The 'Criminology of War', what is it good for? Absolutely nothing!

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Within this short article we intend to make some brief critical comments in response to a question we have previously posed elsewhere (see McGarry and Walklate, 2016b). As per the title of this article, we ask: 'the criminology of war, what is it good for?' In brief, and to complete the lyric by Edwin Starr through which we posed this question, our answer is: 'absolutely nothing!' (or at least, potentially). In what follows, we wish to explain our reasoning for this answer in relation to the precarious co-option of 'war' as a criminological 'specialism'.

It is the case that 'criminological' attention to 'war' has been intermittent during the past century, but it is *not* a 'new' object of study for social science. Our own previous work has suggested that the study of 'war' should be of more sustained concern to 'criminologists' than has previously been the case, given its existence on a complex continua of (gendered) violence, harm and victimisation (qua Cockburn, 2012); a lack of concern which (for us at least) typifies the mainstream centrefolds of criminological interests in 'street' crime, criminal justice processes, and so on. These interests were, and remain to be, informed by a rationale put forward by Jamieson (1998) advocating *for* a 'criminology of war'. From our reading of this work however, the study of 'war' was not intended to be pursued as a criminological 'specialism'; quite the opposite. A later paper, penned in *Studi Sulla Questione Criminale*, offers this position some additional clarity whereby Jamieson (2012) continues that, "the war/crime nexus is, or ought to be, an object of enquiry that belongs to no one, not even criminology". In

concert with Jamieson (1998; 2012), and more recently DiPierto (2016), we maintain that any attempt at studying 'war' is de facto, an inter- and intra-disciplinary pursuit. If co-opted as solely a 'criminological' phenomenon, any pursuit of studying 'war' merely constitute 'zoo-keeping'.

Next, Jamieson (2012) suggests that the study of war for criminology enquiry remains as important as it has ever been, but crucially "what it comes down to is not so much a question of what people call it… Rather it is a question of how the study of war is imagined and achieved". An example of this *problematique* is evidenced within the second edition of *Cultural Criminology: an Invitation*, wherein a new chapter has been introduced dedicated specifically to 'war'. As one might expect, throughout this chapter importance is drawn to the use of ethnographic methods, cultural anthropology and 'culturally' informed research to problematise the study of war further than matters of 'state crime' alone. Apropos our previous comments, it also advocates for the study of 'war' to be interdisciplinary (i.e. drawing upon Critical Terrorism Studies), urging us to 'humanise' rather than essentialise those who commit acts of terrorism to better understand the motivational and structural factors behind mass acts of violence and atrocity. We admire the ways in which these rather tricky debates are proposed, negotiated and articulated. However, within the opening gambit of this chapter such a 'cultural' account (this time of war) is once again partially exposed for making assumptions of the state as a nomothetic 'other'; a point astutely observed by O'Brien (2005) a decade earlier.

In depicting the visual account of an aerial attack on Iraqi civilians from a US gunship during 2007, it is noted as being important for a variety of reasons,

> not the least of which is the insight it provides into the nature of communication that takes place between military personnel when assessing such situations – *a mix of efficient military-speak, wisecracking and self-congratulation* (Ferrell, et al, 2015: 125, *our emphasis*).

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However this kind of verbal communication as illustrative of the enactment of state violence in war is considerably less straightforward when understood as a dialogue. As Mair et al (2012: 92, *our emphasis*) explain,

> natural language plays a very particular role in the events depicted in the cockpit tape – *it does not straightforwardly give us access to what transpired*... Moreover, if we do not think about the way talk is embedded in and carried forward the action, if we treat it as broadly commensurate with the way in which language is used and evaluated in other contexts, for example a context of retrospective inquiry, we are liable to miss the ways in which the breakdown of interactional interchangeability came to occupy a central place in these events.

We are using this example (yes selectively) to illustrate how attempting to approach the study of 'war' from within the confines of established criminological enclaves (i.e. 'cultural criminology' or indeed a 'criminology of war') can prove to be deeply treacherous, and should perhaps be approached with caution.

Our own work relating to 'war' is not exempt from this point, nor the critiques it carries; as has been perceptively observed elsewhere (see Degenhardt, 2015; Shute, 2016). Indeed our own contributions have yet to address a variety of fundamental touchstones. For Shute (2016: 191), a crucial absence is a lack of detailed and nuanced discussion of what constitutes 'war' "in a juridical, diplomatic or international relations sense"; that is, to differentiate the study of war within criminology from being the purview of state crime 'by any other name'. For Degenhardt (2016) other absences include: a lack of focus on the consequences of war for civilians; features of developing technologies of war such as drones and 'cyber-war' being left unacknowledged; a preoccupation with state-centric matters of war making, with less acknowledgement of other actors in war (i.e. private military contractors and mercenaries); and although pointing to structure and context, a clear rationale is yet to emerge as to what should be done with this critique to prevent war being waged, and violent foreign policies backed by politicians in future. While this list uniquely pertains to our own endeavours, to these well-made observations we would also note the absence of perspectives not just about the global south, but addressing war from geopolitical locales where war

has historically occurred and been waged the most by Metropolitan (Imperial) armies (see McGarry and Walklate, 2016a).

Finally, we return to where our initial interests in the study of war began, with the 'soldier as victim'. For clarity, this was not a sympathetic view of soldiering but an analytical challenge to the theoretical and conceptual efficacy of victimology as being incapable of problematizing a 'victimological other' in extremis. This approach is taken by Shute (2016: 192) as valuable for "promoting both nuance and discomfort", but to which he remains "deeply ambivalent"; as do we. However, as Degenhardt (2016) also usefully points out, recent 'criminological' forays such as this into the study of war are too focussed on soldiers; a persistent historical trend, stemming from the early comments of Bonger (1916) on matters relating to a war/crime nexus. However, we do agree with Degenhardt (2016), but with a different emphasis.

It appears that the co-option of 'war' into some parts of criminological 'ownership' has quickly pursued a less ambivalent, and more sympathetic military agenda; drawing upon Ministry of Defence sponsored funding for military 'veteran' issues, veiled behind criminal justice initiatives and well-meaning institutes. Here, we might suggest that colleagues should tread most carefully, for 'deviant knowledge' (qua Walters, 2003) can be easily withered when institutionalised agendas undergird the parameters of sociological research; especially where 'crime' is concerned. For those with doubts about this, we encourage readers to be attentive to the historical purchase of the 'criminological enterprise' within UK institutions, and seek to connect and unpack the origins and influence of military sociology. Our concluding challenge would be for readers to 'spot the difference'?

With these things in mind, our answer remains: the 'criminology of war' is indeed potentially good for 'absolutely nothing'. To conclude, we leave the final words to Jamieson (1998: 480), in that,

> It is not sufficient to re-animate the existing criminological literature on war and crime. Recent transformations in the nature of war and the nation-state preclude

this, as do theoretical advances on issues of gender, violence and social exclusion.

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