

Place, space and identity: the manifold experience of transition in and after the military

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**PLACE, SPACE AND IDENTITY:
THE MANIFOLD EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITION *IN AND AFTER* THE MILITARY**

Guest editors: Dr Katherine Albertson, Dr Paul Taylor and Dr Emma Murray

Editorial

This special edition of *Illness, Crisis and Loss* brings together established authors in the field of military and post-military life. It is an invitation to readers to critically consider the experience of those serving in the military, and what post-military life can look like. Each article encourages readers to develop an intellectual awareness of significant issues facing those who serve in the military, and their careers and identity afterwards. Each taking particular themes as their focus, they provide a rigorously informed critical investigation of military and post-military life. Readers of these articles will be provided with a rich, social theory-informed, approach to military and veteran studies. Transition within and out of the military institution is a substantive focus. In the reader's engagement with each article, we encourage them to think about how and where transition occurs. What places does it take place in? What spaces does it change or create, and how are identities formed, reimagined, or recrafted by the self or others.

While securing the wellbeing of Britain's Armed Forces community has been of historically fluctuating interest in British society (Dandeker et al. 2006), since the early 2000's, this topic has come to the fore of public anxiety. This has drawn an apparently ever-increasing interest from academic, practitioner and public-policy making sectors, both nationally and globally. British society maintains a duty to ensure that 'those who serve, those who have served, and their families are treated fairly' (Armed Forces Covenant, 2000). A call to which key stakeholders have responded avidly, ranging from local authorities, public health commissioners, employment support services and from the third sector. Last year, the Armed Forces Covenant Report 2018 outlined a number of key advancements in the Government's existing approach to supporting Britain's military community. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence announced the first UK-wide 'Strategy for our Veterans' (2018), which establishes a broad remit for further multi-agency work to aid veterans in their transition back into civil society. Further, the Veterans' Gateway's 24/7 helpline is currently being trialled as a new outreach support service.

Yet, despite these steps, questions remain over enduring gaps in appropriate support for the British military community. For example, in 2015, research suggests that the proportion of veterans suffering from mental health problems following service is as high as 10 per cent (Help for Heroes & Kings Centre for Military Health Research, 2015). A 2017 YouGov survey commissioned by SSAFA, found that more than two in five (41 %) of British Armed Forces veterans felt lonely or isolated at some point since leaving the military, a third (34%) said

they had felt overwhelmed by negative feelings and over a quarter (27%) admitted to having suicidal thoughts after finishing their military service. More than three in ten (31%) reported they had one or no close friends, suggesting a limited support network in civilian society. Moreover, this research also found that female veterans feel less supported than their male counterparts, with 43% of ex-servicewomen reporting feelings of social isolation (SSAFA, 2018).

This special edition contains four papers from academic researchers working on the front line of research in military and post-military life. However, they draw from much more diverse sources of data than those included in the contemporary public debates described above. Collectively these papers promote an understanding of overlooked losses such as: a loss in military identity amidst changing imperatives of military work; the loss of a sense of belonging in veterans having contact with the criminal justice sector; the complexity of the life-course trajectories of PTSD sufferers working within the Private Military Contractor sector; and the significance of ensuring the transitional literature includes the experiences of female veterans. Taken together, these papers stimulate a critical challenge to a traditionally homogeneous approach to 'transition'. This is done through an illumination of transition *within* the military and *from* the military with particular reference to wellbeing, gender and offending behaviour.

The first paper of this collection by Murray and Taylor considers the potential crisis of military mission when soldiers are required to attend to public policing duties. The unavoidable impact of such 'mission creep' is likely felt on those carrying out such work. Their identity is affected by this, and military work becomes more opaque. The distinctive identity of the soldier is complicated by imperatives lodged by political actors responding to a changing global security landscape. Occupational transitions occur; from a role built historically on the forging of victory from chaos, to roles which increasingly signal a constabularisation of the military for purposes of domestic public policing, law and order.

Second, attention moves to transition from the military. Albertson's paper begins by reporting the experience of transition on feelings of social cohesion and belonging from an often unheard from a group of military veterans - those having come into contact with the criminal justice and addiction recovery sector. Essentially, Albertson's paper explores the impact of transition from a grounded theory approach, highlighting those positive re-negotiations of identity and belonging can take place during that process. This paper draws on existing literature to provide a contextual understanding for the later critical exploration of key themes of loss from original veterans' life history narrative data.

The third article by White is a thoroughly engaging exposition of the governance of post-traumatic stress disorder in a similarly under-researched veterans' cohort - the soldier-turned-contractor. White applies the political economic lens to his data in order to position this topic as a rich source of learning for the reader. This paper invites one to ask essential questions about the impact of the biographies of governance on those who experience post-traumatic stress disorder are subjected to.

Similarly, Dodds and Kiernan's final paper in the collection establishes the experiences of a further group not well represented in the research or indeed policy literature- female veterans. This paper is the result of a well-informed piece of literature review work, given the lack of research focussing on female veterans' experiences in the UK. However, this paper

is unequivocally timely, going on to recommend further research in this area and drawing attention to the lack of gender-sensitive support once women leave the military. Collectively, these three contributions advance important issues that raise some interesting and timely questions which are highly relevant to the Journal of Illness, Crisis and Loss's aims of showcasing research documenting the narratives of people who have gone through processes of crisis and loss.

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