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# **State institutions and social identity: National representation in soldiers' and civilians' interview talk concerning military service.**

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Abstract

Theory and research deriving from social identity or self-categorization perspectives often starts out with the presumption that social actors necessarily view societal objects such as nations or states as human categories. However, recent work suggests that this may be only one of a number of forms that societal representation may take. For example, nations may be understood variously as peoples, places or institutions. This paper presents findings from a qualitative interview study conducted in England, in which soldiers and civilians talked about nationhood in relation to military service. Analysis indicated that, in this context, speakers were often inclined to use the terms 'Britain, 'nation' and 'country' as references to a political institution as opposed to a category of people. In addition, there were systematic differences between the ways in which the two samples construed their nation in institutional terms. The civilians were inclined to treat military service as a matter of obedience to the dictates of the government of the day. In contrast, the soldiers were more inclined to frame military service as a matter of loyalty to state as symbolically instantiated in the body of the sovereign. Implications for work adopting a social identity perspective are discussed.

State institutions and social identity: National representation in soldiers' and civilians' interview talk concerning military service.

Over the past thirty years, social psychologists have increasingly come to understand widescale social systems with reference to the psychological process of *social identification*. When he first introduced the term, Tajfel (1978 p. 63) defined social identity as, 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his (*sic*) knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'. Subsequently, researchers have attempted to develop the construct in a number of different ways. On the one hand, Tajfel's original conceptualisation of social identity has been re-specified as *self-categorization*, involving, 'cognitive groupings of oneself and some class of [social] stimuli as the same (identical, similar, equivalent, interchangeable, and so on) in contrast to some other class of stimuli' (Turner et al, 1987, p. 44). On the other hand, researchers have explored the potential theoretical and empirical utility of approaching social identification as a multi-dimensional construct (see Ashmore et al, 2004). Some researchers have advocated a return to Tajfel's original three-component model, and consequently distinguish the cognitive from the affective and the evaluative aspects of group identification (Jackson, 2002). Others have attempted to distinguish, for example, between the process of identifying with a group and identifying with group members (Karasawa, 1991); between self-categorization, group self-esteem, and commitment (Ellemers et al, 1999), or between social identification as a matter of cognitive centrality, ingroup affect or ingroup ties (Cameron, 2004).

Although some researchers have suggested that their preferred model of social identification pertains equally to all forms of social group, others have suggested that

qualitatively different types of social identification may map onto different types of social group membership. Rabiee et al (1989) for example, distinguished between *social categories* (collections of individuals who are understood to share some attribute in common) and *social groups* (social systems characterised by perceived independence between members). In a broadly similar vein, Prentice et al (1994) distinguished between *common-identity* groups in which identification is based on an attachment to the group as a whole, and *common-bond* groups, in which identification is a matter of perceived interpersonal bonds between group members.

In this paper we take the argument one step further. We accept that it can often be useful to distinguish between two distinct types of ‘social group’ (see Calhoun, 1999): *social categories* (in which membership is determined by judgements concerning the similarity, or functional equivalence, of a distinguishable class of people); and *communities* (in which membership involves interpersonal ties and relationships). However, we would also argue that both of these types of group may be distinguished from the construct of an *institution*. The distinguishing feature of institutions is that they need not simply comprise categories or communities of human beings. Rather, they can take the form of hybrid entities, including groups of people, but also including material objects (places, buildings, artefacts), and procedures (constitutions, statutes, bureaucratic systems and so forth).

This distinction between *social categories* and *institutions* is not one that is commonly made in contemporary theory and research in social psychology. In so far as researchers have considered such issues, they have largely been the concern of those seeking to apply social identity perspectives to organizational psychology. For instance, in their seminal paper outlining the implications of social identity theory for the study of organizations, Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 25) suggested that

identification with organizationally-derived social categories leads individuals to ‘support the institutions embodying those identities’. In practice, however, this body of work tends to involve the treatment of organizations *as* social categories (e.g. Haslam, 2004; Highhouse et al, 2007; Hogg & Terry, 2000; van Dick et al, 2004; van Dick et al, 2005), with little exploration of the representation of, or identification with, relevant ‘institutions’ themselves. Consequently, social psychologists often presume that organizational identification can be understood with recourse to the generic construct of social identification, defined as the perception of oneness with, or belonging to, a group of persons (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This kind of approach has recently been questioned by Condor (2006a) who argued that in so far as social psychologists treat institutions simply as social categories, they may fail to appreciate the ways in which constructs like ‘Lancaster University’, ‘the Catholic Church’ or ‘the European Union’ may also be understood to be instantiated in places and buildings, or to refer to sets of established practices, regulations and bureaucratic systems.

Condor (2006a) illustrated the ways in which institutions may be understood as ‘more than’ or as ‘other than’ a category of people with particular reference to one kind of societal formation which has traditionally been treated by social psychologists as an exemplary instance of a social category: the nation. Condor argued that nations are not in fact generally understood, either by academics or by ordinary social actors, as ‘pure’ social categories or even simply as imagined communities (cf. Anderson, 1983). As Cubitt (1998 p.1) noted, ‘the term "nation" serves sometimes as a virtual equivalent of "people", sometimes of "country", sometimes of "state"; it designates now a community, now an environment, now a component in a global political system’.

Cubitt's account of the construct of nationhood as hybrid, and hence potentially ambiguous, might prompt a concern for the various ways in which 'national identity' may be manifested: as a sense of oneness with a group of compatriots, as a sense of place and belonging, or as a sense of 'constitutional patriotism' (cf. Habermas, 1996). The value of this kind of perspective has been explored in a series of qualitative studies which have considered the different ways in which national identity may be represented in different national contexts (Condor & Abell, 2006a) and the ways in which any particular social actor's understanding of nationhood may vary according to rhetorical situation, and the particular normative concerns to which they are orienting (Condor et al, 2006).

Previous research within the social identity tradition has noted how people may actively construct the boundaries of national group membership, and the stereotypical characteristics of members of national ingroups and outgroups, in order to achieve particular interactional goals. For example, Reicher and Hopkins (2001; Hopkins & Reicher, 1997) have used qualitative analysis of data from a range of sources – including political speeches and interviews with politicians – to show how elite commentators can depict Scottish national character in a variety of ways depending upon their particular rhetorical project. However, Condor's approach suggests that social actors may have even more rhetorical room for manoeuvre than Hopkins and Reicher allow, in so far as their understanding of nationhood need not be restricted by decisions over who properly 'counts' as an ingroup member, or the specific characteristics associated with national group membership.

One set of issues which has begun to be considered by social psychologists pertains to the ways in which people can elide or distinguish the constructs of nation-as-people and nation-as place. For example, in their study of the political debate

concerning proposals to ban foxhunting in the UK, Wallwork and Dixon (2004) pointed to the ways in which constructions of Britain-as-people could be elided with constructions of Britain-as-place in attempts to justify particular courses of political action. Conversely, Abell et al (2006) highlighted how speakers in England and Scotland could strategically depopulate the national category, casting Britain as a purely geographical entity, in order to manage various normative concerns over the representation of British people in terms of a common culture or character.

In this paper, we extend this perspective to consider some of the ways in which social actors may invoke institutional notions of nation in addition to, or as a substitute for, an understanding of nation-as-people or of nation-as-place. At this point, it is worth noting that there are various ways in which a nation may be conceived of in institutional terms. On the one hand, a nation may be equated with ‘the Government’, meaning the political executive of a given State. In liberal democracies this might loosely be termed ‘the government of the day’. This kind of construction is apparent in formulations such as ‘French selling off Irish embassy’, a headline which appeared on the BBC news website on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008. In this case ‘French’ refers not to the French people, but to the government of France. It is the government, not the people, of France which is selling the embassy buildings, something which is made explicit in the accompanying article, which informs the reader that ‘Two of Ireland's most prestigious properties are set to be sold off by the French government.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, work which attempts to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, or between different types of patriotism, frequently includes questionnaire items which refer to the government (e.g. Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Rothi et al, 2005; Schatz et al, 1999). For example, in Kosterman and Feshbach’s (1989) influential study of patriotic and nationalistic attitudes in the USA, both patriotism and nationalism subscales include items which refer explicitly to government. For instance, one of Kosterman and Feshbach’s (1989, p. 264) items that weighted positively on their patriotism sub-scale was ‘Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong.’ Thus patriotic sentiment, in Kosterman and



Alternatively, a nation may be identified with the relatively enduring apparatus of State. Although in some countries, such as the US, the Government and the State may be embodied in the same figurehead (the President), the UK provides a set of institutional arrangements in which the Government is clearly symbolically distinguished from the State, with the latter being personified in the figure of the monarch or ‘the crown’ (Bogdanor, 1995; Nairn, 1994). Just as Britain may on occasions be treated as a reference to the elected government of the day, in some contexts Britain may be treated as a reference to the monarchy rather than to the population or the territory of the United Kingdom (Condor, 1997; Condor & Abell, 2006b). In fact, as Nairn (1994) pointed out, the British state has historically revolved around a notion of ‘the crown’, rather than ‘the people’. It is therefore perhaps somewhat surprising that relatively little research has addressed issues pertaining to British national identity in relation to perceptions of the monarchy (see Billig, 1992, for a notable exception)<sup>2</sup>.

In this paper we explore some of the ways in which people in England spontaneously represented their nation (Britain or, more rarely, England)<sup>3</sup> in the context of lightly structured interview discussions concerning national identity and military service. The topic of military service is particularly apposite for the study of national representation given the frequent association between national categories and

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Feshbach’s conceptual scheme, depends at least in part upon the capacity to *distinguish* ‘the government’ from ‘the U.S.’

<sup>2</sup> To the extent that social identity theorists do consider the monarchy as an aspect of British national representation or identification, it tends to be treated as something towards which individuals may have a particular attitude as a corollary of their identification with the nation as a category of people. For example, Hogg and Abrams (1988) cite a liking of the Royal family as potentially following from identification as English.

<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, the UK is a multi-national state. Hence, technically ‘England’ is a reference to the nation and ‘English’ to a national identity, but ‘Britain’ refers to the polity or geography of the United Kingdom, and ‘British’ to a category of citizenship. In practice, however, the terms tend to be used more flexibly in England, and the construct of ‘the British nation’ is commonly used in political discourse as a reference to the state (see Billig, 1995).

military service in academic discourse (Gibson & Abell, 2004). However, little research has in fact studied the extent to which, and ways in which, ordinary social actors may account for military service in terms of national identity or ‘patriotic’ sentiment<sup>4</sup>. In a previous study conducted in England, Gibson and Abell (2004) found that soldiers’ research interview talk actually featured evidence of rhetorical distancing from the implication that military service might be motivated by such sentiment, whilst also taking the connection between military service and extant states for granted. In this study, we take this line of analysis further by exploring the ways in which people in England talk about military service in relation to different possible formulations of nationhood: as a people, a place or a political institution.

## Method

The present study draws on data from a project designed to investigate commonsense ways of talking about national identity and military service amongst two samples in England. The first, a sample of young adult civilians, were chosen to reflect the age group typically targeted by military recruitment efforts. The second consisted of soldiers serving in the British Army.

### *Participants*

Civilians: Thirty nine interviews were conducted with young adult civilians. Of these, 37 were one-on-one and two were with male-female couples, resulting in a total of 41 participants (20 women and 21 men). Twenty-five participants were selected from a

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<sup>4</sup> Druckman (2001) and Stern (1995) are partial exceptions, though their analyses are, for the most part, at the level of national populations rather than dealing specifically with military service. Similarly, researchers (largely US-based) concerned with identifying the reasons why people join, or choose to remain in, the military sometimes consider ‘patriotism’ or related constructs in relation to military service (e.g. Eighmey, 2006; Gorman & Thomas, 1991; Griffith & Perry, 1993; Perry et al, 1991; Lakhani & Fugita, 1993; Woodruff et al, 2006). However, this is typically conceived of in terms of individual differences, rather than as a matter of social category membership.

sample who had completed a questionnaire for a separate project<sup>5</sup> and indicated that they would be willing to be contacted for a more extensive interview. A further 12 participants were recruited at Lancaster University, and the remaining four were recruited through snowballing and personal contacts. All of the civilian participants were resident in the North West of England at the time of the interviews, but otherwise these respondents were sampled for heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity, occupation and educational background. The participants ranged in age from 18 years 6 months to 26 years 10 months (M = 21 years 11 months).<sup>6</sup> The interviews were conducted between March 2003 and May 2004, and took place either at participants' homes, in a pub or cafeteria, or in the Psychology Department at Lancaster University.

Soldiers: Eighteen soldiers in the British Army were interviewed between April and May 2004. Seventeen interviews were conducted one-on-one, and one interview was conducted with two soldiers. Seventeen of the interviewees had been born and raised in England, and two had been born to forces families in Germany before returning to England. All participants were white men, however, in several other respects they constituted a heterogeneous sample. The interviewees ranged from 17 to 46 years of age (M = 29.4).<sup>7</sup> In terms of ranks, the sample consisted of six Privates, one Lance Corporal, eight Sergeants, two Staff Sergeants, one Warrant Officer and one Lieutenant. The soldiers were drawn from a wide range of regiments, with 13

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<sup>5</sup> *'Orientations of young men and women to citizenship and European identity'* (EC, contract no. HPSE-CT-2001-00077).

<sup>6</sup> Where participants did not specify a figure in the 'months' box of the demographics form, a value of 0 months was used in calculating the mean. Demographic data were not collected for one participant (the female in one of the couples).

<sup>7</sup> Precise figures for months in the soldiers' ages were not recorded.

belonging to regiments with regional attachments (infantry, guards, cavalry and artillery regiments), and six belonging to non-regionally based technical corps (engineers and logistical specialists). The interviews were conducted on army premises during breaks in the soldiers' working day.

### *Interviews*

In all cases, data were collected through lightly structured interviews conducted by the first author. The interview guide indicated general topics to be covered in the conversation. Since our concern was to use the interview conversations to shed some light on the variable interpretative practices available to the respondents, and in particular the various ways in which nationhood might be constructed in relation to military service, no attempt was made to standardize the wording or order of the interviewer's interventions.

The civilian interviews were designed to elicit talk about local, national and European issues and identities, and were not presented as being explicitly concerned with the role of national identity in military service. These respondents rarely mentioned military service spontaneously, and in most cases the topic was introduced into the conversation by the interviewer. The soldiers were informed that the study concerned people's reasons for joining, and experiences in, the military, but were not informed that we were specifically interested in the issue of national identity. Soldiers' spontaneous accounts of military service tended to focus on interpersonal-relational bonds or regimental identities, rather than national identity or patriotic motivation (Gibson & Condor, forthcoming; cf. Gibson & Abell, 2004). In these cases, the interviewer was responsible for introducing an explicitly national frame of reference.

### *Treatment of interview accounts as data*

In view of recent debates about the use of interview data for social psychological research (e.g. Potter & Hepburn, 2005), two issues are worth highlighting. First, we treated the talk generated in the interview context as samples of discourse rather than as a basis for formulating inferences concerning the objective referents of talk, or the subjectivity of the respondents (see Wengraf, 2001, for an account of the distinction between these three approaches to interview data). Consequently, we shall not be using these data to draw inferences concerning soldiers' actual motivations for military service, nor shall we be assuming that the accounts provide transparent access to individual respondents' subjective experiences or cognitive processes. Rather, following Potter & Mulvey's (1985) recommendations, we are using lightly-structured research interviews, 'as a technique for generating interpretative work on the part of participants, with the aim of identifying the kinds of interpretative repertoires and interpretative methods used by participants' (p. 269), with the particular goal of understanding how particular interpretations of nation or country may be employed to manage various concerns over normative accountability.

Second, it is worth outlining precisely which concepts and categories were introduced in these interviews. Although it was necessary to introduce issues of patriotic sentiment or national identity in the soldier interviews, our analysis paid attention to the ways in which these were constructed by the interviewer as well as by participants. It would be difficult to sustain a claim that participants treated national categories in institutional terms if each occasion on which a participant had done so had been preceded by a question from the interviewer that also treated national

categories in such terms. Consequently, where we refer, for example, to situations in which soldiers constructed country-as-monarchy, although terms such as ‘nation’ or ‘country’ may have been used by the interviewer in preceding questions, the specific focus of our analysis – the construction of country-as-monarchy – is introduced by the participant themselves. In adopting such a position we are not intending to assume a rather crude distinction between researcher and participant talk, since all talk in the interview setting will have been jointly produced rather than being ‘owned’ by an individual speaker (Condor, 2006b). Rather, we shall be following Wetherell’s (2003, p. 13) argument that although ‘[t]he interview is a highly specific social production, ... it also draws on routine and highly consensual (cultural/normative) resources that carry beyond the immediate local context, connecting local talk with discursive history.’ This means that although the specific context of the research interview, with its own norms and conventions (see e.g. Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006), is important, it is not deterministic of participants’ (or interviewers’) utterances. So, a question concerning ‘patriotic’ sentiment may occasion the construction of country-as-monarchy, but the construction itself draws on the sorts of cultural resources and wider institutional discourses to which Wetherell (2003) refers.

### *Analytic procedures*

All interviews were transcribed for content, and fully anonymised. The first stage of analysis involved collating all stretches of talk in which respondents discussed military service in relation to a national frame of reference. In order to avoid de-contextualising these extracts, the analysis did not rely on these excised segments in isolation, but also involved returning to the whole interview to place them in their original context. Analysis then proceeded with a view to identifying the way

in which ‘country’, ‘nation’ and related terms were used, oriented to, and constructed in relation to military service. Specifically, usages of such terms were coded according to whether they were constructed in social categorical, institutional or geographical terms.

The preliminary stage of analysis involved the identification of common tropes, interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or rhetorical commonplaces (Billig, 1987) employed by respondents in the course of discussions of military service in relation to nationhood or ‘patriotic’ motivation. These constituted stretches of talk involving the use of the same cliché, or system of terms in the course of discussion about a given action or event. The analysis then proceeded to identify the specific contexts in which these formulations were being used, and the rhetorical functions that they were serving for the speaker, using a combination of qualitative analytic techniques recommended by Silverman (2006). Microanalysis of the extracted segments of talk was informed by insights from conversation analysis, and examination of patterns across the data set utilised the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once a potential pattern had been identified, particular analytic attention was paid to all deviant cases, with the aim of developing an entirely comprehensive analytic scheme capable of accounting for instances which appeared at first glance to constitute exceptions to the rule (see Silverman, 2006).

### Analyses

The interview respondents treated the constructs of *nation* or *country* as assemblages of people, places and institutions (cf. Condor, 2006a). In the specific context of talk about military service, respondents were especially inclined to distinguish institutional versions of nationhood from formulations of nation in terms

of place and/or people. For the civilian respondents, talk about military service (especially in relation to the war in Iraq) tended to make available the construct of nation-as-government. This formulation, in turn, could afford an understanding of military service as action in support of the interests and values of the government of the day as opposed either to the individual's personal beliefs, or to the values and interests of their compatriots or homeland. In contrast, the enlisted soldiers frequently mobilized a version of nation-as-monarchy (exemplified in the fixed expression *Queen and Country*). We will outline the details of these analyses in turn.

### Civilians

The idea that voluntary military service is generally motivated by patriotic sentiment or a desire to 'serve one's country' was a commonplace feature of the civilians' accounts. In 28 of the 39 civilian interviews, respondents spontaneously referred to patriotic motivation in the course of explaining why people might choose to join the armed forces. Furthermore, consideration of deviant cases – those participants who explained military service in other ways – indicated that they also commonly mentioned patriotic sentiment as an available explanatory resource. For example:

#### **Extract 1: 'I don't think it's about patriotism...'**

- 1 I: Sure. I mean why do you think some people do join up?
- 2 Deb: I don't know, with young people, I don't think it's about
- 3 patriotism to their country. It's just a career.

Although respondents typically oriented to a commonsense assumption that military service might be understood to be a function of patriotic sentiment on the part of



individual members of the armed forces, there was nevertheless a good deal of variation in their accounts. Much of this variation stemmed from the polyvalence of the referents *country* or *nation*, affording a range of understandings concerning precisely who or what constituted the object of *patriotism*, and who or what the armed forces might be *servng*.

The civilian respondents relatively rarely cast the act of ‘serving one’s country’ as entailing a sense of common identity and purpose with one’s extant compatriots (cf. Turner et al, 1987). Rather, military service tended to be treated as involving the relinquishment of individual moral autonomy to the government of the day. On the one hand, this could be treated as laudable, disinterested civic duty. More commonly, however, the civilian respondents were inclined to cast military service as involving mindless obedience to a political elite in a manner which could easily conflict with personal moral values, and with the interests of the nation-as-place or the nation-as-population.

In extract 2, Joseph, the son of an English father and Polish mother, is discussing the competing claims of England and Poland on his allegiance through the topic of voluntary military service. Although Joseph was unusual in so far as he was able to orient to a dual national allegiance, his emphasis on the fundamentally amoral aspects of *fighting for* any country drew upon a repertoire that was commonly used by members of the civilian sample:

**Extract 2: 'I fight for what I believe in'**

- 1 Joe: If you were to ask me you know what army would I join  
2 if I had to join an army, I wouldn't, I wouldn't erm I  
3 mean if there was a war on and you know and you  
4 asked me right whose side would you take, it depends.

5           It depends what the war was over and what I felt you  
6           know the reasons were. I mean if England were to fight  
7           Poland for instance and Poland were doing it for some  
8           stupid reason I would join England, you know because  
9           as I say I do what I believe in, I fight for what I believe  
10          in not what somebody tells me is the right way to do  
11          things.

In this stretch of talk, Joseph is effectively distinguishing military service from more general issues relating to national identity, belonging or pride. In the context of talk about military service, *England* and *Poland* are treated as impersonal constructs, attributed with ‘reasons’ over and above those of the population. In this case, ‘fight[ing] for’ one’s country essentially entails obedience to some external, and essentially unpredictable, political authority.

Extract 3 was taken from an interview conducted in March 2003, shortly before the start of the Iraq War. In this case, the respondent also treats military service as involving the abrogation of individual moral autonomy to the country-as-government, but casts this in a more positive light:

**Extract 3: 'doing what one’s leaders think is right'**

1       I:       yeh yeh., what do you think about the, position that it  
2           puts, uh, the, British and American troops in who going  
3           to uh, to war? what would you feel like if you were in  
4           their position?  
5       Harry: I think that, I mean they are, they're extremely,  
6           extremely brave.

7 I: yeh.

8 Harry: and they should be applauded I mean they're just, they're  
9 serving their country they're just doing their duty.

10 I: right

11 Harry: and I mean I saw someone, an American soldier saying,  
12 he didn't particularly agree with it but, he wanted to,  
13 stick by his country.

14 I: sure

15 Harry: and do what his leaders, um thought was right, which I  
16 agree with I think that, it's a bit degrading sort of  
17 anti-war protestors, I think it's a bit degrading to the  
18 people that are willing to put their lives on the line, for  
19 our own safety and our own security.

In this extract, Harry is presuming that the 'country' that individual members of the armed services are 'serving' represents something other than an extended self-category. According to this account, serving one's country and doing one's duty by it, represent a *selfless* action (Dickerson, 1998) involving, in particular, the setting aside of personal opinions and moral judgements. Hence, Harry applauds the exemplary American soldier who sets aside his own personal views through respect for his national leaders, and criticises 'anti-war protestors' who are (by implication) failing to put aside their personal opinions. For present purposes, the especially noteworthy aspect of Harry's account concerns the way in which he construes 'country' as instantiated in, and reduced to, 'leaders' (line 15), whose interests he later

elides with those of the population as a whole ('our own safety and our own security', line 19).

In extract 3, we can see how Harry is rhetorically eliding a chain of constructs: military engagement = serving one's country = doing what one's leaders think is right = defending collective national security. However, many respondents explicitly distinguished these constructs in order to justify a different evaluative stance on the war in Iraq. In extract 4, we see a case in which a respondent is criticizing Britain's involvement in the war. In doing so, he forges distinctions between the nation as people and nation as government, and between patriotism and respect for one's national political leaders:

**Extract 4: 'the Britain that we see as our Britain...isn't always the government'**

- 1 I: Yeah. Do you think there's any sense in which it's  
2 patriotism if you like, that people join up for, that  
3 might have an effect?
- 4 Tim: Pr- I don't know er, probably yeah. I mean a lot of  
5 people, j- I think if, if Britain itself had a problem, then  
6 people would be very patriotic and join up. And you  
7 know, and like – I mean although it's not joining the  
8 army, if you look at the massive marches against the  
9 war in Iraq, people thought that was going to be a bad  
10 thing for Britain because it was going to waste time,  
11 money, people's lives, danger, you know every-, of the  
12 army. So that was people standing up, for, for what they  
13 believed in within Britain, about Britain. But you know,

14           it's almost like, like Britain is being pushed around by  
15           Tony Blair, so they stood up against – obviously it  
16           didn't work.

17    I:       Yeah.

18    Tim:    But then once they actually went to war, more people  
19           started supporting it. Opposing the fact that we were at  
20           war but supporting the people who were there.

21    I:       Okay.

22    Tim:    So they support the British people, th- the Britain that  
23           we see as our Britain.

24    I:       Right.

25    Tim:    Which isn't always the government.

26    I:       Yeah.

27    Tim:    Which is slightly different.

28    I:       Okay.

29    Tim:    So.

30    I:       Yeah.

31    Tim:    I mean I- I'll stick up for Britain as a country as an  
32           island, but I might not stick up for the government, at all  
33           ((laughs)).

In this case, we can see how the respondent orients to the specific context of the war in Iraq to distinguish between two forms of military service. The first, entailing collective patriotism (line 6), pertains to situations in which Britain or the British people themselves are understood to be confronted with 'a problem' (line 5).

The other, exemplified by the war in Iraq, involves coercion of the people by the government of the day. In this case, British military engagement is presented as being against both the wishes, and the potential interests and security, of the British people.

Whereas Harry in extract 3 effectively elided nation-as-government with nation-as-people, Tim's argument depends precisely upon prioritising the nation-as-people over a competing formulation of nation-as-government. Throughout his account, Tim uses a construction of 'Britain' as a self-inclusive social category (lines 19 & 23: 'we'; line 22; 'the British people'). This common national category membership involves a potential for collective action motivated by a common patriotic sensibility, and a shared concern to defend ('stand up for') national interests (lines 10-11: 'time, money, people's lives'), values (lines 12-13: 'what they believed in within Britain'), one's compatriots (including members of the armed forces) and one's homeland (lines 22-23: 'the Britain that we see as our Britain'; lines 31-32: 'Britain as a country as an island').

In relation to the war in Iraq, Tim explicitly distinguishes his version of Britain-as-people from a rival formulation, by virtue of which 'Britain as a country' might be understood to be synonymous with the government of the day (lines 22-33). Far from eliding the views of his country's political leadership with the national interest *per se*, Tim casts 'Britain' as an object that is conceptually distinguishable from government: 'it's almost like ... Britain is being pushed around by Tony Blair' (lines 14-15).

It is interesting to note the different ways in which Tim and Harry construct members of the armed forces in relation to nation. For Harry, the armed forces are effectively involved in serving the government, and hence opposition to current military conflict represents both disloyalty to national political leaders and a

‘degrading’ orientation to those ‘people that are willing to put their lives on the line’ (extract 3, line 18). In contrast, Tim treats members of the armed services simply as ‘British people’, and hence constructs opposition to the war in Iraq as essentially compatible with ‘supporting the people who were there’ (line 20). Consequently, whereas Harry presents anti-war protesters as acting against the interests of their country in so far as they fail to support their leaders or members of the armed services, Tim treats the act of joining the anti-war protests precisely as an exemplary instance of British people being inspired by patriotic motives to ‘stan[d] up for’ their country, in a manner which is effectively analogous to situations in which ‘a lot of people’ might ‘join up’ (lines 4-13) to protect their country from external threat.

### Soldiers

Analysis of the soldiers’ interviews focused on stretches of talk in which military service was discussed in relation to *country* or *nation*. In practice, many references to *country* or related terms were fleeting, and consequently it was often impossible to determine the precise referent of the term. For example, when asked about the significance of ‘serv[ing] your country’ or being ‘proud of your country’ in military service, one soldier responded that ‘I like to serve my c- serve my country, yeah’ before shifting topic to focus on family history as being an influence on military service. Although such fleeting references and topic shifts are significant in their own right (see Condor & Abell, 2006a; Gibson & Abell, 2004; Gibson & Condor, forthcoming), they are less relevant to the theoretical issues under discussion in the present paper insofar as they involve no discernable construction of country in either social-categorical, geographical or institutional terms. For this reason, the analysis presented here concentrates only on those references to *country* and related terms

which were elaborated upon, or which otherwise allowed claims concerning a particular understanding of country to be warranted with reference to the text.

*Common character and common geography*

As with the civilians, the soldiers frequently treated their relationship to country as potentially involving more than a simple identification of self in terms of social group membership. Again, terms such as *country* and *nation* could signify a people, a place, an institution or a combination of these, and terms such as *patriotism* could signify sentiment related to any of these versions of *country* or *nation*.

Extract 5 provides an example of a respondent apparently using a fairly straightforward social categorical formulation of *nation*. In this stretch of talk, Jason offers an account of the way in which regimental and service rivalries within the British Army may be subordinated to a unifying sense of British identity in an international context:

**Extract 5: 'we're the British, we do things this way'**

1 Jason: ... you find that there's er, units amongst themselves,  
2 there's you know, very bitter rivalries er, between units  
3 er, and between services funnily enough. But when –  
4 when it comes to er, any form of big deployment like er,  
5 Iraq, you find that that – the sort of small scale er,  
6 rivalries just get sort of pushed aside really. And er,  
7 and the national element becomes more important. It's  
8 an odd – it's an odd thing really. You probably get  
9 small scale little, er, gripes and – and complaints



10           between units that are fighting the same battle groups or  
11           brigades or whatever. But er, when it's a national, er, a  
12           national thrust like – like Iraq.

13    I:       Yeah.

14    Jason: You know, I think it – it becomes a unifying er -

15    I:       Yeah.

16    Jason: You know it's the British army, because then you're in  
17           an international context anyway. You've got the British  
18           army controlling elements of Basra, er, and then the  
19           Americans in Baghdad and er -

20    I:       Yeah.

21    Jason: So it becomes er, it's a global – or sorry, I should say  
22           it's a multi-national effort.

23    I:       Yeah.

24    Jason: Therefore the – the British side of your, you know, your  
25           character comes out and it's sort of “we're the British,  
26           we do things this way” etcetera, etcetera.

On the one hand, we can appreciate how Jason's account employs a lay version of Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al, 1987), in which a shift from categorisation at one level of abstraction to categorisation at a higher level unifies the subordinate categories of the former level in terms of a common identity. On lines 1-3 Jason refers to ‘very bitter rivalries’ between units and services (subsequently downgraded to ‘small scale little ... gripes and ... complaints’ on line 9) which, in the context of a ‘big deployment’ (line 4) or ‘national thrust’ (line 12), are ‘pushed aside’

in favour of ‘the national element’ of military service (line 7). In this ‘international context’ (line 17) common membership of the British Army provides a ‘unifying’ (line 14) identity. In this context, ‘the British side of ... your character comes out’ (lines 24-5), leading to collective action based on a common sense of national identity (lines 25-6: ‘we’re the British, we do things this way’).

On the other hand, it is worth noting that even in this case, the respondent is not simply treating British military service as a function of some perceived relationship between the members of the armed forces and their nation, understood as a social group. For example, it is clear that Jason’s reference to ‘a national thrust’ on line 12 refers not to a British national imagined community, but to the British Army (lines 16-18). When he then uses national deixis (‘your’, ‘we’re’) on lines 24-26, it is apparent that this too pertains specifically to the ingroup of the British Army and not necessarily to any wider British imagined community.

In so far as Jason’s account in extract 5 fails to represent members of the British armed forces as acting as or for British people *per se*, his account was fairly typical of the way in which military service was represented by the soldiers. In other cases, the soldiers could treat the British Army as – ideally if not always in practice – acting on behalf of the British people, but this was normally presented in rhetorical formulations which elided reference to people with constructions of nation as place. An example is provided in extract 6, taken from a point in the interview when Chris had been arguing that peacekeeping duties are not generally enjoyed by soldiers. In the course of justifying this position, Chris alludes to a common understanding that the primary role of the Army should be the defence of ‘our own borders’:

**Extract 6: defend our own borders**

1 Chris ... I think the army – the British army is far too

2 stretched, for the role we're doing. There's going to  
3 come a time when we haven't got enough forces to  
4 defend our own borders let alone – but that's just my  
5 opinion.

In the course of arguing against peacekeeping, Chris treats the bottom line *raison d'être* of any army to protect the national homeland as a form of common knowledge (cf. Billig, 1987). His formulation of Britain as a territory avoids any explicit reference to the potential role of the army in defending the British *people* or *way of life* (as would be the case if, for instance, Jamie had referred to 'defend[ing] our people'). However, at a banal level it is taken for granted that a people exist to whom the territory belongs – they are 'our' borders (Billig, 1995). What such geographical constructions achieve is to make 'our' unifying factor a matter of territory rather than of social identity (cf. Abell et al, 2006).

Chris's reference to 'borders' is of course an invocation of political, as opposed to physical, geography, although his formulation avoids explicit reference to political institutions. However, the soldiers also frequently oriented to *country* or *nation* in institutional terms.

#### *Country as political institution*

As with the civilians, there was evidence that the soldiers were orienting to the possibility that declaring oneself unambiguously *for the country* might be interpreted as a claim to support the government of the day. One soldier dealt with this by explicitly distinguishing pride in the country from pride in the Prime Minister:

**Extract 7: 'Bit of a clown'**

- 1 I: You proud of the country?  
2 Cal: Yeah. Yeah. Not so much Tony Blair like.  
3 I: Right.  
4 Cal: Bit of a clown isn't he?

In contrast, the identification of *country* or *nation* with the institution of monarchy (N = 8; including four who used the fixed expression *Queen and Country*)<sup>8</sup> was used by the soldiers as a device to manage accountability. Consider, for example, the following extract in which Mark uses a reference to 'fighting for Queen and Country' to render the national aspect of military service normatively unaccountable:

**Extract 8: 'Queen and Country and all'**

- 1 I: Yeah. What about sort of, a sense of loyalty to like the  
2 country and that, sort of patriotism? Is that important?  
3 Mark: Yeah it's important, and er, I don't know how they get  
4 it in you but, I know I have and I know my – I know all  
5 my mates will have.  
6 I: Yeah?  
7 Mark: It just comes, I don't know why.  
8 I: Yeah. Is that something that you need to have before  
9 you join up or is it something that's developed?

---

<sup>8</sup> Institutional discourses in the British armed forces symbolically construct military service around the monarchy (Strachan, 1997). Significantly, this is reflected in the official oath of allegiance:

I swear by almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend her Majesty, her heirs and successors in person, crown and dignity against all enemies and will observe and obey all orders of her Majesty, her heirs and successors and of the generals and officers set over me

(Ministry of Defence, 2006).

10 Mark: No you d- you don't really think about it before you  
11 join up. You just walk in and then once you're signed  
12 you're just, I don't know it's just there isn't it?  
13 I: Yeah?  
14 Mark: It's just.  
15 I: Is that generally quite important in the army?  
16 Mark: Yeah, definitely.  
17 I: Sure, sure. Why in particular?  
18 Mark: Because you've got to fight for your Queen and country  
19 and all. If you're not prepared to do that then what are  
20 you going to do?

The first thing to note about extract 8 is the way in which Mark universalizes and explains 'a sense of loyalty to ... the country' and 'patriotism' (lines 1-2) among the armed services, in order to render this normatively unaccountable. Although Mark initially agrees with the interviewer's assessment that these psychological factors are 'important' (line 3), he then goes on to cast them as the consequences of, rather than prior motivating factors for, enlisting in the armed services. His statement, 'I don't know how they get it in you' (lines 3-4) casts loyalty to country as a consequence of military training rather than due to the predisposition of recruits. When the interviewer explicitly questions Mark on this point (lines 8-9), Mark responds by claiming that 'you don't really think about it before you join up' (lines 10-11). His use of the word 'just' four times between lines 11-14 is significant in marking normality. 'You *just* walk in' marks the activity of 'walking in [to the recruitment office]' as routine and unexceptional, and is implicitly depreciatory (Lee, 1987) in that it

functions to inoculate against an unspoken assumption that one might ‘walk in’ for a particular reason, for example patriotism. The subsequent two uses (‘once you’re signed you’re just, I don’t know it’s just there isn’t it?’) mark the presence of patriotic sentiment once people have entered the armed forces as routine and unexceptional, and his final summary (Line 14: ‘It’s just’) again marks normality but also suggests that it lies beyond explanation – it *just* is.<sup>9</sup>

The second feature worth noting about this exchange is the precise way in which Mark constructs the object of this unexceptional, universal, sense of patriotic sentiment that ‘just’ comes to members of the armed services: ‘your Queen and country and all’ (lines 18-19). As with other rhetorical commonplaces, Mark’s invocation of ‘Queen and Country’ can be understood as a device to manage accountability by appealing to sentiments that are assumed to be commonly held (Billig, 1987).

The ‘Queen and Country’ formulation did not merely serve to render references to the national sentiment accompanying military service as relatively unaccountable. In particular, the rhetorical formulation of nation-as-monarchy could be used to avoid implications that military service might be politically motivated<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Mark’s use of *just* contains several parallels with the way in which Weltman’s (2003) sample of local politicians used *just*. Specifically, both use *just* to avoid predicating category membership on ideological commitment – in the politicians’ case to their party and its underlying philosophies, and in Mark’s case to pre-existing ‘patriotic’ loyalty to the country.

<sup>10</sup> Despite its continuing constitutional role in the UK state, the British monarchy is normatively apolitical in the sense that it displays no party political preference, and has no formal input into policy. The implications of this constitutional arrangement were elaborated by the then Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, nearly 150 years ago:

The maxim of the British constitution is that the Sovereign can do no wrong, but that does not mean that no wrong can be done by Royal authority; it means that if wrong be done, the public servant who advised the act, and not the Sovereign, must be held answerable for the wrongdoing.

(Palmerston, 1859, cited in Bogdanor, 1995, p. 14).

Indeed, the monarch and the army can be seen to occupy roughly analogous positions much of the time in that as the constitutional actions of the monarch are in reality the actions of the government of the day, in which the monarch, acting under ministerial ‘advice’, effectively has no say, so the actions of the army are ultimately the actions of the government. In this way, the ‘Queen and country’

This is illustrated in the following two extracts from the same interviewee, Harold, who constituted a deviant case insofar as he was the only soldier in the present corpus who spontaneously and explicitly denied the role of national sentiment as motivation for military service. At the start of the extract, Harold is in the midst of arguing for the importance of the army's regimental system, following a general question from the interviewer on its role in the encouragement of a sense of belonging in the army:

**Extract 9.1: 'Queen and Country and all that sort of crap'**

- 1       Har:    You know like (2) it's not for Queen and Country and all  
2               that sort of crap. It is – and you might have heard this  
3               before and it's – it's stereotypical and it's sort of stayed.  
4               It's a sense of letting down your mates.

In this part of his argument, Harold emphasises the interpersonal-relational ties of regiment by explicitly denying the importance of 'Queen and Country and all that sort of crap', and instead prioritising 'a sense of letting down your mates' (see also Gibson & Abell, 2004; Gibson & Condor, forthcoming). This is formulated as a general principle concerning military service ('it's not for Queen and Country'; 'it's a sense of letting down your mates') rather than his own personal view. The way in which these alternatives are invoked hints at the existence of two competing versions of military service. Specifically, on the one hand there is a version of military service as involving attachment to, and acting for, 'Queen and Country', while on the other hand is a version of military service as essentially revolving around small group and interpersonal loyalties, in particular one's regiment, which in turn draws on interpersonal bonds to one's friends or 'mates'. The commonsense nature of both

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formulation can be seen to inoculate against accusations of interest or bias, not merely on the part of the individual soldier presently speaking, but on behalf of the army as a whole.

these versions is apparent in the way in which Harold invokes them. ‘Queen and Country’ is mentioned without explanation or justification – it is treated as mutually understood that this constitutes one culturally available account of military service. Equally, it is preceded by ‘you know’ – a marker of common knowledge (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987). Similarly, Harold’s use of ‘[not] letting down your mates’ as a preferred alternative to ‘Queen and Country’ is prefaced by the suggestion that the interviewer ‘might have heard this before’, and that even if this is not the case, it is nevertheless ‘stereotypical’ (i.e. commonly known).<sup>11</sup>

In extract 9.2, which follows a few lines after 9.1, the interviewer topicalizes Harold’s dismissal of the unstated suggestion that military service might be motivated by a concern for ‘Queen and Country’:

**Extract 9.2: 'an oath of allegiance to the state'**

- 1 I: Yeah, yeah. So when you say it’s not about Queen and  
2 Country, is that, an impression that’s created, is it? That  
3 it’s maybe er -  
4 Har: Supposed to be.  
5 I: Yeah.  
6 Har: But, I – me personally, the bottom line – I think the  
7 bottom line, you know, how c- this sounds very  
8 mercenary. If they privatised the army and Tesco’s were  
9 paying my wage I wouldn’t really give a shite.  
10 I: Right. Is that the same with a lot of people do you think  
11 or – or are there people that’s er, attached to -  
12 Har: Er, no there – there are people who are very patriotic.

---

<sup>11</sup> Harold uses the term ‘stereotypical’ without any of its connotations of inaccuracy, but rather to indicate something which is perhaps clichéd, but nevertheless true.



13 I: Yeah.

14 Har: There are people but, I'm slightly – I'm slightly  
15 bordering republican myself but -

16 I: Okay.

17 Har: Er, I wouldn't get into – I don't think we'd be better off  
18 – we wouldn't be better off with a president because  
19 that's all political and stuff like that.

20 I: Yeah.

21 Har: But all this Queen – the Queen's all right, no drama with  
22 the Queen.

23 I: Yeah.

24 Har: And her immediates. It's all the other hangers on.

25 I: Right.

26 Har: Tossers.

27 I: Sure. ((laughs)) Because I noticed that the oath of  
28 allegiance<sup>12</sup> is – is all about the -

29 Har: Well it is, yeah.

30 I: Monarchy isn't it?

31 Har: You do. You take an oath of allegiance, but (2) her  
32 majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and stuff,  
33 you know, the other bit is her heirs and successors and  
34 it is – it's an oath of allegiance to the state more than -

35 I: Yeah.

36 Har: The person.

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<sup>12</sup> The oath of allegiance was reproduced on a board which was hanging on the wall in the room where the interview took place.

The interviewer's suggestion that the 'Queen and Country' version of military service may be 'an impression that's created' (lines 1-3) is accepted by Harold, who then goes on to reiterate his denial concerning its actual significance, this time phrased in explicitly individualised terms (line 6: 'I – me personally'). When the interviewer picks up on Harold's shift to a personal frame of reference (lines 10-11), Harold contrasts his own position with that of others: 'there are people who are very patriotic' (line 12). Significantly, Harold treats patriotism as synonymous with a desire to serve 'Queen and Country', and contrasts this with his own feelings which are 'slightly bordering republican' (lines 14-15).

Three things are worthy of note about this stretch of talk. First are the links between the constructs of *country*, *monarchy*, *republicanism* and *patriotism*. According to Harold's line of argument, patriotism denotes an attachment to country, understood as synonymous with the institution of monarchy rather than to a category of compatriots: being republican and being patriotic are treated as mutually exclusive. Second, Harold still adopts normative concerns related to the collective interests of the British people (specifically considering whether 'we'd be better off' with a monarch or a president). However, such a concern with *our* welfare cannot be glossed as 'patriotic' in Harold's terms. Third, Harold's argument against replacing the monarchy with a president (lines 18-19) can be seen as an example of the management of apoliticality. Specifically, Harold is faced with the problem of replacing the head of state following his claim to be 'slightly bordering republican', and orients to a presidency as unsatisfactory because of its politicality. In adopting this line of argument, Harold tacitly assumes the normatively apolitical nature of the British monarchy.

The subsequent question from the interviewer poses a challenge to Harold's management of his own non-patriotic (i.e. non-monarchist) identity by suggesting that the very act of becoming a soldier involves some sort of attachment to the monarchy in the form of the oath of allegiance (lines 27-30). However, Harold manages this by emphasising that the oath is 'an oath of allegiance to the state more than the person' (lines 34-36), thereby drawing a distinction between 'Queen and Country', which he has already dismissed as 'crap', and 'the state'.

This deviant case makes visible a range of assumptions that may ordinarily underscore taken-for-granted invocations of monarchy in relation to military service and 'serving the country' in this specific national context. Specifically, the linking of social action based on attachment to *country* with the institution of monarchy anticipates, and thereby inoculates against, the potential charge that in *serving one's country* one is in fact serving *the government*, or more generally abnegating one's moral autonomy to a tendentious political interest. Notably, these normative concerns do not arise from a conceptualization of *country* or *nation* as an object of social identification in terms of the perception of psychological commonalities of co-nationals, but from the potential of *country* or *nation* to be flexibly treated as a political institution.

### General Discussion

The present findings lead us to suggest that not only did participants construct *country* in terms not wholly compatible with the social categorical model, but also that normative concerns surrounding *country* understood in institutional terms were evident over and above concerns regarding *nation* or *country* conceived of in social categorical terms. We will now consider these issues in more detail.

### *Hybridity and normativity*

In adopting an *a priori* definition of societal and institutional entities as social categories and identities, the social identity approach may only be offering a partial account of ‘social’ perception and identification. Of course, most social identity theorists acknowledge this to some extent, and Tajfel himself framed his approach as ‘relevant to certain limited aspects of social behaviour’ (1978, p. 63). In adopting an approach which treats the definition of any given object of identification as an empirical question – that is, as a matter for participants rather than for analysts – we have considered one way in which the purview of analyses of societal representation and identification might be extended (cf. Condor, 2006a).

Moreover, the present study suggests that we should expect institutional constructions of objects of identification to be bound up with a range of context-specific normative concerns over and above those associated with the assumption of identity based around perceived common character. In contrast to the political discourse analysed by Dickerson (1998), in which politicians presented themselves as acting in the ‘national interest’ in order to disclaim partisan political motivations, in the present dataset framing one’s actions as being ‘for the country’ risked conveying the impression of acting for a political interest. Previous studies of national accounting in England have demonstrated how speakers treat displays of ‘patriotic national pride’, or talk about ‘this country’ as potentially hearable as indicative of prejudice (Abell et al, 2006; Condor, 1996, 2000, 2006a). Specifically, talk which can be heard as assuming a national group united by common character or culture is resisted. The present findings suggest that a different, albeit related, concern is present when issues of ‘nation’ or ‘country’ are discussed in England in the context of

military service. These concerns are different in that rather than arising from the equation of national pride with prejudice, they centre around the potential for talk about supporting, acting for, or serving, the ‘country’ to be received as indicative of support for particular policies. However, these concerns are related in that they also involve the presentation of the self as a rational individual. In the same way that one may present oneself as proud of one’s country, whilst managing the impression of irrational prejudice, one may present oneself as willing to act for one’s country, but not to mindlessly abnegate one’s moral autonomy. It seems that these respondents had to skilfully manage the implications of the construction of ‘country’ in terms of common culture or character *and* in governmental-institutional terms in order to present themselves as rational moral actors.

These normative concerns were managed in broadly different ways by the civilians and the soldiers interviewed in the present study. The soldiers frequently employed a rhetorical resource which was rarely invoked by the civilians – namely the country-as-monarchy construction (cf. Billig, 1992). It might be pointed out that this perhaps reflects the differing extent to which the civilians and soldiers were prompted to discuss such issues by the interviewer – as was noted above, ‘national’ talk tended to emerge relatively spontaneously in discussions of military service amongst the civilians, whereas most of the soldiers did not discuss such issues until prompted. However, the key issue here is the soldiers’ invocation of monarchy, which was indeed spontaneous, as in extract 8 in which the interviewer’s question concerning ‘loyalty to ... the country’ is responded to with the spontaneous invocation of the monarch in the formulation ‘Queen and Country.’ This is not to say that such invocations are not occasioned by the interviewer’s questions – they clearly are – but simply to point out that in answering such questions, interviewees also

appear to be drawing on specific cultural resources not invoked by the interviewer or the civilian participants. As discussed above, the use of such constructions fulfilled the function of ensuring that ‘country’ was tied to an apolitical monarchy rather than to a tendentious political interest, and can be seen as an example of the management of stake and interest (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992). In distancing the self from the political *reason* for any particular military action, one is attending to the implication that one may personally agree with that action.

In contrast, the civilians attended more directly to the implication that acting for ‘the country’ potentially entailed engaging in immoral activity. Many participants offered this as an argument against personal engagement in military service, and it may also be seen as an identity management strategy insofar as it implicitly attends to an alternative, selfless, version of military service which would render non-service accountable.

It is worth pointing out that the normative concerns identified in the present study – and the rhetorical resources used to manage them – are likely to be specific to the particular cultural and historical context in which the research took place. For example, previous research has identified important differences in the particular normative concerns to which people orient, and the particular strategies which they use to navigate these concerns, in the course of national accounting in England and in Scotland (Abell et al, 2006; Condor & Abell, 2006a, b). The possibility of such differences in rhetorical strategies in relation to military service represents an important question for future research. Similarly, it should be noted that some of the normative concerns evident in the present study may be contingent upon the fact that at the time the interviews were conducted the salient military issue was the war in Iraq. Whether the tendency to equate acting for *country* as acting for *government*

would have been quite so pronounced in other historical contexts is one which is worthy of further consideration. It is, however, worth noting that the observation that the construct of *nation* or *country* may refer to particular political institutions in calls to military service can be identified in relation to previous conflicts. For example, the socialist journalist Hamilton Fyfe (1940, p. 259) argued that national sentiment was used by ruling elites to fool the masses into participating in wars, and suggested that '[w]hen people are told "You must fight for your country" it means they must fight for the policy of a Government'. In contrast to Fyfe's observations, the participants in the present study, far from being ideological dupes unable to see the hidden agenda behind exhortations to 'fight for your country', routinely oriented to such concerns, and had access to a stock of commonsense rhetorical resources with which to manage them. It remains for future research to explore the contextual limits of these observations with respect to other military conflicts, and times of relative peace.

Consideration of the limits of generalisation from the present study is further suggestive of the flexibility of national accounting. In the highly specific social setting of the research interview (see e.g. Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006), speakers can be seen to manage social categorical, institutional and geographical versions of 'country' or 'nation'. If constructions vary in the context of the research interview, it would be reasonable to expect further variation in different discursive arenas (cf. Gilbert & Mulkey, 1984). Indeed, we do not wish to argue that the relatively restricted context in which the present data were collected represents a comprehensive general account of the way in which national talk is done in relation to military service in England. There are clearly interesting questions concerning, amongst other things, the way in which national talk is done (or not done) by soldiers in the barrack room, on the battlefield or in the recruitment interview. Equally, the ways in which

civilians treat the military-country problematic in a variety of discursive contexts is worthy of further attention.

Similarly, the way in which participants in the present study mobilised hybrid-institutional constructions of ‘country’ or ‘nation’ is suggestive of the wider importance of the institutional representation of entities commonly conceptualised as social categories and identities. As well as raising empirical questions concerning other political/societal entities, such as ‘Europe’ (Condor & Gibson, forthcoming; Condor et al, forthcoming), these findings also raise a range of questions for authors seeking to re-specify the concerns of organizational psychology in terms of social identity (see Haslam, 2004, for an overview). In particular, the tendency to reduce organizational membership to social category membership could be re-cast as an empirical question in much the same way as the present study re-casts the question of national representation. For instance, a member of staff at a university may construct ‘the university’ in social categorical terms in one context, and in another context treat ‘the university’ as referring to the organization/institution itself, or to a set of buildings. Indeed, in some contexts the three may be explicitly rhetorically dissociated. Future research would do well to explore the ways in which institutional understandings of identities might be treated as relevant by social actors. Specifically, such research might consider the distinction between two ways in which institutions may be treated as relevant for matters of identity and collectivity: First, the dissociation of institution and collective (e.g. people vs institution), and second, framing collectivity in terms of institutionality rather than common culture or character (e.g. people [*we*] as united by common institutions). It might therefore be fruitful to explore further the distinction between contexts in which collectivities might be treated as separate from institutions, and those in which collectivity is



actually *done in terms of common institutional membership or attachment* (cf. Habermas, 1996).

If recent extensions and critiques of the social identity tradition have emphasised the extent to which social categories are actively constructed (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), the way in which social identities can be constructed in terms of common geographical referents (e.g. Wallwork & Dixon, 2004), and the way that membership might be done through geography precisely to avoid implying the existence of a shared social identity (e.g. Abell et al, 2006), the present study has provided an empirical demonstration that one of the categories typically held as being an exemplar *par excellence* of the social categorical model might, in certain contexts, be treated not simply as a social category, nor as a geographical location, but as an institution (cf. Condor, 2006a). Moreover, the present findings suggest that the specific institution which is used to construct 'nation' or 'country' may have substantive implications for the types of inferences a speaker makes available about the meanings of social action. By adopting an *a priori* definition of societal and organizational identities in terms of the social categorical model, many variants of the social identity approach risk neglecting the way in which social action may be based upon, and justified in terms of, institutional identities which are not wholly reducible to social identity as currently conceived.

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