Violence on 'Civvie Street'? Being a 'Violent Veteran' amid a 'Criminology of War'

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As the centenary of World War 1 (1914-1918) continues to be commemorated across the world, remembering the violence and the sacrifice experienced during 'the war to end all wars', we are reminded that in the hundred years that have passed, the United Kingdom has remained in armed conflict in one form or another. The commemorations do not mark an end, but a position through which we might interrogate violence [and its impact] from the past to the present, and the present to the future. Yet, while the necessity for warfare appears ever-present (and ever-pressing), the nature of conflict has varied considerably during this time. Criminological analyses of war can also be traced back this far, particularly to the work of Willem Bonger (1916), who offered a commentary on the economic conditions of militarism. Yet, as war and the causes of such violence have been reworked, those whom aim to make sense of the interconnections between war and crime (the legal and the illegal), are forced to rework their theorising in globally expansive, and interdiciplinary ways (Jamieson 1998; Loader and Percy 2012).

The 20th Century for example, was largely defined by what military strategists would often term Clausewitzean battles. War, by and large, was tied to national projects, and geo-strategic forms of identification i.e. going to war as a matter of national identity and allegiance, neatly marked the very contours of violence (even though victims of various proxy wars from Vietnam to Latin America might suggest a different analysis). Hence, the idea that wars were fought between nations and that the soldier embodied the defender of the realm (or national defender) has been a dominant frame for analysis. Such understandings began to unravel in the 1990's. With the advent of what

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Mary Kaldor (2012) called 'New Wars', our knowledge of the nature and causes of violence was transformed through a 'global dislocation'. This was significant. Not only did it suggest that the lines between warfare and criminal activity were increasingly blurred, but as Kaldor further explained, since the new wars involved multiple actors that operated beyond the confines of the modern nation state, the distinction between *internal* and *external* and *local* and *global* were difficult to sustain. However, in what is often termed 'post 9/11', the events of September 11th 2001 are considered a further departure from understandings of war, particularly those based upon a linear process and territory. Epistemological constructions of an inside/outside of security, times of war/ times of peace, and domestic/international matters "no longer appear as a credible political referent – geopolitically or intellectually" (Evans 2013:2), as the management of risk and violence unsettles neat explanations of both space and time.

The significance of this for criminology is all too apparent – particulary since distinctions between what is 'war' and what is 'crime' are increasingly blurred as is *what* the response should be (the military, the police, or both). Through this complex interchange, now more than ever, war and crime have come to share the same political and juridical spaces. Evidence of this can be seen in three key ways (Murray 2015):

1. **Language** - as metaphors of war frequently occupy crime discourse - for example the 'War on Drugs' and 'War on Terror' – metaphors of justice also occupy war discourse when fought to through a discourse of seeking 'justice';
2. **The merging of policing and military policy and practice** – as the militarisation of policing and the constabularisation of the military are now all too familiar – and indeed, in May of this year, armed military was deployed to the street of London to support the police in the face of a heightened terror threat (known as 'Operation Temperer'). This is markedly different from the military presence at the Olympics in London in 2012 when military personnel were largely unarmed, yet both place military personnel on a *domestic* 'front-line';
3. **Space** – as the War on Terror has disrupted linear territorial modelling that underpinned war – risks have no point of origin – and fundamental questions of special integrity are undermined. This poses a fundamental challenge for legal

frameworks.

Upon this altered terrain, the 'criminology of war' has continued to develop with vibrancy; interrogating the criminogenic properties and consequences of war, the violence and victimisation experienced, the merged security provision and indeed the military and its personnel (see collections such as Walklate and McGarry 2015, Jamieson 2015 and McGarry and Walklate 2016). And as wars continue to be fought in the same space as wars of the past are commemorated, both visible and invisible 'traces' of violence are evident upon the body of soldiers as well as those witnessed at sites of memorialisation (Walklate and McGarry, 2016). There is however perhaps another politically fraught and complex violence to 'trace' – and that is the violence committed *illegally* by military veterans' post-deployment (and often service). Although there has been an appreciation of these violent legacies of war in popular culture for some time, for example through cinematic depictions such as those portrayed through Martin Scorsese's acclaimed *Taxi Driver* (1976), and more recently *Jarhead* (2005) and *American Sniper* (2015), there had been a reluctance to draw attention to this problem at the level of government policy and public awareness campaigns. In 2008 this changed considerably, with the publication of a report by the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO, 2008), which acknowledged for the first-time the scale of veterans convicted of predominately violent offences.

Following the widespread media attention generated by this report, a very specific discourse started to emerge: one that constructed the veteran who commits a criminal act as a distinct subjectivity *and* a distinct problem for juridical and political categorisation. At the risk of providing a reductivist account of the knowledge that emerged, two key 'voices' have dominated how the 'violent veteran' is represented and understood, the *political* and the *psychological* (Murray 2016). The *political voice* is concerned with raising awareness, asking questions such as 'what do we know about the causation of veterans' criminality?'; 'what sorts of crimes are most common?'; 'what should interventions look like?' and 'who is best placed to provide support?'. Since NAPO (2008) this voice has been lively, and it is important to note that it is not always in agreement, as the *political* in this context (for me at least) consists of Government and non-government organisations, veterans' charities, anti-

war lobbyists, research into criminal justice policy/practice, and of course the penal reform campaigns, such as the formative inquiry conducted by the Howard League (2011). There does however seem to be an agreement that more research needs to be done. The *psychological voice* is more concerned (perhaps obviously) with foregrounding quantification and mental health and well-being (Murray 2016).

This research all tells us something different about the 'veteran-offender', but as knowledge develops at a staggering pace, there is a notable lack of a *criminological* voice and the voices of veterans themselves (Murray 2016, Treadwell 2016). The consequences of this are twofold and profound. Firstly, when studied in this way, veterans become an 'object' to be studied at a distance, instead of as political subjects with agency. As we come to make sense of the biographies of those who were once 'national defender' and now 'national offender' (Murray, 2015), I would argue that it is the voices of individuals that are implicated in this that are of importance, moreover their voices can disrupt our understandings of their unique place in society (and security). Secondly, the lack of criminological voices has meant that discourses have emerged without reference to the State's role in the construction and subsequent management of this political category (Murray, 2016).

So, what might become of the 'violent veteran' within a literature on war which continues to be reworked under current political conditions? Indeed, by extension, what would a criminological analysis that attended to the 'view from below' reveal about both war and criminal justice in the 21ˢᵗ century? As two criminological problems continue to emerge – that of the violent veteran and that of war (and the military institution) – a considered narrative which places veterans' voices at the centre of any analysis which aims to connect the two is key. For Treadwell (2016: 344), this critique should focus on "the very nature of militarism and violence". I would agree, and suggest that obtaining veteran's testimonies are not only ethical but furthermore, as the veteran continues to embody a continuum of violence, so their testimonies present significant challenges and demand a rethinking of the violence of warfare in the 21ˢᵗ Century. Particularly, as understandings of the violence committed 'on "Civvie-Street" continue to develop amid an altered understanding of space, what it means to *be* a

violent veteran in the criminological sense must be interrogated, and indeed how qualitative narratives further illuminate an altered juridical-political setting.

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