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The Operation and Subversion of Gendered War Discourses:
SOLDIERHOOD, MOTHERHOOD AND MILITARY DISSENT IN
THE PUBLIC PRODUCTION OF KIMBERLY RIVERA.

JOANNA TIDY

This article undertakes a discourse analysis of texts concerning a recent high profile case of opposition to war by Kimberly Rivera, a US soldier and a mother of five. Developing on previous research concerning how female soldiers, anti-war women and anti-war soldiers have been made intelligible within understandings of war and gender, the analysis traces the discursive repertoires constituting Rivera as a political subject. The article considers how, when, and with what implications for broader discourses of gender and war, and their transformation, the categories of soldierhood and motherhood were invoked to construct and obstruct Rivera as an intelligible dissenting subject. The most common presentation of Rivera centred on her motherhood, understood to be in crisis due to her military role. With motherhood and soldierhood seen to be antithetical this crisis could be 'solved' through opposition to war. This limited the extent to which Rivera was intelligible as a 'thinking citizen' and reproduced motherhood and soldierhood as stable categories leaving their immanent discourses concerning war and gender untroubled. The article then considers ways in which alternative avenues for transformative interventions could open up if dissenters like Rivera were 'written' as other than fundamentally contradictory figures.

Keywords: Military dissent, military mothers, soldierhood, subjectivity, anti-war.

INTRODUCTION

Women are increasingly visible as active participants in the conduct of war (for example, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sjoberg 2007; Ahall 2012a, 103-4; Benedict 2009; Namaan 2007). But, as this article explores, female soldiers have also come to be visible alongside their male counterparts as military dissenters: soldiers publically opposing the wars in which they have fought. These soldiers, along with those who variously seek to make sense of, support or pacify their political interventions, call on, navigate and contest established logics and repertoires of intelligibility that delineate how masculinity, femininity and war interrelate. These gendered formations of political intelligibility often map onto the lived lives, bodies and practices of women soldiers and military dissenters in uneasy and unstable ways, making these soldiers somewhat "unruly" (Achter 2010) political subjects around and in whom there is the potential for political transformation (see McFarlane 2014). The category of anti-war female soldier is

therefore a discursive site highly significant to our understanding of the operation and subversion of the gendered war order.

This article asks how the discursive logics and repertoires constituting regularised and common sense understandings of 'women soldiers', 'anti-war women' and 'military dissenters' operated in the case of Kimberly Rivera, a US soldier opposed to the war in Iraq who was jailed for desertion in 2013. I chart how the production of Rivera as a political subject opposed to the war (how she positioned herself and was positioned by others) centred on her role as a mother. Her military role was seen to be associated with multiple manifestations of a crisis of motherhood, which was seen as antithetical to violence, war and effective soldiering. The crisis could be 'solved' through opposition to war. I argue that this produced Rivera as a legible dissenting subject who had a valid perspective on peace through motherhood but it obstructed other possible avenues and reproduced the categories of 'soldier' and 'mother' as stable, discrete and oppositional. This analysis reveals how 'common sense' understandings of women, war and motherhood were invoked to discursively construct and obstruct Rivera as an intelligible dissenting subject and how they can therefore both enable and constrain anti-war and anti-militarist political intervention. This is important because in order to be effective, opposition to war must address and intervene in the regularised discourses of masculinity, femininity and war that comprise the gendered formations underpinning conflict. I also consider what avenues for political intervention might be opened up if Rivera was understood as, for example, a more unified subject who was able

to plausibly be both a mother and (anti-war) soldier (with complicating implications for both categories).

Rivera's story is typically rendered as follows. It was when she was working as a sales clerk at Walmart and struggling to support her family that the prospect of joining the army and receiving "full benefits" for them (Courage to Resist 2007) became appealing. She and her husband Mario agreed that whichever of them lost the necessary amount of weight to meet the Army's criteria first would join up. It was Kimberly (Jones 2008). She served as a wheeled vehicle driver in a 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Iraq during 2006 where she "became disillusioned with the U.S. mission" (Huffington Post 2013). The most commonly repeated account of the turning point in Rivera's view centred on her encounter with a young Iraqi girl who she described as "...shaking in fear, in fear of me, because of my uniform... [A]ll I saw was my little girl and I just wanted to hold her and comfort her. But I knew I couldn't. It broke my heart" (Meola 2013). In 2007 she "left the army without authorization while on leave" in the U.S. (Amnesty 2013) and then headed to Canada with her family where she sought refugee status as a conscientious objector. With her application refused she was deported back to the United States in 2012 and charged with desertion. By this time she was a "pregnant mother of four" (Spencer 2013). In April 2013 Rivera was sentenced to fourteen months imprisonment, which was reduced to ten months under the terms of a plea agreement, and a bad conduct discharge. Rivera's (thwarted) family life was the prism through which her political intervention was understood: "[I need] to be with my kids so they can be happy again, and to help my husband, so we can be a family again" (Rivera quoted in

Meola 2013). Eighteen days after giving birth to her fifth child, in December 2013, she was granted early release.

GENDER, WAR AND SUBJECTIVITY

I work with the premise that gender is a social category (Butler 1990; Connell 1995) constituted and reproduced through social practice. The category is populated with a range of femininities and masculinities that are defined relationally and are accorded differing value within society (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). People move between and practise various forms of gender and their entailed power relations throughout their lives and across spaces and contexts as an ongoing “gender project” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849). Gender projects are undertakings of subjectivity: “the varying forms of selfhoods by which people experience and define themselves” and are categorised, defined and understood, so that selfhoods are a product of the social and cultural (Lupton and Barclay 1997, 8) that draw on established understandings about particular iterations of gender and their place and power within the world.

Rivera’s practices of self (such as how she presented herself in media interviews and statements and at her trial), and how others presented and made sense of her (such as which elements of her story were emphasised and which images used to illustrate news stories about her), are therefore understood here as a gender project that drew on vocabularies of common sense about the relationship between war, peace and gender in varyingly affirming and disruptive ways. The ‘writing’ (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005; Ahall 2012a, 105; 2012b,

290) of Rivera in this way produced her as a subject with varying degrees of political agency on certain terms and within certain discursive logics and repertoires. Understandings and logics regarding women soldiers, anti-war women and anti-war soldiers provided the most prominent vocabularies through which Rivera's political subjectivity was constituted.

As Elshtain (1995 [1987], 4) describes (see also Goldstein 2003) the 'common sense' established societal understanding of war, peace and gender links men and masculinities to war and women and femininities to peacefulness. Within this normative account, soldierhood is identified "exclusively with masculinity" (Sasson-Levy 2003, 441, 447) and "femininity is perceived as antithetical to the military" (Sasson-Levy 2003, 456), warring and political violence. This is the binary for which women soldiers are a complication and within which they are accommodated and produced as socially and politically legible. As Stachowitsch (2013, 161) points out, changes in military labour arrangements mean that "gender images cannot be reduced to the dualism of 'war-prone men' and 'peaceful women' anymore", with the discursive field now populated by a range of military femininities as well as masculinities. Women soldiers are often discursively rendered, or written (Ahall 2012a, 105) to preserve existing repertoires of intelligibility concerning the gendered order of war. Women engaged in political violence are explained within society as enacting a skewed or corrupted femininity for example (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, 11; Ahall 2012a; 2012b), or embodying two separate modes of being that are ultimately contradictory, making them liminal rather than unified (Millar 2015).

As writers such as Ruddick ([1989] 2002), Alonso (1993), Knudson (2009) and Slattery and Garner (2011) explore, opposition to war and militarism by women is often understood and practiced as maternal activism. Women's opposition to war is rendered within the logic that femininity is naturally peaceful and protective (Scheper-Hughes 1996; Swerdlow 1993). By virtue of their association with life giving, women, whether or not they actually are mothers, are seen as having a valid perspective on peace (Steans 2006, 59; Segal, 2008, 23; Ahall 2012b, 290).

Common sense understandings of men, masculinity and war also shape how opposition to war by soldiers is understood, practised and achieves political authority. Opposition to war by soldiers is made possible through a complication of privileged masculinity-defining categories such as that of the war hero (Coy, Woehrle and Maney 2008; Rowe 2014; Tidy 2015; 2016; Stough-Hunter and Hart 2015). Anti-war soldiers are written as iterations of martial heroism within which the referent figure of legibility is a warrior fighting for a new (and worthy) political reality.

To analyse how these vocabularies of 'common sense' operated within the gender project of Rivera's political subjectivity I turn attention to the ways in which her reasons for joining the army, process of disillusionment during deployment, opposition to the war and her subsequent fight against deportation and imprisonment were publically articulated and how they enabled and constrained her as a political subject. A discourse analysis of public representations (both self-representation and representations framed, mediated

or originating with others) was undertaken, focusing on a collection of press releases, news reports, public commentary and other public texts such as petitions, all of which were made publically available between 2007 and 2014. This material was compiled by searching news databases, search engines and a method akin to snowball sampling where additional documents were gleaned from links and references in texts already in the collection.

I work with a definition of discourse as a social practice that establishes “a group of statements...representing the knowledge about a particular topic” at a particular time (Hall 1997, 44). Therefore, social practices entail and reproduce particular understandings concerning what it is to be, for example, a soldier and a mother or how war can be opposed. I understand ‘statements’ broadly to relate to a wide range of social practises including linguistic representations (for example, Rivera being referred to or naming herself as a ‘mother’ or ‘soldier’), images (such as images of Rivera in military or civilian clothes and images of her playing with her children) and actions (such as her being the subject of a Change.org petition) all of which are social practices and, through relations with each other, are ways in which a (gendered) social reality is constructed and contested (Howarth 2000, 8) and lives lived as “gender projects” within it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849).

In practical terms, the application of discourse analysis involved a process of textual immersion through which tropes, themes and narratives were identified, such as the trope of ‘motherhood in crisis’. The next stage involved tracing how these elements operated in relation to each other in the narrative, such as how

the trope of 'motherhood in crisis' was linked in the narrative to Rivera's work as a soldier. Drawing on existing understandings of the relations of power entailed in the 'common sense' of the categories 'women soldiers', 'anti-war women' and 'military dissenters' I was then able to unpack how particular tropes and logics within the narrative constructed and obstructed Rivera as a political subject; considering, for example, what avenues of critique followed from or were closed off when her anti-war stance was understood as the intervention of a mother.

ANALYSIS: REPRESENTATIONS OF RIVERA AS A SOLDIER, MOTHER AND DISSENTER

Rivera was not the first female U.S. soldier to refuse deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan citing reasons of conscience, however she has been one of the most high profile. Her deportation, trial and imprisonment generated significant public attention. She was the subject of numerous media articles both supportive and critical by mainstream/established media outlets (such as the magazine *Marie Claire* and regional and national newspapers) and alternative media (such as Democracy Now). Organisations that form part of the military dissent movement (such as the support organisation Courage to Resist) disseminated interviews and features. Amnesty recognised her as a prisoner of conscience and campaigned on her behalf, and peace campaigner Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a public letter in which he described Rivera as a person "of courage and peace" who had demonstrated a "commitment to" making "the world a better place" (Tutu 2012).

Rivera's dissent as a crisis of motherhood

'Motherhood' as a discourse does not have to accompany pregnant or mothering bodies; instead it is the "capacity of female bodies to give life" (see Ahall 2012a, 109) that associates female bodies with the maternal. Kimberly Rivera, however, was overtly a mothering body. She was, for example, heavily pregnant during her trial. It was from the starting point of Rivera's embodiment of an apparent dichotomy – as a soldier and mother of four (and then five) – that the production of her dissenting subjectivity flowed. Rivera's opposition to war was understood as a product of a crisis of motherhood hinging on two particular aspects of her story: her encounter with a child whilst she was working as a gate guard in Iraq and the negative consequences of her entanglement with the military for her own children (and her husband).

Across the representations, Rivera's encounter with the "little girl shaking in fear, in fear of me, because of my uniform" (quoted in Meola 2013; Whitman-Bradley, Lazare and Whitman Bradley 2011, 84-85) is documented as a catalyst; it is a story she told across interviews and it was emphasised in reportage and commentary. Rivera is quoted as saying that the child "haunts my soul" (Molland 2013) and that "[A]ll I saw was my little girl and I just wanted to hold her and comfort her. But I knew I couldn't. It broke my heart" (Meola 2013). The *Marie Claire* article on Rivera (Jones 2008) presented the child as crystallising a pre-existing unease with the role of soldier in Iraq:

[t]he nameless child suddenly represented everything that felt wrong about being in uniform, about being in Iraq, for the 26-year-old former Wal-Mart clerk who had joined the military out of economic hardship, hoping to build a better future.¹

Another article referring to the encounter contextualised Rivera's words with the assertion that it was "her maternal instincts that first landed Kimberly Rivera at odds with her role serving in Iraq" (McKee 2014).

Encounters with Iraqi civilians, especially children, are not uncommon in military dissenters' public narratives, including soldiers 'seeing' their own children in Iraqi children. Ethan McCord was another high profile military dissenter who came to public attention through his association with WikiLeaks' *Collateral Murder* footage (which captured an Apache helicopter firing on, killing and injured a number of Iraqis, including civilians, in a suburb of Bagdad in 2007). Following the release of the footage McCord, a US soldier sent to the scene and shown carrying a badly injured child from a destroyed van, released *An Open Letter of Reconciliation and Responsibility to the Iraqi People* and spoke extensively to the media. Representations of McCord began from a similar starting point to Rivera: recounting the moment he found two injured children in the van he is quoted as saying "When I saw those kids, all I could picture was my kids back home" (Steiber and McCord 2010).

Drawing on 'common sense' understandings of the relationship between gender and war these statements were positioned very differently. In Rivera's case, unease at the distress of the Iraqi girl was attributed by those sympathetic to her anti-war stance to her "maternal instincts" (McKee 2014). For others it was evidence that "women in general, and mothers in particular, are not made to be combat soldiers" (Adachi 2013). Both articulations wrote Rivera into the 'mother' subject position, a category "at odds" (McKee 2014) with being a

soldier. Rivera became intelligible as living proof that the soldier and the mother are antithetical. Focusing primarily on her dissent as a way of resolving a crisis of motherhood presented her political actions as those of a mother discharging her natural duties. This left little room for elaboration of Rivera's critique and constrained her legible opposition within the realm of maternal instinct and emotion (Knudsen 2009, 167) which was rendered in generalised terms. This limited the extent to which she could be written as a simultaneously "thinking citizen" with an assessment of broader power structures, as Eli Painted Crow, "a mother and grandmother who was a career soldier in the U.S. military" (Shigematsu 2009, 416) elaborates:

Once you have taken public action as a mother, then commentators insist on understanding everything you do and everything you say as simply the actions and words of a mother. They, journalists, officials, critics, even your allies, become profoundly reluctant to recognize you as a thinking citizen.

There could, in this formulation, be no intelligible position of military motherhood from which to oppose war: dissent could only be legible through the dichotomy of the two. In contrast, public representations of McCord sustained his soldierhood, and with it authority on war, enabling the more wide ranging critique he went on to make. His response to the children and dissent were made intelligible as an extension of his military service and good citizenship, producing him as an (anti)war hero: "a good soldier" who, unlike his superiors, was "truly worthy of support" (Coy, Woehrle and Maney 2008, 180). His emotional reaction to the injured children was made intelligible within a "tough-tender" form of heroics (Niva 1998; Managhan 2011, 457) that emphasised him running through the scene of devastation left behind by the Apache, carrying a wounded child in his arms (Zetter 2010), and exhibiting "bravery on and off the battlefield"

(Sheehan 2010). Whilst Rivera could have been 'written' into a tough-tender narrative – perhaps as some permutation of the “patriotic heroine” discourse of female soldierhood (Stachowitsch 2013, 167) – her motherhood proved in this instance to be a more ready repertoire of understanding.

Rivera's encounter with the Iraqi child was therefore understood to illustrate the crisis in her motherhood that resulted from the performance of two antithetical roles: mother and soldier. The narrative of military dissent flowing from this starting point is that opposition to war and the rejection of being a soldier and being in the military will 'solve' the maternal crisis. On this reading, going AWOL was more about Rivera's return to effective motherhood than political critique of the war.

During her time in Canada, deportation and trial Rivera was represented as a woman struggling against the military machine to resolve her maternal crisis and fulfil her natural calling to be a good mother. Representations often suggested a contrast between Rivera's supposedly 'natural' “maternal rationality of care” and the military logics that thwarted her, producing those logics as “perverse” (Managhan 2011, 451 quoting Ruddick). Images of Rivera in the media almost entirely depicted her out of uniform and usually either playing with her children, posing as a family group with them and her husband Mario or, in one example, (McKee 2014) signified by a stock image of a heavily pregnant woman in handcuffs. These images made Rivera intelligible as a mother in crisis: caught between the “good mother” and “bad mother” archetypes. She was presented as having the natural inclination and the potential to be a “good

mother” (“caring and nurturing ...[and]...charged with protecting her children from harm” (Slattery and Garner 2011, 88)) but who, albeit due to her entanglement with the military, was a “bad mother”, “harming her children” (Knudson 2009, 169). Such bad mothering was represented as the product of, initially, her role in a morally unsustainable war and then her enforced separation from her family after deportation back to the U.S. from Canada (Meola 2013; Goodman 2013). A mother’s “cultural value” is commonly “determined by how well she nurtures and protects” her children (Slattery and Garner 2011, 90), a cultural value that underpinned the ‘writing’ of Rivera as an intelligible dissenting subject.

Rivera’s thwarted caregiving duties were emphasised in accounts of her dissent. Whilst awaiting trial she described how two of her children had depression and her youngest was now refusing to eat having previously been breastfed up until Rivera’s detention (Meola 2013) (whilst the family were living in Canada). Here, the image rendered is of a mother’s most primary, physical role, nourishing her baby, being thwarted by the perverse rationality of the military justice system. Rivera spoke as a ‘good mother’ when she rhetorically asked “how could I look my children in the eye and tell them to be good people, when I was contributing to causing harm and death to innocent people on the other side of the world?” (Change.org 2012) Here the role of good mothering was seen to entail not just physical care and nurture but moral, spiritual and social training as well (Slattery and Garner 2011, 89). Rivera’s “rationality of care” (Managhan 2011, 451, quoting Ruddick) was seen as illuminating damaging war logics, reaffirming the

discourse of an inherent contradiction between the practice of mothering and that of soldiering.

In a petition against her deportation from Canada, the logics of good mothering extended to a questioning of a broader American national morality: “[we] ask for only one thing: to continue to live our lives in Canada. We want our children to grow up in a peaceful country that values tolerance, respect, and community” (Change.org 2012). This narrative drew on regularised understandings linking gender, nation and peace/militarism, with Canada publically intelligible as the peaceful, feminised counterpart to a masculine US. In this way, the US was imagined as a soldier and Canada as a mother, mobilising and reproducing the maternal-martial binary. This in turn served to disconnect Rivera from America rather than sustaining it as a national project in which she might continue to have a stake. This reinforced the notion that the US was no place for the peaceful (maternal) values that Rivera embodied, leaving it untroubled in its supposed unbridled masculinity and militarism. This is in contrast with the avenues of critique opened up through, for example, an (anti)war hero subjectivity. In such cases the (typically male) anti-war soldier is intelligible as a patriotic American hero fighting to change the nation for the better (including by making it a more peaceful place, a move that that can be achieved without necessarily feminising the anti-war soldier because he has already proved his masculinity on the battlefield – Tidy 2016).

Within a vocabulary of intelligibility provided by the gendered war order Rivera’s critique of American masculine nationhood could only occur if it was

linked to the domestic needs of the family and the good mother's imperative to provide morally, spiritually and socially (Slattery and Garner 2011, 89). Rivera could not call for a peaceful and tolerant nation as an (anti)war hero or otherwise "thinking citizen" (Shigematsu 2009, 416) but only as someone who wanted such a nation because of the positive environment it would provide for her children.

Accounts of the crisis in Rivera's maternalism also emphasised a broader domestic crisis imperilling the heteronormative family formation and established gendered arrangements of political economy. The discussion of these themes was articulated within the terms of maternal-martial and domestic-military opposition and emphasised the exceptional nature of Rivera's case. What was sayable more broadly about the lives of military personnel and how they are shaped by the logics and imperatives of the military institution was therefore limited. Narratives explored how Rivera's husband Mario was being called upon to assume caregiving duties and enter the feminine realm of domestic labour. In Meola (2013) Rivera emphasised how the burden of childcare fell to Mario whilst she was awaiting trial: "without me at home it is difficult for him, as he is taking care of our 4 kids and they take most of his time. Having me home would help him". In an interview with Mario and Kimberly Rivera's lawyer shortly after her imprisonment, the interviewer Amy Goodman (2013) repeatedly emphasised that Mario now found himself "the primary caretaker for their four young children". "So, how will you raise the four kids alone? How are you going to do this over the next 10 months?" Goodman asked. The thrusting of Mario into the position of "primary caregiver" is therefore seen

to disrupt not just regularised discourses of motherhood but of masculinity and fatherhood as well (see Lupton and Barclay 1997).

The decision to send Rivera to jail was written as disruptive not just of good mothering, in preventing Rivera from providing the nurture her children require, but also unsettling of 'natural' gendered norms of domestic and family care and their associated configurations of labour. This was an extension of the disruption brought about by Rivera's deployment, and military role more broadly. As noted above, the narrative of Rivera's military career emphasised the financial imperatives that drove her decision to enlist, revealing that it could have just as easily been Mario in the army had he managed to lose the necessary weight. Rivera was therefore written as a somewhat accidental figure within the military institution, a mother who had become a breadwinner and joined a masculine institution because she was the more effective dieter. Such a narrative sits uncomfortably with regularised understandings of the gendered political economy of military service, in which men are seen to proactively enlist to serve their country, ideally for patriotic reasons (somewhat incidentally providing materially for their family) and leaving wives to care for their children back at the base house. Rather than the Riveras' experience of asymmetric domestic labour arrangements and family separation being understood as typical for military families it was framed as a consequence of Rivera, a mother, taking on what should have been – within the gendered war order – a masculine role. In this way, Rivera could not be a 'thinking citizen' who encountered challenges faced by all soldiers as they leave their families for long periods, an illumination of the military experience that might have complicated the neat division between

the domestic and the military sphere. Instead, her domestic crisis was seen as an aberrant experience of military life that resulted from her (unsuccessful) attempt to 'live' both the oppositional subject positions of soldierhood and motherhood.

On the one hand the narrative of Rivera's maternal crisis can be read as a challenge to martial logics that, coming up against the rationality of care, are seen to disrupt the natural order of family relations, making good mothers into bad mothers and compelling fathers to assume emasculating caregiving and domestic labour roles. On the other hand, the narrative outlined can also be read as containing an underlying lesson regarding how ill-advised it is to attempt to disrupt the gendered war order by reconciling the positions of mother and soldier. Representations that made Rivera intelligible as a mother did open up a range of possible critiques that included a wider questioning of military logics. Whilst the crisis in Rivera's motherhood was tied to these broader critiques, at other times the crisis was seen to reside not in anything intrinsically wrong with war or military logics but with Rivera's poor judgement in trying to be a soldier and a mother. As one critic of Rivera put it, "women in general, and mothers in particular, are not made to be combat soldiers" (Adachi 2013; also Gurney 2013).

Written as a mother Rivera became for the most part intelligible as a woman for whom the rationality of care was defining and incompatible with soldierhood and the broader martial logics that manifest not just in the military but in U.S. culture and nationhood more broadly. Although Rivera's dissent was primarily practiced and understood as the intervention of a mother, there were other moments when Rivera's soldierhood was foregrounded. I now turn attention to

what space, if any, there was to discursively write Rivera's soldierhood as something other than a contradiction to her 'real' identity as a mother and consider the extent to which this produced her a legible "thinking citizen" (Shigematsu 2009, 416).

Rivera as a soldier

Rivera had been to Iraq as a member of a 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and there is some attention paid in the texts to how her disillusionment with the Iraq war was rooted in a wider set of experiences during deployment (i.e. not just a mother's maternal instinct to protect an Iraqi child) including a near miss with a piece of shrapnel (Boardman 2013) and working as a gate guard, a role Rivera said (Courage to Resist 2007):

...was looked down on by infantry soldiers who go out in the streets, but gate guards are the highest security of the Forward Operation Base....I had a huge awakening seeing the war as it truly is.

Moments like this, albeit less common than those emphasising Rivera's motherhood, served to make visible the less glamorous aspects of soldiering and women soldiers' proximity to violence and combat at a time when they were officially excluded from such roles. Both of these elements represent a complication of the discursive gender-war ordering. In quotes like the one above, Rivera is seen to be speaking as a soldier responsible for "the highest security of the forward operating base" who witnesses "war as it truly is" (Courage to Resist 2007). The hierarchies of military masculinity and authority that place combat soldiers – "infantry who go out in the streets" (Courage to Resist 2007) above those who stay within the confines of the forward operating base (who are derogatively called FOBbits) is directly challenged. Rivera's account reveals that it is not only the combat soldiers, the masculine warrior heroes (Woodward

2000, 643) of the gendered war order, who see “war as it truly is” (Courage to Resist 2007). Making Rivera intelligible as a soldier therefore disrupts assumptions about the figure of the soldier such as default maleness – “we can talk about soldiers in general but they are always referred to as male” (Shigematsu 2009, 423), – heroicism, and proactive engagement in combat (Woodward 2000, 643). These assumptions, which sustain the referent vision of the soldier as a hypermasculine male warrior hero both entails glorification of soldierhood which perpetuates masculine privilege, militarism and war, and also reproduces a limited knowledge of war itself (Tidy 2016).

Representing Rivera as a soldier who was responsible for security on the Forward Operating Base writes her as an iteration of the (anti)war hero subjectivity and accords her a critical perspective alongside many other anti-war veterans of Iraq (and in smaller numbers Afghanistan) who are written as anti-war subjects through the terms of their encounters with war’s grim realities, made possible by their “boots on the ground” (Christensen 2008, 155; Anden-Popadopoulos 2009; Kennedy 2009) proximity to war. Importantly, a figure such as Rivera could also productively complicate the (anti)war hero category, ameliorating the reproduction of dominant assumptions about ‘the soldier’ that are entailed within this dissenting subjectivity (Tidy 2016) (a reinstatement that can ultimately serve the logics of militarism). The extent to which these avenues of critique and intervention were pursued however was bounded. The images chosen to accompany articles about Rivera on the Courage to Resist website for example, depict her either in civilian clothes with her children and husband (generally looking happy) or alone, or just with her husband, sometimes in

uniform and generally looking unhappy. There are no photographs of Rivera with her children whilst in her military uniform, a move that would – like the photographs of military mothers breastfeeding in their fatigues discussed by McFarlane (2014) – have the potential to present an unruly military mother subjectivity.

Rivera's accounts of how she experienced her soldierhood whilst awaiting trial were also potentially disruptive of regularised understandings of what it is to be a soldier. She described how since her deportation from Canada and return to the U.S. Army she had been "playing soldier", something that she found intensely stressful: "To this day I can't handle or hold a weapon without breaking out into severe anxiety and nervousness. Since being back in the army, I just go to work every day. Just playing soldier has been bringing up my anxiety"; "[t]o have to pretend to be a soldier every day is difficult, because I am not" (quoted in Meola 2013). A media report (Huffington Post 2013) stated that when "Judge Col. Timothy Grammel asked Rivera ...[during her trial]...how long she remained absent, Rivera replied: 'As long as I possibly could, sir. ... I intended to quit my job permanently'".

Understanding soldierhood as a job and work (in contrast to regularised narratives that position it as 'service', a calling or a destiny for example) has the potential to be subversive of the narratives of war and violence in which militarism is grounded. A subjectivity that encompassed both motherhood and soldierhood as non or at least unevenly contradictory elements would rest *not* in these categories being fixed and stable; rather, it could complicate both and have

the potential to re-arrange the regularised formations of the gendered war order. For example, to speak of one's role as a soldier as a 'job' illuminates the ways in which people become soldiers because of their economic responsibilities and constraints, making being a soldier a financial imperative rather than a noble calling to sacrifice in service of the nation. This narrative, less amenable to the narratives of militarist glorification within which soldiers are so often articulated, would also rearticulate the possible ways of being a mother. For example, motherhood and being the family breadwinner might come to seem less oppositional, contesting the ideas concerning the political economy of military service discussed above.

Understanding Rivera's experience of "playing" at soldier in terms beyond those of a mother's 'natural' feminine horror of violence and instead, for example, as one of the ways in which soldierhood is a performance (Sasson-Levy 2003, 441, 448) about and in the course of which those in the military have a fluctuating and at times ambiguous relationship, could also undermine the idea that soldierhood and its entailed gendered ideals is an innate and enduring category. Revealing the category of soldier as a construct, unstable and contingent for *all soldiers* (not just those that are female, or mothers) therefore has the potential to disrupt regularised (and easily glorified) understandings of 'natural' soldierly aptitudes, a cohesive military self and the completeness of military discipline and training.

However, because Rivera was represented as a dichotomous subject, flitting between fixed and irreconcilable positions, her understanding of her soldierhood as a job seemed to be a marker of her *un-soldierliness* (the perhaps well meaning

but misguided actions of a desperate mother trying to care as best she could for her children) and the instability and contingency of soldierhood was attributed to the crisis in her motherhood (which also remained uncomplicated). Rivera could not therefore be legible as a simultaneous soldier-mother who like many of her fellow soldiers (of all genders) became soldiers for economic reasons and experienced and practiced soldierhood (and parenthood) in an unstable and fluctuating manner. Instead, she was primarily intelligible as a mother whose maternal nature meant she had never really fit into being a soldier the first place. It was regularly noted, both by her supporters (for example Jones 2008; McKee 2014) and detractors (for example Adachi 2013; Gurney 2013), that Rivera had joined up in a context of financial desperation having previously worked – at that point a mother of two – as a clerk at Walmart. Critics suggested that therefore Rivera’s case was not comparable to those of other conscientious objectors who had joined the military after 9/11 as part of a “patriotic duty” to “protect their country”. Rivera, it was claimed was “not one of those soldiers. She simply experienced buyer's remorse and fled” (Gurney 2013). In not being “one of those soldiers” Rivera’s intelligibility as a “thinking citizen” (Shigematsu 2009, 416) was obstructed.

Whilst ‘motherhood’ as an anti-war and antimilitarist subject position opens up some avenues of political intervention, regularised, ‘common sense’ understandings of the gendered war order limit the possible, intelligible reach of maternal femininity into other categories such as the masculinity-defining ‘soldier’. Some form of non-liminal military-maternal subjectivity might open up the possibility to both destabilise regularised understandings of soldiering and

motherhood and advance a critique of war and militarism. The problem however is the tenacity with which both categories are understood as exemplars of a binary gender ordering, even within political projects that seek to remake the discourses around war and militarism. This can leave those more far reaching and troubling interventions within the categories 'soldier' (and therefore masculinity) and motherhood (and therefore femininity) obstructed. In sum, whilst at times Rivera was legible as an anti-war subject within the terms of (anti)war heroism (and through this a productive complication of the category of "hero" (Rowe 2014, 4)) for the most part more disruptive treatments of femininity, masculinity, soldierhood and motherhood were excluded through a recourse to the dogged discourse of maternal-military contradiction.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article I have analysed Rivera's political subjectivity as a gender project in which both she and others were engaged. It was a project through which she experienced, defined and understood her own political subjectivity but she was also experienced, defined and understood by others. The boundaries between the two are rarely clearly defined as they operate within and are articulations of a common vocabulary of social reality. Nevertheless, the analysis presented here illustrates how the terms on which individuals can politically 'be' (including the scope and shape of their political agency) are regulated by the same discursive ordering in which they seek to intervene. In order to be intelligible to others and ourselves and to undertake a dialogue about the world we fit within common-sense understandings and logics because these are the vocabulary and grammar of our social reality. We are subject to these discourses not in the sense of an external ascription but in the sense that they structure our

social realities, our position within the social world and the extent to which we can reorder it because they carry particular forms and measures of political authority.

Rivera's position as a mother, seen as antithetical to soldierhood, therefore defined the possible terms and extent of her political intervention. These were produced as valid within maternal terms, however this constrained her legibility within other categories of dissent and for the most part spared both the 'soldier' and 'mother' categories the complication that a less antithetical rendering might have yielded. This matters because anti-war action must be able to intervene in the broader gendered structures that underpin war including through complicating, subverting or confounding the categories of political intelligibility they provide. Such opposition to war inevitably operates within these discourses but at stake is the possibility of achieving change through them. This article has explored how for soldiers who are also mothers, the terms of legible dissenting subjectivity supplied by the gendered war order constrain the possible range and reach of public anti-war critique.

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ⁱ Material such as this points to presence of classed as well as gendered dynamics in the case of Kimberly Rivera. A full discussion is beyond the remit of this article but deserving of further attention.