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Support the troops: military obligation, gender, and the making of political community. Katharine M. Millar. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 2022. 304 pp. £63; ISBN 9780197642337. Available as an e-book.

Millar's book is a highly accessible way-in to the concepts and practicalities of militarisation in the United Kingdom and United States of America. It explores what she refers to as a "support the troops" discourse, whereby individuals and organisations profess their backing of those in the military. The book is richly-layered, with some thought-provoking and surprising arguments.

For me, there are a number of highlights. Firstly, that "support the troops, hate the war" statements can never be fully effective as an anti-war strategy because they *always already* reify the martial. "The troops" are deserving of our support *because* they are located within a martial institution. As Millar argues, '[this discourse] means that opposing stances – ending the war and supporting the war – may be justified with reference to StT' (p. 94). This is also revelatory of what is labelled "political" and what is not. Second is Millar's assertion that there is a masculine anxiety about non-participation in the military in the modern age, which drives a desire to claim martial authority by showing support for those who are currently in service. I found this both interesting and compelling. This for me recalled work about Captain Tom Moore, where the authors argue that public support for the elderly WWII veteran constituted a form of 'vicarious' resilience, heroism, and militarism (Browning and Haigh 2022, p. 1).

Throughout, the book deftly weaves in relevant political theory to make the case that affective engagements with the military are, in large part, related to our understanding of citizenship and the social contract. In my experience, students of political theory can find the subject dry, intimidating, or both (there are a variety of reasons for this). One thought I had whilst reading this work is that it might prompt students to re-evaluate their ambivalence – or negativity – towards political theory more generally. The way in which political theory, especially the critique of liberalism, is incorporated into this work makes it very easy to engage with, and those interested in militaries might discover an interest in political theory "by accident" as a result of reading this book.

The book poses a range of interesting implicit questions. The book examines the "support the troops" discourse in the context of the "war on terror": what might this look like in a different geographical context, e.g. support for those fighting against Russia in Ukraine? The internet also provides a newer arena for militarised discourse, and it would be helpful to understand how this might reinforce or change the discourses Millar identifies. Further, there is frequent discussion in the UK about whether the UK has "enough" troops: to what extent does a pervasive "support the troops" narrative pre-justify increased military spending? Millar convincingly argues that many "support the troops" statements are underpinned by a desire to "bring them home": how does this shape social ideas of "home" and Otherness, and what should we do with soldiers when they get there? And what does a "support the troops" discourse – which has become "unmoored from war" (p. 70) – do in contexts where the line between war and "not war" is blurred? In my view, this question is especially important in light of Howell's (2018) intervention around militarization, especially the argument that it seeps into a variety of spaces beyond the military itself, for example, the university, and the police (as a result of this broadening, she instead uses the term 'martial politics', p. 117).

In the final chapter, Millar also poses an explicit question of what should be done in light of her arguments that "support the troops" discourse is problematic. Obviously, there is not space to examine this question in much detail, but I would very much like to see her reflect more on this in future. The fact that this book prompted me to ask so many questions is indicative of the way in

which it causes you to see connections and divergences from your own work. This makes it an especially useful resource for those working around militarisation, militaries, gender, or public memory.

My one small critique of this work is the placement of the methodology chapter. As a reader, I place great value on being able to see what an author has done, how, and why. This is, in part, so that I can emulate interesting research methods within my own work. As Millar herself acknowledges, however, this is also “an exercise in pedagogy” (p. 207) – I myself often refer students to works specifically for their methodological value and clarity. In this book, the methodology chapter is presented as an appendix (and is written in smaller text) and I would have preferred this to be in the flow of the substantive chapters. I did a straw poll of my Twitter/X followers on the subject and whilst most agree with me on this matter, around a third of people said they did not need to see a methodology chapter in a book, so I acknowledge that this is also down to personal preference, as well as a possible choice made by the publisher. The scale of this work is extremely impressive, examining thousands of paragraphs from 6-9,000 pages of text; with the placement of the methodology chapter at the end, it is perhaps easier to forget this. In my view, the method/ology is something that could have been front and centre in this work, to explain to the reader early on just how deep and considered the analysis is.

Overall, however, this is a very minor point and this is a work of exceptional quality (as well as scale). I would highly recommend it to both academic staff and students for its empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions.

References

Christopher S Browning and Joseph Haigh (2022) ‘Hierarchies of Heroism: Captain Tom, Spitfires, and the Limits of Militarized Vicarious Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic,’ *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(3): ksac026.

Alison Howell (2018) ‘Forget “militarization”: race, disability and the “martial politics” of the police and of the university,’ *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20(2): 117-136.