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The Hero
The Monster
The Wife

Geographies of remaking and reclaiming the contemporary military 'hero'

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Abstract

Who is the military hero? What does he represent? And, how is he remade and brought into recognition? This thesis uses four diverse 'sites of remaking' to explore these questions, specifically drawing on the Plymouth military community theatre project *Boots at the Door*, the Invictus Games, Help for Heroes, and the Military Wives Choir. Using these sites, I argue that the remaking and reclaiming of the hero in the framing of war takes place through complex, spatially and temporally situated negotiations which mobilise not only the hero subject himself, but also his performative others. This research draws into conversation feminist theory from Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and Lauren Berlant with existing literature in critical military studies and political theory. Crucially, I argue that Butler's (2009) analysis of the frame does not go far enough in telling us how it is that the frame might function. The research presented in this thesis helps to give texture and detail to our understanding of the framing of war, and allows us to consider how the hero might function within it as a *deferred promise of happiness* (Ahmed 2010).

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List of Abbreviations

BBBR – Big Battlefield Bike Ride

BNP – British National Party

BSA – British Sociological Association

EDL – English Defence League

H4H – Help for Heroes

MoD – Ministry of Defence

RBL – Royal British Legion

SSAFA – Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association

WoT – War on Terror

Statement of Copyright

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They say that doing a PhD is more of an emotional journey (battle?) than an intellectual one. For me, this really rings true. While the past three or so years have certainly been the most intellectually challenging and rewarding of my life so far, there have been many moments of struggle. That I have completed this thesis is in large part a testament to the wonderful (and patient!) people I have around me.

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To David Newman, everything.

For Dave, who got me through.

"Sing, Muse, of the man who, wary and wise,

Over time, and across far off lands,

Wasted and destroyed the sacred town of Troy"

- *Boots at the Door*

1. Narratives of Heroism and Sacrifice: An Introduction

The Hero

On the afternoon of the 22nd of May 2013, a man was butchered to death in Woolwich, London. Early news reports indicated "fair suspicion" that the brutal attack was terror related, with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) "urgently" looking into reports that the victim was a soldier. Before the body had even been identified, concern among the general public that the victim had been a member of the armed forces was growing with considerable momentum, illustrated not least by the Facebook page titled "RIP Woolwich Soldier – RIP to a hero" which sprung up on the very same day of the attack, and which quickly gained thousands of 'likes'.

The victim of the Woolwich attack was soon identified as 25 year old Drummer Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. We learned that he was attacked near the perimeter of the Royal Artillery Barracks where he was stationed, and that his attackers had identified him as a member of the armed forces by his camouflage rucksack and Help for Heroes t-shirt. In the week following the attack, Help for Heroes received more than £600,000 in donations and pledges, causing the website to crash due to a high level of

activity[1]. Two JustGiving pages, one for Help for Heroes and one opened in Rigby's memory titled "RIP Woolwich Soldier", raised £19,828 and £106,240 respectively in the six days following the attack.

Against his family's wishes, Rigby's name was soon used to mobilise support for the English Defence League (EDL) and the British National Party (BNP), with the latter using Rigby's murder as a tool in their 2014 party political broadcast. In the broadcast, a middle aged war veteran stands beside a war memorial, looks over his shoulder and whispers to the audience in a thick Liverpudlian accent; "*Election day is the anniversary of Lee Rigby's murder…it's our duty to vote BNP and restore capital punishment for such horrific crimes*" (BNP 2014). Lee Rigby became a subject who no longer belonged to his family, having been reclaimed and remade[2] by the national imagination and sovereign state. More than the specific loss of a son, a husband, a father, Rigby was reclaimed and remade as a "hero" lost to the nation.

The murder of Lee Rigby is where the story of this thesis begins. As a subject, Rigby brings to light the politics of the military hero within the sovereign imagination. He became a figure around whom "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) congealed and circulated, an embodiment of 'our boys' in the armed forces, and in his murder we were brought face to face with the hero's monstrous terrorist 'other'. Having served for six months in Afghanistan, and in death leaving behind a grieving wife and child, Rigby became an ideal character around whom narratives of heroism and sacrifice could circulate in a national tale of 'good' versus 'evil'.

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[1] According to ThirdSector.com, 28th May 2013

[2] These terms are important to the overall argument of this thesis, and so will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter, with the distinctions between them fleshed out.

What does it mean to call someone a hero? The figure of the hero is fantastical, a being who dwells in the realms of fiction, fantasy, mythology, legend. The hero is a vehicle around whom "lessons about how life should be lived" circulate (Ross 2002: 306), a metaphor for morality and justice. He[3] is a character who challenges the forces of evil, and is as such an embodiment of 'us', of an imagined community (Anderson 1991), of all that we are as a nation. It is not an apolitical act to call someone a hero. To do so is to assign to them an identity within a much wider framework of ethics and righteousness, to locate them in a transcendent world in which they are beyond critique. To name someone a hero simply by virtue of them being in the armed forces points to a much broader politics of the sovereign state[4], a politics which lies at the very heart of this thesis.

The popular and enduring rhetoric surrounding 'our boys' in the armed forces affirms the narratives of belonging and nationhood in which the hero is himself embedded. They are associated with generations of heroes, aligned with heroism as a linear consequence of their membership of the armed forces. Such rhetoric points to the gendering of the hero, as a subject who embodies the masculine protector role of the sovereign state over its people (Hooper 2012). He is rooted in ideas of hegemonic masculinity, strength, bravery, and protection, and indeed this imagination plays out in the very performativity of the hero, as later chapters in this thesis show. The gendering of heroic

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[3] This thesis will refer to the military hero figure as 'he', as he is an inherently gendered subject and rooted in ideas of hegemonic masculinity, bravery and physical strength (see Higate 2003; Hopton 2003). This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

[4] Throughout this thesis the sovereign state will be shown to exist and act through multiple registers, an approach rooted in an understanding of sovereignty and state power as working through a "loosely assembled global system" (Connolly 2004: 34). This thesis will see 'the state' primarily as an imagination, one which takes countless material and discursive forms including but not limited to individual members of the armed forces (or 'petty sovereigns', see Butler 2004), the government and their policies, and indeed the circulating rhetoric regarding state security and nationhood.

military narratives plays out elsewhere in relation to female soldiers[5]. For example, Howard & Prividera (2004) use the 'rescue' of prisoner of war Private Jessica Lynch to show how her mobilisation in media narratives as a "submissive female archetype" serves to "demonstrate US military prowess that encourages masculine constructions of warrior heroes" (p89: see also Prividera & Howard 2006)[6]. Indeed, Sjoberg (2007) notes that even in media representations of Lynch as 'heroic', emphasis was placed on how Lynch was brave *beyond her femininity*, portraying her as anomalous rather than archetypal. In contrast Lynndie England, the female soldier involved in the Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse scandal, took on the role of the "fallen woman" in media coverage, with her professional and personal behaviour framed in relation to the warrior hero archetype (Howard & Prividera 2008). Speaking of the contrast between the story of Jessica Lynch and that of Lynndie England and other women involved in the tortures at Abu Ghraib, Sjoberg (2007) notes that;

> "*Jessica Lynch's hero story was plastered on the television, in newspapers, and even in a made-for-television movie; her gender-role story could be made to fit an ideal-type of militarized femininity. The women at Abu Ghraib by contrast were swept under the carpet, or more accurately, appeared only in so far as they were compared (unfavourably) to Lynch. It is not that their behaviour was typical of women soldiers, or that it had anything to do with their being women. Instead, the media, the USA and a world full of socially constructed*

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[5] Work in this area has shed light on a number of militarised femininities, including but not limited to those of 'Beautiful Souls' (Elshtain 1992, the feminised other to the warrior hero discussed further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6), and the lipstick and high-heel wearing female soldier who is militarised, but feminine (Enloe 2000; see also Sjoberg 2007).

[6] This has been further discussed by Dowler (2002) in relation to the gendering of war narratives post-9/11, in which we can see the "tendency to masculinize the heroes of the attack as gallant warriors and ignore the contributions of women firefighters, police officers and rescue workers who had also risked their lives" (p159).

and reinforced gender stereotypes were not ready for the reality of women sexual abusers" (p90).

As Sjoberg (2007) tells us, Jessica Lynch was held up as an icon of controlled militarised femininity (see also Enloe 2000), while Lynndie England and others posed a threat to this established order, and so were "swept under the carpet". Another example of how the gendering of heroic narratives plays out in complex ways can be seen in the figure of Chelsea Manning, the former soldier of the US Army convicted of espionage in 2013. In Manning, the relation between the figure of the 'traitor' and the gendering of her story playing out in the dominant media narrative becomes clear, as we can see how the transgender anti-hero subjectivity is written in relation to the masculine and patriotic hero[7]. Chelsea Manning was renounced, disavowed, and rendered a monstrous character who could not be recuperated by the sovereign state. In all of these examples, we can see how the gendering of the warrior hero archetype and his others (the fallen woman, the submissive female soldier, the traitor) is crucial to their functioning within state narratives.

The "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) which embed Rigby and other 'fallen heroes' as subjects within the national imagination are not new; rather, there are clear historical roots to the notion of military heroism[8]. Historically, there has been great import to remaking wounded or deceased soldiers as heroes, in order to preserve the relationship between masculinity and the state (see Caso 2016; Bourke 1996; Bösl 2013). Indeed, we

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[7] Chelsea Manning offers an interesting example to interrogate some of the contentions of this thesis further, and so I return to her story in the concluding chapter.

[8] This thesis does not attempt to provide a genealogy of the hero. However, we can see moments and examples from history in which a particular framing of the hero is dominant, and these are important to recognise.

have seen the persistent rhetoric regarding national duty throughout history, as soldiers have been framed as belonging to the state, literally embodiments of national values and 'us' against 'them'. Crucially, the framing and claiming of the soldier by the state requires a negotiation of the curious political position occupied by the armed forces, articulated by Jenny Edkins in this way;

> *"We could say that servicemen and women belong to the nation-state. They have been taken out of the everyday realm of civilian life. They serve the nation: they kill and die for it… Narratives of heroism and sacrifice in the aftermath of war underscore the strange position of military personnel, especially civilian conscripts: they have no choice but to die, yet their deaths are scripted as sacrifice"* (Edkins 2011: 131-132).

As Edkins outlines, the "strange position" of military personnel between service to the state and sacrifice relies upon a narrative of heroism and belonging, in which the hero is claimed by and on behalf of the state. That the military are willingly sacrificed by the state shows the necessity of the heroic narrative, a necessity which is unpacked in much more depth in Chapter 2. Important to note here, however, is that the curious position of the soldier necessitates both a *reclaiming* and *remaking* of the hero, processes which play out in different ways. To reclaim the hero is to discursively reformulate the subject within a narrative of sacrifice that by its very nature prioritises the concerns of the state. At a more complex level, to remake the hero is to establish a different kind of 'whole' subject and his relation to the state. In both of these processes, the willing sacrifice of the hero is negotiated as a necessity for the state.

So, why is it important and timely to study this phenomenon now, in the contemporary context? While narratives of heroism and sacrifice surrounding the armed forces are not new, the way in which they have come to be

entangled with everyday life and popular culture has undeniably changed over time. As I will show in the following paragraphs, the hero figure has come to be brought into recognition through countless banal sites, ranging from the "support our wounded" rhetoric of Help for Heroes which circulates through civil society via wristbands, mugs, and hooded sweatshirts, to the chart-topping Military Wives Choir playing on Radio 1, or Prince Harry's feverish promotion of the Invictus Games on Twitter. In all of these examples, what we see is not only a claiming of the heroic subject in a way which recognises but, crucially, *remakes* the violence of warfare[9], but also the mobilisation in this process of the hero's 'performative others' such as the military wife. Indeed, it is in their 'mundane-ness' that these processes become so powerful, as in their imperceptibility they are rendered difficult or even impossible to challenge and critique. As I will show, what is particularly interesting in the contemporary context is the nuanced practices through which the complex hero/state narrative plays out. Indeed, while the hero figure is clearly rooted to a large extent in dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity as outlined by Higate (2003) and Hockey (2003), more recent literature has begun to shed light on the complexity of modern military masculinity, and indeed on the new ways in which military casualties of modern conflict are celebrated and mourned (Zehfuss 2009; King 2010), and so the contemporary context is interesting to consider in light of this (see Chapter 2).

This narrative has clearly been troubled in the face of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The characterisation of the soldier as a heroic and moral defender of the nation was disturbed by the so-called 'War on Terror' (WoT), a war of doubtful legitimacy for which public support was low (Kelly 2012).

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[9] This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

Increasing concern over the rising numbers of casualties, "embarrassment over alleged allied war crimes (see Leigh 2010), increasing realisation of continued political instability in Afghanistan despite years of occupation, and evidence that UK military action has increased the risk of terrorism to British citizens (Manningham-Buller 2010)" all contributed to the public disillusion with the war, and concerns over Britain's role (Kelly 2012: 724). In this political climate, the status of individual members of the armed forces themselves as moral and just defenders of the nation was thrown into confusion. What follows was, as Kelly (2012) tells us, "a discursive formation circumventing questions of political legitimacy", which became "institutionalised as *the* way to frame the WoT" (p724, emphasis in original). At this point in the early twenty-first century, as the discourses of a 'war on terror' begin to erode, we start to see a new phenomenon in contemporary militarism emerge. In this discursive formation, the heroic figure of the soldier was required to be reclaimed and celebrated in *renewed* ways. As such, the contemporary manifestation of this figure is unique.

The year 2007 sees the founding of Help for Heroes, a UK military charity which aims to *"[support] those with injuries and illnesses sustained while serving in the British Armed Forces. No matter when someone served, we give them the support they need to lead active, independent and fulfilling lives"* (Help for Heroes 2017a). More than other similar charities such as the Royal British Legion and SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Families Association), Help for Heroes mobilise in the general public a sense of obligation, by claiming that "*Help for Heroes considers anyone who volunteers to join the Armed Forces, knowing that one day they may have to risk all, is a hero. It's that simple*" (Help for Heroes 2017b). Indeed, more than any other similar charity, Help for Heroes has become a brand, an "industry" (The Telegraph 2016); walk down any British high street and you will see someone wearing a Help for Heroes hoodie or t-shirt. Help

for Heroes captured something in the national imagination, a desire to support 'our boys' rooted in ideas of patriotism and the sacrifice of the armed forces. Indeed, as founder Bryn Parry claimed himself, "*it was like a dam ready to burst*" (The Guardian 2010). At the same time, we see amputee Iraq war veterans on *Dancing With the Stars*, the Military Wives Choir topping the charts for Christmas 2011, and disabled military veterans competing for their countries in the first Invictus Games of 2014. As with Help for Heroes, these examples point to the prominence of heroic narratives in popular culture and everyday life.

We can see at work a fetishisation of the hero, in which he becomes a transcendent celebrity-Greek-God hybrid figure whom we are invited (and obligated) to at once admire, venerate, willingly sacrifice, put our faith in, and grieve for. Indeed at the same time, the hero is a figure created in relation to his likeness to us; he is like us, one of 'our boys', and as such *the hero himself is ours*. The figure of the military hero is affectively powerful, creeping into the most banal and prosaic moments of daily life. One simply has to look to the presence of "eggs for soldiers" (Tidy 2015) on the shelves of British supermarkets, or the Help for Heroes charity wristbands hanging from the wrists of adults and children alike, to see how Edkins' aforementioned narratives of heroism and sacrifice (2011: 132) have permeated the most intimate corners of everyday life. More recently in fact, we have even seen the military hero subject appear in Yan's show-stopping 'Heart of a Hero' trifle in *The Great British Bake Off* (Figure 1.1)[10].

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[10] Yan's 'Heart of a Hero' trifle was said to be a tribute to her Father's service in the Navy, and featured a chocolate cityscape of Hong Kong topped by a jelly poppy. Yan said of the trifle that "It's called heart of a hero. That's my dad's heart. He's a hero".

Figure 1.1 Yan's 'Heart of a Hero' trifle, featured in Episode 5 of The Great British Bake Off 2017 (Image from Metro 2017)

Kelly (2012: 433) refers to this phenomenon of prosaic representations as a "hero-fication strategy";

> *"The current hero-fication strategy, with its plethora of multiagency initiatives becomes clearer. The joint responsibility of public, media and military/ politician is made obvious. The rhetoric is 'the troops' do a great job and they're ('our') 'heroes' by virtue of the fact they are British military alone, irrespective of the actual 'work' being done. Their position vis-a-vis being UK military guarantees them (almost universal demand for) respect and hero-fication. The joint chain of ceremony necessary to successfully carry out such image-work requires a military demeanour of heroes doing good work – suitably supported by a willing media and culture industry – whilst the public deference is to salute, cheer and flag wave. The media's deference is to uncritically support official UK government policy lines – to act as publicist not critical observer (Thussu and Freedman, 2003) – and become primary messenger of the nation when the tributes to bravery, selflessness, courage and heroism are required in order to assuage the nation's grief over the death of*

another British soldier. It is also to show due demeanour of revulsion and annihilation towards those who publicly dissent."

Kelly (2012) argues that such "hero-fication" is a deliberate strategy of the state, a means through which support for the armed forces (and, by extension, the wars that they wage on behalf of the state) is gleaned while annihilating the possibility for critique or resistance. He claims that the "willing media and culture industry" is recruited in this "joint chain of ceremony", pointing to a complex structure through which such narratives come to permeate everyday life. Yet, it is perhaps an oversimplification to say that this mobilisation of multiple 'industries' (as Kelly refers to them) is purely a deliberate strategy of the state. Rather, as I will argue in this thesis, the remaking of the hero is much more nuanced than it might appear in accounts of 'state strategy'. Importantly, I will contend that the hero is a performative subject, constituted through countless bodily iterations which cannot necessarily be harnessed by the state. Indeed, while the primary contention of this thesis is that the figure of the hero fundamentally works *in the service of* the sovereign state, the processes through which this reclamation of the hero take place are intricate, and spatially and temporally situated. Thus, rather than a deliberate and controlled strategy of the state, the making of the hero occurs through a much more plural and multi-linear chiming together of multiple elements in a "resonance machine" (Connolly 2008; see also Closs Stephens 2016: 188). The nodes in the frame of recognition of the hero are not simply state managed, but rather permeate "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170). Such a figure is brought into recognition not only through the mobilisation of 'heroic' tropes, but also by harnessing a particular relation with the self, and with his performative others. In the case of Lee Rigby with which I began this introduction, we can see that his likening to us was constituted through the circulation of particular kinds of images and details of his life. We saw

photographs circulated in the British media of Rigby's final hours before the attack, pixelated images of the soldier buying chips just around the corner from where he was murdered. We are told of his gentle nature, that "he was always smiling", that he left behind a wife and two year old son. What was made clear to the British public was his likeness to us; he was one of 'our boys'.

The Monster

> "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you."
>
> - Friedrich Nietzsche.

In his critique of the UK's "hero-fication strategy", Kelly (2012) touches upon an important point. Regardless of whether we take this phenomenon to be strategic, the mobilisation of the figure of the military hero functions to blur out the violence of the sovereign state, or of the "actual 'work' being done" (p433). What we see in the harnessing of the hero figure is a dichotomous mode of representation, between the 'hero' who embodies 'us', and the 'monster' enemy or terrorist in some far off land who he fights on our behalf.

Crucially, the heroic trope is often mobilised in relation to the wounded or dead soldier. This is of course not a new strategy of the state (see Caso 2016; Bourke 1996; Bösl 2013), yet its contemporary manifestations are central to the arguments put forward in this thesis. In the figure of the wounded or dead hero, we are confronted with the impacts of violent warfare and, indeed, the profound violence of the sovereign state. In Lee Rigby one can see an overt attempt to unmake and remake the subject and state memory in a particular way (Edkins 2003), one which brings the battle between 'good' British soldiers and 'evil' terrorists to the foreground, while rendering the role of the British state in this violence invisible. Rigby was quickly reclaimed by the state, his

death immediately labelled as an "act of terror". His death became an assault on the British people as an imagined national community, and this summoned public were mobilised in anger and grief. While Rigby was one of "our boys", deeply embedded in a discourse that attributes to civil society an almost paternal obligation to the vulnerable petty sovereigns of the armed forces (Butler 2004: 65), so too was he an example of the ambiguity and contested nature of the hero. He treads a contested space, as a boundary figure who is at once willingly sacrificed by the state in warfare, yet rendered grievable[11] through particular conditions (Zehfuss 2009; see also Butler 2004). He is a problem subject, a figure who must by necessity be unmade and remade in order to maintain the parameters of sovereign life. By harnessing the power of the 'hero' figure, the state encourages citizens to forget the element of sovereign violence at work, participating in the construction of a state memory which maintains the fantasy of sovereign benevolence.

In the figure of the hero, we can see the imperative of remaking the monstrosity of the violence of the sovereign state. This thesis, in part, aims to flesh out how it is that these ambiguities and inconsistencies are effectively incorporated into the framing of the military hero, in service of the sovereign state.

The Wife

As shown earlier in this chapter, the hero figure is profoundly gendered. At his very roots, he reminds us of powerful masculine heroes of mythology and legend, while in contemporary manifestations he continues to embody physical power, bravery, and hegemonic masculinity (see Hopton 2003; Higate 2003; Basham 2013). Yet in the making of the military hero, we can also

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[11] The relation between the hero and the grievable subject is crucial to this thesis, and will be unpacked in much greater depth in Chapter 2.

observe a powerful role for the military wife. In heroic tales such as *The Odyssey*, we can see the hero in part constituted by his feminine 'other', the Penelope figure who necessarily must wait at home and mourn his absence. Indeed, one of the more delicate and nuanced ways in which Rigby was reclaimed as one of 'our boys' was in the mobilisation of his wife. Consistent with much of the rhetoric around the death of soldiers in and around the War on Terror (see for example Zehfuss 2009), much of the media focus around Rigby's death centred on his (estranged)[12] wife and child, who he left behind. In this way, the figure of the hero is brought into recognition in part through his feminised 'other', the military wife who epitomises feminine patriotic sacrifice.

The mobilisation of the military wife can be seen in new ways in the context of contemporary militarism. For example in 2011, only a few years after we see the emergence of Help for Heroes, the Military Wives Choir appear in a BBC1 programme titled *The Choir: Military Wives* featuring celebrity choir master Gareth Malone. The audience are invited to spectate upon the lived

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[12] While Rigby and his wife were separated, this particular element of the story was often obscured. Indeed, tellingly, the British media later told us that Rigby and his wife had planned on getting back together. As such, the narrative of national healing and reconciliation embodied by the hero figure was mirrored in the mediation of their story.

experiences of the women of the choir, and support them as they sing of their feminine sacrifice while their husbands are deployed.
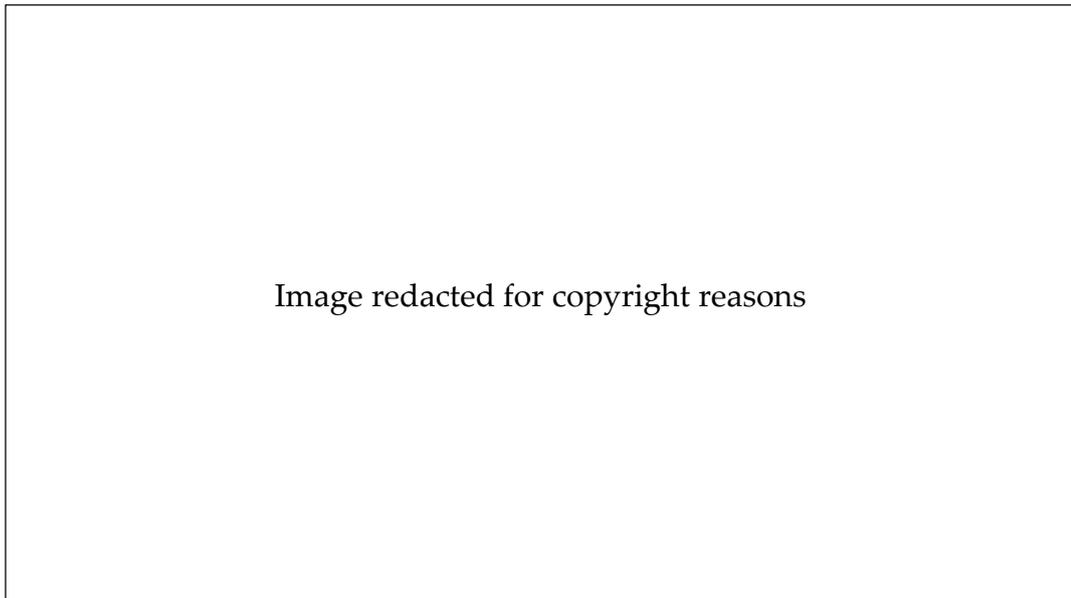
Figure 1.2 Gareth Malone's 'The Choir: Military Wives'

Captivating the British public, the choir made Christmas number 1 in 2011 with their charity single *Wherever You Are*, which raised money for the Royal British Legion and SSAFA. The choir form an example of what Jo Tidy calls "post-2008 conscience capitalism", in which "perpetuation of militarized logics are produced as a notionally apolitical social 'cause'" (2015: 2). The choir are perceived as deserving and *in need* of support, a 'cause' depicted as 'apolitical' which as such cannot be contested. Indeed, Victoria Basham extends this point;

> "*The packaging of these emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects on "our boys" and the women and (girl) children they leave behind as hit singles, allowed the wider British public to personalise war. Objecting to such heartfelt expressions of support for soldiers would be hard-hearted, cynical or snobbish; even if an effect of remaining silent is to back "our boys", "wherever they are" and whatever they do (Barnett 2012)*" (Basham 2016: 889).

In the Military Wives Choir, we can see how the figure of the military wife as an embodiment of feminine patriotic sacrifice has come to be embedded in everyday life and popular culture, and indeed how she functions to generate support for 'our boys on the frontline'. Just as the figure of the monstrous 'terrorist' is central to the creation of a heroic military subject, so too is the military wife. More than that however, in the frailty and grief of the military wife we can see a metaphor for wider civil society in need of protection. This metaphor was nowhere better demonstrated to me than in an episode from my fieldwork, in which a group of military wives rehearsed a melancholy song of absence and loss while a little boy played in the background;

> *"The rehearsal time ticked along slowly, as the choir went over and over the same new song. You could see some of the women in the group were starting to get frustrated and restless, and I was feeling it a little too. My attention kept wandering to the boy across the room playing with his action figure, who had now begun animatedly enacting a battle scene, using the pew in front of him to take cover from what appeared to be heavy fire. He raised his arms to shoot his invisible opponent, shook his body violently as he was shot himself, and dived theatrically under the seat. I wondered whether the women in the choir had noticed this dramatic performance taking place next to them, or whether they were simply choosing to ignore it. They were probably used to children playing in the background of rehearsals, but to me the irony of this particular scene was striking."*

(Extract from fieldnotes, Military Wives Choir rehearsal)

This was a poignant and telling moment within the project; in this snapshot of something so banal and mundane as a child playing in the background of his mother's choir rehearsal, the gendered relations of male soldier/protector and the protected female caregiver/mourner came into stark focus. In fact, there was something almost prophetic about the way the scene played out. The

mother, stoic in her husband's absence, sang of her pain and dedication, while just a few feet away the son performs a story of military becoming, predicting the very same future of sacrifice and mourning. The men of the armed forces are destined to fight for the women and children of the nation, just as their mothers, wives and daughters are destined to mourn their absence and remind us of their sacrifice. The figure of the military wife illustrates to a willing national public what is at stake in the presence of the hero. Yet, by taking a more critical reading, we must question; how does the appearance of the military wife help us to consider the making of the hero across multiple bodies and spaces within a "resonance machine" (Closs Stephens 2016: 188; see also Connolly 2008)?

Beyond the subjects of fantasy

In the figure of the military hero, one can see a clear politics at work, which this thesis will flesh out and give texture to. Central to the argument presented, however, is that any attempt to harness the hero is an attempt to render a singular, knowable and coherent sovereign subject. Yet as Jenny Edkins tells us, "*No place that the person occupies… can fully express what that person is. There is always something more*" (2003: 12). This excess of subjectivity overflows the representation of the person so that they are never fully rendered knowable. Indeed, it is impossible to formulate a singular and knowable subject, and so the hero must always necessarily overflow the parameters of the sovereign. What would an everyday encounter with the hero in a Recovery through Theatre programme performance, a Help for Heroes Recovery Centre in Plymouth, a rehearsal for the Military Wives Choir, offer us that the sovereign 'hero' narrative cannot or does not? And what can we say, then, about the violence at work in the making of the figure of the hero?

On a basic but nevertheless profoundly important level, there is a violence to the remaking and reclaiming of such a subject. It necessitates the harnessing of certain narratives, and the silencing or erasing of others. But what can we say of the narratives, bodies, experiences, that overflow the parameters of the sovereign subject? Is there a capacity to resist, or to contest the framing of the hero? And, if we view the figure of the hero as a component in the wider framing of war, how do these moments of fracture or dissonance act in relation to the frame? Judith Butler argues that it is only through an examination of how the frame circulates and breaks with itself that it can be challenged and reimagined;

> *"it is not only a question of finding new content, but also of working with received renditions of reality to show how they can and do break with themselves. As a consequence, the frames that, in effect, decide which lives will be recognisable as lives and which will not, must circulate in order to establish their hegemony"* (2016 [2009]: 12).

According to Butler, the frame breaks with itself just as it seems to propagate particular state renditions of reality, yet it is only through these frames that we can establish and recognise their hegemony. Indeed, Maja Zehfuss (2009) argues further that;

> *"…it may be the negotiation between these two – the way in which both the frame and the recognition of singularity inevitably fail – that could offer us the best chance to find the resources to re-imagine the frame we cannot escape"* (Zehfuss 2009: 21-22).

Thus, perhaps by encountering the moments of slippage in the frame, we can recognise the impossibility of a singular and coherent heroic subject and begin to "re-imagine the frame we cannot escape" (*ibid*), resisting the framing of the hero.

Research Questions

This introduction has outlined some of the key problems which the overall thesis addresses in relation to the figure of the military hero. The research questions that guide and animate the project are as follows;

1) How is the military hero brought into recognition and continually remade?

2) In what ways is the gendered figure of the military wife enrolled in the making of the contemporary hero?

3) What is at stake politically in the remaking and reclaiming of the military hero?

4) How is the sovereign subject of the hero contested, resisted, and overflowed?

Chapter outline

The first chapter develops the theoretical approach I take in this thesis. It unpacks the significance of the figure of the military hero in contemporary geopolitics, showing how he occupies a peculiar political space, at once both willingly sacrificed by the nation, and rendered grievable as a necessity to the production of the sovereign state. This chapter then explores how this curiosity is negotiated in the construction and framing of the subject, using Judith Butler's *Frames of War* as a conceptual lens. At this point, I will use the work of Sara Ahmed (2010) and Lauren Berlant (2011) to add detail and texture to the framing of the hero, exploring what it is that the hero *does* in the frame and how the figure functions. This chapter will crucially explore how we can consider the hero as a deferred promise of happiness (Ahmed 2010), a figure who is brought into recognition in part through performative others such as the military wife who brings into recognition what exactly is at stake in the hero. Finally, the last section of this chapter will consider how we can

approach fractures and slippages in the framing of the hero; as discussed in relation to Edkins' (2003) notion of the excess of subjectivity, it is not enough to view the hero as a static figure through which wider frames of war act. Rather, he is a performative subject, always ambiguous, incorporating elements of the sovereign alongside a more resistant subject.

The second chapter of this thesis is a reflection on methodology, and considers how we can approach the problems of this thesis practically. I consider the specific locales in which we can encounter the figure of the hero, and provide a justification for choosing the city of Plymouth as a site for this encounter. It will show the importance of an engagement with the hero that is sensitive to the intimate, the prosaic, and the mundane. This chapter will then outline the specific examples chosen in this thesis through which to explore the remaking of the hero. It is my contention that each of these different sites or examples demonstrates a different negotiation with the remaking of this figure. These examples are discussed in the following order; 1) *Boots at the Door*, 2) Invictus Games and Help for Heroes, 3) The Military Wives Choir, Plymouth. The final sections of this chapter will consider the challenges of conducting this kind of research, and the ethics of investigating an 'emotional military geography'.

The third chapter, which is my first empirically-oriented chapter, centres on a discussion of the *Boots at the Door* performance in Plymouth, as part of the Royal British Legion's Recovery through Theatre programme. This chapter explores the different means through which the hero is recovered and performatively remade through theatre. It considers "recovery" not simply as the transition of servicemen and women back to normal life, but also as the process of rendering military 'heroes' as singular and knowable subjects who can be recovered and recognised within that community. This chapter is comprised of two halves, the first of which considers the presence of the sovereign subject in the play, while the second half examines the disruptive or

resistant subject. Crucially, this chapter argues that it is insufficient to consider only how the sovereign subject is sustained. Rather, his performativity is itself ambiguous, containing elements of the publically recognised alongside a more resistant subject.

Chapter four, the second empirical chapter of the thesis, focuses on the challenge of remaking the wounded hero, using the examples of the Invictus Games and Help for Heroes. It will flesh out this challenge through a focus on three particular encounters, the first of which will shed light on a remaking of the hero which relies on performance and appearance. The second encounter will show how the remaking of the subject relies on the notional achievement of potential and a specific orientation to the future, while the third and final section of this chapter will explore some of the excesses, fractures and moments of dissonance which challenge the fiction of a singular and complete sovereign hero subject. The overall contention of this chapter is that the wounded military subject brings to light the monstrosity of the violent sovereign state, and to reconcile and remake this in the heroic subject relies upon a 'two-fold forgetting', in which the relationship between military masculinity and the state is restored, and the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' upon which the hero relies is reinstated.

Chapter five, and the final empirical chapter of the thesis, focuses on the Military Wives Choir, Plymouth, as an example of how the military wife subject is mobilised in the remaking and reclaiming of the hero. Coherent with the structure of the first empirical chapter, this chapter will be split into two halves, the first of which will examine how the choir and the figure of the military wife are mobilised in the service of the sovereign state. The second section of this chapter will consider the potential for the wife to act as a more resistant subject, with the capacity to "land in unexpected places" and challenge the sovereign trajectory towards a knowable future.

The conclusion to this thesis will draw my overall arguments together, and address each of my four research questions individually. Finally, it will consider the limitations of the project, and flesh out some directions for future research.

The contribution that this thesis makes to wider scholarship is both empirical and theoretical. It draws on primary research with everyday examples of contemporary militarism, including the Royal British Legion's recent Recovery through Theatre Programme and the bestselling Military Wives Choir, with whom to date there exists no primary research of this kind. As such, this thesis offers new empirical lenses through which to examine the "hero-fication strategy" (Kelly 2012) at play in contemporary militarism, contributing to the wider scholarship of critical military studies and military geography.

In addition, this thesis brings a new critical reading of feminist theory from scholars such as Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and Lauren Berlant to an engagement with political theory on sovereignty and the nation state. It sheds light on the value of thinking anew about how it is that Butler's *Frames of War* function, considering the frame in relation not only to "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170) but also a deferred promise of happiness (Ahmed 2010). Finally, it proposes an examination of the military hero not simply as a figure within contemporary militarism, but also as a subject with the capacity to resist and overflow.

The contribution that this thesis makes is deeply feminist. First and foremost, the theoretical framework and conversation staged in this thesis exists, as noted above, between three feminist theorists. It is this conversation which shapes not only the conceptual foundations of the thesis, but also the methodological approach of the research itself. While this approach was one which remains committed to feminist research praxis in its openness to the

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lived experiences of participants, and indeed to the value of the mundane and 'everyday' in geopolitical research, it was also one characterised by its responsiveness to the underpinning exchange between feminists. That is to say, this feminist theory became crucial to the way in which the research findings and 'data' were analysed and brought into conversation, as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. Indeed, the particularity of the subject of this research as gendered, embodied, and affectual, is deeply rooted in and shaped by important feminist work undertaken in geography by scholars such as Jo Sharp (2004; 2009; 2011), Lorraine Dowler (2002; 2012), Deb Cowen & Emily Gilbert (2008), Rachel Pain (2004), and Sue Smith (Pain & Smith 2008) among many others.

2. Framing the 'hero'

"Currently, the state operates on the field of perception and, more generally, the field of representability, in order to control affect, and in anticipation of the way that affect informs and galvanizes political opposition to the war. I refer to a field of 'representability' rather than 'representation' because this field is structured by state permission; as a result, we cannot understand this field of representability simply by examining its explicit contents, since it is constituted fundamentally by what is cast out and maintained outside the frame within which representations appear. We can think of the frame, then, as active, as jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence, without a visible sign of its operation and yet effectively."

(Butler 2007: 953)

In the introduction to this thesis I have discussed the significance attributed to the figure of the military 'hero' in contemporary geopolitics, and the curious position which he occupies in the sovereign imagination. The affective politics which gather around Lee Rigby following his murder most clearly point to the position of the military hero in the national imagination; he is the embodiment of 'us' in the fight against 'them', and exists within a political space which is beyond critique. The first section of this chapter will develop this point, shedding light on the nature of the hero and his relationship with the sovereign state. Yet, as the example of Lee Rigby has illustrated, the military hero occupies a peculiar political space. He is at once willingly sacrificed by the nation, yet at the same time he is by necessity rendered grievable (Zehfuss

2009; see also Butler 2004; Edkins 2011). The second section of this chapter will explore how this curiosity is negotiated in the construction and framing of the subject, using Butler's *Frames of War* (2009) as a conceptual lens through which we can examine the military hero. Crucially however, the contention of this thesis is that the hero offers a *deferred promise of happiness*. The third section of this chapter will therefore unpack the work of Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011) in relation to this deferred promise, using these ideas to give texture and detail to the functioning of the frame. As I will show, the framework of the promise allows us to think not only about how the hero functions, but also how he is brought into recognition through his performative others, specifically the figure of the military wife. Finally, as the wider thesis will argue, we must recognise that the hero can never be a singular, coherent, and knowable subject; he is always incomplete. Jenny Edkins (2003: 12) tells us that;

> *"No place that the person occupies… can fully express what that person is. There is always something more. Again, this is not a question of people not fitting into the roles available for them and a call for more person-friendly societies. Nor does it concern multiple or fragmented identities in a post-modern world. It is a matter of structural impossibility… There is always an excess, a surplus, in one direction or the other. However, we choose on the whole to ignore this – to forget the impossibility, and to act as if completeness and closure were possible. We hide the traumatic real, and stick with the fantasy…"*

The final section of this chapter will therefore consider how we can approach the fractures or moments of slippage within the framing of the hero conceptually. Importantly, it is not simply that, as Williams tells us, "uncanny, unexpected experience[s] can act to cause a slippage in the experiencing of the dominant discourse" (Williams 2014: 15), although this is certainly part of the

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story. Rather, the figure of the hero as a performative subject is himself ambiguous, incorporating elements of the sovereign alongside a more resistant subject. As such, the theorisation of the hero presented in this thesis is inspired by Butler's work on *Frames of War*, in which she claims that it is only through an examination of the way in which the frame circulates and breaks with itself that it can be challenged or reimagined. Zehfuss (2009) puts it another way;

> *"…it may be the negotiation between these two – the way in which both the frame and the recognition of singularity inevitably fail – that could offer us the best chance to find the resources to re-imagine the frame we cannot escape"* (Zehfuss 2009: 21-22).

The final section of this chapter will begin to think about the extent to which the framing of the hero always breaks with itself as a necessity to his very functioning, while at the same time considering the hero as a performative subject with the potential to 'land in unexpected places' (Foucault 1997).

Sovereign Heroes

The fantastical figure of the hero can be traced across historical boundaries, through mythology, folklore, classical literature, fairy tales and popular fiction. From an early age, children read of brave and courageous heroes who fight the forces of evil in its many forms to win their fair maiden's hand, invited to enact these binary categorisations by clutching their plastic swords and battling their enemies in search of glory. Into our teenage years, we read of comic book superheroes who take on their villainous counterparts to save the world from catastrophe ("truth, justice, and the American way!"[13]). Into our adult years, heroes continue to permeate film and popular culture, yet

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[13] Superman's famous slogan, telling of the geopolitical concerns of the superhero figure.

now we increasingly see heroic tropes creeping into news reports, Facebook pages, and political memes. Heroes and ideas of all things heroic are inescapable, present in all corners of everyday life and popular culture.

But what does it mean to be a 'hero', or, perhaps more accurately, to *name someone* as a hero? The hero by his very nature is the embodiment of 'us' against 'them', a strong symbol of courage, protection, power, perfection and justice (Boudreau & de Alba 2011). He is the manifestation of state power and morality, characterised by strength, bravery, and the capacity to overcome, all attributes which the state tries to embody. Jason Dittmer's (2013) work in *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero* explicitly explores this relationship between the figure of the [super]hero and the nation. He claims that "at the core of the nationalist superhero is the essential premise of the otherwise binary nation-state being identifiable in a single human body" (p25). The hero is a figure around whom sovereign attachments and fantasies circulate, as he is the embodiment of state power yet at the same time an actor through which wider politics are played out and articulated.

As a narrative device, the hero is a vehicle around which "lessons about how life should be lived" (Ross 2002: 306) circulate, with heroic action evolving in a world of 'right' and 'wrong' (White & Arp 2008, cited in Boudreau & de Alba 2011: 79). As such, the hero is a character integral to the notional construction of a 'good life', but at the same time one who ties this vision to the aims of the sovereign state. In this narrative, heroes help to structure the very boundaries of how we must live and engage in political life; what is at stake in the figure of the hero is the very existence of the good life, the parameters of which are intimately woven with the demands of the sovereign state. Crucially, the nature and characteristics of the hero are noted to be tied to the social, cultural, economic and political contexts from which they emerge (Boudreau & de Alba

2011; see also Warner 2000 [1998]). The hero figure is, as such, in flux, always situated and reflective of wider cultural and political concerns.

The heroes of mythology and classical literature no doubt inform our understanding of heroism, the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other', and indeed of morality itself. According to the old stories, such heroes battle foul creatures of the underworld, and overcome unimaginable physical and psychological horrors on their path to greatness, a path which Joseph Campbell coined "the hero's journey" (2004 [1949]). This journey, Campbell notes, is a trope which even permeates many of our contemporary understandings of who a hero is[14]. Indeed, this notion of a 'journey' upon which heroes must embark sheds light on the necessity of 'overcoming' in bringing the hero into recognition.

While we can see the roots of this in classical literature and mythology, this idea has permeated the contemporary framing of military heroes, as later chapters in this thesis will explore; suffering, as Dittmer (2013) notes, "is a key part of the masculine heroic mythos and thus is a necessary component of narrations of both superheroes and national security" (p28; see also Dittmer 2009). Crucially though, the classical hero is inherently flawed; Heracles for

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[14] The story of Heracles (or Hercules) provides a clear example of this. Heracles was the son of Zeus and his mortal lover Alcmene, born to be a champion of both Gods and mortals, bearing heroic attributes such as insurmountable strength and bravery. Yet, the tale of Heracles is, like much of Greek mythology, a dark and complex one. The story goes that Zeus' divine wife Hera was, understandably, furious that her husband had betrayed her and fathered a son with a mortal woman. Hera took her anger out on Heracles, attempting to kill him by leaving snakes in the infant's crib. The snakes of course proved to be little match for Heracles, who even as a tiny baby displayed incredible strength. As Heracles grew older his strength increased. Hera, as she became aware of Heracles' growing strength and abilities, started to plot her revenge against him again. She afflicted him with a bout of uncontrollable and sudden madness, which caused him to kill his children – and, according to some, his wife Megara too. Horrified at what he had done, Heracles begged the King of Thespiae for forgiveness and absolution. After consulting an oracle, Heracles was instructed to perform the famous 12 Labours. These labours involved perilous tasks and slaying a number of monsters, including the infamous nine-headed Hydra beast.

example was, according to legend, easily pushed to anger and known for uncontrollable bouts of rage. But, according to Boudreau & de Alba (2011: 79), "a hero may act emotionally in reaction to a dramatic situation, without taking much time for 'thought experiments', yet reactive gestures are inscribed in a coherent conception of the self-evolving on a linear timeline. Even if the hero can make mistakes, he is normally depicted as having a stable morality". Even with such inherent flaws as those of Heracles, the figure of the hero embodies 'stable morality'. This inherent moral compass, like the hero himself, can be seen to occupy a position within the linear time of the nation upon which our geographical imagination relies.

The inherently flawed nature of the hero is one aspect of his curious positionality. The hero, crucially, is at once both "of us" and "not of us", occupying an ambiguous position in which he is a boundary figure. Across Marvel and DC comics for example, we see superheroes who have a secret identity which they must keep hidden to protect themselves[15]. Superman is shown to be a figure who, while doing much to protect the world's citizens, has his own position always called into question. This boundary positionality is telling of the function the hero has in relation to the sovereign state, as the boundary figure of the hero is essential to the survival of the sovereign. Amoore & Hall (2013) similarly note that the ambiguous figure of the clown is central to the King's survival;

> *"the King and the Clown are inescapably conjoined – sovereign power haunted always by the presence of the clownfool… the sovereign and the clown are*

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[15] Generally in DC comics, the emphasis is on the secret identity of the hero being the 'real' identity – Superman is Clark Kent, Batman is Bruce Wayne. In Marvel comics, on the other hand, it is usually the case that the 'human' identity is the 'real one – Peter Parker is Spiderman, Bruce Banner is the Hulk.

bound together in a relationship characterised by antagonism, but also mutual reliance. In short, the sovereign needs the clown" (Amoore & Hall 2013: 94).

It is, therefore, not enough to say simply that the hero reflects and enacts the concerns of the sovereign state through his strength and physical power. Rather, it is through his curious positionality as both "inside" and "outside", "claimed" and "rejected" by the state that many of the more nuanced functions of the sovereign state are negotiated. The figure of the military hero at the heart of this thesis is a key figure through which to explore the nuanced ways in which the sovereign state functions.

According to Boudreau & de Alba (2011), the figure of the hero adjusts according to the political and economic conditions within which he appears. In contemporary geopolitics, the figure of the military hero has come to be harnessed and mobilised in service of the sovereign state. As the introduction to this thesis has shown, this mobilisation of the hero is timely, set against a backdrop of the so-called War on Terror, dwindling public support for a war with questionable legitimacy (Kelly 2012), and a fragile promise offered by the state to secure the population. The political rhetoric surrounding the armed forces serves a number of purposes, not least the justification of violent warfare and a means through which 'we' are defined against the enemy 'other'. The military can be seen as a crucial actor through which an imaginative geography of the nation is articulated and performed in multiple sites, both at home and abroad. Indeed, Victoria Basham (2013) argues that "Britain has always considered military deployments to be a legitimate and useful way to *protect and project* the UK, its way of life, its independence, its values and its interests" (p19, emphasis added). Kelly (2012) refers to the contemporary strategy as one of "hero-fication", while Tidy refers to the

necessity of this in relation to the "rehabilitation of the armed forces" (2015: 3).

Figure 2.1 Lord Kitchener's recruitment poster, World War 1

It would be clumsy to say that the figure of the military hero is rooted entirely in the context of the War on Terror and contemporary militarism, of course. "Narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) have circulated around members of the armed forces in different ways throughout history. The framing (and claiming) of soldiers by the nation-state has historically been tied with the need to generate an army, drawing in particular on ideas of hegemonic masculinity and patriotism. Take for example Lord Kitchener's

recruitment posters of World War One, in which the persistent rhetoric regarding national duty was key (see Figure 2.1). Soldiers in this way were framed as belonging to the nation state, literally embodiments of national values and 'us' against 'them'[16]. As early as World War 1, we can see how the vulnerability of soldiers was out of necessity remade in the national imagination. For example Bourke (1996) and Bösl (2013) both draw on accounts of physically wounded and disabled veterans from World War 1 to show how even in the absence of a limb, such figures have the capacity to be remade as symbols of state power; "Bourke notes how maimed veterans represented a domesticated masculinity, but they were celebrated as national heroes nonetheless" (Caso 2016: 6). We can see therefore that the framing of the military in relation to heroism and self-sacrifice is not a new phenomenon in itself.

Today, the War on Terror has brought to light the role of the armed forces in "invoking a narrative of strength" (Tickner 2002; cited in Dowler 2002 p159), and the framing of the soldier, particularly in relation to ideas of heroism and patriotic masculinity, continues to be intimately woven with the wider framing of war and imaginative geography of the nation (Basham 2013; Zehfuss 2009). Members of the armed forces remain embedded in the popular and enduring rhetoric which identifies them as 'our boys', defenders of justice and bringers of peace to whom we owe our lives and freedom. The military hero is, like his mythological, literary and historical counterparts, rooted in the linear time of the state, in an understanding of nationhood and belonging which "violently installs itself as both origin and end of the culturally thinkable" (Butler 2008: 19). Contemporary soldier heroes are understood in

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[16] Indeed, it has been suggested that a "nation" can itself be defined as "two males defending the women and children in a specific territory" (see Yuval-Davis 1999: 130).

relation to their historical counterparts, drawing heavily on visions of morally courageous military men of years gone by. As Jo Tidy (2015: 3-4) notes, the rehabilitation of the British armed forces is;

> *"achieved through a discursive coupling of the British military as an institution, and the soldiers who comprise it, with nostalgic invocations of past, morally virtuous wars, particularly World Wars One (the 100th anniversary of the start of which was in July 2014) and Two".*

By discursively coupling today's British soldiers with their historical counterparts from "past, morally virtuous wars", the distinction between them is blurred out, and the hero soldier is located firmly within the linear time of the state. Such linearity implicates the "radical 'down-scaling' of the world into infantile categories and identities: 'good' versus 'evil', 'civilisation' and 'freedom' versus a cartoon world of 'evildoers,' 'terrorists,' and storybook characters described in presidential speeches as 'the dictator' and the 'tyrant'" (O'Tuathail 2003: 859).

As touched upon earlier in this chapter, however, the military hero is fundamentally a boundary figure, at once "of us" and "not of us". To approach in more depth the functioning of the hero in relation to the sovereign state, particularly considering the hero as a boundary figure, Judith Butler's *Frames of War* can provide us with a conceptual framework.

Frames of War: The 'hero' as sovereign subject

Judith Butler's *Frames of War* (2009) considers the way that war is 'framed' through the careful carving up of experience and construction of particular imaginations. Drawing on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis Butler considers how certain visual images may perpetuate or challenge dominant discourse and geopolitical imaginations (see also Williams 2014). For Butler (2009), focusing on the frame as an object of analysis enables us to identify the ways

in which dominant discourses co-construct reality, as well as to identify items which may challenge the reiteration of the frame (Williams 2014: 14-15). She draws upon the example of photographs in order to develop her argument, particularly using the work of Susan Sontag to suggest that photographs reflect but also constitute political interpretations (Butler 2009). She argues that;

> *"[w]e do not have to have a caption or a narrative at work to understand that a political background is being explicitly formulated and renewed through the frame. In this sense, the frame takes part in the active interpretation of war compelled by the state. It is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly"* (Butler 2007: 952).

"[T]he frame", she argues, "functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself" (Butler 2009: 71). Indeed, as Butler says herself, this is a process controlled by the state. She contends that states attempt to manage the affective force of images, in order to produce particular political effects. She uses examples taken from the War on Terror to describe "how the frames that allocate the recognisability of certain figures of the human are themselves linked with broader norms that determine questions of humanization or dehumanization" (Butler 2007: 951). How we respond to the suffering of others in war, she claims, relies upon "a certain field of perceptible reality already being established*" (ibid*).

Importantly, Butler claims that;

> *"…the frames of war are part of what makes the materiality of war…Just as the 'matter' of bodies cannot appear without a shaping and animating form, neither can the 'matter' of war appear without a conditioning and facilitating form or frame"* (Butler 2009: 29).

We can see somewhat of a conceptual lineage here, with Butler's earlier work on *Gender Trouble* (1999) in which she claims that gender is performative, always iterative and adapting. This lineage is made most clear when Butler states in relation to *Frames of War* that "subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognised" (2009: 3-4). Just as the gendered subject is constituted through performative iterations which are always shifting and in flux[17], so too are the frames through which war is understood iterative, and as such always constituting and reconstituting the "terms through which subjects are recognised" (*ibid*).

The argument put forward in this thesis is that by recognising the importance of the figure of the hero in contemporary geopolitics and his relationship with the sovereign state, we can in turn see that the hero is a component in the wider framing of war. If the frames of war make the materiality of war, then the contemporary framing of war must by necessity incorporate the figure of the military hero. Indeed, following Butler's argument, the hero "is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly" (Butler 2007: 952). Unpacking this further in relation to Butler's earlier work in *Gender Trouble,* it is possible to view the hero as a performative subject, in whose iteration lies the interpretation and materiality itself. This will be unpacked in greater detail later in this chapter, but for now it is enough to consider the hero as an integral component in the framing of war.

In the epigraph to this chapter, Butler claims that we cannot hope to understand the "field of representability" simply through examining what is contained *within* the frame; rather, the frame is in part constituted by "what is cast out and maintained outside the frame within which representations

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[17] This is clarified in Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993).

appear" (Butler 2007: 953). Butler continues that "We can think of the frame, then, as active, as jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence, without a visible sign of its operation and yet effectively" (*ibid*). As such, the frame is always in flux, always at once claiming and discarding subjects; that the frame is "*doing both at once*" is crucial (*ibid*).

Yet, there appears a moment of contention in this, as the hero is by his nature rooted in the linear time of the state, yet at the same time a boundary figure who is at once both "of us" and "not of us", grievable and non-grievable. As such, he is a figure who is *himself* always at once claimed and discarded. Butler uses her argument specifically in relation to the rendering of grievable or non-grievable lives; "what qualifies as Bodies that Matter, ways of living that count as 'life', lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?" (Butler 1993: 16)[18]. She argues that our responses to the loss of Muslim lives in the War on Terror are shaped by the "field of perceptible reality" in which Muslim lives are rendered 'non-lives' and therefore non-grievable. If, as Butler tells us, the field of representability in which lives are categorised in such a way is "constituted fundamentally by what is cast out and maintained outside the frame", a frame which is active, "jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence" (Butler 2007: 953), then the creation of the sovereign subject must rely on the maintenance of a boundary; "the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing" (Butler 2009: 12). It relies upon a particular field of *intelligibility*, "understood as the general

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[18] Butler's question regarding whose lives count as lives can be seen to have links with Agamben's work on Homo Sacer (1998). Agamben argues that homo sacer is he who is abandoned by the law, and who is reduced to "bare life", life which is biological but with no political significance (zoē). Agamben contends that the sovereign is he who decides on and in the state of exception, in which subjects can be reduced to bare life , supporting Schmitt's argument (1985) that the sovereign is "he who decides on the exception" (p5).

historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable" (Butler 2009: 6);

> *"these normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition"* (Butler 2009: 4).

In Butler's analysis, the binary characteristics of 'safe' and 'unsafe', 'grievable' and 'non-grievable' are "historically contingent", rooted in the "homogenous empty time" (Anderson 1991; Closs Stephens 2009) of the nation state. But, what can we say of a figure who at once is understood within the same "historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable" (Butler 2009: 6), and a boundary figure who is at once inside and outside? This is the moment in which the intrigue of the figure of the military hero emerges. Edkins (2011) articulates one aspect of the relationship between the armed forces and the state;

> *"We could say that servicemen and women belong to the nation-state. They have been taken out of the everyday realm of civilian life. They serve the nation: they kill and die for it… Narratives of heroism and sacrifice in the aftermath of war underscore the strange position of military personnel, especially civilian conscripts: they have no choice but to die, yet their deaths are scripted as sacrifice"* (Edkins 2011: 131-132).

The dominant framing of the soldier relies on "narratives of heroism and sacrifice", yet, there is a paradox at play here. Their deaths are "scripted as sacrifice", rendered "grievable lives" in Butler's terms, yet they are *willingly* sacrificed by the nation. Zehfuss (2009) suggests that the lives and experiences of soldiers tread a contested space between the categories of 'grievable' and

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'non-grievable' that Butler (2004) proposes[19]. According to Zehfuss (2009), members of the military have their lives made grievable through a certain repetitive narrative in military obituaries – indeed, as this thesis will show, this framing occurs through multiple modes of visuality, embedded in everyday life and popular culture. Crucially, the framing at work must by necessity render the hero soldier grievable, but at the same time blur out the violence that they enact (and, by extension, the violence of the sovereign state). To think about this in terms of the state memory that is at stake in the figure of the hero, the subject must be unmade and remade through such framing, to incorporate the notion of military sacrifice, but erase the violence of the state. As such, the practices through which the hero is framed rely upon the unmaking and remaking of this subject in particular ways (Edkins 2003).

Considering the argument put forward by Zehfuss (2009), we can see that the hero is a boundary figure, always at once both willingly sacrificed and grievable, "being" and "not being", "becoming" and "unbecoming". Butler says this of such challenging subjects;

> *"What is this spectre that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating at its inside and its outside? As inside, it must be expelled to purify the norm; as outside, it threatens to undo the boundaries that limn the self. In either case, it figures the collapsibility of the norm; in other words, it is a sign that the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing, an undoing that inheres in its doings"* (Butler 2009: 12).

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[19] Anthony King (2010) similarly argues that the contemporary way in which 'fallen heroes' are mourned, celebrated and commemorated represents a clear break with the past, examining how "twentieth-century commemorative rituals, which mourned the sacrifice of anonymous individual soldiers for the nation, have been superseded by new lapidary conventions which fundamentally revise the status of the soldier in public imagination. In acts of remembrance today, soldiers are personalized and domesticated, remembered as fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters" (p1).

Thus, according to Butler, even these boundary figures work to highlight the work of the frame as "managing the prospect of its undoing". Perhaps one can argue, following Butler, that just as the sovereign frame is unstable, in flux, always at once "jettisoning and presenting", so too is the figure of the military hero. In fact, the nature of the hero as straddling the boundary of the frame is central to his functioning. While the hero is a subject through which the boundaries of "inside" and "outside" are maintained (Butler 2009; Walker 1993), his own subjectivity as *always both* is crucial.

Butler's (2009) *Frames of War* is fundamentally about visuality; frames provide a way to filter the world, bringing certain ideas to the foreground while blurring out others (Kuypers 2009). The frame, according to this analysis, makes the image; yet, the problem that we encounter is that Butler does not detail enough how this happens. Butler's work on performativity, as in *Gender Trouble,* considers the countless practices through which the gendered subject is performatively made, showing how the "designation of the natural happens from *within* culture" (Loxley 2007: 117 on Butler, emphasis in original). A similar conceptual aim can be seen in Butler's work on *Frames of War,* as she explores how war is understood in part through the frame. Yet, her focus on the visual image is limiting. One of the conceptual aims of this thesis is, therefore, to offer more detail and texture on how the frame is working, how the frame produces the hero, and what the frame might *do.* Indeed, I will offer a more developed and textured account of how it is that the frame functions to structure what can count in geopolitics, but also as a boundary device that is exceeded and contested.

Although Butler's analysis focuses on the visual image, I would firstly argue that visuality is not just about what we see. Rather, our understanding must incorporate the conditions of what is visible. Mitchell (2002) suggests that visuality "is not limited to the study of images or media, but extends to

everyday practices of seeing and showing, especially those that we take to be immediate or unmediated" (p170, emphasis added; see also Jay 2002; Mitchell 2005). When we consider visuality as a source of transmission (and indeed creation) of dominant geopolitical imaginations, Mitchell's understanding implies that frames of war exist beyond the realm of images or media (2002). The "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (*ibid*: 170) not only draw into the discussion other materials such as objects, written narratives and so on, but also implicates other senses as ways in which we can extract meaning. If we see frames of war in this way, we must conclude that the sovereign fantasy of the hero is embedded in the geopolitical imagination in multiple sites that mobilise countless alternate ways of seeing and knowing. Therefore, as the methodological chapter to this thesis will show, there is great value to be found in examining some of these sites and modes that extend beyond the visual culture of images.

Militarism and "everyday practices of seeing and showing"

The following section of this chapter will consider some of the work that has already been done on contemporary militarism and everyday life, particularly within the scholarship of critical military studies. The research presented in this thesis contributes to this scholarship, but works beyond the grammars of "militarism", to think more critically about how these "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170) act within the wider framing of war, and indeed how there might be capacity for resistance.

"Militarism" is considered to be "the extension of war-related, war-preparatory, and war-based meanings and activities outside of "war proper" and into social and political life more generally" (Sjoberg & Via 2010), or more simply, the perpetuation of militarized logics (Woodward 2014). Dowler (2012) on the other hand distinguishes between militarism ("attitudes of a

society about military effectiveness") and militarization ("a form of mobilization for conflict") (p491). There are clear similarities to be drawn between the conceptual approach of work on "militarism" and Butler's *Frames of War*. Both notions consider the ways in which war is made, in part, through practices of everyday life; as Butler tells us, "the frames of war are part of what makes the materiality of war" (2009: 29). Similarly Rachel Woodward's account of militarism highlights the fact that armed conflict is itself only made possible through the presence of countless "activities, processes and practices" (2005: 727, see also Kelly 2012 p726), thus arguing that militarism in everyday life is fundamentally tied to the very practices of war. While Butler's work focuses on the visual, work on militarism extends this analysis, into the realms of (to name but a few examples), military memoirs (Woodward 2003; Woodward & Jenkings 2012), toys and video games (Martin & Steuter 2010; Woodyer 2012; Yarwood 2015), sport (Kelly 2012) and even food products (Tidy 2015). Martin & Steuter for example tell us that "Popular cultural products, such as toys, video games, film, and television prepare the population for the possibility of war and then the decision to go to war" (2010: 119).

Crucially of course, as Merje Kuus tells us, militarisation can be considered as;

> *"an integral part of everyday social life in western liberal democracies today… I use the phrase civic militarization to challenge and undermine the common-sense distinction between militarized locations and lifestyles – dominated by military and state institutions – and the seemingly non-military sphere of civil society"* (2008: 625).

As such, life itself is always already militarised. The imperative of work on militarisation is to consider what this process means for peoples' everyday lives. There is great value in examining how is it that peoples' lives are implicated in this, beyond simply an examination of the 'everyday'. Much of

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the broader literature on militarism fails to consider in enough depth how groups of individuals engage with being 'militarised'. Cynthia Enloe for example considers how it is that military wives are 'militarised' (1983; 1990; 2000), yet further consideration needs to be given to how it is that these women themselves engage with that process. As Alex Hyde argues, "such analyses of militarisation often remain detached from their effects: from the lived experiences, social relations and embodied practices that make militarisation mobile, processual and transformative" (2016: 864; see also Baker *et al.*, 2016).

Much of the existing work on militarism shows how its logics privilege certain narratives, contributing to the affirmation of the military subject within the bounds of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity; for example, Cynthia Enloe (2007) argues that militarization influences the construction of dominant narratives, narratives which blur out experiences of some and place the experiences of others as normal. Military memoirs provide clear examples of this. Woodward & Jenkings (2012) among others (see Hopton 2003) have drawn attention to the politics (and popularity) of written narratives of military experience, focusing specifically on the military memoir as a discrete genre. Woodward (2003) tells us that;

> *"Novels such as Andy McNab's* Immediate Action *feed a seemingly insatiable public appetite for accounts of soldierly heroism, bravery, and cunning, appetites whetted by real-life accounts of military engagements that celebrate the mental, physical, and emotional strength of men in battle, transcending physical danger and mental fears in order to complete the mission; see, for example, McNab's* Bravo Two Zero *and Chris Ryan's* The One That Got Away. *The veracity and legitimacy of these stories aside, models of masculinity provide characters to flesh out stories of daring and tales of adventure"* (p45).

Woodward touches here upon the power that narratives of war have upon the public, highlighting the desires that feed our obsession with the genre. Hopton (2003) similarly notes citing John Newsinger's *Dangerous Men* (1997: 80) that;

> *"Whatever the intentions of the authors, the attraction of these books could be described as pornographic… The page-after-page of photographs are, in fact, pin-ups, but instead of pictures of young women… they are pictures of soldiers and their weapons and equipment… Whereas the traditional pin-up celebrates and endorses heterosexuality, these soldier pin-ups celebrate… a tough warrior masculinity" (p113-114).*

In such narratives, "tough warrior masculinity" is venerated, feeding on an almost sexual desire from the general public to spectate and gaze upon the masculine heroic soldier subject[20].

Elsewhere, work in military studies has explicitly critiqued the "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) at play in popular culture (Kelly 2012). For example, John Kelly's work on "hero-fication strategies" in popular culture and sport draws critical attention to the political significance of mobilising these narratives, in which 'hero' and 'extremist' emerge as characters in a "ideological hierarchical dualism" (2012: 724). In a similar vein, Jo Tidy's (2015) work on military charity food brands and nostalgia identifies the political implications of depicting the military in these terms, arguing that by rendering the British military intelligible "within the terms of existing commoditized discourses of post-2008 vintage nostalgia", they are produced as a "notionally apolitical social cause" (p2). Indeed, Horn (2010) and Basham

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[20] The popularity and dominance of the notional association between soldier heroes, adventure, and "tough warrior masculinity" has strong links to British imperial 19th and 20th century adventuring (see Green 1980; Bristow 1991; Dawson 1994; Paris 2000).

(2016) tell us how a similar aim is achieved through the mobilisation of the notional sacrifice of military families;

> *"the effect of fighting a war with an all-volunteer force, however, is that this kind of rhetoric is made all the more necessary – the war has not touched most civilians' personal lives in any significant way (aside from those with friends and family involved in the war), meaning that sympathy and loyalty must be derived for those who are suffering the consequences of the war. Military men and women are then cast as selfless heroes, and their families as unwavering patriots"* (Horn 2010: p59).

Victoria Basham (2016) specifically refers to the work of the Military Wives Choir in producing the military as a "notionally apolitical social cause" (Tidy 2015: 2), and the significance of the gendered role of the military wife[21];

> *"The packaging of these emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects on "our boys" and the women and (girl) children they leave behind as hit singles, allowed the wider British public to personalise war. Objecting to such heartfelt expressions of support for soldiers would be hard-hearted, cynical or snobbish; even if an effect of remaining silent is to back "our boys", "wherever they are" and whatever they do (Barnett 2012)"* (Basham 2016: 889).

According to Basham, the figure of the military wife presented through gendered performances of the Military Wives Choir works to generate sympathy from the national public, and render any expression of critique for the work being done by 'our boys' impossible. Woodward & Jenkings (2012) similarly note that the real cost and lived experiences of war have generated a

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[21] The significance of the figure of the military wife will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter, and again in the final empirical chapter of this thesis.

level of public sympathy, sympathy which is mobilised in British memoirs from the Afghanistan war. In contrast to US memoirs which explicitly celebrate military exceptionalism, Woodward & Jenkings (2012) claim that British memoirs are in part characterised by their framing in relation to public sympathy towards the true costs of war on the minds and bodies of soldiers, while at the same time being celebratory of the heroism of "our boys" (see also Woodward, Winter & Jenkings 2009). There is a communication of the personalised experience of war at play in such publications, a giving of testimony which personalises war and at the same time illustrates links between "the conduct of specific warriors and the grand legitimising narratives of geopolitics that justify putting them in harm's way in the first place" (Dalby 2008: 453).

The work outlined above illustrates how critical military studies has done a great deal to highlight how strategies of contemporary militarism work to bring a particular kind of military subject into recognition, one which is embedded in "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132). Indeed, as Tidy (2015) and Kelly (2012) illustrate, there is a politics to this, in which the rehabilitation of the British armed forces is a paramount concern (Tidy 2015). Taking a critical reading, we can see in the remaking of the military hero a paradox which Zehfuss (2009) refers to, using Butler, in these terms; "The despair at the loss of an irreplaceable life does not necessarily predispose us to question the frames that make violence and war possible, as the frame inevitably always already frames the loss" (p21-22). That is to say, the unmaking and remaking of subjects which Edkins (2003) claims is integral to the creation of state memory from the outset incorporates the real life testimony of soldiers, embracing the relationship between the state and the individual soldier but at the same time forgetting elements of the violence which they enact. Woodward & Jenkings' (2012) work on British military

memoirs shows how the real effects of war on the bodies and minds of soldiers is incorporated into the frame in a way which in fact works in the state's interests.

I would argue that there is great value to be found in reading these "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170) through which the logics of contemporary militarism are enacted both in terms of militarism *and* frames of war. By understanding these processes as working within the framing of war, we can extend our understanding of the frame beyond Butler's realm of the visual towards wider conditions of visibility and practices within everyday and prosaic spaces. Indeed, what Butler's framework might contribute to existing work on militarism is an appreciation of the potential to resist, to overflow, and more importantly to at once "jettison" and "present" (Butler 2009). As mentioned earlier in this section, everyday life can be seen as *always already militarised* (see Kuus 2008), yet there is little consideration in literature on militarisation given to how particular groups or individuals engage with or negotiate this. By bringing this literature into conversation with Butler's *Frames of War* (2009), there is scope to critically approach the 'militarised' subject in more nuanced ways.

Yet, considering the sovereign hero subject in this way can only take us so far. As earlier sections in this chapter have shown, there is a symbolic, metaphorical force attached to the figure of the hero. This is an element of the hero's nature and production that cannot be adequately approached simply through the lens of *Frames of War*, or indeed through an extended understanding of the frame as incorporating "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170). Rather, to fully understand how the hero works in contemporary geopolitics, we must look again to field of *intelligibility* through which the heroic frame can be understood, "the general historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable" (Butler 2009: 6);

"these normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition" (Butler 2009: 4).

The foundational claim of this thesis is that the schema through which the hero becomes 'knowable' can be understood as a deferred '*promise*' of something. The following section of this chapter will unpack this contention in relation to the work of Sara Ahmed (2010) and Lauren Berlant (2011).

The hero as a sovereign fantasy in the "promise of happiness"

The hero is by his very nature a fantastical figure, whose relationship with the state is characterised by his offer of almost transcendental strength, power and bravery. A key claim of this thesis is that the hero is an integral figure within a wider 'sovereign fantasy', revolving around the characterisation of 'good' versus 'evil', 'us' versus 'them', 'normal' versus 'abnormal', 'safe' versus 'unsafe'. As such, this fantasy is recruited into the very framing of war. But what is a sovereign fantasy, and what forms does it take? To explore this question, it is useful to draw on the work of Sara Ahmed on *The Promise of Happiness* and Lauren Berlant on *Cruel Optimism*. These texts provide a lens through which we can approach the figure of the hero as an object of optimism through which the state acts. While it may seem curious to consider *happiness* as a conceptual lens through which to examine a figure in the framing of violent warfare, as this chapter section will show, happiness is the form which violence takes in relation to the figure of the hero.

According to Sara Ahmed, "happiness shapes what coheres as a world" (p2), it structures our way of being and provides a vision of what we must work towards in our lives. Happiness resumes the form of deferred possibility, a

promise, something that we can feel in anticipation rather than presence. She claims that;

> *"Happiness is looked for where it is expected to be found, even when happiness is reported as missing. What is striking is that the crisis in happiness has not put social ideals into question and if anything has reinvigorated their hold over both psychic and political life. The demand for happiness is increasingly articulated as a demand to return to social ideals, as if what explains the crisis of happiness is not the failure of these ideals but our failure to follow them. And arguably, at times of crisis the language of happiness acquires an even more powerful hold"* (p7).

The promise of happiness does, therefore, hold a position of authority; it governs our actions, our vision of a 'good life', and the boundaries within which we must hold our tongue and remain silent[22]. In this way, the promise of happiness provides the structure for action, inaction, critique, and resistance. *'Happiness' is that which we must aim for*. Lauren Berlant (2011) further considers the relationship between this promise or 'object of optimism' and the neoliberal state, focusing her attention to the particularities of neoliberal fantasies of the 'good life'. We can liken Ahmed's 'happiness', then, to Berlant's 'object of optimism', and see that both notions are fundamentally tied to a sovereign, neoliberal vision of a 'good life'. Berlant remarks that "while in this book ['Cruel Optimism'], optimism about the good life that I am tracking is related to crises in state participation in the economic and legal life of social actors and populations, it usually takes other routes, through zones of labour, neighbourhood, and intimacy that constitute the more immediate and manipulable material of good-life fantasy" (p14). 'Optimism about the

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[22] See Ahmed's work on Feminist Killjoys (in *The Promise of Happiness,* 2010) *and Living a Feminist Life* (2017)

good life', as Berlant tells us, can therefore manifest in many forms. We can see it in the structures of our society, the ties that we cultivate between us, and crucially to this thesis, the relations that are enacted between civil society and the sovereign state. The good life fantasy, the fantasy through which the sovereign acts, is therefore constituted by the "manipulable material" of everyday life.

Berlant considers how politics "pulls on bodies using the ligaments of affect, how politics becomes irresistible, even when it is self-frustrating" (Schaefer 2013: 4). Schaefer (2013) notes of Berlant that "Politics produces fantasies, tethers that draw us forward to particular attachments in the form of images, narratives, bodily practices. But these fantasies also contain elements of their own frustration or refusal" (Berlant 2011: 226). The "manipulable material" that Berlant refers to therefore recruits bodies, mobilising them affectively in a way which renders their politics "irresistible". Such bodies are tethered to fantasies, fantasies which can loosely be described as of "the good life" but which fundamentally relate to the ideals of the neoliberal state. Yet while Berlant's main concern is arguably with neoliberalism, I argue that fantasies of sovereign life are as interesting and prevalent in the everyday, and affectively mobilise bodies as vehicles of attachment in the same way.

Berlant claims that "Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it" (2011: 48). If, as Berlant (2011 226) argues, politics produces fantasies, then the sovereign fantasy can be seen to be produced and enacted through attachments to specific bodies and narratives, both of which function affectively. In the sovereign fantasy, the 'hero' is a crucial character. The figure of the hero promises to guarantee the endurance of the sovereign state in its benevolence

and omnipotence, and, importantly, protects the desire which locates this subject as powerful and magnetic. The figure of the hero protects and reaffirms the sovereign relation between the state, masculinity, power and protection. While enacting the promise of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent sovereign state, the hero is at the same time a promise of happiness in himself. Such a figure is never actualised, only becoming; that is not to say that the hero figure does not 'exist', but rather, the idea of the hero is always in flux, fleeting, tethered to the fantasies of politics. As Boudreau & de Alba (2011) note, the figure of the hero adjusts according to the political and economic conditions within which he appears. Indeed, we can identify people as 'heroes', but it is the category of the 'heroic' that is always unstable, ambiguous, fractured, incoherent. To take this further, as later chapters in this thesis will explore, the framing and performativity of the hero soldier is itself always ambiguous, at once both sovereign and containing fragments of a more resistant subject.

We can see the deferred promise of the hero present in the making of state memory through examples such as the repatriation of fallen soldiers through Royal Wootton Basset (Jenkings et al., 2012) or the 'poppy politics' of Remembrance Sunday (Marshall 2004). Jenny Edkins (2003) claims that state memory relies upon the unmaking and remaking of subjects, the breaking apart of particular ties with the state which must be forgotten, but at the same time a celebration of other kinds of relations with the sovereign. In the example of the military hero, forms of remembrance rely on the state reclaiming fallen soldiers, yet at the same time blurring out the element of the sovereign state which inflicted this violence. This is precisely the argument that Victoria Basham (2016) makes in her discussion of the gendered and racialized politics of the Royal British Legion's Annual Poppy Appeal. Edkins (2003: 11) argues that "forms of statehood in contemporary society, as forms of political community, are themselves produced and reproduced through

social practices, including practices of trauma and memory". We can again see here the nature of the military hero as ambiguous, always at once "grievable" and "non-grievable", "jettisoning and presenting", "*doing both at once*". But crucially, in the reclaiming of deceased soldiers, or indeed in wider acts of reclaiming physically or mentally traumatised soldiers in service of the state such as in the Invictus Games, we can see a deferred promise at work. It is a multifaceted promise, which at once gives the assurance of a 'good life' following service in the armed forces, and of a covenant in which the sovereign state offers security and protection to civil society. It is a promise of nationhood, of belonging, of community (Anderson 1991), but also of power, of the right of the sovereign to "make live or let die" (or, indeed, "make die or let live", see Foucault 2003).

The unmaking and remaking of subjects (Edkins 2003) can be thought about in another way. Crucial to Berlant's argument in *Cruel Optimism* is that such objects of attachment are at the same time both magnetic *and frustrating.* That is to say, our attachment to the figure of the hero is detrimental to our own flourishing. Part of the reason the figure of the military hero is so effective, is that he exists beyond critique. The notional distancing of "our boys" from the state and the military itself (see Kelly 2012; Basham 2016), provides (what is perceived as) an opportunity to support the hero of the armed forces without actually supporting the wars they might be fighting or the political parties who wage them. Indeed, it is impossible to articulate hesitance about military charities, the Military Wives Choir, the Invictus Games, without being deemed to be unsupportive of 'our boys' on the front line. Thus, our attachment to 'our boys' is deliberately mobilised in order to justify violent warfare, yet our inability to critique such a figure poses a challenge to the flourishing of our own political agency. The unmaking and remaking of the relation between the hero and the state therefore has implications not only for state memory and

the upholding of the sovereign fantasy, but also for our own political agency; "these fantasies also contain elements of their own frustration or refusal" (Berlant 2011: 226).

Sovereign Wives: Gender and "the promise"

Considering the figure of the hero as a "promise of happiness" allows us to shed a different light on the gendered roles at play in contemporary militarism and the framing of war. More specifically, it allows us to examine in more detail the figure of the military wife, how she acts and what she offers sovereign power.

Much has been written on the relationship between the military and masculinity. The soldier is characterised by stoicism, phallocentricity, domination and heroic achievement, alongside the "eroticisation of… risk-taking and even lethal violence" (Hopton 2003: 113). Beevar (2000), Hockey (2003), and Basham (2013) argue that the relationship between masculinity and violence in the military has, for hundreds of years, been fundamental to military values being upheld; indeed, "War and the military represent one of the major sites where direct links between hegemonic masculinities and men's bodies are forged" (Morgan 1994: 168). Yet, "glory and respect can belong only to the fighting men whose aggression is controlled and regulated by the state and used to uphold the authority of the state" (Hopton 2003: 114). The element of control by the state is therefore crucial in imagining the military body as 'heroic'. Caso (2016: 4) notes, "Emotional integrity and physical power are characteristics associated with masculinity. The military has historically been conceived as the quintessential institution that inscribes these powers onto men. Military training moulds the male subject, forging his muscular body and disciplining his emotions".

More recently however, scholars have begun to make complex dominant understandings of military masculinity, following Robert Connell who compellingly argues that, "Institutionalised violence (e.g. by armies) requires more than one kind of masculinity. The gender practise of the general is different from the practice of the front-line soldier" (1995: 7). The practice of state violence by military bodies necessitates fluid performances of masculinity, that both reinforce and challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity. For example, military masculinity relies on a fundamental sense of brotherhood and comradeship (Basham 2013). Members of the armed forces who do not reflect the "look out for your mates" mentality are seen as feminine, unsoldierly and can even be subject to official sanctions (*ibid*). Yet, behaviours which may be considered un-masculine in wider society are often not only condoned but encouraged; for example periods of mourning and 'heart-to-heart' discussions with one another are considered vital coping strategies when regiments experience the death of a colleague (*ibid*). Across the armed forces it is also interesting to note the prevalence of vaguely (and even overtly) homoerotic rituals. Basham (2013) for example discusses the "crossing the line" ceremony, which dates back to the sixteenth century and celebrates the crossing of naval vessels over the equator. This 'ceremony' involves a combination of excessive alcohol consumption, nudity and the simulation of homosexual acts (*ibid*). These rituals can be seen as a way of reinforcing the sense of brotherhood within regiments and, particularly if they are long-practiced historical rituals, strengthens their sense of military history and belonging. As Basham (2013), Higate (2012) and Belkin (2012), all argue, homoeroticism and embracing behaviours deemed unmasculine actually constitute part of the performance of heterosexual masculinity in the armed forces. What is therefore interesting for this research, particularly in the contemporary context, is how the practices of remaking and reclaiming the

military hero might speak to this body of literature and more nuanced understanding of military masculinity.

Hopton (2003: 115) points out that "If the reciprocal relationship between masculinity and militarism is weakened, so too is the power of the state to manipulate public support for its right to use violence to pursue its policies at home and abroad, as well as to encourage young men to join the armed forces. Thus, the state has a vested interest in maintaining strong ideological links between militarism and masculinity". It is clear then that the fantasy of the military hero is inherently gendered, just as the nation is gendered (Hooper 2012). What we can see is that the heroic body is constituted in large part by 'masculine attributes'[23]. Of course, as Judith Butler tells us in *Gender Trouble*, the designation of the 'natural body' happens from *within* culture (see also Loxley 2007: 117). Butler's work on performativity develops the work of Austin to consider the "power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (Butler 1993: 20). Indeed, as Loxley articulates it, "our bodies cannot be understood as standing outside culture, as the ground or origin of our social identities" (2007: 117). As such, not only is the male body inscribed with politics, but so too is the relationship between the heroic body and masculinity. Butler poses the following questions in *Gender Trouble*;

> *"…is there a political shape to 'women', as it were, that precedes and prefigures*
> *the political elaboration of their interests and epistemic point of view? How is*

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[23] Of course, following the work of Basham (2013), Belkin (2012) and others, it is important to note that the maintenance of a relationship between military masculinity and the state is also complex. For example, Belkin (2012) suggests that the partaking in a duality between sexism or homophobia and homoerotic military rituals can serve to discipline soldiers and force them to conform to the aims and traditions of military institutions. Higate (2012) additionally contends that such homoerotic rituals can help soldiers to overcome the dehumanising aspects of service in the military, as well as their distance from intimate human contact. One could argue that such practices further reinforce a sense of 'nation', and constitute the performance of an imaginative geography of 'us' and 'them' (Gregory 2004) in the everyday and banal.

that identity shaped, and is it a political shaping that takes the very morphology and boundary of the sexed body as the ground, surface or site of cultural inscription? What circumscribes that site as 'the female body'? Is 'the body' or 'the sexed body' the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is 'the body' itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers or sex?" (Butler 1999: 164).

The hero is inherently *bodily*, iterative and performative, forged by "political forces with strategic interests". In the case of the hero, these strategic interests tie him inextricably with the concerns of the sovereign state. Importantly, however, the hero is not constituted only by his own masculinity, the performative acts which "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (Butler 1990: 279), but also his relationship to his performative others. Butler tells us that "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space" (Butler 1999: 179). As such, we can see that the hero is, too, "tenuously constituted in time", reliant upon the normativity of the performative to designate behaviour of the "inside" and of the "outside". If the hero is framed in terms of hegemonic masculinity, as the defender of the feminised nation, then we can argue that the hero is in part constituted by his feminine 'other'. According to Via, hero narratives (or "narratives of heroism and sacrifice", to use Edkins' (2011) terms) centre around the existence of not only the masculine defender of the nation, but also the feminine other through whom he is brought into recognition. In this fantasy, the military wife is the embodiment of nationhood and patriotic sacrifice; "physically fighting (and dying) for a national interest is perceived as masculine, whereas it is the proper sphere of women to sacrifice within the home to defend those interests" (Horn 2010: 62).

Cynthia Enloe has written extensively on the role that women play in processes of militarisation (see for example Enloe 1983; 1990; 2000), arguing that "all spheres of a woman's life can and have been militarized" (1983; 264); "In each country military strategists *need* women. They need women who will act and think as patriarchy expects women to act and think. And they need women whose use can be disguised, so that the military can remain the quintessentially 'masculine' institution, the bastion of 'manliness'" (p220). More specifically however, the military wife can be considered a vital component within the sovereign fantasy. As Via (2010) points out;

> *"A large part of the gendered roles in and around militarism can be accounted for by understanding the centrality of hero narratives to both soldiering and citizenship. In these narratives, the heroic warrior defends the feminised other for the good of the self, family and country (Huston 1983; Elshtain 1987; Young 2003). In this social structure, men are not only honoured as citizen-warriors but are also bound to fight when called upon (Goldstein 2001), while women serve as biological and social reproducers of the nation generally and soldiers specifically (Yuval-Davis 1987)"* (Via 2010: p45).

Of course, while the military wife occupies a very clear position in the sovereign fantasy, her role depends to a large extent on the ability of the military (and therefore the state) to control her. In *Does Khaki Become You* (1983) Enloe discusses the military wife as a 'political problem'[24] – military wives pose a potential problem, in that they can challenge their husbands' loyalties to the military and the nation. Yet, there is the possibility that they can be harnessed and mobilised in ways conducive to the aims of the armed forces;

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[24] We can see a link here between Enloe's 'political problem' of the military wife, and Sara Ahmed's 'willful subjects'. According to Ahmed (2014), to be "willful', is to be troublesome to power, and yet the making of an unruly or "willful" subject is also a means of governing and making manageable.

> *"If those women can be socialised to become 'military wives', they can perhaps further some of the military's own goals. For instance, women as military wives can help win civilian support and sympathy for the military by making it seem a less brutal or insulated institution. And military wives can – if controlled – give male soldiers emotional support and incentives to 'act like men' in battle"* (Enloe 1983: 48).

Under specific conditions, therefore, military wives are "socialised to accept their role as caretaker and peacemakers, and further socialised to accept that these issues are secondary issues, a footnote to the 'national security interest'" (Horn 2010: 62).

Consider this in relation to Butler's work, and we can see that the figure of the military wife helps to constitute the masculine hero, as well as "*what is cast out and maintained outside the frame*" (2007: 953). Indeed, perhaps we can argue that in her role as the embodiment of feminine sacrifice, and a figure through which the masculinity of the hero is brought into recognition, perhaps she also works to "manag[e] the prospect of [the norm's] undoing" (2009: 12). That is, in her stoicism and performance of sacrifice, the military hero subject even in his ambiguity is remade and 'managed'.

Yet, I would argue that the figure of the military wife also works in another way, within the 'promise of happiness'. In the sacrifice of the military wife, we can see what is at stake in the promise. The promise becomes latched not simply onto the needs of the sovereign state, but also even onto the most familial and intimate relations between husband and wife, father and children. In the figure of the hero himself, we can see that what is at stake is the power of the sovereign state, as well as nationhood, belonging and community. But, the sovereign figure of the military wife allows this frailty to also be translated onto more banal, prosaic and intimate spaces, harnessing the relationship between the family unit and the wider concerns of the nation.

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As Victoria Basham (2016: 889) has argued, in *"emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects"* such as those of the Military Wives Choir, the British public are able to *"personalise war"*. This serves not only to reclaim and remake the violence of the military in ways conducive to the aims of the sovereign state, but also to show what could be lost if we do not subscribe to and participate in the promise. Furthermore, the framing of military heroes in relation to the suffering of their wives, and therefore to their own vulnerability, points to the reciprocal relationship of obligation between civil society and the hero. Yes, he is obligated to us, but crucially, *we are obligated to him*.

The resistant subject: Breaking the frame

As I have shown earlier in this chapter, the framing of the hero must by necessity work to render the hero soldier grievable, but at the same time blur out the violence that they enact (and, by extension, the violence of the sovereign state). Within Butler's framework, we can see that even as a boundary figure, the hero works to highlight the functioning of the frame as "managing the prospect of its undoing" (2009: 12), and so the nature of the hero as straddling the boundary of the frame is central to his functioning. While the hero is a subject through which the boundaries of "inside" and "outside" are maintained (Butler 2009; Walker 1993), his own subjectivity as *always both* is crucial. In this sense, we can see that the hero is necessarily always an ambiguous figure. But, is there still a capacity for the hero to resist, and to break the frames within which he works?

If, as Williams (2002: 156) argues, frames serve to reflect and reinscribe "a shared definition of presently occurring social reality", then as discussed above, we can see examples of this far beyond the visual culture of images. Maja Zehfuss (2009) argues that 'frames' of war can be made perceptible through other modes of representation, such as military obituaries. She claims

that the official MoD obituaries of fallen soldiers can be seen, to some extent, as scripted narratives in the pursuit of nation-building; deceased servicemen and women have their lives 'tidied' into neat boxes conducive to this project (*ibid*). As such, the mode of representation is performative in the text of the obituary. One of the fundamental shortcomings with Butler's conceptualisation of 'frames' of war, which Zehfuss (2009) in some ways addresses, is that in her discussion of the frame she is herself working only *within* the frame. By using military obituaries to examine the contested position occupied by soldiers in the framing of war, Zehfuss is opening up a space to think anew about forms that these frames can take beyond the visual register. Yet Zehfuss' analysis also has further import for how we think about the ambiguity of modes of visuality (2009). The example of military obituaries reveals gaps in the frame, by highlighting their ability to simultaneously reinforce and challenge dominant geopolitical imaginations;

> *"Butler's 'frames of war' permeate these obituaries. Yet whilst this confirms her argument to an extent, she does not consider the peculiar situation of the armed forces and therefore has nothing to say about how it is that we are, despite their grievability, prepared to risk their lives… The despair at the loss of an irreplaceable life does not necessarily predispose us to question the frames that make violence and war possible, as the frame inevitably always already frames the loss. But it may be the negotiation between these two – the way in which both the frame and the recognition of singularity inevitably fail – that could offer us the best chance to find the resources to re-imagine the frame we cannot escape"* (Zehfuss 2009: 21-22).

In the military obituaries that Zehfuss discusses, we can see how the soldier is a figure who throws into question our recognition of the frame. While the frame "inevitably always already frames the loss", it is our recognition that "both the frame and the recognition of singularity inevitably fail" that allows

us to consider in different ways how it is that the frame might function. Thus, Zehfuss shows us that it is through an understanding of the ambiguity of the frame, that we can ultimately come to "re-imagine the frame we cannot escape" (*ibid*).

One of the interesting aspects of Butler's analysis is her standpoint on what constitutes resistance to the dominant frame (Butler 2009). She contends that images which challenge the perpetuation of a dominant discourse by extension resist that discourse (*ibid*; see also Williams 2014). However, as Williams (2014) points out, by creating this dualistic mode of thought, between images which reinforce the dominant geopolitical imagination and those which challenge it, Butler is in fact reinscribing the existence of two static and mutually reinforcing positions which further entrench the frame itself. The frame 'break' can therefore be understood as the replacement of one static viewpoint with another (Williams 2014). If we consider this in light of Zehfuss' proposition, there are some obvious sticking points. By revealing the gaps in the frame, are we disrupting it? Williams (2014) would suggest so. She argues that the 'frame break' is not synonymous with disruption; indeed, 'disruption' as a geopolitical term is ill defined in literature (*ibid*). Williams considers how dominant geopolitical discourses can be challenged through disruption, looking specifically at the artwork of British artist Fiona Banner and her disruption of dominant discourse surrounding the military and military aircraft (*ibid*). Her contention is that "…an uncanny, unexpected experience can act to cause a slippage in the experiencing of the dominant discourse, a disruption to the 'field of vision' that is troubling, but also important in that it offers the opportunity for the frame to be seen, questioned, and reassessed" (Williams 2014: 15). She therefore offers "a more nuanced suggestion, that dominant frames are challenged by disruptive moments and events…that

cause those frames to be thrown into confusion and exposing the gaps within the citational and iterative practices that enable their continuation" (*ibid*: 15).

To explore the gaps and moments of dissonance in the framing of the military hero, the research presented in this thesis draws critical attention to such "uncanny, unexpected" moments of slippage. In doing so, it is possible to imagine this fantastical sovereign figure not simply in terms of objective, unavoidable and necessary militarism which is *always already everywhere* (Kuus 2008), but rather as a subject embroiled in ambiguity. The hero is an embodiment of practices of both power and resistance, which Sharp *et al.* (2000) argue are always necessarily intertwined. That is to say, he is incoherent, incomplete; as Edkins tells us, there is always an excess of subjectivity (2003).

Yet, it is not enough to say that the ambiguity of the hero appears through breaks or moments of slippage in the frame. To more closely approach this, we need to examine the nature of the hero as a performative subject, one who is brought into recognition through countless temporal, spatial, and bodily negotiations.

As illustrated earlier in the chapter, the hero is a performative figure. This is one of the peculiarities of the hero within the framing of war; true to Butler's theorisation of the performative body, he is "not to be construed as a stable identity" but rather as "an identity tenuously constituted in time" (Butler 1999: 179) always *being* and *not being*, *becoming* and *unbecoming*. The modes through which he is brought into recognition are always situated, contextual, *of a time and place*. Even the speech acts through which the hero is brought into recognition, which I will engage with in more depth in later chapters of this thesis, are ascribed with meaning in ways sensitive to the time and place in which they are uttered. Sara Ahmed further notes of performativity that;

> *"On the one hand, the performative is futural; it generates effects in the constitution or materialisation of that which is 'not yet'. But, on the other hand, performativity depends upon the sedimentation of the past; it reiterates what has already been said, and its power and authority depends upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence"* (Ahmed 2004: 92-93).

If the performative is in part futural, we can argue that the performativity of the hero is central to the way in which he functions as a *deferred promise* in the wider framing of war. This promise is one which "depends upon the sedimentation of the past… its power and authority depends upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence" (*ibid*), and as such, that it is rooted in the linear time of the state is central to the power relations in its enactment.

Yet, this futural aspect to the performative is arguably the key to how the subject might resist. Ahmed tells us that;

> *"If the performative opens up the future, it does so precisely by citing norms and conventions, as to repeat something is always to open up the (structural) possibility that one will repeat something with a difference. Significantly, iterability means that the sign can be 'cut off' from the contexts of its utterance; that possibility of 'cutting' is structural to the writerly nature of signification (Derrida 1988)"* (Ahmed 2004: p93).

On the one hand, Ahmed is reiterating what we already know of Butler's argument; "that performative utterances can go wrong, be mis-applied or misinvoked, is essential to their proper functioning" (Butler 1997: 151), or as she tells us in *Excitable Speech* (1997), there can be no sovereign speech act. Yet, to me, that "the performative opens up the future" is crucial here. Perhaps it is possible to argue that the nature of the hero within the framing of war as a

performative subject is in part that which allows him to resist, to overflow, to imagine alternate futures beyond the linear time and trajectory of the sovereign state.

Conclusion

This chapter has fleshed out the value of considering the hero as a sovereign subject within the wider framing of war, as understood by Butler (2009). It has shown that just as the frame itself need not be stable and can be in flux, always "jettisoning" and "presenting" (Butler 2007: 953), so too can the hero occupy this contested space. Using the work of Zehfuss (2009), we can see that the hero is by necessity always at once grievable and non-grievable, a life willingly sacrificed yet one which must be remade and reclaimed by the state. The hero acts a crucial component in the contemporary framing of war, a subject who allows the violence of the sovereign state to be at once forgotten and harnessed in a productive way. Indeed, this chapter has also provided some vital detail and texture to the frame, using the figure of the hero to consider how the frame might not simply function through the visual, but also through "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170) and indeed through the *deferred promise of happiness*. The performativity of the hero is, to use Ahmed's terms, "futural"; he "generates effects in the constitution or materialisation of that which is 'not yet'" (2004: 92-93). The power of the hero lies in the promise that he provides a willing nation, of security, state power and indeed sovereign benevolence. It is paradoxical that the hero represents at once the violent power of the sovereign state and its capacity to care and recover, yet this is central to his functioning.

While this chapter has pointed to the capacity of the hero to always at once be "jettisoning" and "presenting", being, becoming, and unbecoming, always at once "*doing both*", I would argue that the performative nature of the hero as "futural" actually also points to his capacity to resist, overflow, and break the

frame. Edkins (2003: 12) tells us that "No place that the person occupies… can fully express what that person is. There is always something more". As such, I would argue that while the hero is always at once "*doing both*", so too does he hold the capacity to reimagine alternate futures, and 'land in unexpected places' (Foucault 1997).

In conclusion, this chapter has unpacked the conceptual aim of this thesis in bringing together three sets of literature, namely Butler's work on *Frames of War*, the work of critical military studies on militarisation and the everyday, and the work of Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011) on futurity, affect, promise, and sovereignty as a future horizon. The contention of this thesis is that by examining the hero as a deferred promise of happiness, we can approach the violence at work in processes of militarism and practices of sovereignty in new ways. Ultimately, by bringing these literatures into conversation with one another, I argue that there is scope for productive new conversations on the violence and harm enacted in the promise of happiness which the figure of the hero embodies.

3. Methods

"It was a hot summer's day in August 2014. I had been invited to a family barbeque by my friend Dan, who I had met one night in my home city of Plymouth a few years before. When I met Dan, a skinny 24 year old with a broken nose and arms scrawled over in crudely tattooed black ink, he was a Corporal in the Coldstream Guards. Before meeting Dan, I had no specific interest in the armed forces; my experience of the military thus far had been largely informed by my father's teaching position at the Britannia Royal Naval College, the many hours I had spent scuffing my feet along its vast and immaculately polished corridors as a child, and years later the nights I had spent dodging rowdy Navy lads on nights out. I found myself fascinated and intrigued by the way Dan narrated his life in the military. The dark humour and sneering cynicism he shared with me over cigarettes and shots of tequila stood in stark contrast to the almost regal military pride of the BRNC, and the ornately painted walls and musty uniforms in beautiful glass cabinets which I had known before."

(Extract from fieldnotes)

At the very heart of this thesis lies a violent juxtaposition, between the "ornately painted walls and musty uniforms" of the face of the military, and the "dark humour and sneering cynicism" of the subject which the state remakes. In the previous chapter of this thesis I unpacked the theoretical framework through which we can understand the sovereign fantasy of the military hero, and how he functions within the wider framing of war. The military hero subject is unmade and remade through countless temporal,

spatial, and bodily negotiations; yet, as the previous chapter argues, while Butler's analysis of the frame tells us that the framing of war makes the image itself, she does not go far enough to tell us how exactly this happens. The analysis provided by a reading of Berlant (2011) and Ahmed (2010) offers us the opportunity to consider differently the detail and texture of the frame at work, and opens up a space to think anew about the "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170) through which he is brought into recognition. As Cowen & Gilbert (2008) argue, the home and homeland are spaces of security, and so narratives of the 'domestic' are involved in the ideological battle of war. However, as Edkins (2003: 12) tells us, there is always an inherent impossibility in the making of a singular, knowable, and coherent subject. As such, the sovereign hero can never be made a whole subject. What this thesis begins to approach is thus not simply the processes through which the hero subject is made or remade, but (crucially) also the "uncanny, unexpected" moments of slippage in this framing.

The struggle that appears to us, then, is; how do you practically examine this process? In this chapter I seek to give colour to this methodological aim, and flesh out the specific methods and overall approach used in this research, along with the challenges that arose. As the opening extract to this chapter illustrates, there is a violence to the remaking of the hero subject. This methodological chapter will therefore critically engage with the value of mobilising emotional geographies as a means of encountering and addressing this violence. In keeping with the wider aims of this thesis, which consider the hero subject as fundamentally gendered, this research demonstrates a commitment to a feminist methodology which engages with the 'everyday' and with the voices of women who are often rendered invisible. As Pain & Smith (2008) note, the 'everydayness' of geopolitics is often left out of the discussion, and itself poses a methodological challenge. What counts as a

source of analysis in geopolitics? And, how do we approach the subjects of this type of research?

Sites of the hero

In October 2014 this project stood before me as an insurmountable task. Like many (if not all) first year PhD students, I had countless questions, but no answers. I had spent the previous year during my Masters conducting archival work at the Imperial War Museum, and dwelling on how we might incorporate the archive into our understanding of frames of war and of the hero soldier. I quickly came to understand that while the military hero figure has clear historical roots, the contemporary context and processes through which the hero is brought into visibility were, for me, far more interesting to consider. Indeed, a critical reading of geographies of the hero through archival work does not allow us to approach one fundamental characteristic of this subject; such a figure is, first and foremost, profoundly *bodily*. As the previous chapter in this thesis has shown, the very notion of the 'hero' is tied inextricably to notions of hegemonic masculinity, physical strength, bravery and heterosexuality. The first challenge that this thesis necessarily must overcome is, how to incorporate a reading of the hero subject that is sensitive to his "fleshy corporealities"?

When setting out on this project, institutional spaces such as the Catterick barracks had seemed like an obvious place in which the everyday lived practices of the 'hero' could be encountered, especially through extended periods of ethnographic research[25]. What became apparent however was that while this kind of approach would perhaps shed light on the *embodied*

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[25] This type of research with the military poses its own challenges regarding access, hierarchical and cultural complexities unique to the military, and negotiating the insider/outsider status of the researcher (see Williams *et al.* 2016; Soeters & Shields 2014; Carreiras *et al.* 2016).

practices through which the hero may be performed or made visible, it would not allow me to closely enough encounter the politics at work in understanding how it is that the hero *functions*. It is not simply the case that the hero subject 'objectively exists', but rather that he is brought into recognition, remade and rendered visible in order to perform specific functions. After all, as the previous chapter has argued, the hero is a performative subject inextricably tied to the sovereign promise of happiness, a promise of a good life and of the benevolence and power of the sovereign state. It is not enough therefore to draw only on a methodological approach which places the hero *himself* at the centre, but rather we must prioritise one which recognises the importance of the spaces in which this happens, and the practices and other bodies or figures which are mobilised. Indeed, it is clear that the hero is brought into recognition *even in encounters when he is himself not present*. That is to say, the sites in this research acknowledge that the hero is remade and rendered visible not only through his own performance, but also through the performative practices of others.

This thesis draws on four discrete 'sites of remaking' through which the military subject is brought into recognition. The sites chosen in this research do not reflect a geographically scalar approach to the concerns of this thesis. That is to say, the sites do not assume some kind of primacy to institutionalised or already recognised sites of national heroism. Rather, they cut through these conceptual problems in different ways, providing alternate means through which to encounter the remaking of the hero subject, and the politics in which this is embedded. All of the sites or lenses chosen demonstrate a different negotiation with and remaking of this figure. Crucially, these sites also open up space to encounter the heroic subject through his performative others, drawing specifically on, as this chapter will show, the figure of the military wife. A brief outline of these sites, and the

methods used to engage with them, is given in this chapter. Importantly, however, all of the grounded 'sites' which this research draws upon are situated in the military city of Plymouth, in the South West of the UK.

Plymouth

The primary research discussed in this thesis was conducted in the military city of Plymouth in the South West of the UK. Plymouth has a proud and extensive military history, one which continues to shape the fabric of the city today. Most obviously, the military presence can be seen in the landscape of the iconic Plymouth Hoe, and the Royal Citadel which perches atop of it. The Royal Citadel is a "dramatic 17th century fortress built to defend the coastline from the Dutch" (Visit Plymouth 2016). Now home to 29 Commando, it is an intimidating structure which physically looms over the city, and which really epitomises a 'militarised landscape' (Woodward 2014). Beyond the Royal Citadel, Plymouth is home to Devonport Naval Base, "3 Commando Brigade Headquarters and several Territorial Army units. The Royal Air Force was also based in the city until 1992. Furthermore, there are Royal Marine bases in Plymouth, Turnchapel, Lympstone, Instow and Chivenor, which is also the base for No 22 Squadron RAF. Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth delivers basic training for all Royal Navy Officers, while other ratings train at HMS Raleigh, Torpoint." (Herman & Yarwood 2014: 7). As such, Plymouth presents itself as an ideal site for research on the armed forces and militarism, particularly the way in which it permeates everyday life[26].

The narrative put forward in a city such as Plymouth is one which prioritises the veneration of the armed forces, yet at the same time positions them

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[26] Plymouth has been chosen as a site for similar studies on military communities (see for example Herman & Yarwood 2014).

according to their likeness to us. Plymouth's relationship with the armed forces is celebrated, something which is visible not only in its militarised landscape but also in events such as the annual Armed Forces Weekend, in which thousands of people descend on the Plymouth Hoe (seafront) to celebrate the military and what they do 'for us'. We are reminded in such events of our proximity to the military, and see the popular rhetoric depicting the armed forces as 'our boys' play out. In such events, this subjectivity becomes almost visceral.

The intimate, the prosaic, the mundane

As the opening extract to this chapter illustrates, this research is very much informed by my own proximity to the subject, and the intimacy and entanglement of my relationship with the military. Having spent all seven of my high school years in Plymouth, my understanding of the militarism and military identity of Plymouth is profoundly personal, formulated from years of feeling and being "Plymouthian". I had become accustomed to the way in which militarism permeates the everyday lives of its citizens; on a Friday and Saturday night, the clubbing area of Union Street is crawling with navy men and the occasional group of marines or soldiers, with Jesters (colloquially known as 'Molesters') renowned as the go-to bar if you want to "snag a sailor". The early hours of countless Sunday mornings had for my friends and I been spent in our favourite Mutley Plain haunt 'Goodbody's', fending off the advances of rowdy 'military lads' while we gorged on cheesy chips and pints of tea. The military presence in Plymouth can be tasted in the salty air of the Barbican - the historic sea front from which the Mayflower set sail for America in 1620 -, felt in the dark and sticky corners of the Keyham Vaults pub where sailors go to drink and fight, heard in the old-fashioned air raid siren that sounds every Monday from Devonport dockyard and echoes across the city. For me, these 'sticky' moments of encounter shed a more textured light on the

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militarism at play. These are encounters which are often "immediate or unmediated" (Mitchell 2002: 170) but which form a key component of this research. In such moments, the violence of the state in reclaiming the lives and bodies of the armed forces comes into recognition and is made palpable.

There is therefore a methodological imperative in being sensitive to the intricate and profoundly localised moments of fracture in the framing of the hero. My identity as a "Plymouthian" positions me well to engage with these situated practices, performances, and moments of dissonance. Such reflexive accounts allow us to bring into visibility "absences, fallibilities and moments that require translation" (Pratt 2000: 642). Indeed, as Valentine notes, it is through an engagement with these kinds of moments that we may "de-centre our research assumptions and question the certainties that slip into the way we produce knowledge" (2002: 126). Furthermore, Woon (2013) tells us that any focus in political geography only on secondary resources neglects an important examination of the way in which political processes play out in everyday life and, as such, "emotional fieldwork" has a great deal to offer us as researchers. The following discussion of the specific 'sites of remaking' used in this fieldwork will demonstrate a sensitivity to how such political processes play out in everyday life.

Boots at the Door

Boots at the Door was a play produced by the military community of Plymouth through the Royal British Legion's Armed Forces Recovery through Theatre programme. According to the promotional material for the play; "*Looking beyond the drama of the frontline, Boots at the Door is a funny and poignant play that explores what it means to be a hero – both in the field and at home*" (Boots at the Door 2015). This focus on "what it means to be a hero" positions the production well within the aims of this research. As Leavy (2015) tells us, "Performance serves as a method for exposing what is otherwise impossible

to reveal" (p175). The performance of *Boots at the Door* was chosen as a lens through which to examine the figure of the hero, not only for what the recovery through theatre project sought to reveal about "what it means to be a hero", but also what it can reveal about the *performative nature* of the hero. Indeed, as Hickey-Moody (2013) notes, a methodological approach which draws on affect and aesthetics "recognises that processes of making meaning, crafting emotional responses and producing images in thought are practical and political acts. These acts inform *the possible* in social imaginings." (p85, emphasis in original). As such, an examination of *Boots at the Door* allowed me to consider the production of images in the play as *political acts*.

Artistic productions such as art, film and theatre are not static and apolitical. Rather, they teach us "to feel in certain ways, and these feelings have politics" (Hickey-Moody 23: 83). Further, an engagement with such modes of representation allow us to "demonstrate how embodied capacities are increased or decreased by sounds, lights, smells, the atmospheres of places and people. It allows us to understand the ways popular art such as films, games, pop music, wikis, popular dance and high art (visual art, theatre, dance), change people's attachments to subjects" (*ibid*: 80). Through an interrogation of the characterisation, stagecraft, and tropes mobilised in the performance itself, and indeed through an analysis of the script *as text*, *Boots at the Door* can shed light on the conditions through which the sovereign subject is brought into recognition.

An analysis of the performance *as event* required undertaking an ethnographic style of thick description, paying attention not only to the technicalities of the performance itself, but also to the conditions of visibility in which the performance occurred (Kear 2013). As Loxley (2007: 149) notes of Schechner's 1988 work (p72), performance incorporates "not just what happened between the raising and lowering of a curtain or between two blackouts, but also all the

preparatory interactions between spectators and the performance space, and anything that happened in and around that space until the last audience member departed". "For Schechner", Loxley argues, "performance was emphatically not just what happened in a clearly demarcated stage space: in using the term to denote also the whole range of experiences that surround the site and duration of theatre he was opening up 'matrixed' to the 'non-matrixed' interactions that surround it" (Loxley 2007: 149). Thus, the 'thick description' created from attending the event began upon entering the building of the theatre, and ended after I had left.

One of the inherent difficulties with conducting this type of research is that not all of the intended meanings and subtle intimations can be gained simply from watching the performance (although, as the director of the play Lee Hart pointed out in an interview, much of the meaning gained from theatrical performances is deliberately situated and *of a time and place*). In order to gain a fuller understanding of the delicate codes of meaning present in the play, I also drew on textual analysis of the script *as text*. In particular, this method used critical discourse analysis (CDA), which considers the ways in which written and spoken language can enact cultural and social identities and perspectives (Gee 2010). CDA draws on a Foucauldian (e.g.1977) approach to discourse as a vehicle through which power is exercised in the construction of disciplinary practices. CDA is more receptive to the role of a pre-existing material reality in constraining individual agency than discourse analysis, and can be epistemologically aligned with critical realism (Reed 2000; Bryman 2012). Phillips & Hardy (2002: 8) outline five devices of analysis used in CDA, including exploration of how a discourse is constructed using texts; how actors employ the discourse in order to legitimate their actions; and how the discourse gives meaning to social life. This research draws particularly on these three elements in a consideration of how a particular discourse

surrounding the 'hero' as a sovereign subject is created, reinforced or disrupted in *Boots at the Door*.

In addition to an analysis of the performance as event, and of the script as text, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the director of the production and two of the cast members, a method discussed in more depth later in this chapter. The cast members' names have been kept anonymous, however the director of the play gave consent to be named.

Challenges

One of the problems with this aspect of my research was the great difficulty in gaining access. Months of back and forth emails between myself and the staff at TR2 (the Production and Learning Centre attached to the Theatre Royal Plymouth) were in the end fruitless, as I was denied access to the project's workshops and rehearsals. This was on the grounds of the project already having their own researcher (perhaps from the Royal British Legion) who was always in attendance, and they were as such reluctant to allow an additional researcher "in the room"[27]. Fortunately, my later interviews with cast members and the director proved to be enlightening and exceptionally useful, and so this element to my research did not suffer too heavily. The case still remains however that a prolonged period of participant observation at the project's workshops and rehearsals could have provided me with a much

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[27] I was also told that in the latter weeks of the rehearsals, there were usually a number of journalists in attendance, and so my presence would have been "problematic". As Belcher & Martin (2013) note however, *not* gaining access is itself a finding of importance in political geography. In the case of *Boots at the Door*, it is arguably quite telling that the theatre staff and the Royal British Legion did not want me present during the initial "therapeutic" improvisation workshops (to use one of my research participants' terms) or later play rehearsals.

more in-depth experience and understanding of the performativity of the hero, and the encounters through which this subject is produced.

Invictus Games and Help for Heroes

The Invictus Games and the charity Help for Heroes both provide pertinent examples of vehicles through which the wounded military hero is remade and reclaimed by the state[28]. Drawing on the Invictus Games (specifically the 2014 and 2016 games) involved quite simply watching the games (and indeed the attached 'Invictus Choir' series of 2016) unfold on television and taking 'thick descriptive' notes, as well as conducting critical discourse analysis of official Invictus material online. My analysis was not confined only to this official material, however, and in addition incorporated a photographic series based on the Invictus competitors by Erik Tanner published in Time Magazine. As such, 'Invictus' provided not simply a discrete example of the remaking of the 'hero' in official material, but rather a wider site through which the wounded subject could be approached.

The work on Help for Heroes used in this thesis draws primarily on material found on the Help for Heroes website, which provides an extensive database including annual reports and detailed information on the charity's fundraising activities and challenges. In addition, the website itself provides a great deal of material and extracts from beneficiaries, which are themselves telling of the particular narrative put forward by the charity. The final component of my research on the charity involved a visit to the Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre in Plymouth; I had been invited along on the visit by a fellow academic – and, if it hadn't have been for this invitation from someone who already had a 'contact' at the centre, I suspect I never would

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[28] Full background details of these examples will be discussed in Chapter 5.

have managed to gain access. On the visit itself, we were taken on a guided tour of the facilities at the centre, and were afforded the opportunity to ask any questions we had.

Challenges

A significant difficulty of conducting research using the Help for Heroes website was that it was constantly changing, with the specific material available online (particularly relating to beneficiaries) always in flux. In practice, this meant that (once I had realised the transient nature of the website) I had to be extremely diligent with my note taking and referencing. In addition, and consistent with what I had heard from other researchers and voluntary sector workers, I found Help for Heroes to be totally unresponsive to my (numerous) online enquiries, and in fact quite inward looking and suspicious of researchers. On one occasion, I telephoned one of the charity's 'challenges' teams to ask some questions about the Big Battlefield Bike Ride, and found them to be very suspicious of me. In fact, after ending the phone call with the woman I had been speaking to, a man calling from the same number phoned the office I was working in with my partner (who answered the phone), claiming to have received a "missed call" from us and wanting to know who we were. My partner, unaware of the situation, told him that he had got through to his business line, at which point the man on the other end hung up. This brief encounter struck me as being quite telling of the inward looking nature of Help for Heroes, and indeed of the high stakes involved in the remaking of the wounded military hero. On the other hand, during my visit to the Recovery Centre, I found the staff to be helpful, willing to engage with researchers, and in fact quite critically aware. My conversations with Adam (whose name has been changed for anonymity) at the centre indicated that a schism existed, between the representational practices of the charity writ

large, and the everyday practices of care and rehabilitation undertaken in Help for Heroes' name.

However, even in the space of the Recovery Centre, the narrative put forward by Help for Heroes was tangible. This was evident in moments of rupture, which are discussed more extensively in the second empirical chapter of this thesis, but which are important to touch upon here as a methodological challenge. In one particular instance, our tour around the accommodation building (Parker VC) was interrupted;

> "*As we were leaving the building, we came across a man in shorts and a floppy summer hat checking his pigeon hole in reception. Adam briefly said hello to him, they exchanged some 'banter', and we were moved quickly outside. Adam explained to us then that the man was a resident in Parker VC who suffered from severe PTSD and had developed Tourette's syndrome. I got the impression that Adam had not expected us to bump into any of the centre's beneficiaries on our tour*".
>
> (Extract from fieldnotes, visit to Help for Heroes Recovery Centre)

The violence of the narrative put forward by Help for Heroes became clear in this moment, as we became witness to a fleeting moment of the lived experiences of the trauma of war. Indeed, in this moment there was a palpable discomfort among those of us on the tour. The awkwardness of the encounter and the speed with which we were shuffled out of the building shed a harsh light on the hierarchical dichotomy we were participating in, between the researcher and 'the researched'. I exchanged an uncomfortable look with the other PhD student in the group, suddenly feeling very aware of our position as spectators and feeling like caricatures of scientists, studying our subject with intrigue while taking notes on clipboards. While it was never the intention for this aspect of my research to be ethnographic, the research process was to a certain extent animated by a concern with avoiding the

objectification of "the veteran" as passive research subject who lacks agency. As Bulmer & Jackson (2016) note, "There is much at stake in claims 'to know' the embodied experience of war and militarism. We are troubled by conventional modes of representing the veteran, which we feel are often determined by didactic agendas which objectify 'the veteran' as a social problem" (p2). As such, the methodological approach taken in this research was one informed by the valuable existing work in veteran led research, such as that of Bulmer & Jackson (2016) and Caddick et al., (2017), which places importance on not attempting to speak on behalf of veterans.

The schism between the representational practices of the charity writ large, and the everyday practices of care and rehabilitation undertaken at the Recovery Centre served to challenge my cynicism about the charity as a whole. Yes, it was certainly true that the charity creates and relies upon a specific vision of the wounded soldier as 'heroic', and as such fabricates a relation of obligation between the charity and civil society. Indeed, the charity as a whole not only appeared to be inward looking and suspicious of researchers, but have been accused of a host of more serious offences including bullying employees, sharing beneficiaries medical records, and even fraud (see Telegraph 2016). Yet, what I saw at the Recovery Centre was a group of staff members, who were ex-military themselves, working hard to improve the lives of those in their care. As such, it became difficult to maintain the wholly critical perspective which I had set out on this project with. Indeed, it became a struggle that I negotiated within myself throughout this research[29].

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[29] This difficulty, of maintaining a 'critical' perspective while conducting close research with the military and organisations associated with them, is discussed in depth by Baker *et al.*, (2016).

The Military Wives Choir, Plymouth

The Military Wives Choir provide a compelling site to examine the gendered logics of militarism and "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) have come to permeate popular culture and everyday life and to date, no other in-depth primary research with the choir exists. Indeed, the Military Wives Choir also provides an interesting example of an alternate genre through which the framing of war can take place, beyond the realm of the visual to other "practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170). Indeed, this research seeks to contribute to a feminist geography, interested in the "reclaiming and validation of women's experience" (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997: 566). My research with the choir consisted of twelve months of phased fieldwork, making up the bulk of my primary research. I conducted thirteen interviews in total with choir members, as well as several weeks' worth of participant observation at choir rehearsals. In addition, I attended a number of the choir's public performances and fundraising events, as well as conducting an analysis of the BBC's 2011 coverage of the choir in *The Choir: Military Wives*, their repertoire of songs, CD imagery and promotional material.

On "emotional fieldwork"

"Dan and I developed an unlikely friendship, and it was through him that I came to find myself in the field of military geography. That summer's day in August, I found myself in the back garden of Dan's parents' house in Saltash, Cornwall. His sister Theresa was celebrating her 30th birthday, and had invited round a small group of the family's close friends. The group, as it turned out, was made up of three naval officers and their wives; Theresa's husband Tim was a submariner and so, as I later heard, most of their mutual friendships had developed out of involvement with the military. We sat in the

hot afternoon sun and drank beer, and I (still feeling a little uncomfortable in the situation, as I hadn't met Theresa before and was very much an outsider) quietly watched the back and forth exchange of 'military banter' between Tim and his friends. Quite a few beers later on my part, I was in the passenger seat of Theresa's car holding a birthday cake as we drove to her house to continue the celebrations. "Have you seen Frozen?" she asked me, and without waiting for a reply continued "I love it, it's my favourite Disney film". She leaned across to the CD player, pressed play, and started crooning loudly in my ear "Let it go, LET IT GOOOOO". I looked over my shoulder and exchanged an amused look with Dan, who was sat on the back seat eating leftover barbeque food. "Shut up, you sound like someone's swinging a bag of cats at a brick wall!" he shouted through a mouthful of piri-piri chicken. It wasn't true of course; Theresa was actually a very good singer, but Dan was the sort of person who would take any opportunity to make fun of someone. Theresa leaned towards to me and said loudly over the music "I sang at the Albert Hall you know. With the Military Wives Choir"" (Extract from fieldnotes).

As the extract above shows, the access I gained to the choir was largely a matter of luck and having the right contacts[30]. The difficulty of gaining access to do research with military institutions, and the common necessity of having to use personal contacts, is an issue widely acknowledged in military studies (see Ben-Ari & Levy 2014; Walker 2016; Hyde 2016). Such research often relies on the use of a "gatekeeper" figure (O'Reilly 2005:91) who helps to provide access to particular social events. This, for me, was Theresa. Theresa took me

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[30] The implications of this kind of access to military institutions is discussed by Alex Hyde (in conversation with Baker *et al.,* 2016), who claims that having a family contact through whom she was granted access enabled her to gain the trust of participants, but also brought to light a number of more complex dynamics related to rank, class and sexuality. Indeed, Hyde later questions "If we develop professional relationships and personal friendships with military personnel, empathize with particular narratives, begin to identify with certain values… Does this impact our capacity to do critical research?" (p147).

to weekly choir rehearsals, which opened up subsequent opportunities to recruit participants for interviews and focus groups, as well as speak more informally to choir members during the rehearsals themselves. "Tagging along" with Theresa also gave me the opportunity to attend choir fundraising events, and informal gatherings at her house with other choir members.

My relationship with Theresa and her family became quite intimate over the course of my research. Not only was I already a good friend of her brother, but as the months went on and we spent more time together, I came to know Theresa well, and developed a deep understanding of her lived experiences as a military wife. The hours I spent sitting at her kitchen table drinking tea and eating biscuits, the evenings spent in the passenger seat of her car while she told me about home schooling her children, the family barbeque, the birthday night out, all provided me with an insight into the life of a military wife which I could not have gained purely from my role as 'researcher'. This had a profound effect on my research; while I embarked on the project from the outset harbouring an undeniable cynicism about the Military Wives Choir, and the overtly gendered role that they play in contemporary militarism, I found myself softened by my encounters with Theresa and the other women of the choir. According to Bondi (2005: 1), "there is great value in approaching emotion not simply as an object of study, but as a relational medium in which research, researchers and research subjects are necessarily immersed". Taking this view, we can see that there is value in acknowledging that my emotional engagement with the women of the choir was not necessarily detrimental to the project, or even just a symptom of the affective political processes at work, but also a crucial mode of engagement through which any 'knowledge' must necessarily be produced. Indeed, as Baker *et al* (2016) note, "the affective politics of that encounter don't necessarily dissipate immediately afterwards just because the encounter was short lived" (p143). Ethnographic, embedded

and emotional encounters of this kind can in fact provide an understanding and a "language" through which the researcher might negotiate their role in the civilian/military model of difference in the future (*ibid*).

The value of this kind of emotional 'immersion' was exemplified clearly to me during my attendance at weekly choir rehearsals, access I gained through my relationship with Theresa. I spent a number of weeks attending choir rehearsals on a Thursday evening, always with Theresa, observing but not participating in the singing. These rehearsals took place in the chapel of the Royal Citadel (home to 29 Commando). The practicalities of attending involved informing the chair-person of the choir two weeks in advance so that they could put my name on the attendance list, against which I needed to be 'ticked off' by the security guard at the gate upon arrival. This to me felt like a performance of security more than anything else, as on one occasion my name was not on the list but I was permitted entry regardless (after a long conversation about whether my name was Valerie). During the rehearsals, I sat quietly on one side of the chapel, taking notes and allowing myself to become immersed (Emerson et al. 2001). One particular occasion, at a choir rehearsal in January 2016, stands out in my mind as a moment in which my emotional immersion became clear to me;

> *"It was nearly the end of the rehearsal, and Rhys [musical director] decided it*
> *was time for some light relief. They decided to sing "Stronger Together", one*
> *of their most popular songs which features on the album. It is easy to be cynical*
> *about the Military Wives Choir. There is no denying that they perform and*
> *recreate a very specific understanding of the military, drawing on gendered*
> *ideas of military heroism and the necessary sacrifice of the patriotic wife. At a*
> *distance, I harbour this cynicism too. Yet up close, I couldn't help but be drawn*
> *into the emotion of it. Singing "Stronger Together", the women of the choir*

stood up and began to hold hands, dancing from side to side and hugging each other.

"Together we are stronger we can overcome

We can walk this road together we can stand as one

And now nothing can divide us we are stronger together

Together we belong, together we are strong"

I don't know whether it was the way the voices harmonised together, the overwhelming atmosphere and feeling of community in the contained space of the chapel, or the fact that I'd already had an insight into the life of a military wife through my relationship with Theresa and her family. But, in that moment, I had goosebumps."

(Extract from fieldnotes, Military Wives Choir rehearsal)

According to Elias (2007), a balance should be maintained, between being involved personally during participant observation, and remaining to a certain extent detached (see also Moelker 2014). Yet, in this instance, it was through the very process of *failing to be detached* that the politics and affective power of the choir truly became clear to me. My research with the choir indicated that rather than maintaining a static position between "being involved personally" and "remaining to a certain extent detached", more useful was an approach which allowed me to move between this position and one in which I was immersed and *attached*.

In total I interviewed thirteen members of the Plymouth choir, undertaking semi-structured interviews and one focus group (with two participants) in participants' homes or, occasionally, cafes, as part of my commitment to "feminism research practice" (Letherby 2003; Sharp 2004). The location of the interview was decided by participants, in order to ensure their autonomy over

the process; this was particularly important given the often sensitive nature of our conversations. Indeed, while I started by developing questions I wanted to address and the order I might ask these in ("the right probe at the right time", Plummer 1983: 97), it quickly became apparent that it was more beneficial to allow the women to steer the direction of the conversation. As such, my research with the choir reflected a somewhat 'participatory' approach (Pain 2004). That is not to say that this part of the project falls under the bracket of "participatory action research" (PAR) (Kindon et al. 2007), but rather that to a certain extent, the women of the choir were setting the agenda. Most of the women who I interviewed approached me themselves at rehearsals after I had given a brief talk about my research. Indeed, while I started every interview with a few brief questions about how and why they came to be in the choir, all discussions were driven almost entirely by the participants themselves. Many of the women had particular topics in mind that they wanted to talk to me about; in particular, two women had decided from the outset that they wanted to tell me about the problematic representation put forward by the BBC programme *The Choir: Military Wives.* What emerged as a result of these interviews was a series of themes which reflected the choir members' *own* perspectives on how they reinforce a particular representation of the military wife, and indeed how they challenge this. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and partially coded using descriptive and analytical codes, taking influence from the work of Cope (2010).

However, as this thesis will show, the remaking and reclaiming of the heroic subject takes place through highly nuanced and situated negotiations in everyday and banal spaces. Therefore, in order to adequately examine these negotiations, it was vital to take an approach to the research which looked *beyond* the black and white 'codes' in the data, and think about the spaces of

meaning *in between.* In pursuit of this aim, the methodological approach taken in this research was one characterised by an openness and responsiveness to both the participants *and* the theoretical framework of the project. That is to say, a key component in the analysis of the 'data' was a close reading of the material alongside the arguments of Butler (2009), Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011). In practical terms this meant that 'rigour' of analysis as it is widely understood, achieved in particular through the painstaking coding of interviews, focus groups and wider text seen in Cope's (2010) work, was across the entire project considered less of a priority than an intuitive and reflexive approach.

An unavoidable question which follows this claim is of course; how can one make any claims to knowledge when a systematic and 'rigorous' approach to analysis is not considered vital? The analysis presented in this thesis is rooted in both the experiences of participants and my own experience as researcher and as such, I would argue, demonstrates a commitment to reflexivity consistent with feminist research praxis (see Harding 1987; England 1994; Rose 1997). In the context of this research, a prioritisation of 'rigour' of analysis through coding would have failed to address the multidimensional and textured layers through which the hero can be brought into recognition. As I have already discussed, my positionality as a "Plymouthian" was significant and arguably crucial in enabling me to engage with the nuanced practices of heroic remaking and reclaiming in a more intimate way. Indeed, particularly in the context of my research with the Military Wives Choir, the entanglement of friendship and empathy with participants during and indeed beyond the research became central to my analysis. It is for example impossible to detach my understanding of the way the military wife figure acts within the wider promise of happiness from my deep emotional and empathetic engagement with participants such as Theresa. It was therefore neither desirable nor

appropriate to this research for me to attempt to maintain distance and a level of objective 'rigour' when analysing the material.

The comfort of things

My engagement with the Military Wives Choir was not limited simply to attending rehearsals, performances and events, and speaking to its members over cups of tea. Rather, one of the difficulties of this research emerged through my encounters with the very banal objects of the everyday through which the experience of military wives in the choir could be articulated[31]. This ranged from the widely available Military Wives Choir albums, to the box of tattered period war costumes dug out by one interviewee from a dusty cupboard, to the tea-stained music sheets I was given for reference during a choir rehearsal. All of these objects are at once both intimate and public, prosaic and political. Such material is inscribed with meaning, but this meaning cannot always be articulated. A challenge that arose therefore was, how to use or incorporate these mundane objects in a way which was meaningful to the project, and true to the participants' lived experiences. In the end, much of this material was simply left out.

Nevertheless though, the nature of this research did to a certain extent necessitate an engagement with alternate materials, beyond simply that which can be seen. An adequate encounter with the Military Wives Choir would not be complete without giving due appreciation to the politics and affective power of their song repertoire, or more specifically, their music both *as text* and as a catalyst of particular affective engagements. Countless hours were spent leaning against damp train windows or trudging to the supermarket

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[31] The value of prosaic and intimate objects in this kind of research is exemplified in Daniel Miller's book *The Comfort of Things* (2008)

with my headphones on, listening to the choir on Spotify[32]. This type of research demands a sensitivity to emotion, to music as a genre through which the framing of war and of the hero can take place. It necessitates an engagement with the multi-layered fabrics of meaning attributed to any given song performed and rehearsed by the choir.

Boredom and bad singing

A commonality across much of my attendance at Military Wives Choir rehearsals was, I am sorry to say, boredom. It quickly became clear that of the rehearsals I attended, 80% of the time (with rehearsals usually lasting from 7pm until 9 or 10pm) was used painstakingly 'pulling apart' the different components of songs, separating the women into groups (soprano, alto, tenor) and going through the music line by line. The women themselves often became restless, and I usually found myself suffering in the same way, with my attention drifting to other things happening in the room such as the children, who were brought along by their mothers, playing in the background. It would be untrue to my experience of this research to claim that every moment of the process had been significant – indeed, one of the challenges of conducting research in everyday and prosaic spaces is that these moments in which nothing happens are likely to be countless. Then again, it is arguably true that the experience of 'nothing happening' is central to my critique of the Military Wives Choir as a vehicle through which the sovereign hero subject is remade.

Another characterising experience of my research process with the choir was that of laughter. More specifically, it was the innumerable occasions during

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[32] Indeed, much of my understanding of the technicalities of the music itself came from long conversations with my (much more musically inclined) partner.

choir rehearsals in which I found myself stifling laughter, clamping my lips together or looking determinedly at my shoes to hide my amusement (or, often, *be*musement). A key 'character' common to all of the Plymouth choir's rehearsals, and who invoked endless amusement in me, was the musical director Rhys;

> *"Rhys was a dynamic - almost larger than life – character, who spoke with exaggerated arm gestures and bounced slightly on his feet as he walked. It quickly became clear that Rhys was exactly the type of character that this group of women needed to direct them; there were a few ladies who continued to laugh raucously and chat loudly over the top of his voice as he tried in vain to talk them through a complicated new song they were learning. But, instead of getting frustrated and yelling at them to stop talking (as I might have been tempted to do), Rhys simply made a couple of loud and catty comments (which made the room erupt with laughter) and carried on over the noise. As I sat and watched, still sipping on my now cold tea, I thought about the reasons these women had shown up that night. I recalled a conversation I'd had with Theresa a month or so previously, in which she had told me that she was one of the more experienced singers in the group, compared to some of the others who had never sung as part of a group before in their lives. Watching the scene unfold, it occurred to me that Rhys's approach of just carrying on over the disruption was the most appropriate one; these women were after all not there just for the singing. As one interview participant told me later, the Military Wives Choir is first and foremost a support group and a choir second"* (Extract from fieldnotes, Military Wives Choir rehearsal).

Rhys's "catty" comments during rehearsals were totally appropriate to the situation, and served a clear purpose within the group dynamics. Almost by

necessity, Rhys took on the role and persona of the "Bitchy Queen"[33], a much discussed trope in queer studies (Devoll & Blazina 2002: 34), and embodied the opposite of the straight, masculine military men who were the choir members' husbands. This was the only kind of character who seemed able to bring some semblance of order to this group of rowdy women, and indeed was one who brought into greater recognition the hetero-masculine figure of the military hero who the women of the choir were (supposedly) singing about. When teaching the choir different song components, and demonstrating the particular ways they should be sung, Rhys would often burst into very loud and out of tune song. These were outbursts which I struggled to contain my amusement at, never sure whether he was doing it deliberately to invoke laughter, or whether he was genuinely just not very good at singing. In such moments, my positionality as somewhat removed from the group dynamics became most clear, and I felt distinctly uncomfortable and guilty. However, in the car on the way home after rehearsals one evening, I asked Theresa whether he did it deliberately; she said she wasn't sure either.

Such moments of awkwardness and discomfort manifested in a different way, at one particular fundraising performance on the Plymouth Barbican (seafront). Theresa had told me the choir were raising money towards their flights to New York to perform at Carnegie Hall, so I went along and met them in one of the pubs they were performing in. I stood in the crowd, nursing my drink as they sang two quick songs before shaking their buckets under the noses of bank holiday pub-goers. The performance was, unfortunately, not

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[33] Devoll & Blazina (2002) describes the "Bitchy Queen" character as "the "prissy" gay man who takes on culturally traditional ultra-feminine mannerisms and has a sharp tongue and an acid wit. In pop culture, this archetype can be seen in the character Jack from the NBC series "Will & Grace." With his acid tongue, quick comebacks and "effeminate" mannerisms, Jack is the ultimate Queen" (p34)

one of their best; Theresa flurried past me afterwards muttering "well that was shit" and that she was "embarrassed, but oh well". Unsure of what else to say, I decided to be polite and said "nooo, it was fine!" This did however provide an awkward starting point for what became my first encounter with many of the choir members, as I was using the opportunity to 'recruit' some interview participants.

Research with the military

"More than other organizations, the military is a world on its own, an island within society-at-large on which its inhabitant work and live together" (Soeters *et al*., 2014: 3). The nature of the military as a "world on its own" makes it an inherently difficult institution to research. While this thesis does not draw on research undertaken within the institution itself, my involvement with the Military Wives Choir and the cast of *Boots at the Door* nevertheless obviously involved an engagement with the military community. In *Encounters with the Military: Towards a feminist ethics of critique* (2016), Baker *et al* discuss the importance of the face-to-face encounter with what can broadly be defined as 'the military' in critical military studies. They note that;

> *"dominant ideas about militaries, what they are for, and how they should work, are so often de-personalized in that they are removed from the level of people and their everyday interactions. We talk about big strategic concepts as if they have nothing to do with people, as if they could exist independently of our own beliefs and actions. In addition we talk about these concepts as if they are un-gendered, whereas they seem to me to be deeply embedded in gendered ideas, and this gendering plays a central role in their normalization"* (*ibid*, p142).

Following Baker *et al* (2016), this research prioritises the face-to-face encounter with the military, and is committed to 'people-ing' the processes of militarism and narratives of heroism and sacrifice at the heart of this thesis. In particular,

given that the vast majority of my primary research participants were military wives, this research necessitated a sensitivity to the deep entanglements through which the military becomes implicated in the life of the serviceman's wife. This approach is in tune with the work of Alex Hyde, whose discussion of the lived experiences and "material, discursive and emotional labour" undertaken by women married to servicemen provides a much needed ethnographic encounter with the figure of the military wife, and the role that she plays in processes of militarism (2016: 857).

A reflexive approach to conducting research on and with the military demands an acknowledgement of the researcher's status as insider/outsider (Higate & Cameron 2006). Indeed, as Baker et al (2016) note, it is important to consider and explore how it is that these boundaries work to shape the very knowledge that we produce. Due to my perceived identity as an "outsider" to the military, many of the women I spoke to from the choir went to great lengths to explain to me *what it was like* being 'married to the military', while others used it as an opportunity to educate me on the differences between sailors/airmen/marines/soldiers (and why they were proud to be sailors' wives, rather than soldiers' wives). Indeed, being an 'outsider' made it easier for me to ask 'stupid questions', questions which often caused participants to reflect critically on elements of their experience which had gone unmediated.

While my position as 'outsider'[34] to the military undoubtedly prevented me from fully understanding the intricacies and politics of life within the military,

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[34] While I consider myself to largely be an "outsider" in the context of the military world, I did have some experience with military life, as my father taught at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth for many years. Many of my childhood years were spent attending Naval events, taking part in the college's amateur theatre productions, and visiting the beagles who lived on site, not to mention hearing my father talk at length about the intricate internal politics involved in teaching at such an institution. As such, the positionality I assumed as a result of my father's involvement with the Navy was one defined by his cynicism. In order to

being a young white female allowed me to 'fit in' with the wider group (particularly in choir rehearsals), as all but two of my research participants were female and white British (with one white Australian female and one white male). I was at least eight years younger than all but one of my research participants, which largely worked in my favour as I naturally took on the position of the 'naïve and curious researcher' who was able to ask the 'silly' questions. Indeed, as a young woman I felt that I was more easily able to circumvent the question of my marital status, a topic I tried to avoid given the difficulty of comparing my own experiences in a relationship with those of the Military Wives Choir, who would often not see their partners for six or even nine months at a time.

While undertaking research with the Military Wives Choir my brightly coloured hair, tattoos and piercings clearly acted as bodily markers of difference, drawing attention to me during participant observation at choir rehearsals. Yet this was the only space in which I found my physical appearance to have had a negative impact; in fact, one of the choir members I spoke to also turned out to also be heavily tattooed, providing a common ground on which we could develop a rapport. My accent however, which is Southern but often perceived as 'posh' middle-class, at times became a distinct marker of difference, as a number of my participants had strong Plymouthian ("janner") accents. This made me feel slightly uncomfortable on occasions, as I was keen to not enact or be perceived within class structures in which I assumed the role of educated, middle-class academic researcher studying women whose experiences I could not possibly understand.

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not to trivialise the experiences and perspectives of my participants, I did not share my ambiguous position in relation to the military with them.

In my research with the choir, I become very aware of my personal politics and the impact that this might have had. During the period of my fieldwork, the EU referendum in the UK was on the immediate horizon (and in fact, the final day of my fieldwork was on the day after we received the result). This meant that a great number of the conversations I had with the women of the choir eventually turned to the referendum or UK political parties (despite my best attempts to avoid this conversation). As a strong supporter of the 'Remain' campaign, and a pro-Corbyn Labour party voter, I found it quite difficult to negotiate conversations with several of my participants, all of whom were open 'Leave' voters and many of whom supported the Conservatives. I stayed largely silent in these conversations, and simply listened to the participants' perspectives, although this became very difficult in two particular instances, one of which ended in a participant making racist and offensive comments about "foreigners". At this point, I decided to politely end the conversation.

The ethics of an emotional 'military geography'

One of the inescapable challenges of this research lies in the fact that at its very core, it is concerned with the lived experiences of violent warfare. Throughout this project, I heard intensely emotional stories of precarity and loss, of women who would go for months at a time without hearing from their husbands, women who heard stories on the news and feared for their partners lives, even one woman who experienced the violence of war herself and had subsequently been discharged from the British Army with PTSD;

> *"I was lucky, I never really had a lot to do with severe injuries, I mean I would*
> *see people wandering around afterwards and one of our guys lost both legs, but*
> *I was in the pharmacy, we didn't have to deal with that day in day out, the*
> *guys that did had it a lot harder. I think the worst for me was Thursday*
> *afternoons, I hated Thursday afternoons, cos Fridays they would have the*

expatriation of anyone that died that week, and in the afternoons I used to go and help out with the medical stores cos they didn't know what they were dealing with, Thursday afternoons you'd see a load of the lads practicing putting a loaded coffin into an ambulance out by my med stores, because that was the last thing they could do for their friend was to see them off properly, and seeing these guys in tears even just with an empty coffin used to get to me… I didn't like Thursday afternoons" (Interview extract, Kate).

Kate's tearful interview, in which she described the trauma of Thursday afternoons in Afghanistan, left me feeling shaken. The nature of this research necessitated a careful and sensitive approach to the difficult conversations that came up. My approach to ethical research and sensitivity draws on the guidelines of bodies such as the British Sociological Association (BSA), who state that the design and conduct of social research project must be tactful, and not cause extensive emotional distress or physical harm. While my questions were asked with sensitivity, and were open enough to allow participants to direct the conversation in the way they wanted or felt comfortable with, several participants showed a desire to share quite personal and traumatic experiences, perhaps as a means of catharsis (Faulkner & Tallis 2009). In the case of my conversation with Kate, it was a challenge to know what to say or how to react; Adamson & Holloway (2012: 739) suggest that "the researcher can provide support, often in silence, just by being present", and so I simply listened. Indeed, as Kavanaugh & Ayres (1998: 94) point out, "crying is not always the cue for the interviewer to intervene". While it is at times emphasised in feminist research practice that reciprocal openness between researcher and participants can help to develop a rapport (Oakley 1981), I found that this was only appropriate in certain situations. For example, in conversations with military wives about the therapeutic benefits of singing, or the emotion they felt in singing particular songs, I would reciprocate

participants' disclosures with my own perspectives (within reason), whereas in conversations about the emotional distress they experienced during singing when their husbands had been recently deployed I did not attempt to liken my own experiences to theirs, in order to not undermine their experiences. This in fact became a crucial component of my research practice with the choir, as many of these women told me that they felt great frustration when "civvies" tried to liken their own ("trivial") experiences to theirs. For example, Emma recounted to me the usual theme of conversations with her "civvie" friends about her husband going on deployment, in which they would say they knew "exactly how she felt";

> *"Or they go "oh yeah I know exactly how you feel, my partner's got to be away Friday night" – and you're like, "really… that's exactly the same"… "where's he going for the weekend?" "oh like four miles down the road"… "my God… you poor lovely, how are you gonna live through that one?" [Laughs]"* (Interview extract, Emma).

Anonymity of participants was also of great importance in this research, particularly given the sensitive nature of some of the participants' disclosures. This not only included material related to the practices of the military, but also of the Military Wives Choir Foundation, Help for Heroes, the Royal British Legion, and various individuals involved in the making of *Boots at the Door*. A small amount of very sensitive material disclosed to me in interviews has been excluded from this thesis, due to my concerns about compromising the relationships or positions of the participant/s in question.

Conclusion

The overall methodological approach of this research has tried to maintain a commitment to feminist research practice, by placing the 'everyday' at the forefront of its concern, and giving a voice to military wives whose lived

experiences are often obscured. The approach taken is one which renders everyday forms of violence, which are often not taken seriously in political geography, as valuable objects of research. The research in this thesis incorporates an understanding of frames of war as extended beyond the visual to "everyday practices of seeing and showing" (Mitchell 2002: 170). As such, my approach draws on methods which attempt to encounter these practices, mobilising a sensitivity to the notion that "the act of constructing new ways of feeling is at once a contextualised, local event and an enduring augmentation of existing aesthetic tropes… we see that the contextual specificity of each performance is absolutely what allows it to make sense" (Hickey-Moody 2013: 90).

In order to keep the voices of participants present and active in the thesis, the following empirical chapters incorporate a great deal of, often lengthy, quotations from participants. This is consistent with wider feminist endeavours to ensure that the voices of participants remain present in the written articulation of research findings (Holloway 1989).

4. Boots at the Door: Recovering the hero through theatre

"One thing we did in one of the workshops was look at the idea of fairytales, which I think ties in with the idea of building a military hero, and that's exactly where this has gone, because what came out of it despite, this obviously focuses a lot on PTSD and because its talking about life after the frontline, the idea of heroes, the character that I play is married to a Royal Marine and um... you only sort of get a touch of it but basically his storyline is that she met this man, they had a fairytale he was a hero, he was a dream man and what's happened to him after his service and what he's like to live with now, and how to reconcile this dream warrior that she had with now this ordinary man who is very broken at the end of it. And that's a very similar thing with all the characters, where they are in this kind of, I guess coming back from the idea of heroism to the idea of how do you live a normal life after that? That's the story of Boots at the Door. But the other thing that the overarching narrative of it is Odysseus. Trying to find his way back, ten years at war and ten years to come home, trying to find his way back to his wife and family, that is the theme of the play."

(Interview extract, Boots at the Door cast member).

Boots at the Door is fundamentally a play about recovery. The story of the play focuses on a military hero, in his many different disguises, trying to find his way back home to reality, to a world in which he can be at peace with himself. The very aim of the Royal British Legion's Recovery through Theatre programme is to "[improve] confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian life" (Royal British Legion 2015). But what is the significance of the 'recovery' of the military hero, specifically in the context of theatre? What is it specifically that theatre has the potential to recover?

This chapter argues that through different, often creative, means, the figure of the hero is recovered and rendered knowable, performatively re-made as a subject and part of a community. In the context of the Recovery through Theatre programme, and more specifically the *Boots at the Door* production, the military hero is performatively re-made through drama, characterisation, and stagecraft. 'Recovery', therefore, means more than simply helping servicemen and women to transition to normal life again, and integrating them back into a community. Rather, recovery in this context comes to refer to the rendering of military 'heroes' as singular and knowable subjects within that community.

Importantly, however, this chapter begins to approach the inherent ambiguity of the hero. *Boots at the Door* is not simply an uncritical representation of the hero as we expect to see him, but rather attempts to unpack and disrupt such frames through which we come to understand the armed forces. This chapter argues that it is insufficient to pay attention only to how the figure of the hero is performatively created and sustained. Rather, the performativity of the hero is itself ambiguous, containing elements of the publically recognised hero alongside a more resistant subject who challenges this recognition. This chapter argues that it is not enough to say only that the hero is created

performatively in this case study, but rather we should acknowledge the ambiguity and multiplicity of the representation itself.

Recovery through Theatre

In 2011, the Royal British Legion came together with the Theatre Royal Haymarket Masterclass Trust and the Ministry of Defence to write, produce, and perform their own play on the West End stage (Royal British Legion 2015). The aim of the programme was to provide servicemen, women and veterans with new skills and experiences, while at the same time "improving confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian life" (*ibid*). The debut production of the RBL Recovery through Theatre programme, or Bravo 22 Company as they became known, was titled '*The Two Worlds of Charlie F*', and was first performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in January 2012. It then toured the UK, performing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and winning the prestigious Amnesty International Award for Freedom of Expression.

The legacy of *The Two Worlds of Charlie F* has so far been fairly extensive. In 2014, The Charlie F Project (UK) Ltd toured *Charlie F* once again, and included many participants from the original production. The tour was funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council England, and raised funds for the Royal British Legion at each performance. The legacy of the production has also extended to regional projects, including the Buckinghamshire Legacy Project and the Plymouth legacy project (*all ibid*).
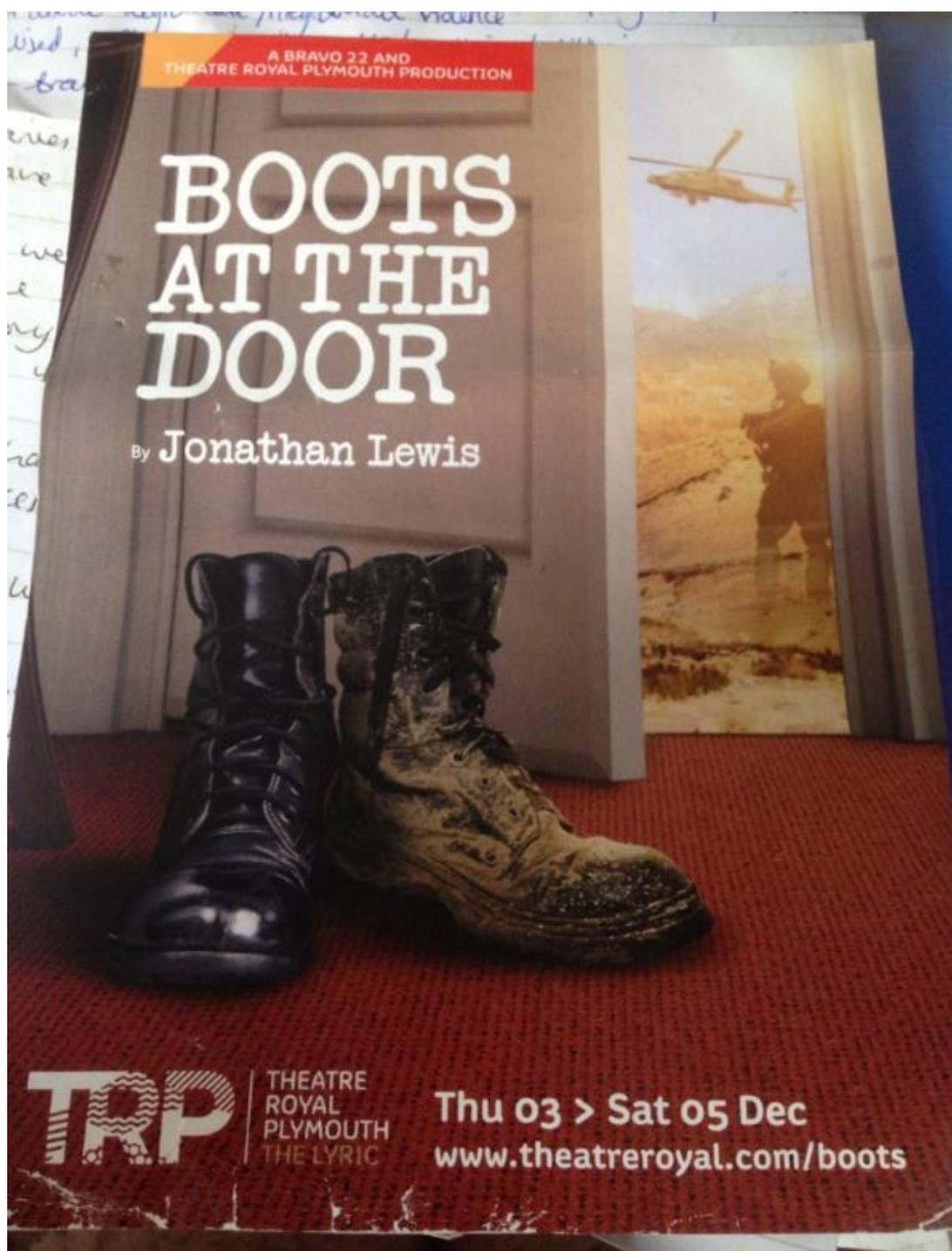
Figure 4.1 Boots at the Door promotional flyer (front)

The 2015 Plymouth Armed Forces production of '*Boots at the Door*' was the culmination of a collaborative project between the Theatre Royal Plymouth, and Bravo 22 Company. The project's aim was to create a play which

Figure 4.2 Boots at the Door promotional flyer (back)

explores "the military community and [tries] to provide a deeper insight into the military way of life" (Theatre Royal 2015).

The Armed Forces Project brought together members of Plymouth's military community, including servicemen and women, veterans, and their spouses. The production comprised of twenty members of cast and an additional twenty-one story contributors and development workshop participants, with another five members of the Production Support Team listed in the programme for being members of the military community (Boots at the Door programme, 2016). Of the twenty cast members, two were professional actors while the other eighteen identified as members of the military community.

The story of Boots at the Door

The plotline of Boots at the Door focuses on a group of members from Plymouth's military community coming together to make a play. Through different characters, the story explores several lenses through which we can examine the military experience, using Homer's *The Odyssey* as a poetic backdrop against which we can approach the idea of the military hero 'returning home', as a metaphor for recovery. Rather than focusing simply on the stories of warfare as told by serving men and women or veterans, it also tells such stories through parents, spouses, partners, and even a more ambiguous character (Tash) whose only claim to a military identity lies in the fact that she has "shagged so many of them". It is a story which in some ways drives towards recovery, reconciliation, and redemption, but which in others points to a possibility that there can in fact be no recovery.

The process of making Boots at the Door

The final script for Boots at the Door was written in a collaborative process between the writer Jonathan Lewis, the director Lee Hart and the cast/production team members. The full process involved workshops over the

course of 9 months in which the cast and production members, which in the early stages used ice breakers and theatre games to open the cast up;

"we got a bunch of participants into a room in April for about 8 or 9 days, some of those were company members that went all the way through and that you saw on stage, some of them just came for that part of the process and then their lives took them in different directions, so in those April sessions we sat and we chatted in a room, and I suppose it was a mixture of introducing them to the nature of making theatre and theatre games, icebreakers and getting them used to each other, developing spontaneity and things like that, playfulness…" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

These early workshops also acted as a way in which the 'writer in the room' Jonathan Lewis could open up some of the cast's stories;

"often it would just kind of go into a two hour talk, often quite heated, often there were some interesting dynamics especially between the men and the women, and they were sort of like, it was interesting to see guys talking about what it's like for them coming home, and the women talking about what it's like for them when the guys come home, I know it's not always that kind of gender stereotype but on the whole it is that way round, and Jonathan Lewis was making lots of notes, we were all making lots of notes" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

After this stage, there was a break until June, where the company spent another 8 or 9 days in development sessions;

"it was a little bit more theatrical this time but there was still a lot of chats, maybe a few strands, really we weren't thinking so much about developing characters back then we were just thinking about opening up stories" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

The early development stages of the production were, therefore, driven around the elicitation of stories about the hero and his life, rather than focusing on the characters as vehicles through which these stories were told. This opening up of stories often involved techniques of setting up scenes and asking cast members to narrate their experiences;

> *"So for instance Debbie in the show… she's been a nurse for quite a few years and she now has PTSD and she's been off sick, she's been on quite a few tours of Afghanistan and Iraq, um… and one of the things for example that we did with Debbie was to, we created an exercise where in room three in TR2, she built, recreated the wards in um Bastion where she was last based in Afghanistan, so usually chairs and tables and stuff that we found in the room, she was able to map out in the room so OK this would be there, this is where the Afghani prisoners of war if you like would be treated, this is the next ward that would be there, operating theatre there, in sort of like real size as best we could, and then we peopled it so like what would this person in this little room be doing, so in a sense she was able to creatively reconstruct the world that she had worked in, and that prompted obviously like, incidents that she would talk about as she could see it all happening, and she found it quite moving, it felt like she was in it"*

(Interview extract, Lee Hart)

The process of recreating scenes becomes a means through which events and emotions are captured and translated into something tangible that can be worked with;

> *"it was playing, it was really playing and recreating moments of their own lives really, and then Jonathan went away and came back with a script that I suppose spliced some of them, it wasn't like Victoria character and Debbie character, but they were in a certain character… you know there would be,*

there was an Australian woman for instance in the show, and I suppose what he tried to do was, cos this was quite an interesting thing what do we do, do we have them play themselves on the stage, is that going to be really strange? And we decided not to do that because it would be too revealing, we were uncertain as to how this was going to play out. We figured it would be better for them to explore the world and the issues that come up by having a little bit of distance from it. So perhaps you would see something that was very pertinent in your own life being played out by a colleague on the stage, so you still got to kind of witness the creative process of seeing this issue worked with and played out, but you're not having to, it's not like bearing yourself up there" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

So, an act of translation took place, between acquiring raw narratives and translating these into theatrical characters who were both enjoyable to watch and enjoyable to play. Thus, while the production took the starting point of eliciting 'real life' stories to steer the direction of the play, these narratives were nevertheless required to be translated into stage performances of characters who essentially became condensed and saturated versions of themselves. The first version of the script was written by Jonathan Lewis, and was later adapted and in part re-written in a collaborative process between Hart and the cast.

What does it mean to "recover"

Over the past six years, recommendations on how to improve the access veterans have to health services have been made by a multitude of government policy documents and thinktank reports. These have included the review of current research produced in collaboration between the Forces in Mind Trust and the Mental Health Foundation in 2013, and Lord Ashcroft's Veterans Transition Review (2014) (Samele 2013). The recovery of veterans and serving members of the armed forces has become a central concern for the

state; however, this imperative of veteran recovery is not simply about assisting the victim of trauma. Rather, recovery is directly related to the proper continuation of the armed forces; as Lord Ashcroft explicitly points out, "the more potential recruits (and their families and teachers) believe that joining the Forces leads to a fulfilling subsequent life […] the more will want to apply". The very notion of "recovery" is, therefore, tied to the promise of a good life, and indeed the promise of happiness that the military hero himself represents.

Clinical services have been developed alongside non-clinical services and support for veterans, with the aim of helping ex-servicemen and women to properly reintegrate into society. But "What the state attempts", according to Edkins (2003), is;

> *"a normalisation or medicalisation of survivors… The aim is recovery, or the reinsertion of survivors into structures of power. Survivors are helped to verbalise and narrate what has happened to them; they receive counselling to help them accommodate once more to the social order and re-form relationships of trust. In the case of the military these days, those suffering from symptoms of traumatic stress are treated swiftly with the aim of being returned to active service within a matter of hours or days"* (p9).

Recovery thus becomes a linear process, an 'end-goal' which veterans must seek to achieve and which will allow the subject to become whole or complete again. After all, 'recovery', according to widely accepted dictionary definition, can be understood either as "a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength", or "the action or process of regaining possession or control of something stolen or lost" (Google 2016). The assumption is that something is 'lost' at the point of trauma, and that there is a necessary linear process to be undergone in order for that lost thing to be recovered.

This is an aspect which I want to take forward in my understanding of 'recovery'. Rather than viewing recovery as simply a process through which the hero "returns to a normal state of health, mind, or strength", this chapter seeks to shed light on the project of recovery as a linear trajectory towards the 'taking back' of the sovereign subject. That is to say, 'recovery' refers to the means through which the singular, knowable, and recognisable figure of the military hero is brought back into recognition within the community and political imagination. As Jenny Edkins (2003) argues, the process of recovery from trauma aims, or is assumed, to reproduce a linear time in which the traumatised person becomes whole again. The project of recovery, in the context of the Recovery through Theatre programme and *Boots at the Door*, therefore works on the assumption that the end point of such recovery will be the production of a complete, whole, and knowable subject. As Hart pointed out to me when discussing the difficulties of getting participants to open up about their experiences in the armed forces;

> *"Largely we had to really draw out some of that kind of like very gutsy stuff because you know they don't want a fuss, they didn't sign up to, they just get on with it, if something needs doing just get on with it, something needs fixing we fix it, very practically minded bunch of individuals, and some of them in a sense are broken temporarily, you know working with PTSD or physical challenges..."* (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

This idea that the hero is 'broken temporarily' is key to understanding the imperative of recovery; through such projects as the Recovery through Theatre programme, the hero can be 'put back together' and brought back into recognition as a singular sovereign subject.

Part 1: The sovereign subject

As Woodward & Jenkings (2012) note, "the literature of war is increasingly escaping from between the covers of books and engaging directly with a wider popular culture of war as entertainment. This culture prioritizes the idea of the soldier which accords to almost stereotypical models of military masculinity" (p366). *Boots at the Door* can be seen as a poignant example of the way in which this 'literature of war' can escape from between the covers of books and creep onto the stage of a community theatre project. It demonstrates how producing the sovereign subject of the military hero can become a project of recovery, and how spaces of performance can come to be implicated in the affirmation of the state.

The following section of this chapter will draw on the understanding of recovery as a process through which a singular, knowable, and recognisable figure of the military hero is brought back into recognition within the community and political imagination. It will unpack the multiple processes and frameworks through which this subject is produced in *Boots at the Door*, and seek to expose some of the tropes through which the figure of the hero can be understood.

The sovereign space of performance

"We step into the theatre foyer from the cold, and are met immediately with the smell of mulled wine which fills the air. A military brass band plays Christmas songs, and groups of people stand nearby nursing drinks, chatting to one another and listening to the music. There is a Royal British Legion stand nearby, manned by an elderly gentleman in a uniform with a red poppy pinned to his blazer. As we head towards the Lyric door, another man from the Royal British Legion offers us a programme."

(Extract from field notes, *Boots at the Door* performance)

When considering the politics of theatre and performance, it is important to think beyond simply the site of the stage. As Loxley (2007: 149) notes of Schechner's 1988 work (p72), performance incorporates "not just what happened between the raising and lowering of a curtain or between two blackouts, but also all the preparatory interactions between spectators and the performance space, and anything that happened in and around that space until the last audience member departed". "For Schechner", Loxley argues, "performance was emphatically not just what happened in a clearly demarcated stage space: in using the term to denote also the whole range of experiences that surround the site and duration of theatre he was opening up 'matrixed' to the 'non-matrixed' interactions that surround it" (Loxley 2007: 149). Adrian Kear (2013) further argues that "the conditions of the appearance of the image provide the very ground for the recognition of the politics of the image, drawing attention to the theatrical politics of spectatorship as a relational exposure of – and to – *political ontology*" (p20).

The experience of the *Boots at the Door* theatre performance on the 3rd of December 2015 was thus not simply constrained to the stage room, the period of time between the curtain going up and the curtain going down. My understanding of the performance, as both an audience member and a researcher, was very much shaped by the conditions of visibility (Jay 2002; Mitchell 2002; Mitchell 2005) of the theatre which I encountered on the day of the performance. The three days of performances ran from the 3rd to the 5th of December 2015, only a few weeks after Remembrance Sunday and before Christmas. The production was therefore well positioned in a period of time when the public are most open to nostalgic representations of the armed forces; Christmas is widely acknowledged to be a time of reconciliation, a time for remembrance. With yearly frequency, the public are invited to remember the so-called 'Christmas truce' of 1914 between French, German, and British

soldiers on the Western Front in World War One; take for example the 2014 Sainsburys advert which uses dramatization of the truce to remind us that "Christmas is for sharing". The brass bands playing Christmas songs, the smell of mulled wine, and the temporal proximity of the performances to Remembrance Sunday and Christmas Day itself provide conditions of visibility which leave little room for doubt as to how the performance was intended to be viewed. We are encouraged to, from the outset, spectate upon the performance through the lens of reconciliation and nostalgia, reminded of the linearity between the 'Tommys' of World War One, the elderly Royal British Legion veterans selling programmes outside, and the servicemen and women performing in the play. The performance is from the outset, then, claimed for the state.

These sovereign conditions for recognition were, too, present inside the Lyric stage room, just before the 'performance' itself began;

> *"Inside the stage room, a few people are sat down already although we are early. There is a strong, thick smell of mulled wine in the air, and what appears to be some lingering fog or smoke from the special effects. On the stage, there is a soldier in camo uniform brandishing a gun, stood on top of a large box about six or so feet tall. There are rocks littered across the stage, and on the large backdrop screen there are scenes of flashing lightning. My mother turns to ask me "Is that a real person up there?" I pause to look for a moment, and notice that he has started pacing around the top of the box, as if on patrol. "It must be" I said to her, "he's moving."*

(Extract from fieldnotes, *Boots at the Door* performance)

Figure 4.3 Opening scene from Boots at the Door

The theatricality of the moment insists on the soldier as subject; the scenes of thunder and lightning on the backdrop give a foreboding atmosphere, a dramatic element that reminds the audience of a scene from *The Tempest*, and our attention is drawn to the figure of the hero who patrols to protect us; this initial classic image of the soldier in the violent space of warfare is one easily recognisable to audiences. The scene is theatrical, dramatic, one in which the pacing gun-wielding soldier becomes an icon, a concentrated version of himself acting as an easily recognisable sovereign subject. This opening scene reminds me of something Lee Hart said to me in an interview;

> *"I think some of these old stories sort of like… the muscularity and their commitment to telling a story, that has sort of like old fashioned qualities like you know, nobility and honour and things like that, respect and dignity and a promise er… and that they have courage to take to paint big pictures and to try big leaps in imagination, like you can create a big cyclops that you know*

rips the head of his men, they became also powerful images that I suppose for some people, you know like those guys who have been to Afghanistan they've seen their mates you know blown into bits, must take on an equally sort of like massive demonic proportion in your memory and in your mind." (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

This "courage to paint big pictures and to try big leaps in imagination" is perfectly exemplified by the figure of the pacing 'hero' soldier set against a backdrop of thunder and lightning. It is a 'big picture' that this scene is trying to paint, one in which the soldier is from the outset depicted to take on the categorically 'pure' distilled characteristics of a hero from classic literature. In the following moments, the lights go down. At this point, as Adrian Kear points out, "the spectator is enveloped by silence and darkness – the conventional theatrical preface to the emergence of visibility and speech" (2013: 24).

Homer's The Odyssey and the hero

With the pacing hero still raised above the stage, the other cast members emerge and stand together in front of the scenes of lightning, and recite an extract Homer's *The Odyssey;*

"Chorus   Sing, Muse, of the man who, wary and wise,

Over time, and across far off lands,

Wasted and destroyed the sacred town of Troy.

Many people he saw and beheld their hearts and minds,

Many pains he endured, heartsick, lost at sea,

Striving to win his life and bring his comrades home.

But as hard as he tried he could not save them from disaster,

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Driven as they were by recklessness, the blind fools,

They devoured the cows of the sun-god,

And he snatched from them the day of their return.

Sing out his story, daughter of Zeus – sing of our time too!"

(*Boots at the Door* script extract)

This chorus reminds us from the very outset of the play that there is a wider framework in which we must understand the figure of the military hero. It demonstrates the "courage to paint big pictures" which Hart refers to, the vision of the hero being one from classical mythology, holding distilled and pure characteristics of bravery and strength. He is "*the man who, wary and wise/ Over time, and across far off lands/ Wasted and destroyed the sacred town of Troy*". The hero remains high up above the other cast members, positioned as a figure of strength and protection who will become central to the subsequent scenes. This image of the hero is one of an 'objective truth', a 'promise of happiness' to use Ahmed's (2010) terms.

Viewing the sovereign subject of the hero in the terms of a 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed 2010) can be useful in thinking through the implications for the political imagination of reaffirming a singular subject of the hero. Lauren Berlant (2011) argues that "Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance or something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it" (p48). The hero, as an 'object of optimism', promises a particular understanding of the sovereign; to push this further, by understanding the hero against the framework of *The Odyssey*, as "*the man who, wary and wise/ Over time, and across far off lands/ Wasted and destroyed the sacred town of Troy*", we can come to understand the sovereign as an objective truth, an

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omnibenevolent and omnipotent presence who exists beyond critique. As Schaefer (2013) points out of Berlant (2011: 226), "Politics produces fantasies, tethers that draw us forward to particular attachments in the form of images, narratives, bodily practices". The hero, as understood through *Boots at the Door* in its reference to the framework of *The Odyssey*, is an example of this fantasy.

The links to Homer's *Odyssey*, and indeed to classical literature and mythology more generally, remain present throughout the play. The play's narrative uses stitched together stories from the cast members, but uses *The Odyssey* as a structure against which these stories are formed. The idea, as I am later told in interviews with Hart, is to mirror the military hero going away to battle and trying to find his way home, both physically and metaphorically;

> *"…for something that was written an awful long time ago, at the heart of the story, I just thought although take away the monsters and the exotic and the fantastical elements what you have at the heart of it is someone who's been off to war, having a very hard time trying to find his way back home… so that was what we were playing with in the room, clearly, you know many of the guys throughout their service their home life had suffered, and one guy particularly in the room was still in the process of trying to keep his family together, his wife and him were going through some stuff, but you could tell in his heart he wanted it to work out, and you could tell in a sense he was going through that journey, although he was physically back here he was still in this process of coming home, and like how do I get back both my family but sort of like a way of life that seems so alien to me"*

(Interview extract, Lee Hart)

We are reminded here of Joseph Campbell's work on the 'hero's journey' (2004 [1949), the path all heroes must tread in order to overcome adversity and become whole again. This idea of a linear journey is reflected in the very

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notion of recovery as a goal, an end point which must be achieved in order for the sovereign subject of the hero to be complete and recognisable within the social order. These notions of a linear journey towards reconciliation, redemption and recovery were reflected even more clearly in an interview with a cast member of the play;

> *"One thing we did in one of the workshops was look at the idea of fairytales, which I think ties in with the idea of building a military hero, and that's exactly where this has gone, because what came out of it despite, this obviously focuses a lot on PTSD and because its talking about life after the frontline, the idea of heroes, the character that I play is married to a Royal Marine and um... you only sort of get a touch of it but basically his storyline is that she met this man, they had a fairytale he was a hero, he was a dream man and what's happened to him after his service and what he's like to live with now, and how to reconcile this dream warrior that she had with now this ordinary man who is very broken at the end of it. And that's a very similar thing with all the characters, where they are in this kind of, I guess coming back from the idea of heroism to the idea of how do you live a normal life after that? That's the story of Boots at the Door. But the other thing that the overarching narrative of it is Odysseus. Trying to find his way back, ten years at war and ten years to come home, trying to find his way back to his wife and family, that is the theme of the play"*

(Interview extract, *Boots at the Door* cast member)

Here, the interviewed cast member refers to the "fairytale" of her character's husband being a hero, and the struggle of trying to reconcile this "dream warrior" with "now this very ordinary man who is very broken at the end of it". The storyline she is referring to between Nicola and Donny involves the exposure of the veteran husband as suffering from PTSD, yet possessing the ability to recover and reconcile with his wife; which, ultimately, he does;

"DONNY : You should mind your own business, that's what you should do. /

NICOLA: You'll wake the kids Don, now be / quiet.

DONNY : And these chips are disgusting. (As he gets more agitated, he throws it on the floor) They're frigging cold. /

NICOLA : (Suddenly completely losing it, and throwing the fish and chips all over him) That's it! Frigging cold chips! (Pushing him over and kicking him) Stone cold soggy chips! I can't believe these poisonous fucking chips are so disgustingly cold! /

DONNY : (Tentative) Calm down will ya? It's only fish and chips.

NICOLA : (Regaining her calm) That's what it's like Don. Living with you. All the time. So don't tell me I don't know anything about PTSD. Okay?

He turns away, but at the same time should suddenly realize what Nicola has been going through.

…

Nicola and Donny come together for a hug."

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'Chips/Hotel' scene)

That the hero is "very broken", the idea pointed out in the earlier interview extract from the actress who played Nicola, is highlighted in the scenes between Nicola and Donny. However, what comes to light in this particular scene is the ultimate potential for reconciliation, recovery and redemption. The trauma of PTSD which Donny (and indeed his wife) experience is located within the linear time of recovery, given as a starting point for a journey towards *being recovered*. In this scene, what is shown is the redeeming power of love and understanding; Donny may be "temporarily broken" (to use Hart's terms), but he is not beyond the possibility of the love of his wife, and neither is he beyond the possibility of recovery. Therefore, just as the hug

between Nicola and Donny at the end of this scene shows how reconciliation is possible, so too does the wider play point to the nature of the hero as *recoverable* and *redeemable*.

Penelope

The role of the military wife in the recovery of the hero is interesting to consider in *Boots at the Door*. Using *The Odyssey* as backdrop for the play not only sheds light on who the hero is, but also highlights the significance of the figure of Penelope (or rather, the wife who is left behind) to the story. As Hart put it;

> *"what's great about that story as well is that it's not just about the guy with a very minor role for the woman who is waiting for him, his wife seems she seems to sort of come out really well in that she's going through her own story which is getting some page time, which is keeping all of these suitors at bay and coming up with more and more creative ways of putting off these guys who are going 'you know he's never coming back, just get with me'… and the son as well, so you also had the home life sort of playing out, so in a room where we had to be honest we had loads more women and military wives from the start than we had guys, the problem has been reaching the guys and recruiting the guys from day one from the April workshops we had a room full of really up for it women who were like 'yep I wanna be a part of that' because they belonged to that part of that group, 'I want to get on stage I want to do something for myself' 'I want to show my husband what I can do'… so it had something for both the male and the female in that story, I think you know the female was very powerful in it, the male was obviously a very strong character, and it allowed us to kind of, as we touched on before I think these old stories are still really useful to us."*

(Interview extract, Lee Hart)

The military wife was therefore integral to the wider concerns of the play. Although there were practical reasons for incorporating the figure of Penelope into the storyline, the powerful image of the female was central in putting across broader ideas about heroism, masculinity, and sacrifice. Cynthia Enloe (1990) reminds us that women have a fundamental role to play in processes of militarisation and in wider representations of the armed forces (see also Beevar 2000). As Via (2010) points out;

> *"A large part of the gendered roles in and around militarism can be accounted for by understanding the centrality of hero narratives to both soldiering and citizenship. In these narratives, the heroic warrior defends the feminised other for the good of the self, family and country (Huston 1983; Elshtain 1987; Young 2003). In this social structure, men are not only honoured as citizen-warriors but are also bound to fight when called upon (Goldstein 2001), while women serve as biological and social reproducers of the nation generally and soldiers specifically (Yuval-Davis 1987)"* (p45).

The Penelope figure is therefore central to the production of a singular and knowable hero subject, as she is the literal embodiment of his 'feminised other'. There are several typical examples of Penelope figures in the play; Nicola whose husband Donny has PTSD; pregnant Tanya whose husband Baz is away on deployment; and even Elaine, a mother whose son has just returned from deployment and proposed to his girlfriend, leaving Elaine feeling abandoned and jealous. These representations of women who are left behind waiting for their military men to return home (whether from deployment, or more metaphorically from trauma and PTSD) push the role of Penelope into characters beyond simply military wives, but further into military mothers. These characters, while having their own storylines, ultimately act as vehicles through which to articulate wider stories about the armed forces and the figure of the military hero. The female component of the

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cast is, as Hart points out, strong, meaning that many of the stories of 'the armed forces' are enacted through female roles, or indeed through female perspectives.

Take for example the Skype scenes between pregnant Tanya and her husband Baz;

"Scene 10 – It's a girl!

> *TANYA: Oh my god at last! How long did that take?*

> *BAZ: I know sorry babe the connections shit here*

>   *How's things going? How's my babies doing?!*

> *TANYA: I'm alright, a little tired. I've got something to show you babe.*

> *BAZ: Go on...*

> *TANYA: I had the scan look! Can you see her?*

> *BAZ: It's a girl?*

>   *…*

> *BAZ: I can't wait. Did you find out your exact due date?*

> *TANYA: April 25th.*

> *BAZ: April 25th?*

> *TANYA: Yeah why?*

> *BAZ: Babe I'm not back then.*

> *TANYA: What?!*

> *BAZ: I'm not back until May 5th.*

TANYA: But I can't do this without you! Can't you ask to be sent home early?

BAZ: I can't babe.

TANYA: Why not? What about if I call welfare?

BAZ: I can't Tanya. The lads need me this is an important operation If something happened and I wasn't here/

TANYA: And what if something happens to us and you're not here.

BAZ: I'll see what I can do.

Look I've got to go but I'll call you soon. I lo/ve

SKYPE CUTS OUT, END OF CALL SOUND

TANYA: (exhales) love you too."

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'It's a girl' scene)

In this scene the audience are shown the struggles of a pregnant woman who is left without her husband while he is deployed. We can imagine her frustration at the temperamental internet connection, upon which she relies to have any contact with her husband, and at the fact that he likens the needs of 'the lads' on deployment to the needs of his wife and unborn child. Yet, the reason he is deployed in the first place is made clear; "*The lads need me this is an important operation*". Thus, we are reminded of the important role of the soldier in relation to national security and fulfilling the objectives of the armed forces, and so the sovereign hero is reinstated as subject.

Part 2: The disrupted subject

Boots at the Door, as I have shown, takes the starting point of a sovereign project of recovery with a linear trajectory. It aims to "improve confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian life" (Royal British Legion 2015), thus working towards the reclaiming of a singular and knowable figure of the hero. As Lee Hart states;

> *"From my point of view we just wanted to give people a voice, get them connecting again to that sense of community, of working towards something worthwhile with that community, of taking something, taking sometimes a bunch of experiences that you think, what are these experiences I carry these more negative ones, how can I do something useful with them?.. I suppose for me, whether this was written in the official guidelines, but how can we do, what can we do, OK so they've got this very painful story but before their very eyes they're seeing a bit of space emerge in it, and it becomes you know not this fixed thing anymore of "my story my pain", it gives some space to move and to change"* (Interview extract, Lee Hart).

So what, then, is considered to be "worthwhile" in this context? If the military community are, in this project of recovery, "working towards something worthwhile", then perhaps one could draw conceptual links with the work of Judith Butler on 'grievable life' (2004), or more specifically the critique of this work posited by Maja Zehfuss' (2009) in her paper on military obituaries. Zehfuss (2009) argues that military personnel occupy a contested position in the grievable/non-grievable binary, where they have their lives (and deaths) 'tidied' into a particular framework in order to *make* them grievable to the nation. The *Boots at the Door* production could be seen as a similar performative remaking of the military experience; perhaps, then, this was the

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imperative of turning a specific set of military experiences into something "worthwhile".

However, as Zehfuss (2009) points out (although not necessarily in these terms), the military experience is much more plural than such dominant representations suggest. Indeed, rather than finding only a singular and knowable sovereign figure of the hero in my research, the subject I have encountered is necessarily always multiple, ambiguous, and incomplete. As Jenny Edkins (2003) points out, the process of 'recovery' from trauma is assumed to reproduce linear time, in which the subject is eventually made complete and 'whole'; this, therefore, does not allow for the incomplete or disrupted subject who I have found in my research. The following section of this chapter therefore seeks to unpack the manifold iterations of this subject, by examining the moments of fracture and dissonance present in the play.

No longer "my story my pain": Community theatre and Boots at the Door
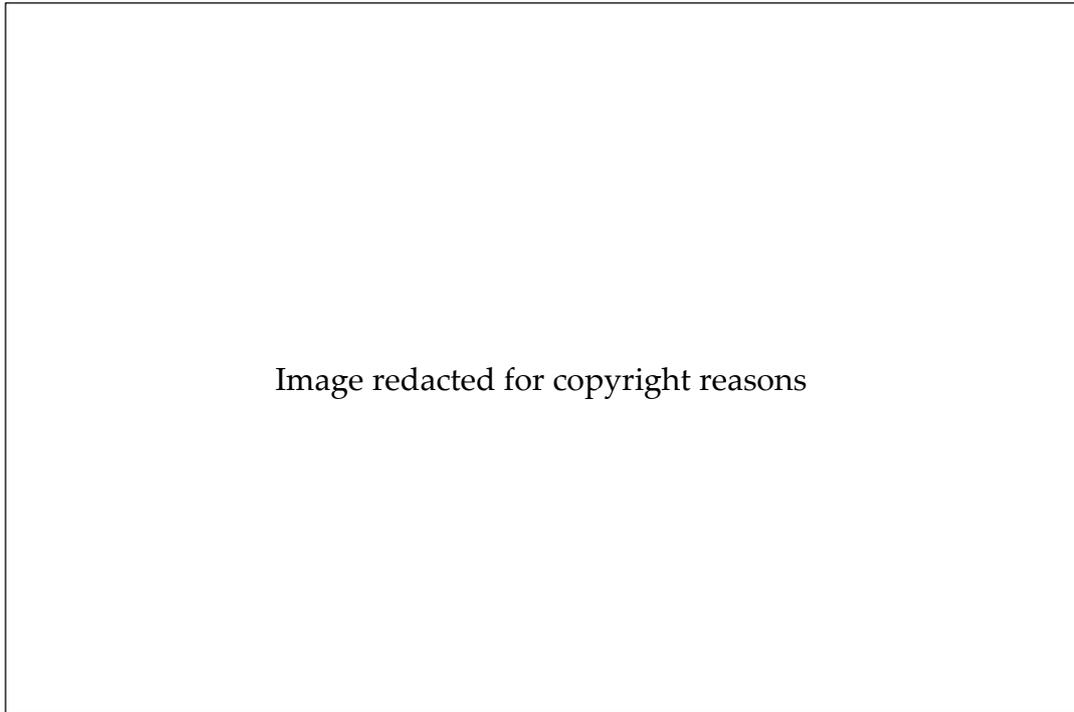
Figure 4.4 The Boots at the Door cast

The significance of the form of *Boots at the Door*, as a community theatre project, cannot be overstated. Community theatre, as a mode of performance and representation, is distinct in that it asks local people to participate in a theatrical remaking of their own experience, in the translation of their own stories into a dramatic performance which others will want to watch and they will want to enact. Community theatre has great potential for participatory work which can give a voice and agency to disenfranchised groups (see Mattingly 2001; Richardson 2015; Pratt & Kirby 2003); as Mattingly (2001) points out, "community art is one way the stories and perceptions of typically marginalized community residents can reach a large audience, as well as one means of community development and improvement" (p445). Indeed, theatre can be "a rich site for thinking about
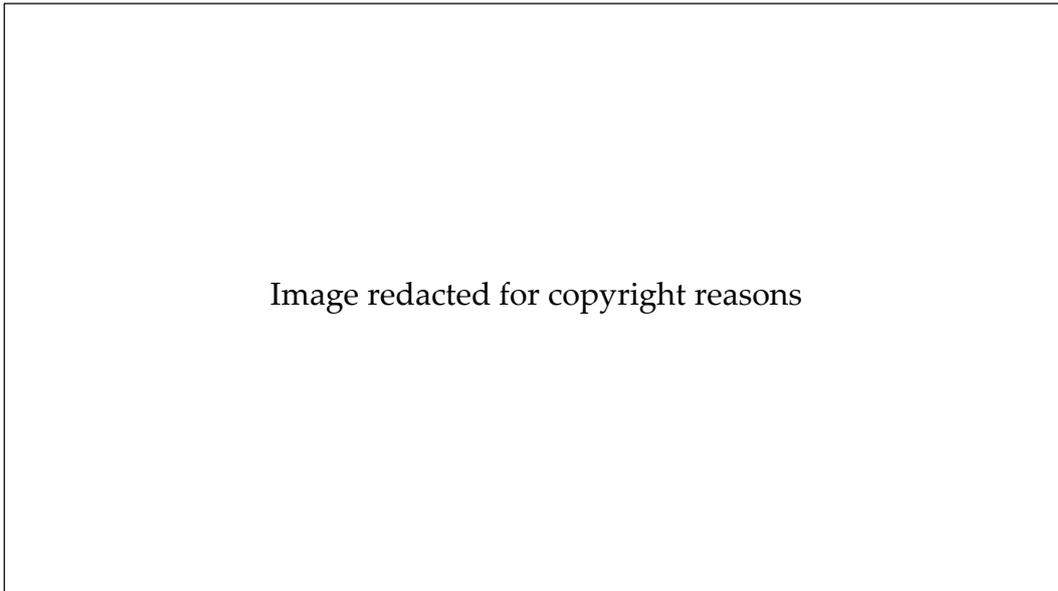
Figure 4.5 The Boots at the Door cast

epistemologies that blur the line between context and text, and text and embodied practice" (Pratt & Kirby 2003: 14).

While it is not necessarily true that *Boots at the Door* had the goal of contributing towards community development and improvement, it is certainly the case that the project took the starting point that the voices of the military community in Plymouth were marginalized and often either not heard or forgotten. Hart said that;

"you know the armed forces here in Plymouth have been here forever, they've always been just this huge part of the city, but I think it was felt that they haven't always been so welcome, you know like armed forces communities seem to stay for valid reasons quite um… keep themselves to themselves…I think we were hoping through this project that we could kind of like, I mean I don't know how you could measure the success of it, but we had hoped it would, that the wider Plymouth community who came to see the show would have a greater understanding of these people who live in their city who they maybe don't see so often but they just read about their lives in the media, and um… in the military the armed forces communities would be kind of coming to the theatre

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and a little door would have been opened to more engagement with us and with other organisations across the city" (Interview extract, Lee Hart).

Thus, the Plymouth armed forces theatre project became a means through which the military community in the city were given a 'voice' and the ability to tell their stories[35]. *Boots at the* Door was composed out of real life experiences of this community, and stitched together to form an overarching narrative. Yet, acts of performance such as these do not simply 'give a voice' to those who write and perform it, but, if one reads such performances through the work of Butler, Derrida, and Austin (Austin 1975; Butler 1990; Butler 1997; Butler 1999; Derrida 1988) they work further to in fact constitute the boundaries of what is sayable and hearable. It is important therefore to not limit the work of such performances to their ability to tell a particular story, but rather to consider how projects such as *Boots at the Door* help to define which stories can be told at all. Importantly though, the role of the cast comes into play here, as they were participating in the construction of their *own* representations. While in many ways the play served to reinforce the dominant boundaries of what is sayable and hearable about the military hero, the role of the participants and their testimonies ultimately worked to undo some of these representations, and thus disrupted the creation of a singular and knowable sovereign subject.

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[35] What is interesting about the armed forces project in the context of Plymouth is that, as Hart notes, the military community are a "huge part of the city". Yet there is the impression that the armed forces community keep to themselves, which is in itself an interesting perspective as it is widely acknowledged that the military community are intimately woven into the very fabric of Plymouth's identity.

Theatricality

The role played by the testimonies of participants in disrupting the sovereign subject is a significant one. When talking about the process of writing *Boots at the Door*, Lee Hart said in relation to the first and second drafts of the script that;

> *"what that first draft really was, it was basically like those development workshops we had done in April… So it was really like, where is the theatricality in that? So we decided to push for more scenes where it was people in their lives, so we would see an argument in the street between Rickshaw and his wife where he's saying I want to come home and he's got her a bunch of flowers and it all plays out like that, or scenes where he then goes to a therapy session where you hear like, what's happened in his background that is this recurring story for him. And it became much more satisfying for the company I think then, they started to really construct the play for themselves… they really found ownership of it, and developed it and created some brand new characters. Debbie for instance, the character she played which was, dunno if you remember, she and her husband are waiting in the hospital corridor and their son is in there and has come back from war and has got injuries that are going to have an impact on their lives, and she's trying to remain hopeful but her husband is like becoming quite cynical. So that is something they completely developed themselves with a bit of steering from us"* (Interview extract, Lee Hart).

The first draft of the script was developed further, to address the *theatricality* element, by including "more scenes where it was people in their lives". In referring to the need for theatricality, Hart was speaking of the imperative for theatre to be captivating, arresting, to move the audience but also to challenge their perception and question what it is they think they see or know. For Hart,

theatricality came from the 'realness' of the narratives, the truth of certain added scenes that served to captivate the audience and create meaning through imagination but also authenticity. This highlights the multiplicity of experiences, beyond simply the linear representation of the sovereign subject, as the question is raised "which of these plural, multiple tales is *theatrical*?"

This is nowhere better exemplified than in the character of 'Jacko'. Jacko, a disabled amputee veteran who suffers from alcohol addiction and kleptomania, represents an amalgamation of many of the problems faced by veterans suffering from PTSD. Evident in his character and storyline are traces of countless narratives from the project's development workshops. His storyline, focusing around his mental health struggles and attempted suicide, reflects a particular notion of who the 'temporarily broken' (to use Hart's words) hero is, and what the linearity of recovery should look like. He represents the plurality of experiences, but made 'theatrical' by condensing and saturating these into one character. Lee Hart argued that;

> *"I suppose making theatre is trying to concentrate things, there's a theatre maker called Peter Brooke who in talking about "what is theatre" and whatever, it's not real life, cos in real life during the course of my day, there might be quite a few interesting things happen, but if you want to make theatre out of it you kind of have to condense space and time, so that you know in an hour's worth of performance time it's all there and you don't have to sit for twelve hours watching the character of Lee, so I think that condensing and compressing was necessary, did we lose something? I suppose yeah, it was a challenge to take everything, to take every angle and every experience and to find it a home in a two hour, hour and a half performance… um… especially if we wanted… it to have a sense of journey, a sense of a story being told rather than a documentary on the stage where it was just lots of testimony. I mean this for me is still like something wow like to learn how to do this, how can we*

create something that is both theatrically arresting, that's got a lot of scope for you know to give a home to the… to some of the things we have available in the theatre, that we can shift location from, that we can bring imagination to the work that we can shift from one place to another, one time to another, um… all of that is possible in theatre and I really like to explore that rather than its all set now here in this room, and its talky talky, I like something that have something of a, that can have a fantastical element to them to, which is why I suppose we tried, looked for a link to a classical story, the Odyssey, um to find something more poetic within the just testimony, but without losing the rawness of the testimony either, so it was sort of like a playful experiment on how to sort of bring two things together – poetry, storytelling, documentary, testimony, fly on the wall if you like."

(Interview extract, Lee Hart)

The challenge of this 'playful experiment' was in trying to translate a set of raw testimony into something that is theatrically arresting but at the same time truthful. He claims that theatre has great potential to bring imagination to a story, but at the same time condense it in time and space. To transform a set of raw narratives into a two hour theatre performance is to inevitably lose something, but also to change it, to make it saturated and dramatic. The authenticity is not necessarily lost in this process, yet it is transformed. Indeed, a new depth of meaning can be achieved without having to "sit for twelve hours watching the character of Lee", but rather by mirroring narratives which are easily recognisable, such as that of Homer trying to make his way home in *The Odyssey*. By bringing this "fantastical element" to the story, deep meaning can be conjured without troubling the nature of a theatre performance as condensed in time and space. I questioned whether Hart had concerns about the authenticity or claims to truthfulness made by the play in light of this;

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"I think what we had, as soon as we committed to that then there was no fear in my mind at that point, no worry about 'is it going to be authentic' because you know it was coming from them, so in a way that kind of let me off the hook you know [laughs] ah well if it's coming from them then I can't be held accountable [laughs]" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

Hart maintained that authenticity could not be lost when the narratives in their raw form came from participants. The character of Jacko therefore illustrates the ability of theatre to take big leaps in imagination, while at the same time making a claim to authenticity. The multiple, plural stories embodied in his character were required to be translated into something 'theatrical', and he became a character 'condensed in space and time'. Major events in his life such as his attempted suicide are, for example, condensed into the space of a two hour performance, demonstrating how choices were made in the writing process regarding 'which of these multiple stories are *theatrical*?', and therefore 'which should be shown?'

Yet, by bringing imagination to the testimony of participants in this way, potential is created for the linearity of the sovereign recovery trajectory to instead 'land in unexpected places' (Foucault 1997)[36]. That is, this imagination provides the possibility for alternative futures to be imagined beyond simply 'recovery' as a set pathway towards redemption and recognition. While *The Odyssey*, as I have already argued, is a poetic backdrop for the entire performance which reflects pre-existing notions of what it means to be a hero, the scenes from real life experiences which pepper this narrative and the theatrical imagination that is brought to the play highlight the openness of the future it imagines. As Hart points out, "*that we can shift from one place to another,*

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[36] In speaking of the potential to "land in unexpected places", Foucault is drawing attention to the fact that there cannot be a definitive 'end point' to any intervention such as *Boots at the Door*, but rather an openness to alternate readings and imaginations.

one time to another… all of that is possible in theatre". The testimony of participants exemplifies the potential for the subject to *overflow* the parameters of the sovereign; it is not simply a linear story of recovery in which the hero is rendered a singular and knowable subject, but rather is punctuated by moments of fracture and dissonance.

Humour

One of the elements of *Boots at the Door* which clearly exemplifies this dissonance and overflowing of the parameters of the sovereign, particularly in relation to the linear trajectory of recovery, is that of humour. The play was to a large extent a comedy, despite touching on a number of very serious issues such as PTSD, alcoholism and suicide. Much of the comedy was enacted through the performance of a "military sense of humour", and in particular through the character of Tash;

"there was this brilliant conversation opened up around Jesters and going out and sort of like being on the snag and being out to try and snag and squaddie and things [laughs] so later down the line when Becky was sort of without, sort of a bit lost about what to do with her, I sort of encouraged her to, so 'we need to create something for you that belongs to that world back there, all of that stuff from Jesters and that sort of very like funny Union Street up for it quality of Plymouth, we need to find a voice from that in our play', and so what developed was this whole thing of the night out in Jesters, the character who comes along to audition for the play whose only connection is that she's had like sex with loads of armed forces guys… and it was like the humour that was necessary that kind of like let us get away with some of the more dark stuff, so that character [Tash] that Becky created that got some really great laughs most nights like both at the beginning and in the night out scene where she's trying to give advice to the girls, became a really interesting voice and I think yeah,

that was born out of lets tune into that Plymouth rough and ready kind of voice, so I think yeah we knew we had to have that in there, that voice… and vital as well I think for these people, for the armed forces, these kind of people, they don't take anything too seriously, they'll not kind of like, I mean we got them better at it sort of sitting around in a circle and being a bit more you know, but largely if something shit happens they'll take the piss out of it rather than go 'oh how do you feel about it?' do you know what I mean? [laughs] That's kind of like, not in their way of working, so I think it became really crucial to have something that was a bit more you know…" (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

The character of Tash thus became a central vehicle through which a truthful representation of the Plymouth military community was portrayed. As Hart argues, that comedic voice was "vital… for these people, for the armed forces, these kind of people, they don't take anything too seriously"; therefore, there could be no representation of the military hero without incorporating his trademark military sense of humour – in fact, humour became a crucial mode of recognition through which the hero was made visible. This is particularly true if we consider the figure of the hero as illustrated and reflected through multiple figures which constitute the creation of the sovereign subject. For example, I would argue that the sovereign figure of the hero is in part constituted by the representation of his dutiful wife, but also, as in this particular case study, a wider comedic voice articulated through multiple bodies. Indeed, as Amoore & Hall (2013) note, "As has long been recognised in the histories of theatre and dramatic art, the King and the Clown are inescapably conjoined – sovereign power haunted always by the presence of the clownfool" (Amoore & Hall 2013: 94). They argue that "the sovereign and the clown are bound together in a relationship characterised by antagonism, but also mutual reliance. In short, the sovereign needs the clown" (*ibid*). Thus,

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the figure of the clown (in this case, Tash) is integral to the representation of the sovereign (the 'King', the petty sovereign of the military hero).

What is interesting about the character of Tash, though, is that her relationship to the armed forces is from the outset ambiguous. This was illustrated most clearly in the 'night out' scene, in which Tash talks to some of the other characters about the play they are working on;

"*TASH: How do you all know each other anyway?*

NICOLA: Well us 3 are in a play together

CHRISSY: With my mother in law to be

TASH: Oh. Is this that Forces project?

TANYA: Yeah

TASH: I know the one, I applied. Didn't get in it. Gutted.

NICOLA: Oh why?

TASH: Fuck knows. Apparently because my only link to the military is having shagged so many of their men, it don't make me eligible. I know right. Discrimination I reckon. They say you are what you eat."

(*Boots at the Door* script extract)

Tash's identity is called into question; is she 'military'? Is she not? On the one hand, she does appear to embody the stereotype of the 'military slut' (Kayla Williams 2006) which is present in many gendered representations of military women, and as such is not an unfamiliar character in the construction of a military identity. Yet her precarious position in the military/non-military binary is a source of comedy throughout the play, and forces the audience to question what exactly the parameters of being in the military community are. As Emerson (2016) notes, "[i]n *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes how his

laughter on reading Borges 'broke up the surfaces and planes to which people were accustomed, disturbing and threatening the distinction between Same and Other'. The humour that Foucault sees is part of an active critique, taken up by Butler, who argues in *Gender Trouble* that through comical *parody*, politics can be critiqued and recast" (Emerson 2016: 722). Emerson (*ibid*) further points out that to laugh is to know the world differently, or to 'look awry' to use Zizek's terms. From this perspective, then, the comedy of Tash's precarious military identity allows the audience to alternately engage with the militarised identities that confront them. Indeed, Tash's exaggerated embodiment of the blurred boundaries between military and non-military people highlight the instability of these categories, and attest to the performative nature of military identities (see Butler 1999).

The humour of the play also disturbs the linear notion of 'recovery'. Hart argues that "*largely if something shit happens [military people will] take the piss out of it rather than go 'oh how do you feel about it?' do you know what I mean? [laughs] That's kind of like, not in their way of working*". The Recovery through Theatre programme aims to "improve confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian life" (Royal British Legion 2015), reflecting the linear notion of recovery as a process of "healing", "acceptance" and "coming to terms with the past" (Summerfield 2002: 1106). Yet, by translating this recovery into the dominant trope of 'black humour' associated with the military, this linear process is disturbed. The potential of humour and comedy to critique and recast politics (Emerson 2016) opens up space in the trajectory of recovery to re-imagine alternative political futures beyond the end-point of 'recovered'. As Lee Hart points out;

> "*From my point of view we just wanted to give people a voice, get them connecting again to that sense of community, of working towards something worthwhile with that community, of taking something, taking sometimes a*

bunch of experiences that you think, what are these experiences I carry these more negative ones, how can I do something useful with them?.. I suppose for me, whether this was written in the official guidelines, but how can we do, what can we do, OK so they've got this very painful story but before their very eyes they're seeing a bit of space emerge in it, and it becomes you know not this fixed thing anymore of "my story my pain", it gives some space to move and to change" (Interview extract, Lee Hart).

By thinking beyond the parameters of "my story my pain", instead "taking the piss out of it", Hart argues that participants have seen "a bit of space emerge" to re-imagine what recovery might look like. Yet, there is violence in this humour. Hart argues that the comic scenes in the play allowed them to *"get away with some of the more dark stuff"* by bringing moments of light relief to what could have otherwise been a very negative and upsetting performance. In certain scenes, these moments took the form of black humour, where experiences of violence were translated into comedy. For example, during the 'night out' scene where Tash explains the dangers of being a woman in the nightclub Jesters (colloquially known as 'Molesters'), which is often frequented by military men;

"TASH: Alright love, some dodgy maltowe at the bar just asked me to give you this

NICOLA: Oh for fuck sake. (TURNS AROUND) I've got a fella, leave me alone alright

TASH: Yeah shove your terminator up your fucking arse mate. (TAKES SIP) Nob-head

NICOLA: Jesus

TANYA AND CHRISSY MAKE THEIR WAY OVER

TASH: You gotta watch yourself in here love, last week our Trish only went up to the bar for a shot of apple sours. Two guys got a few drinks down her, and next time I seen her she was getting fingered in the middle of the dance floor by one while the other put it on youtube. She won't come back now, she says she's having a couple of weeks off.

VICKS: Shit

TASH: Yeah, they don't call it molesters for nothing"

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'night out' scene)

More often, though, the comic scenes were juxtaposed quite closely with the most shocking moments in the play. For example, the highly comical labour scene, in which a serviceman on deployment watches his wife give birth over skype while his friends make lude comments over his shoulder, moves quickly into the most disturbing and poignant scene of the play in which Jacko, a disabled veteran, is caught with a gun in his hand about to commit suicide. Indeed, elsewhere in the play the audience is confronted with a split stage, in which the stage light (and therefore the audience's focus) flips back and forth between a comic scene between two characters in a hotel, and Jacko drinking vodka out of the bottle in his bedsit and pointing a gun at himself in the mirror. In these moments, the audience are never really sure what they are seeing, never able to become comfortable with the mood of the scene before it is disrupted. As Kear (2013) points out, "The image's moment of appearance becomes the point at which the activity of viewing is thrown into question, and the spectator is invited to occupy a different relation to the visible and its normative construction and distribution" (p25). "In this sensate moment of fissure", he argues, "this temporal burst of illumination, the political structure of spectatorship is opened up through a 'rupture in the relationship between sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought, and between what is thought and what is felt" (*ibid*). The moment of uncertainty about what the

audience are seeing thus presents an opportunity to confront the structures which shape their own understanding. According to Kear, Ranciere;

> *"suggests that the aesthetic encounter's capacity to 'reconfigure the fabric of sensory experience' through altering the 'frames, scales and speeds' of perception, destabilizing the 'self-evidence of the visible' and making 'the invisible visible', exemplifies its operation as a practice of 'dissensus'… Experienced as 'a singular disruption', the aesthetic encounter takes place through the appearance of an image that 'interrupts the smooth working' of representation and sets into play the recognition of the fact of presentation as 'a singular mechanism of subjectification'. As a practice of dissensus, art – like politics- consists in revealing the distance, and the difference, between a social situation and its representation; the presentational appearance of the image functions not simply as an ontological fragment of the visible but as a political staging of the conditions of visibility making manifest 'the separation of the sensible from itself'"* (Kear 2013: 26).

By switching back and forth between comic and shocking scenes, the "smooth working of representation" is interrupted, and the nature of the performance as a "singular mechanism of subjectification" is brought into visibility. Therefore, the audience are confronted with the inability to produce a singular and knowable sovereign subject of the hero; he is always ambiguous and difficult to pin down. Indeed, to relate this back to the arguments made in Chapter 2 regarding the hero as a boundary figure, one can see that humour is used as a vehicle through which the hero is brought into recognition, and his boundary nature negotiated[37]. Through humour, the hero is "made

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[37] And, as Louiza Odysseos tells us, the comic medium must be considered as an "essential element of the political" (2001: 720)

strange" (Emerson 2016)[38], understood within the "historical schema or schemas that establish domains of the knowable" (Butler 2009: 6), yet at the same time recognised as at once both inside and outside, 'of us' and 'not of us'.

Ambiguity

This "obtuse power of the image", to use Ranciere's terms (Kear 2013: 22), works to highlight the ambiguity of the hero throughout the play. Take for example the opening scene, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter but which can be read in a different light;

> *"Inside the stage room, a few people are sat down already although we are early. There is a strong, thick smell of mulled wine in the air, and what appears to be some lingering fog or smoke from the special effects. On the stage, there is a soldier in camo uniform brandishing a gun, stood on top of a large box about six or so feet tall. There are rocks littered across the stage, and on the large backdrop screen there are scenes of flashing lightning. My mother turns to ask me "Is that a real person up there?" I pause to look for a moment, and notice that he has started pacing around the top of the box, as if on patrol. "It must be" I said to her, "he's moving"*

(Extract from fieldnotes, *Boots at the Door* performance)

The figure of the soldier who is first introduced to the audience, as discussed earlier in this chapter, becomes a character with distilled heroic attributes, immediately recognisable within the schemas of the knowable (Butler 2009). Yet, at the same time, this particular encounter with the hero immediately

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[38] Furthermore, comedy and laughter have a significant role to play in a political critique which challenges what we take to be normal or necessary (Bleiker 2000; Odysseos 2001; Amoore 2006).

throws his own recognisability as a dramatic figure into doubt. We can see that he is the hero but, is he alive? Is he dead? Is he even there at all? To return to Kear's work on Ranciere, the "self-evidence of the visible" (2013: 26) is destabilized in this moment of fissure and uncertainty, thus calling into question the structures through which we come to recognise the hero by bringing to light the nature of the performance as "a political staging of the conditions of visibility" (*ibid*). One could argue that this is the prerogative of theatre, to cast doubt on the recognisability and dramatic certainty of subjects. Indeed, there is evidence of this scattered throughout the play; take for example, the juxtaposition of comic and shocking scenes discussed above, which prevent the spectator from reaching a settled and stable position of recognition, or the split scenes between the budding romance of a young serviceman and his girlfriend and the deteriorating relationship between a veteran with PTSD and his wife.

This particular scene calls into question which of these relationships is really the 'fairytale', and forces the audience to confront their assumptions about what a 'hero's story' should look like. By the end of this dual scene, the 'fairytale' of the blossoming romance between the young serviceman ('Flaps') and his girlfriend Vick has been unpicked and fractured, while the broken relationship between Donny and his wife Nicola has been put back together. In an interview with the actress who played Nicola, it was said that her character "*met this man, they had a fairytale he was a hero, he was a dream man and what's happened to him after his service and what he's like to live with now, and how to reconcile this dream warrior that she had with now this ordinary man who is very broken at the end of it*" (Interview extract, *Boots at the Door* cast member). While the reconciliation between Donny and Nicola points to the potential for recovery, the underlying notions about what that recovery means in terms of

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reproducing a knowable figure of the hero are ultimately disrupted. They do not have the 'fairytale' life, and he is not a 'hero'.

In many other ways, *Boots at the Door* is not a story about war or heroes in the way that we are used to seeing them. Importantly, there are no scenes in which we see the soldier in his 'natural habitat' of the battle scene, with the exception of the very first opening scene featuring the pacing, gun-wielding soldier. And, even in this scene, his recognisability is cast into doubt. While there are a couple of instances in which we see a character on deployment in Afghanistan, we see him through the lens of his wife at home, who is heavily pregnant and attempting a conversation with him on Skype via a precarious internet connection. This is a rather different perspective than those we are used to seeing, particularly in the context of a visual performance (usually in TV or film), which typically presents the hero as a hyper-masculine figure located almost entirely in the field of battle. Elsewhere in the play, the limits of the female hero are explored through the character of Sonya, the mother of an injured serviceman who had herself been an army medic. Below is an extract from a scene depicting an exchange between Sonya and her husband, following the hospitalisation of their son;

"*TC: This is your fault you know*

Sonya: I'm sorry?

TC: Darren had no interest in coming in the Dockyard with me, could have got him in easy. No, he wanted to follow his mother into the army. Wanted to be a full time frontline medic to make his Mummy proud

Sonya: Don't you dare blame me for this, Darren is a grown man and you supported him as much as I did with his decision to join up and anyway it was your suggestion that I join the TA in the first place

TC: I didn't think it would end up with you going to war, at worst I thought you would be away for a couple of weeks each year, plodding around Germany or Salisbury Plain bandaging up other part timers

Sonya: You can stop this right now. This is not about you and me, ifs and maybes, this is about Darren our son, and the fact that my beautiful boy is in there hurting right now and there is nothing I can do to help him."

(Boots at the Door, script extract)

Here Sonya is blamed for having contributed towards her son wanting to join the military to 'make her proud'. This to some extent pushes the limits of the representation of women and heroes, as usually the hero is following in a male relative's footsteps rather than those of his mother. Yet, immediately following this, the audience is reminded of Sonya's role as the feminine caregiver; "*this is about Darren our son, and the fact that my beautiful boy is in there hurting right now and there is nothing I can do to help him*". The project markets itself as "*a funny and poignant play that explores what it means to be a hero – both in the field and at home*" (Boots at the Door promotional flyer); but, who is the hero in this scene? Is it the faceless injured serviceman lying in his hospital bed, or is it the distraught army medic mother? 'What does it mean to be a hero', in this example? Once again, we can see how the subject ultimately overflows the parameters of the sovereign.

Unrecoverability

Throughout the play, the struggle to reconcile the ambiguity and inherent incompleteness of the hero subject with the sovereign project of recovery is clear. The play is from the outset directed towards a linear path of recovery and recognition; it is one component in a wider project by the Royal British Legion, with the aim of "improving confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian

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life" (Royal British Legion 2015). It therefore assumes from the start that there is a singular figure that *can* be recovered, that can be rendered knowable and successfully reintegrated into the community and sovereign imagination.

Boots at the Door does however at the same time highlight the fragility of this project of recovery. Throughout the play, issues such as PTSD, alcoholism, as well as the experiences of the families at home are brought into recognition. One scene which exemplifies this most clearly is titled 'The Lotus Eaters';

"*Scene 11 – The Lotus Eaters*

For nine days, nine whole days,

I was borne by rough, treacherous waves,

On the teeming sea. On the tenth day

Our squadron reached the mainland of the lotus-eater

– whose food is the lotus, its fruit and flower.

Chorus: We disembarked on the coast, drank fountain water,

And the crew ate a hasty meal by the ship.

When our stomachs were full,

I sent a detail ahead: two hand-picked men and a runner

To find who lived here. Did they live like us? On bread?

They raced off, the first at pace

And soon enough, they mingled among the locals:

The lotus-eaters. The lotus-eaters and they had

No thought of killing them at all, no, none

Simply shared the rich lotus to taste.

And each man who ate the lotus, the succulent fruit,

Lost all urge to return, or send word to us.

Just – their only wish was to stay with the lotus-eaters forever.

Like a drug, they thought of little else.

All of their thoughts of home, the journey back, lost forever.

But I dragged them back, back to our forlorn ship.

They wept but I forced them, dragged them,

Put them in the hold, tied them tight,

And yelled for my comrades to re-light our path,

"Quick – there's no time, no moment! Go!"

HARRY: *Great. Really well read. I really love this part of the odyssey. You start to feel that Odysseus might slip or fail, that he might never return.*

ELAINE: *Sounds like de-compression to me.*

HARRY: *What's that?*

ELAINE: *After a deployment before they come home the men/*

SONYA: *And the women!*

ELAINE: *And the women, get taken to Cyprus for 48 hours to get it all out their system.*

HARRY: *You mean/*

SONYA: *Blowing off some steam. Having a drink. There's a two can rule though.*

MITCHELL: *The two cans you can see...that's what we always say!*

ELAINE: *Exactly! It's just postponing the return home to get on the booze for a bit. That's basically what Odysseus did.*

HARRY: *But did he? He didn't choose to stay in the land eating the lotus fruits. He eventually had a realisation and managed to pull himself and his men away and carry on the journey home.*

ELAINE: *Yeah but he should have just made his way straight home to his family.*

HARRY: *Well yes in a fairy-tale, in an ideal world I'm sure he would. But realistically, what takes him to the Lotus fruit in the first place? What does he get from them?*

JACKO: *We need numbing.*

HARRY: *Numbing?*

JACKO: *Yeah. When someone offers you something to numb the memories, the harshness of your reality, the truth about what you've seen and done, you take it.*

RICKSHAW: *Because otherwise you feel like you're falling into darkness.*

HARRY: *But isn't this light, a false light?*

MITCHELL: *How can you have a false light?*

HARRY: *Sometimes you can think the thing that makes you happy is real, in this case the Lotus fruits, but maybe it's just a lie you tell yourself, a fantasy of everything's fine, nothing can hurt me. It's easier to stay there than face up to the reality of a long, cold journey home.*

SONIA: *But the lie is more appealing.*

RICKSHAW: *Oh yeah course. They've travelled, they've fought, they're tired and they've finally found somewhere warm, safe, a paradise where they can escape to and they want to stay there. Wouldn't you? You get used to avoiding the damage, fixing what's broken, so you bring it home with you, this thing that makes life more bearable.*

HARRY: *And do you bring it home with you?*

JACKO: *Yeah.*

HARRY: *So, what is your lotus fruit?*

JACKO: *Beer.*

       (PAUSE)

Scotch, whisky, port, vodka. It doesn't matter, it all does the same thing.

MITCHELL: *We've all got our vices. Even civvies do, for their own troubles. Don't you?*

HARRY: *Well yes. Definitely. But Odysseus does manage to see the light, find his way home.*

JACKO: *Just because you can see him, doesn't mean he's home.*

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'The Lotus Eaters' scene)

'The Lotus Eaters', as a scene in *Boots at the Door*, centres on the struggle of the hero to 'return home'; as a metaphor for recovery, this brings to light a number of points. One of these, is the element of obligation related to recovery. Elaine, the mother of a young Naval officer in the play, claims that rather than staying to 'eat the lotus fruits' (or, rather, to indulge himself and his emotions), Odysseus "*should*

have just made his way straight home to his family". This takes the emphasis away from the recovery of the hero himself, and shows the wider picture of a family at home waiting. The scene, importantly, unravels some of the temporal assumptions about a linear pathway towards recovery. Rickshaw notes that; *"They've travelled, they've fought, they're tired and they've finally found somewhere warm, safe, a paradise where they can escape to and they want to stay there. Wouldn't you? You get used to avoiding the damage, fixing what's broken, so you bring it home with you, this thing that makes life more bearable"*. Indeed, as Jacko points out, although Odysseus manages to escape the lotus eaters, *"Just because you can see him, doesn't mean he's home"*. One could argue that in the context of recovery, this indicates that just because the hero has been *rendered* recognisable, singular, recovered through programmes such as *Boots at the Door*, does not necessarily mean that he is in fact recovered, or indeed a complete subject.

Image redacted for copyright reasons
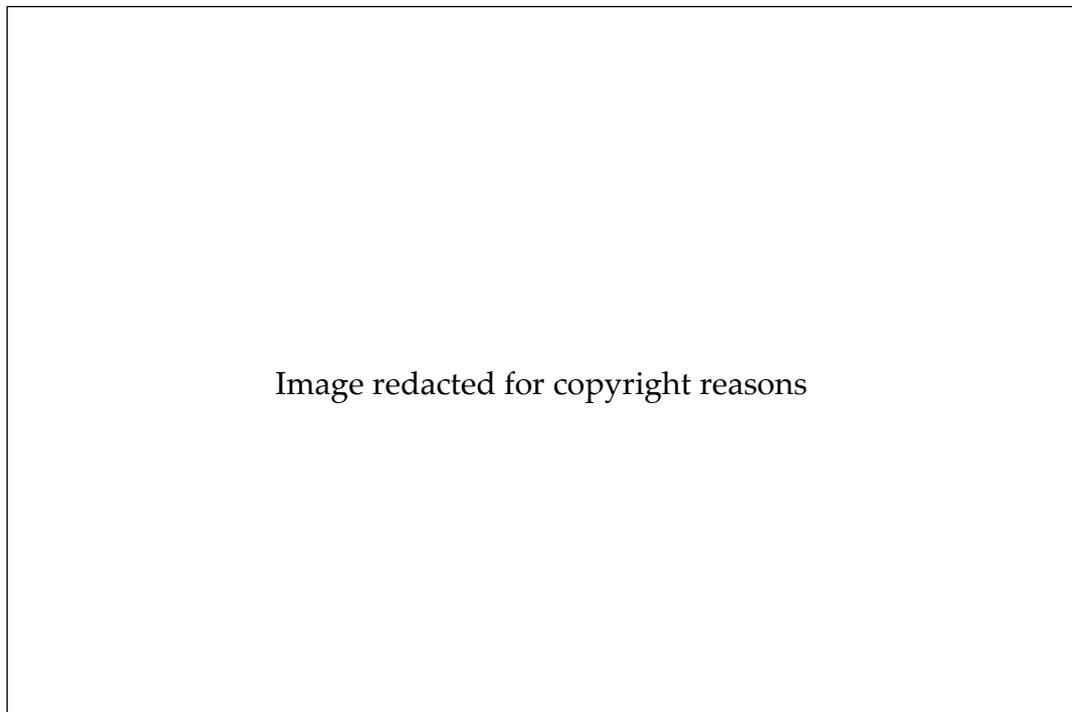
Figure 4.6 Boots at the Door scene, Jacko's bedsit

What, then, if there can be no 'recovery'? Is it possible to imagine alternate futures, in which the hero subject is left to remain 'incomplete'? In one of the

final scenes, Jacko is caught by Harry (the director) with a gun in his hand about to commit suicide;

"JACKO: *I'm a shadow of the man I used to be, I don't who I am anymore. Why I'm here. What the point is. I am sat here, right at the fucking bottom, and I know there is no way back up again for me. I look at my options but they all end the same.*

HARRY: *But they don't have to. You can choose a better path, a better ending.*

JACKO: *It's not that easy Harry. It's not all fucking theatre and la di fucking da. Yeah I could not have a drink now but the next time I do, and I will, I know I don't have it in me to fight through this, because I'm so fucking tired of this fight. I just want it to be done with.*

HARRY: *I don't know what to say. But, I just want you to know that despite how you feel about yourself right now I think I know who you are. Just look at how far you've come.*

JACKO: *Yeah and look where I am now. Facing the same demons I always have, on my own.*

HARRY: *You're not on your own. So many of us we want to see you break free from this. We can help you! We want to see you find your way back home.*

JACKO: *I will never find my way home.*

HARRY: *Maybe you're already there Jacko. Maybe it's just our fault for not recognizing you. Perhaps we had our eyes so firmly fixed on the horizon that we just didn't see the man standing in our midst, needing our help. You're home Jacko. You're home."*

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'Jacko's bedsit' scene)

In this scene, Harry articulates the voice of the sovereign project of recovery. He argues that Jacko has the ability to *choose* his own ending, to choose a road to recovery over a position of despondency and depression; "*You can choose a better path, a better ending*". Indeed, his language is rooted in the idea that it is a *journey*, comparable to that of Odysseus, or described in Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' (2004 [1949]) "*just look at how far you've come*", "*We can help you! We want to see you find your way back home*". Yet, Jacko's voice in reply articulates the reality of this struggle; "*It's not all fucking theatre and la di fucking da", "look where I am now. Facing the same demons I always have, on my own*". In referring to his 'demons', he invokes the language of the sovereign figure associated with the classical hero of *The Odyssey*, but turns it on its head to show that this sovereign subject is in fact always disrupted. Indeed, unlike the sovereign figure of the hero, Jacko states that "*I will never find my way home*". Harry pushes this critique further; "*Maybe you're already there Jacko. Maybe it's just our fault for not recognizing you. Perhaps we had our eyes so firmly fixed on the horizon that we just didn't see the man standing in our midst, needing our help. You're home Jacko. You're home*". Perhaps what Harry is trying to say here, in relation to the wider aims of the play and the Recovery through Theatre project, is that by imagining only one, linear, trajectory towards recovery, the multiplicity, ambiguity and inherent incompleteness of the hero subject become lost. Rather than having eyes "firmly fixed on the horizon", should we not try to re-imagine alternate futures in which there is no singular path towards recovery?

Perhaps, then, the subject is never able to be rendered singular, knowable, and complete. The alternate version of Jacko's bedsit scene, which was not shown in the final performance but which was included in the folder of documents sent to me by Lee Hart, reflects this idea most clearly;

"*HARRY: I heard you got arrested. What happened?*

JACKO: I got caught.

HARRY: Doing what?

JACKO: Shoplifting. It was one of the things I was good at. Now I can't even get that right.

HARRY: What did you steal?

JACKO: Two bottles of vodka. I only got caught 'cause I dropped one of them.

HARRY: Vodka? Is that what I can smell in here?

JACKO: Why are you here exactly?

HARRY: I heard you were in trouble. I was worried.

JACKO: Who are you, Mother Theresa?

HARRY: No, but I thought this programme was about being honest with yourself – and now I find you're back on the drink!

JACKO: So now you're my mother

HARRY: Oh, God, I came here to help and I'm just making it worse. I'm sorry, Jacko.

JACKO: I don't need your pity, thanks all the same. Now if you don't mind I've got packing to do

HARRY: Where are you going?

JACKO: Got kicked out, didn't I? Broke the rules one too many times. So forget your workshops, forget your Good Samaritan routine. Forget everything.

HARRY: So you're just giving up – just like that? Walking away as soon as you hit a bump?

JACKO: Oh, what do you care?

HARRY: Fine. Fine. Do what you want. [He moves towards the door]. Don't forget your Lotus Fruit.

JACKO: Oh, fuck off, Harry. Fuck you and fuck your theatre. And you can stick your Lotus Fruit up your arse.

HARRY: Well forgive me for trying to help.

JACKO: I've still got one good arm to knock your teeth out with.

HARRY: You're not the only one with problems, Jacko. But you wouldn't see that, would you? Too busy drowning in your own self-pity. But you don't have to stay on the Lotus Eaters' island. Remember who you once were.

JACKO: Don't you realise? I don't want to remember.

HARRY: Well that's up to you. It's your choice. You're lucky to have a choice – you can choose your own fate. At least no-one snatched it away from you.

JACKO: What are you talking about?

HARRY: You can leave the island, Jacko. Just sail away. You know the line: Plunge your oars into the grey-green briny ocean, make your escape. [exits]

JACKO: [calls after Harry] You're forgetting. They drowned anyway."

(*Boots at the Door* script extract, 'Jacko's bedsit' alternate version)

The scene brings to light the facade and fragility of the sovereign project of recovery; we can imagine a hero who can "*plunge [their] oars into the grey-green briny ocean, make [their] escape*", but ultimately, "*they drowned anyway*". The audience are forced to confront the voices and stories that are forgotten in this

sovereign project of recovery; what does it mean for those who, like Jacko, *"don't want to remember?"* What is actually recovered, in the end? And, perhaps more importantly, what is lost?

Conclusion

This chapter provides an empirical starting point for the thesis, and considers *Boots at the Door* as a 'site of remaking' through which we can examine the figure of the hero. Leavy (2015) tells us that "performance serves as a method for exposing what is otherwise impossible to reveal" (p175). *Boots at the Door* works to reveal that which is otherwise impossible to articulate, giving a "voice" to the military community of Plymouth and mobilising the techniques of theatre to translate experiences into something coherent and tangible. This "voice" is harnessed and rendered productive, "worthwhile" to use Hart's words, as it attempts to remake the military subject within the linear and sovereign parameters of "recovery".

By unpacking the relation between the remaking of the hero and the sovereign project of 'recovery', I have shown that that recovery is not simply about the return of the subject to normal life. Rather, recovery can be seen as a narrative through which the reclaiming of a singular, coherent and knowable figure in service of the sovereign takes place. The play itself traces the hero's metaphorical struggle to return 'home', using *The Odyssey* as a poetic backdrop against which he is brought into recognition. It tangles with the question of whether recovery can be possible; Harry tells Jacko in one of the final scenes; "plunge your oars into the grey-green briny ocean, make your escape". "You're forgetting. They drowned anyway", replies Jacko. The audience are invited to spectate upon a subject who is "temporarily broken", yet, by the end of the play, he is forcibly put back together, rendered a whole and knowable sovereign subject. The conclusion of the performance sees

characters coming back together, fixing broken relationships and reconciling with one another, thus offering the possibility of ultimate redemption.

Boots at the Door sheds light on the multiple and entangled conditions of visibility through which the hero is made recognisable. The play was from the outset claimed in service of the state, temporally situated within the period of nostalgia and promised reconciliation between Remembrance Sunday and Christmas. In the presence of the elderly Royal British Legion veterans wearing poppies and the military bands playing Christmas songs, we are reminded of the linearity between the 'Tommys" of World War 1, the soldiers who fought the Nazis in World War 2, and "our boys" on the frontlines today. This linear time of the nation in which the hero is necessarily embedded "violently installs itself as both origin and end of the culturally thinkable" (Butler 2008: 19), and works to bring into recognition what exactly is at stake in the figure of the hero. Indeed, we are persistently reminded of this throughout the performance via female characters, who at once embody the feminine patriotic sacrifice necessary to the creation of the hero, and shed light on the lived experiences of struggle that go along with it. For example, the audience are invited to empathise with Tanya, whose husband Baz is on deployment while she is pregnant (and indeed in labour) with their child, while at the same time reminded by Baz that "*The lads need me, this is an important operation*". As such, the violence of war on the family of the hero is not shied away from, but is in fact rendered unavoidable and necessary in the pursuit of heroic glory. There is, therefore, a persistent narrative of imperative and inevitability that is always co-present in the making of the hero.

Yet, what *Boots at the Door* reveals at the same time is the inherent ambiguity of the heroic subject. The subject who we encounter throughout the play is incoherent, always at once reinforcing and resisting, "jettisoning and presenting" (Butler 2007: 953). The very opening scene of the play brings into

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recognition this ambiguity most clearly; while the figure on stage stands before us as the ultimate promise of happiness, a distilled and pure character representing all things heroic, he is ultimately always overcast with a shadow of doubt. The audience are forced to always question what it is they are seeing; *is the hero alive? Is he dead? Is he there at all?* This, afterall, is the prerogative of theatre, to throw confusion on the recognisability and dramatic certainty of subjects. So, while *Boots at the Door* works to persistently remind us what it is to be heroic and what is at stake in the figure of the hero, we are never clearly told *who* the hero is. What we see therefore is a clear maintenance of the boundary between that which is discarded and that which is claimed, and yet the hero is *always at once both*.

5. [Techno]Heroes and Monsters

The previous chapter approached the fragility of the sovereign project of 'recovery', using the example of *Boots at the Door* to think critically about what 'recovery' can really mean in the context of such performances. As I have argued, 'recovery' can refer not simply to the process of "returning to a normal state of health, mind, or strength", but also to the linear project of 'taking back' the sovereign subject. In this chapter I take this thinking forward, and consider how this aspect of 'recovery' might mobilise particular kinds of bodies – or, to follow Judith Butler, how 'hero' bodies come to be "bodies that matter" (Butler 1993). More specifically, this chapter will focus on the challenge posed to this linear sovereign narrative by the figure of the wounded, traumatized or disabled military body. This figure is one in which the violence of the sovereign state is made visible, and the 'real' of warfare cannot easily be remade, obscured or forgotten; this is violence which is marked, often permanently, on the physical body.

The challenge of the wounded military body

As previous chapters in this thesis have highlighted, the construction of a singular and knowable hero within the sovereign fantasy draws upon dichotomous ideals of who 'we' are and who the 'other' is. This dichotomy characterises much of the discourse surrounding the War on Terror, depicting the war as a battle of good versus evil, British and American hero soldiers

versus evil 'foreign terrorists' (see Chapter 2). Indeed, if we look further, to literary, historical as well as other contemporary examples, we can see that the very existence of a 'hero' relies upon the presence of a 'villain', often a monstrous being who allows for "a radical fear to seize hold of us" (Canghuilhem 2005 [1998]: 187). This model for recognition appears in its most raw form in classical literature and mythology, stories in which brave and powerful heroes must fight against monstrous beings, foul creatures of the underworld. Joseph Campbell's (2004 [1949]) thesis on '*The Hero's Journey*' even outlines the struggle against such beasts as a necessary component in the journey towards becoming a hero at all. Drawing on a more critical reading of Campbell's work, we can see how this figure of the monster might be reinterpreted as simply an embodiment of a deeper struggle with the self. The previous chapter in this thesis for example uses *Boots at the Door* to show how such a monster could be understood in metaphorical terms; as Lee Hart said,

> *"Some of these old stories… have courage to take to paint big pictures and to try big leaps in imagination, like you can create a big cyclops that you know rips the head of his men, they became also powerful images that I suppose for some people, you know like those guys who have been to Afghanistan they've seen their mates you know blown into bits, must take on an equally sort of like massive demonic proportion in your memory and in your mind."* (Interview extract, Lee Hart)

In *Boots at the Door*, then, it is the trauma of war which appears as this monstrous figure of "demonic proportion" which haunts the hero, the foul creature which he must do battle with in order to find his way back to his doting wife.

What is the common component of the monstrous, then? To adequately approach the hero, this seems to be a fundamental question. We know that the sovereign hero is necessarily the embodiment of bravery, stoicism,

heterosexual potency, and importantly, physical strength. But is it always true that the monstrous 'other' to the hero is defined only in terms of what the hero is not? On one level, the monstrous can be seen as that which the hero must seek to defeat, a representation of the things that the sovereign self does not want to be and does not want to exist. As Shildrick (2000: 81) puts it, the monster fulfils "the necessary function of the binary opposite that confirms the normality and centrality of the accultured self". Indeed, an understanding of the monstrous or grotesque as a reflection of wider societal concerns has been well documented, not least in Marina Warner's seminal work *No Go the Bogeyman* (1998). Warner traces the emergence and significance of the figure of the 'bogey', using folklore, fairytales and film to think about the capacity of the 'bogey' to scare, lull, and mock. Importantly, Warner notes that "Fears trace a map of a society's values; we need fear to know who we are and what we do not want to be" (p387). We can see, then, that part of the significance of the monstrous lies in its capacity to scare, to invoke fear; fear which is fundamentally rooted in wider societal concerns. Lauren Berlant tells us that, "politics produces fantasies, tethers that draw us forward to particular attachments in the form of images, narratives, bodily practices" (2011: 226). As previous chapters have argued, the hero is an embodiment of such a fantasy, a promise of justice which excites us to form attachments to a subject who by his very nature is difficult to grasp, to pin down. The monstrous, in this fantasy, can take on many shapes and proportions, but at all times works to instil fear, to lull, to mock, to tug mischievously on the veil of normality, to smack its lips with delight as it pokes holes in the sovereign promise of a 'good life'.

If we consider the monstrous in its physical form, we must look beyond the foul creatures of the underworld fought by classical heroes such as Odysseus and Heracles. Hughes (2009) claims that the experience of disgust when faced

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with the monstrous comes from the failure to "see 'his' likeness in the differences from which 'he' recoils in horror" (p403). According to this argument, the monstrous is the physical apparition of all things abnormal, unusual, and different to ourselves. But, what happens when the hero becomes the monstrous? Central to the functioning of the hero is the likeness to ourselves which he takes on; he is 'ours', he is the embodiment of 'us' in the fight against 'them'. But, what happens when we fail to see our likeness in him, when he appears not as the embodiment of sovereign power but as inscribed with abnormality, belonging instead to what Hughes (2009: 405) refers to as "a realm that is impure, unclean and disorderly", an "[affront] to the 'civilised' human condition, including… monstrosity, infection, disease, decay, death"?

The wounded or disabled military body is an example of this kind of troubling figure. Hughes (2009) points out that the notion of 'the monstrous' has long been a prominent trope around which much discussion has focused in feminist disability studies. In this body of work, critical attention has been drawn to the ways in which the idea of the 'monstrous' is employed as a central sign through which the disabled body is brought in to recognition. Kuppers (2003) for example notes that the vision of the 'monstrous' has come to characterise the conventions of disability performance (see also Garland-Thomson 2005), while Rachel Adams' study on *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (2001) highlights the role of the freak show as a performance of disability in itself. In Shildrick's (2000; 2002) and Hughes' (2009) arguments, the monstrous occupies a position upon which representations of able-bodied-ness rely. Thomson further points out that the 'monstrous' disabled body "exposes the illusion of autonomy, self-government and self-determination that underpins the fantasy of absolute able-bodiedness" (Thomson 1997: 45, cited in Hughes 2009: 401). Indeed, if the

monstrous can be seen to represent all things unsafe, abnormal, then not only does the 'monstrous' disabled body expose the illusion that underpins the fantasy of able-bodiedness, but also that which underpins the sovereign fantasy of a 'good life'.

Wounded military servicemen and women are profoundly difficult subjects. The wounded military body first and foremost provides a challenge to the link between militarism and masculinity; as Caso (2016: 4) notes;

> *"Emotional integrity and physical power are characteristics associated with masculinity. The military has historically been conceived as the quintessential institution that inscribes these powers onto men. Military training moulds the male subject, forging his muscular body and disciplining his emotions. War, however, represents a challenge to this embodiment, for it can unmake the product of military training".*

Indeed, as Hopton (2003: 115) points out;

> *"If the reciprocal relationship between masculinity and militarism is weakened, so too is the power of the state to manipulate public support for its right to use violence to pursue its policies at home and abroad, as well as to encourage young men to join the armed forces. Thus, the state has a vested interest in maintaining strong ideological links between militarism and masculinity".*

The wounded or disabled military body troubles the vision of physical strength and masculinity; such a figure instead locates a curious position, in which the aesthetic materiality of the disabled body by necessity must be inscribed with new meaning and possibility.

Hughes (2009) argues that the experience of disgust when faced with the disabled body comes from the failure to "see 'his' likeness in the differences from which 'he' recoils in horror" (p403). That is firstly to say that, the disabled

body is only 'monstrous' in its capacity to invoke disgust, and secondly that this disgust is a consequence of our inability to see our own likeness in the disabled body. Yet, I would like to use this as a point of departure, and to trouble this argument by suggesting in fact that often the disgust comes when 'he' succeeds in seeing 'his' likeness in that from which he "recoils in horror". That is to say, the moment in which the "fantasy of absolute able-bodiedness" (Thomson 1997: 45, cited in Hughes 2009: 401) comes to light is the moment in which we recognise ourselves in the monstrous. Indeed, this recognition of our own likeness in the wounded military body provides a challenge to the self/other binary which the state tries to reiterate, and which the military body is mobilised through. To take this one step further, the figure of the wounded military 'hero' confronts us not only with the horror of our own recognition, but also with the horror of knowing that this is as a direct result of the violence of the sovereign state. These bodies "are constant reminders to the able-bodied of the negative body – of what the able-bodied are trying to avoid, forget and ignore" (Hughes 2009: 406). In the moment of recognition, the "promise of happiness" (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011), a neoliberal vision of sovereign power and benevolence, is shattered.

There is, therefore, an imperative in transforming the 'monstrous' back into the hero. The wounded military body brings to light the violence of the sovereign state and the 'real' of warfare, and as Jenny Edkins notes, "The real is traumatic, and has to be hidden or forgotten, because it is a threat to the imaginary completeness of the subject. The 'subject' only exists in as far as the person finds their place within the social or symbolic order" (2003: 12). Being inscribed with the bodily impacts of sovereign violence, such a subject provides a challenge to his own imagined completeness and so these impacts need to be disguised, remade or forgotten. Indeed, there is a two-fold forgetting at work. As argued earlier, it is not simply the violence of the

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sovereign state that is brought into recognition in the wounded military body, but also the likeness to ourselves. The sovereign must therefore attempt to both restore the link between military masculinity and the state, and also reduce our likeness to the disabled military body. In this way, the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other', between 'us' and 'them', is restored, and the hero becomes functional again. In Jenny Edkins' work on the politics of trauma (2003), she argues that the creation of state memory relies upon the unmaking and remaking of subjects, the breaking apart of a sense of self in that which we must forget, but at the same time an identification with elements of the self. In order to reclaim the wounded military body, and incorporate it into the national imagination and memory in a useful way, elements of the self that we recognise in such a subject must be forgotten while others must be celebrated. The wounded hero provides a fundamental challenge to the national imagination in this way.

Edkins (2003: 11) argues that "forms of statehood in contemporary society, as forms of political community, are themselves produced and reproduced through social practices, including practices of trauma and memory". Thus, the incorporation of the wounded hero into these structures relies on social practices, beyond simply memorials or the grammars of memory. Rather, Edkins argues that "what the state attempts… is a normalisation or medicalisation of survivors… the aim is recovery, or the reinsertion of survivors into structures of power" (2003: 9). Survivors of trauma are by necessity medicalised, located back on a sovereign trajectory towards recovery which can be claimed by the state. Subjects on such a trajectory, according to Edkins, thus surrender the voice they might have which would speak against the state. Indeed, "abuse by the state, the fatherland, like abuse by the father within the family, cannot be spoken in language, since language comes from and belongs to the family and the community" (Edkins 2003: 7). Thus, the

violence of the sovereign state fades into the background, while 'recovery' is remade as the central concern in wider social practices.

The remaking of the wounded hero

This central concern with 'recovery', and with reclaiming the relation between military masculinity and the state, plays out in interesting ways. This is where Judith Butler's (1993) analysis in *Bodies that Matter* becomes useful to us. According to Wilson (2005: 162);

> "*In Butler's analysis, materiality is a process through which the body comes into being via repeated practices that bring about a fixed materialization over time. She refers to matter 'not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter… matter is always materialized' (Butler 1993: 9)*".

Butler thus explores the body as discursive, insisting that there is no access to a pure materiality outside of language (Wilson 2005: 163) as the body is always "a matter of signification" (Butler 1993: 68). Thinking about this in relation to the hero body, we can return to the analysis posited by Zehfuss (2009) of military obituaries. She argues that the deceased military body can be discursively rendered heroic, "a life worth grieving", by drawing on particular attributes and relations to the self, while rendering others invisible. We must by necessity recognise particular elements of what it means to be human, to be 'like us', to be recognisable in relation to the sovereign self; fallen heroes are men noted for their sense of humour, who "wouldn't hurt a fly". They are remembered as heterosexual, patriotic men who love their wives and country in equal measure. In these representations, particular likenesses to the self are celebrated, while other elements individual to the serviceman in

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question are rendered invisible. We can see at work here the unmaking and remaking of subjects that Edkins (2003) refers to.

Yet, this does not take us far enough in thinking about how the materiality of the body itself is employed. Wilson (2005) questions the relation posited by Butler between language and the body; "Language partially constructs the body, no doubt. But is language also partially constructed and shaped by the body?" (p163). Bray and Colebrook (1998: 38) highlight that "representations are not negations imposed on otherwise fluid bodies"; in other words, at a certain point discourse must fail to remake or reshape the body (see also Wilson 2005: 164). In order to legitimately remake the wounded hero, the materiality of the disabled body must be acknowledged and mobilised. After all, the figure of the hero is inherently bodily, bound up in physical power, masculinity, heterosexuality and, further, sexual potency.

By necessity, the remaking of the wounded hero must mobilise the materiality of his body, as the masculine and powerful body is the original site of the heroic subjectivity. The wounded or disabled military body would seem to pose a challenge to the relation between the soldier body and heroism, yet one of the peculiarities about disability in the military is that it actually does have the ability to be remade in terms of masculinity, and therefore the potential to be reclaimed by the state. In historical wars, it became necessary for the disabled military body to be remade as masculine; in Bourke's (1996) discussion of militarized masculinity in Britain during WW1, she argues that the ambivalent discourse around physically wounded military men showed that "[t]he disabled soldier was "not less but more of a man"" (p58). "Bourke notes how maimed veterans represented a domesticated masculinity, but they were celebrated as national heroes nonetheless" (Caso 2016: 6). Furthermore, Caso notes that;

"Both Bourke's (1996) and Bösl's (2013) accounts of physically disabled veterans tell a compelling story about a particular politics of absence, for the absence of a limb in these cases comes to symbolize the power of the state rather than the embodied experience of the disabled individual or the inability of the state to secure the bodily integrity of its citizens. Bourke presents the missing limb as a sign of patriotism and sacrifice for the nation, a narrative that validates the authority of the state over and by its citizens. Bösl analyzes the missing limb more overtly as the symbol of a new democratic and sovereign rebirth" (Caso 2016: 6).

Indeed, through the visual analysis of the aesthetics of militarized masculinity in the work of US photographer Michael Stokes, Caso (2016) argues that *"sexing the disabled veteran upholds the notion of militarized masculinity, makes militarism sexier, and buttresses the power of the state… Sexually powerful and technologically enhanced veterans are techno-masculinized; that is, they embody a masculinity that is beyond the human"* (p3). We can see then that while the vision of the wounded soldier has the potential to challenge the link between militarism and masculinity, in fact both contemporary and historical examples show that physically disabled military bodies have the capacity to be rendered masculine, powerful, and heroic. Indeed, the absence of a limb can come to represent patriotism and sacrifice, as well as state power, rather than vulnerability and femininity, while the presence of prosthetic limbs points to a new kind of post-human technomasculinity. Such subjects, rather than having their masculinity compromised, are 'more-than-human', 'more-than-masculine'.

Representations of disabled military bodies, particularly those who rely on prosthetics, as masculine and heroic therefore draw heavily on the understanding of the 'techno-human' or 'cyborg' put forward by Donna Haraway in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway's cyborg is defined as being one of,

or a combination of, four components; a "cybernetic organism", "a hybrid of machine and organism", "a creature of lived social reality" or a "creature of fiction". According to Haraway, cyborg identity relies on notionally transgressing boundaries, in particular challenging discourses of otherness which maintain "the illusion of the invulnerable autonomous subject" (Reeve 2012: 106). Haraway's cyborg is, as Siebers (2001: 745) says, "spunky, irreverent, and sexy; they accept with glee the ability to transgress old boundaries between machine and animal, male and female, and mind and body". This is the representation of the disabled body that the reclamation of military masculinity relies upon. Yet some scholars remain divided in opinion on how *A Cyborg Manifesto* speaks to disability studies (Kafer 2009); some see the cyborg as "providing a way of understanding the lack of a fixed boundary between disabled and non-disabled people", while some argue that cyborg theory "cannot offer solutions for the material disadvantage faced by disabled people in society" (Reeve 2012: 91, see also Kafer 2009). Siebers (2001: 745) claims that "Haraway is so preoccupied with power and ability that she forgets what disability is. Prostheses always increase the cyborg's abilities; they are a source only of new powers, never of problems. The cyborg is always more than human – and never risks to be seen as subhuman. To put it simply, the cyborg is not disabled". Furthermore, Kafer (2009) suggests that "cyborg theory's celebration of technological intervention and human/machine couplings perpetuates the ableist assumption that disabled bodies are broken and require "fixing"" (Kafer 2009: 224).

The remaking of the wounded military body as 'cyborg' or 'techno-heroic' is therefore somewhat exclusionary and troubling. Yet to make the matter even more complex, a problem arises when we consider mentally rather than physically traumatised military bodies. Caso (2016: 4) points out that;

*"As a result of war, soldiers can suffer physical and emotional injuries;
however, while the physically injured soldier has been accommodated within
militarized masculinity and discursively constructed as the epitome of heroic
sacrifice for the nation, emotional traumas are framed as a danger to the
masculine gender identity writ large. This is because emotions remain
associated with femininity, and as such fail to project the power of the idealized
masculine state."*

Therefore, one of the challenges in remaking this subject lies in finding a
means of incorporating both physical and emotional injuries into the
transformation; it is not necessarily the case that vulnerability needs to be
entirely written out of the narrative, in the way that Haraway's cyborg might
suggest. Rather, as the following sections of this chapter will show, the
contemporary remaking of the wounded military hero has by necessity
attempted to mobilise mental trauma as well as physical trauma[39].

Indeed, this reminds us of the need to carefully negotiate particular relations
with the self that Edkins (2003) describes. The following sections of this
chapter will show that the re-imagining of both the physically and mentally
traumatised military body rely on the unmaking and remaking of the subject
in selective ways, which ensure that we can identify elements of the self, but
at the same time keep the self/other distinction intact. Judith Butler (1993) tells
us that "materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain
highly regulatory practices" (p1). This chapter will therefore consider how the
materiality of the wounded hero body is constituted through such regulatory

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[39] While historically the emotionally or mentally wounded serviceman posed a challenge to
the framing of the military hero (see Caso 2016; Bourke 1996; Bösl 2013), the mental struggles
of engaging in violent warfare have over recent years become a source of interest and empathy
within the wider national public. For example, Woodward & Jenkings (2012) claim that British
memoirs are in part characterised by their framing in relation to public sympathy towards the
true costs of war on the minds and bodies of soldiers.

norms, norms which negotiate particular relations with the self. It will cut through this problem using three 'sites of remaking'; the Invictus Games, the Help for Heroes Big Battlefield Bike Ride, and a visit to the Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre in Plymouth, UK. These three sites approach distinct aspects of the politics of recognition at work, although many of the themes are present across all. The first two of these sites consider two regulatory negotiations at work respectively. While Butler does not account for the posthuman, her analysis and that of Wilson (2005) can be taken forward to consider how the body is constituted not only through discourse but also through its relationship to other bodies (Wilson 2005: 164). From this perspective, we can see that such a figure relies on other ways of communicating and negotiating particular elements and relations with the self. The first empirical section of this chapter will therefore examine the Invictus Games as a remaking of the hero which relies on performance and appearance. However, integral to the very functioning and imagining of the hero is a particular linear relation with the time of the state. The second 'site of remaking' discussed in this chapter is that of Help for Heroes, and their signature challenge The Big Battlefield Bike Ride. Drawing on these 'sites', I consider how the remaking of the subject relies on the notional achievement of potential and a specific orientation to the future.

Yet, while these practices work to unmake and remake the subject, attempting to render the hero complete and knowable, there is always an excess. As Jenny Edkins puts it;

> *"No place that the person occupies… can fully express what that person is. There is always something more. Again, this is not a question of people not fitting into the roles available for them and a call for more person-friendly societies. Nor does it concern multiple or fragmented identities in a post-modern world. It is a matter of structural impossibility… There is always an*

excess, a surplus, in one direction or the other. However, we choose on the whole to ignore this – to forget the impossibility, and to act as if completeness and closure were possible. We hide the traumatic real, and stick with the fantasy of what we call society" (Edkins 2003: 12).

The third and final section of this chapter will therefore explore some of these excesses, some of the moments of dissonance which challenge the fiction of a singular and complete sovereign hero subject[40].

Invictus and Performance

The first 'site of remaking' which this chapter will focus on is that of the Invictus Games, and the way in which it serves to bring into recognition a particular iteration of the 'hero' through performance. According to John Kelly, "sport is being co-opted into a multi-agency strategy that positions the military, government, media and citizens in a joint ceremony of supportive affirmation of UK militarism" (2012: 722). The mobilisation of sport in this way reflects a wider strategy of contemporary militarism, in which popular culture becomes a central means through which the violence of the military becomes discursively isolated from the role of 'our boys'. By supporting 'our boys' in sport, the public are able to stand behind the men and women of the military without feeling that they are directly supporting the state or the violence of the wars they wage (see Chapter 2). Examples of this use of sport in the popular culture/militarism nexus can be seen in *Dancing on Ice*, Football for

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[40] Important to note here is that it was never the intention for the material in this chapter to be ethnographic. Rather, acting as an external viewer in all three 'sites' provided particular kinds of encounter with the politics of recognition at work, in which the relation between the 'performance' and the 'audience' is most clearly brought into visibility.

Heroes (Kelly 2012) and indeed the Invictus Games, which this chapter will focus on[41].

Yet, rather than being simply an example of banal militarism at work in sport, the Invictus Games crucially presents an example of how the wounded soldier body is remade and recovered through performance. In particular, the Games very clearly depict the hero in terms of the 'techno-human'; it is about the public performance of sporting achievements, achievements which render the wounded military body more than human. The arena of the Invictus Games becomes a crucial space in which a particular iteration of this body comes into being, one which relies on multiple co-present vehicles of representation. As these vehicles of representation are impossible to separate, in order to work through them it will be useful to focus on different 'snapshots' through which the politics of recognition become visible in the Invictus Games.

About the Invictus Games

In 2013, Prince Harry (the patron of the Invictus Games) visited the Warrior Games in the USA, a sporting competition specifically for active-duty service members and veterans, and became "inspired" to bring a similar event to London. According to the Prince, the Games provide "an important part of a broader legacy of support, through a combination of on-going care, training and employment opportunities, to the well-being of those men and women who have served their country" (Invictus Games 2016a), and the event is "the only international sporting event for wounded, injured and sick Servicemen and women" (Invictus Games 2016b). The inaugural Invictus Games was held

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[41] 'Football for Heroes' saw a British Defence Medical Services team play against a team of recently retired football 'legends' in a charity football match to raise money for Help for Heroes (see Kelly 2012), while Lance Sergeant Johnson Gideon Beharry became one of the 'celebrities' featured on the 2011 season of the UK's *Dancing on Ice*, with his career listed as 'hero' (see Kelly 2016).

in London in September 2014, and welcomed over 400 competitors from 13 nations (Invictus Games 2016b). Across the four days of the competition, participants competed in nine sports across five venues (Invictus Games 2016c). Two years later, the second Invictus Games in 2016 was held in Orlando, Florida, and the 2017 games were held in Toronto from the 23rd until the 30th of September. Building on the success of the 2014 games, the Invictus Games Foundation was established "to pursue and develop the legacy" of the games (Invictus Games 2016d). This foundation is governed by a board of trustees, who according to the website have "far reaching experience in the military, business and sport sectors. They are all deeply passionate about the vision of the Invictus Games and the positive impact that sport can have" (Invictus Games 2016a).

It is clear in the framing of the Invictus Games that this sporting event is about 'recovery'. Of course, for the purposes of this chapter (and in keeping with the arguments made in Chapter 4), it is important to note that 'recovery' refers not simply to the rehabilitation of mentally and physically wounded servicemen and women, but also the process through which a singular and knowable sovereign 'hero' figure is brought into recognition. Indeed, as Edkins (2003) argues, the project of 'recovery' is in itself a means through which the wounded subject is incorporated into wider power structures, and rendered invalid as a voice through which to express dissent.

Image redacted for copyright reasons
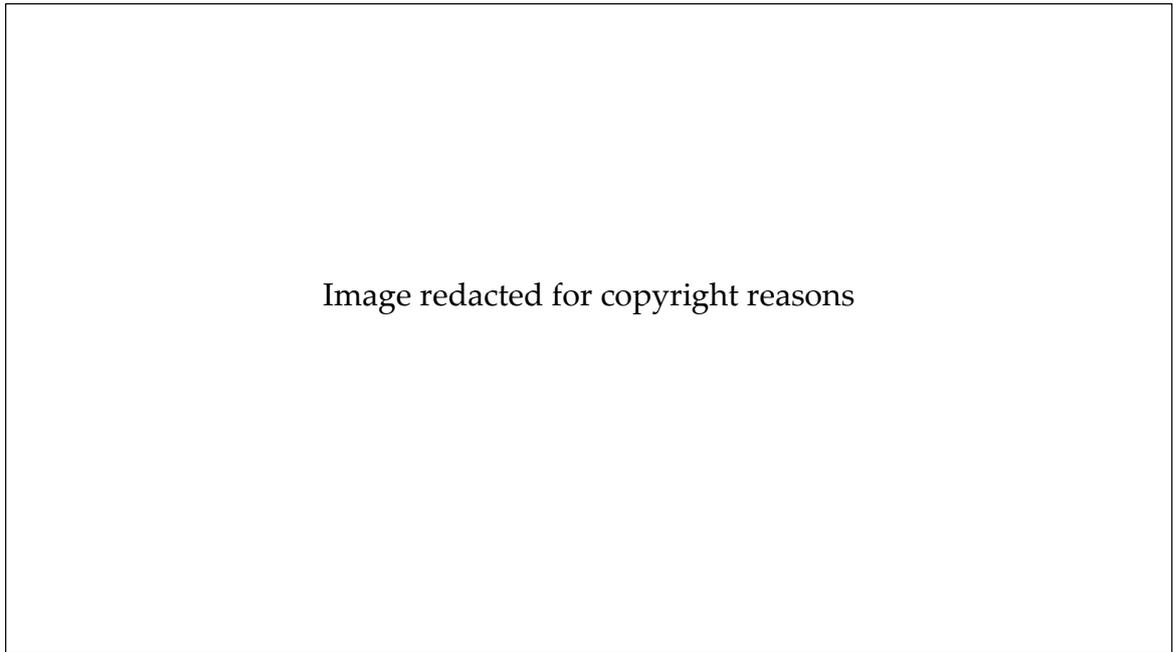
Figure 5.1 'Heroes triumphing at the Invictus Games'

Image redacted for copyright reasons
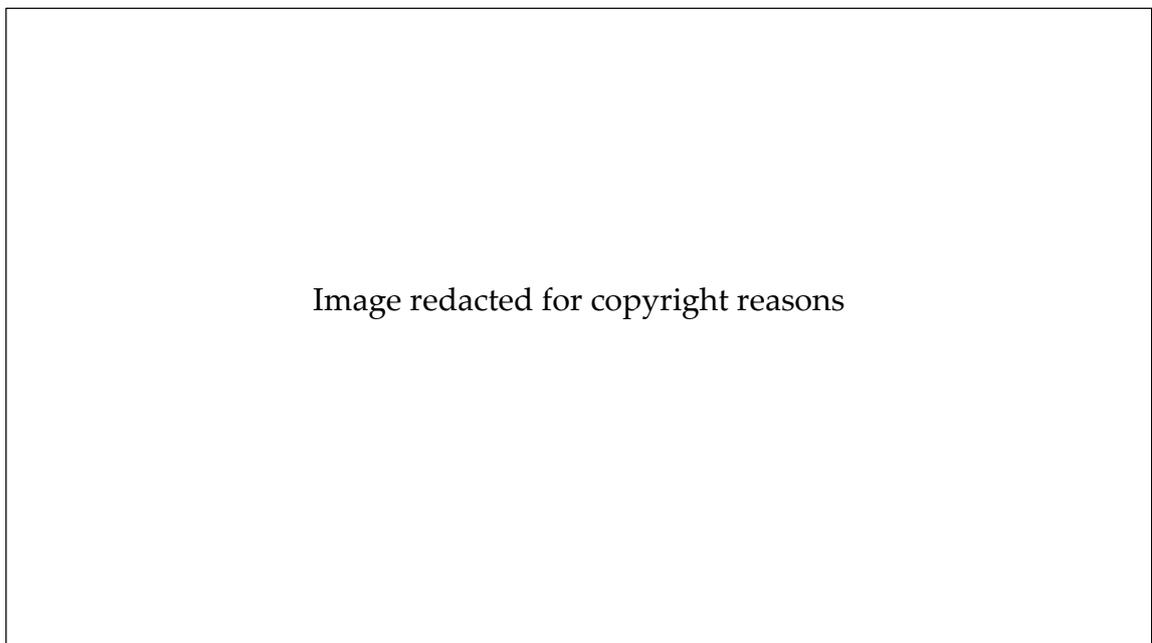
Figure 5.2 Heroes triumphing at the Invictus Games'

The first 'snapshot' I would like to consider in order to approach the politics of recognition at work in the Games, are the images above (Figures 5.1 and

5.2) of 'Heroes triumphing at the Invictus Games'. While in themselves these images provide only small screenshots from one of many 'highlights' reels from the Games available online, they do help us to shed light on the much wider politics of recognition at work in the media and mediation of the event. They point to specific conditions through which the wounded hero subject is brought into visibility; and, as Adrian Kear (2013) points out, "the conditions of the appearance of the image provide the very ground for the recognition of the politics of the image" (p20). In examining the politics of recognition at work, we can think about how the rendered bodily subject might reshape or help to constitute the boundaries of "what qualifies as Bodies that Matter, ways of living that count as 'life', lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?" (Butler 1993: 16).

The images above show men (and a woman) from team USA, draped in their nation's flag or marching with resolve towards the starting line. These competitors are claimed from the outset by the state, drawing on a particular relation between the hero and the sovereign 'self' that relies on sporting competitive obligation. We are reminded of the "fighting talk" shown in a video advert leading up to the games, between Prince Harry and the Obamas, in which Barack and Michelle Obama tweet a video to the Royal saying "Hey, Prince Harry… remember when you told us to 'bring it' at the Invictus Games? Be careful what you wish for" (The Guardian 2016). Prince Harry tweets back; "Fighting talk there! You can dish it out, but can you take it? –H", later posting a video of the Queen watching the Obamas' video and scoffing "oh really? Puh-lease" (The Guardian 2016). The Games became a vehicle through which wider state concerns regarding masculinity, competition, strength, and victory were articulated, inscribing the wounded military body with pride, promise, but also obligation to the nation. Crucially to the example of Invictus, the fulfilling of this obligation is spatially and temporally bounded to the site

of the arena. The arena becomes a space in which the wounded body is put on display as an almost gladiatorial subject, asked to perform on behalf of the nation; in the arena, we have a stake in the success of the wounded military body, and *all things are possible.*

Snapshot 2 – Portraits of competitors by Erik Tanner

While the mediation of the event and conditions of visibility prepare us for the recognition of the gladiatorial subject, as argued earlier in this chapter, this representation by necessity must be tied to the materiality of the body. The next 'snapshot' which I would like to focus on shows how this gladiatorial subjectivity comes to be tied to the 'techno-human' body.

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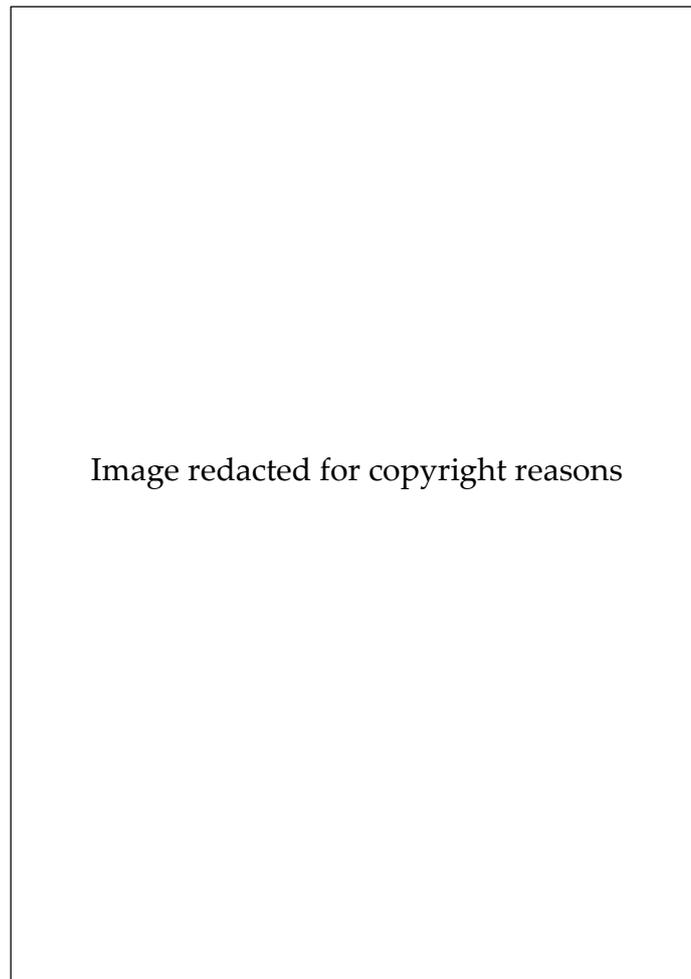
Figure 5.3 Allan Armstrong of the Invictus Games (Erik Tanner 2016)

In 2016, New York based artist Erik Tanner photographed portrait images of Invictus athletes after different events, "subtly showing the intensity of the competition" (Time Magazine 2016). The images were displayed in an article by Time Magazine titled "See Inspiring Portraits of Vets from the Invictus Games" (*ibid*), and depict athletes in action shots or posing, often with sports equipment, in at times quite powerful black and white images.
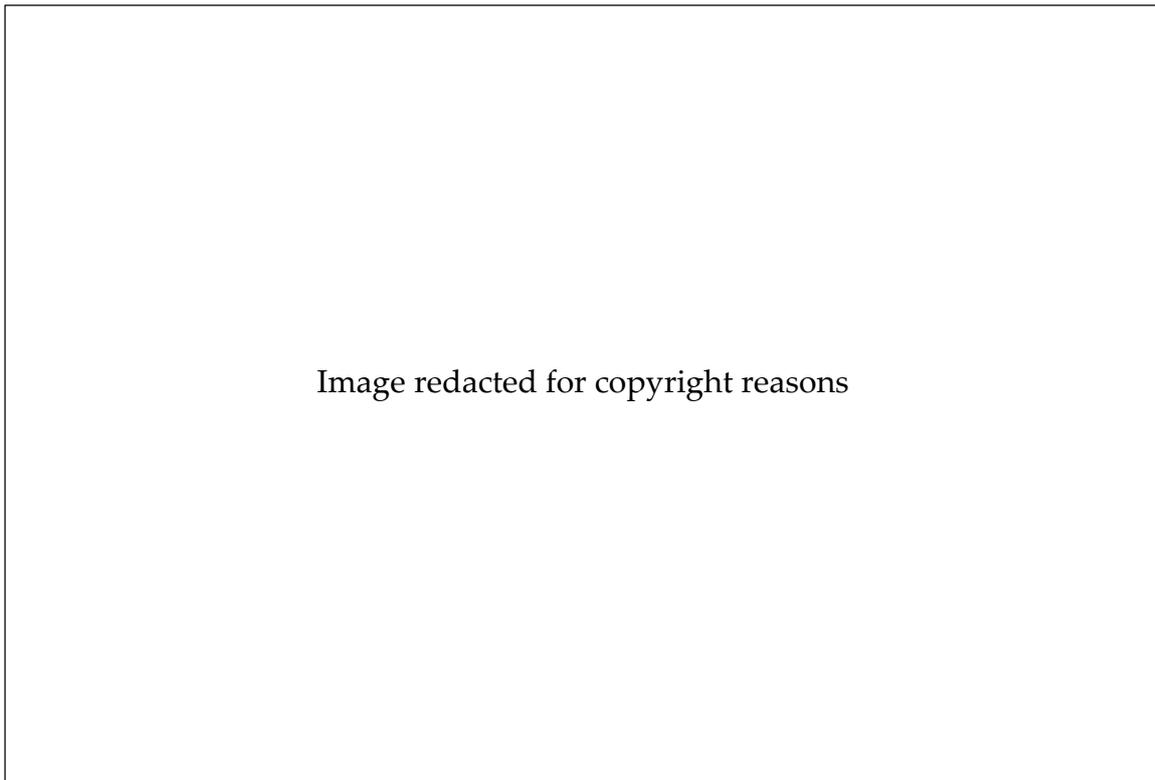
Figure 5.4 Ivan Sears of the Invictus Games (Erik Tanner 2016)

The image of Allan Armstrong (see Figure 5.3) is arguably one of the most powerful photographs in the set, showing a physically fit, attractive, and tattooed athlete wearing a swimming cap and goggles, crouched in a powerful stance which shows his lean muscular physique, but with his right leg missing. Similarly, the portrait of Ivan Sears (Figure 5.4) shows him leaning forward, facing the camera to confront the audience. The subjects of these photographs are commanding, confrontational but not aggressive; they are fearless, proud of their bodies, and proud of their bodily capabilities. While

they are confronting the audience, what we experience is not a confrontation with injury and sovereign violence, but rather with the heroic body and its capacity to overcome. In these bodies, the fantasy of a 'good life' is maintained.

The word 'Invictus', the Games foundation claims, means "'unconquered'; it embodies the fighting spirit of the wounded, injured and sick service personnel and what these tenacious men and women can achieve, post injury. The Games harness the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation, and generate a wider understanding and respect for those who serve their country" (Invictus Games 2016e). Invictus draws on a vision of the wounded military hero as one characterised by tenacity, a drive to achieve and to overcome. Harriet Gray (2015) notes that narratives of redemption can be seen clearly in the discourse surrounding the Invictus Games;

> *"According to the Invictus Games website, the 'wounded warriors' who compete 'have been tested and challenged, but they have not been overcome. They have proven that they cannot be defeated. They have the willpower to persevere and conquer new heights.' The injured bodies of these servicemen are thus reinterpreted, and understood not as something which makes servicemen weak, but conversely as something which makes them strong through providing the opportunity for demonstration of their ability to overcome."* (p13-14).

As Gray tells us, the Invictus Games provide the opportunity for the injured bodies of servicemen to be remade, and presented to the public as conquerors of their weakness. We can see in Tanner's images how this capacity to overcome is tied to heroic masculinity. The men and women of the armed forces are presented through the regulatory practices (Butler 1993) of Invictus not simply as heroes, but as warriors. They are warriors not simply because they have fought in wars, but because they have fought to overcome the physical and mental impairments that these wars have inflicted upon them.

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Tanner's photography highlights this crucial characteristic of the representation of the wounded hero performed in Invictus. The Games are a performance of a posthuman body, with a 'more-than-human' capacity to transgress boundaries of human capability. This is brought into recognition through the display of 'cyborg bodies', elite sports men and women with prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs and national flags draped around their shoulders. Tanner's work depicts these 'more-than-human' bodies most clearly, reminding us of Dona Haraway's cyborg or technobody. Such bodies are, as Siebers (2001: 745) says, "spunky, irreverent, and sexy; they accept with glee the ability to transgress old boundaries between machine and animal… mind and body". Such a body is not simply able to 'overcome', but is made *better*, *more* advanced, *more* capable. The body that is materialised through representation becomes an embodiment of the open futures that it imagines; this body has the capacity to *be anything*, to *do anything*. Given the conditions of visibility at the Invictus Games through which these bodies are brought into recognition, we are left in little doubt as to who the [techno]hero is, what he is capable of, and what he represents.

In this way, Invictus addresses the challenge of "How can [wounded members of the armed forces] be recognised for their achievements and not given sympathy?" (Invictus Games 2016e). The Invictus Games was founded on the basis that there is a need for wounded military bodies to be "recognised" as valid, accomplished although physically injured subjects, without falling into the trap of becoming "the helpless child always in need of being looked after" (Caso 2016: 5). The imperative of this partly, as previously argued, comes from the 'monstrosity' of recognising in the wounded soldier body the violence of the sovereign state. Of course, it is this element of recognition that is crucial here. It is not enough for this subject to be produced discursively, rather, as Wilson (2005: 164) argues, it is in part constructed through its relationship to

other bodies. We must spectate upon the performance of this body in order for it to exist. Thus, the 'warrior body' is created through a performance of sporting achievements, in which they push their bodies to the limits and show their more-than-human capacity to 'overcome'.
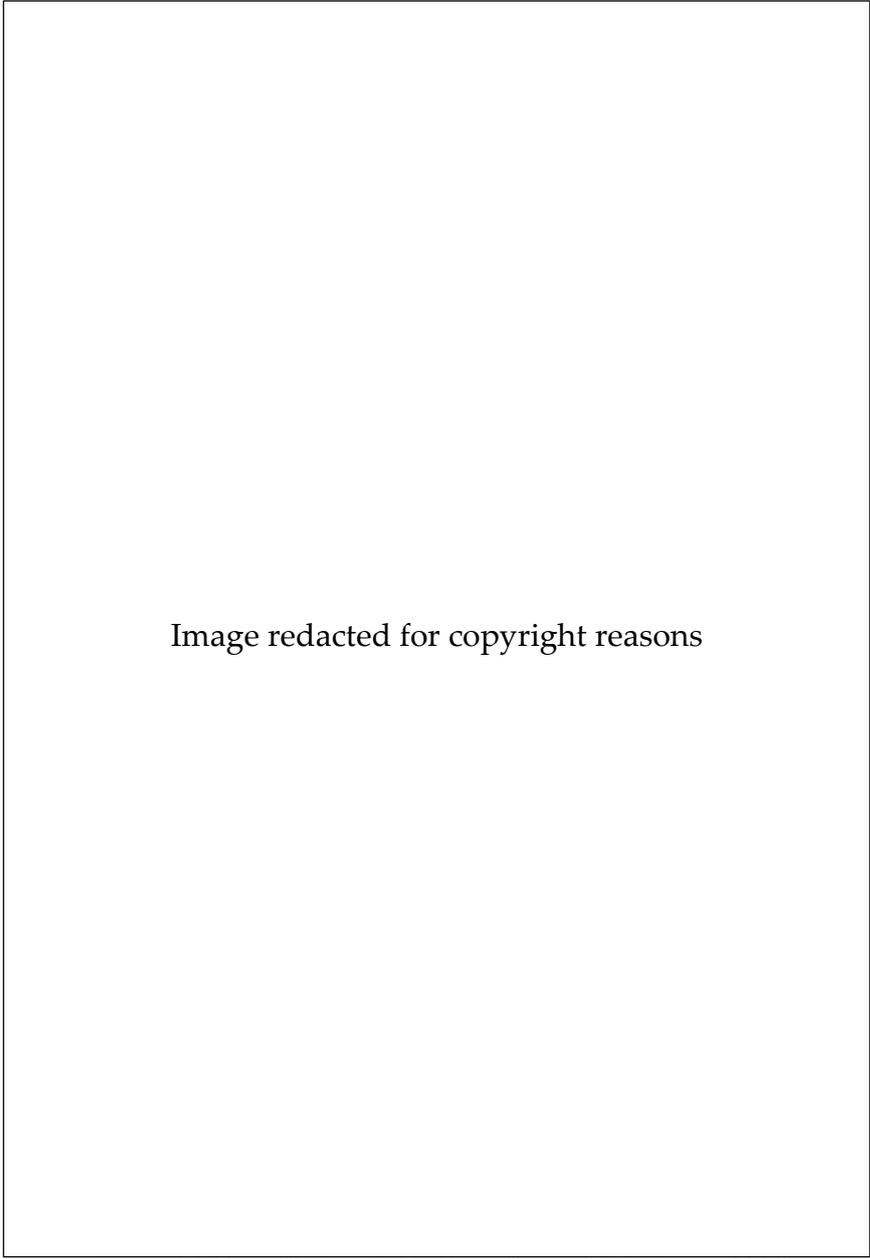
Figure 5.5 Peter Cook of the Invictus Games (Erik Tanner 2016)

Yet, we can see in Invictus that the subject created by the Games is one who is simultaneously a heroic warrior and vulnerable, following dominant media narratives in the UK (see Woodward *et al.*, 2009). Part of the complexity of the

Invictus Games as an example of the 'recovery' of a sovereign hero figure appears in the way that the Games mobilise a body which is both "spunky and irreverent" and at the same time profoundly human.

To pick this apart, it is useful to look at another of the images in Tanner's collection. The image of Peter Cook (Figure 5.5) contrasts with the previous images discussed from the collection, and confronts the viewer much more with the material reality of the disabled body and, arguably, with the violence of war.

The co-presence of the 'techno-human' subject and a recognition of the 'profoundly human' reminds us of what Rosa Braidotti tells us in *The Posthuman* (2013), that we cannot draw a binary distinction between the human and then the posthuman. Rather, the human is always present in the posthuman, as the posthuman is a particular articulation of what it is to be human; "We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (Haraway 1985: 66). In this understanding, the ambiguity of the subject is essential. Indeed, "For Shildrick (1997) the body is 'leaky' and its boundaries are elusive. Once, however, it is admitted that both social and biological bodies are not given but exist only in the constant process of historical transformation, then there are only hybrid bodies, vulnerable bodies, becoming bodies, cyborg bodies; bodies, in other words, that always resist definition both discursive and material (Shildrick 2002, 121)" (Hughes 2009: 403). If we consider that these categories are not meaningfully separable, we can see that the Invictus subject is one in which different articulations of human-ness and heroic capability are made visible. In this way, Invictus carefully negotiates particular relations with the self, unmaking and remaking the subject in a way which ensures the materiality of the wounded military body is brought into recognition, while the violence of the sovereign state is

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forgotten. This is central to the contemporary remaking of the hero, and contrasts somewhat with the historical reclaiming of masculinity in wounded military bodies discussed by Bourke (1996) and Bösl (2013). Important to also note is that Haraway herself in fact alludes to cyborgs, figures inscribed with inherent promise, as 'monsters'. Thus, perhaps we can argue that the co-presence of the monstrosity, that which threatens the promise of happiness, in the remade sovereign subject is in fact a characteristic of this subject's promise.

Snapshot 3 – The Invictus Choir and the Invictus Spirit

The co-presence of the techno-human and the profoundly human in the Invictus remaking of the wounded military body is mirrored in the 2016 addition of Gareth Malone's 'Invictus Choir'. This was the first year that mental trauma was incorporated into the representation of the Invictus body in a meaningful way. The Invictus choir became the subject of a two part mini-series which followed Gareth Malone and his choir made up of physically and psychologically wounded servicemen, women, and veterans as they worked towards their final performance at the 2016 Orlando Invictus Games. Viewers follow the process from the 'auditions', the rehearsals, to the final performance, depicting firstly Malone's hunt to find veterans and servicemen and women with the most compelling and captivating stories. These range from Allison, who suffers badly from PTSD and who struggles to leave the house, who hopes that "reconnecting with her love of singing will help her in her recovery", to Paul, a man who offers no discernible singing talent but instead a heart wrenching story about losing the sight in both his eyes following a multiple IED explosion while on tour in Afghanistan. Paul, according to Gareth Malone, "is what it's all about, someone like him is exactly what I'm looking for" (*Invictus Choir, Episode 1*). "The goal", Malone tells the choir members, "is to inspire the world with your voices, what you've been through, and what you're doing now". In this narrative, the focus is on the

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performance of their stories, "what they've been through", and their trajectory towards recovery (*ibid.*). By incorporating men and women with not only physical but also mental trauma, the Invictus Choir goes some way to addressing the challenge posed by emotional trauma which is "framed as a danger to the masculine gender identity writ large" (Caso 2016: 4). The Choir actively seeks to shed light on the emotional and physical trauma of war, but largely as a means of providing a compelling and entertaining story to viewers. Viewers are invited to spectate upon such bodies, revel in their pain, but importantly follow the story to its conclusion in the form of their final performance in Orlando. The traumatised military subject, through this type of performance, is rendered by the state a 'safe' rather than troubling or difficult subject.

Importantly, there is a distinction made between the members of the Invictus choir and the Games participants. While games participants are depicted as warriors, this is not necessarily true for the choir members. Their subjectivity is drawn in relation to their capacity to overcome (through the medium of song), but unlike the games participants we have no stake in their success, and they have no real obligation to us. The path that they embark on, while undeniably being a linear trajectory towards recovery, is profoundly personal – although, it is still subject to the gaze of the British television audience. In contrast, the games participants are on a journey towards achievement in which they have an obligation to us; they are competing on behalf of the nation, their success is our success. Thus, a notional distinction is drawn, between the games participants who are claimed by the state, and the choir members who are simply spectated upon. It is their vulnerability that is necessary to the performance that they give; members are chosen according to how captivating their story is, and the two part series emphasises throughout what is at stake in their performance. They will either be ready, or they won't.

They will either succeed, or they will not. In this way, choir members are positioned as working towards recovery; recovery which may or may not materialise. The potential of their voice to trouble the sovereign imagination and memory is therefore, as Edkins (2003) argues, undermined.

Then again, the success of the games participants is claimed again and again to not depend on medals and placings. Rather, as Prince Harry tells us in a rousing speech at the 2016 closing ceremony;

> *"What could explain the remarkable sportsmanship of Mark Urquart in sacrificing gold on the track to push Stephen Simmons into first place? Invictus!*
>
> *How else could I describe the way I felt seeing Tim Payne, a man I met three years ago to the day, in his hospital bed at Walter Reed, beaming as he wore his gold medal round his neck? Invictus!*
>
> *What defines the spirit of Denmark's Jonas Andersen, who loaded the coffin of his friend onto the flight which changed my life in 2008, and then fought through his own dark days to compete in London and Orlando? Invictus!*
>
> *What is the force that drives Elizabeth Marks to return to these games after nearly dying two years ago, to compete now, at the highest level, in a sport that renders her blind and faint? Invictus!*
>
> *What makes us cheer for Luke Synott, who took up wheelchair tennis, not just to represent his country again, but so he could play the sport with his children? Invictus!*
>
> *Why did we stand in our seats, cheering our hearts out as Jordanian Wheelchair racer – Ulfat Al-Zwiri – fought, inch by inch, to the finish line? Invictus!*

What else could we say about the woman who wrote to me after watching the opening ceremony on Sunday night, to say she'd realised the time had come for her husband to get help for his depression? Invictus.

Why did the 9/11 hero, Sarah Rudder, pick herself up when she fell, just meters from the finish line, and push on for a silver medal and into the embrace of her French rival? Invictus!

You are all Invictus. You are now ambassadors for the spirit of these games. Spread the word. Never stop fighting. And do all you can to lift up everyone around you"

(Prince Harry, Invictus Games Orlando 2016 closing ceremony).

We are reminded that the success of the wounded military body, and of the nation, comes not necessarily in the medals that they win, but in their triumphs over adversity. Prince Harry claimed that "*These Games have shone a spotlight on the 'unconquerable' character of service men and women and their families and their 'Invictus' spirit. These Games have been about seeing guys sprinting for the finish line and then turning round to clap the last man in. They have been about teammates choosing to cross the line together, not wanting to come second, but not wanting the other guys to either. These Games have shown the very best of the human spirit*" (Invictus Games 2016e). By reframing what is at stake in the Invictus Games in these terms, the military spirit is made 'unconquerable' and thus, its body was never conquered in the first place. While members of the Invictus Choir are illustrated to be occupying the sovereign trajectory towards recovery indefinitely, the games participants occupy an entirely different trauma temporality.

Help for Heroes

The second site which I would like to focus on in this chapter is the British charity Help for Heroes and their flagship challenge 'The Big Battlefield Bike

Ride'. Using these sites I will consider how the wounded hero is remade through a notional achievement of 'potential'. An adequate interrogation of the role which Help for Heroes plays in the remaking of the wounded military body is, however, impossible without first considering the wider framework through which the politics of the charity emerge. The following section of this chapter will therefore carefully explore this framework, and bring these different elements into conversation with one another.

Help for Heroes was founded by Bryn and Emma Parry in October 2007 following a visit to Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham. This visit, according to the Parrys and Help for Heroes, left them feeling that they *had no choice* but to provide fundraising assistance for new facilities, by setting up a brand new charity; they wanted to "just do something" (Help for Heroes 2017b). According to Bryn and Emma Parry, the charity is founded on the principle that "anyone who volunteers to join the Armed Forces, knowing that one day they may have to risk all, is a hero. It's that simple" (Help for Heroes 2017b). Thus, members of the military become heroes not through their acts, but through their very participation in the armed forces at all. Indeed, one of the curious things about Help for Heroes is its claim to being apolitical. On the charity's website it is claimed that;

> *"Help for Heroes is strictly non-political. Wars can happen under any government. The Charity seeks 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, even in times of comparative peace. It is Help for Heroes aim to help those who are wounded in the service of the country to recover… Help for Heroes has no affiliation with any political party and strongly opposes those who seek to use its name, or images for any political gain. The money raised by Help for Heroes' supporters is used to*

support all injured and ill service personnel and Veterans, regardless of their

gender, colour or beliefs" (Help for Heroes 2017b).

In this way, Help for Heroes participates in and contributes to the notional distancing of 'our boys' from the state and the military itself (see Kelly 2012; Basham 2016), providing (what is perceived as) an opportunity to support the men and women of the armed forces without actually supporting the wars they might be fighting or the political parties who wage them. In a 2010 interview for The Guardian, Bryn Parry said that "All the Land of Hope and Glory stuff has its moments, but H4H isn't people rallying to the Union Jack. It's people trying to help the blokes" (The Guardian 2010).

It was at the September 2007 launch of the charity that Bryn Parry first stated that "it's about the 'blokes'" (Help for Heroes 2017b). This notion that the charity is "about the blokes" has over the years been used across the website and the Help for Heroes promotional material, although for obvious reasons seems to have been criticised quite heavily; the website's FAQ section now includes a section dedicated to explaining the use of the term 'bloke' and its gendered connotations, and points out that the full quote was in fact "it's about the blokes, the men and women of the armed forces" (*ibid*). Looking further, to the 2008 Annual Report, we can see that Parry went on to say;

> *"It's about Derek, a rugby player who has lost both his legs, it's about Carl*
> *who had his jaw wired up so he's been drinking through a straw. It's about*
> *Richard who was handed a mobile phone as he lay on the stretcher so he could*
> *say goodbye to his wife. It's about Ben, it's about Steven and Andy and Mark,*
> *it's about them all. They are just blokes, but they are our blokes; they are our*
> *heroes. We want to help our heroes".* (Help for Heroes 2008 Annual Report,
> p4).

Parry's later explanation notwithstanding, it is clear to see the highly gendered notions of military camaraderie and heroism at work here. "The blokes" can be likened to historic grammars of soldierhood; they are "our boys", they belong to the nation, and as such we have an obligation towards them. Indeed, the word "bloke" is deliberately colloquial, and renders such men (and women) knowable, recognisable, and 'like us'. The idea that "it's about the blokes" points to the wider mobilisation of particular kinds of masculinised bodies by the charity. Of course, most clear to see is that Parry's claim that "it's about them all" fundamentally neglects to incorporate the stories of women. This leads us to the broader question; whose lives, bodies, stories, are written out of this narrative?

Despite the claim to being 'apolitical', Help for Heroes and the particular embodiments of soldierhood and heroism which it mobilises are inherently political. "The blokes" of the armed forces are inextricably tied in the national imagination to the sovereign state; they are petty sovereigns themselves, and, as Victoria Basham (2013) puts it, "Britain has always considered military deployments to be a legitimate and useful way to *protect and project* the UK, its way of life, its independence, its values and its interests" (p19, emphasis in original). Although this points to the military embodiment of British values abroad in armed conflict, I would argue that protecting and projecting the UK are in fact mutually dependent in terms of military presence in the British national imaginary. Thus, as previous chapters have argued, members of the armed forces themselves are not only the embodiment of the violent sovereign state, but a means of projecting ideas about nationhood. In this way, imploring people to "support our wounded", "the blokes" of the armed forces, becomes not an apolitical act, but a politicised mobilisation of certain bodies in the pursuit of nation building. As Kelly (2012: 733) points out;

"The current hero-fication strategy, with its plethora of multiagency initiatives becomes clearer. The joint responsibility of public, media and military/ politician is made obvious. The rhetoric is 'the troops' do a great job and they're ('our') 'heroes' by virtue of the fact they are British military alone, irrespective of the actual 'work' being done. Their position vis-a-vis being UK military guarantees them (almost universal demand for) respect and hero-fication. The joint chain of ceremony necessary to successfully carry out such image-work requires a military demeanour of heroes doing good work – suitably supported by a willing media and culture industry – whilst the public deference is to salute, cheer and flag wave. The media's deference is to uncritically support official UK government policy lines – to act as publicist not critical observer (Thussu and Freedman, 2003) – and become primary messenger of the nation when the tributes to bravery, selflessness, courage and heroism are required in order to assuage the nation's grief over the death of another British soldier. It is also to show due demeanour of revulsion and annihilation towards those who publicly dissent."

Kelly reminds us here that what he calls the "hero-fication strategy" works to blur out the violence done by the military, and to rally support for troops in a way which by extension isolates those who dissent. In this way, Help for Heroes works as part of a much larger structure through which the 'hero' figure comes to be integral to the framing of contemporary warfare.

Help for Heroes attracts the active support of fundraisers all over the country; founder Bryn Parry claimed that the huge public support for the charity was a result of the political climate at the time being like "a dam ready to burst" (The Guardian 2010); the British public were desperate for a way in which they could show support for 'our boys' by providing them with the medical and psychological care that the government just doesn't have the resources to provide. It is important to highlight the sheer scale of national support for

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Help for Heroes. Between 2007 and 2012, the charity had raised more than £141million (and by 2015 it was claimed this figure was up to £200million), with much of that being spent on a series of 'personnel recovery centres' run on Ministry of Defence land. Huge civil support for the charity has encouraged enormous public participation in fundraising activities such as bake sales, barbeques, collection weekends, and of course sporting events such as RAAMRaces (see the Twitter hashtag #RAAMRACES) and the flagship fundraising challenge Big Battlefield Bike Ride. Much of the charity's donations come from these "challenges" in which members of the public take part in sponsored activities which push their bodies to their physical limits, the significance of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Charitable Objectives

The Help for Heroes' charitable objectives, as given on their website, are as follows:

> *"To assist persons who are currently serving or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their dependants, by advancing any lawful charitable purpose at the discretion of the Trustees and in particular, but not exclusively:*

> • *To promote and protect the health of those that have been wounded or injured whilst serving in the Armed Forces through the provision of facilities, equipment or services for their rehabilitation.*

> • *To make grants to other charities who assist members of the Armed Forces and their dependants.*

> • *To promote and protect the health of those who have been wounded, sick or injured whilst providing services to, or in conjunction with, and in either case under the direction of the commander of the Armed Forces*

in an area of conflict or war and to provide benefits to the dependants of such persons who are in need"

(Help for Heroes 2017b).

The charity seeks to "deliver an enduring national network of support for our wounded and their families". They claim they will "inspire and enable all those who have made sacrifices on our behalf to achieve their full potential" (Help for Heroes 2017a). Help for Heroes funds and works with around 60 specialist organisations and charities (Help for Heroes 2017c), and by 2014 had spent £29.6m on delivering various kinds of support to veterans, serving personnel, and families (Help for Heroes Annual Report 2014a). According to the charity);

"Help for Heroes has built a nationwide recovery network from scratch. This includes not only a grant giving capability but also four Help for Heroes Recovery Centres, which have been purpose-built with charity funds and which support around 4,000 individuals every year. Help for Heroes funded the £8.5m rehabilitation complex at Headley Court. Help for Heroes has provided over 10,000 financial grants to individuals to the value of £12.6m. The Charity has funded, or worked with, over 60 specialist charities and organisations to date, spending over £31m delivering support to Veterans, Serving personnel and families. In the last financial year (1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016) we provided funding for projects for other charities including Combat Stress (£1m), Princes Trust (£0.5m) and SW Veterans Mental Health (£0.4m). Other charities Help for Heroes work with include Adventure Quest, Horseback UK and Haig Housing Trust. Help for Heroes has also funded thousands of individuals through the dedicated Army, RAF and Naval Service charities: The Royal Airforce Benevolent Fund, ABF The Soldiers' Charity, The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and the Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund. In addition, Help for Heroes has established

the Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters[42] fellowships for the wounded and their closest loved ones. This brings together (as at Sept 2016) 7,500 members who rely on the Charity and each other to champion their needs and given them a voice." (Help for Heroes 2017b).

Help for Heroes in the everyday
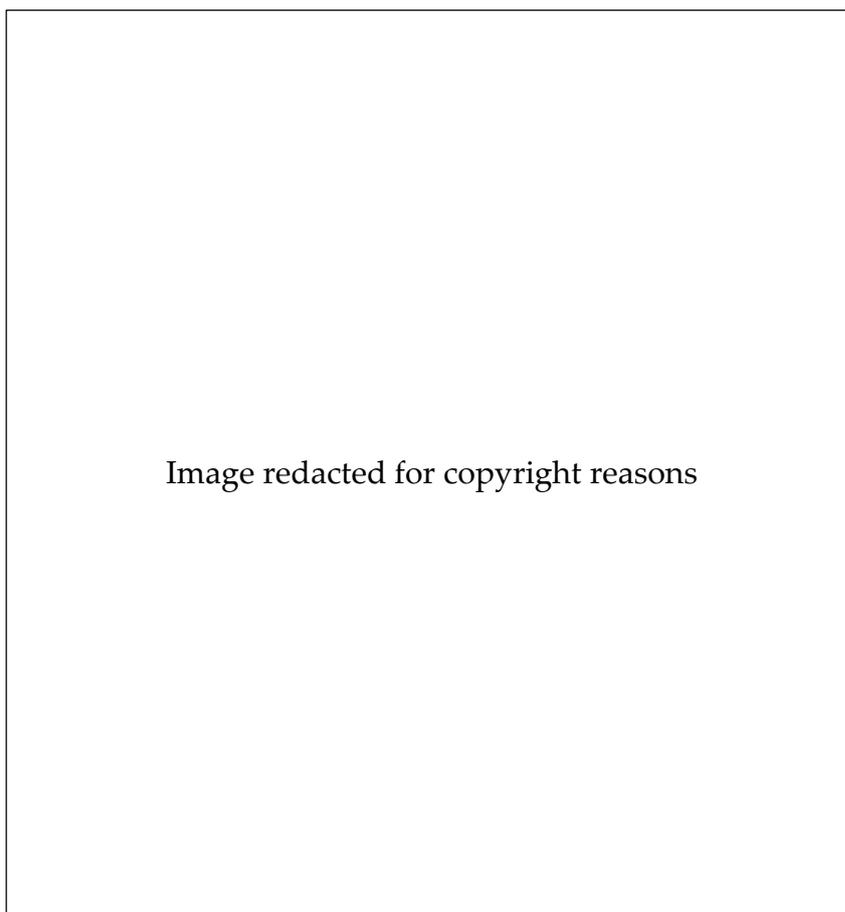
Figure 5.6 Help for Heroes merchandise bear

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[42] The Help for Heroes 'Band of Brothers' is "a fellowship that exists to bring together wounded, injured or sick Servicemen, women and Veterans, to encourage their mutual support and friendship", while the 'Band of Sisters' provides a support network for loved ones, both male and female (Help for Heroes 2017b). In this binary support network, the "wounded, injured or sick Servicemen, women and veterans" are recruited to a masculinist, heroic 'Band of Brothers', while loved ones are feminised caregivers ('sisters').
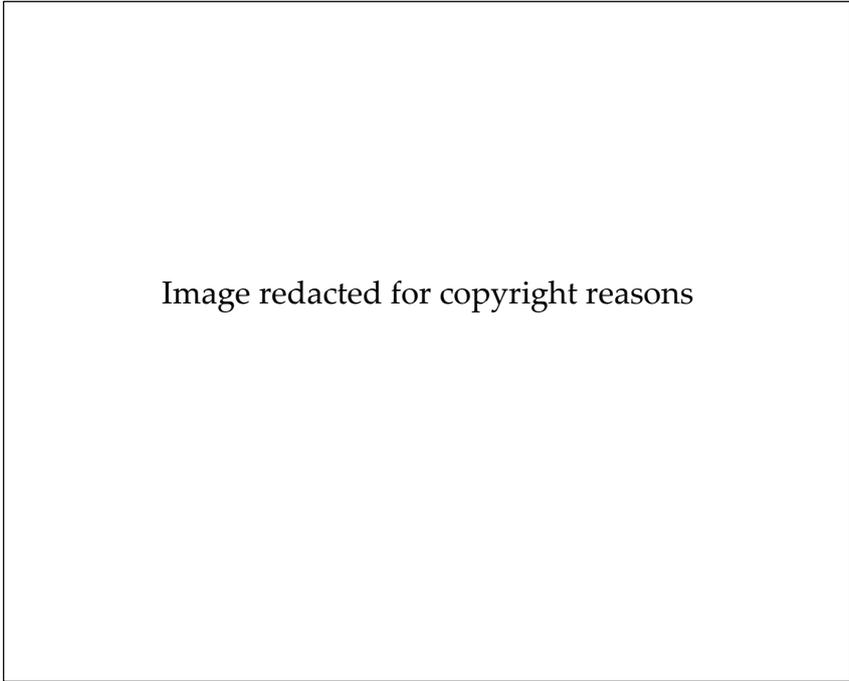
Figure 5.7 Help for Heroes wristband

One of the key ways in which Help for Heroes conducts its fundraising activities is through the sale of merchandise, which it does through the trading subsidiary Help for Heroes Trading Ltd (Help for Heroes 2017e). This sells gift products and items of clothing, including but not limited to t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, wristbands, mugs, and teddy bears. All of the profits from Help for Heroes Trading Ltd are gifted to the charity as donations. Even Help for Heroes endorsed food products such as 'Eggs for Soldiers' can be seen on the shelves of British supermarket giants such as Asda, Tesco and Morrisons (Tidy 2015), pointing to the prominence of these quiet and banal symbols of militarism in everyday life[43]. While banal, such symbols are not without their significance to the overall machine within which Help for Heroes functions. The prevalence of such objects in everyday life show how militarism and what John Kelly (2012) refers to as 'hero-fication' strategies can become so banal and

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[43] Help for Heroes works with a number of brand partners, including Ginsters, Hildon Water, Eggs for Soldiers, and Martson's brewery (Help for Heroes 2017d)

everyday that they are difficult to challenge. It is hard to disagree with the wearing of a Help for Heroes wristband, and by extension with the charity itself, without appearing to be unsupportive of 'our boys' on the frontline. The presence of these banal codes of militarism in popular culture, then, serve to "symbolically annihilate critical opposition" (Kelly 2012: 722).

The example of the Help for Heroes wristband, which has become something of a cultural symbol in recent years, illustrates this most clearly. The tri-colour bands emblazoned with the Help for Heroes slogan "support for our wounded" are available to buy online and in selected shops, and have become hugely popular among all branches of society. In 2014, Bryn Parry claimed that "over six million wristbands are proudly being worn in support of our wounded servicemen and women, including many wristbands on the frontline in Afghanistan". The wristbands are a symbol of support for both the charity and by extension "the blokes" in the armed forces, which has even spread across international boundaries. Indeed, the wristband can be seen as a statement, although perhaps not deliberately, of a banal level of alignment with particular ideas regarding the armed forces, heroism, and the nation. Although Help for Heroes makes a claim to being apolitical, it is clear that the 'narratives of heroism and sacrifice' that they so heavily draw upon are inherently political in nature, and reinforce the imaginative geographies of 'us' and 'them' upon which frames of war are dependent. The wearing of the wristband therefore becomes a means through which these ideas spread and affect, congealing around the object itself and circulating between bodies, and exemplifying how a non-human agent can shape capacities to feel and act (see Bissell 2010; Hitchen 2016).

Importantly therefore, the Help for Heroes wristband provides an example of how civilian bodies can be mobilised by "supporting our wounded". The tagline 'Support for Our Wounded' appears not only on the wristband but on

the majority of the charity's merchandise, such as t-shirts and hoodies. Chomsky draws attention to the deliberate ambiguity of such calls to 'support our wounded';

> *"Who can be against that? … It doesn't mean anything. That's the point. The point of public relations slogans like 'Support our troops' is that they don't mean anything … Of course, there was an issue. The issue was, do you support our policy? But you don't want people to think about that issue. That's the whole point of good propaganda. You want to create a slogan that nobody's going to be against, and everybody's going to be for. Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn't mean anything. Its crucial value is that it diverts your attention from a question that does mean something: Do you support our policy?" (Chomsky 2002: 25–6).*

"Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn't mean anything". This is crucial. It points to the hidden question, the one which no one wants to be asked, that lurks in the background not only of Help for Heroes' 'support the troops' tagline, but of every minute node through which the charity functions (despite, again, their claim to being apolitical).

The call to 'support our wounded', and our participation in this through the purchasing of wristbands and other merchandise, mobilises a particular relation between the self and the other, not only by demonstrating a banal level of alignment with the injured military subject, but also by reminding us of our own proximity to this body. They are *our* wounded; just as the claim that 'it's about the blokes' renders the wounded body familiar, so too does the call to 'support our wounded' encourage us to recognise our own likeness in this subject. To take this a step further, consider again the challenge that the wounded body poses outlined at the beginning of the chapter; as I stated previously, the recognition of our own likeness in the wounded military body provides a challenge to the self/other binary which the state tries to reiterate,

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and which the military body is mobilised through. The example of Help for Heroes and their call to 'support our wounded' addresses this in an interesting way, by remaking the binary between the self/other; it is not the case that there is a forgetting of the recognition of the self at work, but rather this recognition is overtly mobilised. The boundary between the monstrous and the hero does in this way become remade, as our self-recognition does not cause us to 'recoil in horror', but rather catalyses a reclamation of this subject. Thus, the wounded military body becomes heroic because we can recognise in him ourselves.

Buying a wristband, a t-shirt, a box of eggs, also, importantly, allows the average civilian to have a stake in someone else's future. The wider public are able to participate in the creation of a particular kind of imagined future, one which places 'recovery' as the set sovereign end point and 'support for our wounded' as the linear pathway towards it. The notion of 'futures' is integral to the way in which Help for Heroes galvanizes support, but also to remaking the wounded military body. Help for Heroes mobilises a particular orientation to the future, in which the achievement of 'potential' is placed as a central concern, and the rhetoric through which the heroic body emerges. Take for example the 'Performance Pathway' to recovery set out by Help for Heroes, which; "By working with… partners, including the British Paralympic Association, UK Sport and National Governing Bodies… supports a number of military athletes aspiring to represent their country at a national and international level" (Help for Heroes 2017f). This in practice involves a process of "talent identification" in collaboration with key partners, with the aim of putting beneficiaries forward to take part in winter and summer Paralympic sports (*ibid*). According to the website;

> "*Help for Heroes supported ten individuals on their journeys to the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, eight as athletes and two as Channel 4 presenters. Getting*

to the start line was a huge achievement in itself, but there was a total of four medals won, two gold medals in cycling and athletics, and two bronze in athletics and para-canoe.

In addition, through partnership with the British Paralympic Association, the charity supported the delivery of the Paralympic Inspiration Programme which saw seven supported military athletes attend an education programme based in Rio, with the aim to best prepare them for Tokyo 2020. The Paralympic Inspiration Programme aims to provide developing athletes with knowledge that will prepare them for a future Games experience as a selected athlete, as well as inspire and excite potential future Paralympians in their ambitions."

(Help for Heroes 2017f)

As we can see here, emphasis is put on "inspiring" and "exciting" "potential future" athletes. But this performance pathway is itself a model for 'recovery', a path which wounded servicemen and women can take in order to move towards the actualisation of a 'good life'. In this way, the achievement of potential becomes a necessary means through which the hero body is 'recovered' and 'remade'. To unpack this idea in more depth, the following section of this chapter will examine the charity's Big Battlefield Bike Ride fundraising challenge.

The Big Battlefield Bike Ride

The Big Battlefield Bike Ride (BBBR) is claimed to be the "original H4H fundraiser" and their "signature challenge" (Help for Heroes 2017g). The BBBR is a fundraising event in which over 200 fundraisers cycle across France visiting sites of historical military significance, led by a team of beneficiaries (Help for Heroes 2017g). Each year the bike ride tends to be a variation on this historical theme, although this chapter will focus on the 2015 example;

"For the eighth annual challenge [the 2015 bike ride], our route will follow a World War 2 theme as we take you on an emotional and challenging journey as we ride from Paris to Cherbourg taking in the Normandy D-Day beaches. You will visit these historic World War 2 sites while cycling alongside a number of our wounded, injured and sick heroes. This is an amazing opportunity to meet those who have benefitted directly from your fundraising efforts and to help us continue supporting them for life".

The use of the World War 2 theme invokes a particular kind of association between different generations of the military; the Second World War is seen as untouchable in terms of defining soldierly heroism and sacrifice, and in retracing these historical footsteps, the differences between historical and contemporary wars are collapsed. Thus, our contemporary 'heroes' are rendered identical to the historical heroes who fought the Nazis, with the temporal and spatial boundaries being blurred. Indeed, by physically tracing (and retracing) these heroic narratives geographically, certain spaces and ideas are brought to the foreground while others are rendered invisible and forgotten. In this way, the retracing of old steps becomes an important means through which historical and contemporary military heroism is solidified and made tangible. Indeed, we are reminded of Joseph Campbell's (2004 [1949]) 'hero's journey' here, the path through trials and tribulations towards self-discovery that all heroes must go through. In the tracing of steps in which heroism was realized in historical wars, the vision of the contemporary hero against the linear time of the state is brought into recognition.

This heroic journey through trials and tribulations can be seen not only through this retracing of an old journey, but also by considering the BBBR as a new challenging journey for contemporary 'heroes' and civilian fundraisers. The notion of 'challenges' and 'pushing boundaries' is prominent throughout the rhetoric of Help for Heroes; the wider aim of the charity is, after all, to

"inspire and enable all those who have made sacrifices on our behalf to achieve their full potential" (Help for Heroes 2017a). The charity's website is littered with inspirational quotes from beneficiaries, such as '*Whatever your circumstances, set targets and tick boxes. You don't know where it will lead*'. The BBBR, as the charity's 'flagship challenge', reflects this rhetoric. Not only are fundraisers invited along on the challenge, but so too are wounded veterans encouraged to participate by pushing their bodies to their physical limits. In pushing their bodies in this way, both challengers and veterans are enrolled into the enactment of a heroic journey towards self-discovery. In contrast with the Invictus Games, the journey of the BBBR is intensely personal; the general public do not necessarily know who is taking part, who struggles the most, who manages to finish at all. Yet this personal journey is as much implicated in the remaking of the wounded subject as the public displays in the arena of Invictus. Indeed, while the Invictus Games remade this subject through public performance, the personal journey enacted in the BBBR is too about the achievement of potential, the fulfillment of something.

At play here is the notion that by pushing the body to its physical limits, it is driving towards this fulfillment. But what is it being fulfilled? Implicated of course is the relation between the state and masculinity, as in order to maintain this relation the wounded military subject needs to be remade as strong, powerful, and capable. This much is clear. Yet, to go deeper, I would argue that Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) is useful to us, in thinking through the relation between the sovereign subject of the hero and the achievement or realizing of potential. If, as previous chapters have argued, the hero itself is a promise of sovereignty, of state power and benevolence, of nationhood, I would argue that in pushing the wounded military body to achieve its full potential, it is the very promise of this happiness that is at stake. *The potential is the promise*. Thus, in enacting or realizing the wounded subject's

potential, the hero is remade in a way which ensures that the promise of happiness remains intact.

The role of the civilian fundraiser in this enactment is perhaps, then, somewhat ambiguous. Of course, while the journey that is undertaken is overall intensely personal, it is possible to argue that there is an element of spectatorship at work. According to the charity, the idea is in part that participants can learn from heroes, get to know them as people and see where the money raised for Help for Heroes goes. But this choreographed and staged encounter with the wounded subject does something more, in co-constructing the boundaries between the human and the technohuman, the civilian and the hero. Fundraising participants are able to exert their gaze on the wounded military body, and in this process the heroism of this body, and its ability to transgress the bounds of human capability, is brought into recognition. Yet, as argued earlier in the chapter, the technohuman cannot be meaningfully separated from the human, as the technohuman is in fact a particular iteration of what it means to be human (Braidotti 2013). Thus, perhaps we can say that the encounter with the technohuman in the BBBR serves not simply to put under gaze the wounded military body's ability to overcome and fulfill its potential, but also sheds light on our own likeness to the hero. This, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, is an element of the process of remaking which is crucial to the contemporary hero.

Performance, potential, recovery: Everyday moments of contestation

The Invictus Games and Help for Heroes, specifically the Big Battlefield Bike Ride, are sites which shed light on how the wounded military subject is remade in different ways. The Invictus Games is telling of how such a body is mobilised through performance, bringing into recognition a particular

iteration of the techno-hero which reclaims the relationship between the sovereign state and the masculine military body. From these small fragments, we can see the complex negotiations through which the struggle to render a complete and knowable hero subject takes place. Yet, what remains from considering these examples, is an understanding that these performances do not approach the lived experiences of the wounded subject in a meaningful way. At a very simple level, while the Invictus Games and the multiple fundraising practices of Help for Heroes serve a clear function in mobilising the wounded body in a particular way, it is clear to us that this representation does not tell us the whole story; certain narratives are left out. It is not enough to say that the wounded military subject is "spunky, irreverent, and sexy" (Siebers 2001: 745) in his new techno-masculine iteration, because as Siebers points out, this is an inaccurate illustration of the lived experiences of many disabled people. At a deeper level, there are subtle fractures and moments of dissonance in these performances; we can see in the example of the Invictus Games the struggle to incorporate the emotionally and psychologically wounded subject into a representation which overall attempts to reclaim masculinity and the potential to overcome. As Edkins (2003:12) tells us, there is always an excess of subjectivity, and so the sovereign project to create a complete, singular and recognisable hero subject always inevitably fails. While in the Invictus Games, the Invictus Choir, and Help for Heroes we can see a carefully negotiated co-presence of both warrior and vulnerable subjectivities, there is an inherent violence to the claim that the hero is always *inevitably* both, when in fact this vulnerability is *produced*. What confronts us in the wounded heroic body is the violence of the sovereign state (*the monstrous*), and so we are left to wonder; can there be a meaningful remaking of the hero which adequately addresses this violence?

To shed light on this violence more directly in relation to the wounded hero body, I would like to now draw on a personal encounter with the Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre in Plymouth, UK. The centre arguably provides the best example of how the sovereign narrative of recovery is laid out; this narrative is such that recovery becomes a designated end point, a linear trajectory which, true to the overarching rhetoric of the charity, we must "inspire" servicemen and women to set out upon. The centre aims to "inspire those who have been wounded, injured or become sick while serving our country and enable them to lead active, independent and fulfilling lives" (Help for Heroes 2017h), reminding us of the imperative of recovery to recruitment alluded to by Lord Ashcroft (2014); "the more potential recruits (and their families and teachers) believe that joining the Forces leads to a fulfilling subsequent life […] the more will want to apply". The concerns of the state are written into this narrative from the outset, as the centre serves to help 'heroes' who have undergone trauma "while serving our country", yet crucially the role of the sovereign state in inflicting this trauma is written out. There is little room in the given narrative for moments of uncertainty or critique, yet what emerged in my visit to the centre during fieldwork were moments of discord in which its inherent instability is brought into recognition. We are reminded of what Williams (2014:15) tells us, that;

> *"…an uncanny, unexpected experience can act to cause a slippage in the experiencing of the dominant discourse, a disruption to the 'field of vision' that is troubling, but also important in that it offers the opportunity for the frame to be seen, questioned, and reassessed"* (Williams 2014: 15).

Visiting the centre, to me, opened up such crucial moments of "uncanny, unexpected experience", and encounters with the horror of the 'real' of warfare (Zizek 2002; Edkins 2003). Indeed, these moments of recognition shed light on the hero subject as both incomplete and not fully governed (or

governable); what, then, is left over? In this final section of the chapter, I will begin to think about this.

About the centre

The £23 million Naval Recovery Centre is situated on the grounds of Devonport Naval Base, although it serves men and women not only from the Navy but also the Royal Marines, the Army, and the Royal Air Force. It is comprised of two buildings; Parker VC, a specialist accommodation building named after a military serviceman awarded the VC, and the rehabilitation centre Endeavour, so named as it "defines the nature of the effort put into recovery activities" (Help for Heroes 2014b). Parker VC makes use of "60 single cabins, six family cabins, social spaces, a large multi-functional space, conference facility and 24 hour reception support" (*ibid*). Endeavour "consists of three buildings, and includes a sprung-floor gymnasium, eight medical consultation rooms, a Support Hub for veterans, a multi-functional space containing Café Hero, a hydrotherapy area, changing rooms and a 25 metre six lane competition pool" (*ibid*).

There is an interesting juxtaposition between the highly militarised site of the naval base and the profoundly therapeutic space of the recovery centre; with the exception of the usual military check in points and procedures, one can move quite quickly from the militarised and masculine space of duty to sanitised, safe spaces of sanctuary provided by hydrotherapy pools and bee keeping gardens. Upon entering the grounds, you become aware immediately of the sheer amount of money put into the centre; the space is clean, new, and impressive, with large open areas and pristine statues of familiar Help for

Heroes images such as the two uniformed servicemen carrying a wounded colleague on a stretcher[44].

Figure 5.8 Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre, Plymouth.

An emphasis on community and inherent solidarity between servicemen and women of the military is present in all aspects of the centre, and in the very ethos of Help for Heroes; "it's about the blokes" (Help for Heroes 2017b; see also Help for Heroes Annual Report 2008). The narrative laid out at the centre is clear from the outset. There is a linear pathway set out, from the camaraderie of the military in which you suffer trauma (although, the camaraderie is the emphasised aspect), to the recognition that you are heroic for your service (see 'Café Hero'), to the inspiration to embark on your latest heroic journey, the 'endeavour' of recovery, to the eventual status of 'recovered'.

During my visit to the centre, I was given a tour of both Endeavour and Parker VC. The tour provided me with an understanding not only of the facilities and their functions, but also allowed me to engage with some of the narratives that emerged around war and recovery, while shedding light on the politics of

[44] The wounded serviceman shown on the stretcher is holding his thumbs up, depicting a positive representation of recovery and brotherhood between service members.

recognition at work. The following extracts from my fieldnotes provide brief snapshots of the fractured account of recovery provided by the centre.

Tracing the fragments of contestation

"Our first stop on the tour leads us to the gym, an enormous open room boasting millions of pounds worth of hi-tech equipment. It seemed strangely empty and sanitised to me, although I guessed that our tour was scheduled deliberately during a quiet period. On the far side of the room is a huge climbing wall; Adam tells us that when the centre opened, they had an informal competition to see who could climb to the top first; symbolic, he says, of the uphill climb towards the victory of recovery."

(Extract from field notes, Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre)

The recovery centre's gymnasium is a key space in which the technomasculine hero emerges; the millions of pounds worth of state of the art equipment provide a means through which the wounded serviceman enacts his "more than human-ness", becoming an enhanced version of himself who like the Invictus Hero challenges the parameters of disabled capability. This is a space which imagines an almost 'cyber' future, one which transcends the limits of the human and allows us to imagine countless possibilities for who we might be, and what we might become. Such a sterile space is untouched, untainted by humanity and the knowledge of warfare and its capacities to traumatise, and therefore shows the playing out of the sovereign narrative, a narrative upon which the existence of the centre itself relies. Indeed, the notion of a linear journey towards recovery is written into the very narration of the space by Adam and its members; "*they had an informal competition to see who could climb to the top first; symbolic, he says, of the uphill climb towards the victory of recovery*".

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Yet we exit the gym, and moments later pass one of several disabled toilet/shower rooms;

> *"We stand and stare at a toilet, which looks like no toilet that I have ever seen. Adam describes to us in great detail its functions in assisting wounded servicemen with single or multiple amputations; considerable amounts of money are put into the toilet facilities at the centre, to ensure that the needs of every member are met, no matter how physically impaired they are."*

(Extract from fieldnotes, Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre)

Unlike the Invictus Games, this space provides at the same time an encounter with the monstrous; that is, we are forced to confront what Hughes (2009) refers to as "a realm that is impure, unclean and disorderly to a murky, disavowed world that threatens propriety and identity. The abject finds expression in affronts to the 'civilised' human condition, including… monstrosity, infection, disease, decay, death and the waste products of the body, all those substances and fluids that might pass from the inner to the outer body and that embody the capacity to disgust and repel (p405)". We are confronted with the 'leakiness' of the disabled veteran body, and feel disgust in the recognition of the state self in this vision. That is to say, such moments bring us face to face with the knowledge that *this is what war does, this is what we have done*. Indeed, it is in the very act of standing and staring, that we encounter our difference with the disabled subject, and our positions as voyeurs of the trauma of warfare. Such an encounter is not with a 'safe' vulnerable subject, as we see in the Invictus Choir, but rather with an unpredictable vulnerable subject who cannot be effectively harnessed in service of the state.

We walked next from Endeavour to Parker VC;

> *"Adam took us next to Parker VC. As we wandered along the corridor, I noticed the paintings on the walls; stormy seascapes, abstract flowers, country fields. Someone asked why they chose paintings that were so far removed from the military context of the centre; Adam replied that the people living there knew they were in the military, they didn't need reminding. I found this curious, given the prominence of military statues just outside. When we left the accommodation building, I found myself looking for examples of this contradiction".*

(Extract from fieldnotes, Help for Heroes Naval Recovery Centre)

This moment of exchange in Parker VC is telling of the façade but also the fragility of the sovereign project of recovery. The blurring out of the violence of the military and warfare stretches even into the banal act of choosing wall paintings, yet it does not stand up to scrutiny; "they know they are in the military, they don't need reminding". As we were leaving the building, we came across a man in shorts checking his pigeon hole in reception. Adam briefly said hello to him, they exchanged some 'banter', and we were moved quickly outside. Adam explained to us then that the man was a resident in Parker VC who suffered from severe PTSD and had developed Tourrete's syndrome. I got the impression that Adam had not expected us to bump into any of the centre's beneficiaries on our tour.

At the end of our visit to the centre, we were taken to the beekeeping, fruit and flower garden at the back of the site. And, it is against this site that the technohuman space of the gym contrasts most significantly, as the garden is marked by its profoundly human and organic approach to recovery. Such a space appeals to the aims of the centre in addressing not only physical but mental trauma; the garden is a safe, therapeutic space, which provides the mentally wounded with a place of escape. The garden again takes on a strange juxtaposition with the militarism of the geography it locates, as the looming

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grey walls of the wider naval base are clearly visible just beyond the garden fence. As we walked around the garden, we were encouraged to try apples from one of the trees (*taste the fruits of the project's labour, participate in the performance, revel in the substance we have manufactured. I grimaced; the apples were bitter*). It seemed to me that the fruit garden highlighted the limits of the technohuman, as all trauma inevitably becomes profoundly organic, in the end. Indeed, for me the garden was jarring, and brought into clear recognition the violence at play in attempting to create a singular and knowable hero figure at *any (and all) cost.*

Conclusion

The threat of the wounded military subject lies in its monstrosity. That is to say, the challenge posed to the state comes in the moment of recognition, in which we see our own likeness in that from which we "recoil in horror" (Hughes 2009: 403). This moment of recognition sheds light on the "fantasy of absolute able-bodiedness" (Thomson 1997: 45, cited in Hughes 2009: 401), and therefore on the fragility of the relation between the state and masculinity, while at the same time bringing into visibility the violence of the sovereign state. This chapter has shown that by necessity, the state must attempt to both restore the link between military masculinity and the state, and at the same time reduce the likeness to ourselves which we recognise in the disabled military body. In this way, the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' upon which the hero subject relies is restored, and he becomes functional again.

We have seen from the examples of the Invictus Games and Help for Heroes that this 'two-fold forgetting' occurs through the unmaking and remaking of the relation to the self (Edkins 2003). While the context of each site is different, we can see the same thing happening in all of them. The subject is at once heroic, techno-human, human, vulnerable, recovered, and indefinitely

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recovering, his remaking relying on multiple co-present vehicles of representation. It relies on performance, a particular mobilisation of the body and of the public, in a way which forces the subject to locate a different trauma temporality. This temporality is one which is of course tied to the linearity of the nation-state, but which fundamentally depicts this body as an object of spectatorship rather than a troubling subject, and thus removes the capacity of this subject to provide critique (Edkins 2003). It therefore relies on a particular orientation to the future. Crucially, an acknowledgement that this phenomena is so widespread and normalised is inescapable; it has become part of the architectures of normal activity, not only happening in the confined space of the arena or the journey of a bike ride, but spiralling out into every high street store, showing that, as Merje Kuus (2008) tells us, militarism is *always already there*.

Such processes and negotiations attempt to render the heroic subject singular and coherent. Yet, what Edkins (2003) tells us is that there is necessarily always an excess, a surplus which overflows the parameters of a complete and knowable subject. While the fieldnote extracts touched upon above are only minute encounters experienced within a much wider machine, taken together, these fragments trouble the sovereign narrative. In the space of the recovery centre, the techno-hero subject is juxtaposed in a jarring way with the "leakiness" of the material reality of the disabled body. The vulnerability of the subject in this encounter is not one who is 'safe', as we see in the Invictus Choir, but unpredictable and impossible to harness in service of the sovereign; there can be no remaking of this leakiness, only monstrosity in the recognition of the violent sovereign state in this apparition. Any framing of the wounded military subject in terms of technohuman masculinity crucially puts forward a narrative in which the violence of the sovereign state is blurred out or made a catalyst for redemption through the 'hero's journey' (see Campbell 2004

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[1949]). In the Invictus Games and Help for Heroes, for example, the violence which the hero must strive to *overcome* is framed as necessary and inevitable through the mutual reliance and co-presence of warrior and vulnerable subjectivities; one cannot be *unconquerable* without having something to *conquer*. We can also see very clearly in the recovery centre the vulnerability of the heroic subject; yet, this is a vulnerability which, despite attempts, cannot be harnessed in service of the sovereign state. Rather, such attempts must always fail, as we are forced to confront the nature of sovereign violence not as inevitable, but *produced*. Williams (2014:15) suggests that;

> *"dominant frames are challenged by disruptive moments and events…that cause those frames to be thrown into confusion and exposing the gaps within the citational and iterative practices that enable their continuation" (ibid).*

What becomes apparent, then, is that the fragility of the sovereign project of "recovery" can be brought into recognition through the exposure of gaps in the frame, within the "citational and iterative practices that enable their continuation". The uncanny and unexpected moments of slippage that took place in the recovery centre offer minute disruptions to the 'field of vision', to the smooth working of representation in which the hero is made visible.

6. *Willful Wives*

Introduction

"He was always so plausible. Many people have believed that his version of events was the true one, give or take a few murders, a few beautiful seductresses, a few one-eyed monsters. Even I believed him, from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn't think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me. Hadn't I been faithful? Hadn't I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation – almost the compulsion – to do otherwise? And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why wouldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners. Don't follow my example, I want to scream in your ears – yes, yours! But when I try to scream, I sound like an owl"

- *The Penelopiad,* Margaret Atwood.

Atwood's *The Penelopiad* brings a critical reading to the life of a woman previously obscured behind her husband. It gives flesh and complexity to a figure who has been rendered two-dimensional, whose depth of story and multiplicity of character is so often quashed in the pursuit of a singular and

knowable subjectivity. The voice she articulates is one "haunted by the hanged maids" (*ibid*), tinged with sadness, regret, and bitterness. While *The Penelopiad* troubles the linear and two-dimensional understanding of *The Odyssey's* Penelope, so too does this chapter seek to flesh out a more critical understanding of the military wife, and her role in relation to the narratives of heroism and sacrifice that have become central to the spinning of contemporary militarism. Previous chapters in this thesis have applied critical interrogation to the aesthetic and bodily remaking of the hero subject, illustrating the complex, spatially and temporally situated processes through which this sovereign subject is brought into recognition. This chapter will develop this further, to consider how the figure of the military wife, a subject long considered to be embroiled in the gendered workings of militarism, acts as a performative subject with the potential to contest and undermine the sovereign narrative.

Using the example of the Plymouth branch of the UK's bestselling Military Wives Choir, this chapter will examine the mechanisms through which a singular and knowable military wife figure is harnessed and mobilised, but, importantly, will attempt to pick apart the artificial linear relationship between the hero's wife and the state. The Military Wives Choir portrays a powerful image of the 'Penelope' military spouse, the hero's wife who must necessarily stay behind to mourn the absence of her husband and care for their children. Such a role for the military wife is fundamental to the structuring of militarised logics (see Enloe 1983; 1990; 2000). The Military Wives Choir goes further to provide an example of how this Penelope figure is ultimately rendered marketable, a commodity in neoliberal architectures of contemporary militarism. They are an example of what Jo Tidy calls "post-2008 conscience capitalism", in which "perpetuation of militarized logics are

produced as a notionally apolitical social 'cause'" (2015: 2). As Victoria Basham puts it;

> *"The packaging of these emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects on "our boys" and the women and (girl) children they leave behind as hit singles, allowed the wider British public to personalise war. Objecting to such heartfelt expressions of support for soldiers would be hard-hearted, cynical or snobbish; even if an effect of remaining silent is to back "our boys", "wherever they are" and whatever they do (Barnett 2012)"* (Basham 2016: 889).

Basham uses the choir to show the power of such gendered performances in bringing war into recognition in contemporary society. Such performances are a means through which the national public are able to spectate upon and even empathise with the lived effects of war, yet crucially unable to show dissent or critique. Thus, the women of the Military Wives Choir occupy a curious political space, in which an entire country can stand behind them and their husbands (not only stand behind, in fact, but actively buy into), without standing behind or buying into the wars they fight in.

Importantly, though, the political force of the Military Wives Choir lies not only in the image they portray, but also in the banal practices of the choir as 'self-care'. The choir is, according to the participants in this project, first and foremost a support group, a means of connecting with other women and sharing a safe space in which they can sing for emotional release. This chapter will argue that these banal acts are not insignificant, but rather that they provide an opportunity for the women to look upon a speculative horizon of who they might become. The choir empowers its members, motivating them to start college courses, pursue new careers, and take part in activities which despite appearances are fundamentally *not about their husbands*. Just as *The Penelopiad* moves the reader to consider that there is another, hidden story

behind the dominant narrative of *The Odyssey*, so too does this chapter seek to consider what this narrative might be for the Military Wives Choir. Indeed, as the soliloquy given in the epigraph to this chapter reveals, there is capacity for this hidden voice to be *willful;* Penelope tells the reader that she has become; "*An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with*". Like Atwood's heroine, the women of the choir are shown in this chapter to be curious and critical of their role in the perpetuation and continuation of the dominant narrative. They are 'willful subjects' (Ahmed 2014), ungovernable figures who have the potential to disrupt the sovereign narrative and imagination of a knowable future.

Gareth Malone and 'The Choir: Military Wives'

The formation of The Military Wives Choir is somewhat contested, however it is widely accepted that the first choir under the bracket of "Military Wives Choirs" as we know it was formed in Catterick in 2010 by military wives Nicky Clarke and Caroline Jopp (Military Wives Choir Foundation 2016a);

> "*Nicky had written to Gareth about the benefits that a choir could bring to military wives during a deployment to Afghanistan, and this had inspired Gareth to create the TV programme*".

The Military Wives Choir was subsequently given a public face in 2011 by UK TV personality Gareth Malone, who formed a choir with the aim of helping wives and girlfriends of servicemen to express themselves through song, particularly when their partners were deployed[45]. The choir's journey was documented for the BBC in a programme titled *The Choir: Military Wives*;

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[45] Gareth Malone had become known for his previous work with 'unlikely' choirs, such as the all-boys school in Leicester featured on *The Choir: Boys Don't Sing* (2008) and the group of shy young teenagers featured on CBBC's *The Big Performance* in 2010 (IMDB 2017). As such, part of the charm of *The Choir* as a TV series, and indeed Gareth Malone, could be traced back to

"In 2011, whilst UK Armed Forces were deployed in Afghanistan, Gareth Malone arrived at military bases in Chivenor and Plymouth to film the TV programme "The Choir: Military Wives" which recorded the creation of two choirs of military wives. Those choirs, galvanised by the support from each other whilst husbands were away, unexpectedly enjoyed amazing success when they came together to record 'Wherever You Are'. The ladies created an unprecedented level of public empathy for military wives and girlfriends, and consequently SSAFA and the Royal British Legion. Inspired by Chivenor and Plymouth, other military wives began to set up choirs across the country, with Lympstone, Portsmouth, Salisbury Plain and Wattisham among the first" (Military Wives Choir Foundation, 2016a).

At the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in November 2011, the military wives performed an original song titled *Wherever You Are*, which was written by renowned songwriter Paul Mealor using the wives' letters to their husbands on deployment. Theresa, a research participant from the choir who had been a cast member of the original programme featured on BBC1, suggested that the extracts from letters or diaries that were used in the song were those which were poetic, and played best into the gendered narrative of the hero and his wife. Theresa even speculated that the famous line from the song "*light up the darkness, my prince of peace*" could have come directly from her diary (which she exchanged with her husband upon his return from deployment), and a line which read "you are the light in my darkness, my prince". *Wherever You Are* was released as a single in December 2011, and in selling more than 556,000 copies claimed the UK Christmas number 1. Fast-

the programme's legacy of bringing people in challenging situations together through singing.

forwarding to today, there are now more than 70 military wives choirs across the UK and beyond.

The significance of *The Choir: Military Wives* in crafting a particular representation of the women of the choir cannot be overstated. The programme itself was widely watched across the UK, airing on BBC2 in the prime slot of 9pm-10pm. It generated huge public interest in the choir, and several follow up series' such as *The Choir: A Year On* and *The Choir: New Military Wives,* which followed "choirmaster Gareth Malone, as he forms a special Military Wives choir to perform at a WW1 centenary prom at London's Royal Albert Hall, alongside the cast of War Horse" (BBC 2014).

The narrative put forward in *The Choir: Military Wives* was one heavily embedded in and inscribed with gendered military logics. The series took the starting point that the wives "needed a voice, and this is about giving them a voice right now" (Gareth Malone, *The Choir: Military Wives, Episode 2*); yet, crucially, this is not a voice that can speak freely. Rather, it is one confined to the parameters of a sovereign speech act. Reiterated throughout each episode of the series is that "*their husbands are away fighting in Afghanistan*", "*The women's husbands have been away for nearly two months*" (*The Choir: Military Wives, Episode 2*). We are reminded time and time again that "*You wake up thinking of them, you go to bed thinking of them… the thought of your child going to war and putting his life potentially on the line, something as a mother you have no control over*" (choir member, *ibid*). Indeed, as one choir member points out, "*It's not action man playing here, this is real stuff*" (*The Choir: Military Wives, Episode 2*). To a critical eye, there is of course a violence in this, that "*this is real stuff*", yet it is made into a spectacle for consumption. In one episode, Gareth Malone is shown considering whether it is right for him to branch the choir out to Plymouth, at a time when the city is reeling from the death of a Plymouth based Royal Marine from 42 Commando who was killed in Afghanistan.

Malone himself highlights the difficulty of this situation, yet indicates that it provides an opportunity for the speech act of singing to become therapeutic; *"going into a very sensitive situation with something as ridiculous and as crass as singing in a choir… I think its testing what a choir is for, and really testing it to the limit"*.

While *The Choir* repeatedly does lay claim to being an important means of release and distraction for these women (in fact, this was given as a reason to take the choir to Plymouth even in light of recent tragic events; "at the moment they need all the support they can get"), what is more striking is the wider value placed on the choir. One choir member is shown saying *"For me, singing with the girls is singing for all wives [read: military wives]… it's really emotional"*, while Malone says of one performance the choir give; *"Gig is the wrong word… this is a ceremony"* (*The Choir: Military Wives, Episode 2*). *The Choir* does not shy away from the inherent violence of military life, illustrating its lived impacts through the voices of military wives. Crucially though, the articulation of these experiences through the speech act of singing is given meaning and imperative for the sovereign state; *"this is a ceremony"*[46]. *The Choir* renders these speech acts as crucial in the unmaking and remaking of the subject, at once cathartic for the wives and for the sovereign, embroiled in the deferred promise of happiness that the sovereign hero figure represents. Performances of the choir are rendered ceremonial, almost sacred, reclamations of the subject.

Indeed, such sovereign narratives play out through particular characters in the series. It follows for example one member of the Chivenor choir, Samantha, someone who lacked confidence in her own abilities but who

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[46] Indeed, the term "ceremony" chimes with the many ceremonies and rituals through which military identities are brought into being.

possessed a powerful singing voice, in her journey towards performing a solo at the Royal Albert Hall. Sam's personal story is given a particular focus; we see her transformation from a nervous performer to a woman with confidence, an icon for everything the choir represents; "I think that the choir has had a bigger impact on Sam than anyone else, its restored her to life… she was incredibly vulnerable… and now she's necessary" (Gareth Malone, *The Choir: Military Wives, Episode 2*). We hear about her hopes of her husband not having to go to war following the death of Osama Bin Laden, and how they are dashed by her husband being deployed on his first tour of duty to Afghanistan. This individuation of heroic narratives (although in this case, through the figure of the wife) follows a wider trend in contemporary militarism, reflected in the growing popularity of military memoirs (Woodward 2003; Woodward & Jenkings 2012). Crucially, these representations are inherently gendered in *The Choir*. Narrations of Sam's personal experience are peppered with clips of her pushing a pram carrying her infant child, making cups of tea, talking to the camera from the domestic space of her home. As episode 2 follows the choir in the lead up to a performance at Sandhurst, the narration of their nerves and the significance of performing in such a formal military institution are similarly coloured with clips of women trying on dresses, getting fake tans, and painting their nails. We see the women in tears, hugging, expressing the emotion of trying to articulate the violence and pain of their lived military experiences. We are reminded time and time again of the (feminine) sacrifice that military wives make "for their husbands" and by extension for their country, encouraged to pity them, support them, and venerate their husbands. As Via (2010: 45) points out;

> "A large part of the gendered roles in and around militarism can be accounted
> for by understanding the centrality of hero narratives to both soldiering and

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citizenship. In these narratives, the heroic warrior defends the feminised other for the good of the self, family and country".

As such, the 'Penelope' figure of the military wife has long been considered central to upholding military values (Enloe 1983; 1990; 2000; Basham 2016; Via 2010; Horn 2010). Yet what is significant about the Military Wives Choir is the way in which the military wife becomes implicated in the construction of "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) in popular culture. As Horn (2010) puts it;

> *"The effect of fighting a war with an all-volunteer force, however, is that this kind of rhetoric is made all the more necessary – the war has not touched most civilians' personal lives in any significant way (aside from those with friends and family involved in the war), meaning that sympathy and loyalty must be derived for those who are suffering the consequences of the war. Military men and women are then cast as selfless heroes, and their families as unwavering patriots"* (p59).

The Military Wives Choir reflects the positioning of those "suffering the consequences of war" in the realm of popular culture, a means of restating the selfless heroism of their husbands who they are left behind waiting for and inviting audiences to support them without feeling constrained politically. As Victoria Basham notes, the sovereign subject of the military wife is performed deliberately through "the packaging of… emotionally-charged gendered performances of war's effects on "our boys" and the women and (girl) children they leave behind" (Basham 2016: 889). This 'packaging' is integral to marketing the Military Wives to consumers, but also to the (related) wider politics of the "muscular liberal state" (*ibid*).

Legacies

The Military Wives Choir Foundation

Following the success of *The Choir: Military Wives*; "In January 2012, choir members from Chivenor, Plymouth and Catterick came together to discuss how best to create a sustainable organisation to benefit all military wives, building on the legacy from the success of the song 'Wherever You Are'" (Military Wives Choir Foundation 2016a).

> *"Encouraged by Gareth and actively assisted by other supporters, including SSAFA, the Royal British Legion, Decca and 20:20 Television, the concept of a Foundation, to act as an umbrella organisation for all military wives choirs, was born. Needing a team to breathe life into the vision, a call was put out to all choirs in February 2012 and in March 2012 a group of women stepped forward to volunteer their time to found the charity we now know as the Military Wives Choirs Foundation (MWCF)… Running alongside the business of setting up choirs the team were managing numerous high profile projects including recording three albums; In My Dreams, Stronger Together and Sing, releasing a book 'The Military Wives', performing at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Classical Brit Awards, the Festival of Remembrance and countless television appearances and local performances. The charity was officially incorporated on 25th July 2012 with four founding trustees Nicky Clarke, Athol Hendry, David Ashman and Kirsty Bushell. The dedication and commitment of the co-founders and trustees was realised on 13 September 2012 when 647 women from 24 choirs came together at Wellington Barracks in London to officially launch the charity. On this same day, Gareth Malone was welcomed as the charity's first patron. Wherever You Are shot to Number 1 in the UK charts and raised over £500,000 for military charities The MWCF continues to operate as a volunteer-led organisation providing guidance,*

funding and support to all its member choirs, with more than 70 choirs at British military bases in the UK and overseas" (Military Wives Choir Foundation, 2016a).

Military Wives Choir, Plymouth

The discussion provided so far in this chapter has focused primarily on the representation of the choir (and by extension, military wives) through television and text. The wider chapter however provides a much more textured analysis of the politics at work in the choir, coloured by months of personal and very emotional engagement with the choir during fieldwork. As the material above shows, the legacy of *The Choir: Military Wives* has been extensive, and has led to the development of branches across the UK. The primary research used in this chapter focuses however specifically on the Plymouth branch of the Military Wives Choir, the second choir featured in the original BBC series in 2011. Of the 50 or so current registered members of the Plymouth choir, approximately 8 were cast members of *The Choir: Military Wives*. This branch of the choir is made up of women aged between 18 and 65, wives / girlfriends / mothers / daughters of servicemen, as well as several serving and ex serving women. The majority of the choir members are tied through their spouses to the Royal Navy, although a very small number have links to the Army, Royal Air Force and the Royal Marines. The Plymouth branch of the choir perform at a large number of local and national events each year, and in May 2016 (a few months after my period of fieldwork was completed) about 20 of the members travelled to New York to perform with other choirs at Carnegie Hall.

The choir rehearses in the chapel at the Royal Citadel, home to 29 Commando regiment of the British army, and several members are associated through their spouse with this regiment. The rehearsal space as a site through which

the military wife figure emerges is not insignificant. The Royal Citadel epitomises a highly militarised landscape; perched atop of the city's historic Hoe (the seafront), the base to 29 Commando looms ominously over the city, surrounded by high walls with cannons directed out through old embrasures. The entrance to the Royal Citadel is a large stone archway with impressive architectural military carvings, flanked by uniformed men with guns. To enter the site, visitors are required to register with their full name and vehicle license plate two weeks in advance (unless they are on the list of regular choir attendees), and then sign in at the gate with men in hi-vis jackets;

"It is a bitterly cold December evening, not long before Christmas, when we pull up outside the Royal Citadel. A formidable looking structure perched atop of Plymouth's historic seafront, the Royal Citadel, home to the 29 Commando Regiment of the Royal Artillery, was everything you could imagine a militarised landscape to be. Steep walls crawling with vines surrounded the site and cut into the green hills of the Hoe on the far side. Disused canons loomed overhead, pointing out to sea or poking through slim gaps in the stone, and armed soldiers flanked a towering stone archway at the front. Theresa wound her window down as one approached to take our names. Once permitted to enter, we drove through the archway into a large parking area and got out to totter across to the chapel where choir rehearsals took place.

Stooping slightly, we entered the chapel through a heavy wooden door. Immediately I was immersed in an entirely different world to that of the cold military outside; a world which simultaneously conjured images of polite coffee mornings and Christmas Eve village church services. Women milled around a pop up table with chipped coffee mugs and small bottles of milk, piling over one another for teaspoons of sugar. Some exchanged hugs as they shook off their coats and made chit-chat, some were more reserved and trickled slowly into the main chapel area to find a seat, folding their jackets on their laps. Most of the

women surveyed me from a safe distance, smiling to show that I was welcome but definitely interested in my presence.

After ten or so minutes of coffee drinking and conversation making, the rest of the group made their way into the main area of the chapel where the choir rehearsed every week. The chapel was an interesting space in itself; the walls were adorned with a combination of biblical extracts, religious ornaments, and military artefacts from the Royal Citadel's history."

(Extract from field notes, Military Wives Choir rehearsal)

This juxtaposition between the therapeutic, caring atmosphere of the choir and the highly militarised space they rehearsed in was really striking to me during my research. It is impossible to forget, in such a space, the omnipresence of the military in the functioning of the choir, and in the everyday lives of the women who sing in it. There is a violence to the looming presence of the military here; the women are singing about the pain they experience as a result of their husbands' professions, yet the militarised space of rehearsals acts as a constant reminder of the role of the military in inflicting this pain. I could not help but be reminded of the earlier encounter at the Help for Heroes Recovery Centre accommodation building in Plymouth, in which Adam had told me that the men and women they helped there knew they were in the military, *they didn't need reminding.* Considering the overwhelming presence of the military in the choir rehearsal space, I couldn't help but wonder whether the violence is greater in constant reminders of the role of military in the pain military communities experience, or in trying to remake or even forget their role.

Part 1: In the service of sovereign power

"…Shrewd Odysseus!... You are a fortunate man to have won a wife of such pre-eminent virtue! How faithful was your flawless Penelope, Icarius'

daughter! How loyally she kept the memory of the husband of her youth! The glory of her virtue will not fade with the years, but the deathless gods themselves will make a beautiful song for mortal ears in honour of the constant Penelope"

- *The Odyssey*, Book 24 (191-194)[47]

This chapter has thus far "set the scene", fleshed out the backdrop of the Military Wives Choir as they appear, and provided a starting point for my analysis. The following section of this chapter will, in an approach similar to earlier chapters in this thesis, now provide a more in depth reading of the Military Wives Choir as a vehicle of production for the sovereign subject.

Songs, performance, therapy

The representation provided in *The Choir: Military Wives* is, as I have already argued, one informed by highly gendered notions of the hero and his feminised other, the doting wife who stays at home to mourn his absence. While *The Choir* draws heavily on the intense emotional experiences of the women, the mobilisation of this feeling and affect goes far beyond the narratives shown in the television series. Rather, to truly appreciate the affective power of the choir, one has to engage with their music as a genre through which the subject can appear.

On a superficial level, the choir's repertoire itself illustrates how the sovereign subject of the hero is produced. The overwhelming focus on songs about the absence of their husbands depicts a particular image of the military spouse, one which shows them to be the doting wife, the feminised 'other' to the masculine hero 'self'. Their first album '*In My Dreams*' (2012) features only the

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[47] Cited in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005)

two original choirs from Chivenor and Plymouth, and narrates a story that largely revolves around relationships with military husbands, and the pain of their absence[48].

Songs such as *"With or Without You"*, *"On My Own"* and indeed their hit song *"Wherever You Are"* bring into recognition a military wife who is constructed in relation to the hero, thus showing how the subject himself works. At this level, therefore, it is the representation to consumers through particular song lyrics that are significant. For example in *"With or Without You"*, the focus is on absence and loss;

> *[Redacted for copyright reasons]*

> (Lyrics extract from 'With or Without You', In My Dreams 2012)

We can see a similar theme in *"On My Own"*;

> *[Redacted for copyright reasons]*

> (*ibid*)

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[48] The album includes songs such as *With or Without You, Fix You, On My Own*, and *Make You Feel My Love*.

Indeed, the technicalities of the music lends itself easily to the creation of these kinds of sovereign speech acts. Several of the choir's songs, such as *Wherever You Are,* use a piano solo 'lead-in' and 'lead-out' at the beginning and end of the song, which works to reinforce the sense of seclusion and loneliness put forward through the lyrics. The use of multi-harmonic choral music, often found in traditional Christian church music, invokes visions of angelic virtue and a sense of awe or importance that cannot be adequately articulated through words alone. This relation with church music is deliberately cultivated in the album version of *With or Without You* (from *In My Dreams* 2012), in which the vocals are made to reverberate in order to mimic the echoing sound of performing in a church or hall. The use of harmonic thirds and fifths in the choir's music works to generate a 'bigger' sound, heightening the listeners' sense of awe. The feeling generated by such music transcends the capability of spoken (or sung) speech acts, in that they can be *felt* before they can be *understood.* For example, *Wherever You are* reminds the listener of the awe inspiring music of Elgar's *Nimrod* (from Enigma Variations), or *Vide Cor Meum* (based on Dante's *La Vita Nuova*), from which meaning and a sense of imperative can be gained without necessarily being able to understand the lyrics. This sense of importance imparted by the very music of the choir depicts the military wife and the hero within readily available tropes and narratives of heroism and sacrifice, echoing what Gareth Malone tells the audience in *The Choir: Military Wives* that "*this is a ceremony*"[49].

At a deeper level, however, it is also the cathartic and therapeutic element of the choir, and more specifically of singing melancholy songs, which helps to

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[49] Indeed, the four chord progression of many of the choir's pop song covers (which make up a great deal of their repertoire) renders them easy to sing but also recognisable, popular, and marketable. The four chord progression used in *With or Without You* for example is so popular that it is known as the "axis of awesome".

bring the heroic subject into recognition. The speech acts that the choir engage in through singing are written as crucial components in the unmaking and remaking of the subject, with the cathartic nature of the experience intimately entangled with the deferred promise of happiness that the sovereign hero figure himself represents.

The therapeutic aspect of the choir was something that all research participants from the choir were keen to talk to me about. Theresa, for example, said "*I find singing very therapeutic*", while Kate said that "*mostly I go for the singing to be honest cos I do love to sing… but it is fun and it's good to let your hair down*". For these women, the therapeutic element of coming to the choir and singing was a main reason for becoming a member. One significant component of this was that the choir is first and foremost a support group – as many participants were keen to tell me from the outset. From what I learned during my time with the choir, the support element often relied on being able to sing and 'unlock' particular emotions among like-minded people. It was important to many of these women to be able to get this emotional release, to sing songs which allow them to come together as a community in both happiness and sadness. As Theresa & Emma noted;

> "*Emma: I don't think I've been to a choir practice where someone hasn't cried. Every week, every single week someone will cry, because somebody's away or someone is ill or for whatever reason*
>
> *Theresa: And music does that it's very therapeutic, and what's quite nice is that people feel they can cry, they don't feel stupid for having a good cry*"
>
> (Focus group extract, Emma & Theresa)

Karen similarly noted in relation to singing particular songs that;

> "*…it is good going over the old stuff because certain songs also have emotional connections, and there's some weeks that some songs are requested not to be*

sung because you don't want to break down. I mean before Christmas there was a couple of ladies who didn't know if their husbands were coming home, they were on submarines they had no contact with them, and Rhys wanted to sing "Bring him home" but one of the girls went no, and that was respected um… because she was holding it together to that point and she would have broke down otherwise. But if someone does say that you can understand it's not like 'oh come onnn' you just right that's fine, there's a generic understanding in the choir to just do that. And then you realise oh right OK someone needs a bit of help here, and you feel it as well, I mean I'm feeling all goosepimply now cos I can even remember the face of the lady that it happened to just before Christmas, but it does make you realise actually, sometimes you go to single mindedly focus on a song that you're learning or an event coming up, which is good cos your focus is taken off what is worrying you as well, but then it gets brought back to reality because you realise 'I'm not the only one going through this, someone else is, and they're having a harder time than I am at the minute' or they're just feeling exactly the same as you and you feel that you're not alone cos of it as well, and they won't even realise they've done something but you go home feeling actually I'm not in this ship on my own."

(Interview extract, Karen)

As Karen said, "It is good to go back to old songs because everyone can sing them from start to finish and it is a good release to sing". The therapeutic aspect of the choir, for Karen, therefore came not only from singing, but from singing a particular type of song. Indeed, often singing the sad and melancholy songs that the choir are known for became a means through which women were able to express their emotions, and gain support from other choir members who might be going through similar things. Karen later noted that singing these types of songs was therefore not just about performing a

particular idea of military wifehood (although that was certainly significant), but rather was also important to the very functioning of the choir;

> *"…if we just sang happy songs, sometimes we're not all happy happy and a lot of us can sing a song and put so much emotion into it how it's supposed to be sung I think that's more what we're known for not necessarily, we're not all classically trained brilliant singers, we sing as one but when we sing as one we sing emotionally, and we connect with people, and I think that is part of our charm and part of why people know us and like us. Um… singing songs that do make you well up or give you the lump in the back of the throat or the goosebumps are the songs that give you more memories as well and you get a connection with the audience, so I think that's why we need to sing songs or like to sing songs that do mean something to everyone individually and as a whole… so yeah having a varied amount of songs but also having songs that are known well to our audience gives us a chance to connect with them and be known for who we are."*

(Interview extract, Karen)

As Karen suggests, the importance of singing sad and melancholy songs comes from the therapeutic, cathartic experience that they provide. By being able identify with a song and put emotion into a performance, the women are able to "connect with" the audience, which is "*part of [their] charm*". This, to me, brings to light a critically important part of how the military wife, and indeed the sovereign hero, is brought into recognition through the choir. The therapeutic and cathartic experience of performing in the choir is inherently tied to the construction of the hero subject, as the experience of military wifehood is always depicted in relation to their husband. The emotional release of singing songs that they can themselves connect with subsequently allows these women to connect with their audience, producing a "resonance

machine" (Closs Stephens 2016: 188; see also Connolly 2008) of affect in which the sovereign subject is always necessarily at the centre.

It is not just in spatially and temporally abstract acts of singing that this occurs, though. Rather, as I discovered, these processes were situated and contingent; private spaces of rehearsal and public spaces of performance produced different kinds of emotional encounters. This was first made apparent to me while attending weekly choir rehearsals. I had become aware that the first half of each practice tended to focus on learning new songs (although this depended to some extent on the time of year and upcoming performances), painstakingly going through songs line by line and learning each element (soprano, alto, bass). However, the end of choir rehearsals would usually involve going over older songs that everyone knows, giving (as Karen said) every member an opportunity to sing a song from start to finish and give them a kind of emotional release. A particularly poignant moment in my fieldwork came from attending a choir rehearsal in which there were several new members. While they spent some time at the beginning learning a new song, the end of the rehearsal became a very clearly emotional experience for many of the members;

> *"Rhys [the musical director] decided that the rehearsal would end on 'Stronger Together'. The members seemed much more upbeat about singing this, after the frustration of painstakingly going through a new song line by line. All the older members knew the song, and I couldn't help but be drawn into the emotion of it; the women of the choir stood up and began to hold hands, dancing from side to side and hugging each other.*
>
> *[Lyrics redacted for copyright reasons]*

I don't know whether it was the way the voices harmonised together, the overwhelming atmosphere and feeling of community in the contained space of the chapel, or the fact that I'd already had an insight into the life of a military wife through my relationship with Theresa and her family. But, in that moment, I had goosebumps. By the end of the song everyone was holding hands and several of the newer members had tears in their eyes. I later asked Theresa whether that sort of thing happened a lot; apparently it did."

(Extract from fieldnotes, Military Wives Choir rehearsal)

This moment appeared to me as a peak of emotion in an otherwise quite dull and technically demanding rehearsal. According to the members I spoke to, these moments were really central to the reasoning behind attending choir. In the space of rehearsal, it became clear how the sovereign subject of the military wife came to be embodied and performative, a subjectivity that is mobilised affectively, circulating through and congealing around particular kinds of emotional attachments to songs, becoming iterative. The rehearsal was a time and space in which the military wife subject was really made bodily.

Yet in this particular emotional encounter in my research, what also struck me was the ease with which I was co-opted into this affective resonance machine. The emotion of the songs and the women singing, the sacred space of the chapel, the feeling of unity, as well as the intimate attachments and lived experiences I had encountered during my time with the choir members, in this moment became entangled and interwoven, illustrating perfectly the complex processes through which the heroic subject is brought into recognition in performance. To use another example, the public spaces of performance mobilise different affective techniques to construct the subject, drawing in particular on nostalgia and a linear understanding of the time of the state.

In public events, the choir's set lists draw largely on the two 2012 albums, but individual choirs have some room to incorporate songs of their own choice as well, decided by the musical director in collaboration with their choir committee. In particular, certain events demand a specific kind of repertoire; for example, performances such as the annual Armed Forces Day Festival tend to incorporate a combination of album songs and historical war songs such as '*It's a Long Way to Tiperary*', while Remembrance Sunday or Festival of Remembrance performances usually draw on more sombre songs, as well as seasonal Christmas songs. Indeed, smaller scale local performances provide more of an opportunity for choirs to sing songs of their choosing, whereas the choir foundation specifies that for larger performances which may have media coverage, more of a focus on the traditional repertoire from the album is required. Another reason for this, according to one research participant, was that for large scale performances when multiple choirs from around the country often have to come together, it is important for them all to have learnt the same songs as there is often very little opportunity for them to rehearse together.

The Plymouth branch of the choir undertake a number of local as well as national performances events every year, not least of which is the annual Armed Forces Weekend performance on the Hoe (seafront) in Plymouth. During my period of fieldwork, I attended the 2016 celebration[50], where the choir performed on stage later in the afternoon. Many of the songs sung by the

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[50] The 2016 Armed Forces Weekend celebration coincidentally fell on the day after the EU referendum results came out. This is not insignificant; the presence of union jack flags and nationalist sympathies were particularly striking to me at this event, although it is perhaps true that in my state of distress and disillusionment at the result, I was more sensitive to such displays of nationhood.

choir in this performance had clear historical roots (e.g. *'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'*, *'Silver Tassie'*), and deliberately invoked a particular image of the military wife linked to patriotism and self-sacrifice. As I was told by choir members, the songs they sing depended on the event they were performing at; as such, the focus on songs linked with previous wars was a deliberate move, a means of appealing to and "connecting with" an audience primed for nostalgia and patriotism.

The deliberate mobilisation of a specific, historically rooted image of the military wife serves to blur boundaries between older, 'moral' wars in which the role of the armed forces was clearer and considered justified, and contemporary wars. The subject is therefore located clearly within the linear time of the state (Closs Stephens 2009), an understanding of nationhood and belonging which "violently installs itself as both origin and end of the culturally thinkable" (Butler 2008: 19). We can see this also in the choir's second album, *'Stronger Together'* (2012), which in contrast to their first album posits itself as a more upbeat selection of songs, "songs of courage, hope and friendship" (Stronger Together 2017), reflected in part by the use of over 700 Military Wives Choir members from across the country and beyond (Stronger Together 2017). A claim is made that these songs of togetherness represent "the very best of the British Spirit" (Stronger Together 2017), indicating the mobilisation of the figure of the military wife as a vision of 'British strength' and patriotism[51].

As mentioned in previous chapters, the state relies on the embedding of militarism into popular culture in order to justify increasingly morally ambiguous wars and the position of the armed forces. The choir appears then as an example of what Jenkings *et al.*, (2012) refer to as "the rehabilitation of

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[51] Songs from this album include *Stronger Together, Rule the World, One Voice* and *Get Here*.

the military in the aftermath of the Iraq war, and the legitimisation of the Afghanistan war" (p361). Jo Tidy (2015: 8) further writes that;

> *"Presenting these very different wars and an institution much changed compared to its incarnation 70 or 100 years ago in the same discursive package produces an equivalency which nullifies debate around the politics of current or recent wars or the role of the military as an institution. The British military and the wars in which it has been embroiled are positioned as a universal and non-contentious space of conscience which transcends politics, populated by "heroes", service, bravery, and national virtue… All wars – past, present, and future – are conflated within imaginations of a nostalgically omnipresent "good war": a hybrid of World Wars One and Two. Whilst this obscures more controversial narratives of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the characterization of World Wars One and Two – and Britain's role in them – within the nostalgic discursive trope of "vintage" reifies these past wars as "good" (Terkel 1984) and morally straightforward, removing less comfortable aspects from public discourse. In perpetuating the image of the World Wars as the good wars, this nostalgia-based memory narrative (entailed in the harnessing of wartime aesthetic within the "vintage" trope) presents World War One and Two as templates for war fought well."*

So, the dominant image of the military wife portrayed by the choir has clear historical roots, and the choir capitalise on this in order to appeal to their audience. Importantly though, this link to historical ideas about the military wife and the role she plays in relation to the armed forces is central to the way the military wife figure functions as a sovereign subject. Indeed, the military hero is himself brought into recognition through this figure. The example of the Armed Forces Weekend performance given by the choir demonstrates again how the functioning of this sovereign subject is situated and affective. Just as Hickey-Moody (2013) tells us of *Swan Lake* that;

"[t]he texture of the dance work in an assemblage of the venue, the costumes, lighting and music, as well as the bodies on stage and the movements of the dancers… we see that the contextual specificity of each performance is absolutely what allows it to make sense" (p90)

so too does the contextual specificity of each choir performance (and indeed rehearsal) allow the sovereign subject to function and "make sense".

The nostalgia associated with the choir can be attributed as a reason for wider support for the choir, particularly with older generations. Several of the women I spoke to said that most of the people who go to watch their performances were older men and, more so in fact, older women;

"Theresa: Yeah they like to see a few tears in a gig don't they, they get a bigger applause if someone cries, much bigger [laughs] standing ovations usually if a couple of people cry

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Theresa: I don't know, I think with the older generation

Emma: It's the world war two thing isn't it, they remember packing their men off and…

Theresa: And I think obviously with a lot of what we're singing that resonates quite strongly with them, and they respect what we do as military wives, so you know it's tough on the men but it's also tough on us, and actually it is quite nice to see that, and I think for the elder audience when we let ourselves be upset during a gig, you don't do it on purpose sometimes there's a line in a song and you just can't help it, but I think for them I think they feel quite, and this might sound quite cocky but I think they feel quite honoured that we feel comfortable letting down our barriers in front of them and I think just as a sign of respect and also empathy they feel the need to stand up when they clap.

Doesn't happen so much with the younger generations if there's young people in the audience, but if they've not been through it then they don't understand"

(Focus group extract, Theresa & Emma)

According to these women, one of the things about the choir that older audience members can relate to is that they see the military wives of the choir playing a similar kind of role to their own in previous war times. They remember "packing their men off", and in the performances of the choir can see such women articulating the emotion they experience as a result of playing the same part. The representation of the Military Wives Choir thus contributes to the notional blurring of boundaries between old "well fought" wars and contemporary wars (see Tidy 2015).

Such "nostalgic invocations of the long-past, morally virtuous "vintage" world wars" (Tidy 2015: 2) produce a subject who embodies the sacrifice made by the armed forces 'for their country', and creates strong ties in the public imagination between the contemporary military wife, and the military wives of previous wars who stayed home to wait for their husbands, often for years at a time. One of the choir members I spoke to in an interview said that;

"People don't even know what our military does anymore… I hope the choir helps with that, it's kind of a light hearted aspect shows that we are still here, they are still away, they're not just sat around spending tax money [laughs]"

(Interview extract, Anna)

In this way, the choir can be seen to 're-write' the role of the military in the national imagination. Their husbands are still away, and they as doting partners and wives are still at home waiting for them. Not only that, but the fact that the military and their families are constantly negotiating between presence and absence essentially justifies and legitimates their position; 'they're not just sat around spending tax money'. In this way, 'narratives of

heroism and sacrifice' become prominent and legitimise the very presence of the armed forces.

There is, of course, a violence to this. By producing a subject who is temporally located within "well fought" wars, the sovereign hero subject is remade and thus the violence of contemporary warfare is rendered invisible. This blurring out of military violence is exemplified not only in the nostalgic image that they perform, but indeed in the very lyrics of the songs that they sing. Take for example the lyrics to the Military Wives bestselling Christmas number 1 single '*Wherever You Are*';

> *[Redacted for copyright reasons]*

> (*Wherever You Are*, Military Wives Choir)

Lyrics such as 'light up the darkness, my prince of peace' and 'may your courage never cease' depict a very specific representation of the military 'hero', in which his role is totally morally unambiguous and necessary. The violence conducted by individual servicemen and women, and indeed by the wider military, is glossed over, re-shaped and rendered invisible. Indeed, by drawing on images of 'light' and 'darkness', the world becomes distilled down into light and dark, heroes and villains, with the role of the British military

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being clearly heroic and legitimate. Furthermore, the notion that 'Wherever you are my love will keep you safe' positions the military wife as the feminine carer of the masculine hero, and constructs a fairytale-like relationship between her and her husband – one which appeals to audiences and consumers. The violence displayed by the choir is not the violent warfare of the armed forces against other nations, but rather the violence against them of their husbands' absence "until [their] task is done". The Military Wives Choir therefore perform a particular kind of proximity to violence, in which the violence and horrors of warfare are brought into visibility, but only through the lens of the partners (read: wives) who grieve their husbands' absence. Thus, the impacts of armed conflict are rewritten through the voices of the patriotic wives who are left behind.

Violence and representation

As shown earlier in the chapter, *The Choir: Military Wives* puts on display the 'appropriate femininity' (Basham 2016: 889) of the military wife, necessary to their role in these narratives of heroism and sacrifice. This 'appropriate femininity' of the choir is also perfectly illustrated by their 2012 album '*In My Dreams'*, the cover for which features an image of a serviceman in uniform walking hand in hand across a green landscape with his female partner (read: wife) and two children (Figure 6.1).
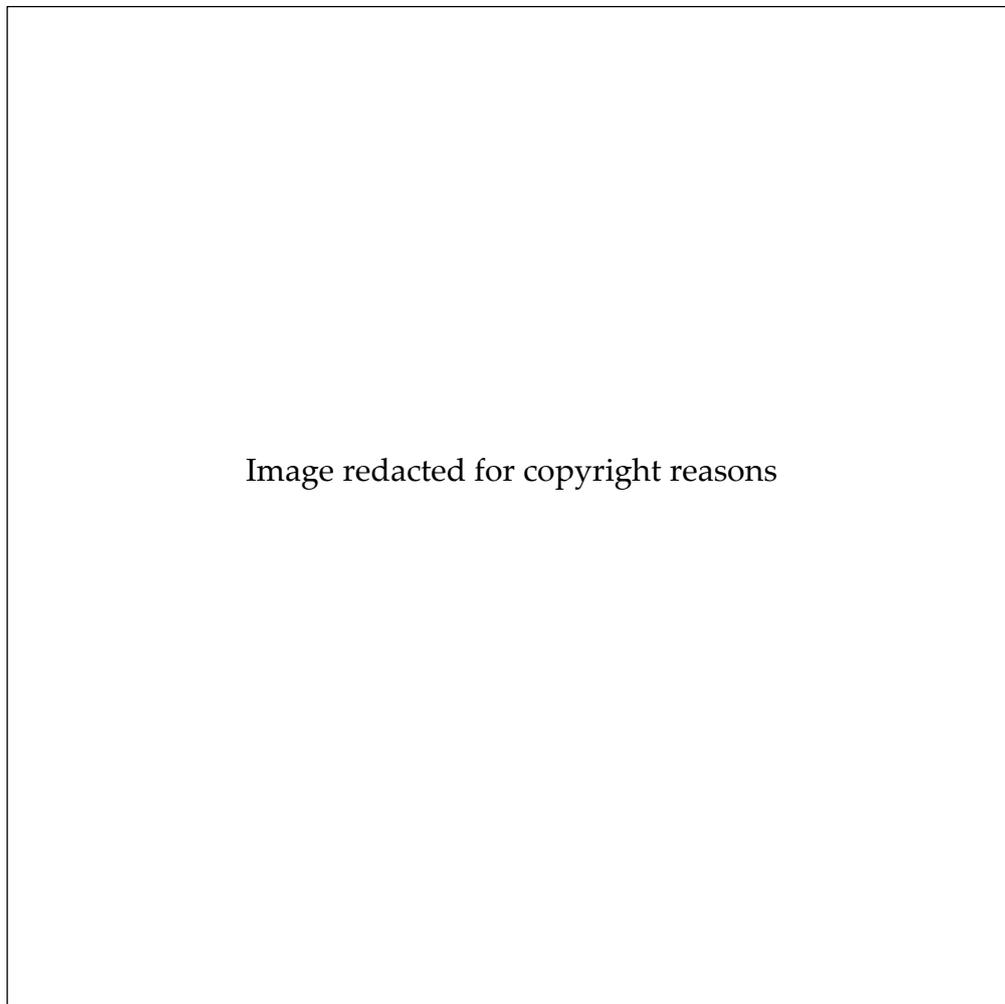
Image redacted for copyright reasons

Figure 6.1 In My Dreams (2012) album cover, Military Wives Choir

The woman wears a floor length feminine dress, with her hair pinned up in a demure and modest style, representing the "appropriate femininity" of the military wife depicted by the choir (Basham 2016: 889). The soldier and his

family walk towards a rising (or setting) sun, on the horizon of a typically British, nostalgic landscape. The scene depicts a carefully chosen image of 'England's green and pleasant land', with a mass of poppies around their feet in the foreground of the image, but at the same time invokes a sense of danger, of something being at stake, at risk of being lost. The image illustrates the importance of the figure of the military hero to the family unit, but also to a wider sense of nationhood. In this instance, the feminine wife reinforces the masculinity of her husband, his role as defender of the nation and her subsequent feminised representation of the women and children he protects. Indeed, the rural landscape of the image reflects a notion of the countryside as a space to become a particular type of man, with the "homeland" as an imagined rural vision (Woodward 1998; Lowe et al., 1995).

During my research this 'appropriate femininity' was also exemplified in the choir's performance at the annual Plymouth Armed Forces weekend;

> *"I wandered over to the stage where the choir were about to perform, sliding through throngs of young parents with their children, and older couples with sandwiches and plastic cups of beer. I settled just in front of the stage against the railing, next to a few excitable elderly ladies in shawls. The choir's musical director Rhys soon came to the stage to introduce the ladies, who trooped in in a uniform line, wearing matching outfits and wide - but perhaps hesitant - smiles. Their red t-shirts had single white flowers pinned to the chest, and were paired with white trousers and union jack neckerchiefs tied loosely around their necks"*

(Extract from fieldnotes, Armed Forces Weekend, Plymouth)

The women dress in matching outfits, patriotic colours of red and white with union jack neckerchiefs. They present a clear display of appropriate

femininity, which tugs at the heart strings of an audience primed for nationalist nostalgia.

Figure 6.2 Military Wives Choir performance, Plymouth Armed Forces Weekend 2016

This to me really exemplified the role of the choir in these wider relations between nation, state and the nostalgia of militarised popular culture. To use Tidy's (2015) definition, this refers to "the nostalgia for past cultural artefacts, aesthetics, and values, particularly those that evoke wartime and post-war domestic life, austerity, and government information campaigns" (p2). The invoking of such 'nostalgic' images and cultural symbols of bygone wartimes as union jack neckerchiefs and popular songs of World War One points again to the mobilisation of the military wife in this political imaginary.

As an earlier section of this chapter highlights, a significant role in the representation of the choir to the public can be attributed to the BBC and their coverage in *The Choir: Military Wives*. Of the women I spoke to as part of this

research, several had been involved in the original televised programme. In a conversation with one choir member who had participated in the series, I asked if she knew how the production team chose the specific members they followed;

> *"I think some of it is Gareth [Malone]'s decision but a lot of it is governed by the production team and what they think would make a good story."*

(Interview extract, Theresa)

This element of what "would make a good story" is really integral to the representation of the choir that we can see through the television programme. One choir member told me that particular situations in the programme were choreographed and staged in order to portray a particular kind of linear relation between the figure of the military wife and the state. One participant, who had been involved in *The Choir: Military Wives*, told me that;

> *"In the TV stuff I've done, the production team go out of their way to create situations where people will be upset or uncomfortable or sad and they want it on camera and its actually genuinely insensitive, a lot of us when we did the proms there was a lot of that going on and a lot of unhappy choir members because of that and it was awful, I mean they made us sing for a plane coming back from Afghanistan and they made these poor people come in and listen to us sing "The Snow" some really random Elgar choral piece and we're like… we don't want to be here, these people just want to go home, they want to be with their wives, and we all just felt so massively uncomfortable, but the production team who know nothing of what it could possibly be like coming back from Afghanistan or being someone waiting back home, we felt really uncomfortable like we shouldn't be there but they were just like THIS IS FANTASTIC LETS GET IT ALL ON CAMERA"* (Interview extract, Theresa)

The women were asked to take part in what was described as an uncomfortable situation, performing in front of returning servicemen (and women) who they did not know, in order to make a "good story". This "good story" is one which positions the military wife firmly within the narratives of heroism and sacrifice surrounding the military, and implicates them as 'wavers of the flag', uncritical beacons of patriotism who support our boys "wherever they are" and whatever they do (Barnett 2012; cited in Basham 2016: 889). The truth of the matter, which was that these women felt deeply uncomfortable being there, was obscured from view in pursuit of this vision. Theresa suggests that the production team for the series structured these scenes in order to invoke emotional responses from both the choir members and the audience. Thus, it became clear that these women were all too aware of the representation that the BBC were seeking to create of the choir. Theresa told me that in her experience, there was always a cameraman "sitting on the side lines waiting for someone to cry". This staging of emotional responses is a means through which sympathy and support for the military wives (and subsequently for the military) is generated and reinforced, creating a situation in which "objecting to such heartfelt expressions of support for soldiers would be hard-hearted, cynical or snobbish; even if an effect of remaining silent is to back "our boys", "wherever they are" and whatever they do (Barnett 2012)" (Basham 2016: 889).

Several of the choir members I spoke to indicated that many people (civilians) have a particular perception of the women of the choir (and, as a result, of military wives in general);

> *"Interviewer: Do you think there is a really particular representation of the military wives choir then?*

Theresa: I think it's the public's perception, I don't think we are perceived by people who know what it's like, I think we are perceived that way by the majority of civilian people who have no idea what it's like

Emma: Who just think we sit at home crying everyday

Theresa: Because of the media coverage of Wherever You Are and cos of the style of the song and the lyrics, and because of all the stuff we do at gigs, how sad it is how sad the lyrics are, and you know there's a lot of 'Oh look at those poor sad women' [laughs]"

(Focus group extract, Theresa & Emma)

This idea of "oh look at those poor sad women" really touches on something important. It is not just the flat representation of the military wife that matters politically, but also the way in which the audience are implicated in this construction. We are invited to feel sorry for those "poor sad women", yet always afforded the opportunity to engage in support for them. In supporting the women of the choir, one participant told me that "*they can feel good about themselves and feel like they are doing their bit*" (Interview extract, Emma). Thus, it is possible to argue that supporting the choir acts as a means through which audiences can alleviate their own guilt. As Theresa said in one interview though, "*people want to see tears*"; there is an element of enjoyment to spectating upon and consuming the emotional military wife subject. Theresa and Emma spoke in one conversation we had about the types of song that they sing, and the expectation audience members have when they go to see a choir performance;

"Theresa: The thing is that we do sing a lot of dreary depressing stuff

Emma: It is incredibly depressing, it is really grim

> *Theresa: And I think a lot of the choir members have said many a time to the committee that actually although when we perform and stuff there's a certain amount of expectation*
>
> *Emma: People want to see us miserable, they want to see us standing up saying "I miss my husband" they don't want us to be happy clappy"*

(Focus group extract, Theresa & Emma)

As Emma said, "people want to see [them] miserable… saying 'I miss my husband'". Such performances of misery allow the audience to gaze upon a vision of a recognisable sovereign future, a "promise of happiness" (Ahmed 2010). That is, this image of the tearful military wife displays to us a particular imagination about the certain existence of a military hero, thus implicating the legitimacy of warfare and the benevolence of the neoliberal state.

Part 2 – Resistant subjects: Willful Wives

> *"The two of us were – by our own admission – proficient and shameless liars of long-standing. It's a wonder either of us believed a word the other said.*
>
> *But we did. Or so we told each other."*
>
> *- The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood

The first section of this chapter has explored the complex, situated and often affective means through which the Military Wives Choir harnesses and mobilises a particular sovereign vision of the military wife. Yet, the subject who I have encountered in my research overflows and exceeds these parameters. The next section of this chapter will attempt to unravel some of the claims to singularity and linearity of the sovereign trajectory in which representations of the choir are embedded. In particular, it will shed light on the extent to which we can view the military wife as a "willful subject" (Ahmed 2014). Ahmed asks "Does happiness lead us 'willingly' in a certain

direction?" (2014: 4), and argues that "to break free from duty [in the service of happiness] is narrated as wilfulness" (*ibid*: 116), to have become a "problem". The willful subject acts as the 'killjoy', troubling the conditions through which she is asked to sit at the table of happiness, and as such throws the very promise of happiness itself into question (Ahmed 2010). The following section of this chapter considers whether by questioning these conditions, the military wife might be considered such a 'willful' subject (Ahmed 2014).

The extract taken from an interview with Theresa, which describes the discomfort experienced by choir members during the making of *The Choir: Military Wives*, begins to touch upon this wilfulness. What we can see in this extract is a subjectivity which does not comfortably align with the sovereign subject of the military wife depicted through the choir. The humour and disdain with which she says *"we felt really uncomfortable like we shouldn't be there but they were just like THIS IS FANTASTIC LETS GET IT ALL ON CAMERA"* is not accounted for in the sovereign subject. I encountered the wilful military wife subject many times throughout my research. In fact, my research indicated to me that to identify the women of the choir as wholly governable subjects who are mobilised by the state in particular ways would be to do them a great disservice.

From the outset of my research with the choir, I became aware that these women were highly critical of their role in reproducing certain 'stereotypes' about military wives, and even of the way their voices were mobilised in the writing and re-writing of "narratives of heroism and sacrifice" (Edkins 2011: 132) around the armed forces themselves. Prior to embarking on fieldwork, I had experienced some mild anxiety about how I was going to frame my research to my participants, wanting to be honest and open about the aims of my project but also aware that I would need to be tactful and sensitive when

approaching the idea of 'heroism'. Yet, what I found was that these women were very much aware of the image they were presenting of the armed forces, and indeed of themselves. In fact, many of them problematized this in their conversations with me; this was nowhere better exemplified than in my very first conversation with interview participant Violet. I had gone along to a fundraising performance on the Barbican (seafront) in Plymouth that the choir had organised to help raise money for their New York trip to perform at Carnegie Hall. My hope was to use this opportunity to see the choir in action, and to recruit some participants at the same time. My contact Theresa introduced me to a group of women sat at a table close to the bar, and explained that I was looking for choir members to take part in my PhD research. I got talking to an Australian lady, whose husband was based out of Plymouth for two years. I explained to her what my research was about quite openly, while she nodded with understanding. Smiling enthusiastically she said *"well, the choir is a great example of what you're interested in, we really create this idea of forces men as heroes"*.

This surprised me – although, perhaps, it should not have done. In my naivety, I had assumed that the ladies of the Military Wives Choir would be to a certain extent unaware of the politics at work in the representation they produced, through the songs they sing and the coverage of the choir in the media. The conclusion that I came to regarding this by the end of my fieldwork was that actually these women knew exactly what it was they were participating it, were certainly critical of it and tried to fight against it, but continued to act within these parameters out of necessity. As choir members, they unfortunately did not have a lot of choice about the types of songs they were singing for example. Theresa told me that many of the women in the Plymouth choir had expressed a desire to sing happier songs in rehearsals and at performances. In a conversation with Theresa and Emma, they spoke at length

about their dissatisfaction with the types of songs they sing in the choir, songs that reinforce a very gendered and particular representation of the military wife;

> *"Theresa: …We have said that you know a lot of people have put their feet down although there is that expectation we would also like to sing stuff that we enjoy singing that's happy and upbeat*
>
> *Emma: And also when you go you want to be uplifted, you don't want to be stood there like "I miss my husband I want this I want…"*
>
> (Extract from focus group, Theresa & Emma)

Here, Theresa and Emma express a desire to sing more uplifting songs, to engage in speech acts which do not simply act in service of the sovereign, but rather which allow them to imagine alternate futures for themselves, futures in which their own happiness is placed at the centre. This was in fact a sentiment expressed by all of my research participants. Such a desire was apparently "taken into consideration" by the choir committee when deciding which songs they learn at rehearsals, but ultimately the foundation decides which songs choirs sing at public performances (and, as mentioned previously, these are usually songs from the album).

Nevertheless though, the desire to sing different kinds of songs expressed by the choir members to me appeared as an act of defiance, an attempt to challenge the conditions in which they are required to "sit at the table of happiness" (Ahmed 2014). These moments of defiance did not only appear in the expression that members would like to sing more upbeat songs, but even in the more banal act of 'making fun' of the songs that they are given to sing. In the case of Theresa and Emma, their frustration with the kinds of speech acts they are required to engage in also manifested in laughing together at the lyrics of one song written specifically for the choir;

> *"Theresa: [Reading song lyrics] [Redacted for copyright reasons]… see when we are given stuff like that to sing, it's just like Oh God…*
>
> *Emma: Like* On My Own *[sings] "I'll slit my wrists" [laughs]"*

Emma went on to say;

> *"they made one of the poor girls sing this on deployment day, like, you do realise her husband has left TODAY that's the most depressing song you could possibly imagine."* (Interview extract, Emma)

Emma and Theresa laughed almost hysterically at this, finding humour in the violence of this and mocking the conditions through which they are made to appear. In such moments of humour, an alternate future is imagined; as Emerson (2016) argues, to laugh is to know the world differently.

But what is the significance of these kinds of banal expressions of wilfulness? According to Ahmed, "happiness shapes what coheres as a world" (Ahmed 2010: 2), it structures our way of being, resuming the form of deferred possibility and promise. The promise of happiness holds a position of authority, governing our actions, our vision of a 'good life', and the boundaries within which we must hold our tongue and remain silent. Berlant further claims that "Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it" (2011: 48). As argued earlier in the thesis, the sovereign hero subject can be considered in these terms as a "promise", whose framing relies on a notional deferred possibility of an optimistic future. In the moments when the subject speaks or acts beyond the designated boundaries, and as such refuses to sit at the table of happiness, the very promise of this happiness is called into question.

Voice

The previous half of this chapter focuses critical engagement, in part, on the role played by the song repertoire of the choir in constructing the sovereign imagination. But, this analysis needs to be taken further, to consider the notion of 'voice'. What voice is it that is projected through the choir? To fully appreciate the significance of the kinds of voices the choir projects, one has to look beyond simply the songs that they sing, towards the very criteria for choir membership in the first place;

> *"Membership shall be open to any female who has an interest in assisting the choir achieve its aims, will honour the choir's code of conduct and meets at least one of the following criteria:*
>
> *1.   Wife, fiancée or co-habiting partner of serving British armed forces personnel*
>
> *2.   Serving or retired British military personnel*
>
> *3.   Immediate family of serving British armed forces personnel i.e. mother, sister or daughter*
>
> *4.   Wife, fiancée or co-habiting partner of veteran British armed forces personnel*
>
> *5.   Wife, fiancée or co-habiting partner of serving non-British armed forces personnel on UK postings*
>
> *6.   Civilian employees employed within the military community who provide a direct service to aid the welfare of serving military personnel and their families."*

(Military Wives Choir Foundation 2016b)

There are a few things to note here. Clearly, you first have to be a woman to join the choir. It goes without saying that the Military Wives Choir provides a highly gendered and heteronormative platform through which to articulate militarised logics. Importantly, though, the strict membership criteria demands a particular kind of relationship between its members and their military partners – if you are joining as a partner rather than being military or ex-military yourself, you must at the very least be living with them in order to join. In other words, casual sexual partners cannot become members of the choir. For me this is really telling about the kinds of voices they are choosing to project through the choir and whose voices are silenced. The choir very much draws on a vision of the military wife as the devoted, patriotic spouse who waits patiently for her husband to return from deployment and who therefore makes her own kind of sacrifice for the good of her country. In this imagination, there is no room for the ambiguous females of military life whose role cannot be pinned down; as Cynthia Enloe points out, such women pose a "political problem" (1983). We can see a parallel here with the character Tash in *Boots at the Door*, whose ambiguous relation with the military (characterised only by her many casual military partners), who provided a comic voice in the play but whose character in the storyline was deemed unsuitable for participation as a member of the military community. The peculiar level of involvement and scrutiny over the sexual relations of military partners in the choir also points to the heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity of the military as an institution (Hopton 2003; Higate 2003; Basham 2013), as well as the intimate relationship between the state and disciplined militarised bodies. Importantly, though, as the previous section of this chapter has illustrated, the voice which the choir attempts to mobilise is one which fosters a vision of the military wife as a governable subject, a subject who acts within and performs a very particular image of military life and militarised identities. It is an attempt to inscribe the military wife onto a set sovereign trajectory of a

knowable future, a set end point in which we know who the military wife is and we therefore know who her hero husband is.

However, while the choir attempts to mobilise a governable and sovereign voice in which Enloe's "political problem" (1983) is addressed, there are aspects of this "voice" that are not accounted for. Firstly, something that is not considered in this imagination is the excitability of speech (Butler 1997). For example, when talking about the kinds of songs she likes to sing at choir, Anna said that;

> *"I prefer singing about how I'm going to be strong for you or I'm going to be strong in spite of you [laughs] or I quite like the ones where it's about us not them"* (Interview extract, Anna).

Not only did she claim to enjoy the act of deliberately singing beyond the parameters of what is expected of the choir (i.e. that they are always singing about missing their husbands), but Anna also spoke of a natural lack of participation in this sovereign imagination;

> *"It's strange, all of the soppy love songs that we do sing don't remind me of Mark. They more remind me of my family back home, like last year my mum found out she had breast cancer, so I was always singing for her it was nothing to do with him so it's like sorry love [laughs]"* (Interview extract, Anna).

Here, we can see how the excitability of speech can come into play; it is not enough to say that a single speech act can always be made and interpreted in only one specific way, but rather we can never know how it is reinforcing, resisting, or disrupting the sovereign intention. As Butler herself says, there can be no sovereign speech act; "that performative utterances can go wrong, be mis-applied or misinvoked, is essential to their proper functioning" (Butler 1997: 151). In Anna's case, the supposedly sovereign speech act of the choir singing about their husbands is troubled by the ability of the military wife to

act outside of these parameters, to disrupt these on different registers. Anna laughed at the fact that she wasn't always singing about her husband, clearly indicating an awareness of the expectation that exists that the choir sing only about their military partners, and making it "strange" (Emerson 2016). When I asked Anna what she would usually think about when singing at the choir, she said that;

> *"Sometimes you sing so you can get something out, other times you think about the more technical side of things like when you've got to breathe or what the next high note is that you've got to hit, so it sort of like helps to blank it out"* (Interview extract, Anna)

For Anna, then, the physical act of singing provided not necessarily an emotional release, but rather a means of "blank[ing] it out". My overall conversation with Anna indicated that she was keen to critique the assumptions made about who military wives are, who they sing about, and how they feel. This was in fact true of many of the choir members. For Anna, even the emotion she was able to put into a performance depends on a number of different things, such as the personal circumstances of each individual member and the event they are performing at;

> *"The thing is the songs that we sing in the choir sometimes have more resonance with you at one time than another, so that is always interesting that you can sing a song at a concert and be fine and you can sing a song at a different concert and you'll be in floods of tears cos your husband has just gone away… I find it's to do with the situation and the emotion that the songs bring out"* (Interview extract, Anna)

One can surmise that even the cathartic experience of singing a particular kind of song in choir performances cannot necessarily be harnessed by the state;

there can be no sovereign speech act (Butler 1997), and we cannot know where speech acts will land, how they might reinforce, or how they might resist.

Not only were the choir members I spoke to surprisingly critical of their role in the prominent narratives of heroism and sacrifice surrounding the military, but I would actually argue that many members have mobilised the voice given to them by the choir in order to provide a wider critique of the linear sovereign trajectory laid out for them in their day to day lives. As Karen told me, in a choir rehearsal;

> *"…you can belt it out and that could be the only time that week that your voice is getting heard in a way, especially if your husband is away and you've got two children you don't talk to many people, at choir you're singing it all out, at least you've had two hours of singing your voice is being projected as such"*
> (Interview extract, Karen)

So, the choir is a means through which these women can project their 'voice', not only physically but metaphorically; it becomes a means of expression, of allowing themselves freedom and selfhood away from their home lives and their children. This voice, Karen went on to argue, became a means of empowerment;

> *"It has been very empowering, a lot of the girls have started to do things like they've started courses, so like for me I've wanted to train to be a counsellor for a while and going to the choir and doing the gigs and having the support and stuff I've finished my course, other girls have started up businesses, other girls have changed jobs or gone for jobs that they've always wanted to go for, and I think it's been really empowering for everybody to have this voice, that's a big thing that the choir has given us its given us this voice together but also individually, so like OK I want to go and change my job so I'm going to change my job"* (Interview extract, Karen).

Thus, for Karen, the choir became a core component behind many women suddenly being empowered to find new jobs, go back into education, or start their own businesses. She attributes this to the 'voice' given not just to the women as a collective, but also to them as individuals with their own agency. As Karen said, for many members of the choir their participation led to them finding new jobs, starting their own businesses or going back to college;

> *"It is a bit of a paradox. That is what I've noticed in my choir, there's one girl who has started a photography business, another girl who has started up a business, two or three have changed jobs and gone for jobs they wanted to do rather than being stuck in jobs they had"* (Interview extract, Karen)

The paradox that she spoke of was that the choir represents a particular image of military wifehood, and yet through participation in the choir, women have ended up often changing their lives in a way which directly contradicts this vision. The choir provided many women with an opportunity to alter the gendered family roles in their own lives, as it allowed them to go out and do things for themselves while their husbands had to stay at home with the children;

> *"Before my husband would be going away and the armed forces do this thing called adventure training which is where you have to go for two weeks and do something like skiing or scubadiving all under the guise of 'teambuilding', I call it a holiday but he's like no no its team building, so he would go away doing scuba diving for two weeks, skiing for two weeks and I would do nothing, but now it's like I'm going to go and sing at Twickenham or I'm going to sing at the Albert Hall, I've been very lucky he's been very supportive, not every husband is supportive… some husbands, you can kind of tell aren't so supportive of the fact that we're now going out and doing stuff and hang on you've got to stay at home and look after the children, which beforehand there would be no need to because I wouldn't go anywhere. So it's kind of enabled*

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me to be like OK I'm going out and doing stuff now, you can stay home and look after the children" (Interview extract, Karen).

Karen here not only highlights the challenge to the highly gendered structure of military life posed by becoming a member of the choir, but also describes the opportunities for wilfulness that go along with this; "*it's kind of enabled me to be like OK I'm going out and doing stuff now, you can stay home and look after the children*". The change in gender roles described by Karen was, as she said, not always welcomed by their husbands;

> *"It is very empowering… but some husbands haven't wanted their wives to go out and do stuff and in the end with some of them they, some girls have left and I'm absolutely convinced it's because their husbands wouldn't look after the children and be supportive… In one case I think it's because the husband is very sort of 'look at me look at me', and because the spotlight was on his wife he didn't like that, so she left in the end"* (Interview extract, Karen).

This again is the voice of a willful subject, a subject unwilling to '*be seated at the table of happiness'* (Ahmed 2010; 2014); while Karen describes women who have left the choir because their husbands were unsupportive, by shedding light on this Karen is herself engaging in critique. Of course, the possibility that several women had left the choir because of the challenges it has posed to their relationships with their husbands shows the struggle at work here, and illustrates that wilfulness and "empowerment", to use Karen's terms, do not necessarily go along easily with becoming a choir member, but rather are fought for.

Fractured time and knowing the world differently

Attending choir rehearsals, and being a member of the Military Wives Choir in general, appears an act of 'care of the self'. The women attend in order to get out of the house, get away from the children, have an emotional release

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through singing, but also fundamentally to allow them an opportunity to get their frustrations at military life out of their system so that they can return to their families as the stoic military wife figure. The role of the military wife in upholding military values is clear; without the wife to stay at home to look after the children, maintain the home, provide emotional support and unpaid labour, the members of the armed forces would not be able to do their jobs. Therefore, the sovereign imperative of engagement in self-care becomes apparent (and, as Foucault points out, there is always an element of ethical and civic obligation to such practices in political society). One choir member said to me in an interview that;

> *"I've heard someone say they mention it [the choir] to them at Raleigh [the naval training institution in Saltash, Cornwall] now… [laughs] if anyone is sat moaning, like their girlfriends are worried about how much they're gonna be away it's like yeah send them to this its fine [laughs]"* (Interview extract, Anna)

It is not just that the women of the choir feel an ethical or even sovereign obligation to engage in such practices of self-care; rather, husbands become actively mobilised in encouraging their wives to attend, particularly if these women are "moaning" about such things as their partners being away for long periods of time. Indeed, the state are actively involved themselves in encouraging engagement in this type of 'appropriate' self-care. Attending choir is deemed as 'appropriate' because of the kinds of voices it chooses to project, the voices it silences, and the ideas about military wifehood (and indeed militarism in general) that the choir articulates, which do not disrupt the aims or ideologies of the military. As such, we must acknowledge that these kinds of acts of self-care are not banal and apolitical, but rather are entangled in governmental practices and techniques. This is the argument put forward by Foucault (2010), when he claims that the care of oneself is a means

of *governing* the self and others through conduct. By participating in particular kinds of speech acts through the choir, speech acts which can supposedly be harnessed by and for the state, members are enrolled as subject to governmental techniques of self-care.

Yet, as Foucault points out, there can be no 'care' of the self without 'curiosity'; there is an etymological link between these notions (Latimer 2000; De la Bellacasa 2012; see Foucault 2010). Guilmette (2014: 290) further contends that "This curiosity entails "care" for "what exists and what might exist . . . a readiness to find what surrounds us strange." The care of oneself is therefore always necessarily a cultivation of other sorts of selves, and so offers the opportunity to always be 'other'. For example, as we have seen, many of the women from the Plymouth branch of the choir have experienced a kind of "empowerment", perhaps as Karen notes as a result of being given a "voice". By engaging in such acts of self-care, the women of the choir are able to look upon a speculative horizon of who they might become; one can never consider that one has 'arrived', one is always en route, and never a complete subject. Indeed, it is impossible for the subject to be wholly governed through such means, as such subjects are governing themselves. These modes of governance are speculative, never fully knowing their trajectory or outcome. Thus, while the choir attempts to render the military wife a singular, knowable and governable sovereign subject, their participation necessarily entails a curiosity and capacity to act beyond the set trajectory; one cannot know where it will lead, or in which unexpected places they will land.

This possibility for landing in unexpected places and acting beyond the sovereign trajectory poses a challenge to the time of the state which the choir seeks to locate itself within. Such an understanding of nationhood and belonging "violently installs itself as both origin and end of the culturally thinkable" (Butler 2008: 19), and does not allow for the possibility of alternate

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futures. In this cultivation of other sorts of selves, the stability and sovereignty of the military wife figure is thrown into confusion.

Care, therapy, subjectivity

The therapeutic and self-care element to attending choir is, as touched upon earlier in the chapter, reliant upon the construction of a community and close relations between choir members; the choir is first and foremost a support group. Every single one of the participants in this research told me from the outset that one of the main reasons they joined the choir was to make friends, particularly with people "in the same boat" as them;

> *"It was a way of meeting other ladies as well who had similar interests and who would understand the life I lead"* (Interview extract, Karen)

Indeed, several participants spoke of the need that they felt to attend choir regularly in order to stay part of this community;

> *"…the choir keep me [in the military community]… I am a little bit removed and I think I miss it, that's an important part of being in the choir, the community is more like an extended family and now I get my little fix of that each week"* (Interview extract, Kate)

For Kate, involvement in the choir wasn't simply about staying in a community of military wives (perhaps partly because she was herself ex-army), but rather with the military community as a whole, which she sees as "an extended family"[52].

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[52] Much literature exists on understandings of the military in terms of 'family' and cohesion (see for example King 2013; 2006; Segal1986). Segal (1986) for example suggests that the military family is the intersection of two "greedy institutions", who both demand commitment, loyalty, time and energy.

On the one hand, the community and unity of the women in the choir can be seen to work in the service of the sovereign. For example, in episode two of *The Choir: Military Wives* Gareth Malone tells the audience that the unity of the choir "sends a better message of support to the troops than anything else". Malone refers here to the unity of the choir in their friendships as well as the coming together of their voices as one. Thus, even the very nature of choral music, as bringing together different kinds of voices such as soprano, alto, tenor, and bass to form one coherent voice, works to reflect the aims of the sovereign state. Indeed, as Malone's statement clearly illustrates, "the troops" themselves are at the centre of this concern. Furthermore, as discussed earlier in the chapter, this voice is harnessed as a means of constructing the wife's subjectivity in relation to her husband.

Yet, my encounters with the choir brought to light a more complex kind of subjectivity at work. The earlier fieldnotes extract from a choir rehearsal, in which members held hands and swayed from side to side while singing *Stronger Together*, demonstrate this quite well. The lyrics of this song are ambiguous; "*Together we are stronger we can overcome, we can walk this world together we can stand as one, and now nothing can divide us we are stronger together, together we belong, together we are strong*". Are they referring to their relationship with their husbands? Or, are they referring to their relationships with each other? In the intimate space of the choir rehearsal, the excitability of speech (Butler 1997) manifested as the women articulated their strength in one another through the song; their husbands were not the focus here. In fact, this was something I noted throughout my time with the choir. While these women might have been singing songs that were supposed to be about their husbands, not only were they often singing about or imagining something or someone else, but in coming together as a community to engage in this act of therapeutic and cathartic self-care, they were placing themselves and each

other as the central concern. The Military Wives Choir works in this way to challenge the sovereign subject; for the sovereign subject to work, she must be formed in relation to her husband, yet what we see in reality are subjects who are formed partly in relation to one another.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on the example of the Military Wives Choir to consider the complex mechanisms through which a singular and knowable military wife subject is harnessed and mobilised. It has shown that the figure of the military wife created through the choir is one deeply embedded in the gendered logics of militarism, in which "*actual men and women are expected to 'take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls' respectively*" (Elshtain 1995: 4, cited in Basham 2016: 88). The creation of this subject is temporally and spatially situated; in the public space of performance, the choir embody "appropriate femininity" (Basham 2016), drawing on the "*nostalgia-based memory narrative… which presents World War One and Two as templates for war fought well"* (Tidy 2015: 8) in order to ground the military wife firmly within the time of the state. In the private space of the rehearsal, the subject was made tangible through different kinds of emotional encounters. The sovereign subject of the military wife came to be embodied and performative, a subjectivity mobilised affectively, one which circulates through and congeals around particular kinds of emotional attachments to songs, becoming iterative. On the surface, the Military Wives Choir participate in the "smooth working of representation" (Kear 2013: 26) that characterises the making of the sovereign subject.

Yet, delve a little deeper and we can see the profound violence of the representation at work. This is nowhere better exemplified than in the episode of *The Choir: Military Wives* in which the women of the choir are brought out to sing to returning troops. On the surface, you have a group of women

engaging in what Gareth Malone refers to as a "ceremony", enacting an almost sacred performance of the deferred promise of happiness which the sovereign hero and his wife offer. Peel back the layers of "representability" (Butler 2009), though, and you see women who feel deeply uncomfortable about the project which they are forced to undertake; *they made these poor people come in and listen to us sing "The Snow", some really random Elgar choral piece and we're like… we don't want to be here… but they were just like THIS IS FANTASTIC LETS GET IT ALL ON CAMERA* (Interview extract, Theresa).

Indeed, beyond the violence of representation, this chapter has shown that there exist other subtle fractures in the smooth working of representation. For example, the creation of a cohesive subjectivity can be seen as a means through which the subject is rendered more troublesome. Consider this in relation to the vast literature on military cohesion (King 2013; King 2006; Siebold 2007), and we can see that in the context of the military, servicemen and women are trained to cohere, to align themselves with a masculine identity which despite claiming to be essential and natural is in fact *produced*. This is widely accepted to be a process through which military bodies are rendered governable (see for example Basham 2013). Yet, while the formation of this kind of subjectivity through the Military Wives Choir closely mimics this aspect of the culture of the armed forces itself, for the sovereign subject of the wife to work, she must be formed in relation to her husband. The primary concern when choir members are singing, contrary to the sovereign narrative, is not necessarily with their husbands, but rather with engaging in a "care of the self", a care which relies on the unity and community offered by the choir. Thus, what we see in reality are subjects who are formed partly in relation to one another, and a subjectivity which at once adheres to recognisable military culture *and at the same time* disrupts the sovereign narrative.

Indeed as I have argued, this care of the self actually allows for opportunities to see the world anew, to imagine alternate futures for themselves beyond the sovereign trajectory. As Karen points out, "*it has been very empowering*". But, there is of course a violence, or *cruel optimism*, at play here. As Cooke & Speirs (2005) note, a significant characteristic of life in the military (and therefore, for their family) is the expectation and demand put upon them of mobility (see also Hyde 2015; Enloe 1983; Enloe 2000). Military families are essentially subject to the whims of the MoD, and must relocate as often as they are required to do so. Many, if not all, of the Plymouth choir members had joined in order to meet similar people, make friends, and have a kind of emotional release in the form of singing. Yet, the cruelty of it is that this participation is likely to always only be fleeting. Karen for example had been a member of a previous choir before moving to Plymouth with her husband and children. Indeed, another participant Violet had been living in Plymouth for two years since her husband was transferred from Australia, but at the time of our interview was about to return to live in a part of Australia where she had no family or friends. Through their participation in the choir, members have their expectations raised, making friends and engaging in a form of self-care which could at any moment be snatched from under their feet. Such women might, through the choir, be able to imagine alternate futures for themselves, yet for military wives these futures are always inevitably precarious.

At the heart of this chapter lies the question of the extent to which the military wife subject encountered in this research "refuses to sit at the table of happiness" (Ahmed 2014). The subject who I have encountered in my fieldwork is one who cannot be successfully harnessed or wholly governed. She is wilful, never able to form a complete or knowable subject, always at once reinforcing and disrupting the frames through which we come to recognise her. However, while she may be wilful and throw into confusion the

promise of happiness, this is not through an absolute refusal to participate in this performance. As we have seen, the members of the Plymouth military wives choir demonstrate disdain for the representation they participate in through their humour and banal acts of defiance, *yet they still willingly take part*. At work here is not a refusal to sit at the table of happiness, but rather a troubling of the conditions through which we understand the promise itself. A central concern for many of the choir members I spoke to was with challenging the representation of military wives by singing different songs;

> *"Interviewer: Do you reckon singing different songs would make a difference to the representation of military wives?*
>
> *Theresa: I think it could, people underestimate the power of music I think music is incredibly powerful"* (Focus group extract, Theresa & Emma)

These women are not seeking to challenge the claim towards military heroism. Rather, they point to the possibility that the military wife need not have her own agency and capacity to act compromised within this promise of happiness. Perhaps, as we have seen, the promise of happiness can incorporate, and act in spite of, the wilfulness of the military wife, and her potential to 'land in unexpected places' (Foucault 1997).

7. Conclusion

The research developed in this thesis has used several diverse 'sites of remaking' to interrogate the sovereign subject of the contemporary military hero. It has considered the hero as a 'problem' subject who occupies a curious political space, in which he must necessarily be remade in service of the sovereign state and the deferred promise of happiness (see Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011). Using the examples of *Boots at the Door*, The Invictus Games, Help for Heroes, and the Military Wives Choir, I have argued that the remaking and reclaiming of the hero takes place through complex, spatially and temporally situated negotiations which mobilise not only the hero subject himself, but also his performative others. Indeed, drawing upon Butler's *Frames of War* (2009), I have argued that the hero is an example of how the frame functions, as "active, as jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence" (Butler 2007: 953). Just as the frame is always in flux, always constituting and reconstituting the "terms through which subjects are recognised" (Butler 2009: 3-4), so too is the hero. Although the sites of remaking considered in this thesis represent just small nodes in a much wider structure through which the contemporary hero is brought into recognition, they are nevertheless telling of the ways in which he functions, and indeed of what is at stake in remaking and reclaiming him.

As an empirical starting point, *Boots at the Door* brings to light this co-presence of the sovereign and resistant subject in the remaking of the hero, showing how his subjectivity is always fleeting between recognisability and ambiguity. Importantly, Chapter 4 begins to unpack the relation between the remaking of the hero and the sovereign project of 'recovery', arguing that recovery is not

simply about the return of the subject to normal life, but also the reclaiming of a singular, coherent and knowable figure by the sovereign. This argument is developed further in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which uses the sites of The Invictus Games and Help for Heroes to consider the challenge of the wounded military body to this project of 'recovery' or 'remaking. It contends that the remaking of the hero upon which the promise of happiness relies necessitates a two-fold forgetting, in which the relationship between military masculinity and the state is restored, and the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' upon which the hero relies is reinstated. To go further, these 'sites of remaking' shed light on what exactly is at stake in the figure of the hero, showing how the complex processes of remaking and reclaiming work to blur out the violence of the sovereign state. Crucially, my encounter with the site of the Help for Heroes Recovery Centre begins to touch upon the fractures and moments of dissonance in this remaking. In order to consider the potential to resist the sovereign narrative further, the final empirical chapter of this thesis has used primary research with the Military Wives Choir to interrogate how it is that the hero's performative 'other' engages with the processes in which she is enrolled. Chapter 6 has shown how the figure of the military wife is crucial to the remaking of the contemporary hero but, importantly, has also shown how such a sovereign subject has the capacity to resist the sovereign narrative and imagine alternate futures.

This study has been animated by four research questions, which I will now address individually in order to restate the key arguments of the thesis and draw the different strands together.

1) *How is the military hero brought into recognition and continually remade?*

A primary contention of this thesis is that there is an imperative to the remaking and reclaiming of the military hero by and for the sovereign state, an imperative which will be discussed in more depth in section 3 of this chapter. The remaking and reclaiming of the hero has been shown to play out in complex and nuanced ways in the examples used and indeed, the spaces in which this takes place are diverse. As such, the critical space to imagine heroism and patriotism differently are entirely undercut by the banality and 'everywhereness' of the hero[53]. Even in the examples of the Help for Heroes Big Battlefield Bike Ride and the Invictus Games, processes that occur in spatially and temporally situated encounters spiral out from the arena (for example) and into the high street. We are invited to "support our wounded", encouraged to wear wrist bands, buy t-shirts, eat "Eggs for Soldiers" (Tidy 2015), implored to participate in a banal level of alignment with the hero (and, by extension, the armed forces and the sovereign state writ large) which it is near impossible to contest, and which quells any resistance to the state and the military machine. These banal and mundane processes of remaking and reclaiming are specific to the contemporary context, and point once again to the importance and significance of their study. Furthermore, the intricacy of the negotiations outlined in this thesis speak to literature in critical military studies on the complexity of contemporary military masculinity (see Belkin 2012: Basham 2013) by showing how the heroic subject manifests in different forms, not all of which can necessarily be comfortably aligned with dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity. Of course, the processes which this thesis

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[53] See Derek Gregory's '*The Everywhere War*' (2011).

describes are not an exhaustive list, but rather only touch upon the myriad acts and sites through which the hero is reclaimed and remade.

What does it mean to remake and bring into recognition the hero? As Chapter 2 has argued, to reclaim the hero is to discursively reformulate the subject within a narrative which prioritises the concerns of the state. More accurately, it involves a process of 'unmaking' and 'remaking', a breaking apart of the self and reclaiming of particular aspects of that subjectivity (see Edkins 2003). In the case of the hero, there is a complex negotiation which must necessarily take place, in which he must be rendered a coherent, singular, and knowable subject. As chapters 4 and 5 in particular show, such a subject must be made grievable, restoring the link between military masculinity and the state. Yet at the same time, the violence of the sovereign must be blurred out. Chapter 4 uses the site of Boots at the Door to consider how this plays out through a narrative of 'recovery', while Chapter 5 sheds light on the inherent difficulty of such a remaking in light of the wounded military subject. In such a subject, the monstrous violence of the sovereign state is most clearly brought into recognition, providing a challenge to the fantasy of a world split into distinct categories of 'good' versus 'evil', 'heroes' versus 'villains' upon which the sovereign state thrives. In the case of the Invictus Games and Help for Heroes, the remaking of the hero necessarily involves the co-present forgetting of state violence and remaking of its corporeal impacts. In the Invictus Games, the 'warrior hero' subject is created through the performance of sporting achievements, in which wounded military servicemen and women push their bodies to the limits and demonstrate a more-than-human capacity to overcome adversity. Spectating upon such a subject creates a strategic encounter with a bodily materiality that shows the (inescapable) impacts of violent warfare, but remakes it as a challenge to be overcome on the hero's journey (Campbell 2004 [1949]).

Across the sites of remaking discussed in this thesis, the hero is from the outset claimed in service of the state by mobilising a particular relation between the subject and the audience. At a simple level, we can see this in particular conditions of visibility through which the hero appears, such as the Invictus subject draped with the national flag, or the linear temporality of the nation displayed in the co-presence of the contemporary hero, the elderly veteran and wider Christmas nostalgia and reconciliation in the performance space of Boots at the Door. Such displays show the hero to be fundamentally *of the nation*. Yet, at the same time as being *like* us, the subject is brought into recognition as *unlike* us. In such a relationality, the hero is remade as obligated to us as well as a figure to whom we are obligated. We can see this in the co-presence of the warrior figure and a more vulnerable subjectivity in Invictus, and indeed in the staged encounter between civilian fundraisers and 'heroes' in the Big Battlefield Bike Ride. Furthermore, the very language used by the charity Help for Heroes of "it's about the blokes" points to the claiming of a subject in whom we can recognise a likeness to ourselves, but at the same time feel a sense of obligation. It is in part through this obligation that the remaking of the violence of the sovereign state occurs, as the promise of happiness is depicted as something that we have a role to play in; *we must support the hero, or it will all be for nothing*.

The nuances and challenges of this obligation are negotiated differently in the Invictus Choir, as a distinction is drawn between the choir member who is spectated upon but to whom we have no obligation, and the games participant in whose success we have a stake. Invictus choir members are positioned as working indefinitely towards recovery, and are therefore ultimately rendered 'safe' subjects as their potential to trouble the sovereign imagination and memory is undermined (see Edkins 2003). In contrast, our investment in the Invictus games participant plays out in the spatially and temporally situated

site of the arena, in which the hero occupies a particular orientation to the future and is claimed as a coherent discursive figure through which the sovereign promise plays out.

The remaking and bringing into recognition of the hero does not, however, occur simply through the mobilisation of the hero subject himself. Rather, as this thesis has shown, there is a powerful role for his feminised performative 'other' in this process. Of Boots at the Door and the use of Homer's The Odyssey as a poetic backdrop for the narrative, director Lee Hart told me that "it had something for both the male and the female in that story, I think you know the female was very powerful in it". In Boots at the Door, therefore, female figures were deliberately mobilised as ways of telling the hero's story, mechanisms through which the heroic narrative plays out and the sovereign subject is brought into recognition. For example, the character of Nicole is used to illustrate the lived impacts of PTSD as experienced by her husband, while Elaine is used to voice the concerns of a mother whose son is in the military, and who she feels is slipping away from her. Many of the female roles used in Boots at the Door present an overtly gendered subject who embodies the feminine patriotic sacrifice necessary to the recognition of the hero. Indeed, it is fundamentally through these female roles that we learn what is at stake in the figure of the hero. This will be discussed in more depth in the following section of this chapter, in relation to the Military Wives Choir.

2)   *In what ways is the gendered figure of the military wife enrolled in the making of the contemporary hero?*

The figure of the military wife is a central character through which the contemporary hero is brought into recognition. Chapters 2 and 6 have shown that the hero is in part constituted by his feminine performative 'other'; as Via (2010) puts it, "*A large part of the gendered roles in and around militarism can be*

accounted for by understanding the centrality of hero narratives to both soldiering and citizenship. In these narratives, the heroic warrior defends the feminised other for the good of the self, family and country (Huston 1983; Elshtain 1987; Young 2003)" (p45). Indeed, to relate this to the wider arguments put forward in this thesis regarding Butler's *Frames of War*, the military wife can be seen as helping to constitute "what is cast out and maintained outside the frame" (2007: 953).

The representation of the military wife provided through The Military Wives Choir draws upon and mobilises the highly gendered logics of militarism, working largely within the dominant frames through which we come to understand the military hero and his wife. The narrative of the BBC programme *The Choir: Military Wives* depicts the military wife as a 'Penelope' figure, a subject who stays at home to stoically mourn her husband's absence and so embodies feminine patriotic sacrifice. She is brought into recognition through particular conditions, her subjectivity always written in relation to her husband as she sings of her "prince of peace" who "light[s] up the darkness" (song lyrics, *Wherever You Are*). Indeed, we can see this even in the banal materials that circulate in the choir's name, such as their 2012 *In My Dreams* album cover which depicts the military wife as the epitome of "appropriate femininity" (Basham 2016). Of choir performances, the national audience are told in the BBC representation that "gig is the wrong word… this is a ceremony" (*The Choir: Military Wives*, Episode 2). As such, these performances of gendered militarism are rendered ceremonial and sacred means of reclaiming the subject. There is a level of importance assigned to the heroic subject in this narrative which transcends the realms of everyday life, remaking the hero as an almost celestial being in which we must become personally invested. One is reminded of the opening scene from *Boots at the Door*, in which the hero stands elevated above the audience, pacing the stage with his gun, demonstrating to us his power and the promise which he

embodies. *In The Choir: Military Wives*, light is shed on the entanglement between the heroic promise of happiness, gendered militarism, and popular culture, depicting what Kelly (2012) would refer to as a "strategy" through which public sympathy is gleaned by "personalising" war (Basham 2016).

Beyond the television programme, this same 'Penelope' subjectivity is mobilised in countless ways through the choir's public performances, and indeed in private rehearsal spaces, both of which demonstrate different kinds of emotional encounter through which the sovereign subject is made bodily. In public performances, every aspect of the conditions through which the subject is made visible requires a careful negotiation with the temporality and spatiality of the particular performance. At the Armed Forces Day 2016 performance for example, we see a particular kind of display which chimed with an audience primed for nostalgia and patriotism, with the choir singing historical songs such as "*It's a Long Way to Tipperary*" and "*Silver Tassie*". As such, just as the sovereign narrative put forward in Boots at the Door relied upon particular conditions of visibility, so too did the performances of choir. As Hickey-Moody (2013) puts it, "the contextual specificity of each performance is absolutely what allows it to make sense" (p90). To take this further, such performances relied heavily upon the mobilisation of a particular relation with the audience. As Theresa said, "people want to see tears", pointing to a kind of consumerist enjoyment of distress on the part of the audience, in which they expect to see a particular kind of subjectivity on display. Indeed, as Emma told me, going to watch choir performances allows the public to not only spectate upon the sovereign subject and bring her into recognition, but also to feel like they are showing support and as such make themselves feel better. Supporting the choir allows the public to show a banal level of alignment with military wives, and subsequently their husbands and the armed forces as a whole, without necessarily giving overt political support

to the wars they wage on the state's behalf. Furthermore, by making themselves *feel better*, one can argue that the audience are participating in the enactment of the sovereign promise of happiness, actively partaking in the imagining of a future in which the population are secured.

It is not just in the public space of performance that the sovereign subject of the wife, and by extension, the hero, is brought into recognition. Rather, one can see a different kind of emotional encounter taking place in the private space of rehearsal through which this subjectivity is made tangible. A central reason for members attending the choir at all was the emotional release provided by singing particular kinds of songs. As such, the speech acts that the choir engaged in through singing became crucial components in the unmaking and remaking of the subject. In singing melancholy songs about absence, loss, and grief, choir members were able to achieve an emotional release which was affective, working to bring members together in a powerful moment in which military wife-hood subjectivity became visceral and embodied. This was nowhere better exemplified than in the particular choir rehearsal in which members sang *Stronger Together* while crying, holding hands, and hugging. This moment in my fieldwork pointed crucially to the performative nature of the sovereign subject, and showed how the cathartic experience which drew members to attend choir became intimately entangled with the deferred promise of happiness that the sovereign hero figure himself represents.

3)   *What is at stake politically in the remaking and reclaiming of the military hero?*

As Chapter 2 has shown, the sovereign hero subject is intimately entangled with the 'good life' fantasy, and with the deferred promise of happiness through which the state and frames of war act (see Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011;

Butler 2009). In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant considers how politics "produces fantasies, tethers that draw us forward to particular attachments in the form of images, narratives, bodily practices" (2011: 226). As such, the sovereign 'good life' fantasy can be seen to be produced and enacted through attachments to specific bodies and narratives, both of which function affectively. This thesis has argued that in the sovereign fantasy, the figure of the 'hero' is crucial. He promises to guarantee the endurance of the sovereign state in its benevolence and omnipotence, and, importantly, protects the desire which locates this subject as powerful and magnetic.

However, the hero can be considered a 'problem subject', a figure who is at once "of us" and "not of us". He is a subject who, like Amoore & Hall's (2013) 'clownfool', is always at once both "inside" and "outside" as a necessary function for the sovereign's survival. But how is it that a figure who is so precarious in his positionality can be so powerfully tethered to the fantasies of the sovereign? As I have argued in Chapter 2 using Butler's Frames of War (2009), it is the precarity and ambiguity of the hero that is actually the source of his strength and magnetism within this fantasy. The hero, like the frame itself, is a subject through which the boundaries of "inside" and "outside" are maintained (Butler 2009; Walker 1993). Yet, that "we can think of the frame… as active, as jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence, without a visible sign of its operation and yet effectively" (Butler 2007: 953), is crucial. I have argued that, following Butler, just as the sovereign frame is unstable, in flux, always at once "jettisoning and presenting", so too is the figure of the military hero. It is through the heroic iteration of both insider and outsider subjectivity that the fantasy of the good life is maintained, and the framing of war can take place. In practice, the positionality of the hero as always both is carefully negotiated in practices which are led both by and for the state, in what Connolly refers to as a "resonance machine", practices which

are discussed earlier in this chapter (Connolly 2008; see also Closs Stephens 2016: 188).

The example of *Boots at the Door* illustrates the ambiguity of the hero most clearly. The hero is brought into recognition against many of the dominant frames we have come to expect, introduced to us as an almost transcendent, powerful figure who embodies masculinity, power, and all that we stand for as a nation. Yet at the same time, the audience are forced to always question what it is they are seeing; *is the hero alive? Is he dead? Is he there at all?* It is of course the prerogative of theatre to cast doubt on the recognisability of subjects, but more importantly, as Leavy tells us, "Performance serves as a method for exposing what is otherwise impossible to reveal" (2015: 175). Boots at the Door works to reveal the ambiguity of the heroic subject, as we are persistently reminded what it is to be heroic and what is at stake in the figure of the hero, but we are not told who the hero is. Is he the pure and distilled character who stands elevated above the audience, patrolling the stage with his gun? Is it Donny, the former soldier suffering from PTSD, or Jacko, the amputee veteran who is caught attempting suicide? Is it the wounded son whose face we never see, or his grieving army nurse mother? In *Boots at the Door*, we see a clear maintenance of a boundary between that which is jettisoned and that which is presented, yet the hero is always fleeting in and out of these subjectivities, always at once both. In this way, we can see the capacity of the hero to be claimed in service of the state without necessarily being challenged to be made concrete.

Yet in the Invictus Games, we see this play out differently. As Amoore & Hall argue in relation to the clownfool, "the sovereign and the clown are bound together in a relationship characterised by antagonism, but also mutual reliance. In short, the sovereign needs the clown" (2013: 94). In the case of the hero and the sovereign, the mutual reliance between them is marked instead

by the hero's capacity for redemption and recovery, through which the monstrosity or violence of the sovereign state is remade or forgotten. The games show how the fantasy of the 'good life' is maintained through the remaking of the wounded military body in a way which attempts to blur out the violence of the sovereign state. It seeks to remake the hero as a posthuman subject, a gladiatorial figure with the capacity to overcome. Indeed, the very name of the games "Invictus" meaning "unconquered" points to the fantasy of a subject who is a unified and conquered terrain that never needed to be remade in the first place. But, of course, the Invictus Games always misses its target. While the games clearly illustrate that the power of the hero as a discursive figure lies in his subjectivity as always "of us" and "not of us", "human" and "posthuman", the challenge of attaching these fantasies onto the fleshy corporeality of the wounded military body can never be adequately met. In the space of the arena, we can suspend disbelief and allow ourselves to be taken in by the performance of the hero, but in reality there can be no meaningful separation made between this body and sovereign violence.

The theoretical material drawn upon in Chapter 2 has argued that at stake in the figure of the hero is the very promise of happiness itself. Yet, what comes to light through the empirical material presented in this thesis, is that while we are persistently reminded of what is at stake in such a figure as a necessity of his functioning, this promise is never fulfilled. This is of course the argument put forward by Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011), that there is a cruelty in the inevitable failure for the promise to be met. On one level, we can see moments of fracture and slippage in the remaking of the hero, as in the Help for Heroes Recovery Centre, which I will discuss in more depth in the following section of this chapter. However, at a deeper level, the failure of the promise to be fulfilled is intimately woven with the very nature of the hero. His very existence occurs out of necessity in the contemporary context of a

fragile promise to secure the nation, and so we must wonder whether if this promise was fulfilled, would the figure of the military hero exist at all? Time and time again, the heroic narrative is mobilised in order to justify (or, in fact, blur out) violent warfare, violence which has a profound impact on the military servicemen and women which such a narrative recruits. The very idea of military heroism is widely contested by military servicemen and women themselves, found to be deeply problematic. It appears then that the cruelty of the promise exists in the fact that the heroic narrative violently mobilises a subject who can never fulfil the promise which would secure his release. It is not simply the national public who suffer from the cruelty of the heroic promise which can never be fulfilled, but the hero himself.

4) *How is the sovereign subject of the hero contested, resisted, and overflowed?*

In Chapter 2 I argue that the figure of the hero is always ambiguous, at once containing elements of the sovereign and a more resistant subjectivity. Using Butler's *Frames of War* (2009), I have argued that this is crucial to how the frame, and the hero, functions, as always "jettisoning and presenting" (Butler 2007: 953). Indeed, as the previous section of this chapter has touched upon, this ambiguity and evidence of doing both at once is present across the empirical examples used in this thesis. Yet, as all three empirical chapters have shown in different ways, the ambiguity of the hero also manifests in moments of slippage, fractures in the frame in which the smooth working of representation is disrupted (Kear 2013: 26). In *Boots at the Door*, one can see how the narrative of 'recovery' is mobilised in order to bring into recognition a singular and coherent subject, yet in my visit to the Recovery Centre in Plymouth, the excesses of subjectivity which Edkins (2003) speaks of were brought into clear focus. Indeed, Boots at the Door touches upon the violence of the sovereign driving of the subject along the linear trajectory of recovery,

as we see in Jackos's bedsit scene; "plunge your oars into the grey-green briny ocean, make your escape" says Harry. "You're forgetting. They drowned anyway", replies Jacko. Yet it is in the recovery centre that the profound violence of the heroic narrative and its deployment is really brought into recognition. An uncomfortable encounter with a veteran suffering with PTSD, the shocking materiality of the centre's toilet facilities, the paradox of the stormy seascape and floral landscape paintings on the walls of Parker VC, and the juxtaposition of the therapeutic bee and fruit garden with the harsh military landscape just over the fence, all serve to fracture the sovereign narrative.

Beyond the minute moments of dissonance in which the hero frame is disturbed, light can be shed upon the subject's capacity to resist when one considers the hero as performative. Ahmed (2004: 92) argues that the performative is "futural", and;

> *"if the performative opens up the future, it does so precisely by citing norms and conventions, as to repeat something with a difference. Significantly, iterability means that the sign can be 'cut off' from the contexts of its utterance; that possibility of 'cutting' is structural to the writerly nature of signification (Derrida 1988)"* (Ahmed 2004: 93).

That performances can go wrong, be mis-invoked, mis-applied, is central to their proper functioning (Butler 1997). Thus, if the hero is brought into recognition in part through performative speech acts, one could argue that this remaking and reclaiming can never be truly successful as there is always capacity to overflow the parameters of the sovereign. As Butler tells us in *Excitable Speech* (1997), there can be no sovereign speech act. The example of the Military Wives Choir provides the clearest example of this. The military wife is an integral performative 'other' through which the hero is invoked, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter. However my research with the

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Plymouth branch of the choir indicated to me that the practices which they engage in cannot be (and have not been) effectively harnessed by the sovereign. The women I spoke to talked of often singing not about their husbands, but about other things in their lives, and other people. Indeed, it is not simply that the women of the choir resisted the sovereign narrative by mis-invoking the speech acts they were set, such as the melancholy songs from their albums. Rather, they actively practiced wilfulness (Ahmed 2014). Unhappy with the types of song they were asked to sing, songs which gave a representation of military wives as "poor sad women" (focus group extract, Theresa), many of the choir members had attempted to challenge the status quo and sing different, more upbeat songs. They spoke of the songs they sing with disdain and cynicism, laughed with each other at lyrics which they found to be "incredibly depressing" and "really grim" (focus group extract, Emma). Yes, these are subjects who have been co-opted into the sovereign promise, but they do not go along with this willingly and without question. Rather, the subject I encountered was one who sought to trouble the conditions through which we understand this promise.

Furthermore, as Karen suggested, attending the choir had itself been an empowering experience for women, allowing them to change the gender roles within their family and affording them to opportunity to imagine alternate futures for themselves, change jobs, or start college courses. These are futures which could not be imagined from the outset, in a project which is intended to work in the service of the sovereign. Thus, the example of the choir shows how moments and practices through which the sovereign narrative is resisted are not just banal, subjective and largely inconsequential fractures in the smooth working of representation, as we might argue we see in the case of the recovery centre and indeed *Boots at the Door*. Rather, such practices also manifest in bigger and more positive ways, in which subjects promised to the

sovereign are able to imagine alternate futures and "land in unexpected places" (Foucault 1997). The resisting of the sovereign narrative in Boots at the Door and the recovery centre sheds light on the profound violence of the remaking of the hero, throwing into question the linear trajectory towards recovery and redemption in which the hero must necessarily be situated. The conversations I had with the Military Wives Choir did also shed light on this violence, but its articulation through humour, frustration, and wilfulness pointed to a curiosity in the subject which is not otherwise accounted for.

Concluding remarks

The research presented in this thesis makes a contribution to wider scholarship that is both empirical and theoretical. It develops existing literature on contemporary militarism and the everyday, considering how it is that the lived impacts of militarism are engaged with by its subjects. In addition it uses primary examples such as the Royal British Legion's Recovery through Theatre Programme and the UK's Military Wives Choir, with whom previously there existed no primary research of this kind. While the empirical sites used in this study are only discrete and specific examples within a much wider structure of recognition, my contention is that these are nevertheless telling encounters through which light is shed on the hero, how he functions, and how his sovereign narrative might be resisted. Beyond empirics, there is also a theoretical contribution made by this thesis to existing scholarship. By bringing feminist theory from scholars such as Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and Lauren Berlant together with existing literature in critical military studies and political theory, I have shed light on how it is that we might give texture to the framing of war. Butler's (2009) analysis of the frame, as I have argued, does not go far enough in telling us how it is that the frame might function. The research I have presented, while limited in its scope, helps to give texture and

detail to our understanding of the framing of war, and how the hero might function within it as a deferred promise of happiness (Ahmed 2010).

This research has, in many ways, raised more questions than it has answered. While it has shed light on how the masculine gendered hero is brought into recognition and continually remade, a question that pervades this discussion is; what can we say of the female hero? I have argued that the discursive heroic subject is by his very nature embedded in notions of military hegemonic masculinity, and a notional link with state power through which the very sovereign promise functions. Yet, this logically must lead us to think next about the role that is played by military women. In this discursive structure, is there scope for female heroism? As I touched upon in the introduction to this thesis, prisoner of war Private Jessica Lynch was held up in the media as an icon of controlled militarised femininity (Sjoberg 2007; see also Enloe 2000), while figures such as Lynndie England and others posed a threat to this established order, and so were "swept under the carpet" (Sjoberg 2007: 90). But are there negotiations in everyday life through which the female soldier might be rendered 'heroic'? And, what specifically are the conditions through which this might occur? In order to fully understand how it is that the gendered hero figure of the hero is remade and brought into recognition, it would appear that we must next consider how this plays out in relation to the women of the armed forces. Indeed, while this thesis has discussed the practices through which the hero is reclaimed and remade in the service of the sovereign state, it has not gone far enough to think about heroic figures who are disavowed by the state. Chelsea Manning provides an interesting example of a figure who has necessarily been renounced by the state, yet at the same time has been reclaimed as 'heroic' by an entirely new group of people. A final question which we are left to consider, then, is; what happens when a breach occurs?

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