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"They Need Our Help": Non-Governmental Organizations and the Subjectifying Dynamics of the Military as Social Cause

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Abstract:
The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan spurred a range of popular activity – from anti-war protests to war boosterism to veterans' advocacy – purporting to "support the troops". Non-governmental organizations, from veterans' welfare organizations to anti-war groups, are crucial to this transformation of "the troops" into a social cause and matter of collective concern. As such, this article proposes an initial qualification of NGO representative practices as a form of media genre, characterized by striking similarity in presentation, structure, and particularly explicitly normative tone. A poststructural discursive approach is utilized to examine the implications of this genre for the production of subjectivities and power relations inherent to "supporting the troops" via a structured analysis of the public-produced texts of a selection of typologically-identified NGOs in the United States and United Kingdom. The article goes on to highlight the ways in which NGO representations counterintuitively objectify those they seek to support, while simultaneously limiting the political possibilities of supporters. Overall, it is argued that within the context of the liberal state, the representations of support produced across the advocacy spectrum work to not only depoliticize conflict but to "apoliticize" support for the troops as a matter of morality.

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Introduction

Since the invasion of Afghanistan by NATO forces in 2001, and with increasing intensity since the 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq, military symbolism has subtly come to pervade the ostensibly "civic" life of many troop-contributing states. In the United States, professional sporting events include tributes to military personnel (Fischer 2014), citizens stop members of the armed forces to thank them for their service (Bacevich 2005, 30), and "support the troops" (StT) yellow ribbons adorn everything from neighbourhood trees to automobile license plates to domestic consumer goods (Stahl 2009). The phenomenon has become increasingly internationalized, evident in Canada, Australia, and, of particular interest to this

article, the United Kingdom. Though minimally present in 1990-91 (Shaw 1996, 26), StT has come to constitute a routinized component of British public discussions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Basham 2013, 23-27; Dixon 2012, 91), and a plethora of pro-military popular practices – such as "Armed Forces Day", an annual Military Awards, and the honouring of military personnel at sporting events – are now apparent (Dixon 2012, 131-2; Kelly 2012, 728). In contrast, however, to the First Gulf War, wherein support for the troops could be read unproblematically as support for the war, today, "supporting the troops" has become a "fragmented and collective discourse" (Stahl 2009 557), unified only by a generalized understanding that the military or, more accurately, "the troops" – the men and women actively serving in the armed forces – are a matter of collective concern. The military has come to be constituted as an apolitical "area of conscience" (Tidy 2015, 5).

The representative practices of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), specifically military-related charities and anti-war/peace groups, are crucial to understanding this somewhat counterintuitive framing of the "troops" as the subject of collective anxiety. The significance of NGOs to the "causification" of the military is indicated by the remarkable post-9/11 growth in the military-related charitable sectors in both the US and the UK. In 2011, the number of charities established to support the military in the UK was found to have tripled every year since 2005 (Telegraph 2011). While precise statistics are not available for all military-related charitable endeavours in the United States, the rapid growth of the veterans' charitable sector since 2000 (a 77 per cent increase compared to a 43 per cent sector average) and 2008 (up 41 per cent compared with 19 per cent across charities overall) may be taken as indicative of the prioritization of "the troops" as a locus for charitable giving and community service (Hrywna 2013). Anti-war NGOs, though underrepresented in the mainstream media (Hayes and Guardino 2010; Murray et al 2008), also play a vital role in public discourse regarding the troops and the global war on terror, as the mass protests of organizations such as the Stop the War Coalition and United for Peace and Justice, as well as the more radical "performance" protests of groups such as CodePink, constitute anti-war/peace groups, collectively, "as a sizable symbolic force" (Pickerill and Webster 2006, 417; Simone 2006) – and often the only identifiable public opposition to war. This paper thus examines the increasing role of civil society organizations in the US and UK in representing "the troops", and thus the status of civil-military relations, in the post-9/11 era. It thus adds voices and perspectives from outside conventional societal authority – the mainstream media and the state – to contemporary analyses of what it means to "support the troops", arguing that there is an aspect of "care" that parallels, and in some cases, obscures, more contractual notions of obligation.

Due to the unique, highly-structured, and explicitly normative nature of NGO representational practices, the article suggests that the public texts (understood broadly) of non-governmental organizations be understood as a form of media genre, implicated in the "mediatization" – the framing, facilitation, and communication (Cattle 2006; 21) – of "the troops'" experience of war. The conceptualization of this charitable media genre facilitates an examination of the ways in which "certain well-intentioned contemporary political projects…theoretical postures" and modes of representation, such as the impulse to "support" the troops, "inadvertently redraw the very configurations and effects of power that they seek to vanquish" (Brown 1995, ix). The article thus examines how the various articulations of "support" constructed by NGOs condition the subjectivities, social relations, and political intelligibility of both "the troops" and their supporters in the context of the global war on terror.

As such, the article proceeds with an initial qualification of charitable textual productions as a potential form of media genre. This is followed by a poststructural theoretical explication of the structure and social function of "support", and its paradoxical potential for repression. The tensions and variations inherent to "support" are subsequently examined empirically, through the structured discourse analysis of the public statements of representative military and peace/anti-war civil society organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom. Finally, the article concludes by situating NGO support for the troops within the context of the overarching liberal social contract and unpacking the implications of this normative structure for effective dissent. Overall, it is argued that rather than empowering members of the military, "support the troops" discourses, reflected and informed by NGOs, serve to collectively "fix" service personnel to a subjectivity of empty heroism, whilst simultaneously substantially restricting the political field of possibility of civilian "supporters".

NGOs[1] and Representation

In an era of professionalized armed forces, most citizens of Western liberal democracies "experience war as a mediated phenomenon…[a] dramatized, mediated, and represented narrative" (Gardner 2008, 109). As a result, the representation of war requires "the existence of a chain of intermediaries" (Boltanski 1999, 17) between the general public and those "doing" war. As argued by Martin Shaw, NGOs, as civil society institutions, fulfill this function by "representing groups within society", such as "the troops", "in broad cultural, political, and ideological senses, both in the context of society self and in relation to the state" (1996, 13 and 60-3). NGOs, in other words, like political authorities and the mass media, are involved in "the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language… link[ing]…concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" (Hall 1997, 17).

Contemporary NGOs, moreover, in contrast to those of the First Gulf War, when "the troops" first became a matter of collective concern, benefit from the increased ability afforded by the Internet to communicate with interested publics independent of the mass media, and corresponding increase in their "control over representation" (Gillan et al 2011, 41). To that end, this article is less interested in the strategic use of technology to further institutional goals (e.g. fundraising or demonstrating) (see Gillan et al 2011; Bennett et al 2003; Seo et al 2009; Briones et al 2011) than identifying the general mode of representation common to normatively-oriented civil society organizations – or what might be understood as an NGO media genre. Media genres may be understood as "'fuzzy' categories" used to classify textual artefacts on the basis of shared characteristics (Chandler 1997), including "formal 'rules'" of construction, level of detail, form of address, and tone (Richardson et al 2013, 9). Genre, in other words, creates expectations as to structure, presentation, and tone – a reasonable homogeneity of form, if not of substance.

The genre-like quality of NGO textual productions is enabled by, and most evident in, their online presence – specifically their websites, press releases, and public statements intended for broader circulation. The websites of both charitable and advocacy/social justice-oriented

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[1] Note that for the purposes of this article "NGOs" refers to public service-oriented civil society organizations – generally charities and advocacy groups – rather than corporations, unions, or political parties etc.

NGOs demonstrate remarkable similarity,[2] typically possessing a highly-branded home page, links to various campaigns relating to their service constituency, an "About Us" section outlining the organization's genesis story, an online store offering organizational merchandise, and a section offering opportunities to "get involved" (and/or donate funds). Adherence to this template thus offers the ability to brand the NGO through striking visuals (e.g. Help for Heroes' soldier on a stretcher) and pithy slogans (e.g. Stop the War Coalition's "Not in My Name") while utilizing the familiarity of the NGO-website structure to establish legitimacy as a "real", effective organization. A key component of the genre's architecture is the incorporation of other communicative media, such as blogs and social media (in other contexts, considered genre in and of themselves, see Richardson et al 2011), offering a means of cultivating an invested online "micro-public" (Carruthers 2008, 74) whilst still disseminating a relatively coherent message (Gillan et al 2001, 43).

The vast majority of such NGOs also post a pseudo-constitutional mission statement, which, in addition to communicating the seriousness of the enterprise, also establishes the highly normative character of NGO discursive representations. As observed by Shaw, the primary distinction between civil society organizations and the media in representing conflict is NGOs' use of univeralist, normatively-charged values to convey an issue from a particular perspective, while the media purports to provide an objective, holistic overview of the general situation (1997, 15). NGOs, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent empirical sections, do convey information regarding war to a broader public (hence their qualification as a form of media), but do so in a way that is explicitly normative, exhortative, and designed to evoke an emotional response. It is this form of representation of a particular issue, such as "the troops", to a third-party audience, for the purpose of ameliorative action and structured by the tropes of organizational legitimacy, that informs the construction of NGO textual production as a particular, albeit limited, form of media genre. This conceptualization is similar to Louise Grayson's proposal of NGO Reportage – photos produced "working for and alongside NGOs" – as a new genre of editorial photography (2014), as each emphasizes the importance of the NGO, *as an NGO*, to both the production and interpretation of particular representations, and representative practices.

NGOs are thus able to translate form into substance, as their "NGO-ness" becomes a critical component not only framing but constituting their specific messages of charity and advocacy. Facilitated by the Internet, NGOs have become not only the medium of a broader socio-political discourse regarding society's relationship with the military, but also part of the *message* in mediating "the troops" to the general public. The implications of this always-already normative representation for the constitution of power relations, subjectivities, and (often unintended) processes of objectification within the charitable endeavor are elucidated in the following theoretical discussion.

"Supportive" Altruism as Regime of Power

This section, drawing upon a poststructural understanding of discourse as socially productive, examines the ways in which the ostensibly normatively-laudable and apolitical calls of non-governmental organizations to "support the troops!" may simultaneously operate as a potentially repressive regime of power. It is thus concerned with explicating the structure and social function of the NGO-driven transformation of StT into a social "cause" (Tidy 2015, 2).

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[2] The selection and analysis of the specific NGOs incorporated into this study is covered in the methodology section. This discussion is meant to be illustrative, highlighting an archetypical form of representation – in keeping with the observation that few "genre" texts fulfil all criteria of the whole (Chandler 1997).

As summarized by Stuart Hall, a poststructural account, informed by the theory of Michel Foucault, considers discourse:

> "[A] group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. …Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But… since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall 1992, 291).

Discourse, in other words, not only provides a means of communicating knowledge and interpreting social reality but actively creates it (see Foucault 2011, 29-43; Edkins 1999, 41-64). StT, then, as any discourse, may be understood as an expression, manifestation, and working of power: diffuse, de-centralized, and "productive of meanings, subject identities, their inter-relationships, and a range of imaginable conduct" (Doty 1996, 299). The common exhortation to "support the troops" constructs an account of related concepts (e.g. warfare), their classification (e.g. legitimate or illegitimate), subject-positions (e.g. citizen, solider, etc.) and the complex and often contradictory relations between them.

Crucially, however, unlike many broader social discourses, such as the "factual" accounts of the news media, which disguise their implication in the workings of power through claims to represent objective knowledge or reality (Foucault 1980 133; Edkins 1999, 12), StT functions through the constitution of an explicitly normative relationship. In this way, StT operates in a manner similar to the provision of "help", which posits an affective, compassionate relationship between those providing help and those receiving it – "good things" done by one group for others. "Help" is not presented as socially "true", per se, but is intersubjectively understood as a well-intentioned, altruistic, and unconditional interaction wherein one individual or group acts to benefit another without expecting anything in return (Gronemeyer 2010, 56). "Support", then, is presented as a matter of morality rather than politics, existing almost in a vacuum of power, as the acknowledged purpose is to aid, rather than control.

As will be demonstrated in the subsequent empirical analysis, however, it is precisely this eschewing of motive – or of politics – that constitutes such dynamics as near-perfect instances of power. According to Gronemeyer, social relationships purportedly premised upon altruism serve as "instrument[s] through which one can impose upon others the obligation of good conduct" (56), as the act of help necessarily produces the subject-position of "recipient" (and, similarly, "benefactor"). "Recipient" is then inflected with a host of expectations as to behaviour, affect, and social positioning – such as dependency, deficiency, gratitude, humility, and, significantly, future improvement – which are simultaneously the result of, and reason for, the provision of help Though purportedly positive rather than punitive, the provision of support operates in a fashion analogous to Foucault's analysis of the law, which demonstrates that in the process of designating crime a social problem and working for its elimination, the legal/penal system actually produces the subject of "criminal" (Foucault 1991, 276-7; Brown 1995, 131). The normative dynamic of altruism thus becomes tautological and self-perpetuating, as aid is provided because the recipients are "needy", and the "needy" are constituted by the receipt of aid. Acts of altruism are simultaneously potentially empowering/beneficial, and a primary axis of subjectification (Brown 1995, 119-121).

The role of NGOs in furthering this process thus becomes clear, as to be deemed a constituency of concern by a public-service group is, by definition, to become a "cause". Understood in this way, it becomes apparent that altruism, be it charity or advocacy, cannot be refused, as it derives not from a spontaneous, pre-discursive relationship of compassion,

but rather an assessment of need, or lack, according to an external standard of "normality" (Gronemeyer 2010, 56-7). Acceptance and performance of "dependent" subjectivity is thus transformed into a prerequisite for social intelligibility, as altruism is "assigned", rather than requested. Altruism may thus be understood as akin to a Foucauldian discipline, wherein "normal" expectations of social behaviour are internalized to the extent that they appear spontaneous and unremarkable, eliding their constitution as the effects of (often coercive) socio-political power (Foucault 1991 168 and 217; Edkins 1999, 12). This has the key implication – particularly important in the context of "supporting the troops" – of removing such dynamics from the realm of the legitimately political, reconstituting them as a matter of private affect and morality, thus naturalizing their existence as a normal, even laudable, aspect of the overall social order.

Method

This study analyses the publicly-produced texts – websites, press releases, pamphlets/brochures etc. – of non-governmental groups engaged in the construction of the military as a social issue. These texts were selected upon the basis of their use of the phrase "support the troops"/"support our troops", or contextually-appropriate synonyms that similarly comment on the normative relationship between society and the military. The texts were sourced from the NGOs' live sites and the Wayback Machine public Internet archive for the duration of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, 2001 to 2015. Due to the nature of online archiving, wherein resources are sporadic prior to 2005/6, substantially more data is available for the latter part of the period. As a result, and appropriate to the illustrative theoretical discussion at hand, the sample better captures general patterns in language use than change over time. The specific texts and quotations discussed within the paper are chosen as exemplars of both the overall discourse, succinctly conveying both the logic of various "modalities" of support and the conventions of the proposed NGO media genre.

The organizations included in this study were selected in accordance with a typology constructed to balance the inclusion of the most prominent organizations (and thus dominant public representations of "the troops" by the non-profit sector) with capturing variation in the overall discourse, to avoid furthering a falsely homogenous reading of the overall phenomenon. The selected organizations thus cover the range of StT discourse, including veterans' welfare NGOs, major general service military NGOs, military morale/supplies NGOs, and anti-war/peace groups. While originally NGOs of each type were selected for the US and UK with the aim of highlighting distinctions between the states, the generally altruistic, private tenor of NGO-promulgated representations of "the troops", interestingly, generally results in the articulation of a counterintuitively univeralist, non-statist discourse. The country-cases are included, in this instance, to demonstrate the noteworthy correspondence between the two.

Modalities of Support

The following empirical analysis utilizes illustrative examples, interpreted in accordance with the preceding theoretical discussion to examine the dynamics of subjectification inherent to NGOs' mediation of "the troops". In doing so, it identifies three "modes" of support evident in the representative practices of military-related non-governmental organizations, roughly aligning with NGO-type: support as protection (morale organizations); support as deserved (major service organizations); and support as inviting good conduct (veterans' welfare organizations). These modes, in addition to highlighting the complexity and ambiguity

inherent to framing support as a matter of altruism, also illustrate three major implications of the NGO representative genre, namely the subjectification of the supported constituency as dependent, the elision of particular individuals into a collective, passive, subject, and the imposition of an obligation of "good conduct" upon the recipients of support. That such processes of subjectification adhere to members of the military, culturally a far "harder case" than traditional NGO service-groups such as impoverished children, speaks to the overall power of the apolitical, affective representation typical of the genre.

Support as Protection

As StT has come to constitute a "discursive legacy" – a "well-established, repetitive, restrictive and culturally recognized way of talking and writing about a particular issue over time" (Coy et al 2008, 163) – it is unsurprising that a predominant strain of current StT discourse maintains the Gulf War equation of supporting the troops with supporting the war. To select a polemical example, for instance, the US NGO AmericanSnipers, founded in 2003 to provide sniper equipment directly to frontline military personnel, declares: "These special troops [snipers] and the troops that support their missions (machine gunners and medics) are America's finest…And it is our single-minded goal to help them…No matter what." (2014). AmericanSnipers is an extreme illustration of a burgeoning group of "morale" NGOs dedicated to "supporting the troops" through the provision of material items, from personal toiletries to banana bread to explicit affirmations in the form of letters from school children and email messages from the public (Flowers 2005). The website of uk4u Thanks!, a UK charity providing Christmas boxes to military personnel, articulates a similar formulation of support-as-help, citing an MoD endorsement that "Knowing that the public are behind them when they are working in often very difficult conditions, especially at this time, is a real morale boost for our Servicemen and women" (2009). Others spell it out even more flatly: the homepage of the USO (the US United Services Organization) proclaims, "They [the troops] Need Our Help" (2014).

The overall impression left by such constructions is that support is directly connected to the success and wellbeing of the military abroad, through the subtle implication that should support not be forthcoming, they would be worse for it. In keeping with the tautological operation of altruism described above, the troops are diagnosed and constituted as requiring support by the act of its provision. Through the insistence upon its importance, this framing actually has the effect of suggesting that without support, the troops could not function – to the extent that it comes to form a condition of their existence *as* troops. Though not representative of mainstream non-governmental organizations, the common slogan "If you don't support the troops, please stand in front of them" (ArmorforTroops.org 2004) makes this logic explicit. By suggesting that violence is the appropriate response to non-support, it construes its absence as a threat, and the troops as vulnerable to some indeterminate harm. As described by Huiskamp, this portrayal of the troops as not simply appreciating, but subtly *dependent* upon support may be read as a reflection of the belief, a legacy of Vietnam, that "showing national unity and citizen support for the troops has a critical operational value" that will "maximize the soldier's chances of survival" (2011, 291).

It is also notable that "the troops" are rarely depicted as actively requesting support, in accordance with Gronemeyer's observation that "the cry for help of a person in need is rarely any longer the occasion for help. Help is much more often the indispensable, compulsory, consequence of a need…that has been diagnosed from without" (2010, 54). Members of the military, in an ironic matter not dissimilar to civilians affected by war, have little control over

their own representation: "[I]nformation about and images of them are produced by third parties [NGOs] who transmit these to wider audiences…they depend on institutions they have not created and do not control, for the effectiveness of their representation" (Shaw 1996, 12). At this level, "supporting the troops" may be read as a relatively linear process of subjectification, wherein the unsolicited provision of support comes to constitute the troops as paradoxically agentless subjects, dependent upon their representation by charitable others for survival. In the aggregate, this form of representation thus portrays "the troops" as requiring *protection,* a striking contrast to the typical image of the military as an instrument of force.

Support as Deserved?

Intuitively, of course, this construction of the troops as imperiled exists in uneasy tension with dominant cultural narratives lauding "the soldier" as a heroic, autonomous agent (Managhan 2011, 451). As neither the US nor the UK currently mandate conscription, only a minute portion of the population serves. As a result, the soldier is widely regarded as "the best of us", taking on the "unlimited liability" and risking his (for the figure is usually male) life for the whole (Cowen 2008, 17). The vast majority of StT discourse – particularly that propagated by major service/advocacy organizations – valorizes service personnel in line with conventional notions of militarized masculinity (see Barrett 1996). In a typical iteration, for instance, the US NGO Veterans of Foreign Wars praises "our brave men and women" who "are sacrificing so much to keep us free" (n.d.). The UK Help for Heroes proclaims, alongside a logo depicting two foot soldiers carrying a wounded colleague, that their organization is "All about the blokes", invoking a stereotypical image of the valiant front-line combat soldier (H4H 2011). The discourse frequently references the "good soldier" – brave, patriotic, and engaged in combat (see Zehfuss 2012). These soldiers are also autonomous liberal agents, as their heroism, as explicated by Help for Heroes, derives from the fact that they "volunteer[ed] to join the Armed Forces, knowing that one day they may have to risk it all" (2011). Within modern liberal society, the soldier is presented as something of a super-citizen, whose service not only distinguishes them as morally superior, but entitles them to the best support and social welfare (Cowen, 2008 3-24).

The obvious tension between this agential citizen-soldier and the comparatively passive, dependent "troops" derives from the contrast in both the scale and temporality of the relevant subject-position. A careful examination of the above tropes reveals that the "heroic agency" of the soldier derives from their *decision* "to put their lives on the line in defense of their country – and their fellow citizens" (American Legion, n.d.). As the last clause of this statement suggests, at the time of the defining action, the figure in question is less a soldier than a citizen. Heroism derives from the voluntary assumption of risk, and the corresponding exception of the volunteer from the rights and protections to which they are otherwise entitled (Cowen 2008, 16; MacLeish 2013, 144). The telling omission, here, of the soldier's implicit willingness to commit violence makes the heroic, agential soldier and the objectified, dependent troops easier to square (see Tidy 2015, 4). With the strong exceptions of government- and media-circulated accounts of individual bravery under fire – usually in defense of fallen comrades – the range of experiences that comprise the life of a soldier are rarely represented. This mirrors Silvestri's observation that in YouTube videos of military homecomings, private, affective representations of serving personnel similar to those produced by NGOs, the "actual act of warfare is not depicted or even addressed" (2013, 108).

The closest NGO discourse comes to acknowledging the violence associated with military service is generally the assertion, raised above, that supporting the troops necessarily entails supporting the war. Even these instances, however, tend to leave the sentiment at that, without attributing specific agency to the troops (as enacting war? as victimized by war?), thus leaving the relationship between the two somewhat ambiguous. Heroism thus stems more from the choice to join the military than anything inherent to being "the troops". In this way, the ultra-agency of the masculine combat soldier is parsed from the dependence of the passive, objectified – almost fetishized – collective subject of the troops. As described by Joanna Tidy, such "anonymizing representations" of the military neutralize potentially-controversial individuals, actions, or conflicts by generalizing "the troops" into "ahistoric and apolitical ciphers", effectively sidestepping violence (2015, 7). While the figure of the soldier, as a liberal everyman, might have a legitimate claim upon support, "the troops", as a *collective* phantasm, may yet remain defined by, and dependent upon, it – thus substantially contributing to the depoliticization of conflict.

Support as "Inviting" Good Conduct

Despite its entanglement with the parallel subjectification of members of the military as idealized soldiers, NGO representations of "the troops" contain an implicit, yet imperative, invitation to "good conduct" (Gronemeyer 2010 57).[3] Though the abstract "troops" is independent of, and irreducible to, individual members of the military, its construction as "real" comes to discipline those presumed to make it up. Paramount within this range of conduct is the obligation of gratitude. Nearly all morale and veterans' welfare NGOs publicize messages, anecdotes, and videos from serving military personnel, veterans, and, particularly, the wounded. This message, one of pages posted by Operation Gratitude, which provides care packages to deployed US personnel, is typical of the form:

"I wanted to send a quick note to you and thank you for your generous care package filled with Jeff Foxworthy Energy Drinks. With our frantic pace and daily combat operations, these drinks have kept my fighter pilots sharp and healthy. We spend 6-7 hours on edge in a fighter cockpit supporting brave Americans on the ground under unimaginable stress. We all very much appreciate your great support. LTCOL C.J." (2015).

In content, the message validates the provision of support by voicing appreciation and reinforces the constitution of support as "necessary" through the reference to the operational utility of the material items provided. At the same time, the performance of the message as *thanks*, and its apparent authenticity as "user-generated content" (Jenkins ctd in Silvestri 2013, 102), serves to frame the supportive relationship as a normal social interaction, and affirm it as a form of altruism. Though appearing to offer agency to "the troops", the presentation of *lists* of such messages, their editorial selection by the NGO, and their repetition of "grateful" scripts instead incorporates this material into the overarching representative repertoire of the NGO. The simulation of an artificial interaction between the supported and the supporters is thus a key aspect of both the NGO mediation of the troops' war for the general public, and the charitable genre. The troops are instrumentalized, as the procurement and dissemination of their thanks enables the organization to justify its mandate, generate funds, and induce a *frisson* of moral worth amongst the contributing public. As

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[3] Though beyond the scope of this article, it must be acknowledged that the "good soldier" similarly presents an invitation to a certain form of conduct – a particular ideal of militarized masculinity. This comprises another process of subjectification, eliding the experiences of the many military personnel whose service is not encompassed within the universalized norm (see Barrett 1996).

observed by Boltanski, the "tender-heartedness" evoked by the difficulties of others can be "no more than selfish enjoyment unaware of itself" (1999, 115).

This perverse tendency of altruism to compel appreciation for the charitable is also evident, somewhat ironically, in the range of popular practices intended to honour the troops. As described by Kenneth MacLeish in his ethnography of Fort Hood, as at many US and UK military bases, the military warehouses the well-meaning tokens sent by charities, school children, and the public, and routinely tasks volunteers with wrangling soldiers to appear at "Welcome Home" rallies and be thanked for their service (2013, 205 and 182). Similarly, the growing trend of recognizing service personnel at sporting events, supported by charities such as the UK Tickets for Troops (football and rugby) or the US Birdies for the Brave (golf), may be read as similarly voyeuristic practices of compelling soldiers to perform "troopness", present themselves to be supported and, in turn, express gratitude (Kelly 2012, 728-731). These, in turn, mirror state practices of commemoration, wherein noteworthy, often wounded, soldiers are presented at official events – such as the US State of the Union – as heroic exemplars (Achter 2010 51-2). In each instance, the personal experiences of the individuals represented to the public as "soldier" are not only appropriated, but *created*, constituting a mandatory, ostensibly venerated subject-position that demands satisfaction. Significantly, such interactions can be traumatic, as StT becomes a voyeuristic invitation to recount the experience of war, or simply dissonant in its framing of experiences which may be among the worst of the recipient's life (MacLeish 2013, 196-7). The provision of support, thus "commodifies members of the Armed Forces" as a charitable cause "for the audience's pleasure and consumption" (Fischer 2014, 214; Berlant 2004, 5).

For wounded veterans, as observed by Zoe Wool, this dynamic of subjectification is further complicated by the fact that individuals find themselves "nominated" as a "hero or sacrificial victim", simultaneously infinitely deserving and direly in need (2011, 160). In this case, the obligation of "good conduct" aligns not only with the performance of stereotypical militarized masculinity and gracious appreciation, but also a resumption of normality. The discourse of veterans' welfare organizations, such as the UK Blind and Limbless Ex-Servicemens' Association, typically reference a guided transition away from the military with "the clear aim of living full and independent lives" (n.d.). More explicitly, the US NGO Wounded Warrior Project states as its mission: "To foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history" (n.d.). On the home front, the survival of "the troops" is thus attached to the provision of support in a subtler way, as key to "reapproach[ing] normality" (Gronemeyer 2010, 69). The suggestion that service members are not currently "well-adjusted" has the parallel effect of suggesting the troops are *abnormal* within liberal society. Charity and advocacy, though well-meaning and often effective in improving wellbeing, contain an implicit obligation for the recipient to "become normal", and a hope that the "war veteran will be reincarnated as a whole citizen" (Achter 2010, 64). Wounded veterans are thus objectified by the altruistic impulse, reduced to/defined by their bodily injury, constantly framed as a form of "deficiency" (64) – itself intimately tied to their "militaryness". In this way, the very premise for support becomes the rationale for the solicitation of its renunciation. As the veteran is increasingly defined by his/her body (Achter 2010 48), the context of their injury – war – is unrepresented by NGOs, and fades from the discourse.

Wounded veterans are thus subject to an extreme version of the objectifying dynamics inherent to StT as a whole. They are in the unenviable position of having the primary basis of their social identification premised upon a purportedly apolitical relationship of dependence,

thus undermining the political force of any claims they might make – and corresponding ability to exercise meaningful agency. "Support" discursively assigns individual members of the military to the "troops", rendering it an unavoidable site of social intelligibility. The regulatory force of StT, moreover, is amplified by its articulation by non-governmental organizations in the idiom of kindness and morality, as it frames support as a private, affective matter of *care*.

Altruism Turned Back on Itself: Support and the Liberal State

The stability of this discourse of caring support, however, is substantially troubled by the location of these NGOs within the context of the liberal state, and the simultaneous constitution of supporters as *citizens*. The final substantive discussion of the article thus plays out this dynamic, examining the discourse of both military-related NGOs and, particularly, peace/anti-war groups. Briefly, the basic premise of the liberal social contract holds that in return for protection from the violence stemming from a) the state of nature between individuals and b) the anarchic international, individuals delegate their own sovereignty to the state, bestowing upon it a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As highlighted by Asad, however, in practice, the realization of this monopoly requires that "citizen soldiers be prepared to kill and die" for the state (2007, 60-1), indicating a corollary bargain wherein individuals accept that "to be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state" (Butler 2009, 26). Soldiers, through the physical performance of violence and symbolic association with the state (Silvestri 2013, 105), are constructed as protecting society – itself a process of domination (Brown 1995, 15).[4] The subject-position of "supporter" is thus premised upon, and secondary to, an initial relationship of subjectification as the "protectees" of the military. "Support" cannot be read independent of the liberal military contract, nor can it be reduced to a mere affective corollary. This sets up an ambivalent dynamic within the representational practices of NGOs, whose rhetorical and genre conventions attempt to instantiate a relationship of private affect upon the basis of universal values (i.e. the alleviation of suffering and bettering of the less fortunate) rather than the particularistic community of the state.

Support as Compulsory

This ambivalence is perhaps most evident in the frequent assertion, reflected and reproduced by military-related NGOs, that, in keeping with its affective logic, the provision of "support", unlike particular conflicts, is not a matter of politics. As outlined by Help for Heroes, with respect to its mission of supporting the wounded:

> "H4H is strictly non-political. We accept that wars happen under any government and seek to support those people wounded in war, not to comment on the reasons behind such conflicts. Wars are brutal and Servicemen and women are injured almost daily - we can't prevent this, but together, we can help those who are wounded in the service of our country to recover…" (2011).

This formulation – an uncommonly direct elucidation of the logic underlying the common sentiment that once conflict has begun, the troops must be supported, as *fait accompli* – simultaneously demonstrates both moral conviction and a lack of agency. Though H4H and

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[4] This picture is triply complicated if one considers the ways in which soldiers, and military intervention in general, are often portrayed as for the benefit of the citizens of Afghanistan/Iraq – presenting war itself as a form of help that is itself unrefusable.

its donors theoretically occupy a comparatively empowered position within the subjectifying dynamics of StT discourse – as beneficent patrons essential to soldiers' operational success and post-deployment normalization – the above statement speaks to the bounded nature of "support". In asserting that "wars happen under any government", and that therefore "we" are unable to prevent war or injury as a matter of *fact*, the discourse simultaneously reflects and reifies the operation of StT within the liberal military contract (see Tidy 2015, 9-10). The altruistic impulse inherent to most people's experience of StT is turned back on itself, as the purportedly apolitical desire to help results in the abdication of political agency with respect to war – what Berlant describes as "strong patriotic identification mixed with feelings of practical political powerlessness" (1997, 4).

This construction highlights a tension within the purportedly altruistic StT discourse, which, though maintaining a fairly stable dynamic of subjectification towards "the troops", is undershot with the invocation of *obligation*. In its promotional material encouraging people to volunteer, the Royal British Legion lists "repay[ing] the debt to our service men and women" as a primary reason for participation (2003). Other, subtler articulations of StT also contain this notion of duty, usually within the context of implied reciprocity. The American Legion's "Community Covenant" program, for instance, asks local business to sign a symbolic covenant honouring the service and sacrifice of military personnel for the greater good (2009). In this context, StT appears to be not simply about support as charity, but also, potentially, thanks – itself an obligated performance similar to that exhibited by the troops themselves. Similarly, NGOs such as the UK Soldier's Charity frequently offer an online portal for citizens/supporters to thank "the troops" for their service, often in extremely effusive terms (n.d.).

As significant, however, as is this thread of thanks, it is important not to recast the entire phenomenon as simply the conveyance of gratitude. To do so would risk eliding the processes of subjectification described in the previous sections, and reifying its altruistic, apolitical frame. Instead, this relationship may be productively interpreted as one of parallel, mutually-constitutive, yet distinct subjectification – of society to the military within the liberal military contract, as well as (subsequently and simultaneously) the troops to supporters. Supporting the troops, in other words, is "compulsory" – a condition, for supporters, of membership in the community and, by extension, political intelligibility (Managhan 2011, 441-3). In this way, the obligation underlying StT may be understood as a rehearsal of the overarching protective dynamic between the military and society. This process is most evident in the discursive references to the obligation to remember the fallen often made in conjunction with StT. The Royal British Legion, for example, in its Remembrance Appeal, notes that "Thousands of ex-Service people turn to us every month and it is our duty to remember the living as well as those who gave their lives for this country" (2004). A line of continuity is drawn between the soldiers of today, and those of the past, suggesting that the duty of commemoration and remembrance accrues from a more enduring, structural relationship than that of the seemingly-spontaneous iterations of support.

Counter-intuitively, then, despite their "civil" identity and eschewing of politics, NGO representations of "the troops" reify and reproduce an idealized vision of the liberal military contract. Though charitable supporters are themselves rarely concretely represented – as they are, instead, invited to observe the representation/mediation of "the troops" – they yet hover as an unmarked presence upon which the possibility of intelligible representation depends. In highlighting an obligation to "support for the troops", be it in the form of care packages or memorialization, NGOs interpellate the general public simultaneously as potential donors and

as citizens, belying the purportedly private, spontaneous nature of not only its own philanthropic practices, but also those of supporters.

Support as Depoliticizing

The compulsory nature, and gravest consequence, of the dual subjectification of supporters-as-society is most evident in the discourse(s) produced by the peace (now, tellingly, more frequently referred to as the anti-war) movement. Amongst anti-war groups, such as Military Families Speak Out, "Support the troops, bring them home, and take care of them when they get here", has become a common refrain (n.d). This construction perpetuates the constitution of "the troops" as dependent, as they are implicitly vulnerable to harm on the battlefield, and in need of care once they return – in many ways, a recombination of the StT-in-war and StT-as-veterans representations previously discussed. Many anti-war groups, such as CodePink, moreover, articulate StT in terms of affective interpersonal ties, proclaiming they "Love the Troops, Hate the War" (2010).

At one level, such language is a means of strategic self-representation, distancing NGOs from the post-Vietnam caricature of protesters as "anti-troop" (see Coy et al 2008), and attempting to ensure a fair hearing for the anti-war message. This highlights the constraints of representational authority drawn from adherence to genre (Richardson et al 2013, 9), as the constitution of "the troops" as social cause compels anti-war groups, in order to preserve the integrity of their charitable image, and subsequent rhetoric, to voice their support. The anti-war engagement with StT also reflects the extent to which, at a deeper level, "supporting the troops" has increasingly become, in the US and the UK, a Shibboleth of political participation in the guise of an apolitical, moral disposition. As described by Tina Managhan, StT has become, "more or less, a condition of legitimate dissent" (2011, 442). Similar to the way in which the "Help for Heroes" strain of StT abdicates any political responsibility for specific wars (and, correspondingly, ends up indirectly subsidizing them), anti-war groups reify the apparent impossibility of *not* supporting the troops. Even more so than other organizations, peace groups are placed in the position of being tautologically obligated to "support the troops" solely upon the basis of their "troopness", as the "support" which enables their dissent also limits it (Managhan 2011, 447). It thus seems impossible not to support the troops without opposing or opting out of the polity. The common activist slogan "Not in My Name" (Stop the War Coalition n.d.) is thus co-opted *prima facie*, as the acceptance/articulation of the obligation to StT references the compulsory membership in the liberal social contract within which such activities are embedded; in a sense, within the current social imaginary, wars are always already in the name of all.

As observed by Jenkings et al, the denial of politics within an ostensibly personal, moral relationship between society and "the troops", bolstered by the "authentic" mediation of civil society organizations, thus severely constricts meaningful dissent to war, as it becomes possible to oppose a specific war (.g. Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.), but insensible to oppose war *generally* (2012, 361). Voicing a socially intelligible pacifism – alluding, as it does, to a future redundancy of militaries, and implicitly casting aspersions as to their moral worth – becomes politically untenable. The framing of "the troops" as victims also makes it more difficult to address the violence of the military, as war comes to appear as an agentless calamity, much like a natural disaster, that befalls everyone. The particular conflicts of the present may therefore be depoliticized, or even legitimised, by the extension of unquestioning popular concern for their participants (361), while the practice of support itself is rendered as

apolitical, as an obligation of citizenship is transformed, by the idiom of charitable care, into a universal moral value.

Conclusion

The construction of an issue as apolitical "cannot be anything other than intensely political" (Tidy 2015, 10), and, while never fully convincing, requires substantial representational work by a variety of societal actors. This article has highlighted the ways in which the representational practices of NGOs, in substantive content and as altruistic "genre", facilitate the depoliticization of conflict and apoliticization of military support through the construction of "the troops" as a dependent, passive collective constituency, and assign the amelioration of their condition to the "better-off" supporters. As these organizations work in an idiom of private affect, legitimized by their apparent independence of the state and, ironically, denial of politics, their discourse appears "spontaneous and temporary" (Jenkings et al 2012, 361), further instantiating support of the troops, for their own sake, as a matter of morality. This subjectifies those represented with the discourse – both troops and society – as their mutual embeddedness within the context of the liberal state compels certain forms of "good conduct" disconnected from personal experience or inclination. The casting of "supporting the troops" as, fundamentally, a series of private relationships of altruism, with their crucial claims to apolitics, are thus, paradoxically, central to upholding the liberal military contract and overall normative order.

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