gear hang off him with the comfortable look typical of security contractors …. "Bro" Miyagi says, describing the look the contractors try to achieve. "We call it CDI – Chicks Dig It". When we pull in to the airport and stare at ourselves in those mirrored windows, all we say is "Hey, Bro, CDI". (Pelton, 2006: 75)
>
> Square jawed and built low, Pete resembles a real-life white-skinned version of the Incredible Hulk. In his early thirties, he originally hails from the Midwest and spent over a decade in the Special Forces as a weapons specialist. (Pelton, 2006: 75)

These descriptions, although tied to a specific time and place, nonetheless provide an insight into the rituals of self-fetishization that resonate with the political. Here, weaponry and defensive equipment are consciously and meticulously co-opted into the presentation of self in ways that engage a particular aspect of warrior identity. As noted at the outset, the equipment may or may not prove beneficial when called upon, but at least it looks good in the photographs. The exaggeration of the embodied masculine self in regard to offensive/defensive capacity, though framed by a sense of irony and the carnivalesque signal potential mortality . Quite literally – as evidenced in the death of many hundreds of PMSC employees – their life is routinely placed on the line, particularly for those so-called 'shooters' who accompany convoys. Here, discourses in circulation around the 'war on terror' help to constitute how the enemy is constructed. Out there is a faceless, homogenous, but almost certainly 'fundamentalist' Muslim insurgency bent on inflicting death. Their use of *improvised* explosive devices such as roadside bombs underscores the relative lack of professionalism of the 'rag tag' militia, in contrast to the contractors ability to 'buy the look' of the ultimate contemporary warrior. Indeed, consumerist lifestyle and (apparent) professionalism converge here on the site of privatised military masculine identity generally unavailable (and inappropriate) for 'the enemy'.

Other reference points drawn on by Pelton relate to the US heritage of these men, providing the audience with a sense, as noted in the UK context of the regular armed forces, that these are 'our boys' in foreign climes battling evil with good. Indeed, the genealogy of these performative aspects of identity can be followed directly to regular militaries. Customization of equipment, photographs and imagery of soldiers kit is nothing new, but is intensified significantly in the private sphere. Finally, that 'Chicks Dig It' (CDI) provides yet another point of convergence with military masculinities in regard to the clear hierarchised boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. Pelton also touches on this when he says that 'Inquiring about the NO PORN sign posted on the wall brings a round of laughter from the room, and the group finally starts to relax and feel comfortable with my presence as they delve into a lengthy discussion about the best XXX sites on the Web…' (Pelton, 2006: 197).

Asking the question 'who are these men' and examining the ways their masculine identities are constituted and performed should involve analysts in showing how the everyday is in dialogue with the international. After all, listening to these men can

help us to obtain a real sense of the 'cultural construction of subjectivity and the politics of the present' (Lutz, 2006: 597). These, I would argue represent key components of longer-term strategies of change to the private military sphere.

Warrior Diasporas: Tracing the Ripples of Masculinity

PMSCs are argued to operate on every continent except the Antarctic (Singer, 2005) and as such make their presence felt across the globe. More specifically, the ripples of the private military industry engage men and masculinities in both a material and discursive sense in the most intimate of ways across geographically disparate contexts. In regards to the material, PMSC draw on a workforce that uses men from the majority and minority worlds. Semi-official figures drawn from Iraq in 2004 suggest that there were around 3-5000 American contractors, 7-10,000 South Africans and British, 15-20,000 so called Third Country Nationals (TCNs), including those from Fiji, Nepal, The Philippines and El-Salvador, and 25-30,000 Iraqis from the Host Country Nation (HCN) (Pelton, 2006:213). U.S. or British-run companies in Iraq tend to recruit veterans of elite forces including the Special Air Service (SAS), the Special Boat Service (SBS), the U.S. SEALS, Delta and Rangers. TCN men are poorly paid, poorly equipped, and lack high quality training. Schultz and Yeung put it like this:

> Workers recruited by Middle Eastern labour brokers hail from impoverished countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and the Phillipines; they do menial labour for Private Security Companies, such as cooking, serving food and cleaning toilets. Other contractors, former combatants from countries such as Fiji and Uganda and from all over Latin America, more typically take up dangerous physical protection and military support duties. (Schultz and Yeung, 2005: 13/14)

In a broader sense, the critical commentator Jeremy Scahill argued in 2007 that 'The Iraq war has ushered in a new system. Wealthy nations can recruit the world's poor, from countries that have no direct stake in the conflict, and use them as cannon fodder to conquer weaker nations.' (http://www.indypendent.org/2007/08/10/the-mercenary-revolution-flush-with-profits-from-the-iraq-war-military-contractors-see-a-world-of-business-opportunities/).

Unlike the case of regular military personnel, the largely unreported death and injury of many hundreds of private military contractors deflects responsibility from governments such as those of the US and UK. In a sense, these men are 'invisible' since their ties with the home nation extend no further than their passports. Yet, the high profile death and mutilation of 4 contractors of *Blackwater* in Falluja in 2004 brought these men in from the shadows and led to a heightened awareness of private military contractors' role in the occupation of Iraq. More recently however, the trend has been to employ TCNs, not only because are they cheaper but also because, in the wake of the *Blackwater* deaths, it is suggested that this strategy

> Allows the conquering power to hold down domestic casualties — the single-greatest impediment to waging wars like the one in Iraq. Indeed, in Iraq, more than 1,000 contractors working for the U.S. occupation have been killed with another 13,000 wounded. Most are not American citizens, and these numbers

> are not counted in the official death toll at a time when Americans are increasingly disturbed by casualties. (Scahill, 2007)

As vibrant sites of gender, PMSCs are also noted here in their productive capacity. Not only do they establish hierarchies through which women are marginalised, but in addition they have the capacity to create spaces of disadvantage for men too. In this way, their effects can be seen as neo-colonial, casting 'third world men' as subordinate in numerous ways. A potentially interesting line of enquiry here is to trace the journey private military contractors in this category have made to the post-conflict site of Iraq, for example. How is it that men from these contexts end up in subordinate roles supporting coalition efforts? What might their journey involve? The example of the Fijian male contractor is apposite and is now considered briefly.

The recruitment of Fijian men into private security in Iraq is noted to be a growing source of revenue for the families of this 'warrior diaspora' and by mid 2005, there were more than 1000 Fijians working in both Iraq and Kuwait as soldiers, security guards and drivers (Maclellan, 2006: 50). Their employment overseas is broadly welcomed by the domestic government in Fiji alongside the regular healthy remittances dispatched to families back home. In 2003 the British-based Private Security Company (PSC) *Global Risks Strategies* established a branch in Fiji that would provide potential employees pay of around $1700 per month in comparison to the approximate $15,000 per month awarded to 'first world operatives'. However, there have been numerous reports that companies seeking to recruit Fijian men (and probably others from these impoverished and somewhat desperate contexts) have been slow to pay their employees or, more seriously, have been involved in fraud. As Maclellan reports:

> Up to 15,000 people may have paid a registration fee of Fiji 150 dollars to "Meridian" [name of intermediary] in order to be listed for work in Kuwait. Fijian journalist Samisen Pareti reported that villagers used development funds to pay application fees, and that Meridian's recruitment drives have drawn on Methodist church networks using church funds to pay for applications fees, with the money to be repaid if a job is found in Kuwait. (, 2006: 54)

Yet, the intermediary had arranged only 2000 jobs, and had failed to reimburse those who had paid the registration fee. Although it is likely that these kinds of incidents affect not only TCN men, it nevertheless underscores their position of vulnerability within the global market place where their 'warrior skills' are relatively undervalued. This observation returns us to the idea of a 'warrior diaspora as considered above. Here, the military skills and (alleged) instrumentally violent proclivities of these individuals are often assumed to be natural or core essences by regular armed forces including those of the UK. These assumptions likely have a complex genealogy, although in the case of Fiji a number of important observations can be made around how these men have come to be known for their apparent warrior prowess. It has been argued that Fiji has a 'warrior culture' with its roots in both tradition and history. Many indigenous men have experienced military training through the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and as such have to hand under-utilised skills if employed in other work (or indeed, unemployed) in their home country. Importantly, warrior culture is noted to engage ideological and cultural roots, in particular the links between 'Fijian ideologies of "lotu" (Christianity and Methodism), "turagaism" (a belief in chiefly

rights to leadership) and militarism' (Maclellan, 2006: 51). Other work has shown how masculinity, rugby, religion and the "bati" or warrior culture articulate closely with one another (Teaiwa, 2005). Interestingly, then, these cultural resources -- played-out in the geographically distant, parochial context of the islands of Fiji -- find expression in the geopolitical terrain that is the 'war on terror' set against the backdrop of the nexus linking global distribution of resources and masculinity. Numerous questions could be raised at this point. What is the impact of the warrior diaspora on family members in the homeland? How might private military contractors experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or disability be integrated into social contexts that have poorly developed welfare contexts, or no welfare at all? What kind of racisms configure intra-TCN hierarchies where Bangladeshi men clean toilets and Nepalese men are revered for their martial skills (e.g., Enloe, 1980) Is there any stigma attached to employment as a private security contractor working within a politically sensitive context such as Iraq? Though these questions have an equal salience for all contractors, it may be the relative disadvantage of these men that exacerbates post-mission hardship.

From the State to the Private: Values

Consider the following social experiment. Take one fit and healthy man who, though he may not know it, is noted for his tendency to adhere to a brutish Hobbesian rather than a kinder Lockean world view. Train him to kill others within a framework of imposed discipline and a code of military duty, honour and self sacrifice and then release him as a civilian into an environment populated by 'mad mullahs' and 'terrorists' who are the enemies of his country. Ensure that he immerses himself into a locked-down protected masculine enclave where his only other colleagues are men of a similar ilk, relieve him of the shackles of accountability reminiscent of military life and send him out heavily armed into hostile territory in order to conduct security work. Of course this is a rather crude, two-dimensional and perhaps unfair representation of the archetypal private military contractor. Yet, it raises important questions around another line of enquiry that seeks to develop an insight into the relationships between military masculinity and private military masculinity in regard to value systems. As Pelton (2006: 95) reports from his time spent with a *Blackwater* team of operatives:

> I learn in my first conversation with the … team that, for them, living in Iraq means boredom, fear, and the type of deep friendship born of shared extreme experience. Most of all, however, Iraq means money. Every time the clock ticks past midnight, it means another day, another mission, and another $500 to $600 in the bank.

As one contractor sees it within the context of *Blackwater* employees, motivation to become an 'operative' falls into one of two categories:

> *Blackwater* can be like a fucking restaurant. You've got hundreds of people coming through. They usually fall into two categories. You've got the under-thirty crowd – the whippersnappers just looking for the biggest paycheck. Then you've got the over-thirty crowd – the guys with a family and kids that are looking for a company to work for. (Pelton, 2006: 92)

Indeed, there seems to be a broad consensus that many contractors – either ex-military or ex-police 'have realized that their specialized training has limited value in the civilian world, and who, in order to provide well for their families, take serious risks for the healthy pay it affords' (Pelton, 2006: 95). More broadly then, what can be learned about asking questions of the interaction of 'military values' with those of the market where the skill for sale is that of the instrumental use of violence? This problematic is shaped by the fundamental differences between organizational structure and purpose between PMSCs and traditional national militaries. In the latter – the national institution of the armed forces - it is possible to identify both structurally and symbolically those phenomena that govern and constrain extremes of violent practice.

This raises the question of how it is that the (largely unaccountable) corporate warrior ethos shapes social practice on the ground at moments of extreme pressure. Evidence to hand from Iraq documents a catalogue of private security transgressions in the form of large numbers of rounds fired into vehicles (and people) on convoy protection duties, for example (Horton, 2008). Numerous other high-profile incidents of the killing of civilians and their torture by private military contractors (Schooner, 2005) could be explained by the loosening of ties on these men, who – often for reasons of self preservation or misunderstanding – will revert to an excessive use of violence. Further glimpses into what might happen when military masculinities are rearticulated into the private space underscore how extremes of embodiment through the use of drugs (a strictly proscribed, though low-level activity in the regular military) may become normalised:

> "We like to stay in shape. When you're in combat, you want to make sure you're using everything you got. You want to make sure you take a few guys with you, even if you only have your bare hands. Most of us are into steroids big time. D-balls (Dianabol) to bulk you up and Sustanon to help you maintain what you gained. The doctors turn a blind eye to it. We get the stuff across the border in Pakistan. When you see guys bulked up, you know what they are on." (Pelton, 2006: 61)

Once again, the embodied dimensions of the manly world of the contractor are invoked. What might this observation tell us about the health-damaging long term effects of work that places importance on hypermasculine presentation of self?

Some Reflections

Up to this point, the material in this paper has tended to paint a picture of hyper-masculine private military contractors inhabiting a world of extremes and binaries in which the world is black and white and their masculinity configured around a deeply fetishized sense of the warrior self. To these ends it has been selective and focused on Iraq and the company *Blackwater*, which in itself is prone to a degree of exoticisation by commentators and scholars alike. In an all together less dramatic sense, private military contractors come in all shapes and sizes in ways that should encourage us to re-engage with the earlier conceptual discussion around masculinities. The masculine identities of private military contractors should be conceived of as diverse and shifting, depending on the spaces in which they find themselves. Their identities may also turn on their roles as fathers, brothers and husbands replete with everyday,

middle-of-the-road views about politics and the 'war on terror', and cynical about their professional role as military contractor. More anecdotally, I was recently told by an employee of a large PMSC working in Iraq that individuals joining these companies do so for a number of reasons including: their 'closet alcoholism, inability to fit into normal life or disposition to being loners who can be extremely selfish'. The difficulties of doing analytical justice to the male employees of PMSCs should be treated extremely seriously since stereotypical portrayals of militarised masculinity have been noted in the work of particular scholars. Here, the question of diversity in gendered identity together with an acknowledgement of those who resist military socialisation must be included in these kinds of analyses. (Bourke, 1999). Here, the seduction of the hypermasculine, the exotic and the extreme can obscure the everyday realities of these men who may fail to recognise the ways they are framed by scholars.

This brings me onto the related point that may well open up a further line of enquiry for those researchers interested in delving into the masculine identities of those employed by PMSCs. As the *Contractors Creed* above suggests, it may well be that numerous of these men see themselves as mavericks, intent on resistance to the military environments from which they originate. In these terms, their masculinity may well turn on contestations of the hierarchy, the imposed discipline and the military codes that frame such values. To what extent might the concept of privatised military masculinity be of analytical value in these instances? Though carrying veteran status, might not these men be characterised by an autonomy that extends to their active rejection of imposed identity and the assumptions around 'mercenary masculinities' that goes with it? Could it be that their employment is driven by the quest for adventure rather than financial gain? In answer to these and other questions, it is undoubtedly the case that we are considering here a multiplicity of masculinities that fall under the private military contractor rubric. Given that PMSCs themselves play up the professional, engineering, military, logistic and accounting masculinities of their own organizations, future research may wish to set about creating a typology of ideal-type masculinities with which to map this diverse industry. This approach could represent a gender-sensitive alternative to the functional imperative categorisation adopted by Pete Singer (2008) through examining firms from the ground up in respect of everyday social practice and identity, for example.

Final Comments / More Questions

PMSCs are deeply gendered in numerous ways, not least in that they involve many thousands of military veterans amongst their workforce. Indeed, the very notion that the industry can be divided into 'professional' operatives and 'cowboys' underscores just how important the language of masculinity is to these companies and their sub-cultures. What makes a 'cowboy' contractor? In this paper, I have suggested a number of future lines of enquiry alongside some provisional analyses of the masculine dimensions of the industry. Individuals will approach this discussion with their own normative views about PMSCs and how best to engage them, although I hope that the use of a masculinity-sensitive approach will provide alternative and, at times, unexpected findings that capture an important cultural, political and economic developments in the contemporary period. What does this moment of (re) masculinisation look like? However, whilst I have tried to flag those areas considered interesting and useful to the development of the critical masculinities literature, my suggestions are by no means exhaustive. We might also ask, for example, where are

the women? There are, after all, a significant number of female employees in the PMSC sector. Furthermore, what is the role of the wives and girlfriends of private military contractors in terms of the active support, the resistance to, and the passive acceptance of such neo-liberal institutions? What of those forced to host these companies and their employees, including women, boys, girls and men? In another sense, how do wives and girlfriends negotiate the potentially traumatised men confronting them during intermittent periods of leave? How much are they at risk of physical violence from men returning from combat? What does 'victory' mean to these men? How do private military contractors develop a sense of purpose and 'heroism' in the absence of parades and medals?

From the immediate context of the private security contractor it is possible to throw light on some of the ways in which neo-liberal structures and the 'war-on-terror' discourse play themselves out at the level of identity. In turn, this lays the foundations of a more considered focus of the ways that masculinities can be both globalised and localised in ways, ultimately that set the conditions for how particular security practices are both conceived and perceived by host populations.

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