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## **Popular Culture, Sport and the 'Hero'-fication of British Militarism**

### **Abstract**

A number of culturally significant practices have become incorporated into promoting and normalising British militarism in the face of increasing controversies surrounding Britain's role in the "War on Terror". Utilising a critical discourse analysis, this article draws on Goffman's deference and demeanour work and asserts that in conjunction with other popular cultural practices, 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. A discursive formation, which circumscribes legitimate discourses around the "War on Terror" is shown to symbolically annihilate critical opposition to British aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan whilst normalising the joint ceremony of support.

### **Key Words**

Deference; Demeanour; Hero-fication; Militarism; Sport; Symbolic Annihilation

### **Introduction**

This article analyses the ideological role that popular cultural activities are increasingly performing in support of the UK military during the post-9/11 US/UK-led "War on Terror" (WoT). This "war" has formed the basis of an emerging body of work within cultural studies (Denzin, 2004; Giroux, 2004, 2008; Kellner, 2004; Denzin and Giardina, 2007) and the sociology of sport (Jansen and Sabo, 1994; Stempel, 2006; King, 2008). Falcous and Silk (2005) reveal the ideological work of the American corporate media and US sport in 'foreclosing doubt' around wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the face of critical commentary of official accounts. The same authors (2006) analyse the Australian corporate media's response to boxer Anthony Mundine's critical remarks about Australia's involvement in the WoT. Scherer and Koch (2010), meanwhile, provide a reading of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's broadcast of the 'Tickets for Troops' initiative in the National Hockey League, concluding that men's ice hockey helped promote both the war in Afghanistan and the Conservative party of Canada. King (2008),

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Silk and Falcoux (2005) and Butterworth (2005; 2008; 2010) reveal the extent to which the Super Bowl, Olympic Games and Major League Baseball have been co-opted into promoting and normalising official US government discourses of the WoT.

Since 2006, both the United States and Canada have established official military public relations departments. *Operation Tribute to Freedom* (United States) and *Operation Connection* (Canada) seek to manufacture consent for their post-9/11 military operations. Operation Tribute to Freedom (OTF) for example, states its public relations strategy 'identifies media opportunities ... for returning Soldiers (sic) to share their experience with their local communities in an effort to *ensure the public maintains a direct connection to today's army*' (OTF website, my emphasis). Operation Connection uses community-based activities to raise the military's profile and invites young Canadians to 'fight with the Canadian Forces', (Scherer and Koch, 2010). The Canadian Department of National Defense sponsored the Canadian Interuniversity Sport leagues, allowing the military a presence at all university sporting events and access to target recruits (ibid). The targeting of university sport is also shown to be central to the US, with Butterworth and Moskal (2009) revealing the paradox of a US military hardware manufacturer sponsoring a US college bowl competition renamed "the Armed Forces Bowl". They note:

In this context, the Armed Forces Bowl cannot be seen as an independent event, nor can the patriotic and militaristic displays be understood as isolated; rather, they represent a substantive articulation of the form of militarism that reduces citizens to spectators and normalises the presence of war in general and 'the war on terror' specifically. In the midst of declining American public support for the war in Iraq, the rhetorical production of citizenship through sports may be understood as an effort to counter resistance by fostering identification with the 'troops' while eliding the realities of war (p. 414).

This article shifts attention to the United Kingdom, highlighting the plethora of parallel activities that have emerged during this time-period and attempts to explain these activities specifically in sociological terms. It begins by outlining the discursive formation (Foucault, 1972) surrounding Britain's military personnel and its recent operations, highlighting the political-ideological aspects to preferred readings of the WoT

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and the corresponding power of language to juxtapose hero with extremist within militarism discourse. Militarism is used here to capture the ideological normalising processes that present militarism as necessary and natural extensions of nation-states' civil society (Woodward, 2005; Bernazzoli and Flint, 2009). Bernazzoli and Flint (2009) correctly highlight the need to connect the individual to wider society when explaining their successful mobilization during conflict and peace. They note:

... when societies are mobilized into conflicts, this action is predicated on ideas about the naturalness of conflict and enemies ... but in order for these appeals to be successful, they are combined with a focus on moral imperatives and 'obligation to the nation' (p.400).

This article extends this account to consider the constructed moral obligation of "the nation" towards militarism by drawing on the intersection of militarism, popular culture and sport. The theoretical approach utilises Goffman's deference and demeanour work to reveal the reciprocal nature of social conduct and how it enables counter-hegemonic views to be symbolically annihilated, whilst containing debate surrounding Britain's post-9/11 military actions. A selection of illustrative examples of popular culture being co-opted into "the nation's support for heroes" are highlighted in order to contextualise the power of the discourse to embed itself within everyday British life, before discussing three illustrative examples in detail, which expose the hegemonic processes surrounding war discourses in post-9/11 UK.

### **Theoretically Framing the Discourse of Remembering 'Heroes'**

Britain's role in the WoT has faced public opposition, including questions of legitimacy over the Iraq invasion – with three official inquiries and questions over UK government discourses of regime change and weapons of mass destruction - growing concerns over rising casualties – with Burnham et al.'s (2006) *Lancet* article estimating Iraq deaths to average 500 per day - 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

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British citizens (Manningham-Buller, 2010). Yet, in Britain a discursive formation circumventing questions of political legitimacy is becoming institutionalised as *the* way to frame the WoT. As Hall (1997) explains, the discursive formation:

governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it (p. 44).

The discursive formation circumscribes acceptable and unacceptable discussion of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, juxtaposing "hero" with "extremist" in an ideological hierarchical dualism. Hero and extremist are inescapably tied in an inter-dependent relationship – linguistically and politically – legitimising one and demonising the other in a structured moral hierarchy. In UK military discourse, "hero" becomes synonymous with soldier or "our boys," contrasted against the Other, rebel fighters of the invasion/s and occupation/s, who become labelled "extremists" or "insurgents". Thus, the politically charged moral hierarchy of UK "soldier" v Afghanistan (Iraq) "insurgent" is reinforced revealing a powerful, if implicit, hierarchy of morality that articulates for us the virtuous and heroic British soldier to be juxtaposed alongside evil insurgents.

During conflicts, media narratives become powerful conduits between government and citizen. In the US, Altheide and Grimes (2005) describe 'War Programming', as a media-centred propaganda framework that silences war critics, while Gartner (2011) illustrates the power of "casualty images" shaping public opinion around the war. Stabile and Kumar (2005) claim the media helped sustain the 'cynical ploy' (p.765) of justifying war in Afghanistan as liberating women while obscuring the US's legacy of aiding Islamic fundamentalism. In the UK, media narratives frame British soldiers as vulnerable heroes (Woodward et al., 2009). Yet the mediatisation of militarism has witnessed the media acting in a variety of roles, as critical observer, military publicist, or battleground itself (Thussu and Freedman, 2003). Edwards and Cromwell's (2009) analysis of the BBC's

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reporting of Britain's role in Iraq, however, illustrates this media's military publicist role. Citing Cardiff University's (2003) report findings that the BBC 'displayed the most "pro-war" agenda of any broadcaster' (p.28), they explain:

A key feature of BBC reporting is its selective labelling of bias. This is detected when powerful interests – notably the government and powerful corporations – are subject to criticism. By contrast, journalism that faithfully echoes the government line is viewed as neutral. Thus, the assumption that the US and UK governments are motivated by humanitarian concern in Iraq is a 'neutral' view (p.29).

Evidencing an example of such ideologically laden reporting, they cite the BBC's Ten O'clock news reporter Paul Woods, who reported, 'the coalition came to Iraq in the first place to bring democracy and human rights' (p.30). As Edwards and Cromwell highlight, a potentially illegal and undoubtedly violent invasion is replaced in BBC reporting with the polite euphemism 'came to Iraq', and the questionable official orthodoxy of bringing democracy and human rights is willingly endorsed.

Interpretations, therefore, must be considered as part of a broader process of production and diffusion of texts that are inescapably connected to particular social, political and historical power relations. Whilst individuals are able to interpret and appropriate messages in differing ways, through what Thompson (1988) describes as the "space of transformation" and Philo (2007) refers to as "circulation", Hall (1997) reminds us of the intimacy between cultural norms/values and their collective representation in language:

We are born into a language, its codes and its meanings. Language is therefore ... a social phenomenon. It cannot be an individual matter because we cannot make up the rules of language individually, for ourselves. Their source lies in society, in the culture, in our shared cultural codes, in the language system – not in nature or in the individual subject (p.34).

Thus, whilst individuals are free to appropriate cultural messages, they do so not in a political vacuum but in "shared cultural codes". However, the extent to which these cultural codes *are shared* is seldom universal due to subtle differences in the values and meanings associated with contested symbols/actions. Where signifiers have contested meanings, consent is often manufactured as the American and Canadian governments

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recognise with their aforementioned respective military propaganda departments. Therefore, in order to investigate further, Goffman's work on the nature of deference and demeanour allows us insight into the relationships between individuals and the production and appropriation of wider ideological messages.

Illustrating the reciprocal nature of social conduct, Goffman (1967[1956]) noted that 'one man's (sic) obligation will often be another's expectation' (p.49) and that failure to conform and confirm each position endangers the success of both the micro-level social encounter *and* the wider societal implications for future encounters of this sort:

[I]ndividuals must hold hands in a chain of ceremony, each giving deferentially with proper demeanour to the one on the right what will be received deferentially from one on the left... evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labour, the part expressed through the individual's demeanour being no more significant than the part conveyed by others through their deferential behaviour toward him (sic) (Goffman, 1967: p.85).

Deference involves engaging in behavioural rituals of 'avoidance' and 'presentation' in order to act appropriately and in convention with the norms expected of one in whichever role one finds her/himself at a given moment. This is exemplified by, for example, avoiding using the personal name of a superior (avoidance) or positively commenting on a friend's new haircut or dress (presenting). Demeanour, meanwhile involves 'attributes derived from interpretations others make of the way in which the individual handles himself (sic) during social intercourse' (p.78). It is, therefore, important to note the centrality of others' interpretations in the successful construction and reinforcement of identities here, including the enabling effects such a symbiotic dynamic has in the construction of preferred identities. As Goffman explains:

A willingness to give others their deferential due is one of the qualities which the individual owes it to others to express through his (sic) conduct, just as a willingness to conduct oneself with good demeanour is in general a way of showing deference to those present (p.82).

The public, therefore, plays an important role in joint ceremony with the media and military in recreating and sustaining identities and these interactions relate closely to the power some have to ascribe certain behaviours deviant or desirable. Woodward's (2005)

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account of militarism correctly acknowledged armed conflict is only possible if a whole range of 'activities, processes and practices' (p.727) occur. But whilst weapons manufacture, soldier recruitment, housing, facilities, information and communication technologies are essential, so too is the ideological "support of a grateful nation". Thus, Goffman allows us to offer an innovative conceptualisation of civil-military relations beyond the organisational to consider the socio-cultural, discursive and relational spheres.

### **Methodology**

Critical discourse analyses are usually tied to power and social interests (Fairclough, 2001, 2003; Philo, 2007). One should consider the position of power by locating mediated expressions of anything meaningful:

in relation to the historically specific and socially structured contexts and processes within which, and by means of which, these symbolic forms are produced, transmitted and received (Thompson, 1988: 361).

Echoing Thompson's call, Philo (2007) criticises those textual analysts who fail to adequately consider the production and context of texts. In describing the work of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) (of which he is part) Philo explains:

we were interested in how language was linked to wider social processes and how individual meanings and communications related to conflict and divisions within society as a whole ... The issue then was not to look simply at the descriptions which were offered of the world in a specific text, but to look at the social relations which underpinned the generation of these descriptions (p.5).

Thus, this critical discourse analysis avoids seeking to "discover" patterns over a fixed event or mediated product. Rather, it locates *one* common discourse around the hero-fication of militarism and theoretically engages in a critical discourse analysis of it. The main aim is to locate these examples within their wider ideological systems in similar ways the GUMG's analyses have done with their substantive topics.

[I]t was not possible to analyse texts in isolation from the study of the wider systems of ideologies which informed them and the production processes which structured their representation ... This linking of production, content and reception became the basis of our methodological approach (Philo, 2007:14).



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The illustrative examples relate explicitly to broader historical, political and national discourses around the hero-fication of militarism and have been selected because they are perhaps the most high profile examples whereby dominant and alternative discourses around the WoT are simultaneously present and, as such, they reveal an overarching ideological narrative around the hero-fication of militarism in the UK. Three examples are presented, combining to reveal the subtle hegemonic influences surrounding post-9/11 UK militarism. The first two examples centre on the 2009 St Paul's Iraq Commemorative Ceremony because here we see the contrasting narratives captured in one event. The first example reveals the most common narrative (of support) surrounding UK militarism and is illustrated in the deference shown and demeanour given of two of the major protagonists of the service (a grieving mother and acting serviceman). The second example focuses on the media reaction to remarks by the Archbishop of Canterbury at this ceremony, in which he questioned the UK government's decisions to go to "war". Here the annihilation of alternative voices is revealed by focusing on illustrative media articles from two national newspapers (The Sun and The Telegraph) responding to the Archbishop's comments. The final example draws from the world of sport, a well-established cultural site for engendering kinship and the imagined community of nation. It focuses on what is possibly the UK's most visible example of dissent towards the UK's WoT initiatives<sup>i</sup>. Specifically analysed is the media reaction to sections of Celtic FC's supporters who objected to the Earl Haig poppy being implanted onto Celtic's jersey on Remembrance weekend. It draws from Scotland's most popular national newspapers (Daily Record and Scottish Sun) and the UK-wide Daily Mail<sup>ii</sup>. This type of dissent from Celtic fans has occurred in every one of the three years of this newly emerged practice. It illustrates the power of the discursive formation to shape the media and club's (Celtic FC) response to those who have a counter-hegemonic position regarding the articulation of UK militarism and remembrance amid the ongoing WoT.

### **Popular Culture and The 'Hero'-fication of British Militarism**

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In September 2007 British army chief, General Dannatt called for greater public support of “the troops” (see BBC website, 22/9/07) Soon after, a multi-agency campaign of newly created “support the troops” initiatives emerged. Official events include homecoming parades and an annual Armed Forces Day. These have been supported by the Royal British Legion-inspired Wootton Bassett homage to the returning dead British military, an extended BBC prime-time interview of Prince Charles (13<sup>th</sup> June 2008) framed around the ‘tough and testing duties’ of serving UK soldiers, and the Queen’s 2009 Christmas message focusing on supporting the military. Two newly initiated and apparently independent charities, Help for Heroes and Tickets for Troops have emerged and both appear remarkably similar to the American Department of Defense’s Welcome Back Veterans and the Canadian Defense Department’s Tickets for Troops. Television has witnessed both its autumn and spring season prime-time Saturday evening programmes promote the “support the troops” message with X Factor 2008 and 2010 releasing a “song for heroes” and Dancing on Ice 2011 including Tickets for Troops patron Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry VC as one of its “celebrity” dancers. Additionally, serving soldier, Katrina Hodge (nicknamed ‘Combat Barbie’), replaced the dethroned Miss England in the 2009 Miss World contest, active soldiers, ‘The Trio’ released a Christmas 2009 album ‘Coming Home’, soldiers’ partners, “the choir: military wives”, released a Christmas 2011 single, Prime Minister (Gordon Brown) and serving military personnel took centre stage at the grand finale of ITV’s Britain’s Best awards programme, an Oscar-like military award show labelled ‘the Millies’ emerged, Sky News initiated a military-inspired ‘For Queen and Country’ week, and a Sunday night prime-time ‘Concert for Heroes’ at Twickenham was screened live on BBC 1 (12/09/10). In 2008 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) began “advising” teachers on what to include in history lessons resulting in the National Union of Teachers accusing the MoD of behaving ‘unethically’ (see Curtis, 2008). This alleged unethical behaviour included strategically targeting disadvantaged schools to distribute army recruitment materials, a tactic that the US and Canada have been accused of employing (D’Abord Solidaires, 2009). Indeed, Canada’s Operation Connection has been accused of ‘predatory recruitment strategies’ in targeting the working class, ethnic minorities and university

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students to enlist (see Scherer and Koch, 2010). The emergence in the UK of this series of multi-agency practices and “traditions” is remarkably similar to the PR-induced activities of the US and Canadian governments.

In October 2009, a special Iraq war commemoration service was staged at St Paul's Cathedral and witnessed former Prime Minister (Tony Blair), along with senior Royal Family members accompanying representatives of all the armed forces in presenting to “the nation” an institutionalised national demeanour of pride and sorrow. Tracey Hazel, mother of a killed soldier, lit a special candle as part of the ceremony, commenting, ‘the service is a fantastic idea. It makes me so proud to be British and a lot of other people should be’ (see 4NI, 9/10/09). Royal Navy representative, Jon Pentreath, a reader at the service, left little doubt as to what the purpose of such public ceremonies are in fostering desired levels of reciprocal deference and demeanour within and between military, politicians, media and the public when he asserted, ‘it's important for the nation to understand what members of the armed forces and their families are going through’ (see BBC 9/10/09). By utilising Goffman's deference and demeanour work, this call for citizens to deferentially *understand* (which usually includes the tacit expectancy of a dual unquestioning *appreciation*) is mirrored in joint ceremony by military demeanour.

The individual cannot establish these attributes for his (sic) own by verbally avowing that he possesses them ... he can, however, contrive to conduct himself in such a way that *others, through their interpretation of his conduct, will impute the kinds of attributes to him he would like others to see in him* ... through demeanour the individual creates an image of himself, but properly speaking this is not an image that is meant for his own eyes (Goffman, 1967: 78, my emphasis).

This joint responsibility requires both parties play their part accordingly – thus, the military, which cannot establish these attributes and avow that it possesses them itself, relies on others to do this work for it. Therefore, the need for the *public* to understand (and appreciate) is only one half of the equation. The other unarticulated half involves *soldiers* (and other military personnel) needing to *feel* ‘the nation’ understands and supports them by ascribing the positive, heroic attributes to them they would like others to see, making these pleas necessary when spontaneous support appears lacking. The

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following two examples reveal this further. Upon being crowned Miss England, “Combat Barbie” announced that ‘people just do not appreciate the army enough’ (see Daily Telegraph interview 9/11/09). Meanwhile, commenting on the military receiving free tickets for sport and music events, Major Spicer explained, ‘to have the odd perk is great, but *just as important is the thought that what we do is appreciated*’ (Tickets for Troops website, 2011, my emphasis).

These deference and demeanour ceremonies of support are fundamental requirements for maintaining soldier morale. As previous studies have shown one of the necessary conditions in the process of transforming civilians into soldiers – willing to kill, maim and die – is for soldiers to feel the public supports them and their actions (Grossman, 1995; Nadelson, 2005). What appears, therefore, on the surface to be individual behaviour is on closer inspection embedded more broadly in societal norms, values and conventions – ‘shared cultural codes’ (Hall, 1997: 34). As Goffman explained:

Deference images tend to point to the wider society outside the interaction, to the place the individual has achieved in the hierarchy of this society ... the image of himself (sic) the individual owes it to others to maintain through his conduct is a kind of justification and compensation for the image of him that others are obliged to express through their deference to him. Each of the two images in fact may act as a guarantee and check upon the other (pp.82-83).

The joint ceremony between deference and demeanour – with solemn speeches from a grieving mother and pleas for nation-wide understanding and appreciation from active service personnel – provide fertile ground for self-fulfilling mutual reinforcement and support for UK-sponsored military violence whilst at the same time making meaningful opposition problematic. As Chomsky (2002) highlights, the power of slogans like “support our troops” and “help our heroes” is that they camouflage ideological policies whilst remaining difficult to oppose:

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

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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? (pp.25-26, original emphasis).

Thus, both Hazel's and Pentreath's pleas – that others should become proud of Britain and that the public needs to understand - are difficult to object to, yet equally translate, by virtue of joint ceremonies of deference and demeanour, into the soldiers' (and grieving loved ones') need to feel supported – in order to reinforce their positive/heroic position to both themselves and the wider public. Meanwhile questions surrounding government policy become entangled in patriotic platitudes.

Many of the aforementioned examples are banal and, perhaps as a result of this and the hegemonic power to render them apolitical, have witnessed no major dissention. The power of such a hero-fication process is revealed, however, when one considers the few examples of public dissent alongside the symbolic annihilation that accompanies such rare dissention, and it is to these examples we now turn. These are unavoidably selective examples and originate from ceremonial and/or commemorative events, which, by their nature, render dissent particularly problematic in such contexts. However, this opens up the debate to consider the hegemonic power to contain resistance in both popular and high cultural activities where the political is embedded as the banal (family entertainment) and where resistance is pre-determined as poor taste (ceremonies). Maintaining hegemony succeeds when resistance is carefully framed in terms defined by the dominant groups. It is mildly paradoxical that counter-hegemonic voices (and their annihilation) are more common in commemorative/ceremonial events because whilst requiring sombre solemnity, unlike the banal and 'apolitical' sport and culture activities, their politicised undertones are more visible thus more likely to elicit politicised dissent.

It was during this 2009 St Paul's Iraq Commemoration, that the Archbishop of Canterbury asked for reflection on the wisdom of the decisions to go to war. Despite his assertion that supporters *and detractors* of the war may be 'rash', and despite his entirely legitimate questioning of the political decisions that led to the deaths being remembered,

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both the Sun's defence editor and senior features writer accused the Archbishop of 'hijacking' the service 'to spout an anti-war rant' (Dunn and Phillips, 2009). The Sun's major justification appeared to rest on the ubiquitous argument that 'they're soldiers not politicians' and 'we have to support our troops'. Thompson in *The Telegraph* (9/10/09) was equally critical, accusing Dr Williams of 'attention-seeking' and 'leaving ordinary folk scratching their heads'. It should be noted there were others who did not openly criticise the Archbishop. However, it is difficult to find any mainstream journalist openly support the Archbishop's position, with most merely reporting his comments before focusing on the preferred narrative of "heroes" being remembered. Unconditional support for "war", therefore, is presented as *non-political*. Yet, when questions are raised, even within the context of the "nation's" official Church's leading Archbishop reflecting on the spiritual morality of the collective decisions made on "our" behalf, it becomes political and the questioner is symbolically annihilated as an extraordinary sly, attention-seeking rabble-rouser.

### **Sport and the 'Hero'-fication of British Militarism**

Many of the "nation's" sacred rituals have been "helping heroes" since General Dannatt's plea for increased support and just like its high streets, its annual commemoration days, its most popular television shows, its national news programmes, its music industry, its beauty contestants, its royal family and its education system, "the nation's" sport is but one of the fertile sites for aiding the hero-fication process.

Manufacturing consent often involves embedding dominant ideological signifiers into society's sacred rituals, making the United States's, Canada's and the UK's remarkably similar official initiatives unsurprising. Prior to the 2010 England v Wales Six Nations match at Twickenham, vice-patrons of both Unions, Princes William and Harry greeted, as guests of honour, servicemen injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. In season 2009-10, the Football League announced its season-long official charity partner would be "Help for Heroes", and in March 2010 it celebrated its official "helping heroes" week. As part of the public relations activities, each of the 72 clubs staged a designated Football for

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Heroes match, provided a promotional photo featuring players with Help for Heroes banners and balls, emerged from the tunnel behind a Help for Heroes banner and ensured captains and officials posed at kick-off with a Help for Heroes banner (Football league website, 2010). The apparent apolitical conflation of sport and charity combined with an unequivocally politicised message from ex-Conservative party cabinet member, Lord Mawhinney who, in his role as chairman of the Football League, asserted:

The contribution being made by our armed forces around the world is truly humbling. As a nation we do not thank them enough for the sacrifices they make. The Football for Heroes week will *provide an excellent opportunity for supporters to show their appreciation for the outstanding work being done* (The Football League Website, 2010, my emphasis).

Additionally, during Remembrance Day weekend, in November 2008, 2009 and 2010 all English and Scottish Premier League football clubs were asked to display a specially embroidered Earl Haig poppy on club shirts. In the build up to the 2010 football World Cup involving England, newly appointed British Prime Minister, David Cameron addressed British soldiers in Afghanistan with a message of support from the England football manager, Fabio Capello.<sup>iii</sup> It read, 'we are all very proud of what you're doing and you are the real heroes' (see BBC website 11/6/10).

The power of this narrative, of heroes doing good work, often against a deviant "other", is revealed by analysing the reaction that occurred in response to a section of Celtic FC fans who objected to their club's shirt displaying the poppy. They have protested every year this newly created tradition has occurred, distributing leaflets connecting British militarism to civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq and walking out of their club's match after ten minutes in 2008. In describing this, Carson (Scottish Sun) utilised vernacular usually reserved to report terrorists, exclaiming their actions to be an 'outrage' representative of a 'hardcore group' 'plotting to disrupt the poppy day event' (7/11/08). In 2009, a small group<sup>iv</sup> remained outside the stadium during the official Remembrance Sunday minute silence being held inside the stadium and in 2010, a group unfurled a banner during the match which read 'your deeds would shame all the devils in hell: Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan. No bloodstained poppy on our hoops<sup>v</sup>'. Responding to this

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incident Celtic FC released a statement on its club website promising to ‘ban those identified as responsible from Celtic Park.’ It remains unclear on what grounds they are to be banned, with no reason given other than the claim that they have ‘embarrassed’ and ‘tarnished’ the club. Indeed, the discursive formation appears to be so strongly embedded there is a complete refusal by some to allow it to be challenged and this appears to be the main rationale for Celtic’s statement and the near universal negative response by the media.

Prominent Scottish journalist, James Traynor’s headline (*Daily Record*, 9/11/09) left little doubt about the discursive formation, commenting on the 2009 actions – ‘We must silence spiteful minority’. He anchors the event as allowing ‘Europe’s war dead 60 seconds of fleeting respect’. Whilst we should contextualise the apparent ceremonial commemorative nature of these public displays, their increasing seepage into supporting current conflicts cannot be overlooked. The wider discursive and political reality – conflating Remembrance with the “WoT” - is revealed when Traynor later asks ‘who are these spiteful people who refuse to honour and respect the millions who were slaughtered and who *continue to be slaughtered in the name of freedom*’ (my emphasis)? Rather than exclusively remember Europe’s war dead – which in itself overlooks non-European victims and the militaristic paraphernalia so central to UK Remembrance - it is, as Traynor himself asserts, also about remembering those who ‘continue’ dying and being ‘slaughtered in the name of freedom’, a claim that, like Mawhinney’s earlier statement, is undeniably political, subjective and controversial. This articulation illustrates the ease with which “supporting the troops” becomes “supporting the policy”. Traynor accuses the small number of dissenters of being filled with ‘hate’, ‘anger’ and ‘ignorance’ and of refusing to ‘let others remember’. Yet the reality of the situation and its wider political context were overlooked, preventing the subtlety of the actual protest from being revealed whilst seeking to contain and silence alternative voices. The fans remained outside the stadium – making claims that they refused to allow others to remember spurious – and their protest was accompanied by anti-war literature and the singing of a ballad commemorating Aidan McAnespie, an Irish Gaelic footballer who, in 1988, was



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unlawfully killed by a shot to the back from a British soldier<sup>vi</sup>. This was not revealed, facilitating much of the annihilating discourse of 'despicable' and 'ignorant' fans. Thus, potentially relevant and legitimate grounds for objections are overlooked in favour of emotive annihilating phrases like 'spiteful', 'ignorant', 'despicable' and 'shameful', resulting in foreclosing doubt, closing down debate and ultimately annihilating alternative voices.

By assuming the "decontextualised voice" (Wertsch, 1990) of reason, Traynor, like Thompson, Dunn and Phillips in relation to the Archbishop of Canterbury, reveals an ideologically laden framing of the dissenting voices. Traynor presents himself as the neutral, patriotic, rational, caring and proud voice of reason to be contrasted with the biased, unpatriotic (Outsider), irrational, hate-filled and shameful voice of this small number of Celtic supporters. This is further reinforced by Carson's terrorist vernacular of a 'hardcore group' 'plotting' an act of 'outrage'. Dunn, Phillips and Thompson, meanwhile juxtapose their neutrality with the Archbishop's 'attention seeking' 'divisive views on a number of subjects', and his politicised agenda leaving 'ordinary people scratching their heads'. Despite Traynor's own aforementioned assertion that the events were connected to current sacrifices, he also overlooks the fact that Afghanistan and Iraq were overtly referred to by the protestors thus constituting an essential element of their grounds for dissention. Traynor then drifts perilously close to xenophobia, exclaiming, 'these people need to understand we are Scottish ... We don't have any desire to become Irish ... Those who do should scramble over the wall or catch a ferry from Stranraer and leave the rest of us alone.' Traynor mirrors the sentiments of the racist "Famine Song" that has become popular among some in Scotland as a way of racially abusing Irish-Catholics in Scotland by branding them outsiders and telling them to "go home" (see Kelly, 2011). This positions objectors as outsiders, Others and non-Scots, who should go home, and are to be juxtaposed with "us", authentic Scots who all share the same values including universal support for the hero-fication of militarism. 'Hate', 'anger' and 'ignorance' are used to symbolically annihilate the objectors' position whilst simultaneously attempting to demarcate *us* - the established Scottish group who support

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the hero-fication of militarism - from *them* - the 'despicable', hate-filled outsiders hell-bent on transforming non-political remembrance into spite and hate. Thus, with an ideologically preferred anchoring of meaning, dissenting voice is symbolically annihilated by an apparently neutral and objective press.

This juxtaposition of deviant versus non-deviant reveals itself further by understanding the interplay between public relations work and the daily interaction that others fulfil in order to reinforce and further confirm the preferred image of the self (or in our case, the military) being constructed. As Goffman (1967) notes, 'the individual must rely on others to complete the picture of him (sic) of which he himself is allowed to paint only certain parts' (p.84). The current hero-fication strategy, with its plethora of multi-agency 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-à-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. Meanwhile, as Lord Mawhinney's and Major Spicer's aforementioned comments reveal, the sporting authorities incorporate its members' fans into deferentially supporting and appreciating "*the outstanding work being done*". These events are thus *re-presented to us* as demonstrating *our* appreciation. The ambiguity over whether they are government sanctioned or independent grassroots movements are part of their strength. As

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Butterworth and Moskal (2009) astutely note in relation to the official public relations programme America Supports You:

[T]his programme is *an invention of the Department of Defense*. Thus, America Supports You presents the illusion that Americans are independently moved to support the military, when in this case at least, they are given the script by the bureaucracy that depends on the military-industrial complex (p.421, original emphasis).

Whether it is promoting “Help for Heroes” at Football League games or displaying Earl Haig poppies on Premier League football shirts, these ceremonial acts combine to strip the military’s “work” of its realities, which include substantial civilian deaths, increasing casualties among UK forces, destruction of the towns and cities of other peoples’ countries, and the growth and sustaining of future home-grown and overseas terrorists as a direct result of UK/US acts of violence.

Unless one is explicitly speaking out against this hero-fication, thus inviting public derision, one is assumed to acquiesce. As the Archbishop of Canterbury and the section of Celtic fans illustrate, those who deviate from a position of dogmatically “supporting the troops” by turning attention to questions of policy and ideology are likely to be symbolically annihilated in a joint ceremonial ritual that reinforces dominant ideas of patriotic citizen to be juxtaposed with unpatriotic “outsider” and/or deviant. Woodward et al. (2009) explain “the persistence of the idea of the soldier as essentially heroic suggests a need to give meaning to loss ... [T]he need for ascription of meaning reflects anxieties about the legitimacy of the conflicts in which they occurred (p.219). Indeed, but crucially it also gives soldiers a feeling of support enabling them to carry on their “good work”.

### **Conclusion**

Sport’s utility as a cultural form to engender and inculcate symbols of nationhood render its role in these events as unsurprising. Nevertheless, its role as a unifying cultural form remains complex and contradictory as the Celtic fans rejecting and opposing official UK militarist doctrine illustrates. In order to successfully execute a war, governments need obedient and unquestioning soldiers willing to kill and die on its behalf (Grossman, 1995;

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Nadelson, 2005). This is a central feature of army training. Governments (and the soldiers) also require populations to be unquestioning and obedient and part of “the nation’s” training is the annual institutionalised homage to militarism and human sacrifice at Remembrance Sunday and the emerging plethora of all-year round “remembering heroes” events and activities.

Deference and demeanour practices must be institutionalised so that the individual will be able to project a viable, sacred self and stay in the game on a proper ritual basis... Where ceremonial practices are thoroughly institutionalised, ... it would appear easy to be a person. Where ceremonial practices are not established ... it would appear difficult to be a person (Goffman, 1967: 91).

Thus, projecting the preferred image of heroic soldiers fighting terror for our freedom requires a certain institutionalised status if it is to succeed. This article reminds us of the intimate interplay between the political and the popular cultural. It illustrates the paradox of a discursive formation of national militarism in the UK that claims to be apolitical yet acts to reinforce an ideologically politicised hero-fication of militarism agenda. This is exemplified in the unobvious shifting of meaning of Remembrance – from a symbol of *never forgetting* the victims of two World Wars to symbolising support for *our heroes* in Iraq and Afghanistan. When this agenda is challenged, the discursive formation helps commentators overlook their own politicised accounts whilst revealing and demonising the Others’ as highly political and, by association, negative. These processes are closely dependent upon the rituals of deference and demeanour expected of the actors and institutions involved in the joint ceremony. That is, there is an unquestioning deference of appreciation and glorification that good citizens *should* be united in giving to the military, and for those who refuse to take their expected place in the ceremonial order, or worse, challenge the order itself, a special demeanour is given back. Deference and demeanour, therefore work two ways here – First, there is the hero-fication process towards military. Second, a total repudiation and rejection of any legitimate argument against this process occurs a-priori without considering the opposing argument by virtue of the fact *they* oppose *us* and therefore deserve only a negative and dismissive demeanour which is

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manifested in a symbolic annihilation involving branding them outsiders, extremists, and terrorists.

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I teach a range of courses (modules) at Edinburgh including courses on globalisation, the media and sport, sociology of sport, and qualitative research methods. I have published on topics ranging from the sociology of Scottish rugby union fans, Hibernian FC's Irishness, and the mediatisation of 'sectarianism' in the Scottish press. I'm currently co-editing a book on Scotland, football and bigotry (with John Flint at Sheffield).

Additionally I've recently co-written a textbook (with Gyozo Molnar at Worcester) called *Sport, Exercise and Social Theory: An Introduction*, which should be published later this year with Routledge.

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<sup>i</sup> With the exception of the tiny pocket of 'radical' Muslim protestors who, in Luton 2009, jeered returning British soldiers.

<sup>ii</sup> With both the Archbishop and the Celtic illustrations, the media examples were selected because they captured the broad sentiments of the wider print, digital and television mediated commentary of both incidents.

<sup>iii</sup> Around the same time, ex-England international David Beckham made a similar visit, making similar comments.

<sup>iv</sup> Author attended match and observed the events on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at Falkirk FC's stadium.

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<sup>v</sup> The hoops refers to the green and white hooped Celtic jersey.

<sup>vi</sup> The British soldier was found guilty of firing with negligent discharge and subsequently discharged on medical grounds.