

# illustration students' project

## *If... On Martial Values and Britishness*

A selection of outcomes from an early 2014 editorial illustration project by third-year illustration students at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design.

The students were asked by the project tutor to research the main points made in the article 'If... On Martial Values and Britishness', by Emma Louise Briant (Variant, issue 43, Spring 2012), to consider the title of the article carefully when thinking about ideas for their illustrations, and to then produce images that were laconic in character and designed to a set size specification.

The project was proposed in a way so as to meet the fast pace of editorial illustration; the students were expected to produce a series of concept sketches within 24 hours and then develop a final outcome in light of feedback they received from the project tutor and their peers the next day.

Variant has provided the students with a contract stipulating how their images will be used and have remunerated the students for the licence to reproduce their images, providing an introduction to the labour process which has added to the learning experience.

[www.variant.org.uk](http://www.variant.org.uk)

### **'If... On Martial Values and Britishness'**

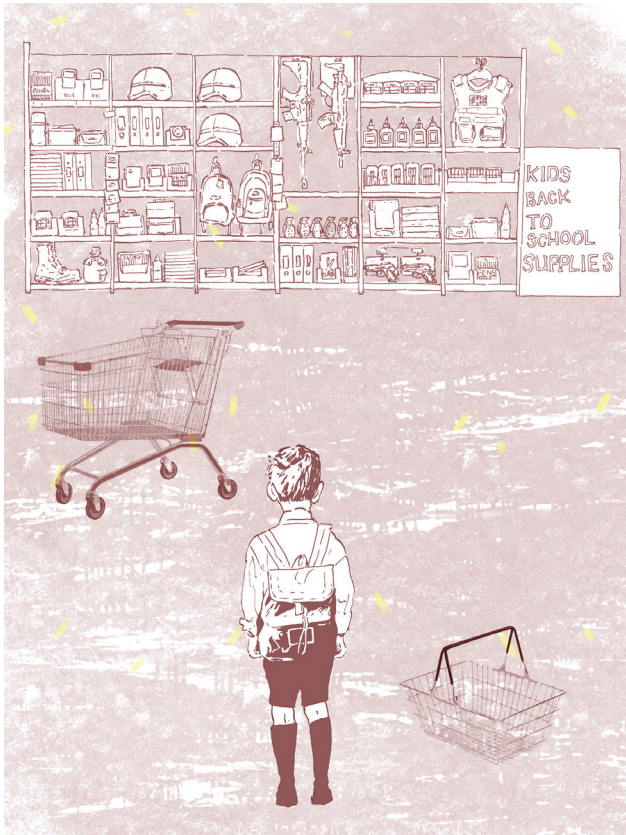
by Emma Louise Briant, Variant, issue 43, Spring 2012

Consecutive Westminster governments have emphasised vigilance to threats', creating scapegoats to distract from domestic and foreign policy and drum up support. Amidst a state-of-emergency London Olympics bristling with securitisation and 'exceptional' democratic foreclosure, the inequity of royal pageant under public austerity draped in imperial re-imaginings, and public school assertions of class power presented as a return to old-fashioned discipline for civil society, Briant assesses this populist construction of 'British' militarism and 'martial values'.

[access original article as text or PDF](#)

# On Martial Values and Britishness

Emma Louise Briant



### Shaking the Pyramid

Back in 2008, the now Foreign Secretary William Hague assured the US that he, "David Cameron and George Osborne were 'children of Thatcher' and staunch Atlanticians". Hague said while he recognised this was at odds with British public opinion, politicians "sit at the top of the pyramid". This autocratic approach extends beyond foreign policy and, it seems, among those being 'sat on' at the bottom are thousands of people who rioted in England last August, 2011. These disturbances were ultimately seen to result from marginalisation and resentment felt in communities experiencing joblessness and aggressive policing; 66% of those charged with related offences were from neighbourhoods that got poorer between 2007 and 2010.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Tories are feeling their pyramid rather unstable. Worsening economic deprivation and lack of opportunity are the foundations of young people's alienation in Britain, practices exacerbated by policy measures including, but not limited to, the scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowances; the arbitrary suspensions of benefits; and 'workfare' programmes demanding the free labour of benefit recipients in return for their continued state welfare provisions. Two years into Coalition government, PM Cameron's brand of Thatcherite "there is no alternative" government has had quite the impact. And yet somewhat ironically, the government diagnose the resulting riots as symptomatic of behavioural issues, weak morality, poor schooling, criminality and gangs.

Autocratic martial values and a deepening militarisation of state and civil society are the mortars used in an attempt to patch-up the neo-Tory pyramid – a neoliberal system of governance, after all, spanning all the dominant political parties. Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, is currently polarising the population into a "hard-working majority" and a "vicious, lawless, immoral minority" – reconstructing the problem of the riots as one of culture, rather than one of inequality and unbounded capitalism. "In so doing he appeals to a few and populism that turns humanity against itself, instead of against government policies. As the theorist Slavoj Žižek argues "the cause of the troubles is ultimately never the system as such, but the intruder who corrupted it (financial manipulators, not capitalism as such, etc.) not a fatal flaw inscribed into the structure as such, but an element that doesn't play its role within the structure properly".<sup>11</sup> Following Žižek's analysis, and in this case: the rioters. The lack of real media debate during the period allowed the favoured of moral panic to prevail, creating a reactionary thrust of public anger used to justify the continuity of significant state restructuring. One petition calling for rioters' benefits to be revoked gained at least 60,000 signatures in the 24 hours after the riots.<sup>12</sup> Such malice and demagoguery may be startling, but isn't all that new. Successive governments have emphasised vigilance to threats at home and abroad, creating scapegoats to distract from domestic and foreign policy and drum up support. The solution to Gove's redefined problem is now, as before, being presented to the public as a return to old-fashioned discipline and martial values, starting with the "moral decay" of the imagined nation's amashed children.



### Discipline the Youth

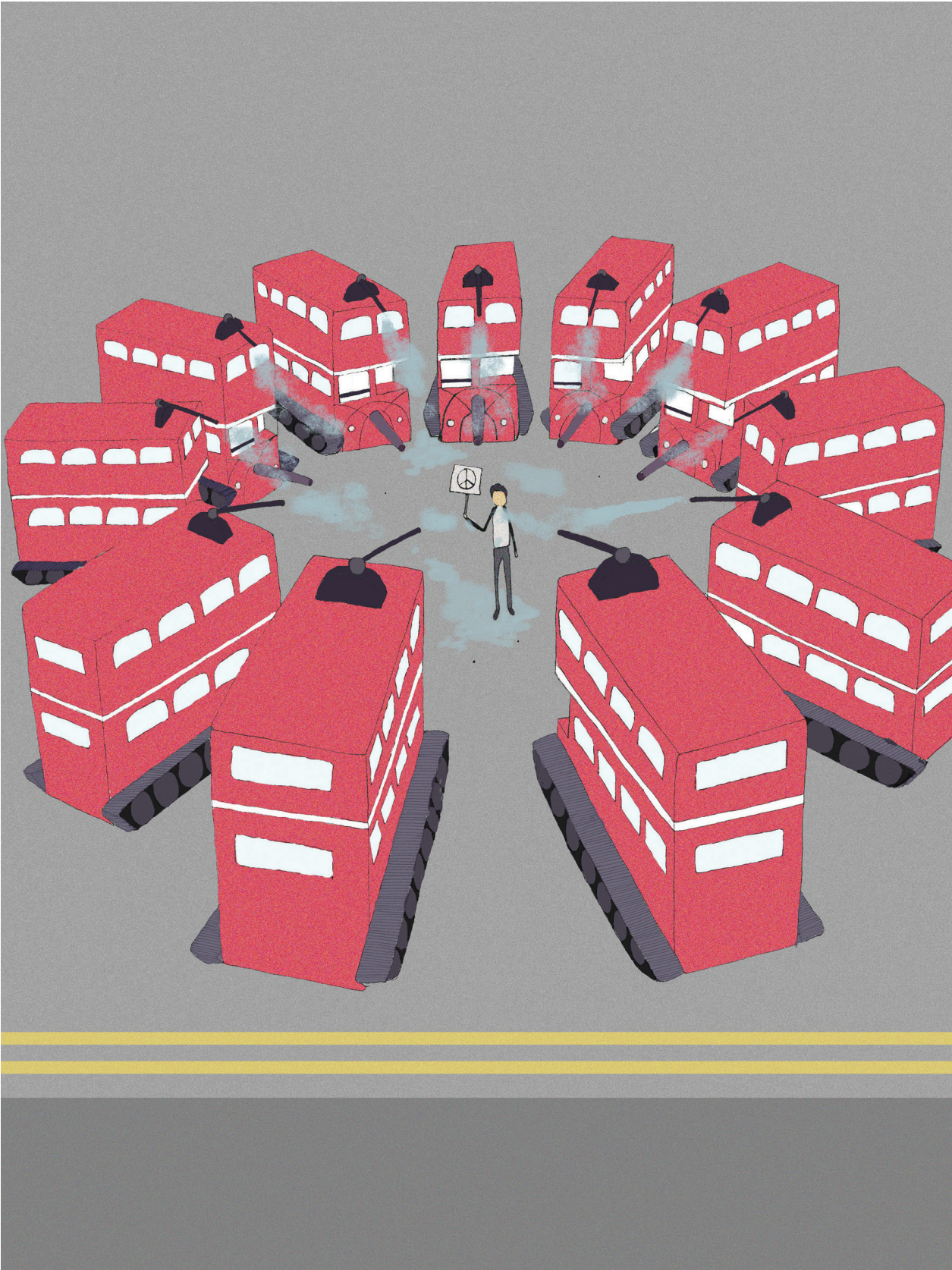
'Citizenship' has been securing the foundations of this pyramid in schools in England since 2002. These compulsory classes set out to nurture cohesion through socialisation, implicitly minimising any questioning of societal institutions. That pupils did gain a more complex understanding of contemporary laws and political systems from such classes is something clearly undesirable to the Coalition. In favour of more subtly-integrated propaganda delivered through history teaching Gove's curriculum review has scrapped these compulsory classes. Gove has said the emphasis will now be on "our island story", the value of 'Britishness', national pride and cohesion.<sup>13</sup> It's the return of the 'Kings and Queens' approach, the rote boredom of yesterday. Under advice from 'Better History Group' think tank and 'history tsar', Simon Schama, British-centred history will strengthen our "national memory".<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere Gove's policies have been criticised

by Cambridge History Professor, Richard Evans, who said they would deliver "self-congratulatory narrow myths of history" to schoolchildren.<sup>15</sup> Quintessentially English myths of 'Britishness' on which martial values can be better built. Coalition plans sunk lower still in August, when Cameron announced his goal to militarise schools in England and Wales. Initiating a wider project for 10 state-run military academies, the 'Phoenix' school opens in September 2013.<sup>16</sup> Conservative Party think-tank Red-barcia recommended "a chain of academies sponsored by the Armed Forces" and "using their practical experience and existing governance support".<sup>17</sup> They will institutionalise militarism; the schools will be entirely operated using ex-military personnel, or 'civilian teachers' "recruited with an intention of joining the Reserves". The priority will be for "vertical promotion" of children. This will instill a hierarchy with lower-ability children held back in lower grades regardless of increasing age; a demoralising teaching structure that reflects



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# if... On Martial Values and Britishness

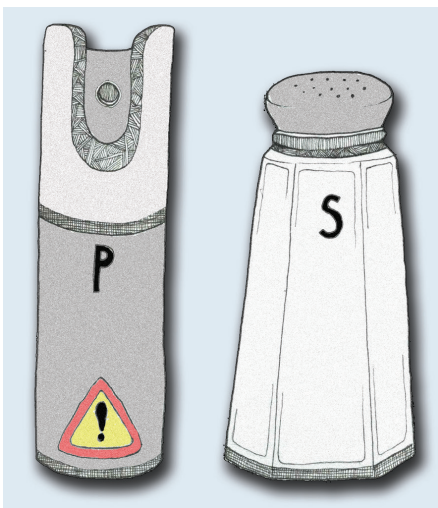
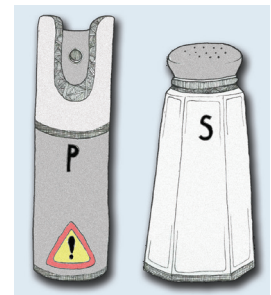
Emma Louise Briant



**Shaking the Pyramid**  
 Back in 2008, the now Foreign Secretary William Hague assured the US that he, "David Cameron and George Osborne were children of Thatcher" and staunch Atlantists.<sup>1</sup> Hague said while he recognised this was at odds with British public opinion, politicians "sit at the top of the pyramid".<sup>2</sup> This autocratic approach extends beyond foreign policy and, it seems, among those being "sit on" at the bottom are thousands of people who rioted in England last August, 2011. These disturbances were ultimately seen to result from marginalisation and resentment felt in communities experiencing joblessness and aggressive policing.<sup>3</sup> 66% of those charged with related offences were from neighbourhoods that got poorer between 2007 and 2010.4 It is perhaps unsurprising that the Tories are feeling their pyramid rather unstable. Worsening economic deprivation and lack of opportunity are the foundations of young people's alienation in Britain, paucities exacerbated by policy measures including, but not limited to, the scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowances; the arbitrary suspensions of benefits;<sup>5</sup> and 'workfare' programmes demanding the free labour of benefit recipients in return for their continued state welfare provisions.<sup>6</sup> Two years into Coalition government, PM Cameron's brand of Thatcherite<sup>7</sup> there is no alternative government has had quite the impact. And yet somewhat ironically, the

government diagnose the resulting riots as symptomatic of behavioural issues, weak morality, poor schooling, criminality and gangs.<sup>9</sup> Autocratic martial values and a deepening militarisation of state and civil society are the mortars used in an attempt to patch-up the now "Tory pyramid" – a neoliberal system of governance, after all, spanning all the dominant political parties. Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, is currently polarising the population into a "hard-working majority" and a "vicious, lawless, immoral minority" – reconstructing the problem of the riots as one of culture, rather than one of inequality and unbounded capitalism.<sup>10</sup> In so doing he appeals to a fear and populism that turns humanity against itself, instead of against government policies. As the theorist Slavoj Žižek argues "the cause of the troubles is ultimately never the system as such, but the intruder who corrupted it (financial manipulators, not capitalists as such, etc.); not a fatal flaw inscribed into the structure as such, but an element that doesn't play its role within the structure properly".<sup>11</sup> Following Žižek's analysis, and in this case: the rioters. The lack of real media debate during the period allowed the favoured of moral panic to prevail; fueling a reactionary thrust of public anger used to justify the continuity of significant state restructuring. One petition calling for rioters' benefits to be revoked gained at least 60,000 signatures in the 24 hours after the riots.<sup>12</sup>

Such malice and demagoguery may be startling, but isn't that new. Successive governments have emphasised vigilance to threats at home and abroad, creating scapegoats to distract from domestic and foreign policy and drown up support. The solution to Gove's redlined problem is now, as before, being presented to the public as a return to old-fashioned discipline and martial values, starting with the 'moral decay' of the imagined nation's amassed children. Discipline the Youth. 'Citizenship' has been securing the foundations of this pyramid in schools in England since 2002. These compulsory classes set out to nurture cohesion through socialisation, implicitly minimising any questioning of societal institutions. That pupils did gain a more complex understanding of contemporary laws and political systems from such classes is something clearly undesirable to the Coalition. In favour of more subtly integrated propaganda delivered through history teaching Gove's curriculum review has scrapped these compulsory classes. Gove has said the emphasis will now be on 'our island story', the value of 'Britishness', national pride and cohesion.<sup>13</sup> It's the return of the 'Kings and Queens' approach, the rote boredom of yesterday. Under advice from 'Better History Group' think-tank and 'history tsar', Simon Schama, British-centred history will strengthen our "national memory".<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere Gove's policies have been criticised by Cambridge History Professor, Richard Evans, who said they would deliver "self-congratulatory narrow myths of history" to schoolchildren.<sup>15</sup> Quintessentially English myths of 'Britishness' on which martial values can be better built. Coalition plans sunk lower still in August, when Cameron announced his goal to militarise schools in England and Wales. Initiating a wider project for 10 state-run military academies, the 'Phoenix' school opens in September 2013.16 Conservative Party think-tank ResPublica recommended "a chain of academies sponsored by the Armed Forces" and "using their practical experience and existing governance support".<sup>17</sup> They will institutionalise militarism; the schools will be entirely operated using ex-military personnel, or civilian teachers "recruited with an intention of joining the Reserves". The priority will be for "vertical grouping" of children. This will instill a by Cambridge History Professor, Richard Evans, who said they would deliver "self-congratulatory narrow myths of history" to schoolchildren.15 Quintessentially English myths of 'Britishness' on which martial values can be better built. Coalition plans sunk lower still in August, when Cameron announced his goal to militarise schools in England and Wales. Initiating a wider project for 10 state-run military academies, the 'Phoenix' school opens in September 2013.16 Conservative Party think-tank ResPublica recommended "a chain of academies sponsored by the Armed Forces" and "using their practical experience and existing governance support".<sup>17</sup> They will institutionalise militarism; the schools will be entirely operated using ex-military



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