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Call to Arms: The University as a Site of Militarised Capitalism and a Site of Struggle*

Anna Stavrianakis

Recent student protests in Bristol, Cambridge, Lancaster, Nottingham and elsewhere against university involvement with arms companies raise questions about the role of the university in contemporary society.¹ Opposition to investments in, and research with and for, arms companies symbolises dispute over the values and interests universities should serve. This article focuses on Bristol University (the author's present institution) as an illustrative example, situating its investments in, and wider relationships with, arms companies and also the military in the context of the commercialisation and militarisation of university research. It argues that university involvement with arms companies and the military serves to orient universities further towards the needs of militarised capitalism. Student protest against this involvement highlights the ambivalent social role of the university as an institution. The article goes on to consider the concept of activist scholarship, and to identify potential strategies for those concerned about the growing commercialisation and militarisation of university life.

The article proceeds in three parts. It discusses Bristol University's relationship with arms capital through its pension schemes and the research it conducts for arms companies and the military (mainly via the Ministry of Defence, MoD). It then documents and analyses resistance to this relationship on the basis of opposition to the commercialisation of higher education in general and the militarisation of science and engineering in particular. The third part focuses on universities as sites of struggle and the relationship between academic research and activism, arguing that our choices of what to research and how to conduct research are unavoidably political. Two distinct approaches are outlined – Weberian and activist strategies – and their implications for academic

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1. See Bristol Campaign Against Arms Trade, <http://www.bristolcaat.org.uk/>; James Dacre, 'Colleges Invest "Unethically" in Arms Industry', *Varsity*, 5 November 2004, http://www.varsity.cam.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8070&Itemid=26; George Fox Six Supporters' Group, <http://www.free-web-space.biz/GeorgeFox/>; Notts Indymedia Collective, 'Protests as Arms Dealers Attend Careers Fair', 18 October 2005, <http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2005/10/325974.html> (all 10 May 2006).

practice discussed. While I make the case for an activist conception of scholarship, I maintain that as socially distinct activities, academic research requires “translation” to be directly useful for activism.

Activist academic practice is motivated by a concern to challenge oppression and promote social justice, and incorporate this into one’s work. Oppression takes different forms across time and space and includes (but is not limited to) sexism, racism and a capitalist system that generates inequality globally. These are forms of social relations that, “while always being historically and differentially inflected ... have persistently (though never absolutely or in any monocausal way) organized people’s lives across social formations and specific situations.”² Opposing oppression and promoting social justice involve a commitment to both challenging these forms of social relations and constructing alternatives.

Analysing the operation of arms companies and their relations with states is an important component of challenging oppression. Arms companies are understood here as companies that produce weapons systems or components in one or more sectors, such as artillery, missiles or electronics. Additionally, military-related communications, information technology (IT) and services are all expanding sectors, and companies specialising in these are understood as arms companies, in line with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s definition.³ Military sales make up a significant proportion of the total sales of the six major UK-based arms-producing companies: 80 per cent of BAE Systems’ total sales in 2004 were military, as were 76 per cent of the VT Group’s, 50 per cent of Cobham’s, 30 per cent of Rolls Royce’s, 29 per cent of GKN’s and 26 per cent of Smiths.⁴ These companies are internationalising through cross-national mergers and acquisitions, multinational consortia, joint ventures, co-development and co-production of products, licensed production (in which one company allows another to manufacture its products under licence), and offsets (in which sales involve some domestic sourcing of components, or inward investment to the buying country), trends that are being replicated in the wider arms industry.⁵

Arms capital has been integrated into the UK state through its representation on high-level military advisory bodies (such as the

2. Rosemary Hennessy, quoted in Mark Laffey, ‘Locating Identity: Performativity, Foreign Policy and State Action’, *Review of International Studies* 26, no.3 (2000), 429-444, 438.

3. Elisabeth Sköns, Sibylle Bauer and Eamon Surry, ‘Arms Production’, in SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 379-418; 397.

4. Eamon Surry and the SIPRI Arms Industry Network, ‘The 100 Largest Arms-Producing Companies, 2004’, in Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2006: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 419-427.

National Defence Industries Council, Aerospace Innovation and Growth Team, and Defence Export and Market Access Forum) and via the revolving door, a phenomenon in which arms company employees move to state or government positions, and vice versa.⁶ One of the most significant examples of this relates to the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), a branch of the MoD that exists to promote arms exports. It is headed by a representative of the arms industry on secondment; the current head joined DESO in 2002 from Matra BAE Dynamics/MBDA, a European missile company in which BAE Systems has a significant stake.⁷ DESO's tasks include "Giving assistance to company-led marketing campaigns" by way of "Harnessing other parts of MoD, the Armed Forces and Whitehall to support industry's efforts."⁸ In this way, key elements of the state act in the direct interests of arms capital, challenging the state's autonomy from capital. DESO support is calculated to equate to a subsidy of £14m per annum.⁹ Other subsidies enjoyed by the arms industry include the use of defence attachés and the armed forces for export promotion, insurance cover extended to arms companies by the Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD), as well as wider research and development support and the distortion of MoD procurement. These costs, borne by taxpayers, are estimated by researchers to total between £453m and £936m per annum (depending on how they are calculated).¹⁰ Arms companies are also more generally involved in shaping the laws and regulations that govern their own behaviour: the latest UK government Defence Industrial Strategy uses the language of partnership to describe the state's relationship with major arms suppliers.¹¹

The relationship between the UK state and arms capital has three significant and interrelated effects. First, the UK is one of the world's top five arms exporting states, reinforcing the threat and use of force in the ordering of international relations and contributing to the maintenance

5. Richard A. Bitzinger, 'The Globalization of the Arms Industry: The Next Proliferation Challenge', *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994), 170-198; Keith Hayward, 'The Globalisation of Defence Industries', *Suroivot* 42, no. 2 (2000), 115-132.

6. Details of arms capital representation on advisory bodies and of the revolving door can be found in Campaign Against Arms Trade, *Who Calls the Shots? How Government-Corporate Collusion Drives Arms Exports* (London: CAAT, 2005).

7. Defence Export Services Organisation, 'Senior DESO Officials,' <http://www.deso.mod.uk/officials1.htm> (17 November 2006).

8. Defence Export Services Organisation, 'Our Mission, Vision and Role,' <http://www.deso.mod.uk/about.htm> (14 August 2006).

9. Paul Ingram and Roy Isbister, *Escaping the Subsidy Trap. Why Arms Exports are Bad for Britain* (London/Oxford: BASIC, Oxford Research Group, Saferworld, 2004), 25-6.

10. *Ibid.* 24-36

11. Ministry of Defence, Defence Industrial Strategy. Defence White Paper, December 2005, <http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm66/6697/6697.pdf> (8 May 2006).

of militarised capitalism around the globe. The arms trade has been central to the expansion of the capitalist system into the periphery and the incorporation of non-arms-producing states into the world military order¹²; today's capitalist world economy remains dependent on the coercive power of leading capitalist states.¹³ Second, the UK exports weapons and military equipment to states such as Indonesia, Israel, India and Pakistan that play a role in human rights abuses and regional instability, despite the government's publicly stated commitments to the protection of human rights and prevention of regional instability.¹⁴ Third, militarisation - the privileging of military concerns in social life, and the belief that preparation for war and the use of force are desirable - is promoted domestically, with military interests privileged in the funding of science, engineering and technology research and development.

Interaction between Bristol University, the Arms Industry and the MoD

Bristol University is involved with arms-producing companies through its investments and through research and teaching relationships. At the time of writing, the University Endowment Fund held shares in Rolls Royce (43,500 shares as at 16 December 2005, approximately 0.54 per cent of the portfolio) and Smiths (25,750 shares, approximately 0.63 per cent).¹⁵ The pension fund of academic and related staff is managed by the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), which at the time of writing held 24,785,681 shares in the top six UK-based arms companies.¹⁶ The University's Pension and Assurance Scheme does not invest in shares directly but in various equity and bond funds; to date the University has not clarified whether investment in arms companies is undertaken by the Scheme.

In terms of research, Bristol University is involved in Defence and Aerospace Research Partnerships (DARPs), that is, industry-led university partnerships funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences

12. Ulrich Albrecht and Mary Kaldor 'Introduction', in *The World Military Order. The Impact of Military Technology on the Third World*, eds. Mary Kaldor and Asbjorn Eide (London: Macmillan, 1979), 1-16.

13. Tarak Barkawi, 'Connection and Constitutions: Locating War and Culture in Globalization Studies', *Globalizations* 1, no. 2 (2004), 155-170.

14. See Saferworld audits of the UK government's annual reports on strategic export controls; <http://www.saferworld.org.uk> (30 March 2006).

15. Email from University of Bristol official to Jillian Marsden (Amnesty International Student Society), 16 December 2005.

16. Campaign Against Arms Trade, 'Universities: Staff Pensions', <http://www.caat.org.uk/campaigns/clean-investment/universities/staffpensions.php> (27 March 2006). Figures correct at October 2005.

Research Council, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), MoD, and industry.¹⁷ It also participates in Defence Technology Centres (DTCs), launched in February 2002 to extend collaboration between industry and universities, and funded by the MoD.¹⁸ Other work carried out beyond the DARPs and DTC frameworks includes collaboration between the Department of Aerospace Engineering and companies such as BAE Systems, Agusta-Westland Helicopters and QinetiQ, and between the Department of Computer Science's Digital Media Group and BAE Systems.¹⁹ The University's MEng degree in Engineering Design features GKN, Airbus, Rolls Royce, Smiths Aerospace, and Weir Strachan & Henshaw as "partners" on the course. Companies are involved in selecting students for the course, take students on industrial placements in the first and third years, and fund a small number of scholarships. The course is designed to produce graduates who can "lead projects in the engineering industry,"²⁰ signifying the orientation of students' education towards the interests of large companies. These examples demonstrate the growing interaction between the University, arms companies and the MoD.

Science and engineering are the main, but not sole, sites of university enmeshment with the arms industry and MoD. Bristol's Politics Department, for example, has been involved in an MoD project on "Potential Generic Adversaries 2003-2033", commissioned by the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre as part of the Strategic Trends programme, to analyse the present and future capabilities of 24 types of potential generic threat to the UK over the next 30 years.²¹ The Department has also run NATO-sponsored summer schools and an MoD-sponsored seminar on small arms policy. The School for Policy Studies hosts a PhD candidate whose research is co-funded by the MoD alongside the

17. For example, the Department of Aerospace Engineering is involved in DARPs with GKN/Westland Helicopters and BAE Systems; http://www.aer.bris.ac.uk/research/aero_and_fluid/ (30 March 2006).

18. Chris Langley, *Soldiers in the Laboratory, Military Involvement in Science and Technology – and Some Alternatives* (Folkestone: Scientists for Global Responsibility, 2005), 45. Bristol's Centre for Communications Research and Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering are both involved in the Data and Information Fusion DTC.

19. Dynamics and Research Control Group, Department of Aerospace Engineering, http://www.aer.bris.ac.uk/research/dynamics_and_control/; Digital Media Group, Department of Computer Science, <http://www.cs.bris.ac.uk/Research/Digitalmedia/> (30 March 2006).

20. Engineering Design, FAQ, <http://www.edes.bris.ac.uk/faqs.htm> (30 March 2006).

21. Potential Generic Adversaries 2003-2033, <http://www.bris.ac.uk/politics/grc/groups/secgov.html#genadv> and <http://www.jdcc-strategictrends.org/index.asp> (30 March 2006).

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The project was designed in consultation with the MoD and seeks to be of policy relevance to the military while the intellectual property rights in the dissertation remain with the author and University of Bristol.

University investment in the arms industry and relationships with arms companies raise three main concerns: legitimacy, commercialisation and militarisation. Investing in a company is a signal of acceptance of its activity. The University claims that “anything legal is considered acceptable” as investment managers “are required simply to seek the best return on the endowment fund in order to generate as much income as possible.”²² This is despite evidence that so-called “green”, “ethical” or “socially responsible” investment portfolios perform as well as, if not better than, non-discriminatory portfolios, making it possible to generate income and also make an explicit ethical statement.²³ (Of course, capitalist investment policies per se are themselves politically and ethically situated.) For the University, the frame of reference is provided by the legal framework of the UK state; by this logic, to discriminate against particular companies or types of company would be unnecessarily to politicise investment.

The position that anything legal is acceptable is itself a political position, however. Laws and investment policies require decisions to be made about what is socially legitimate. Bristol University investments are “based on investment policies agreed by the Finance Committee of Council,”²⁴ which means a group of actors devised a policy within particular value judgements. Although investments in arms companies currently comprise a small percentage of the University Endowment Fund’s overall portfolio, the decision that it is acceptable to invest in these companies is a signal of legitimation. The same applies to USS, which has a policy of engagement rather than divestment. It claims to “use its influence as one of the largest pension funds in the UK to encourage socially and environmentally responsible corporate behaviour and good standards of corporate governance,” rather than simply divest from sectors that some investors find problematic.²⁵ This is based on the

22. Letter from University of Bristol official to author, 17 November 2005.

23. Ethical Investors (no date), “Why Ethical Investment?”, <http://www.ethicalinvestors.co.uk/why.htm> (24 April 2006); N. Kreander, R.H. Gray, D.M. Power and C.D. Sinclair, ‘Evaluating the Performance of Ethical and Nonethical Funds: A Matched Pair Analysis,’ *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting* 32, no. 7-8 (2005), 1465-1493.

24. Email from University of Bristol official to Jillian Marsden.

25. Universities Superannuation Scheme, ‘Responsible Investment’, <http://www.usshq.co.uk/> (24 April 2006).

assumption that arms companies can be socially responsible, a position that can be challenged due to death and destruction caused by the use of weaponry around the world, and the structural violence caused by states' privileging of military strength while other social needs such as education and healthcare provision go unmet. While corporate social responsibility in the form of community work and environmental concern can have limited positive impacts, this obscures the bigger issue of what these companies make, the effects of their products, and the types of social relations that they encourage. Both Bristol University and USS adopt a particular means of exercising political choice; as activists have demonstrated, these choices and value frames are contestable.

Arms company and military funding of research is problematic because of the resultant commercialisation and militarisation of research and education. Privileging arms companies and/or the MoD in setting (or co-setting) research and teaching agendas skews the direction of both these activities. Neither state nor industry funding guarantees particular results, and it is possible to engage critically with branches of the state and capital. But funding necessarily has disciplining effects; while levels of funder control vary across projects, projects designed with or for the state or capital are likely to privilege their interests because they operate within a particular frame of reference. This is not to argue that academia is simply subservient to the will of the state or capital and is instrumentalised by powerful actors. Rather, there is a process of "academic co-production" of pro-state and pro-capital narratives that stems from the dynamics of academia as well as the social structures in which it is enmeshed.²⁶ It is not (necessarily) a case of funders imposing their will on researchers; rather, there is a more subtle process of disciplining in which the value frames that inform research become naturalised.

Commercialisation, through the direct funding of academic research by industry, means that academia becomes further oriented towards the needs of capital and produces research directly in its interests. The orientation of universities towards the needs of the state and capital, and critiques of this, are not a new phenomenon.²⁷ But the growing commercialisation of research is part of a wider process of the neoliberalisation of academia that signals a step-change in this orientation. Universities are becoming increasingly capitalist in their internal organisation and behaviour, one effect of which is to make universities directly functional for capitalism. Universities have played an important task in modern industrial society, selecting personnel for particular social roles, integrating young people into the capitalist system, and legitimising

26. Ron Rubin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy. Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

27. E.g. E.P. Thompson (ed.), *Warwick University Ltd. Industry, Management and the Universities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

a stratified social system; the neoliberalisation of academia requires that they do this and also function in the immediate interests of capital. Direct industrial funding of research is both a cause and symptom of the wider processes of “marketisation, commodification, rationalisation, managerialism, flexibilisation, ... casualisation and proletarianisation of academics” currently underway in British academia and elsewhere, and associated with falling levels of state funding.²⁸ However, it is not clear that universities can fulfil both these roles as the direct involvement of capitalists in academia sacrifices the spirit of free inquiry that has traditionally characterised it and also destroys the image of the university as a neutral institution that allows it to fulfil its legitimating function. While universities are being increasingly neoliberalised, they are also sites of struggle; the transformations underway are therefore unlikely to continue completely unchallenged.

As well as commercialisation, university involvement with arms companies further militarises research. This involves the privileging of military concerns in the allocation of time and resources, which orients scientific and engineering research towards weapons production, encourages students to pursue militarised careers (such as engineering jobs with arms-producing companies), and discourages investment and innovation in the development of alternative technologies, all of which also contributes to the privileging of force as a means of resolving conflict and ordering social relations. A common response to this claim is that arms-producing companies are also significantly involved in civilian engineering. It is correct that the line between military and civilian production is being increasingly blurred, but companies such as BAE Systems – 80 per cent of whose sales were in the military sector in 2004 – are increasingly being oriented towards the military, and especially US, market.²⁹ This orientation, alongside the growing privatisation of services once provided by the military, the growing importance of information technology in the arms industry, the increasing relevance of “spin in” (a process through which civilian-oriented developments in technology are applied to the military sector) and parallel decreasing emphasis on “spin out” in the opposite direction,³⁰ signals a spreading militarisation of a variety of industries, with knock-on implications for what scientists and engineers are encouraged to research.

28. David Harvie, ‘Commons and Communities in the University: Some Notes and Some Examples’, *The Commoner*, 8 (2004), <http://www.thecommoner.org> (14 August 2006), 1; also Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie, *Academic Capitalism. Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

29. Surry and the SIPRI Arms Industry Network, ‘The 100 Largest Arms-Producing Companies, 2004’.

30. J. Paul Dunne and Eamon Surry, ‘Arms Production’, in, SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2006*, 387-418: 394, 414-5.

Science and engineering departments have different relationships with the arms industry and military to those of social science departments, and are involved in the commercialisation and militarisation of research in different ways. Noam Chomsky argues that intellectual subservience to power is a wider problem than the control associated with the funding of particular projects, and that there are fewer ideological constraints on scientific research than on social science research.³¹ But industry funding for academic research is more narrowly focused, secretive, and concerned with short-term gain than state funding is; the instrumentalisation of science is therefore likely to increase as the neoliberalisation of academia continues. There is clearly a difference between engineering research that contributes to the development of military technology and social science research with or for the military on policy issues. But both types of research play a role in legitimising the use of force and identifying more efficient ways of using it; social science serves an ideological function that is less obvious but is still important in privileging the use of force.

Anti-Arms Trade Activism at Bristol

Opposition to Bristol University involvement with the arms industry emerged as members of the Amnesty International and People & Planet student societies took up the theme of Clean Investment. A nationwide network of activists is developing, to campaign for disinvestment from arms companies, encouraged by Campaign Against Arms Trade's (CAAT's) universities and colleges campaign.³² In Bristol this is supported by a local CAAT group, which includes a number of students and academics at both Bristol University and the University of the West of England (including the author). For student activists, the University's investments in arms companies are one element of the University's relationship with the arms industry and MoD. Clean Investment can be seen as both a specific and limited issue relating to the University's investment policy, and also as a step in the process of challenging the role of arms companies in university and wider social life. Comaroff and Comaroff ask whether an act requires "explicit consciousness and articulation to be properly called 'resistance'."³³ The actions of

31. Noam Chomsky, 'The Cold War and the University', in Chomsky et al., *The Cold War and the University. Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: New Press, 1997), 171-194: 178; Chomsky, *Understanding power. The Indispensable Noam Chomsky*, ed. Peter R. Mitchell and John Schoeffel (London: Vintage, 2003), 231-3, 236-248

32. CAAT, 'Clean Investment: Universities and Colleges', <http://www.caat.org.uk/campaigns/clean-investment/universities/> (30 March 2006).

33. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*. Volume 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 31; italics in original. The analysis put forward here is based on my involvement in and understanding of the protest.

Bristol students can be understood as resistance because the themes of commercialisation and militarisation were articulated as a context for their actions. To date, the main vehicle of opposition to the relationship between arms companies and the University has been student protests against University investments. A small number of academic staff have signed a petition calling on the University to disinvest from arms companies, but the local Association of University Teachers (AUT – now University and College Union, UCU) has not, to date, taken up the call for Clean Investment.

Two events brought Bristol University's relationship with arms companies to the fore. Students staged a "die-in" outside a science and engineering careers fair in October 2005 while others distributed an alternative information booklet on several of the companies present – an example of students conducting research into the arms trade and the University's links to it – and engaged in dialogue with students visiting the fair.³⁴ They circulated in the hall for about an hour before being asked to leave on "health and safety grounds", the irony of which was not lost on them. This dual strategy was intended to both shock and inform, to stimulate debate about the relationship between the University and arms companies and the ethics of working for the latter. In February 2006 a motion calling for the adoption of an ethical investment policy was passed at the Students' Union AGM. The debate was controversial and heated, rapidly solidifying around occupational-political identities as "engineers" or "activists", with the chance of actively listening to the opposing arguments diminishing accordingly. But the motion was passed and the Students' Union is now mandated to lobby the University to: commission an independent ethical audit of its present investments; disinvest from any companies that, on the basis of this audit, are considered by independent specialists to be incompatible with ethical investment; and adopt an ethical investment policy that includes a prohibition on investments in the arms industry and is guided by the results of the ethical audit.

Prior to the Bristol actions, six students and graduates of Lancaster University – since dubbed the George Fox Six³⁵ – protested at a "Corporate Venturing" conference in September 2004, challenging the presence of companies such as BAE Systems and Shell on the university campus and the commercialisation of university research.³⁶ They were found guilty

34. The booklet is available at <http://www.bristolcaat.org.uk/careers%20fair%20brochure.pdf> (28 March 2006).

35. The conference was held in the George Fox building on the Lancaster University campus, named after the seventeenth-century activist who was a key figure in the emergence of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers. Fox was imprisoned numerous times, including in Lancaster, for his activism.

36. George Fox Six Supporters Group website, <http://www.free-web-space.biz/GeorgeFox/> (2 March 2006).

(on appeal) of disruption and obstruction, ordered to pay £3,600 costs and given a conditional discharge for 18 months. The George Fox Six helped draw attention to the increasing orientation of academia towards the needs of capital, itself in part a response to the general funding crisis in higher education. In this they echo the conclusion drawn by Scientists for Global Responsibility, that “the dividing line between academic work and commercial work is being intentionally blurred,” a process accelerated by recent British governments.³⁷ Protestors are therefore not the only ones politicising university life: commercialisation is not a natural process, but rather a politically motivated intervention in academic life, backed by economically and socially powerful actors. The actions of the George Fox Six serve as a reminder that universities are sites of struggle.

Universities as Sites of Struggle

University investments in and relationships with arms companies and the MoD raise the wider issue of the role of the university in contemporary UK society, and the appropriate relationship between academic research and activism. Universities can be understood as sites of struggle, of “both domination and contestation.”³⁸ The educational apparatus (in its public and private forms) is a key organ of civil society that helps generate consent and, thereby, hegemony.³⁹ Universities help reproduce the means of production and, alongside schools, are one of the most significant social institutions in which children and (predominantly young) adults learn the attitudes and social rules required for the perpetuation of the capitalist system. The engineering and social science research carried out at Bristol thus fulfils a dual function of contributing to the development of weaponry and legitimising this process and the militarisation of social life that accompanies it. Social science research that normalises the use of force also plays a significant role in contributing to capitalist hegemony. While universities bolster hegemonic social formations, they can also play a role in fostering counter-hegemony, however, as the student protests demonstrate. We need to interrogate the ways in which universities “mediate and legitimate the social and cultural reproduction of class, racial, and gender relations in the dominant society” and also serve oppositional interests.⁴⁰ They do this through the alliances they forge with other social forces (e.g. through investments), and through

37. Stuart Parkinson, ‘Lessons from Lancaster’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2005.

38. Henry A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition* (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1983), 62-3.

39. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 261.

40. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 46, 58.

research and teaching. The focus of this section now turns to research in the social sciences (in particular, International Relations (IR), my own discipline) and the potential for activist scholarship.

If universities are sites of both domination and contestation, what does this mean for research? Primarily, it means that it is a political activity. That is, what academics choose to research (and what they put on their teaching syllabi) is intimately related to their worldviews and value systems. As Max Weber argued, "all knowledge of cultural reality ... is always knowledge from particular points of view."⁴¹ Issues that require and/or receive academic investigation do not exist objectively but within a frame of reference that constitutes them as a problem: "without the investigator's evaluative ideas, there would be no principle of selection of subject-matter and no meaningful knowledge of the concrete reality."⁴² At present, it is only those arguments that challenge mainstream values and ideas that are recognised as political: the inherent political situatedness of mainstream arguments goes unnoticed precisely because it is unremarkable.⁴³ This applies as much to scientists and engineers as it does to IR scholars. As documented above, the problems for which scientists and engineers seek solutions exist within a framework that is significantly influenced by the needs of the arms industry. The problems that IR scholars seek to analyse are influenced by the frameworks governing the discipline, such as the ESRC's emphasis on priority areas and demands for policy engagement. This emphasis, in addition to the principle of having to apply competitively for funding to carry out research, a core academic duty, serves to orient the discipline in particular directions, towards the instrumentalisation and commercialisation of academic research. Even those who seek to "play the game" further entrench the principle of external funding and reproduce the discourse of policy relevance in order to win resources to conduct their own, critical research.

Conducting policy-relevant research is not necessarily antithetical to challenging oppression: targeted interventions in the policy process can be effective, but run the significant risk of co-option. Being accepted

41. Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: The Free Press, 1949), 81; emphasis in original.

42. *Ibid.*, 82.

43. For example, the Political Studies Association annual awards recognise contributions to "the conduct, reporting and study of politics"; PSA, 'PSA Awards 2005', <http://www.psa.ac.uk/awards2005/notice.htm>. The Network of Activist Scholars of Politics and International Relations, meanwhile, was not permitted to affiliate to the PSA as a Specialist Group on the grounds that it was political: "the group's proposed remit exceeded that of academic study"; Naspir had to affiliate as the Specialist Group on Political Activism instead. Naspir, 'Naspir's recognition by PSA', December 2003, http://www.naspir.org.uk/psa/psa_recognition.htm (9 May 2006).

as policy relevant requires that one use the same vocabulary and conceptual language as those making or implementing policy, and this generally requires acceptance of the parameters within which a policy is framed. Even those who seek to use this vocabulary for strategic gain have to negotiate the hurdles of co-option and neutralisation. Policy relevance is often reduced to improving the processes through which a policy is implemented; yet such an approach sidelines debate about the values and goals that inform policy. It is difficult for those who seek to challenge oppression through policy engagement to have an impact on value choices, however. They are unlikely to have access to or credibility with elite actors because their critical stance disadvantages them in the networking that is intrinsic to academia (as in any other profession).

If we accept that research is a political activity, how are we to proceed? Two potential strategies spring to mind. One is based on Max Weber's dictum that "the prophet and the demagogue do not belong on the academic platform."⁴⁴ Academics have a socially privileged role that should not be abused by advancing political positions that carry extra weight because of the authority invested in the speaker. For Weber, objectivity is not the same as moral indifference, but the social position of academic is not one for advancing political views because we cannot choose rationally between values: that choice is "a matter of faith" rather than empirical fact.⁴⁵ The Weberian concept of value neutrality refers to academics' responsibility to keep the scientific discussion of facts separate from the evaluation of them, having accepted that the choice of what to study is value-driven. The task of an academic, in this view, is to engage in technical criticism and value clarification.⁴⁶ This serves to identify the repercussions of particular courses of action and the value schema that motivate them, but refrains from commenting on the validity of those values.

A second option is to engage explicitly as an activist academic, making clear what one's political commitments are and actively choosing sides.⁴⁷ In this scenario, academics explicitly choose to research instances or structures of social injustice, often conduct research with rather than on particular subjects, and use their research to inform campaigning and

44. Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 129-156; 145-6.

45. *Ibid.*, 60, 55; emphasis in original.

46. *Ibid.*, 52-4; also Tarak Barkawi, 'Strategy as Vocation: Weber, Morgenthau and Modern Strategic Studies', *Review of International Studies* 24 no.2 (1998), 159-184; 170-173.

47. Such a position is taken by Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology', *Current Anthropology* 36, no.3 (1995): 409-440, and Mario Novelli, 'Imagining Research as Solidarity and Grassroots Globalisation: A Response to Appadurai (2001)', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 4, no.2 (2006), 275-286.

protest. This is neither necessarily biased research nor the production of propaganda (although of course, like any research, it can be). The activist academic is explicit about the values motivating her/his research – and as argued earlier, value choice is intrinsic to all research, whether it is acknowledged or not – and seeks to connect academic practice to activism, learning from and contributing to activist struggles. Engaging with campaigners and social movements has the dual effect of putting more pressure on government to change its policies and contributing to the wider democratisation of social life through the sharing of skills and knowledge among activists and academics. Both Weberian and activist strategies share an acceptance of the political nature of all research, and that there is no view from nowhere, but the latter strategy actively tries to use research to challenge oppression. Those following a Weberian strategy may well undertake research that is critical of the status quo, but they do not explicitly ally themselves with what they believe to be progressive social forces.

My own understanding of activist academic research retains a belief that scholarship is a different social activity from campaigning. While both are politically situated and motivated, the primary aim of campaigning is to generate change, while the primary aim of scholarship is to generate truth (which can only ever be situated and partial), a process in which scholars have a duty to deal explicitly with 'inconvenient' facts.⁴⁸ However, scholarship and campaigning can be mutually reinforcing, through a process of translation "that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world" that aims to "identify and reinforce what is common in the diversity of counter-hegemonic drive."⁴⁹ One of the challenges for activist academics is traversing the boundaries between academia and activism.⁵⁰ For academics of this persuasion, the task is to ensure that there is "neither too much reflection on too little experience, which is armchair theorizing, nor too little reflection on too much experience, which is mere activism."⁵¹ Of course, there are risks associated with activist research, including the loss of access to the very institutions and actors that need to be examined, because of one's reputation as an activist or lack of contacts within elite circles. This poses difficult questions for activist researchers and can be a disciplining

48. Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', p. 147.

49. Boaventura De Sousa Santos, 'The Future of the World Social Forum: The Work of Translation', *Development* 48, no. 2 (2005), 15-22; 16-7.

50. Paul Routledge, 'The Third Space as Critical Engagement', *Antipode* 28, no.4 (1996), 399-419.

51. John Heron and Peter Reason, 'The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research "with" rather than "on" People', in *Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (London: Sage, 2001), 179-188, 185.

process, requiring them to weigh up the benefits to be gained from contributing to social struggle against their role as a scholar in exploring the social world. Given that activist academics' contribution to social struggle is based on their scholarship, this is a significant risk.

As a brief illustration of how academic strategies play out in practice, my own research explores non-governmental organisation (NGO) activity in relation to UK involvement in the arms trade through the lens of debates about global civil society.⁵² It assesses the government's stated policy against its export practice, introducing "inconvenient facts" regarding the relationship between arms capital and the UK state and role of coercion in the development of capitalism. The leap to an explicitly activist agenda comes through engagement with the issue of change in UK arms export policy and my involvement with anti-arms trade campaigners. I am indebted to campaigners and NGO workers, many of whom have conducted painstaking research into the arms trade and its effects. On the basis of the research I have done – using scholarly methods such as documentary analysis and interviews⁵³ – I am in a position to contribute to activist debates and strategy, which I have done predominantly through involvement with CAAT at the local and national level. A second aspect of my research explores the widespread image of NGOs and campaign groups as progressive agents of global civil society. I am interested interrogating the dominant liberal narratives of a globalising emancipatory and non-violent sphere separate from the state and market, and NGO activity on the UK arms trade is a rich case study for this. This research has implications for campaigning but may not be directly relevant for it. I do not conduct my research for arms campaigners but I contribute where I can; my research agenda is not defined by what is campaignable. This is in line with my understanding of scholarship and campaigning as distinct social activities.

A key issue for critical scholars is strategy: do they use the main claim to legitimacy that scholars have, that of disinterested inquiry, and introduce "inconvenient facts" into their research; or do they get involved with the individuals and groups struggling against the oppression they document and analyse? Significant numbers of academics are involved in advising political actors: the disagreement comes over whose politics should be supported. Academia prides itself on its independence and the

52. Anna Stavrianakis, '(Big) Business As Usual. Sustainable Development, NGOs and UK Arms Export Policy', *Conflict, Security and Development* 5, no.1 (2005), 45-67.

53. This comment is not intended to serve a gatekeeping function with respect to what counts as scholarly method; political science and international relations scholars have been slow to accept the validity of qualitative methods such as participant observation that are more established within disciplines such as anthropology.

impartiality of research, a position promoted by key funding bodies.⁵⁴ If one accepts that “good research is not just books and academic papers, but is also the creative action of people to address matters that are important to them,”⁵⁵ is one at risk of a conflict of interest? In an activist conception of scholarship it is acceptable to be involved with groups and/or individuals one is researching. This rests on an acknowledgement that there are forces of domination in society: some social forces are much better resourced and more widely ideologically acceptable, so being involved with them does not look like a conflict of interest. Activist academic research challenges this and self-consciously allies itself with groups and individuals struggling against oppression in an attempt to bolster forces of resistance.

Conclusion

Bristol University’s relationships with arms companies are illustrative of the enmeshment of universities in militarised capitalism and the resistance that is emerging in response. Understanding the university as a site of struggle raises questions about the way academics conduct their research and teaching. This article focuses on social science research, outlining Weberian and activist approaches as suggestions as to how we can proceed. Both approaches accept that all research is political; activist academics explicitly acknowledge that there are competing forces within society and seek to ally themselves with those challenging oppression. Activist scholarship is not a new phenomenon but it is still controversial in the academy; hopefully this special section will contribute to debate within our community of scholars about the values that inform our work and the strategies we use to implement them.

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54. ESRC, Research Ethics Framework, 2006, http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf, 25 (31 March 2006).

55. Heron and Reason, ‘The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry’, 179.