In the late 1990s Britain’s armed forces faced a crisis. Dwindling numbers of enlisting soldiers and low retention rates created staffing shortages that threatened operations in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and East Timor. Deep-seated racism, a lack of diversity, and bullying within the forces endangered the military’s morale and public image. To address these problems, in 1998 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) dropped its five-year residency requirement, broadening the pool of applicants to people in over 50 countries. By 2010, 7,895 soldiers from the Commonwealth countries, Ireland, and Nepal were part of the British Army. In *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country*, Vron Ware analyzes the formation of “an integrated, culturally diverse army” or Britain’s 21st century Commonwealth and Foreign soldiers. While neo-imperial powers’ dependence on private contractors has been widely documented, less appreciated are the soldiers that countries such as Britain and the United States recruited through their ties to empire. Ware remedies this omission with an insightful and methodologically rigorous ethnography that draws on two years of participant observation, interviews with new recruits and experienced soldiers, document analysis, and archival work.

*Military Migrants* is helpfully divided into four parts: recruitment, culture, racism, and migration, each of which examines the travails of Commonwealth and Nepalese soldiers from a different perspective. In the Introduction we meet Dennis, Ben, Carlos, and Albert as they declaim the Oath of Allegiance, transitioning from civilian to soldier in a mere ten seconds. Only a week before, the four men arrived from Belize and St. Lucia for a brutal six-month training program at the Infantry Training Centre (ITC) in Yorkshire. Selected through Overseas Pre-
selection Teams (OPTs), a program started in 2001 which sent Army recruiters to countries of the Caribbean and Fiji in order to expedite online applications, the young men had waited over a year before the military permitted them to buy their own plane tickets to the UK. Ware follows these men through their training, illuminating the uniqueness of their lived experience as well as the “echoes of empire” embedded in it (p.11). Several men, for example, joined the Army because of close family ties to the British military: Albert’s grandfather was in the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in World War II and his father attended an officer training course in England, while Dennis’s father was a British soldier stationed in Belize. Through this opening ethnographic vignette Ware humanizes the military migrant’s world, illustrates the burden of representation they labored under, and shows the symbolic work they performed until active recruitment concluded at the end of the decade.

Using myriad data sources, Military Migrants analyzes the emergence, uses, and repercussions of what Ware calls “militarized multiculture” (p.xviii). Most powerful are the interviews Ware skillfully conducts to explicate how racism—both subtle and blatant—works within the workplace and how her participants understand and respond to it. Ware first sets out the difficult conditions under which soldiers must struggle: racial divisions of labor, such as Commonwealth soldiers being assigned the least desirable tasks; the social boundaries between Commonwealth and British-born soldiers, such as the former being considered isolationist when they create their own communities and ethics of care; problematic assumptions about atavistic tendencies among soldiers of color based on false biological notions of racial difference; and the endless frustrations of interacting with unsympathetic and confusing immigration bureaucracies. Ware then highlights the voices of migrants to show how they make sense of such discrimination. In Chapter Six, for example, she recounts the story of a soldier from Ghana, who is asked by a British-born soldier “why are ‘you people’ here?” Exhausted by such questions,
Kwaku nonetheless replies: “We are here to get money. That’s why we are all here. I can tell you we’ve got white people in our country working as well and we don’t ask them, ‘why are you here?’” (p.161).

Another remarkable aspect of *Military Migrants* is the focus on self-organizing undertaken by Commonwealth soldiers and their families to answer back to the inadequacies of MoD and Home Office support systems. As Ware argues, “the British Army owed a great deal to the expertise of migrants themselves, particularly those who felt responsible for the wellbeing of their compatriots” (p.227). In response to the Army’s inability to fully support racial and cultural minorities and migrants through the Army Welfare Services (AWS), the Army Families Federation (AFF), a voluntary organization, tackled the complexities of housing, impending and frequent moves, divorce, deployment, and dependents’ education, providing soldiers and their families with important sources of information and problem-solving techniques. They also conducted research and communicated the results within official military channels. In 2010, for example, the AFF administered a survey on problems emerging from familial separation for Commonwealth troops in Afghanistan, and based on their findings recommended better access to mental health services before, during, and after deployment.

Even more noteworthy is the formation of the tri-service Fiji Support Network (FSN) in 2009. Created to “act as a conduit on policy, information delivery, and dialogue between the MoD and Fijian citizens serving in the UK armed forces”, the FSN established direct lines of communication with the chain of command to highlight the needs of Fijian and Commonwealth families and to demand change in protocol and service provision (p.226-227). The FSN also sought a “uniformity in approach” when addressing cultural issues raised in times of death in service or violations of military law. Through the FSN’s work, the MoD was forced to concede that its own welfare services were not adequate for Commonwealth soldiers. As Ware observes,
though the FSN’s interventions may seem straightforward, in the context of migrants in the armed forces “such an organization represented an extraordinary achievement on the part of the people who negotiated for its existence” (p.227).

Throughout the book, Ware situates the transformation of the British military in the context of other neoliberal restructurings, such as those in social welfare, education, and the labor market. Ware links the emergence of “diversity management” and “diversity expertise” consulting firms of the 1990s to crises in a number of public sectors. Hired to combat racism, promote cultural diversity, and address the changing role of women in the world of work, these firms were part of a “formal recognition” that public institutions were responsible for both preventing racism and sexism internally and promoting diversity as a social good externally (p.41). Within the British Army, firms such as Focus were hired to help create relationships with ethnic minority communities, which would aid in recruitment numbers. The firm Saatchi and Saatchi, which ran a campaign called “Putting the Army Back in Business”, won the Effectiveness Award from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising for helping the military meet recruitment goals (p.39-40). At the same time, Ware is careful to point out just how different working in the military is than, “say, a school, hospital, police station, or corporation” (p.22). Indeed that this ethnography was conducted in a “hard to reach” place combined with Ware’s deft maneuvering within an otherwise closed institution that makes the book such an important text.

In an era of extraordinarily high levels of armed (mis)adventures, *Military Migrants* provides vital insights into some of the most charged aspects of 21st century military culture and militarism. An important strength of this timely, engaging, and readable book—and what distinguishes it from some others—is the clarity of purpose. It is an critical contribution to the literatures on war, peace, and conflict, citizenship and immigration, ethnographic field methods,
political sociology, postcolonial studies, race and racism, and empire. It will be of great interest to a wide audience as the range of perspectives in the book helps us appreciate the role of multiculturalism in the British armed forces. It also helps us understand how attempts to address the symptoms of racism rather than their root causes often produce an increase in both.

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February 2015