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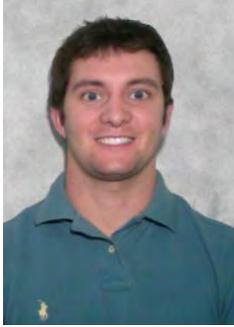
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Patriarchy and Militarism



Dylan Hallagan

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What is patriarchy and militarism? How do they interrelate? Summarize the gender stereotypes and sense of group membership and identity reflected in militarism. Citing the readings and specific events and persons in the film, how did these stereotypes and identity markers contribute to the soldiers' destructive and criminal behavior in Iraq and after they returned to the U.S.? Given the prevalence of gender stereotypes in American culture, what recommendations would you make to further the educational process of "social conversion" in America?

In *The Wounded Platoon*, FRONTLINE investigates a Fort Carson platoon of infantrymen—the 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry—and finds a group of young men changed by war who are battling a range of psychiatric disorders that many blame for their violent and self-destructive behavior. Through the development of programs for "the invisible wounds of war," the U.S. government has focused on addressing the consequences of war while ignoring the militaristic ideologies and patriarchal gender stereotypes that contributed to the soldiers' destructive and criminal behaviors. It is these ideological stereotypes that need to be dealt with through social measures to bring justice to these broken men.

To understand how it is possible for soldiers to come back home so broken and destroyed that their lives fall apart, the vast complexities of patriarchy and militarism must be unraveled. Patriarchy is a social power ideology which is the idea that "power, social control, material wealth, and high social status accrue predominantly to males rather than females" (Burke 3). There is no clear initiating event to prove the start of patriarchy, but historians mostly concede the practice started shortly after the Agricultural-Revolution. Sebastian Kraemer, author of "The Origins of Fatherhood: An Ancient Family Process", explores the origins of patriarchy. Females were primarily the "gardeners" an intensive, laborious trade, while males practiced organized hunting, and had more free time. Out of this free-time, men developed intuition. He states that out of this intuition grew fear and jealousy from the realization that a mother and child's bond is far greater than that of a father and child, and the role of a male to render a child is only necessary for a matter of minutes. This realization questioned man's place in a society. Out of jealousy and fear, males create patriarchy to bring power and necessity for themselves in society ("Kraemer"). Evidently, once this early implication of patriarchy started it has been unstoppable. This is one of the most enduring and pervasive of all social patterns that has lasted multiple millenniums, appearing in all eras such as: prehistory, classical antiquity, and modernity, as well as among all races, social institutions, and economic classes, and in virtually every known culture ("Burke 3").

Patriarchy imposes rigid divisions of male and female roles in society. Patriarchy deems "masculinity" as synonymous with strength, aggression, and superiority, while "femininity" is

synonymous with passivity and inferiority (“Burke 4”). These ideals have been accepted as appropriate, natural, and proper for men and women in society today. Because of this, men are seen as the face of families and power, while women are property of men whose purpose is to serve, respect, and carry on a man’s lineage.

The other contributing ideology, militarism, is the belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests. It’s both an expansionist and imperialist ideology that a government or country should maintain a strong military capability, and also method to resolve conflict through deliberate and organized physical force (“Burke 1”). Physical militarism is easy to comprehend: these are the wars; interventions; coupes; proxy armies; military rule; and human rights violations. However, militarism is much more than just armies, air forces, and navies; it is an ideology affecting governments and political objectives. Through military behaviors, values, and patterns, societies and governments become ‘militarized’. This ideological militarization doesn’t happen all at once, but is a gradual change over time until militarism is a social normality (“Burke 3”).

The basic goal of militarism is to gain or continue power over another (“Burke 2”). To do this militarism embodies the expansion of military might to become the dominant figure of a political realm. This notion creates an idea that the one who has the strongest military has the prerogative to control, intervene, and influence other countries, states, regions. Such are the ideas of US in the Middle East. The invasion of Iraq was built solely on the political gain in the region. The US used military force to capture Saddam Hussein and liberate Iraqis. Since the US has the largest and strongest military, any chance of Iraq winning an all-out war was slim; therefore, the US gained a dominant position over another through the use of military might.

Militarism also achieves power over another by polarizing militaristic nationalism. If nationalism is the identification of “us” and “the other”, then militaristic nationalism is the separation of “us” and the “enemy”(“Burke 2”). Militaries achieve this state of mind through group membership (“Burke 2”). As militaries are formed and constructed through the unification of “us” and similarities under militarism, exaggerated differences transform the “other” to become “the enemy”. This “enemy” ideology allows the justification of more militarism, and it continues to grow and evolve. This evolution of ideas leads to the false realization that the enemy is so wrong the only viable solution to resolve differences is through violence and force (“Burke 2”).

When a government comes to this conclusion, society is manipulated to accept the violence. Media outlets glorify war, instill patriotism, and emphasize the exhilaration of battle. This was evident during Operation Iraqi Freedom, as journalists reported from the front lines as the US captured Baghdad. As war drags on, the sensationalism is eased and militarism is downplayed through doublespeak reports censoring the violent nature of war. Missiles are called “peacemakers” and civilian casualties are called “collateral damage”. This doublespeak masks the horrific realities and oppression that war entails.

Given the exploration of both patriarchy and militarism, striking similarities are evident. This is understandable through the realization that the two concepts are inevitably linked. Militarism, both as ideology and in physicality, spawns from patriarchy’s characterization of male and female gender roles. In pre-historic patriarchy, males were hunters to provide meat for the society, and became warriors as they used hunting skills to protect the livelihood of the group. On the other hand, females were to bear offspring, specifically sons, to continue the

lineage and serve the man's needs. In modern militarism, men need to purge themselves of all weakness and become the epitome of a soldier, to protect their country's interest.

Gender stereotypes are social relationships, values, behaviors and attributes culturally associated with males and females. In patriarchy, stereotypical males are seen as masculine: strong, aggressive, and unemotional; while females are seen as feminine: passive, weak, and emotional ("Burke 4"). In the military, these gender roles are even further hyperbolized. War and combat became upheld as the masculine. During training, a "recruit is stripped of his individuality and is taught not show 'feminine' traits like tenderness or weakness" (Burke 4). Men are cultivated to become tough and hardened—mentally and physically—and to be aggressive, brave, conditioned, disciplined, and competitive; whereas, stereotypical feminine emotions, such as compassion, cooperation, or nurturing, are purged.

A former Marine, Iraqi veteran, and now St. John Fisher College student, Jack Hills, recalls the competitive, cultivating, and masculine nature of boot camp and the military. "Boot camp consisted of three phases. The first phase was to basically break you and the next two were to build you back up into the appropriate image that is most applicable" (Interview with Jack Hills). Drill sergeants were "in your face, yelling", recruits were sleep deprived, and physically and mentally drained (Interview with Jack Hills). Also, there is a "huge alpha male mentality, and everything is a competition that is graded and critiqued" based on the military's standards (Interview with Jack Hills) When asked if the military tries to purge feminine traits, Jack Hills said it was definitely true. "We trained to take care of one another, and be responsible for one another, but it's not compassion, but more of a sense of camaraderie" (Interview with Jack Hills).

This camaraderie that Jack talks about is, as previously stated, group membership. It is the unification of men through communal living in fort, barracks, with uniforms, and partaking in group activities ("Burke 2"). Camaraderie creates tightly knit bonds between a soldier and his company. Upon graduation, soldiers are issued to battalions, where they join other men to create lasting units. They eat, sleep, train, wrestle, and live together, forging loyalty, trust, friendships, and strengths as platoon individuals work together honing their skills to aspire to be an ultimate collective, fighting machine. Any sign of weakness by a person is deemed a chink in the armor. If soldiers are supposed to be the epitome of "real" men —strong and brave and aggressive— then traits of femininity —passiveness— and emotion are weaknesses. In communal platoons where masculinity reigns, soldiers are scared to show weakness out of fear for ridicule and disrespect. Jack says, "If you're deployed overseas, you need to know that someone will unhesitant have your back- you know- watch out for you, and if it comes down it they aren't going to hesitate to put their life on the line for you" (Interview with Jack Hills). If a soldier is in combat and such weak traits emerge it is a liability for the entire platoon, and puts others at risk. If someone breaks down then all of the sudden the focus isn't on the mission. This is why in a competitive, militaristic hierarchy, where many vie for rank and respect, weakness isn't accepted.

In *The Wounded Platoon*, the effects of militarism and patriarchal masculinity are clearly evident. During 3rd Platoons first tour, its unifying leader, Sgt. Huey, was killed by a roadside bomb. He was the father figure of the platoon, taking soldiers under his wing, and was loved by all. But, when he died so did a part of the "unit". He was the keystone and the foundation which the unit was built upon, and when he died the foundations were cracked. Unable to lean on Sgt. Huey and rather than leaning on each other as mechanism of grief, the men fell back on the militarism and patriarchal masculinity that they had been molded with in training: annihilation,

aggression, and more violence. Kenny Eastridge, a private who shared a close bond with Sgt. Huey said, "I will destroy everything", as he hoped for a firefight to release his grief through revenge. And destroy he did. Charlie Company recorded 700 confirmed kills during the tour, and received respect for being one of the deadliest companies ("The Wounded Platoon"). This idea that more militarism can solve problems that arise from it became foundational for destructive and criminal behavior later on.

As soldiers gained vengeance through violence, compassion and morals were completely disregarded as they became so desensitized to the war's atrocities. Another soldier from 3rd Platoon, Jose Barco, is now serving a 52 year prison sentence on two accounts of attempted murder, recalls the psychological costs of war ("The Wounded Platoon").

You know, we ran into, like, groups- like, mass executions, with their hands tied behind their backs and everybody shot in the head, like, side by side. It's not like seeing a dead body while you're walking, you know, to the grocery store here. It's not- it's not like that. It was Iraq. You know, it was- it's kind of, like, acceptable to see that there and not- not really care about it. It got to the point, really, it was like seeing a dead dog or a dead cat lying on the road- it just got to that point. (The Wounded Platoon)

This idea that human death became so common that it was like seeing road kill, is truly astounding. These men have no emotion, no moral, and no warmth because militarism stripped the individuality and dignity from them. It suddenly becomes very apparent how these men could destroy themselves. If these men became so militarized that death had little meaning, and was a normality, then it is comprehensible that life in the US would be near impossible to live without hardship.

As men continued their duty, they could not escape the impacts of intense war. Another soldier, Ryan "Doc" Krebbs, recollected when he hit his breaking point. He stopped loading his weapon when he was out on patrol and knew at that point he was a danger to his fellow soldiers. He decided to help himself and went to an Army psychiatrist on base. When he told the psychiatrist he had a problem, the doctor examined him but cleared him for duty, ignoring the problems Doc Krebbs had. In the midst of a total mental breakdown, Doc Krebbs was told to "suck it up and put his boots back on" because he was soldier, and that's what soldiers do ("The Wounded Platoon"). Soldiers are tough, masculine, and push through pain and suffering.

Doc Krebbs was not alone. Other soldiers had problems, but few dared to express themselves. Expression of problems, insecurities, and emotion in the military is a sign of weakness. In the army, getting help is a stigma that a soldier has a weakness ("The Wounded Platoon"). The implications of militarism and patriarchal ideas of masculinity were supposed to purge these weaknesses during training, as men were conditioned to be the best of soldiers. Out of fear of embarrassment and ridicule, men swallowed their pains and took to destructive outlets when they returned home. They drank themselves numb and became cocaine addicts to ease the realities.

Lastly, since the soldiers had been stripped of individuality, they further rooted themselves in group membership. They were soldiers in a company. On the battlefield, next to their comrades, is where they felt most comfortable. Many opted for a second tour of duty, where veterans like Jose Barco were voluntarily put in the hottest gunfights. Jose saw his second tour of duty as a vindication for leaving his first early. He felt like he owed his company and wanted to go back and fight the hardest battles ("The Wounded Platoon"). Since his individuality had been stripped in his training, the only identity he felt was left in his platoon and the military.

Militarism so consumed his livelihood that all Iraqi's became "the enemy" - the basic principle of militaristic nationalism. During his confession for murder, Barco stated he and Kenny Eastridge had murdered Iraqi civilians.

They're all hajis to me. Like, if I see a dead haji, it doesn't make it better that it's a civilian or that it's an armed guy trying to kill me because to us, they're all- they're all guilty. You disassociate. To you, they're not even people, you know? They're not humans. (The Wounded Platoon)

This is a truly shocking statement, yet, an eerily perfect example of militaristic and patriarchal destruction. It proves how Barco became the military's ideal killing machine by dehumanizing his enemy.

Through two horrific tours soldiers Barco, Eastridge, Krebs, and others of 3rd Platoon had been negatively transformed from naive teenagers to the coldest, and most broken of men. As men like Barco, Eastridge, and Krebs returned home, they slipped through the cracks of justice, as the military could not provide the necessary needs to heal their invisible wounds.

How can the contributing gender ideas of militarism and patriarchy be stopped? Through social conversion: "the changing a society's ideology or comprehensive vision" (Terminology 1). Upcoming generations must be educated as to how militarism "socializes people to accept violence as natural and patriarchy as normal" (Burke). Though patriarchy has existed since the Agricultural Revolution, it is not a fixed concrete system, but rather constructed and reinforced practices past down from generation to generation. Since it is not a fixed system it can be changed.

To change, education of the injustices soldiers face must be taught. People need to debate, converse, and protest to bring the problem to light. Soldiers from wars, past and present, need to tell the world how the USA, the militaristic land of opportunity, destroyed them. Through social awareness, society can realize the extent to which it has become victim of militarism and patriarchy. Mothers and fathers need to teach their sons and daughters to express themselves and not conform to past pretenses of patriarchy. They must break down the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity ("Burke 14"). Boys must be taught that girls aren't subordinates of themselves, but equals, and that they are not objects or property. By emphasizing emotions are human and not gendered, patriarchy can be diminished. If patriarchy is diminished, then militarism will follow since they are both entwined. This doesn't happen overnight; it takes years if not generations to implement change, but it can be done.

The key to overturning these ideologies is the participation of society and personable leaders to instill activism and bring the atrocities to relevancy. As I did more in depth research of *The Wounded Platoon*, I found a comment page where people discussed, and shared opinions. As I scrolled through the comments, I found one by Ryan Krebs and another by Rey Barco (Jose's older brother). It was touching to see men like Krebs and Barco witnessing to people on the internet and thanking them for their support. Knowing that Krebs himself wrote on the forums made the whole situation more personal and relevant to me. People on TV shows and news always seem so much more distant and irrelevant. However, when Krebs wrote a comment, it was like he was talking to me instead of an audience. I believe until a person meets or confronts a victimized individual, the issues at large seem so distant. There is no personal relevance or pity and documentaries are simply to document. But these people need more than that. They need help. I worked in a ski shop in Colorado last year, and the resort put on a

Wounded Warrior Program so wounded veterans could enjoy simplicities that they had before injury. Some may have very well have been from Fort Carson. I was awestruck at the sacrifice some of the men had made: Limbs lost; severe burns; and dismembering of their bodies. War and violence never was real to me until I had to boot-fit a man with half a foot, or a man with no face. Until revelations like that happen in society, militarism and patriarchy will continue to take its toll. For the most part, the general public's lives will remain unchanged until they realize, first-hand, the destruction it carries. People like Doc Krebbs can make an impact by telling their story, and changing people views. And when people realized that the invisible wounds of Krebbs, Eastridge, Barco, and thousands more soldiers are from stems of patriarchal and militaristic roots, then violence, war, militarism, and patriarchy will lose its utility.

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Athens, Archaeological Museum

(Photo by MC)