

Figurations of wounding: soldiers' bodies, authority and the militarisation of everyday life.

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### **Abstract**

This article argues that the figures of the wounded and dead soldier are central organising nodes in public objects, events, and institutions and are generative of intense affects and feelings, which are in turn bound to and constitute geopolitical imaginaries. Through these figurations, bodies of wounded and dead soldiers are brought to visibility, becoming key technologies for the production of authority and attachment, and fostering powerful affective responses in publics that work to amplify and enliven particular forms of neoliberal militarised nationhood.

### **Introduction**

In the winter of 2014/2015, an exhibition of portraits by the musician and photographer Bryan Adams took place at Somerset House, London, entitled *Wounded: The Legacy of War*. In each of the large format images, photographed against a white background, a wounded soldier poses for the camera, his or her injuries made visible to the viewer. The images invite engagement with wounded bodies: bodies scarred by burns, bodies with limbs missing, bodies with disfiguring facial injuries. The exhibition and accompanying photobook received major coverage in national newspapers, as well as television and radio news, gaining ingress into millions of homes throughout the United Kingdom, and Prince Harry, an army captain and champion of wounded servicemen and women's charities, attended the exhibition's private view.

That Christmas, the *Independent* and the *Evening Standard* ran an appeal in aid of the charity Homeless Veterans, while the *Daily Express* raised money for Combat Stress and the *Sunday*

*Express* fundraised for Blind Veterans UK. The soldier as object of charitable giving, as figure of public sympathy, admiration and support, had reached unprecedented levels of visibility. Moreover, this emergent figure of the hero-victim soldier, embodied largely as a visibly wounded, often limbless man in his twenties or thirties, was becoming increasingly commonplace, bleeding into the figurative landscape of the everyday.

In this paper I argue that the figure of the wounded soldier, through its ability to engender emotional responses, has become a central affective technology in the generation of support for the British military, in part by limiting of the possibility of its criticism. In addition to this, I discuss how the public repatriation parade brings the bodies of dead servicemen to visibility, as an alternative, but related, technology through which critical responses to the violence of war are contained and limited. These two forms of visibility of corporeal destruction operate through affective responses to corporeal destruction. I suggest that through the institutional and discursive contexts in which these bodies are made visible affective responses are augmented in those who encounter them, and channeled towards charitable and benevolent, in the first case, and silent and respectful in the second, practices. These two forms of visibility thus move the bodies of publics towards post-political, rather than politically disruptive ends. The figurative analysis undertaken here moves beyond the focus on texts and images alone that is so often the mode of enquiry of critical geopolitics, observing the work that they do as they participate in our material encounters with the world.

Changing approaches to global geopolitics and warfare, as well as the neoliberalisation of cultural and political life, pose particular problems for governments and military organisations whose legitimacy and authority have historically been based on the unquestioned authority of the state and of the line of command (Seidler 2013; Hines et al. 2014). In the United Kingdom there has been a perceived erosion of British values or “crisis of authority” (Kirwan 2013; Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2013) and an increase in

public criticism of the British military (McCartney 2010; Edmunds and Forster 2007; Ruffa, Dandeker, and Vennesson 2013). This crisis of consent and of the authority of the government-military complex led to the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown commissioning a report entitled “National Recognition of our Armed Forces”(Davies, Clark, and Sharp 2008). This argued that the Armed Forces should be actively supported and encouraged by the British public. Identifying the importance of public support in terms of forces’ morale, taxpayers’ willingness to fund the military, and a crisis in recruitment, the report argued for a re-appraisal by the Armed Forces themselves of the priority given to public outreach, and to relations with politicians and the media in particular. The recommendations of the report have largely been taken up, leading to a rebranded Armed Forces Day, a number of educational initiatives and financial support for military charities. It also advocated a strategy of public engagement, legitimation and authority production through third-sector organisations. As I and colleagues have argued, the move towards neoliberalism has led to a multiplication and proliferation of sites of authority (Dawney 2013b; Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2014). Institutions such as workplaces, churches, charities, veterans’ organisations, local and parish government and sports and social clubs are central to the production of the “home front”, as a space of civilian support for wars happening elsewhere.

In this paper, I discuss some of the ways in which this home front has taken shape, and how the figure of the wounded soldier, and of the dead serviceman or woman in flag-draped coffin, participates in its production<sup>1</sup>. I argue that these figures were central to the production

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<sup>1</sup> Space has limited this discussion to the specific articulations of wounding and death that emerged during the second Gulf and Afghanistan Wars, however it would be productive to consider how the politics of these figurations differ from those in previous wars. For discussion of soldiers’ bodies during the Second World War and the Vietnam War, see, among others, (Alker and Godfrey 2016; Cook 2001),

of legitimacy and to the framing of the military during the Afghanistan war, acting as an affective node around which and towards which particular forms of emotional citizenship and practical response were turned. These figurations of damaged and destroyed bodies became technologies through which these responses could operate, as a means of legitimation for the armed forces in general and for the Afghanistan war in particular, by the production of geopolitical imaginaries that tie emotional gestures of support for individual soldiers into broader nationalist, pro-military sentiments and cultures of militarism. The following section provides some theoretical context to the argument, developing the case for an analysis of everyday geopolitics, and for the centrality of affect in the production of geopolitical imaginaries. I then argue that these figures operate as technologies through which the mediation of affect took place in the production of cultures of militarism and geopolitical imaginaries of support for military personnel. This is developed in the following sections with reference to some examples of how the figures of the wounded and dead soldier have shaped public feelings and practices. Finally, I conclude by offering some tentative thoughts about the work that these figures do, considering their role in contributing to technologies and practices of support for the armed forces, and in shaping geopolitical imaginaries.

### **Everyday militarisms**

While Derek Gregory's concept of the "everywhere war" refers to the ways that new forms of warfighting slip the territorial bounds characterised by practices of invasion and state-sanctioned warfare, the ways of garnering public support for warfare too have moved away from traditional organs of authority such as state propaganda towards a diverse array of organisations, institutions and loose formations that participate in the production of public feeling and sentiment. War moves through spaces of everyday life in the formation of the

“contemporary home front” (Rech 2014). Recent scholarship in geography and beyond has pointed to a militarisation of everyday life, and the playing out of war through “other spaces” and everyday life practices, for example through video games, news media, social media sites (Grondin 2011) and in spectator sports (Kelly 2013). Militarisation, defined as “a diverse set of social, cultural, economic and political processes and practices unified around an intention to gain both elite and popular acceptance for the use of military approaches to social problems and issues” (Rech et al. 2014:48), and the extension of military objectives into civilian life (Jenkins et al. 2012) takes place in both everyday and spectacular spaces (Rech 2012; Sidaway 2009; Enloe 2007; Bernazzoli and Flint 2010; Tannock, Burgess, and Moles 2013), and violence and the geopolitical logics of war encroach into intimate domestic spaces (Pain 2015; Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pain 2014), and correspondingly draw on those intimate forms of terror in their architecture. This militarisation involves spaces, practices, technologies and materials that contribute to the production of cultures of militarism. Rech’s work on military air shows provides an insightful discussion of the role of spectacle and material ephemera in the production of geopolitical imaginaries and support for the armed forces. As Rech points out, everyday ephemera (key fobs, ribbons) make militarism and geopolitics tangible, and provide everyday hooks for the expression of geopolitical relations. Work of the militarisation of everyday life focuses on the materials and practices through which these relations are expressed, and particularly through consumption, for example in the proliferation of military charity branding that produce and relay political-affective sensibilities, enabling the buying and eating of eggs, or the wearing of a sweatshirt or participating in a military style fitness class to be coloured through lenses of military support and nationalism (McSorley 2016; Tidy 2015). Through these techniques and technologies, therefore, we can witness the emergence of cultures of militarism and military support that emerge through a diverse and disparate range of practices and visibilities.

The work in this paper also takes its cue from and contributes to considerable bodies of work in feminist geopolitics and feminist international relations that acknowledge the mutual constitution of the intimate and the geopolitical, the importance of the analysis of the experiential in geopolitics (Enloe 2007; Enloe 2014). It follows Dowler and Sharp in arguing for the “importance of ensuring the small, mundane, daily practices of everyday life are understood in relation to the reconstructions of the nation and the international” (Dowler and Sharp 2001:174; Smith 2009), echoing their call for the “grounding” of geopolitics.

While these scholars among others have demonstrated the increasing visibility of militarism in the ephemera and practices of everyday life since 2010, relatively little discussion has taken place with regard to the *work that this does*. This visibility is central to the production of cultures of military support, and, as Rech discusses, works to produce specific geopolitical imaginaries that draw on nationalism, militarism and certain articulations of masculinity. The next section draws on recent work on political technologies of affect in order to develop the concept of the figure, in order to discuss *how* such cultures of military support may emerge.

### **Affective technologies**

Broadly understood as the movement of feeling at a prepersonal level, scholars have variously discussed the concept of affect and its relationship to social and political formations. Often misunderstood as referring to something that operates prior to social and political forms of life, affects can be erroneously seen as operating in excess to social and political formations, and thus outside of the realm of the social. However, as I have argued elsewhere, the relation between the affective and the subjective, and the oscillation between the two is constitutive of experience: “it is in the feeling body that the deepest levels of

subjectivation make themselves known; where our bodies can reveal the conditions of their own production. (Dawney 2013a). While it is clear that an understanding of affect demands that we study its liveliness, its flows and movements, we also need to consider the techniques and technologies through which these movements are organised, and are tied to particular constellations of ideas. Connolly discusses this through the concept of the “resonance machine”, elaborating how the “evangelical-capitalist resonance machine” ties together “evangelical Christianity, cowboy capitalism, the electronic news media and the Republican party” (Connolly 2005:869), without ever naming itself as anything. Thus it emerges as a set of feelings, that carry spirituality at their very core, which colour and constitute a political landscape. This paper follows both Connolly’s and Ben Anderson’s line of enquiry by focusing on the techniques and technologies through which feeling is organised, developing the concept of the figure as an affective technology and, using the example of the figure of the wounded soldier and the display of coffins containing dead servicemen, arguing how this technology works to organise feeling and response that can provide useful insight into the ways in which political and post-political cultures of legitimation and support for military and the Afghanistan war were manifest. Anderson, coming at the concept of affect through a Foucauldian filter, argues that affects are “organised” and “mediated” in the making-political of forms of life, suggesting that politics takes place *through* affect (Anderson 2011, 2014, 2009). In his attention to the conditions of possibility for forms of affective life, Anderson argues that we need to understand how affective capacities are incorporated in political technologies, whether large-scale morale operations such as “debility, dependency dread” as an affective technology of war, or in the use of olfactory marketing techniques to sell consumer goods (Anderson 2014). In other words, we need to understand more fully how affect is imbricated in technologies of power and persuasion, both in the politics of the everyday and the spectacular. Similarly, Masco argues that affects of fear and terror have

become “domesticated as a primary national resource and projected out globally as a twenty first century American project” (Masco 2014:3), demonstrating the affective logic of US securitisation and militarisation, while Closs Stephens draws on the concept of affective atmospheres in order to rethink about the conditions of production of nationalism at events such as the Olympic Games, where nationalist feelings are “circling in the air” (Stephens 2015:182). These moves, and others that constitute the “affective turn” have also found homes in critical geopolitics (Muller 2013) as well as feminist geopolitics (Laketa 2016) and citizenship studies (Fortier 2010).

Emotions, as the sedimentation and naming of affect, the cultural and social articulations of affective force (Massumi 2002; Dawney 2011b), are central to the ways in which technologies of affect are understood and experienced. Emotions are one of the means through which we participate in a public sphere (Ahmed 2004): this is no clearer than in the resurgence of public emotional display after Diana’s death (Seidler 2013). Emotional histories chart the emergence of particular forms of emotional feeling and expression in relation to historical epochs and periods (Langhamer 2013), and the concept of “emotional citizenship” enables an understanding of how feelings participate in the making of public and political life. (Pantti and van Zoonen 2006). Despite ontological and epistemological differences, concern with affect and concern with emotion places the role of feeling at centre stage in the production of forms of political and public life. In the following section, I will discuss the role of these figures as affective technologies, arguing that the forms of emotional and practical responses that they incite are essential to an understanding of the political work that they do.



## Wounded soldiers

The images of wounded soldiers in the exhibition discussed at the beginning of the paper form only part of the constitution of the figure. Figures are composites, made up of associated images that consolidate around certain bodies. Haraway writes of figuration as a “contaminated practice” which throws figures into the world, drawing on stories and associations, on allegories and material histories in the production of ideas and imaginaries (Haraway and Randolph 1997:8). Figures shape our world and understandings, providing a means through which power is given form and made material and meaningful. They provide us with images upon which to hang cultural myths. To study the figure and processes of figuration is not only to study the various representations of the figure, but the means by which figures travel and iterate – in art and literature, across social media, in gossip, conversations in the pub, dreams and daydreams, and also to study the myths and political imaginaries to which they contribute. Castaneda, in her work on the figure of the child, adopts a figurative method in order to “describe in some detail the constellation of practices, materialities, and knowledges through which a particular figuration occurs, and in turn, to identify the significance of that figuration for making wider cultural claims” (Castaneda 2002:8). As I argue elsewhere, invoking the ‘figure’ makes possible a ‘way of conceptualizing the affective capacities that are held by figures that are both material and symbolic, that are produced by and produce the social’ (Dawney 2013b:43, see also Dawney, forthcoming). The figure is more than a media image: it is an operational component of public imaginations, an emergent accretion of images, ideas and association that resonates within each of its iterations. At once material body, media image and cultural signifier, it is both subject and object, indeterminate container for meaning, and affective conduit. The process of figuration gives figures substance as they accrue meaning and political-affective force. Figures are both material and semiotic: they convey meaning and have world-making

effects. To understand the wounded soldier through a figurative analysis, we need to consider both its various articulations and the sorts of practices and political identities that it participates in. A figurative analysis moves beyond the focus on texts and images alone that is so often the mode of enquiry of critical geopolitics, however does not jettison them, instead looking to see how they play out in our material encounters. Images affect us, not just hermeneutically, but materially- they cause changes to take place in our bodies. They hook in to memory, embodied histories, associative images and in doing so affect us, playing into production of imaginaries that are powerfully inflected with affect. They play at the space between body and text: the space of affective forms of life. Figures operate through their encounters with bodies, and their operation is dependent on those bodies' material histories of association and experience: their inscription as subjects. Paying attention to the work that figures do involves paying attention to those material practices that are informed by our affective relations with figures and myths, and which, as this paper argues, enact geopolitical imaginaries<sup>2</sup>. It is of course, important to mention here that figures are complex, numerous and always in a process of transition. Noticing figures and their work is always about noticing patterns and repetitive iterations rather than positing them as monolithic entities. Figures shift over time and in different contexts: indeed it is to a certain extent the indeterminacy of figures that authorises their affective grip.

During the period that this paper was being researched, between 2010 and 2015, the figure of the wounded soldier became more visible in the UK public sphere, in part as a result of the increase in returning visibly wounded soldiers from active service, and in part due to the popularity of military charities for whom the figure became their object and affective draw. The effect of war on flesh reached public visibility through these figurations. During this

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of figurative analysis, see Dawney, in press.

period, and in response to this increased visibility, I began a “militarisation field diary”, as a means of engaging with damaged bodies as figures. I recorded instances of visibility of military life and service personnel in and around my daily life in Sussex, UK, which is not near a garrison town and has no major connections with military institutions. I recorded when I noticed the images of military personnel, and when I noticed ephemera and practices that relate to military charities or veteran’s organisations. This involved an adaptive process of noticing, of observing where the military gains ingress on civilian everyday life, and also the ways in which these images and representations moved me in particular ways. The research also involved analysis of TV broadcasts, social media activity, newspaper articles, gossip and conversations and site visits. In this way, I inhabited a particular mode of reflexive engagement with my own encounters with such texts, a critical inhabitation of a moment that calls into question the “naturalness” of experience (see Dawney, 2013a:629). This methodological approach borrows from genealogy (Foucault, 1984), critical autoethnography (for example, Holman Jones, 2016) and work on affect and method (e.g. Clough, 2009, Wetherell 2012), to consider the moment of embodied encounter with the text, in conjunction with the various articulations of the figure between texts. While this approach is necessarily subjective and partial, nevertheless it has enabled attention to the forms of visibility of such figures during the course of everyday life, and the affective encounter between figures and bodies, both my own and other people’s. Examples of encounters with the figure of the wounded soldier include watching the spectacular and prime-time showing of the Invictus Games (a Paralympic-style international sports contest for injured allied service personnel) on BBC 1, encountering a blinded and injured soldier canoeing on the river who now made TV documentaries about his experience, witnessing the proliferation of *Help for Heroes* flags in domestic gardens and of countless *Help for Heroes* sweatshirts and wristbands worn by members of the public. It also included reading about newspaper appeals as discussed in the

introduction to this paper, attending Armed Forces Day celebrations at a nearby town, featuring a dominant presence of military charities, being invited on Facebook to a various sports events organised in support of military charities - in particular *Help for Heroes*, passing by an ex-serviceman begging in the street, passing veterans in formal dress collecting money at Victoria Station, and watching repatriation ceremonies on the television and reading about them in the print media. All of these everyday visibilities, I suggest, lead to ingress of the figure of the soldier into the everyday and the domestic, partly through their sheer ubiquity. The wounded soldier, and the encounter with the wound, as material evidence of war, became commonplace. Around the same time, the emergence of the repatriation ceremony as public display of deceased servicemen and women led to another, related figure. I want to draw attention to these two means through which the embodied violence of war is made visible, to draw out the means through which both garner particular forms of response, which, while different in both their figuration and the practices that they produce, operate politically as a means of limiting the possibilities of critical response. In the case of the repatriation of the dead this takes place through customary practices of silent commemoration and discourses of respect, and in the case of the wounded soldier through mythologies of triumph over adversity, recovery and admiration. In both cases, it is the affective encounter with the broken (wounded, lifeless) body, in the context of political/cultural institution and imaginaries that augments their charge, while at the same time limiting possible responses to that charge.

### **Repatriation ceremonies and the making-visible of the dead**

Repatriation ceremonies in the towns of Wootton Bassett and more recently Carterton in Oxfordshire involve the silent (or sometimes applauding) gathering of onlookers along the sides of roads as hearses carrying the bodies of dead servicemen and women in flag-draped coffins returned from theatres of war drive from air force bases to coroners' offices. The part

played by veterans' organisations in stepping up to a call for support, as well as a more generalised public atmosphere of participation in emotive events connected to the British Military were central to the emergence of these ceremonies. In the repatriation ceremony, observers and mourners line a public street down which drive hearses containing flag-draped coffins. The roads are lined with uniformed members of veterans' organisations holding lowered banners, as well as others in civilian clothing. Other practices have been added to the events as they have gained momentum, including applause and the laying of single flowers onto the roofs of hearses. TV coverage of these events focuses on the tears of relatives and other onlookers, and on the performance of silent dignity of uniformed members of veterans' organisations as they lower their flags when the hearses approach. What began as a display of respect by townsfolk and veterans' organisations grew between 2007 and 2010 as members of the public travelled to the town in order to participate in a collective act of mourning. In other words, it was as though the making-public of death, through the passing through a high street of the destroyed bodies of British military personnel, demanded some sort of response, some need to turn the potential for public shame and criticism at the loss of life in this conflict into a public recognition of the loss of British military bodies, to personalise, individualise and mourn. Despite reservations by some senior military personnel about their representation of soldiers as victims<sup>3</sup>, their making visible of death, and a disapproval of the outpouring of emotion at repatriation parades, it is the considerable affective draw of these spaces which makes them so interesting: their participation in the production of affects that resonate via media coverage through bodies that are not present at the event. Here, the bodies of the dead, brought to public visibility through the slow parade of flag-draped coffins, give substance to the loss of war. We know coffins contain bodies. We do not need to see them for

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<sup>3</sup> These parades were criticised by Professor Michael Clarke of the Royal United Services Institute, who referred to "an age of recreational grief" and associated with what Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Fry called in *The Times* a "mawkish view of the military" (Coghlan 2010). The right-wing journalist and commentator Melanie Phillips, too, has criticised the "sentimentality" performed at these sites (Phillips 2010).

their power to take hold of us: this masking and the possibility of what lies beneath contributes to the affective force of the coffins and the demand for recognition. Central to the framing of the Wootton Bassett events is the public performance of collective grief and sentimentality. The events draw on the forms of public mourning and memorialisation that have emerged in the light of Diana's death, and respond to "changing public sensibilities about the visibility and display of grief and loss" (Jenkins et al. 2012). The ceremonies, as bottom-up ensembles of charities, press, veterans and publics can be understood as a response to a sense of unease about the hiding of such bodies, a need to make them visible but shore up the possibility that this visibility might participate in the production of political speech that operates against the logic of war. More than merely providing an outlet for bubbling political and sympathetic feelings, they participate in the production of some political forms of life, and in the silencing of others. The silence of onlookers demands that private sentiments remain private. What is visible and audible is thus only what collectively articulates loss without commentary. The silence that they command, prevent other voices from speaking and contribute towards a particular articulation of nationalist politics that conflates and draws on Islamophobia, militarism, class divisions and royalism. The intensities produced at the Wootton Bassett/Carterton ceremonies thus participate in the production of an affective architecture and culture of militarism, as a complex interconnection of spaces, affects and objects through which political significance is attached to the bodies of wounded and dead soldiers (Walklate, Mythen, and McGarry 2011). The figure of the dead soldier and the silence it commands thus acts to make public criticism of war difficult, demanding that such responses remain silent.

Many the contexts in which encounters with the figures of the wounded and dead soldier take place are mediated through military charities and veterans' organisations, and, more than any

other, by *Help for Heroes*. This charity has to date become an enormously successful instrument in both generating income and capturing hearts and minds. Its stated purpose is to provide top quality rehabilitation and support for wounded veterans, both directly and through grants to other charitable organisations, and it is thus in the charity's interest to draw private suffering to public attention. Its ubiquity and aesthetic strategies produces figures of soldiers as individual hero-figures, overcoming adversity as well as on subtle evocations of soldier-as victim to encourage donations ([helpforheroes.org.uk](http://helpforheroes.org.uk)). In its campaign literature and visual communication, the figure of the soldier is personalised, vulnerable and masculine. This strategy of personalisation is echoed in the naming of victims in repatriation ceremonies and the broadcasting of biographical narratives in the television coverage of the Invictus Games. These strategies of figuration serve to personalise and individualise wounding and death, and enable sympathetic responses that work to produce lives lost and damaged as lives worth grieving or lives victorious. In the *Wounded* exhibition, the genre of the portrait personalises the soldier figure and reveals vulnerability through display of the broken body and to-camera gaze. Portraits of wounded soldiers in the Help for Heroes publication *The Hero Inside* juxtapose images of theatres of war with family portraits and images of wounded soldiers participating in practices of rehabilitation and sports (Shaw 2009). These iterations position the figure in terms of family man, sportsman and hero-victim. As Coker argues, the figure of the warrior has declined in popularity during recent wars, and the soldier as humanitarian hero/victim has provided a more acceptable means of figuring military personnel within western moral frameworks (Coker 2007; See also King 2010). The figure of the soldier has moved away from the "warrior" and towards a vulnerable, family man. In his analysis of obituaries of soldiers who died in Helmand, King describes how soldiers' lives are increasingly discussed in terms of his relation to family, rather than the heroic deeds undertaken on the battlefield. The term "hero" is now inextricably associated with

servicemen and women, and produces a specific articulation of nation: the soldier as upholder of “British values” - and a particular form of British masculinity - in the context of a “loss of authority”: a mourning of the loss of values of hard work and sacrifice. The BBC’s coverage of the Invictus Games in 2014 produces similar figurations, contributing to a geopolitical and cultural imaginary of national masculinity and heroism through the figure of the wounded soldier/sportsman, and a staging that draws heavily on the affective atmospheres of the Olympic Games and the military pageant, producing relays of association that augment affect and associate that augmentation with national imaginaries.

These various articulations of the figure, the contexts and the associations that they engender saturate public life, operating affectively to build feeling, to increase intensity through the encounter with wounded flesh, which then feeds into politically benign ways of responding that are tied to geopolitical imaginaries of nation, class and support for the military through techniques of humanisation and vulnerability. The specific forms of visibility and narrative produced by Help for Heroes and other military charities is part of a broader set of aesthetic strategies that emphasis recovery and western medical technology. Soldiers’ wounds are refigured in part as personal setbacks that can be responded to with recourse to individual determination, supportive family and high-tech medical care ([www.helpforheroes.org.uk](http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk)). Wounding is thus a challenge, an opportunity to demonstrate grit and perseverance, and finally, triumph, rather than a means of witnessing the horrors of war. In its visual and discursive techniques, these charities draw on the individual soldier-hero overcoming adversity narrative as well as on subtle evocations of soldier-as victim. The hero-victim figure serves as a powerful means of both garnering popular support for the charity and for the military in general. While the term “hero”, remains firmly attached to the British Army in the twenty-first century, the emergence of discourses around the moral questionability of war



in Afghanistan and Iraq have led to the supplement of the hero with the victim moniker – the pawn in a potentially unwinnable conflict, the possibility of dying “in vain” (McCartney 2011:44). This can be seen as an attempt to normalise and understand their experience: as Dixon points out, military values do not sit easily with neoliberal capitalism: collective altruism, patriotism and self-sacrifice over individualism, materialism and instant gratification (Dixon 2012:134). The hero-victim figure enables a telling of war stories in individual terms, as a narrative of overcoming adversity removed from its geopolitical context. Through these figurations, a “flattening” of the figure occurs, a rendering of death and injury equal, that obfuscates the specificities of forms of wounding and death in war, the questionability of some of the means through which this occurs, but also the specificities of what might be construed as “heroic”. In particular, it is worth noticing how the focus on “visible” wounds in such figurations, effectively limits the extent to which publics engage with invisible forms of violence, such as the effects of PTSD.

Through this figure, supporting a military charity can involve both expression of support for the services and what they stand for, and guilt<sup>4</sup> for their participation in unpopular warfighting at the same time (Strachan 2009). In other words, in the same way as the figure of the hero/victim “flattens” the specificities of forms of injury and forms of service, the support for a military charity provides a public means of expressing complex and often conflicted private sentiments in a way that assimilates them into equivalence through a post-political public practice of generalised “support”.

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<sup>4</sup>The question of personal guilt is particularly interesting in the light of the “not in my name” slogan, used by the Stop the War coalition in protests in the UK against the second gulf war, which effectively worked to perform individual citizen responsibility for war and to contest the lack of democratic representation in engaging in war.

## Geopolitical imaginaries and public practices

Because the figure of the wounded soldier is maintained and managed largely by charitable and veterans' organisations, its figuration is closely woven into practices of public philanthropy and financial support, as well as public commemoration. Practices of charitable giving can thus be understood as a means of responding to the affective force of the encounter with the wound, as a way in which the bodies of publics can recognise and engage with the visibilities of wounding, and participate in the production of the home front.

The affective grip of such figurations has led to attempts to associate the figure with populist nationalism: the far-right group Britain First has variously attempted to capture this, for example via the death of Drummer Lee Rigby in 2013, giving out leaflets at a Help for Heroes stall and campaigning for Help for Heroes wristbands to be allowed in schools (Collins 2015; Mortimer 2016). The forms of nationalist affect that the figure of the injured soldier generates indicates a strong affective force ripe for capture. As an affective technique, the figure of the soldier as hero-victim can channel the forms of sympathetic affect surrounding it towards practices that diminish the possibility of their translation into forms of political speech that operate against militarism. For example, norms of silence and respectful comportment of mourners at the repatriation parades may mean many things, however the onlooker-witness, whether dissenting or assenting, is incorporated in the broader performance of nation and militarism, and provides a ground for the capturing and subsuming of resistant narratives into a more generalised articulation of sympathy and collective life. The space of the repatriation parades of dead military personnel at Wootton Bassett in Oxfordshire, UK operated as a site for public emotion and sympathetic sentiment, and provided a means for individualised responses to the deaths of soldiers in the Afghanistan conflict to be

incorporated into a depoliticised public language. This language, and the accompanied sympathetic sentiments that burgeoned and prospered through the repatriation ceremonies, sporting events and spectacles where these figures were made visible, and through their repetition and material reminder through everyday life, produced specific forms of relating to the wounded and dead bodies of British personnel.

The intensities produced at the Wootton Bassett (and later Carterton) ceremonies thus have to be discussed in the context of a broader context of the affective architecture of militarism, which, I argue here, resonates around the figure of the wounded soldier. The parades occurred at a time when the UK government were working to gain public support for the military, and it is clear that the expression of sentiment at these parades “developed alongside, and cohered with the logic of the Help for Heroes campaign” (Jenkins et al 2012: 361). It is this point, I believe, that is crucial in thinking about the complex interconnection of affect, practice and figuration, as political significance is attached to the bodies of wounded and dead soldiers (Walklate, Mythen, and McGarry 2011). Indeed, the figuration is a central organising force in the production of collective forms of life: it refers at once to specific images of prosthesis-wearing heroic individuals and more generalised political-affective imaginaries of sympathy, support and patriotism. These sympathetic affects became translated into practices that support nationalist and militarist geopolitical positionings, as Ware makes clear: “the authoritarian suppression of sympathy for the unfortunate soldiers and their families was replaced by a re-activated language of patriotic sacrifice and heroism” (Ware 2010:6-7)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning here that, unlike in the United States, the public display of wounding was suppressed during the beginning of the Afghan and Iraq wars. During the Falklands Conflict in 1982, victory parades did not include those wounded or disfigured. The emergent visibility of wounding can be read as both a response to

While the section above has discussed the ways in which the visibilities of wounded and destroyed military bodies can contribute to the production of geopolitical imaginaries that shape and colour everyday life, and towards which affective augmentation can take place, I now turn to a tentative account of how these imaginaries play out in the world through particular forms of practice. While this may take the form of participation in populist nationalist movements, more commonplace forms of practice both contribute to these geopolitical imaginaries and operate to position the figure outside of politics and into a purportedly apolitical world of humanitarian support and fellow-feeling. The argument so far has stated that these figures garner affective intensities in the bodies of publics. The display of wounding, the personalisation of the wounded soldier and its figuration as sportsman, family man and hero promotes affective forms of longing and loss of national masculinities. The figure enables multiple political and subject positions to coalesce around the injured bodies of soldiers such that they are able to bring together a sense of support for individual military personnel without being seen to hold a position on the politics and ethics of individual wars. These affective augmentations, this strength of feeling, I argue, lead to a need to respond. It is my assertion that the specific contexts through which these figurations are made visible, particularly the military charities and veterans' organisations around whom these figurations are organised, can channel affects towards readily available practices and responses, for example participation in commemorative and philanthropic acts. Practices of fundraising, charitable giving and supporting events are often the line of least resistance when confronted by troubling images. The hero-victim binary is a means of both augmentation of affect in publics and the channelling of that affect into particular practices and sentiments that both sates a drive for participation and response and ameliorates the articulation of resistant

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the backlash from these attempts of concealment, and a means of capitalising on the affective draw of the figure.

political speech and action. This double move of augmentation and channelling of affect that figures soldiers as victims causes wounded military personnel to lose authority as subjects through their victim role, while the authority that their suffering, injured bodies substantialises is available to be incorporated in broader affective regimes of nationalism and militarisation. The role of the victim is a silencing role: its claim can only be for recognition/redress rather than a political voice. As Wendy Brown argues in *States of Injury*, the forms of disciplinary control and individuation central to late modern postindustrial societies provide the conditions of possibility for the formation of suffering subjectivities from which emerges an identity politics of wounding and resentment (Brown 1995). The lack of availability of other forms of political subjectivity and political speech renders the hero/victim one of the only figures available to recognition. The forms of visibility that produce wounded and heroic figures, then, draw on and reproduce these conditions of possibility for political subjectivity that render alternative subject formations difficult.

In *Remembering Diana*, Vic Siedler argues that the collective outpouring of emotion, and the occupation of public spaces that unravelled immediately after Princess Diana's death worked to redefine traditional authority. He suggests that, after her death, the figure of Diana became open to a rereading in terms of its resonance with people's individual experiences. Alongside this emerged a popular belief in their own "inner authority" to decide how, why and where to grieve her death. In this way, "somehow the personal and the public had come into a new and unexpected relationship", where vulnerability and grief could be publicly displayed and a democratising of public emotion emerged (Seidler 2013:9). There are certainly similar negotiations emerging through these changing landscapes of military visibility. These figures produce an affective architecture that invites active participation. The feeling of powerful emotions is regarded as a truth that speaks to subjects' experiences in their encounters with

the figure, resonating for them personally. In this way, the authority of the military is renegotiated such that it chimes with experience: the figurations of soldiers' bodies and the affects that coalesce around them articulate a negotiated authority – an authority that ties them to collectives such as nation; that answers a felt need for the security of institutions yet is mediated through bodies that negotiate the terms of their authority according to both the structuring conditions of experience and their embodied and personally narrated histories.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the forms of visibility of wounded and dead military personnel can be understood as figures: iterative and tropic objects that do affective and political work. These figures have become central organising nodes in public objects, events and institutions that are generative of intense affects and feelings. It has argued that these feelings are bound to and constitute geopolitical imaginaries that in turn channel affects towards particular (post)political responses. The soldier as witness to war, and his or her wounded body as testimony to that witnessing, constitutes a potentially dangerous or “unruly” presence in the public sphere (Achter 2010). The wounded soldier as hero-victim - which both draws on victim or “victim culture” alongside myths of the survivor-hero that offer narratives of personal triumph and the resilience and grit of the British military body - moves bodies and incites powerful affects through the encounter with the wound, as the bodies of publics respond to the pain of others. These affective responses to wounding and death are channelled through the practices of participation and emotional display that are encouraged through philanthropic third-sector organisations, particularly through military charities. These charities are powerful conduits of affect: through generating atmospheres of silent commemoration and mourning, and through proliferating “fantasies of participation” (Dean 2009) by offering opportunities for participation and healing such as the purchase of merchandise and participation in

sponsored sporting events. They offer clear pathways for channelling the outrage and paralysis that can emerge in the face of these figurations– the pound in the tin, the sponsored cycle, the purchase of a sweatshirt or the silent witnessing of a repatriation ceremony. The possibility for political responses that question the causes of such corporeal damage are foreclosed through the provision of readily-accessible “channels” for these affects.

This paper has contributed to ongoing work on the affective technologies that participate in the production of everyday geopolitical imaginaries. In particular, it has paid attention to the figure, as one such affective technology, and the work that it does in producing geopolitical formations. These formations, such as nationalism, or militarism, can be experienced as feeling: politics make themselves lived, known and felt through and between bodies. They come to matter in the practices and technologies through which affective forms of life are constituted. They are given force and substance through the intensities produced in bodies involved. Moreover, figures tap into latent subjectivities; they move bodies precisely because those bodies are positioned in ways that enable them to respond, and in ways that channels their responses in banal and often confused ways. The figure of the soldier participates in the production of collective forms of life – it operates as an affective sign that refers both to specific images of prosthesis-wearing heroic individuals and more generalised political-affective imaginaries of sympathy, support and patriotism. Through everyday materials and practices - wristbands, sweatshirts, advertisements for charity sporting events, newspaper appeals – as well as through spectacular events such as the Invictus games and the repatriation ceremony, the figure provides a powerful affective technology of authorisation for contemporary cultures of militarism.

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