

Boy scouts and militarism

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Boy scouts movements are what we can consider embedded in the culture of many countries. The appeal of this youth movement had captured the attention of young boys worldwide. The Boy Scout movement had built a decent reputation of rearing young boys with admirable characteristics. This gained reputation is the very basis why the Boy Scout movement had become the largest youth-based organization in the world. When people hear of the term “ Boy Scouts”, they associate it much with camping and other fun activities.

According to founder of the movement, Robert Baden-Powell, the activities of the Boy Scouts are focused on developing physical and mental fitness, camaraderie, character, and citizenship. The program of the Boy Scout movement claims to be designed to help young people to develop self-reliance, courage, and integrity, among many other admirable traits (Elleke 12-15). The truth behind those stereotypes would not be questioned. What this paper would delve on is what many admirers may have overlooked regarding the nature and the origin of the of the most influential youth movement.

Many critics had argued that the Boy Scout movement can find its roots as being militaristic in nature. The concept of militarism may sound too radical when aligned with the seemingly innocent movement, who talks about having fun while aiming towards being better persons. But of course, criticisms would not be heard of if they are lacking solid and convincing basis. If the nature of the origin of the Boy Scouts movement would be reviewed, the possibility of militarism could be easily disregarded. It is

beyond question that the Boy Scout movement is promoting very ideal yet admirable concepts for youths.

But since there is lots of evidence that suggests militaristic beginnings, this paper would argue, as a reiteration to the arguments of forerunners with the same argument: that it is undeniable that the Boy Scout movement had started as an interest group that is based much on militarism. To springboard this argument, there is no need to look far from the word “ Boy Scouts. ” The term “ scouts” alone would ring a military function. The term would suggest military functions that are closely related to information gathering and reconnaissance.

IF we give much thought on this term, we could relate it to the incorporation of outdoor activities(e. g. camping, trekking) to Boy Scout programs. The movement claims that those outdoor activities are for developing self-reliance and survival in the wild. It is hard to dismiss the notion that these kinds of activities have resemblances to military training. The question of where would Boy Scouts could use this kind of training would certainly intrigue critics. It appears that knowledge of survival in the outdoors is not as practical as the movement promotes.

Knowledge of survival in the outdoors is much useful in the context of war. Militaristic Origins Scouting can be traced back from the time of Robert Baden-Powell, a British lieutenant- general who founded the Scouting Movement. It all started and happened during the Siege of Mafeking, Second Boer War. Baden-Powell recruited boys with ages 12- 15 years old whom he eventually trained. From this situation, he founded the Boy Scouts, which is clearly seen to be a product of a militaristic movement. The roots of British

Boy Scouts, on the other hand, can be traced from its foundation in May 1909.

The organization was actually composed through members of Scout troops in the Battersea District. Although lacking of financial and human power support, the organization survived through various ways of generating these two important resources. To gain financial assistance, the organization pursued to get initial funds through acquiring sponsors. The members used the weekly page of the paper Chums to generate funds from their sponsors. To gain more members, the foundation spread the news of their existence in other parts of the United Kingdom.

However, in October of that same year, the British Boy Scouts was reconciled with Baden-Powell's headquarters. They became the allied organization of Baden-Powell with Sir Francis Vane giving his assurances. That time, he is the Commissioner of Baden-Powell London. One proof that the British Boy Scouts originated from a military orientation is the incident that happened the following month. It was November 1909 when Sir Francis Vane suddenly made a schism right after he was ousted by Baden-Powell from the Scout Association.

The two men actually have opposing views regarding the militarism and bureaucracy. Vane made strong arguments regarding Baden-Powell's militaristic and political leadership over his headquarters staff. Here, the British Boy Scouts proved their support to Sir Francis Vane. They came with Sir Francis Vane in his schism and chose him to be their leader. From this point, The British Boy Scouts expanded its connections and alliances through

founding another organization in the early 1910—the National Peace Scouts. It was actually a joined organization with the Boy's Life Brigade.

From a small organization, the British Boy Scouts, later known as Brotherhood of British Scouts, expanded through forming some allies with other countries such as the United States, Hong Kong, Italy, South Africa, Australia, India, New Zealand, and South America. It was then called The Order of World Scouts in 1911. From a small organization, it expanded to 12 countries. (Jeal 428) However, The Order of World Scouts suddenly declined and eventually made its downfall when Sir Francis Vane got involved with bankruptcy, making the Brotherhood of British Scouts fall back as a domestic, small organization. The presence of militarists

In 1910, fifty-six percent of the 250 Presidents and Commissioners, a total of 140 men, were identified as military officers, whether serving or retired (Springhall, 939-940). With this huge militaristic presence in the government, the Boys Scout Association can be given doubts as the organization that acts as front for further military ambitions. Involvement of the youth in war In Baden-Powell's book entitled *Scouting For Boys*, one chapter discusses marksmanship which is said to be the same with patriotism (Baden-Powell 322). When World War 1 exploded, the scouts were used as auxiliary assistance of the war.

Moreover, those who ages fifteen to seventeen could undergo special trainings in basic infantry techniques, entrenching, shooting, and signaling. In addition, a specific cadet corps called Mafeking Cadet Corps helped military missions through transmitting messages, decreasing the duties of the military men while providing the boys with something to do during the

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siege. The Mafeking Cadet Corps composed of young boys was of great help to the military during the siege in 1899 to 1900. Similarities to militarism The resemblances between the Boy Scout movement and groups with militaristic nature are very striking indeed.

The similarities between the two would go beyond similarities in their appearance. Boy Scouts are sporting uniforms that could only have been inspired by military uniforms. But more striking is the use of badges to determine ranks or seniority. The concept of “badges” could be interpreted as one of the drawbacks of the design of the program of the Boy Scout movement. Boy Scouts could be trained and conditioned to think that everything they do must translate to merits. This could be more than contradicting to the movement’s preamble that is seemingly altruistic.

Many critics had posted the striking similarities, even in the design of Boy Scouting badges to those that the military forces are using. It could also be included that the Boy Scout movements also conduct flag ceremonies in an almost religious manner. Only the military forces practice such religiosity towards nationalistic practices like the flag ceremony. The design of conducting flag ceremonies, in relation to the argument that Boy Scouting involves much militarism could have been for re-instilling nationalistic thoughts in the minds of young people.

In Baden-Powell’s book, *Scouting For Boys*, he had something that could be relatively too hard to absorb by young people, but not of young people under militaristic training “be prepared to die for your country if it need be, so that when the moment arrives you may charge home with confidence...” The most notable part of his line was targeted to young Boy Scouts “...not

caring whether you are going to be killed or not” (Baden-Powell 331-332) For Baden-Powell, the ideal citizenship involves being preparedness for the possibility of death while serving the country.

Those lines could be closely associated to what military personnel say all the time, like they are brainwashed or something, especially when they are set to fight in a war. Even the seemingly innocent practices of Boy Scouts like songs, chants, and marching finds its roots to military influences. Almost all Boy Scout song and chants have similarities to those of the military forces. There striking similarities in terms of cadence, melody, and content.

There is no need to expound on marching as being military influenced. That just requires an open-and-critical mind dashed with even the slightest common sense. Moreover, the similarities go beyond appearances between Boy Scouts and the military. Even the internal design of the Boy Scout program seems to follow militaristic thinking. During the early years of the Boy Scout movement, the divisions of the early version of the Boy Scout movement have very explicit similarities to the way military forces are organized.

It was like there is a corresponding branch within the Boy Scout movement to branches of the military forces. In 1912, there was the Sea Scouts, during World War 2 there was the Air Scouts of 1940 (Vane 19). In the foundational book “ Scouting For Boys”, there was a whole section dedicated for the discussion of the Navy and the Army (Baden-Powell 328-330) Misleading design Militaristic qualities are ever present and obvious at the Boy Scout movement. Yet advocates of the movement persistently dispel the argument that the movement is in anyway militaristic.

Their first line of defense was the seemingly innocent and politically stripped words of Robert Baden-Powell (see introduction of this paper). But many critics view Baden-Powell's design as misleading and leaning towards militaristic ideals. One point of argument by the movement's critics is that misleading leanings set by Baden-Powell. The founder of the movement claims that Boy Scouts are aiming for high morality. According to critics, that kind of design is also employed by other misleading organizations such as when the pacifist group Boys Life Brigade aiming at " saving lives.

" (Foster) One of the most popular interpretations of the Boy Scout movement as a whole is by former president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. His comments are devoid of any leanings, but still it provides good material for this discussion "...it does not try to make soldiers out of Boy Scouts, but tot make boys who will turn out as men to be fine citizens, and who will, if their country needs them , make better soldiers for having been scouts" (Roosevelt) A critic had analyzed Baden-Powell's words to his publisher in 1901.

Baden-Powell's words are " if you want to ensure peace let them see you are prepared for war..." That alone could paint a militaristic interpretation, yet Baden-Powell added and pertaining to the Boy Scouts "...a wise and practical organization of the splendid material lying ready to our hands" (Adams 123) The critic had concluded that the real motive behind the creation of the Boy Scout movement is to provide additional defense for the British military. (Foster) Conclusion The Boy Scout movement started as an organization that has an altruistic mission of helping young people.

But political opportunists had recognized the potential of the growing movement. And by their power and influences, they had managed to create a seemingly innocent movement that has subtly incorporated militaristic traits. Moreover, the Boy Scout movement can not deny the fact that their origins are of militaristic nature. Even the founder of the movement had come from the military. It is just understandable that he may incorporate militaristic ideals in the formulation of the organization that he had started.

Having a militaristic origin does not reflect negatively on the Boy Scouts of today. What is the most efficient way to do is to separate negative and positive traits from militarism. They should reject negative militaristic traits like leanings towards war. More importantly, preserve positive militaristic traits like high-levels of discipline and nationalism. Works cited Adams, William Scovell . Edwardian Portraits. UK: Secker and Warberg. 1957 Baden-Powell, Robert. Scouting For Boys: The Original 1908 Edition.

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