

# Exploring post-military geographies: Plymouth and the spatialities of Armed Forces Day

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## **Introduction**

The concept of militarism recognises that society is economically, socially and culturally orientated towards accepting and supporting military power (Woodward 2005). To date, military geographers have largely concerned themselves with tracing the ways militarism has shaped particular landscapes, localities and economic spaces (Bateman and Riley 1987; Gold and Revell 2000; Woodward 2004, 2005). Post-WWII, the narrative in much of this scholarship has been geared toward understanding the expansion and consolidation of military presence in particular localities (often those that have little to no overlap with civilian spaces). Yet, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a profound reshaping of armed services as many nations have responded to the reduced threat of a conventional hot war in Europe. Martin Shaw (1991, p. 105) has suggested that this has led to a ‘post-military’ society that is ‘far from militarised, and ... preoccupied mostly with economic and social concerns rather than military ambitions’. If, as Shaw asserts, we have moved from a state of ‘militarism’ to one of ‘post-militarism’ and that there are concomitant shifts in *how* this process happens politically, societally and culturally — then there is a need to examine continually how such changes impact upon people and place.

In this chapter we consider how conditions and processes of post-militarism come to matter in geographical research. While this concerns military geographers and scholars of critical military studies, post-militarism as we define it here also draws upon a range of sub-disciplinary concerns. Although the changing nature of armed forces in and of themselves *is* of concern here, equally important are wider political, cultural and societal changes which affect change, and which transition *with* and *alongside* armed forces. Thus, the chapter should be of interest to scholars whose work is shaped by the wide gamut of

phenomena shaped by states of post-militarism. We begin by conceptualising post-militarism and considering how the idea might be used to re-examine and understand the relationships between the armed forces and society. Post-militarism is then explored through a consideration of Armed Forces Day (AFD), an annual public celebration of the UK's armed forces. Drawing on ethnographic observations of the AFD in Plymouth, we consider post-militarism as a valuable hermeneutic with which to interpret contemporary forms of militarism, and therein to chart the overlapping spatialities of civilian and military spheres. We conclude by proposing some future directions provoked by a notion of post-military geographies. Specifically, we argue that military geographers should seek to understand the causes and consequences of such transitions of/for the social and cultural production of space.

### **Post military space**

Post-militarism, as Shaw's (1991) work has shown, is a useful concept with which to begin interrogating the varied effects of the military establishment on everyday (civilian) life. Writing at the end of the Cold War, Shaw recognised the need to reassess our notions of 20th-century 'military society', wherein the military 'dominated all social relations and cultural forms in a direct and oppressive manner' (1991, p. vii). In its place, the task of critical scholars was to understand very different military, political and social realities of the post-Cold War world. While we offer a revision of Shaw's thesis below, our aim in this chapter is similar. Namely, it is to trace the restructuring of UK armed forces in recent years in terms of mission, personnel numbers and the spaces they occupy. In general, this restructuring has followed a pattern of contraction, and is exemplified in the UK by the planned closure of 56 MoD sites before 2040 (Ministry of Defence 2016). Our notion of post-militarism accounts for these processes but seeks a more nuanced analysis of how communities transition *with* and *alongside* the military establishment, and presumes that space and place are key matters in post-military transition.

Given the close relationship between the UK's armed forces and many of their wider communities, post-military society in the UK context involves a nuanced and continually-emergent restructuring and re-imagination of the relationship between civilian and military organisations and spaces (Woodward 2004). Military withdrawal or drawdown has social, economic and cultural consequences for both 'military' and 'civilian' spaces. Drawing on the example of Plymouth, Essex and Yarwood (2017) identify six features of this transition (Table 14.1). These changes are driven primarily by endogenous geopolitical events and

strategic decisions that determine where and how military investments are made or withdrawn in a locality. Naval docks, for example, may be built or contracted depending on military need, impacting on urban morphology, land ownership and structures of urban governance (Jacobs 2004). In turn, these changes lead to exogenous changes in workforces, working cultures and communities that centre on military activities (Bartram and Shobrook 1998). A shift to post-military regimes can lead to a decline in investment, a loss of jobs and a subsequent restructuring of former military communities. As forces shrink and bases are abandoned, the armed forces become less prominent in the public eye (Davies et al. 2008, p. 3) and may be more visible through images of place-marketing or heritage tourism (Pinder and Smith 1999) as well as through veterans' organisations (Herman and Yarwood 2014).

The emergence of new forms of employment, an emphasis on post-service life and the reuse of former military bases point to significant transition, however, that complicates easy distinctions between 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' spaces. Consequentially, as work on the wider geographies of militarism has previously emphasised, there is a considerable need to trace the patterns of militarism as they shape human geographies at a range of scales (Woodward 2004, 2005; Rech et al. 2015). But crucially, this scholarship should also recognise the lingering traces and echoes left by, ostensibly, *absences*, and the entanglements of military and civilian worlds both during and after the post-military transitions.

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<caption>**Table 14.1**<em>Comparing the military and post-military city</caption>

<source>**Source:**<em>Essex and Yarwood (2017).</source>

A central tenet of our concept of post-militarism is, concomitantly, a rejection of the distinction between 'war time' and 'peace' (implicit in Shaw's notion of *de*-militarisation at the end of the Cold War). Since the end of the first Gulf War, and increasingly since the period associated with the War on Terror, scholars have signalled the onset of a latent, low-level militarism which is a product of the changing nature of warfare (in respect of warfighting technologies and theatres of operation), and the increasing cultural visibility of militaries in the news media and entertainment. Our concept therefore accepts a changed, and continually changing, cultural consciousness of the military and its role., As such, we conceive post-militarism geographies as layered and complex, whereby civil society transitions *with* and *alongside* the military (and visa versa). While the term 'post' acknowledges a significant sea-change in an activity (cf. post-industrial city or post-

productive countryside (Wilson 2001; Hubbard 2006)), it also recognises that former activities and presences continue to have significance in the present. Veterans' lives and experiences, for example, suggest both a significant break with the military establishment, whilst at the same time the indelibility of military identities and embodiments. Veterans continue to significantly shape local places by dint of their support needs and presence in communities. This is most clearly seen in the rise of veterans' organisations that play a prominent role in establishing social networks, supporting the mental and physical needs of veterans as well as promoting and celebrating the status of veterans in local places (Herman and Yarwood 2015). All of these are rooted in a military past (both lived and imagined) but shape in important ways the experience of militarism in the present.

Our concept of post-militarism is based on a threefold (and overlapping) understanding of space, and as *structured*, *imagined* and *performed* (Lefebvre 1991; Halfacree 2007). The structural characteristics of the post-military city, for example, can be linked to the 'macro', national-level push factors for base closure or transition (policy and expenditure changes, defence reviews and changing military commitments). As this occurs, spaces which begin to be affected by structural change play host to processes of re-imagination, whereby military heritage may be used to assert visions of military historical legacy and tradition. Such imaginings are often conflicted, however, where assertions of reinvigorated military imaginaries of the city are matched by imaginative attempts to 'move on' from a military past and into a post-military future (Essex and Yarwood 2017). Finally, and centrally to our following account, the structural realities and imaginaries of the post-military city become *performed*, staged and scripted by means of parades, celebrations and other public fêtes (Woods 2010). These performances seek to reproduce dominant, historic or merely convenient imaginaries of the military and its role. Post-military spaces – as structured, imagined and performed – therefore imply a contested terrain of actually-existing conditions which are tempered by situated cultural practices of remembering and forgetting. A post-military geography therefore attempts to chart the complex interactions between situated material circumstances and prevailing cultural politics.

In what follows, we account for both temporal shifts and important material changes to defence landscapes in Plymouth, *and* the situated imagining and performance of militarised cultural imaginaries. Using Armed Forces Day as an example, we explore the concept of post-military geographies by outlining the recent structural and policy contexts, dominant imaginaries of Plymouth's military heritage and, importantly, the *performance* of post-militarism. Central to the following account is disjuncture, dissonance and irony; as we

argue, post-militarism in this context is a contested phenomenon, and reveals the instabilities of cultural militarisation.

### **Armed Forces Day**

The idea for Armed Forces Day (AFD) in the UK was first proposed to central government in the *Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces* (Davies et al. 2008), which was supported by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. After being officially sanctioned in October of 2008, the country's first AFD was held on 27 June 2009. The inaugural host town was Chatham, Kent – a port with a long naval tradition, and which is home to the Royal School of Military Engineering at Brompton Barracks. The *Report of Inquiry* signalled the range of ways that ‘the military ... have become increasingly separated from civilian life’ (Davies et al. 2008, p. 3). The authors argue that A shrinking military establishment, the lack of visibility of military uniform in public spaces and the merging of many Army Regiments, among other factors had significantly eroded the public's ‘familiarity’ with and ‘understanding’ of the British military. Along with AFD, the report suggested a raft of initiatives, such as a ‘troops-to-teachers’ scheme, a vast expansion of the Combined Cadet Forces in schools, and other youth- and school-focused strategies, such as ‘Camo day’ (where pupils are encouraged to wear military uniform). These initiatives coincided with the establishment of a number of high-profile charities, such as Help for Heroes in 2007, which aim to provide moral and financial support for veterans of recent conflicts.

AFD has thus run as an annual event in often more than 300 locations across the country since 2009 (gov.uk 2019). Held on the last Saturday of June to allow participation from schoolchildren and adults alike, AFD encourages celebration and an engagement with aspects of the military establishment that are often off limits to civilians, including vehicles, weaponry and, most significantly, personnel. As the AFD home page states, the day is: ‘... a chance to show your support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community: from currently serving troops to Service families, veterans and cadets’ (AFD 2018, np).

While the range of activities differs in each locale (dictated by the available space, and the extent and character of local military presence and history), the main foci of AFDs are public, often spectacular, events that include fly-pasts, parades, static displays and demonstrations of military hardware. AFD events might span acres of seafront (as it does in Plymouth), or might take the form of smaller presences spread across a city, and located in

public squares, parks or Reserve training facilities. For the armed forces themselves, AFD offers a chance to showcase their wares and talents, to undertake recruitment activities, improve public relations and, according to their website, receive much-needed public visibility. Each year, one town or city is chosen to ‘host’ AFD and, as such, receives high-profile visitors from politics, the Royal Family, chiefs of staff and elite military units such as the Red Arrows.

For the most part, AFD events are well supported locally and nationally, and have entered into the received calendar of state and private military-cultural events in the UK. However, while being relatively uncontentious there are occasional attempts to disrupt or challenge AFD events. In 2013, for example, Sinn Féin objected to Belfast city council flying a British military flag in lieu of AFD and wider sensitivities to a British military presence in Northern Ireland (O’Hara 2013). In 2009, a number of anti-military activists – allegedly linked to an Irish Republican group – were arrested for disrupting AFD in Glasgow (*The Scotsman* 2009; House of Lords 2018). And, increasingly, small-scale protests of AFD are organised country-wide by organisations such as the Peace Pledge Union (PPU 2018). Aside from direct action, a number of commentators have questioned – amid an unproblematic reverence for serving personnel and veterans – the tacit support expected of and at events such as AFD. Writing in *The Guardian*, Simon Hill (2018, np), for example, argues that:

<quotation>[t]he culture of ‘support our boys’ means that politicians are frightened of being seen to be even mildly critical of the armed forces. Recent developments such as the introduction of Armed Forces Day in 2009 and the doubling of state school cadet forces since 2012 have contributed to a culture of everyday militarism which is not healthy for a democracy in which public institutions [like the armed forces] must be open to criticism.</quotation>

Indeed, as activists for the charity Forces Watch argue similarly, AFD represents an institutionalisation of public support amid a rebranding of ‘military activities and service as normal, desirable, and fun’ (Sangster 2014).

The relative lack of resistance to AFD and its apparent popularity point to a wider reinvigoration of the British military’s image with the wider public. Its success, we argue, reflects a condition of *post-militarism* and a variety of post-military geographies. In sum, AFD is symptomatic of structural changes to the British military establishment, and an attempt to re-imagine civil-military relations and the performances that sustain them. To explore these issues further, we locate Plymouth’s AFD in historical and spatial context, before offering an empirical discussion and analysis.

## **Plymouth's AFD in context**

The city of Plymouth is situated in the south-west of England and has been shaped by a long relationship with the state's military capacity (Essex and Yarwood 2017). Its peripheral yet strategic location on the south-west peninsular led to its growth as a naval port in response to military threats from Europe and, especially, France and Spain (Pye and Woodward 1996). Tactically, Plymouth Sound provided a sheltered and easily protected anchorage for naval ships operating in the Channel, Western Approaches and the Bay of Biscay. Thus, Plymouth has been a significant naval port since the 14th century and was crucial for the projection of geopolitical power during the 19th and 20th centuries. Today Plymouth's Devonport dockyard remains the largest facility of its kind in Western Europe. In addition, the Royal Air Force was stationed in the city until 1986 and the Army still maintains a significant presence in the city's Royal Citadel. Plymouth has an overall population of just over 250,000, of which 7,720 (in 2016) were serving military personnel with Medical Services Registration. Significantly, there are currently around 20,000 veterans (of all branches) currently residing in Plymouth (Plymouth.gov 2017), representing 10 per cent of the adult population. This figure is five times the national average.

Plymouth's military past, and in equal measure its present condition as a home for serving personnel and veterans, imply a complex human geographical landscape. In parallel, Plymouth's urban morphology provides further clues to an intricate layering of past and present, aspects of which provide the physical context for contemporary AFD events. Scattered across the city and often visible on the skylines of its south-eastern and -western aspects are myriad fortifications built in response to military threats from the 13th century onwards. In his detailed treatment of this topic, James Sidaway (2009, p. 1091) argues that 'military geography and security/insecurity emerge as master keys' to understanding the ways in which landscape, life and death have been produced in Plymouth, both internally and in respect of wider global connections. In one passage, Sidaway offers a useful account of this topography:

<quotation>Two warships are offshore. In further view, there are forts and artillery towers, now mostly converted to other uses (one is a gym/leisure club), but also twin huge military radio antenna towers with flashing red lights. I look forward: out to sea. For a moment the depth, ecology, and geological history of the seas and Plymouth's role in charting these cross my mind ... There is a chronological layering of defensive and strategic landscapes here. Below are wharves that were vital parts of the Allied

invasion marshalled in 1944, en route to the world war's western front in France. The whole landscape is overwritten by this military past and presence. (Sidaway 2009, p. 1102)</quotation>

Thus, though often invisible (having been built upon, or ceded to the public authority or private developers), many ex-military forts, battlements or barracks have been repurposed, such that the spatialities of post-militarism in Plymouth become indistinguishably military *and* civilian. This has been compounded in more recent history by a decline in military activities and land-uses in Plymouth, compelled by the ending of the Cold War. Plymouth, much as with innumerable other post-military spaces, is being shaped by subsequent policies of downsizing and force restructuring detailed at the outset of the chapter. Notably, proposals to sell-off iconic military buildings (including the headquarters of the Royal Marines – the Stonehouse Barracks – and the Royal Citadel) and key aspects of its naval fleet, suggest the continuation of a now 700-year-old process of civil-military entanglement.

This wider chronology and geography provide the context for the city's AFD events which happen on Plymouth Hoe – an area rich in military history and symbolism. The Hoe is a limestone ridge that overlooks Plymouth Sound, Devonport Dockyard and southward towards the Napoleonic-era breakwater, and, further, the Western reaches of the English Channel (Figure 14.1). There are a number of important military structures on and around the Hoe, not least the Royal Citadel which was built in by Charles II in 1665 to subdue and survey the city after the civil war (Pye and Woodward 1996). The Citadel is currently the base of 29 Commando Royal Artillery and, as such, is off limits to the public. Yet the larger proportion of the Hoe (specifically the green and parade ground) is an important public space which regularly hosts important civic events such as the University of Plymouth's graduation and induction events, the national fireworks championships and an annual half-marathon. Flanking the central public space is a large naval war memorial erected in 1924 and extended in 1954 to mark losses in WWII. This is joined by a host of other smaller monuments to the Royal Air Force, 29 Commando and the Royal Marines, as well as statues commemorating the Boer War, Spanish Armada and Francis Drake.

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<caption>**Figure 14.1**<em>Plymouth Hoe seen from West Hoe (© Geof Shepard, Creative Commons License)</caption>

Thus, as the immediate context for Plymouth's AFD, the Hoe represents quite neatly the complexities of post-militarism in the wider city. This is a vibrant space crucial to social reproduction and cultural expression, to civic identity and at the same time to military heritage and history. The Hoe is a mix of public and private, of historic and operational, and is therefore a product of structural constraints and the locus for practices of (re)imagining and cultural performance. In the following account, we turn to the performance of post-militarism in Plymouth specifically, and offer an ethnographic account of the city's 2018 AFD.

### **Plymouth's Armed Forces Day, June 2018**

<quotation>It was like an allegorical picture of war; the trainload of fresh men gliding proudly up the line, the maimed men sliding slowly down, and all the while the guns on the open trucks making one's heart leap as guns always do, and reviving that pernicious feeling, so difficult to get rid of, that war is glorious after all. (George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938/1989, p. 145))</quotation>

Excellent weather had brought thousands of visitors to Plymouth's 2018 AFD celebrations, a large proportion of whom were families with young children. Arriving at Plymouth's Hoe – after having followed streams of people flowing southward through the city – we were met by a dizzying array of military hardware: armed fighting vehicles, helicopters, artillery pieces, small arms and shoulder-mounted missile launchers, mock ordnance of all kinds.<sup>1</sup> Our immediate impressions were of AFD as an inherently child-orientated event, of civil-military interaction and intergenerationality: younger visitors could be seen waiting for the chance to sit in a British Army Snatch Land Rover, for example, to cock and pull the trigger of a 50-calibre machine gun, or to operate the ranging controls of an L188 105 mm artillery piece. Serving personnel in uniform or camouflage fatigues would often be seen lifting small bodies in and out of vehicles or correcting the posture of a child labouring under the weight of a helmet or flak jacket. Parents were frequently seen photographing their children holding weapons, operating the levers of oversized military equipment or clutching the steering wheel of one or another vehicle.

Importantly, however, engaging *military* activities or objects were not the only presences that vied for the attention of younger visitors at AFD. Alongside the predominant opportunities to handle or experience military 'stuff' were those of a more benign character: a local insurance firm had arranged a penalty shoot-out attraction, for which there was a bustling queue of younger visitors. Equally, on finding that our younger research companion had disappeared towards the end of our visit, we later found him remote-controlling a toy

submarine in a paddling pool at the Babcock engineering exhibit.<sup>2</sup> The emergency services (police, fire and ambulance) too are engaged with excitedly, with visitors of all ages as likely to leave wearing a sticker labelling them a 'Police Officer' as they might a 'Future Pilot'.

The complex layering of presences at AFD at once reflects the geographies of Plymouth's post-military status, and the relatively seamless co-presence of military, quasi-military (in the form of Babcock, for example) and objectively non-military entities. AFD events, wherever they are located in the country, are a product of their locality, and, in Plymouth's case, allow for the reproduction of the entanglements of its local civil-military landscape. That is not to say, however, that these entanglements are unproblematic, particularly where the ambit of younger visitors is a playful involvement in novel and tactile experiences. As Rech (2019) notes, the tactile, ephemeral nature of contemporary military promotional campaigns is increasingly central to the geopolitical story-telling militaries require for the purposes of recruitment. Yet, where a pitch-and-putt golf game is *as readily* engaged with as, for example, the opportunity to shoulder a rocket launcher, AFD raises troubling questions around the *moral* equivalency of such engagements. This is particularly the case where persuasive cultures of militarisation rely, as Everett (2013) argues, on a consistent, low-level, 'sowing of seeds' among younger demographics. AFD, then, as a theatre for the performance of post-militarism, works in part because it affords tactility, playfulness, but more importantly, entanglements of war and recreation, the sort Stahl (2009) has labelled 'militainment'.

Children and young people were also central to the formal programme at Plymouth's 2018 AFD. The event plays host, as they do across the country, to the recently expanded Combined Cadets Forces, the young representatives of which offer skills demonstrations and participate in parades across the main arena showground. At 10:45 a.m. on the day of the event, a military Community Covenant speech was followed by a performance from Plymouth's Military Kids Choir (a choir open to children aged 4–18 with serving or veteran family members). Less numerous were teenage members of the Army Reserve, who on the day of our research visit, asked both of our ages and occupational statuses in order to explain the options for our enrolment into the force.

A highlight of the programme, however, was the junior field gun competition held on the western end of the Hoe promenade. Here, teams of 14–16-year-olds raced over a marked distance with a mock gun carriage in various states of disassembly.<sup>3</sup> One of the teams present was Plymouth's University Technical College (UTC) Junior Leaders Field Gun group (UTC 2019). An ostensibly 'civilian' school, UTC maintains links with Plymouth's military

establishment through its governance structure to further its prioritising of STEM subjects. The purposeful – and, indeed, structural – overlapping of civilian and military worlds continued in the subsequent performances at Plymouth’s AFD, with the junior competition being swiftly followed by the formal Tri-Service Gun Competition (between HMNB Devonport, RAF Cosford and the REME this year), and then by an ‘unarmed combat display’ from Royal Marine Commandos. Thus, along with the ‘structural’ entanglements of the military and civilian education, and the (re)imagining of military heritage, AFD allows, crucially, for *performance*. This is manifest, as with the variously military and non-military experiences on offer to younger visitors, as an unproblematic co-presence of, and cooperation between military, quasi-military and non-military bodies. Though AFD is billed as offering an opportunity to ‘show your support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community’ (AFD 2018), it hinges on a series of performances suggests a more profound series of entanglements. These go beyond ‘militarism-as-entertainment’, and despite Plymouth’s status as an arguably declining, post-military city, is evidence for the profound influence of military history, doctrine and values in a swathe of civic spaces and practices.

As our exploration of Plymouth’s Hoe parade ground meandered northward, it moved away from the prime-location seafront pitches inhabited by military recruiters and the main exhibition area. And amid the Hoe’s war memorials, we discovered, were a host of quite different exhibits. Here, a number of veterans’ charities vied for the attention of visitors. National ‘big hitters’ like Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion were joined by smaller interest groups such as Blind Veterans UK, the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association and BLESMA (for limbless veterans). Both in the veterans’ ‘marquee’ and ‘village’ at Plymouth’s AFD, the tone was more sombre, less celebratory, though no less supportive of the military establishment. Not unexpectedly, the Royal British Legion’s red poppy was a dominant symbol, along with presentation boards showing black silhouetted soldiers with bowed heads.

A central facet of AFD, then, is the ironies and contradictions central to post-militarism in Plymouth and wider British society. As has often been noted of the poppy appeal, the communities of feeling which coalesce around the iconography of the poppy invite the citizenry to ‘remember military sacrifice, whilst forgetting the violence and bloodiness of actual warfare’ (Basham 2016, p. 883). Moreover, capturing quite accurately the *performance* of poppy cultures and (geo)politics at AFD, Basham (2016, p. 892) further argues that:

<quotation>The Poppy Appeal’s celebration of soldiers, living and dead, as ‘heroes’ who exemplify the values of the polity, makes it much harder to question the violence done to and perpetrated by them; the impassioned love songs of their wives and (girl) children make questioning that violence cruel in light of their pain; and the ability to consume and exhibit one’s respect for soldier heroes and their families in ever more diverse ways, only invites people to become part of a community of feeling that shares ‘our’ values, not to question them and how they might exclude racialised ‘others’.</quotation>

Here, as with Plymouth’s 2018 AFD, cultural performances (such as with the Military Kids Choir, or field gun competition), the consumption of a variety of military-branded objects and a requisite sense of ‘respect’ (and an absence of dissent) suggest that AFD is reflective of the wider, conflictual politics of remembering in the UK. Namely, it is an event where remembering and grief for lost or injured bodies happens alongside practices which amount to a *forgetting*. AFD not only allows for the elision of the causes and consequences of armed conflict (though the fetishisation of weaponry, and so on), but, following Basham (2016), produces the conditions for an unquestioning ‘respect’ for veterans, serving personnel and AFD as a whole.

After having taken shelter from the sun briefly in the Hoe’s wooded park area to the north-east of the main parade ground, our research day at Plymouth’s AFD ended with an air display (of exclusively civilian aircraft). On reflection, and after enjoying the festival-like atmosphere of this important civic occasion, we were left with the impression of an event which was curiously *more-than-* (or post-) military in character. Our training as geographers and critical military scholars prompts us to seek out expressions of creeping militarisation, significant ironies or the normalisation of military ideals and practices. Yet, we were left wanting of a more profound critique; a ‘hook’ which would reveal the absurdities of militarism-as-recreation. Our overwhelming impression, however, was of a vibrant event of central importance to social reproduction in the city, one which brought together diverse communities (civilian, military and quasi-military) and which cut across markers of social and cultural differences (age, class, gender, race and ethnicity). But this is *precisely* the effect, we argue, of AFD where it is symptomatic of the post-military city. Emerging as *performance*, AFD allows for the smoothening of the often troubling structural and imagined aspects of civil-military entanglement. What emerges at AFD is a coming-together of a community which is indelibly etched by its military history and traditions, and which will

continue to be shaped by structural, post-military conditions at both national and international scales.

### **Conclusions: new directions in post-military spaces**

In this chapter we have explored Plymouth's 2018 AFD and our concept of post-militarism. We framed post-militarism at the outset through a threefold (and overlapping) understanding of space as *structured*, *imagined* and *performed*. As demonstrated, there are a range of structural factors at work which have produced initiatives like an annual AFD; these factors are also those which challenge cities like Plymouth (through the changing nature of warfare, and subsequent drawdown and transition) and which, along with involvement in unpopular wars associated with the War on Terror, have caused in part a disenchantment with the military. AFD, crucially, is an event which allows for the (re)imagining of Plymouth *as* a military city, and for the imagining of connections between civil and military worlds. AFD allows for these imaginaries to emerge as performances, some of which we detailed above, which reflect the entangled nature of civil-military and quasi-military institutions, identities, spaces and subjects.

Initiatives like AFD, however, reflect many ironies and contradictions which, we argue, are inherent to contemporary militarism in the UK, and particularly to post-military spaces. The immediate space of Plymouth's AFD event was notably varied, with the carnivalesque seafront activities sitting uneasily alongside the quieter and more sombre charitable presences located in and around the Hoe's war memorials. War and conflict were presented, particularly to younger visitors, as sources of fun and entertainment. And the co-presence of civil, military and quasi-military bodies and performances implied troubling structural and moral equivalences. However, AFD elides these ironies and contradictions, and although AFD and other initiatives represent a *purposeful* (re)enchantment of the public with the military, the event represents a coming-together of diverse communities with long-standing associations with the military establishment.

To explore some of the wider implications of Plymouth's AFD, we offer three reflections on the possible contributions of post-military geographies, and of thinking through/with post-militarism. First, post-militarism is a useful way to theorise the *transition* of/for post-military spaces as they are shaped by a variety of structural factors including base closure, drawdown and the contraction of personnel numbers. Post-militarism aims to capture how militaries and their wider communities transition *with* and *alongside* each other, and how these transitions produce significant entanglements of civil and military worlds. There is

limited value, we suggest, in interpreting transitions of this sort as *de*-militarisation (as implied in the work of Shaw (1991)). Rather, the realities of contemporary warfare and of relatively constant, low-level deployments and an increasing reliance on remote warfighting technologies, produce more nuanced, though no less significant, social, cultural and political landscapes. Compounding these structural factors and the entanglement of the civilian and the military is, as we've noted, a purposeful re-enchantment of the public discourse around militarism in the last decade and a half. *Post-militarism*, then, is offered here as a concept with which to capture militarism's geographies as they emerge as otherwise mundane practices of (re)imagination and performance.

Second, we offer post-militarism as a historical-geographical tool. Though our focus was on the recent 2018 iteration of Plymouth's AFD, the city's military past and heritage was an ever-present factor in our analysis (as it is in Sidaway's (2009) account). In many ways, Plymouth has *always* been a post-military city given the peaks and troughs of military build-up and decline over the past 700 years. Post-military geographies provoke us to consider not only specific instances of drawdown and transition, then, but to recognise the long and complex histories of militarism that continue to haunt and shape the present. Post-militarism might therefore be usefully applied to historical instances of drawdown and transition, allowing us to capture the *continuities* (rather than 'breaks') of/in civil-military entanglement.

Lastly, and in connection, post-militarism should be conceived as a 'malleable' concept which can usefully be applied to a much wider series of spaces – those which are not 'garrison' towns or places with strong military histories, and which have subtler, 'quieter' associations with the military establishment. Post-militarism prompts us to investigate a range of other spaces and more discreet processes such as the 'drawdown' of rural, Cold War-era airbases (see for example Dunlop 2015), the repurposing of training and testing facilities (Havlick 2014a, 2014b, see also Havlick, Chapter 13, this volume), or localities which have only recently emerged as sites of contested remembering. There are a number of important questions to be asked of a variety of post-military spaces in the UK and more widely. Although these spaces may face similar *structural* realities and constraints, the value of thinking through/in post-military spaces is a revelation of the marked disparities in post-military transition (which are produced by varied histories, traditions and site-specific discourses of military remembrance and celebration respectively). It is therefore a concept with which to capture at once the *varietal* character and experience of militarism, *and* the important structural factors that have been the main preserve of critical military scholarship.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We (Matthew and Richard) attended Plymouth's 2018 AFD in the manner of 'casual' visitors, content to tour the site, to take part in a variety of hands-on experiences and to engage other visitors in conversation. Over roughly a five-hour period, we visited each of the main exhibition areas on the Hoe, pausing frequently to reflect on AFD as emblematic of our tentative ideas around the 'post-military city'. We were also joined by Richard's eight-year-old son, whose enthusiasm for the event provided important insights into the engagement strategies of AFD exhibitors, and which, moreover, often 'jolted' us from our position as academic researchers.

<sup>2</sup> Babcock International Group PLC is a large engineering firm with an important connection to military geographies in Plymouth. Notably, they are the on-site operators of Plymouth's Devonport Royal Dockyard and maintain both the surface (predominantly frigate) and nuclear submarine fleet.

<sup>3</sup> The military field gun competition has become a Royal Navy tradition (and indeed a tradition in many Western militaries) and has its roots in the landing of guns at the Siege of Ladysmith by the Navy during the Second Boer War in 1899 (see <https://goo.gl/AZmuCQ>). Inter-command competitions have been held every year since 1907.

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