GRIM REAPERS: GHOSTLY NARRATIVES OF MASCULINITY AND KILLING IN DRONE WARFARE

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Abstract

This article embraces the spectral turn and sociological framework of 'Haunting' to investigate the gendered implications of armed drones for the individuals who crew them. Introducing original interview data from former British Reaper drone crews, and focusing on their experiences of conducting lethal operations, this article builds on feminist and queer theorising to illuminate the instability of the binary distinction between masculinity and femininity as traditionally understood. Developing 'Haunting,' I draw out three themes: complex personhood, in/(hyper)visibility, and disturbed temporality as the frames through which the intersection of gender and drone warfare can be examined. I draw upon the conceptual metaphor of the ghost to explore the dead *that is also* alive, the absent *that is also* present, and that silence *that is also* a scream. Through this, I argue that Haunting provides a framework for both revealing and destabilizing gendered binaries and is therefore a useful tool for feminist security and international relations scholars.

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Drone warfare is a deeply gendered phenomenon (Masters, 2005; Bayard de Volo, 2016). Existing interjections on this topic have explored the ways in which drone warfare can be constructed as a *feminizing* influence on Western militaries (for example Coker, 2002; Vallor, 2013; Van Creveld, 2013; Royakkers and van Est, 2010; Asaro, 2013), and understood as representing their hyper*masculinization* as a result of techno-fetishization (for example Kunashakaran, 2016; Masters, 2005; Bayard de Volo, 2016; Holmqvist, 2013). In addition, drone warfare has been explored as a *queer* phenomenon in that it disrupts the heteronormative structures that organise traditional narratives of warfare (Daggett, 2015; Wilcox, 2016). This latter approach reveals the instabilities, contradictions, and inherent 'queerness' within those structures. Daggett (2015) uses queer phenomenology specifically to examine the way drone warfare disrupts the "distance-intimacy" and "home-combat" spatio-temporal axes. Daggett's perspective offers an important insight into the value of recognising the fluidity/instability of gendered binaries, noting that "warrior archetypes that order the act of killing… [are] defined against both the feminine and the queer" (Daggett, 2015, p.362). However, whilst Millar and Tidy argue that Daggett's analysis "can be read as concerning the maintenance of the heroic soldier myth and the production of martial violence as 'combat'" (2017, pp.149, 154), there is space for a stronger (but also queer-inspired) engagement with the concept of the warrior itself and how this is historically/socially/culturally situated. Therefore, this article is interested in a different way of understanding the 'heroic soldier myth,' specifically exploring how killing is difficult and (fortunately) makes people uncomfortable, whilst *at the same time* enhancing the status of those who do kill (in socially prescribed ways). Unravelling the heroic soldier/warrior myth, to illuminate and destabilise the gendered binaries it contains, requires a methodology that can take this situatedness seriously, can pay attention to subtle, barely visible traces, and for this I introduce the methodology of Haunting.

I build a framework of 'Haunting' reflecting the 'spectral (re)turn' literature, drawing on the works of Jessica Auchter (2014), Avery Gordon (2008) and Jacques Derrida (2006) to better

capture the nuance, detail and complexity of drone warfare.[2] Through this framework I situate

the narratives of gender and drones within the complex (cob)webs of power in which they

function.[3] Speaking of 'situating narratives' means acknowledging the ways in which narratives

are lived and embodied as experiences, rather than as purely abstract phenomenon. This is

important to our consideration of (the queer and gendered implications of) drone warfare as

there has been a tendency in the discussion of drones to ignore or oversimplify the experiences

of those individuals involved (For example Royakkers and van Est, 2010; Cole et al., 2010; and

Cole, 2015; For analysis see, for example, Bentley, 2018).

In the first part of this article I contextualise Haunting within the 'spectral (re)turn' exploring

the different ways in which Haunting, and its component of the ghost, have been deployed. I

argue that complexity and nuance are foregrounded in Haunting through three core themes:

complex personhood, in/(hyper)visibility, and disturbed temporality. To build onto the existing

queer theorising of drone warfare, I augment the method of the 'ghost hunt' with the language

of Cynthia Weber's (2016) "queer logic(s)." I do this because, whilst Haunting is already

concerned with the 'things that don't fit' and with the way that ghosts are simultaneously

present and absent, the addition of queer logic(s) provides the necessary vocabulary to render

this binary destabilization explicit. As such, I utilize queer logic(s) to express the ways military

technologies simultaneously destabilize and (re)inscribe masculinity and femininity. The ghost

hunt, the method of Haunting, explores how to take seriously the data which does not 'fit' (e.g.

neatly into the category of *either* masculine *or* feminine) and how to engage with "sensuous"

knowledges (concepts I return to) (Gordon, 2008, p.205). The aim is to think differently about

the work that gender does, "to open up our epistemologies or even our ontologies in fantastic,

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[2] I capitalise Haunting when I am referring to the theoretical framework which I sketch out in this article and use 'haunting' when using the term otherwise.
[3] One of the things that makes sexism so powerful is its 'stickiness', it is difficult to overcome, you can become trapped in it – I therefore use (cob)webs as a nod to this stickiness (For discussions of gender/sexuality as "sticky" see Puar, 2007; Ahmed, 2006; Zalewski and Runyan, 2013).

strange and sometimes baffling ways..." to contribute to existing gender and feminist theorising

on drone warfare and military technologies more broadly (Holloway and Kneale, 2008, p.308).

Therefore, in the second part of the article I apply this framework to the case of British Reaper

drone crews, investigating the threads of gender through original interview data. I introduce the

men and women who spoke to me about their experiences of conducting lethal strikes and

reflect on how these are woven through with particular gendered narratives. These narratives

are explored through a series of 'ghosts' that raise questions about the gendered logics of killing

and how this is situated within narratives of being in a riskless position, the myth of the duel or

dog fight in British military history, and political risk aversion. Ultimately, Haunting provides an

indispensable framework for both illuminating and destabilizing gendered binaries: an essential

tool for feminist security and international relations scholars.

Gendering Drone Warfare

Albeit (several miles) outside of feminist theorizing, Martin Van Creveld's (2013) views the

connection between feminine qualities and the degradation of Western militaries as a reflection

of his perspectives on the importance of keeping military spaces as bastions of 'pure'

masculinity and manliness.[4] I disagree with Van Creveld, but his views provide a useful starting

point from which to illuminate the gendered backdrop of the view that armed drones evidence

the decline of the militaries that use them. What Shannon Vallor (2013) describes as a concern

about the "moral deskilling" of the armed forces, can be viewed instead as a fear over the

erosion of military masculinity through the distancing of crews from the battlefield, and the

attendant reduction in risk to life and limb (see also Asaro, 2013; Royakkers and van Est, 2010).

The various mocking references to "cubicle warriors" and "Dilbert goes to war" suggest, rather

than ethical concerns about the way the technology is used, a discomfort with the loss of the

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[4] For discussions of military masculinity see important works by, for example, Higate (2003); Basham (2013); and Duncanson (2009).

fetishized warrior figure (Economist, 2014; Mayer, 2009). Therefore, feminist scholars have argued that discomfort with remote warfare instead "rests in part with the hierarchy within masculinity that informs 'combatant' and 'war hero'" (Bayard de Volo, 2016, p.58). As such, the questions that emerge are twofold: (1) with the advent of distancing war technologies reducing the need for "honour and valour" in war, how can we distinguish killing which is worthy of our respect and value (Sauer and Schornig, 2012, p.373)? And (2) what are the ramifications for military masculinity?

Some feminist scholars have argued that the use of armed drones results in the hyper-masculinization of the American and British militaries. The physical distancing from the battlefield, Sumita Kunashakaran claims encourages emotional distancing, a trait equated with masculinity alongside "possessing the situational awareness and strategic thinking skills – both highly hegemonically masculinized traits" (2016, p.44). Similarly, both she and Caroline Holmqvist (2013) equate the physical body of the drone with the hyper-masculine – representing the hard, erect, impenetrable body of the ideal soldier. Others have pointed to the increasing importance of "technical proficiency" which "implicitly sets up a dichotomy between the powerful, technologically enhanced state and the weakened, feminine state… which can be bullied, cowed and intimidated by technology" (Manjikian, 2013, p.53).

However, although these authors make convincing arguments, in many of these apparently opposing accounts there are acknowledgements of elements that do not fit neatly into the narratives that they are trying to create. For example, although arguing that the result is hyper-masculinization, Kunashakaran notes that "drones do indeed open up new avenues for more 'feminized' skills" and that the traditional image of the physically strong war hero is "also challenged among [unmanned aerial vehicles] operators" (2016, p.32, p.35). The (coded masculine) emotional remoteness of the "drone stare" Holmqvist argues "furthers the subjugation of those marked as Other" but then she goes on to note that this narrative is disrupted by the technical capacity to see in detail which creates an opposing 'sense of proximity' evoking an emotional response in drone crews (2013, p.452). Therefore, Daggett

(2015) and Wilcox's (2015) queer-inspired frameworks represent an important interjection into this literature highlighting the way killing from a position of risklessness may be construed as 'disorientating' and how the construction of non-heteronormative sexualities as 'other' is connected to gendered and raced discourses in the conflicts where drones are used. Therefore, this article builds upon those works by addressing the way in which the destabilization of gendered binaries is often subtle, unclear and difficult to grasp, and for that I suggest the framework of Haunting with the inclusion of queer logic(s). As such, I suggest that Haunting can help to illuminate how military technologies can simultaneously destabilise and (re)inscribe gendered discourses.[5]

The Spectral Return and Haunting as a Framework

Haunting is part of the 'spectral (re)turn' in social science and has been applied to a wide range of subject areas including sociology (Gordon, 2008; Roseneil, 2009), International Relations (Auchter, 2014), art (Hawkins, 2010), literature (Luckhurst, 2002), history (Kleinberg, 2017), and geography (Roberts, 2013), for example. What these various perspectives share is an interest is the 'stuff' that is more than the visible, the concrete, the objective.[6] Despite an interest in 'ghosts' (figures I will return to shortly), Haunting is not interested in the occult or with parapsychology, but rather requires paying attention to the unsaid, the absent, and silent just as much as the spoken, the present, and the evident. This article draws its inspiration from three primary uses of Haunting, Gordon's (2008) *Ghostly Matters,* Auchter's (2014) *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations*, and Derrida's (2006) *Specters of Marx.* The following section outlines these texts and how I engage and build upon them.

Avery Gordon's (2008) version of Haunting, pays attention to these neglected forms of knowledge as a way of engaging with the claim that "life is complicated" on both a practical and

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[5] This article is concerned with how drone warfare is gendered from the perspective of the operators lives. There is not space enough to cover the, very important, aspects of how targeted populations are gendered (and raced) but this is addressed in scholarship such as Wilcox (2011, 2015) and Acheson et al. (2014)
[6] 'Stuff' is the term that Laura Shepherd (2013) uses to describe her 'data,' and I re-use it here because 'data' is too concrete a word for describing the ephemeral traces of ghosts.

theoretical basis and I use this statement as the start point for theorizing drone warfare. Gordon's (1990, 2008) use of Haunting folds together two of her primary concerns: Firstly, she is interested in how structures of power such as what we call 'racism' and 'sexism' are experienced, how these terms imply something concrete that is at the same time nebulous, something personal which is also impersonal. Secondly, in her investigation of the first, she develops Haunting as an attempt to go beyond what she views as the methodological failings of sociology as a social science. Jessica Auchter (2014) traces the ways in which certain spaces are haunted by the deaths and/or memorialisation that occurred there. Auchter's work approaches Haunting from a slightly different perspective from Gordon, developing a 'hauntology' as an alternative to ontology. She investigates how statecraft relies on the construction of the distinction between life and death to better understand the process of memorialisation. Taking a Derridean perspective, Auchter is interested with 'the politics behind the construction of dichotomies at an ontological level,' focusing on how this plays out in places/spaces of death and memorialisation (2014, p.4). These spaces haunt her, and, like Gordon, she points to the affective nature of reckoning with, and speaking with, ghosts.

Derrida's (2006) *Specters of Marx* builds on his remarks at a conference about the potential future for Marxism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, noting that there were many 'specters' that scholars needed to take seriously. Important for our discussion here are two key elements. Firstly, Derrida's interest in the way that 'time is out of joint' (drawn from Shakespeare's Hamlet) and, secondly, that there are plural spectres of Marx: "Why this plural? Would there be more than one of them? Plus d'un [More than one/No more one]" (2006, pp.1–2). The first of these feeds into what I term 'disturbed temporality' (detailed later). The latter gestures (again) to the recurring theme of binary destabilization and the way in which the ghostly invites a questioning of the boundary line between dyads such as presence/absence, life/death, masculine/feminine. To question these boundaries both Gordon and Auchter draw from Derrida's writing a particular way of dealing with ghosts, specifically that one must be "hospitable" to the ghosts (Derrida, 2006, p.xx, 135).

Ghosts

Ghosts are a core component of every Haunting framework, but how these entities are understood and utilised varies widely across the literature. The main distinctions focus on what they are, whether they should be understood literally or metaphorically, what work they do (if any), and how we can/should/ought to respond to them. Being neither dead *nor* alive, being simultaneously present *and* absent, the ghostly points to the inherent instability of binaries in ways that are particularly useful to thinking about, and troubling, masculinity and femininity as stable categories (see Buse and Stott, 1999).

The ghostly, then, in its capacity to stand "in defiance of binary oppositions" not only illuminates the spectral structures of power behind terms like racism and sexism but *also* points to their construction and forces a questioning of those inequalities often defended under the guise of being 'natural' (Buse and Stott, 1999, p.10). Haunting brings together the personal and subjective with discourses that dis/empower (gender, sex, race, class, sexuality as well as culture, history and society) braiding together the threads which reflect the construction of social life. Therefore, I argue, Haunting is profoundly important for feminist theorizing, providing a means of illuminating the cobwebbed structure of patriarchy and, pointing to ways of "overturning some power" in the pursuit of a more equal society.

From Derrida's perspective, rather than representing either primitive/pre-enlightenment thinking or something frightening, the ghost is a figure that needs to be heard not exorcised. The things that the ghost has to say are important because they indicate "the structure of every hegemony" and the conversations with ghosts are "a matter of neutralizing a hegemony or overturning some power" (Derrida, 2006, pp.46, 58). To think about how to engage with ghosts as a means of "overturning some power" it is necessary to situate Haunting within the wider body of social science scholarship. One of the things that unites many, if not all, of the uses of Haunting, is a suspicion that positivist forms of research are missing important things. In aiming for an elusive (impossible?) 'objective' stance, positivism results in a lack of attention being paid

to the political implications of epistemological and ontological choices: "blinding us to the ways in which those things are expressly produced and fundamentally enabled by a history of loss and repression" (Radway's preface to Gordon, 2008, p.ix; see Clark, Forthcoming for discussion).

Inspired by Derrida, I understand ghosts as something to be engaged with rather than eradicated or resolved, indeed I understand ghosts as inherently irresolvable, not as a puzzle or a problem. Similarly, I understand the ghost as a conceptual metaphor rather than as a purely linguistic device or representative of the occult/paranormal. This means that to engage with ghosts I am required, to paraphrase Donna Haraway (2017), to sit with the trouble. Sitting with the trouble in the context of gender and drones means starting from a point of discomfort (Why does this debate about drones not make sense? Why do the existing feminist engagements feel like they do not 'fit'?[7] How can technology *simultaneously* masculinize *and* feminize?); and proceeding from those points of discomfort to look for ghostly traces of what is not there. It means asking 'How and why does the myth of the duel continue to effect military subjectivity?' 'What does it mean to speak about being a 'warrior' in the contemporary context and why is this contested?' 'Why does this contestation matter?' I point to specific ghosts, that is specific conceptual metaphors, which help me not to stabilize or reveal/resolve the issues but draw attention to the complexity and interweaving of social/political and cultural nuances at the intersection of gender and drones. To do this, the following section explains how the ghostly can form a framework, outlining three key thematic areas which I have labelled: complex personhood, in/(hyper)visibility, and disturbed temporality.

Complex Personhood

Gordon's rationale for Haunting is Patricia William's statement that "Life is complicated," and from this she argues that "Complex personhood is the second dimension" of that theoretical statement (2008, pp.4–5).[8] To do justice to the Reaper crews, who are the focus of this article,

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[7] See section 'Gendering Drone Warfare'
[8] Gordon is interested by Williams' search for the history of her great-great grandmother who was a slave, looking for the shape of her absence in the reports and writings of her owner.

means understanding those individuals as complex social, psychological, cultural, and historical beings tangled in multiple (cob)webs of power that dis/empower in different ways that affect agency.

Perhaps the most useful way of understanding how complex personhood can be conceptually useful is through the idea of 'becoming.'[9] A core contention of post-structural feminists is that sex (just as much as gender) is not something we are born with, but rather something which we must constantly (re)produce (Butler, 1999). This perspective helps us to articulate the way in which "how women are represented (constructed) in language is a seriously political act" (Zalewski, 2000, p.70). As such, if personhood is always in the process of being constructed, if there is "neither origin nor end" to what subjectivity can and should be, then there is space for change, to be different, to be otherwise (Salih, 2002, p.3; see also Butler, 1999; and Braidotti, 2002). This is not to imply that subjectivity is simply a matter of shrugging on a different 'self' each day, but rather that even those moments where what it means to be a specific individual appears to have "congealed" (Butler, 1999, p.33). Therefore, whilst Butler was primarily concerned about the way in which sex and gender congealed, (and I am too) I am *also* interested in the way that all the *other* sediments go into making a person congeal.

A person's subjectivity may 'become' through the 'doing' of certain things associated with gender markers: 'doing' womanhood etc. and also (as per Haunting) through the 'doing' of others. Understanding 'becoming,' in part, through the 'doing of others' means taking seriously the cultural commentary in which an identity is situated, means tracing the shapes of the lived experiences of what is called 'sexism,' means looking at why the figure of the warrior raises its spectral head in accounts of technologically advanced warfare, and so on. This is not to deny individual agency, but rather to acknowledge the social situatedness in which every individual functions. Personhood is never fixed, even after death, but 'becomes' through the process of

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[9] I am indebted to Rhiannon Neilsen for discussions regarding this.

remembering and forgetting (by others), the things we see, the things we don't, the things that we notice are absent.

In/(Hyper)visibility

Given the nature of the ghostly as something indistinct it is perhaps unsurprising that what I have termed, in/(hyper)visibility is my second element of Haunting. This neologism of sorts captures the breadth and inflection of the myriad ways in which it is possible to be (some kind of) invisible and the ways in which what is visible might be illegible. This section is focused on the visible, the invisible, the hypervisible, the things that are somewhere between these categories and the ways that even the unseen might be made known.[10] There are two ways that I use Haunting to approach in/(hyper)visibility, firstly through a consideration of what is (barely) visible but which is ignored; and secondly, through a consideration of what is felt/known but not seen (even as a trace). What the ghostly does is to "muddle" with our ideas of what visibility is, "to trouble the trope of visual clarity as the only sense of affect for mortal thinking" (Haraway, 2017, p.174). In so troubling that trope, Haunting and the ghostly invite an exploration of the 'other-than' visual, the affective, and what Gordon refers to as 'sensuous' knowledge(s) (2008, p.205).

The analytical importance of engaging with in/(hyper)visibility is suggested through a consideration of its political implications. It matters what we 'see' because we have been taught that what we see is what *matters,* that the visible is what we should interest ourselves with. Feminist and queer scholars have scruntinzed this in relation to women and queer individuals, arguing that through rendering these individuals invisible (either by relegating them to the 'private' sphere or by refusing to speak/write their experiences) it has been possible to dismiss them as *not* mattering (Enloe, 2013; Parkins and Karpinski, 2014). Therefore, by asking what

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[10] I have perhaps been linguistically promiscuous in my use of the term 'invisible.' Strictly speaking, this means something of which there is no visible hint, however throughout this article I use the term invisible to also refer to things of which there is a trace. I do so because the ghostly destabilizes the boundary between the visible and the invisible – we may see something of the ghost or we may become aware of its presence without visual cues. Using 'known' here may also be problematic so please note that I use it as a shorthand for the things which whilst only partially graspable are nonetheless the types of 'stuff' that this project pursues.

we are *not* seeing, Haunting enables us to draw attention to the ways in which certain populations, figures or subjectivities have been marginalised or rendered unintelligible. In addition, feminist and queer theorists have shown how invisible subjects can simultaneously be rendered *hyper*visible and the consequences of this simultaneous in/(hyper)visibility, is nothing less than erasure of the individuals' subjectivity (Lamble, 2009; Shepherd and Sjoberg, 2012; See Clark, Forthcoming for discussion). Haunting engages with issues of in/(hyper)visibility *alongside* considerations of complex personhood, disturbed temporality, and it is this multi-faceted approach which enables us to better do justice to the subjects of enquiry. [11]

 The second type of in/(hyper)visibility is concerned with the way in which ghosts can be made visible (become known) through *feeling,* felt in the shiver-down-the-spine sensation, or the sensation in looking at the familiar that something is different or missing (Holloway and Kneale, 2008). The project that formed the basis of this article was based on a sense of discomfort. I wanted to find out what it was about drone warfare that made people so uncomfortable, what it was about crewing those machines that meant the individuals involved were viewed as peculiarly contemptible. I wondered, as I started to look at the different accounts of Reaper crews, what (cob)webs of power I might discover, what sensuous knowledges I might be able deploy to investigate my discomfort.

Disturbed Temporality

The complex persons that I trace are not just situated in a spatial and social situation, but also in a particular time. Using Haunting as a framework means rejecting the notion of linear temporal development, because "Le temps est hors de ses gonds" [time is off its hinges/is out of joint], illustrating the intermingling of the past, present and future (Derrida, 2006, p.22). The 'present' becomes infused with the 'presence' of ghosts who require us to consider the multiplicity of presents: "past present, actual present: 'now', future present" in what Derrida refers to as the "spectral moment" (2006, p.xix). As such, this past/present/future construction of the self

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[11] Both human subject and subject as topic of study

includes interweavings of history, culture, myth, and fantasy. The way that the past is remembered/memorialised as traumatic or edenic, the way that the future is perceived as promising or problematic are both things that interact with our sense of discomfort which comes from the disruption of our 'now' by the past, dislocating the progressive linearity of time.

To understand the importance of (the disturbance of) temporality, I deploy Peter Buse and Andrew Stott's use of 'anachronism' to articulate why ghosts are particularly useful for offering alternative readings of what has been, what is and what might be:

> 'ghosts are anachronism *par excellence*, the appearance of something in a time in which they clearly do not belong. But ghosts do not just represent reminders of the past... they very often demand something in the future.' (1999, p.14)

In addition, the past is not always the historical past, but rather reality is woven through with fiction: Myth is almost as (and sometimes more so) powerful as histories and the shuddering recourse in narrative about drones to *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* reflects the way that we cannot stand still in the now, but rather must build relationships with our future selves before we have even truly imagined them.

Ghost Hunting and Queer Logic(s)

Ghost hunting is the method that I use to engage with the framework of Haunting via "sensuous" knowledge(s), a core means through which the ghosts reveal themselves (Gordon, 2008; Holloway and Kneale, 2008). Gordon argues that what is 'real' may also be invisible, sensual, troubling, and/or "seething" (2008, p.19). Engaging with 'sensuous' knowledges, means taking seriously hunches, intuitions, unspoken commentary, popular portrayals of characters and identities, and artwork. Sensuous knowledge affects our understanding of social reality because it "always involves knowing and doing. Everything is in the experience ..." (Gordon, 2008, p.205).

One of the things which cropped up in various discourses about drones, but which felt at once curiously at odds with the context and essential to understanding it, was the role of history and

mythology. Gordon's framework was useful for thinking about this because she uses fiction as the basis for sociological analysis. In so doing, Gordon destabilizes the distinction between fact and fiction by indicating that there is always some degree of crossover and bleeding-into in each category. I was interested in this because debates about drone warfare were so clearly layered over with history and mythology associated with the British military, as well as science fiction books and movies. Additionally, viewing the categories of fact and fiction, not as separate but intertwined helps illustrate how dichotomous thinking can be both an over-simplification (requiring an engagement with complexity as theoretically and empirically important) and unstable (and therefore heralding the possibility of change, perhaps for the better).

This latter point echoes Daggett's (2015) thinking about the queer disorientations of drone warfare as not yet being solidified – and therefore, perhaps, having emancipatory potential. And it is, in part, her work which inspires my recourse to queer logic(s) (as part of the framework of Haunting) to understand how drone warfare is gendered. I complement Daggett's account with original interview data and suggest that setting this against traditional historic and mythic narratives of heroic warrior sacrifice can further illuminate how this military technology simultaneously masculinizes and feminizes the crews.

Whilst Haunting offers a means of destabilizing or gesturing to the instability of the distinction between the categories of gendered binaries, it currently lacks an adequate vocabulary to make sense of this opening. Therefore, I suggest the addition of Cynthia Weber's (2016) "queer logic(s)," as the vocabulary through which the potential for binary resistance in Haunting can be more adequately realised.

The use of the ghost as a conceptual metaphor seemed already to point to the need for articulating how something could simultaneously be and not be. As I read my adaptation of Haunting through Weber's lens it became clear to me that it already embodied this/these logic(s), what was lacking was the explicit articulation. That is to say, the framework of Haunting refers to the idea of ghosts being, for example, simultaneously present and absent: two

things which are logically mutually exclusive. Weber (2016) explains the existence of such apparent contradictions (and their disciplinary power) as examples of queer logic(s). Therefore, this is something which has not been explicitly noted in Haunting, but which is particularly useful for a post-structural feminist project focused on the binary destabilizing potential of the framework and how drone warfare is gendered.

The idea of queer logic(s) is specifically related to challenging problems with binaries, with queer logic(s) providing a means of being and/or rather than either/or. This means "that one can be a boy or a girl while at the same time being a boy and a girl" (Weber, 2014, p.598), and therefore "queer subjectivities more than exceed binary logics of the either/or" (Weber, 2016, p.166). This, Weber argues, allows for identities to be more than 'and' and/or 'or,' in a manner reminiscent of Derrida's "Plus d'un" (2006, p.22). Approaching the concerns of International Relations in this way "directs us... to categories that connect and break apart foundational binaries... by understanding the stabilizing 'slash' in these binaries as multiplying and complicating connections, figures, and orders rather than reducing and simplifying them" (Weber, 201, p.43).[12]

I highlight the queer logic(s) to draw out the ways in which the arguments of masculinity and femininity in relation to military technologies are limited because the experiences of the crews are always, already, "exceeding all binary opposites" (Harris, 2015, p.17). For those individuals who view the introduction of the drone as a revolution in military affairs, the ghosts serve to demonstrate the way "the becoming-future is haunting us" through fears of terminators, swarms, and lethal autonomous robots (Puar, 2007, p.xx). For individuals who are troubled by the way that drones captured the public zeitgeist and the way the arguments slid past each other so much like oil and water, the ghosts draw attention to how "being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically" (Puar, 2007, pp.xx–xxi). The

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[12] Weber uses the term 'slash' in her description of queer logic(s) and it usefully illustrates the thinness of the distinction between the two categories and also gestures towards the violence which can result from disciplining subjects to fit into one of these boxes.

ghosts create a liminal shadowy space in which the crews can simultaneously be distant and present, be powerful and be impotent, be warriors and not be warriors. By drawing on the sensuous knowledge, I have tried in the following sections to paint the complicated picture of the interaction between gender and military technologies in a way that rejects the feminized/masculinized dichotomy and embraces the queer logic(s) of the ghost.

Data Collection

This article draws on data collected through a series of interviews with former British Reaper crews alongside secondary data about the same population. There is considerably less information available about British crews than their American counterparts. Currently the only country outside of the US to have Reaper drones, the experiences of British crews is understudied and, in popular reports, lacking in nuance (With the notable exceptions of Lee, 2013; Birmingham Policy Commission, 2014). British drones were initially used for intelligence gathering, reconnaissance, and force protection in Afghanistan. Since then their role has been expanded to include reconnaissance missions in Libya, Syria, and Iraq; and strike campaigns in Syria and Iraq. Reaper crews, in the British configuration, are comprised of three individuals, the pilot (who flies the aircraft and releases any weapons), the sensor operator (who does the targeting), and the intelligence officer. These individuals belong to one of two British Reaper squadrons: 13 Squadron based in the UK in Lancashire, and 39 Squadron based at Creech outside of Las Vegas.

I chose to use interviews as my starting point because there has been a tendency within the press (both British and international) to rely on hearsay or to make assumptions about the lives of Reaper crews. Therefore, I used the online professional networking site, LinkedIn, to find and contact individuals with the requisite experiences and to conduct 15 in-depth interviews. The interviews were between one and three hours and were conducted in person and via Skype. I let the interviewees drive the direction of the discussion, emphasising what *they* thought was important about their experiences of crewing Reapers.

Because of the negative perceptions of their roles, I was worried that it would be difficult to engage in discussion with former crews. However, this was not the case, and many individuals were delighted to have an opportunity to 'set the record straight.' As with all research into the experience of ex-military individuals, building a rapport with my interviewees was important because of the potentially distressing nature of some of the discussion. Some of the examples that interviewees gave me to illustrate their claims either had to be completely off record or presented in a vague or partly fictionalised manner. Where I have utilised this material, I have tried to be faithful to what I believe was the message behind what was told to me, acknowledging that this is an imperfect and necessarily partial interpretation. The opinions of the individuals may have changed upon leaving the military, therefore their experiences and perspectives may differ from those who are *currently* serving in these roles. I have given pseudonyms to all of the individuals that I interviewed because of the contentiousness of what Reaper crews do. For similar reasons, the quotes that are provided in this article represent quotes that I carefully noted down during the interview rather than transcriptions, as such it is possible that they are imperfect recordings.

Wielding the Scythe

The most contentious element of the lives of Reaper crews, over which most ink is spilt, is their capacity to use lethal force. Similarly, one of the core markers of the warrior identity is the capacity to inflict death on others and to die gloriously himself. Through a ghost hunt of the experiences of Reaper crews using lethal force, the following section investigates the densities of life that are the lived expression of the statement that "life's complicated" (Gordon, 2008, p.1).

The first ghost I trace is that of the 'Other'. I understand the 'Other', like many feminist scholars, as an identity marker which signals the dangerous, the deviant, the different (Richter-Montpetit, 2007; Pettman, 1996; Hansen, 2006). To this theorising I add, from Haunting, the 'Other' of our own psychology, the subjectivity which comes from 'the life of others, and the other things within us' to signify the way the crews interact with the targets of lethal strikes, the ways that

they make sense of taking life, and the way that this is woven through with narratives of activity, heroism, and paternal masculinity. The primary question this ghost engages with is whether warriors have a 'duty to kill'?

The second ghost is that of cowardice, who acts as the "unhappy echo" of the warrior attribute of courage (Woodward and Winter, 2007, p.74). Through conversation with this ghost I ask whether warriors have a 'duty to die' in order to sediment their masculine status and reflect on how this requirement is navigated in the apparently riskless roles of the Reaper crews.[13] The requirement for members of the British military to act 'bravely' is rendered uncanny by the political aversion to casualties, creating an impossible environment where courage is simultaneously celebrated and undesirable.

Whilst Sara Ruddick and Carol Cohn note that "[t]he practice of war entails far more than the killing and destruction of armed combat" there can be no question that killing and destruction are key identifying components of warfare (2003, p.4) and the association between masculinity and killing is discussed in a range of feminist works (e.g. Peterson and Runyan, 2010; Sjoberg, 2007). In the lives of Reaper crews, Matt Martin describes how "[t]he Italians walked around the Predator 'coffins', patting them as though they were the bellies of expectant mothers" (2010, p.156). That the transportation equipment for the Reapers are called "coffins" serves to highlight the connection between ideas of death and "male parthenogenesis" (Braudy, 2005, p.450).

Members of the British military have the right and responsibility to take life (under certain conditions and) in pursuit of British military aims and within militaries those individuals who have permission to kill are awarded the highest status (Bourke, 1999). The capacity to "get a weapon off,"[14] (with all that statement's wonderful sexual undertones) an interviewee claimed, was important to attempting to resolve the manning crisis that the US Air Force was

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[13] See Clark, Forthcoming for discussion as to the extent of this 'risklessness.'
[14] Interview with 'Geoff'

experiencing with Reaper.[15] Killing evokes the spectral mythology of physical strength (even where that is not directly relevant to the means of killing), and establishes the power status of the individual who can take life as dominant (and therefore masculine) in comparison to those that he/she can kill (who are feminized). Therefore, the missiles attached to Reaper, and the capacity to deploy them, are an important identifier of the crews' masculine warrior status.

The relative status of the Reaper crews in comparison with the fast jet crews is established through the type of weaponry the platform carries ("pretty much the same pay load as one of the USAF's F-16s" (Loveless, 2010, p.195)[16]) and capacity to use it. As Dan noted, "I was quite often in the US Air Force bar when the cream of the crop of Air Force pilots [would come in], they thought they were the bee's knees, but had never ever been in a combat situation…" and therefore, he could establish his status by asking them, "How many bombs have you dropped? None? Oh, I've done five this week."[17] The pride that crew members felt at being operationally busy was enhanced by the fact that they could do more than *just* provide surveillance, countering some criticisms of the Reaper squadrons from within the RAF. Whilst the fast jet guys were still perceived as wrinkling their noses in distain, other crews "had a really operational focus" and the Reaper crews could say "we're operational all the time, and we're dropping bombs," which enabled them to settle more comfortably into the social hierarchy.[18] Therefore "pride associated with flying [Reapers]" is largely based around "getting the most combat experience of anyone…" (Bergen and Rowland, 2013, p.113).

The ghost of the 'Other' draws attention to the complexity in these (cob)webs of gender which can be better understood by reflecting on how complex personhood is being lived in these contexts. The warrior status that confers the marker of military masculinity on the Reaper crews is one which must be constantly performed and renegotiated. Through this lens, the criticism of the Reaper crews results from the way in which their lethal capacity stabilizes their

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[15] (See for example Alexander, 2015; Drew and Philipps, 2015; Majumdar, 2015; Chatterjee, 2015)
[16] Considered the 'top' of the hierarchy
[17] Interview with 'Dan'
[18] Interview with 'Tom'

own gendered status whilst destabilizing the premier position of the fighter pilots (Francis, 2008; Braudy, 2005, p.55). That is, the capacity to kill at such an extreme distance (and the lack of physical risk to the crews), erodes the mythic power of the dog fight, the historical legacy on which the fighter pilots draw their status.

The ghost of the 'Other' also gestures to the Reaper crews' complex relationship with friendly forces on the ground. How can an apparently riskless crew perform warrior masculinity in comparison to those brave souls risking their lives below? Almost to a man[19] my interviewees stated 'saving lives' was the best part of the job.[20] "We're not killing people for the fun of it. It would be the same if we were the guys on the ground. You have to get to [the enemy] somehow or all of you will die" (Reaper crew member cited in Woods, 2015). The importance of saving lives was reflected in the introduction of the unofficial motto (for 39 Squadron) of, 'To save lives. To make a difference.'[21] Therefore, having bombs is important not just because it establishes their credential as warriors but because it allows them to *save* lives.

Temporality is disturbed by the ghost of the 'Other,' because the different time-zones in which the crews operate enable the Reaper to provide over-watch for sleeping troops on the ground, a fond memory of one of my interviewees.[22] Providing 'over watch' enables drone crews, who are not at physical risk, to undertake the role of protector and thereby reclaim some of the traditional attributes of military masculinity (Hicks Stiehm, 1982). The lens of hyper/(in)visibility illuminates the way in which the crews could come 'to recognize the faces and figures of our soldiers and marines, unbeknownst to most of them' in ways that emotionally affected the watchers, "I sometimes chuckled over their youthful pranks and high jinks when they were off duty … I cried with them … whenever they lost a comrade…" (Martin, 2010, p.121).

Despite being 'unbeknownst' to those below, far from an emotionless 'God's eye view,' statements like this point to the complexity of the humans behind the drone. One interviewee

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[19] I had only one female interviewee and she did not comment on this issue.
[20] Interview with 'Robert'
[21] Interview with 'Geoff'
[22] Interview with Robert

told me that it "broke [his] heart" watching the "young lads" in the infantry "being sick [with fear] before they leave" the camp; language which speaks of the emotional connection between the Reaper crews and the ground troops ("We took it personally"), and reveals a paternal perspective.[23] Therefore it is unsurprising that the most painful iteration of the ghost of the 'Other' are the moments when the Reaper crews are unable to save lives and troops die. These are situations in which, despite the way in which the technology on the Reaper drone should make the enemy and dangers *hyper*visible, those threats remain *in*visible. As former Wing Commander of 13 Squadron Damian Killeen (2015) reflected, "the bit that hurts more are the days where you watch people die because we are in a surveillance mode … [or] the guys you're protecting stand on an improvised explosive device."

Further confusing the performance and perception of the masculinity of Reaper crews is the ghostly figure of cowardice. I use the term cowardice not in its military-legal format but as a frame with continuing cultural salience (Walsh, 2014).[24] The right to take life, the duty of kill, examined through the ghost of the 'Other,' is accompanied on its queer journey with the ghost of cowardice, reflecting the confusion over whether warriors have a 'duty to die.'

Commentators have directly connected the increase in risk aversion in the armed forces with their degradation (Coker, 2007; Van Creveld, 2013; Kober, 2015). The ethical and cultural importance of reciprocal risk between combatants has been remarkably resistant to change, reflecting the power of the myth of duel, even in the contemporary western military (Bourke, 1999; Lee, 2012). Whilst it has been argued extensively that drones are no more than the logical extension of technology that has steadily distanced the individuals involved in war, there remains a disquiet over the role of distance in enabling killing and in ideas of valour and

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[23] Interview with anonymous intelligence analyst

[24] I use 'cowardice' here not as a legal definition, but rather to refer to the cultural meaning of the term. For example, the phrase is used in the UK Armed Forces Personnel and Legal Framework for Future Operations (2013) which describes the abuse of Baha Mousa (who died in UK custody in Iraq) as 'violent and cowardly' (p.25) and one of the abusers admits that 'he was guilty of an unprovoked and cowardly assault' on Baha Mousa (Gage, 2011, p.249). Term describes the inhumane actions of individuals in a position of power over another who could not fight back. It is in this sense that the epithet of coward is (problematically) attached to drone crews.

gallantry (Schulzke, 2016; Royakkers and van Est, 2010), indeed some claim that "the drone is a cowardly weapon that threatens to make cowards of those who embrace it" (Plaw and Fricker, 2015, p.198). Whilst I am not claiming that this perspective is accurate, these statements are instructive in understanding the cultural and social context in which Reaper crews operate.

Is it the case then, as Cara Daggett claims, that "[b]ecause drone operators are protected from death, they are disqualified from performing as 'real' warriors because their bodies are not sited in combat" (2015, 363) reflecting the fear that the way Reaper crews are protected from physical harm somehow renders them morally suspect and unmanly (Royakkers and van Est, 2010; Asaro, 2013)? Given the connection between risk, courage and military masculinity, it is no surprise that being stationed at an extreme distance from the theatre of war has a negative impact on the way the Reaper crews are viewed by their colleagues and by the press: "he flies model aeroplanes out of Vegas… he's not … at risk."[25] Interviewee Ken stated that there are some "disparaging misconceptions," a sense that Reaper crews were somehow "war dodging… by not committing their bodies." If you are not sharing the risk then you are stalked by the spectre of cowardice, and "the lack of risk affects how you are perceived within the military."[26]

The function of complex personhood as gestured to by the ghost of cowardice can be explored through Bianca Baggiarini's statement that "the deaths of citizen-soldiers are (inconsistently) profane" (2015, p.130). They are 'inconsistently' profane because we continue to fetishize the heroic warrior who dies in war whilst allowing those deaths to erode support for military operations. The contradiction built into the social and political context of the British armed forces is illustrated by my interviewees:

> "Most honours and awards are given, rightly so, to soldiers directly in combat or harm's
> way."[27]

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[25] Interview with 'Roxy'
[26] Interview with 'Ken', and 'Peter'
[27] Interview with 'Ben'

"[within the military leadership there is a] massive amount of risk aversion."[28]

"we don't want to see people in body bags."[29]

Therefore, whilst times have changed and the distance between warring parties has been steadily extended as a result of technological development, the lens of disturbed temporality suggests something different. Indeed, it appears that the most honourable way to return from battle still reflects the dictum that "All the good men are already dead" because they demonstrated their courage by performing their 'duty to die' in war (Braudy, 2005, p.6). Therefore, there was nothing courageous about the posting in Creech or Waddington and complaints about operator burnout were met with exasperation and ridicule. The ghost of cowardice, then, gestures to the requirements for military masculinity for the crews to risk their bodies, something their roles prevent them from doing.[30]

Conclusion

Applying a framework of Haunting to the lives of British Reaper crews draws attention to the inherent tension in narratives about killing, masculinity and military technologies. I have focused on the way in which the framework of Haunting can usefully illuminate the experiences of drone crews as embodying queer logic(s), specifically the ways that gendered logics simultaneously destabilize and reinscribe military masculinities. Drawing on ghosts I have explored the ways killing makes people feel uncomfortable and at the same time enhances the status of those who do; makes it possible to understand how killing can be interpreted through the language of saving lives; makes it possible to understand how environments that shy away from death can simultaneously fetishize those who die heroically and the social, cultural and historical weight woven through these narratives.

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[28] Interview with 'James'
[29] Interview with 'Roxy'
[30] Despite claims to the opposite, Reaper crews are not shielded from all possibility of physical violence (See Clark, Forthcoming for discussion)

The way in which the Reaper crews conduct war and can kill confers a masculinity that is complicated by the lack of physical risk those crews face. The resulting confusion of gendered discourses is one of the reasons that there is so much discomfort surrounding what Reaper crews do. Their lives refuse to fit into our neat categories of masculine or feminine. But rather, they reflect a queer logic that exceeds both of these categories, much as the warrior exceeds the label of 'warrior,' and the experience of war exceeds 'war' itself (After Scarry, 1987).

Acknowledgements

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