Writing US Identities in the Wars without Frontlines: Literary Perspectives on the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

For many cultural commentators, the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) signalled a new era in which technological advances transformed warfare into what Jean Baudrillard refers to as a virtual experience epitomised by "surgical strikes" and "smart-bombs". In contrast, the Iraq War (2003-2009) was hailed by many as a return to a more conventional form of combat in which soldiers fought their enemy in face-to-face interactions. This thesis argues that such an analysis of the conflicts overlooks the complexity of the war experience for many Gulf and Iraq War combatants. It therefore seeks to construct a reading of the literary responses to these conflicts, including novels, memoirs, and poetry, as well as alternative forms of narrative, which acknowledges the complexity of each war.

Whilst it is important to recognise the ways in which Gulf War combatants experienced virtual war and Iraq War soldiers experienced guerrilla warfare, it is equally important to acknowledge the ways in which these conflicts resisted popular perceptions of them, and how this incongruence affected the combatants. The specificity of each of these conflicts produced multiple literary responses which indicate that combatants' fragmented experiences of contemporary war often resulted in a crisis of the unified self. This thesis undertakes a thematic study of US identities in the existing corpus of Gulf and Iraq War narratives, addressing the ways in which the unique nature of each conflict shaped soldiers' experience of war, how transformations in military technology impacted on the perceived gendering of the military, and how technology affected national identity and the perception of the "other". Crucially, it also examines the ways in which new communication technologies enabled Iraqi civilians to write back to Western discourses of the latter conflict.

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Title Page Illustration

The title page image of the mechanical American soldier is reproduced courtesy of Jim Morrow, July 2010.

Chapter Illustrations

Chapter images reproduced courtesy of Xavier Pick, January 2011.

The illustrations used for each chapter of this thesis are from Pick's current multimedia project on conflict and peace between East and West entitled, 'Journals from War and Peace'. These 'works in progress' are the result of Pick's six week visit to Basra (in southern Iraq) following American, British and Iraqi armed forces in 2008 and 2009. Given the aims of this thesis in terms of highlighting unconventional forms of storytelling (particularly in the most recent conflict), it seems apt to acknowledge Pick's concept of large scale visual storytelling using a mixture of drawings, photography and film.

Pick currently lectures at The Royal College of Art, London. His current projects can be found at: <http://www.xavierpick.co.uk/iraq/iraqsketch/iraqsketches.html>

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Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have offered the utmost encouragement and support through every difficulty, and helped to celebrate every success, of the research and writing process.

The greatest hazard of all, losing one's self, can occur very quietly in the world,

as if it were nothing at all.

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*

Introduction

Writing Contemporary Conflict:

US Identity in Gulf War and Iraq War Literature

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> What follows is neither true nor false but *what I know*.[1]

> Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead*

Communicating the experience of combat is problematic for veterans of any war. However, those deployed in the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) and Iraq War (2003-2009) face new challenges of representation due to the unique nature of these conflicts. This thesis does not claim that these conflicts are entirely different from previous wars. Rather, it asserts that it is essential to explore the ways in which literary responses to the conflicts point to a transformation in combatants' experiences of war resulting from developments in contemporary warfare and the lack of a stable front line. Specifically, it examines how the combination of new and traditional war experiences can result in the crisis of the combatants' unified identity.

The Wars without Frontlines

The Gulf War marked a point at which the temporality of war shifted. Although the Vietnam War is often perceived as the first media war in many ways, the Gulf was the first war in which media coverage was instantaneous. The nature of the Gulf conflict led many cultural commentators to question its status as a war. Noam Chomsky highlights the asymmetrical

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[1] Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 3.

nature of the conflict: 'As I understand the concept of "war", it involves two sides in combat, say, shooting at each other'.[2] Chomsky takes the view that such a conflict should not be considered a war against a powerful military force as the media encouraged Western audiences to believe, but rather it was, as Richard Keeble describes it, 'a 42-day secret massacre hidden behind the media construct of heroic warfare'.[3] Jean Baudrillard argues that the perceived virtuality of the conflict eclipsed the real events in the Gulf region. In a series of three articles written at various points before, during and after the conflict, (which were later collected under the title of the concluding article, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*), Baudrillard seems to suggest that the Gulf War did not occur. Contrary to popular belief, his suggestion was not that nothing happened in the Gulf, but rather that a form of virtual displacement was initiated by allowing the televisual spectator into the battle zone. Like Chomsky, Baudrillard points out that the Gulf challenged public understanding of the nature of war: 'war has always involved an antagonistic and destructive confrontation between adversaries, a dual relation between warring parties'.[4] The outcome was inevitable since the Gulf was a virtual war in two senses: a 'virtual war which results from the strategy of deterrence and the virtual informational war which we experience through the media'.[5] However, for Gulf War combatants, it is this perceived virtuality that problematises their experience. Gulf War soldiers were processing information from several sources, both in terms of their own perception and the information processed through technological sources. As this thesis explores in Chapter One, such a multiplicity of perceptions can cause a fragmentation of the self as combatants develop several identities in order to process all of

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[2] Noam Chomsky, 'The Media and the War: What War?', in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf - A Global Perspective*, ed. by Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner and Herbert I. Schiller (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 51-66 (p. 51).
[3] Richard Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press: New Militarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare* (Luton: John Libbey Media, 1998), p. 18.
[4] Paul Patton, 'Introduction', in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Jean Baudrillard, trans. by Paul Patton (Sydney: Power, 2004), p. 17.
[5] Patton, 'Introduction', p. 16-7.

the information and perform conflicting roles. The main cause of this fragmentation is the inability to reconcile the virtual images they perceive on the computer screen with the real consequences of their actions. In addition to this, combatants also live in fear of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) weapons attacks. Although such fragmentation of the self occurred in previous conflict situations, the Gulf War marks the point at which soldiers began to display an increased awareness of the threat posed to their selfhood. Crucially, many combatants struggle to come to terms with or communicate their own experience of the war since the public perception of the Gulf as a virtual war conflicts with their own experiences and resultant trauma. Indeed, due to the apparently virtual nature of the war, many veterans fail to acknowledge their actions as real combat and feel unable to claim that they suffer from genuine war trauma.

The later Iraq War was also subject to misrepresentation in the mainstream media and in some critical responses to it. Due to the guerrilla nature of the conflict, the Iraq War was widely perceived as a return to a more familiar style of warfare. Certainly combatants deployed to Iraq since 2003 were engaged daily with local people, both civilians and insurgents. Just as in the Gulf conflict, the Iraq War lacked a stable frontline, thus exposing its combatants to the continuous threat of sniper attacks, suicide bombers, and Improvised Explosive Device (IED), Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) weapon attacks. Due to the nature of the injuries, the Iraq War saw the highest percentage of amputees of any US war,[6] and soldiers endured trauma in both traditional and new forms. Although increased face-to-face interaction in the more recent conflict led to many combatants experiencing physical trauma in more conventional terms, this does not exclude them from the kinds of psychological trauma that result from the particular technologies employed in these conflicts. Many soldiers in the Iraq War were

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[6] *Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq*, dir. by Jon Alpert and Ellen Goosenburg Kent (HBO documentaries, 2007), first aired on 9 September 2007.

engaged in a unique combination of both technologically-mediated and face-to-face combat (for example, those using bomb disposal robots or deploying long range missiles). To the same extent that it would be misguided to claim that the Gulf War was a purely virtual war, to categorise the Iraq War as straightforward guerrilla combat would be to overlook its complexity.

Representing the War Experience: The Writers

Kali Tal identifies the difficulty in communicating the experience of trauma through literature: 'Trauma literature demonstrates the unbridgeable gap between writer and reader and thus defines itself by the impossibility of its task – the communication of the traumatic experience'.[7] For the writers of Gulf and Iraq War narratives, describing the traumatic experience to their readers is especially challenging; they attempt to convey the experience of trauma in conflicts which problematise the definition of traumatic experience. Existing literary forms cannot adequately describe the "real" experience of the Gulf and Iraq wars. Just as with Vietnam, the new kind of warfare creates a unique experience which demands a shift to a new narrative paradigm. This thesis explores how veterans of these conflicts attempt to represent their experiences of contemporary war and the impact of these experiences on their sense of self. The novels that emerged from the Gulf and Iraq wars draw attention to the idea of a loss of the unified identity through warfare (and this is demonstrated especially well by those texts that construct disjointed narratives and those that use more visibly modes of technological narration). Perhaps contemporary war calls for new ways of considering the combatant's identity and various selves. One identity is not enough; instead, one must be divided and categorised by a variety of identities. Those in a combat zone are not secure in

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[7] Kali Tal, 'Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma', in *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*, ed. by Philip K. Jason (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991), pp. 217-50 (p. 218).

their identity, be it in terms of nationality, gender, or even as soldier or civilian. Although participation in all wars results in fragmentation of the self to some extent, the specific nature of these conflicts foregrounds this, making combatants increasingly aware of the threat to their unified identities. The advent of what is often described as "intelligent" machinery has caused commentators to reconsider the status of the human soldier in relation to warfare and technology and, furthermore, has problematised what it means to be human.[8] The psychological implications of such an uncertainty are immense and this is evident throughout the texts. Experiences of contemporary war are different to those of previous conflicts and narratives have evolved in order to construct a range of responses to the experience. The texts produced in response to contemporary war offer alternative perspectives to official discourse through a range of conflicting micro-narratives. Gulf War texts, in particular, explore the re-creation of the feeling of combat rather than necessarily providing a direct account. Many of the texts are explicit in their recognition of their status as fictional accounts and construct disconcerting scenarios in order to portray the fragmentation of identity and crisis of the self that many combatants encountered in the conflict. Reconciling the perceived virtual nature of the war with their own experiences, coping with the distancing of consequences from their actions, and enduring a sense of superfluity became central to the Gulf War experience for many of the authors explored in this study.

The demands of accurately depicting wars without discernible frontlines have made for fascinating transformations in the literary forms emerging from the conflict in Iraq. While the narratives from the Gulf War largely took the form of novels, short stories, and the occasional memoir, the Iraq War produced a new generation of narratives in very different formats, including memoirs, poetry, graphic novels and internet weblogs. The conflict has

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[8] Manuel DeLanda considers the relationship between human and machine in warfare in *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 7, and Chris Hables Gray explores the possibilities for cyborg soldiers in 'The Cyborg Soldier-Future/Present', in *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 195-211.

also spawned a multitude of filmic responses, television series and videogames.[9] Perhaps as a result of the remasculinisation of US identity which appears to be operating in the most recent of the two conflicts, texts emerging from the Iraq War do not operate within the same paradigm as Gulf War texts. Although there are many references to post-Vietnam era films in Iraq War narratives,[10] there are very few references to Gulf War cultural responses as framing the Iraq War experience or its literary outputs. This could be due to the short period of time that elapsed between the two wars, to the fundamental differences between the two American-Iraqi conflicts, or to reluctance on the part of Hollywood publishers to engage with ongoing conflict.

Alongside the Iraq War came the phenomenon of the internet weblog (or blog), and thus the opportunity for a new voice to be heard in the West: the voice of the Iraqi citizen. Bloggers such as the 'Bagdad Blogger', Salam Pax, and the anonymous blogger, known by the pseudonym of 'Riverbend', communicate their experiences of war and occupation to the world outside Iraq. This new method of creating war narratives provides yet more ways of perceiving identity and for reconsidering the relationship between humans and machines. Communicating through blogs opens up questions concerning cybernetic relationships with machines at the interface of the screen, and the possibility of creating a new "cyberidentity" for the author. In the Iraq War, it is not only relationships with military technology, but also communication technologies, which problematise the author's self. The boundaries between author and reader are transgressed in the sense that reading narratives becomes a more explicitly interactive process. The interactive Gulf War accessed via the television screen is taken one step further as the reader has the option to e-mail the blogger, thus constructing the opportunity for dialogue. Such media present some compelling questions: what are the

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[9] Chapter Two discusses the different formats of these literary and cultural responses in further detail.

[10] In particular, frequent references are made to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) in many of the novels and memoirs.

implications when the blog is transcribed into the form of the printed book and this interactive element is removed for the reader? How much can be read into the fact that since 2003 the only accounts to emerge from the Iraq war are in the register of documentary? These transformations could be rationalised with the observation that memoirs and blogspots are simply quicker to produce than fiction. To write a personal account of an event is both swifter and perhaps less provocative than producing a fiction based on second-hand accounts of real-life events. It is also important to consider, and Chapter Six will do this, whether these new forms of narrative describe the experience of the Iraq war more effectively than those written in traditional printed form.

Reading Contemporary War: The Critics

Despite the substantial body of literature which has emerged out of both the Gulf and Iraq wars, very little critical material has followed. The relationship of contemporary warfare to the media is well established within cultural theory, by such prominent theorists as Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio and Noam Chomsky, but what is yet to be established is the impact of the Gulf and Iraq wars on the generic and thematic conventions that can be found in US war literature.

Most Gulf War literature has achieved little more than a brief passing reference in collections of war literature such as Sebastian Faulks and Jorg Hensgen's *The Vintage Book of War Stories* (1999). The excerpt from Christopher John Farley's novel *My Favourite War: A Novel* (1996) is appended to this anthology, seemingly as a token acknowledgement of the idea of technologically-mediated conflict. The literature of the Gulf shares this exclusion from collections of American war literature with narratives that emerged from the Korean War, since both conflicts signify an 'event that the United States is anxious to forget; for the

most part…. [and] the fiction that emerges from that war will not prohibit the processes'.[11] However, perhaps it is not the desire to forget the event which causes these narratives to be overlooked, but rather the difficulty in constructing a critical reading of the narratives of what is frequently perceived as a technologically-mediated, instantaneous war. Margaret Norris's *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000) ably demonstrates the problem for critics of Gulf War literature. While the rest of her chapters examine fiction produced from various wars, the focus shifts for her chapter on the Gulf War, 'Only the Guns Have Eyes: Military Censorship and the Body Count in the Persian Gulf War'. Norris' chapter discusses responses to the media representation of the Gulf War and cultural writing, by commentators such as Jean Baudrillard and Christopher Norris. However, no mention is made of the fiction or other narratives which emerged from the conflict, much less is any literary critical reading offered, as is the case with the preceding chapters. To some extent, this lack of literary critical responses to Gulf War texts could be attributed to the close proximity in historical terms of the events themselves taking place. In any literary genre, there is often a delay between the emergence of a body of writing and the critical literary response.[12]

If critical responses to the Gulf at the beginning of the 2000s focused on the media impact of the war, then more recently several articles have focused on high profile Gulf War texts such as Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (2003). The most notable contributions appear in the final section of a collection of

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[11] Wayne Charles Miller, *An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction. A History of the American Military Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 245.

[12] The volatile political situation surrounding these wars could also be a contributing factor to the hesitant response by literary critics. Such controversial events seem to discourage any kind of academic commentary in the immediate aftermath. In the years following the first Gulf War a huge amount of cultural commentary emerged, as did a substantial volume of literature which used the Gulf War as its setting or central theme, with some texts reaching publication as early as 1992 (for example, John J. Nance's *Scorpion Strike*). Despite this, in the fifteen years following the end of the first Gulf War, there has been little literary critical analysis of the texts produced. This has far reaching implications regarding issues of censorship and freedom of speech. Many of the texts written immediately following the Gulf conflict were quite open in their criticism of the organisation of US military action, much more so than the media of the time, and, in many cases, anticipated later developments in cultural theory. There is a freedom available to the medium of literature that allows for a more open criticism of dominant government discourse. This, however, is apparently not always carried through to critical discussion of the material.

articles which reconsider the impact of Vietnam literature from a twenty-first century perspective, Mark Heberle's *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art* (2009). Since the aim of this particular collection is to provide new perspectives on the Vietnam War, it is understandable that articles such as Michael Zeitlin's 'Vietnam and Imaginary Geography in Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*'[13] and Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton's '"I'm not trying to compete with you": Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space'[14] frame the Gulf War narratives they discuss in the Vietnam narrative paradigm. Piedmont-Marton's text, in particular, situates Gulf War literature as the unworthy successor to Vietnam narratives. She claims that the war in Vietnam threatens to overwhelm the attempts of Gulf War soldiers to tell their stories.[15] Whilst it is important to acknowledge the legacy of Vietnam in a reading of Gulf War texts, it is rather limiting to define Gulf War narratives purely by their relation to preceding wars or their literary responses. This thesis argues that such a reading neglects many important themes which are exclusive to Gulf War narratives. By positioning the Gulf War as a less transformative conflict than the Vietnam War, Piedmont-Marton does not fully explore the new challenges that engagement in a perceived virtual war presents to the soldier.[16] It should be noted, however, that her earlier essay, 'Writing Against the Vietnam War in Two Gulf War Memoirs' (included in Alex Vernon's *Arms and the Self: War, the Military and Autobiographical Writing*, 2005), provides a compelling reading of masculinity in Swofford's text and Joel Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express*. Indeed, Piedmont-Marton is one of the few critics who have attempted to move beyond the popular *Jarhead* in her analysis of Gulf War literature. Although the focus

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[13] Michael Zeitlin, 'Vietnam and Imagined Geography in Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*', in *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art*, ed. by Mark Heberle (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 422-32.

[14] Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton, '"I'm not trying to compete with you": Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', in *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art*, ed. by Mark Heberle (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 433-43.

[15] Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', p. 433.

[16] Piedmont-Marton, 'Writing Against the Vietnam War in Two Gulf War Memoirs', in *Arms and the Self: War, the Military and Autobiographical Writing*, ed. by Alex Vernon (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2005), pp. 257-72 (p. 265).

of her later article limits her exploration of the genre, Piedmont-Marton acknowledges the literary responses to the war, including readings of Andrew Huebner's *We Pierce* (2003) and Kim Ponders' *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* (2005). Particularly intriguing is the tendency of literary critics to focus on Gulf War narratives produced in the twenty-first century, rather than those published in the 1990s. Perhaps this can be partly attributed to the post-September 11 interest in the conflict and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Certainly, the filmic adaptation of Swofford's text in this period was met with interest. It could also be due to the fact that some of the later contributions to the Gulf War sub-genre demonstrate an awareness of the potential links to Vietnam narratives and are therefore easier to situate in the American War genre through their relation to other wars.

Iraq War narratives, on the other hand, have been much quicker to attract critical attention. This could be partly attributed to the volume and rapid nature of their production. Thus far, the majority of Iraq War texts take the form of memoirs or apparently instant modes of production such as blogs. In addition to this, the perception of the Iraq War as a return to familiar ground warfare comprising face-to-face contact makes it easier to construct a reading of its texts in relation to previous war literature. Kathy Phillips' epilogue to her study of masculinity in twentieth century, 'The Wars Against Iraq: Red Alert on Girly Men',[17] situates masculinity in the Gulf and Iraq wars in relation to each other, providing a compelling reading of Swofford's *Jarhead* and Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* (2005). A few notable contributions have emerged in response to the new forms of narrative to emerge from the recent conflict. Bloggers, such as American soldier Colby Buzzell, and Iraqi citizens Riverbend and Salam Pax have attracted much attention in the mainstream media and this has opened the way for critical readings of their texts.[18] Brandon Lingle's article, 'Colby

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[17] Kathy J. Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 191-202.
[18] Joe Woodward, 'The Literature of War', *Poets & Writers*, 33: 6 (November /December 2005), 12-14.

Buzzell's *My War*: An Outsider's Voice from Inside Iraq' (2009) constructs an important reading of Buzzell's narrative as a picaro text. Lingle is the only critic to focus on the concept of identity and the self as central to a reading of this text, and as such, his ideas are explored in Chapter Three of this thesis. Other notable articles are 'Lines of Sight: Watching War in *Jarhead* and *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*' by Stacey Peebles,[19] and Keith Brown and Catherine Lutz's review essay 'Grunt lit: The participant-observers of empire'.[20] Brown and Lutz's essay examines the ways in which they argue it is important to consider texts such as Buzzell's *My War*, John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* and Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away* as 'informed sources on the multiple, militarized transnational processes that help drive contemporary globalization'.[21]

Although the literature of the Iraq War in particular has drawn increasing critical attention since the early stages of this project, this thesis is, to the author's knowledge, the only full length study to map the body of Gulf and Iraq War literature. Its focus on representations of American identities in Gulf and Iraq War texts allows for an analysis of how the specificity of each conflict impacts on the war experience and the subsequent literary responses of combatants. If existing forms of literary critical responses to war writing are not adequate to describe the transformed literature borne out of the particular experience of the Gulf War and the Iraq War, then a new kind of literary criticism is necessary. As such, this thesis considers the complexity of human identity in a contemporary combat zone. By considering the multiplicity of identities required by the protagonists in response to demands such as new technologies and automated machines, women fighting on the front line, and

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[19] Stacey Peebles, 'Lines of Sight: Watching War in *Jarhead* and *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*', *PMLA*, 124:5 (Oct 2009), pp. 1662-1676.

[20] Keith Brown and Catherine Lutz, 'Review essay: Grunt lit: The participant-observers of empire', *American Ethnologist*, 34: 2 (May 2007), pp. 322–328.

[21] Brown and Lutz, 'Abstract' for 'Review essay: Grunt lit: The participant-observers of empire,' *Wiley Online Library* (2007) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/ae.2007.34.2.322/abstract> [accessed 20 December 2010].

issues of US and Iraqi national identity, this thesis aims to achieve a timely and innovative reading of the literature inspired by these contemporary wars.

A Gulf War veteran once asserted that she does not believe that civilians can ever really understand the experience of war.[22] It might be similarly claimed that no literary form can fully re-create the experience of either the Gulf or the Iraq wars. However, the reader can be provided with a valuable insight into the fragmenting effect on the identities of combatants through both conventional and alternative forms. This thesis does not claim that the Gulf and Iraq wars are completely different to previous wars. Indeed, they share commonalities with all previous wars to some extent. However, it suggests that the fragmenting effects on the veterans of these wars are heavily influenced by their technologically-mediated experience of the conflicts. Crucially, this thesis argues, the literature of the Gulf and Iraq wars demonstrates the increased awareness of soldiers to the threat posed to their selfhood. Jan Klein suggests that the self can be defined as 'everything constituting an integral part of a given individual'.[23] In the context of N. Katherine Hayles' concept of networks of informational flow and Donna Haraway's notion of transgressing bodily boundaries, it can be argued that the Gulf and Iraq wars have moved combatants forward into a new epoch of the self.

Mapping the Field: A Study of US Identities in Contemporary Conflict

This thesis does not seek to provide an exhaustive investigation of Gulf and Iraq War literature. Rather, it sets out to map the narratives of these conflicts and construct a reading of some of the themes central to these texts (and by extension, the conflicts in a cultural

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[22] This is a reference to a conversation that the author of this thesis had with one of the contributors to the Veterans History Project in Washington D.C. in 2007.

[23] Jan Klein, *Immunology: The Science of Non-Self Discrimination* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1982), p. 5, quoted in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Donna Haraway (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 223.

context). As such, it examines how themes integral to these wars, including the specific nature of each conflict, the gendering of warfare, and the impact on national identity, are represented in the sub-genres of Gulf and Iraq War literature by introducing several different narratives in each chapter.

While the Gulf War has attracted much attention in cultural studies in terms of its perceived virtuality and apparent status as a media war, little has yet been established in terms of the impact of its specific nature on the experience of combatants and the subsequent literary responses. Chapter One, 'Literary Transitions Through Virtual Warfare: Responses to the Persian Gulf War', argues against a simplified reading of the Gulf War as a technowar, claiming that while it is important to acknowledge the impact of military technology, it is also important to consider other factors. In this thesis, the term technowar is used to refer to the perceived image of the Gulf War associated with intelligent weaponry, but it should be noted that this project identifies the apparently virtual experience as only one element of the conflict. The literary responses to the Gulf offer an alternative to the representation of the conflict as a "clean war" relying on precision missiles and surgical strikes. A reading of the Gulf War purely in terms of its technological advances makes it difficult to frame the literature of trauma that emerges from the conflict. The narratives indicate a fragmentation of self and the necessity to develop multiple identities as a coping mechanism. Although much of the cause can be attributed to its apparent technowar status, the narratives suggest that it is also necessary to consider other factors. Chapter One introduces the central themes of Gulf War texts through an examination of James Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War* (1997), Andrew Huebner's *We Pierce* (2003), Gabe Hudson's collection of short stories, *Dear Mr. President* (2002), and Joel Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express: A Gulf War Memoir* (2003). It also considers the ways in which three largely unpublished archival collections (which the author has consulted directly on a research visit to the US in 2007) contribute to a reading of

Gulf War literature. These collections are oral narratives held at the Veterans History Project,[24] poetry and letters contributed to the Aaron Collection of Persian Gulf War poetry,[25] and the Unit Journal of the 4th Battalion Field Artillery which includes poetry and anecdotes from soldiers and their families.[26] With the exception of a small selection of Veterans History Project oral narratives which have recently been digitalised, these collections are not widely available to the public.[27] The Veterans History Project holds soldiers' oral narratives regarding both the Gulf and Iraq conflicts, whereas the latter two collections provide a compelling insight into the experiences and opinions of both combatants and civilians during the Gulf War.

Chapter Two, 'A Return to "Real War"?: The Iraq War Narrative', challenges the perception of the Iraq War as a simple return to conventional warfare. Whilst it is true that troops in Iraq faced increased physical danger from snipers, IED and RPG attacks, the lack of a stable frontline and transition into guerrilla warfare presented new challenges. Like Gulf War soldiers, combatants lived in fear of NBC attacks and like troops from previous wars often struggled to distinguish between civilians and the enemy, thus leading to a continuous sense of paranoia. Contrary to common conceptions of the war, combatants' experiences were also influenced by their interactions with military and (to a greater extent than their Gulf

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[24] The Veterans History Project comprises audio, visual and transcriptions of oral narratives held at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The project spans all of the wars in which American soldiers have participated and was initiated by the Library of Congress, but the oral histories take a wide variety of forms. Some of the interviews are conducted within the military whereas other are conducted by members of veterans' families, or even school children participating in community projects. As such, for the purposes of this thesis, the context of each oral history is taken into account and each one is treated as another narrative in a similar sense to the fictional accounts examined. Any apparent authority lent to the narrative as a result of its status as first-hand information is treated with caution.

[25] The Aaron Collection is a small collection of three peace packets, which were originally collated by Richard Aaron as a means of debating the issues associated with the war and are currently held at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut.

[26] The Unit Journal of the 4th Battalion Field Artillery is a collection of poetry and anecdotes from Gulf War soldiers and their families. The journal is held at The US Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair Army Base, Washington, D.C.

[27] The Library of Congress is currently transcribing oral histories from the Veterans History Project for publication. Given my three weeks of close work with the collection in 2007, Alexa Potter, the Library of Congress's curator of this collection, sought my advice on material for inclusion in this project.

War predecessors) communications technologies. Due to the multiple perceptions that result from such interaction with military technology, Iraq War troops also experienced a fragmentation of identity in the combat zone. Chapter Two explores the impact of these conflicting traditional and psychological traumas through a reading of John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier's Account of the War in Iraq* (2005), Jay Kopelman's *From Baghdad, With Love* (2007), and Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the US Army* (2006). The Iraq War also signaled the introduction of alternative textual forms to the body of war literature. Chapter Two explores a sample of these: Evan Wright's New Journalistic account, *Generation Kill* (2004), Brian Turner's poetry collection, *Here, Bullet* (2005), Anthony Lappe and Dan Goldman's graphic novel, *Shooting War* (2007), Colby Buzzell's memoir adapted from his blog *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005), and the blog *TurningTables* by a soldier known as Moja. Chapter Two examines the texts in terms of what both their form and content contribute to the reader's understanding of the Iraq War experience.

The second section of the thesis examines the ways in which technological advances discussed in chapters One and Two impact on how war is gendered. More specifically, this section addresses the impact of the unique kinds of warfare witnessed in the Gulf and Iraq wars on the individual gender identity of combatants. Chapter Three, 'Masculinity Under Threat: Male Narratives in an Age of Changing Warfare', explores the ways in which masculinity is represented in the literary responses to both conflicts. It considers how the narratives explore issues such as the changing role of the soldier in the warzone, relationships between soldiers and the impact of an increased presence of female combatants. Chapter Three pays particular attention to Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (2003), Joel Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express: A Gulf War Memoir* (2003),

and Tom Paine's *The Pearl of Kuwait* (1997). It also examines two Iraq War narratives, Colby Buzzell's *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005) and Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* (2004).

Chapter Four, 'From Carer to Combatant: Women's Tales of the Wars without Frontlines', explores how transformations in military technology in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have enabled women to play an increasingly active role in the combat zone. Although female soldiers are still not permitted to join the infantry, almost every other role in the American military is accessible. In reality, due to the lack of clear frontlines in the Gulf and Iraq Wars, more women than ever before found themselves in direct physical danger. Due to the guerrilla nature of the conflict, female combatants in roles such as interpreters and military intelligence were under constant threat from the enemy. This chapter examines the increasingly active roles of women in the military and the problems that they face through a reading of Ponders' Gulf War narrative, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* (2005) and Williams' Iraq War memoir, *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2006). It also considers the importance of oral narratives in communicating the female experience of war. It specifically focuses on the Gulf War narrative of Commander Darlene Iskra (US Navy), and the Iraq War accounts of Specialist Krystyna Kalski (Military Police) and Lieutenant Commander Holly Harrison (Coast Guard).

The third section of the thesis examines how national identity is perceived in the Gulf and Iraq wars. It considers the impact of advances in military and communication technologies on representations of Americans and Iraqis in both US and Iraqi texts. Chapter Five, entitled 'Nation and Difference: US Perspectives on National Identities', explores the ways in which perceptions of the American self and the Iraqi citizen are reinforced and challenged by technologically-mediated combat. This chapter examines how national identity is represented in two contrasting poetry collections from the Gulf War: in the first, these consist of entries included in the unit journal of the US Army's 4th Battalion, 5th Field

Artillery, and in the second, contributions to forums on the Gulf War collated by Richard Aaron. These largely unpublished collections of poetry reveal a stark contrast between the patriotic rhetoric of the soldiers in the 4th Battalion and the civilian writers of the Aaron Collection. Where US national identity is represented by the soldier writers as something to take pride in and the figure of the Iraqi is largely absent, the civilian writers question the motives of the conflict and are sympathetic to the suffering of Iraqi citizens. Interestingly, many of the soldier authors of Gulf War literature represent both of these viewpoints. This chapter challenges the apparently "gung-ho" attitude of US citizens towards the war and problematises a simple definition of American identity. Through a close examination of Christopher John Farley's *My Favourite War* (1996), Chapter Five highlights the complexity of American national identity, and the resultant mix of reactions to US action in the Gulf. In the final part of this chapter, a reading of Colby Buzzell's *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* and Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You* explores whether the different nature and challenges of the Iraq War prompted a shift in the way that American nationality is depicted. Crucially, it examines whether American conceptions of the Iraqi "other" are altered by face-to-face interactions.

The final chapter of this thesis examines Iraqi texts that write back to Western literary representations of the Iraq War. The chapter, entitled 'Writing Back Through Technology: Iraqi Narratives and the Virtual "Other"', briefly explores the representation of Iraqis in US texts and maps some of the key non-Western literary responses to the recent conflict. It also considers how interviews with Iraqis, conducted by Western journalists, such as those in Rory McCarthy's *Nobody Told US We Were Defeated* (2006), can contribute to the Western reader's understanding of the challenges Iraqis faced whilst under US occupation. A large part of this chapter addresses the importance of new media in providing a platform from which Iraqi citizens can share their experiences of war and occupation. Specifically, this chapter

examines the weblogs (which were later published in printed form) *Baghdad Burning*, by a young Iraqi woman known by the pseudonym of Riverbend, and *Where is Raed?* by a young Iraqi man, Salam Pax. This chapter examines the ways in which these blogs provide a counter to the image of Iraqi citizens portrayed by the American authors featured earlier in this study. It also considers what the narratives can contribute to Western understanding of the rapid changes experienced in everyday life and the perceived rise in anti-Americanism in Iraq.

This thesis constructs a reading of Gulf and Iraq War texts which considers how the unique nature of these wars impacted on both personal and national identities. Advances in military and communication technologies have transformed the contemporary battlefield, posing new challenges to combatants who often struggle to reconcile these with the more conventional traumas of warfare. This threat to the unified identity manifests itself in many ways. Through a reading of the differing natures of the two wars, the re-gendering of the contemporary battlefield, and the impact on national identities, this thesis maps the fascinating body of literature to emerge from these conflicts.

Chapter One

Literary Transitions Through Virtual Warfare:

Responses to the Persian Gulf War

Chapter One

Literary Transitions Through Virtual Warfare:

Responses to the Persian Gulf War

I felt like I had lost my mind. And found two more.[1]

Joel Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express: A Gulf War Memoir*

For many cultural commentators, the Gulf War marks the point at which warfare becomes 'virtual from the technological point of view and bodyless from the military point of view'.[2] Indeed, the increased use of intelligent weaponry, remote nature of the combat, and instantaneous media coverage of the conflict has prompted theorists to challenge the Gulf conflict's classification as a war. Baudrillard argues that the event that occurred in the Persian Gulf overturned conventional Western notions of war in which 'war has always involved an antagonistic and destructive confrontation between adversaries, a dual relation between warring parties'.[3] Chomsky extends this concept further, asserting that 'the term "war" hardly applies to a confrontation in which one side massacres the other from a safe distance'.[4] The critical discourse of the Gulf War has been dominated by theorists such as Baudrillard and Chomsky who posit the Gulf conflict as a virtual war, both in terms of the remote weaponry used and the media representations of the conflict. Baudrillard suggests that the virtuality of

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[1] Joel Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express: A Gulf War Memoir* (Minnesota: Borealis, 2003), p. 200.
[2] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 44.
[3] Paul Patton, 'Introduction', in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Jean Baudrillard, trans. by Paul Patton (Sydney: Power, 2004), p. 28.
[4] Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 8.

the Gulf War is two-fold: it is a 'virtual war which results from the strategy of deterrence and the virtual information war which we experience through the media'.[5] This chapter explores how this notion is both reinforced by literary responses to the Gulf War, and conversely, the ways in which some Gulf War texts offer the reader a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse which constructs the Gulf as a "virtual war". It examines how other cultural perspectives, such as Virilio's work on perception and DeLanda's work on the relationship between humans and rapidly evolving technology, can inform a reading of Gulf War literature and provide a more complex alternative to the concept of virtual war. This chapter pays particular attention to James Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War* (1997), Andrew Huebner's *We Pierce* (2003), Gabe Hudson's collection of short stories, *Dear Mr. President* (2002), and Joel Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express: A Gulf War Memoir* (2003). It also considers the how oral narratives held at the Veterans History Project and poetry contributed to the Aaron Collection of Persian Gulf War poetry raise issues integral to the virtual image of the Gulf War.

The Problem with Postmemory

Contemporary war literature is strongly influenced by the conflict narratives that precede it. Previous wars serve as the postmemory – that is, the memory of one generation's experience which is passed onto and informs the next – for each new experience of war, and this is reflected in the literary responses to each conflict.[6] The expectations that American soldiers construct for their own war experience are rooted in the war narratives which document American conflicts dating back as far as the American Civil War.[7] For those soldiers fighting

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[5] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, pp. 16-7.
[6] For a detailed discussion of post-memory, see Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
[7] Stephen Crane's Civil War narrative *The Red Badge of Courage*, for example, constructs a strong connection between injury and bravery in warfare. The central protagonist feels the shame of not having suffered an injury,

wars in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century, exposure to cultural representations of twentieth-century wars, most notably the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the post-Vietnam period, contributed to the shaping of expectations for their personal war experience. Central to Gulf War literature is the difficulty of reconciling the soldiers' experience of the conflict with the expectations of combat inspired by cultural responses to World War II and the post-Vietnam era. Many Gulf War narratives illustrate how the failure of the conflict to live up to these expectations, and the new technologies being deployed in the Gulf, often led to greater awareness of a crisis of the self and a resultant sense of fragmented or multiple identities. This chapter examines how the literature that emerged out of the conflict draws on previous war literature paradigms, as well as challenging literary conventions, in order to depict the fragmenting experience of "virtual warfare". Vietnam author Tim O'Brien observes that 'in a war, a soldier sees only a tiny fragment of what is available to be seen….after a battle each soldier will have different stories to tell'.[8] He suggests that each combatant and civilian will experience a different version of the war, so effectively there are as many wars as there are soldiers and civilians; as if there have been millions of wars. There is no single "truth" to be obtained from any war, and furthermore, there is no such thing as an all-encompassing war event. Crucially, in the post-Cold War era it is increasingly problematic to describe a conflict as a singular event since, according to Baudrillard, 'we have fallen into soft war, into the virtual impossibility of war…. as though the irruption or the event of war had become obscene and insupportable, no longer sustainable, like every real event moreover'.[9] In other words, the idea that we have a reliable connection to individual events has changed. Indeed, Baudrillard hailed the early 1990s as an

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thus denying him the "red badge of courage" achieved by so many of his comrades. The reader witnesses the fear and subsequent desertion of Henry in the early part of the narrative, but over the course of the story, Henry overcomes his fear and makes a rapid transformation into an indiscriminate warrior. It should be noted, however, that Crane did not experience the Civil War personally and that the narrative was written many years after the conflict.

[8] Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* (New York: Dell, 1975), pp. 236-7.

[9] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p. 27.

era in which everything is 'transposed into the virtual, and we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse, a hegemony ultimately much more dangerous than real apocalypse'.[10]   Since there are multiple narratives of the Gulf War, and due to the apparently virtual nature of the conflict, there is no single war event for the reader to understand.[11]

Where Vietnam literature employs narrative structures which make the reader feel the uneasiness of the combat zone, the strangeness of the landscape, the fear of the exotic "other", and, ultimately, the horror of the conflict, Gulf War narratives focus on the unique nature of the conflict and its effect on the combatant. For example, Blinn's central protagonist, the Aardvark, does not reach the combat zone in time to participate in combat, but nevertheless Blinn depicts an experience of the war which highlights the virtuality and fragmentation which have been identified as defining features of the conflict by cultural theorists. The literature of the Gulf War can be identified as the point at which a new narrative paradigm developed. Such narratives do not depict reality, but rather increase the reader's awareness of their own inability to see the real world. For example, readers are made aware that the version of the Gulf War that they witness through the news media is a virtual image of war, rather than a reliable connection to the war event. Consequently, the literature of the Gulf War becomes a milestone for a shift of consciousness in which, as Baudrillard asserts through much of his writing, virtual representations become more real than the original: 'We prefer the exile of the virtual, of which television is the universal mirror, to the catastrophe of the real'.[12] Indeed, the culturally aware writers of Gulf War narratives emphasise the blurring of the distinction between real and virtual. Blinn quotes Baudrillard's work in his epigraph:

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[10] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p. 27.
[11] As Gabe Hudson's collection of short stories, *Dear Mr. President* (London: Vintage, 2002) demonstrates, the idea of personalised versions of the war can be extended to include the idea that every soldier has his or her own version of Gulf War Syndrome.
[12] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p. 28.

'obscene is that which eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation',[13] while Turnipseed highlights the difficulty of defining the conflict: 'I was in the *real war* – or, if that didn't exist, I was closer to enemies with guns'.[14] Turnipseed later observes:

> I think… that the idea of the "enemy" is much more easily bourne in the abstract – through the distant chain of hierarchy and command. That enemies, on the other hand, have more than one means of defeat – especially when disarmed. In the long run, our actions on that highway will come back to haunt us.[15]

The body of literature to emerge from the Gulf War indicates that due to the lack of a conventional battlefield, many of the veterans fail to perceive themselves as combatants of a real war; consequentially, they fail to acknowledge themselves as suffering from genuine trauma. In his novel, *Heart of the Storm: A Novel of Men and Women in the Gulf War*, L. H. Buruss reinforces the contentious nature of the Gulf War when a soldier's veteran father congratulates him on being nominated for a medal. The soldier, Walt Shumate, dismisses the conflict as inconsequential: 'Nothing to it Dad… Anyway, this wasn't a real war, like Korea or Vietnam'.[16] Similarly, Swofford's central protagonist fails to recognize his own war experience as traumatic, despite witnessing the aftermath of the devastating bombing of fleeing Iraqis on the 'Highway of Death'.[17] These narratives highlight the complexity of the Gulf War experience. As Turnipseed highlights in the quotation above, being in close proximity to an enemy with guns does not necessarily equate to participating in "real war". Soldiers in the Gulf War experienced both physical and psychological trauma. However, due

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[13] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer, trans. by Bernaard and Caroline Schutze (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), p. 22, quoted in James Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War* (London: Doubleday, 1997), p. 7.

[14] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 62.

[15] Here, Turnipseed is referring to the road from Kuwait City to Basra, which was later known as the Highway of Death. It was the site at which US forces bombed either end of the highway to prevent Iraqis from escaping, then bombed all of the vehicles along the road. It was later reported that the Iraqis on this road were actually fleeing from the Iraqi Army and posed no threat to the US forces. Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 168.

[16] L. H. Buruss, *Heart of the Storm: A Novel of Men and Women in the Gulf War* (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2000), p. 365. Burruss also depicts a soldier who loses her legs when she attempts to rescue an injured Iraqi from a mine field. However, she denies any claim of heroism because she did not sustain her injuries "in combat".

[17] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 313.

to the brevity, perceived virtuality, and the relatively small scale of the conflict, soldiers were faced with an irreconcilable conflict between their expectations of war, their actual experience, and the perceived image of the conflict as virtual. This, together with the fragmented view of war (which is accentuated by distance and technologically-mediated weaponry), problematises the soldier's sense of self. Far from remote warfare being less traumatic or categorised as not constituting "real" combat, its fragmenting effect on combatants' identities can easily be identified as what Laura S. Brown defines as 'outside the range of human experience',[18] thus categorising it as genuine and serious trauma. Unlike some conventional definitions that identify trauma as 'exposure to a traumatic event in which the person experienced witnessed, or was confronted by serious injury to others and responded with intense fear, helplessness and horror',[19] Brown's definition offers wider scope for considering what 'trauma' is and how it should be defined. For Brown, 'human experience' is an event or experience that is not statistically extra-ordinary.[20] Some forms of trauma can therefore be experienced as a result of events that fall outside the domain of common "human experience".

'Like a Child Playing Atari': Remote Warfare and the Media War in the Gulf

Live news broadcasts on networks such as CNN constitute a fundamental element of the fragmented war experience. Blinn's, Turnipseed's, and Hudson's narratives indicate that soldiers' experiences of the conflict primarily took the form of technologically-mediated perceptions via both the radar display and the television screen. Indeed, Turnipseed observes

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[18] Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 100-12 (p. 101).
[19] Larry Minear, *The U.S. Citizen-Soldier and the Global War on Terror: The National Guard Experience* (Metford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2007), p. 31.
[20] Brown, 'Not Outside the Range,' p. 101.

that often the troops' most current source of information was CNN rather than internal military notifications:

> there was no doubt we were going to war… Half an hour later, Bush was on television, informing the American people… The deadline had passed the night before we bused to Norton AFB, but we still hadn't heard if it had been declared… CNN exploded onto the screen… Anti-aircraft fire and flares lit up the Baghdad skies, and sirens screamed beneath the rumble of bombs… someone said, "Fucking A, we're going to war." Nobody Ooh-Rah'd.[21]

The implications of Turnipseed's observations are far-reaching; not only do soldiers rely on television news stations to find out the latest information (because it is faster than hearing the news on the military grapevine), but civilians at home are often better informed about the situation in the war zone than the combatants.[22] In a text held at the Veterans History Project, Lieutenant Colonel Philip Mitchell reinforces Turnipseed's claim that the combatants' experience of these conflicts was lived simultaneously in real-life and through televisual viewing: 'We didn't see combat – we saw SCUD missiles… we all chipped in and bought a large screen TV and we watched CNN, so we saw the same war that everybody at home saw…'.[23] What Turnipseed and Mitchell highlight is the significant impact that the instantaneous televisual coverage had on the combatants' war experience. However, it is crucial to note the discrepancy between the version of the war presented in the media and the experience of those people deployed to and living in Iraq. Although Hudson also highlights the Gulf War's role as a real-time form of entertainment, his characters are sceptical about its likeness to a videogame: 'Everyone's saying Desert Storm looks like a video game on the TV, but from where I'm sitting you couldn't get me to pay a quarter to play it'.[24] Media

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[21] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, pp. 10-11.
[22] Indeed, it was reported that the start of the war was simultaneously watched by George Bush, Saddam Hussein, Mikhail Gorbachev, John Major, and the emir of Kuwait, thus making CNN 'an intercom service for world leaders'. See *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf - A Global Perspective*, ed. by Mowlana, et. al, p. 107.
[23] Philip Mitchell (AFC 2001/001/9893), video recording, Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, (14.05).
[24] Hudson, 'Notes from a Bunker Along Highway 8', in *Dear Mr. President*, pp. 101-56 (p. 123).

organisations promoted the US government's construction of the Gulf as the cure to "Vietnam Syndrome". The US government's 'technology war'[25] in the Persian Gulf was presented by the Western media as a clean, surgical, and above all, "bodyless" war, thus positing it as a morally acceptable course of action. John Broughton argues that 'the notion of an objectively scientific, rationally controlled, relatively decent, virtually harmless assault served an important purpose in offsetting the possible impression of indiscriminate destruction and slaughter'.[26] Tele-spectators of the war were seduced by the surgical strikes on strategic locations,[27] whilst images of the impact of these weapons on Iraqi civilians remained heavily censored. W. J. T. Mitchell identifies the remote guided missiles known as "smart bombs" as an essential component of the way that the war was represented, claiming that 'the abstract image provided for television by the remote, robotic sensors of a "smart bomb", then, is not just an accidental feature of the way that this war is fought, but a crucial element in its overall narrative construction'.[28] Unlike the civilians who accessed the war exclusively through such sanitised images, combatants in the Gulf simultaneously witnessed the war via the television screen, the computer screens of military equipment, and many also witnessed the consequences of the war through their own eyes. Through the cross-hairs, combatants could see the missiles hit their targets and witnessed civilians struggling to escape, often sustaining fatal injuries. As Mitchell explains, 'It's a strange one because you want to do it… but when the reality is, if you look at the guy you killed you might take a second thought about it'.[29] Although the Gulf may have been a bodyless war for American civilians, for many soldiers (and, of course, for many Iraqi civilians), it was not the "virtual"

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[25] H. Norman Schwartzkopf, 'The High-Tech War Machine', *Business Week*, 4 February 1991, p. 38, quoted in *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict*, Chris Hables Gray (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 37.
[26] John Broughton, 'The Bomb's Eye-View: Smart Weapons and Military TV', in *Technoscience and Cyberculture*, ed. by Stanley Aronowitz, Barbara Martinsons, and Michael Menser (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 139-66.
[27] Broughton, 'The Bomb's-Eye View', p. 148.
[28] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), quoted in Broughton, 'The Bomb's-Eye View', p. 144.
[29] Mitchell, VHP (27.12).

war that the media depicted. For Gulf War combatants, it is the combination of virtual and first-hand experience, and the difficulty of processing the two experiences simultaneously, which constructs a duality of conflicting experiences. Consequently, soldiers are faced with two different kinds of traumatic experience: firstly, resulting from the loss of face-to-face contact due to the virtuality of the conflict (and often the subsequent inability to complete the task that they had been trained for), and secondly, from witnessing the devastating results of a conflict which the American public perceived as a rational and humane war. Such duality of experience also contributes further to the fragmentation of combatants' identities through a fractured experience of war. The central protagonist in Blinn's novel identifies the Gulf War as indicative of a wider shift towards the virtual, observing that 'creation is out and… *mimesis* is in'.[30]

Many Gulf War authors reinforce the image of the conflict as a theatre of remote warfare, which transforms its soldiers into players of an intricate videogame. The unique style of warfare encountered in the Gulf results in two significant differences from the combat experience of previous conflicts: firstly, the soldier experienced a significant reduction in the amount of physical contact with fellow combatants and the enemy, and secondly, the increased role of computerised weaponry also required soldiers to process visual information from a variety of sources (in contrast to conventional ground combat in which the soldier largely relied on their own vision). It has been suggested that the act of killing without witnessing the consequences creates a dual perception, and consequently a sense of detachment from moral responsibility.[31] Although combatants are aware that their actions are likely to result in the death of a person, all they actually perceive are – as one Gulf

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[30] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 221.
[31] See Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, 'Exterminating Angels: Morality, Violence, and Technology in the Gulf War', in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf* , ed. by Mowlana, et. al., pp. 202-11.

War poet observes – 'blips on video screens'.[32] As Swofford explains, 'I've seen thousands of bombs land on targets…..but I've never witnessed the extermination of human life….I imagine that I can see the last breaths of these men now dead'.[33] Blinn's protagonist, the Aardvark, emphasises the bravery of seeing the results of your actions, comparing his war to that of Second World War veterans.

> THOSE guys are heroes. I can respect that. But us? Program a Tomahawk from two hundred miles away and let her loose. Drop a torp from a thousand feet up on a sub a thousand feet under. Where's the heroics? THOSE guys fought eye-to-eye. They SAW who they were shooting at.[34]

Although Virilio argues that the emotional detachment from killing in battle originated in the First World War, it is necessary to make a crucial distinction: in the Gulf War, distance killing became the preferred approach to warfare and the potential effects were on a much larger scale, with combatants launching missiles instead of hand grenades. The apparent removal of guilt is intrinsically linked to the lack of first hand vision. Virilio observes that many soldiers who fought in the Gulf War perceived the enemy as 'electro-optic' images or dots on a videoscreen.[35] He suggests that '"postmodern" war requires a split observation, an immediate perception (with one's own eyes) and a mediated perception (video or radar)'.[36] Consequently, the electronically-mediated perception will supersede the first-hand immediate perception, until the point at which 'the optic of conflict is … above all an electro-optic in real time'.[37] In many cases the soldier therefore experiences his or her war primarily through a monitor or cockpit display. Anticipating later developments in cultural studies,[38] Gulf War

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[32] Mary Pjerrou, 'The Beast', Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut, MS The Richard Aaron Collection of Persian Gulf War Poetry (Folder 2).
[33] Swofford, *Jarhead*, pp. 268-9.
[34] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 79.
[35] Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen*, trans. by Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 39.
[36] Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 39.
[37] Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 39.
[38] For example, see *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Videogames*, ed. by Ed Halter (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006) and *Games Without Frontiers: Wars Without Tears*, ed. by Andreas Sudmann-Jahn and Ralf Stockman (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

poet A. D. Winans draws comparisons between this electronic experience of combat and playing a videogame, in which soldiers use SMART bombs to 'hone in on the enemy like a child playing Atari'.[39] Thus, differentiating between a representation of a real entity on their "heads up" display and the virtual world of computer games and television can become problematic. In his novel *We Piece*, Huebner demonstrates the impact of the development of dual perceptions on moral judgments when Sergeant Smith Huebner's tank crew is unable to obtain a clear shot at an enemy sniper:

> Maxwell, just run this sniper over. We can't get a shot on him.
> Sir?
> Repeat, run his ass over. Flatten that fucker!
> Yeah?
> Yes, fucking A! Go!
> Roger, out.

> On his daylight sight Huebner saw the Iraqi sniper's face, when he realized what was going to happen, go from disbelief to anger, then finally pure fear…

> Huebner watched his screen until he was gone. It was like TV. They rode over the man and the car he hid behind. No noise, no bump, nothing, just an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach and the nervy jag of excitement that cracked through his veins.[40]

Huebner's passage demonstrates the blurring of the distinction between the virtual world and the real world, and consequently, a disturbing disintegration of moral conscience. The reader would perhaps expect the captain's order to evoke horror and outrage amongst the crew. However, there is only a brief moment of hesitation before the order is acted upon and the sniper is crushed by the tank. The combatants are spared the horrific spectacle of the Iraqi's death, instead witnessing what they liken to a scene from a television show or a movie: a caricatured version of the sniper's terrified face as the realisation of his own impending death

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[39] A.D. Winans, 'untitled', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).
[40] Andrew Huebner, *We Piece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), pp. 158-9.

is absorbed. Experiencing the consequences of their actions in such a technologically-mediated manner hinders the soldiers in developing sympathy for their enemy. The narrator's comparison to watching TV encapsulates the sense of being a passive party in the death of the Iraqi, and effectively cites remote warfare as the remover of moral awareness. It also reinforces the notion proposed by several cultural theorists that distanced weapons such as the iconic "smart bomb" obscure the destruction that they cause and remove the moral implications of warfare.[41] Indeed, such devices allowed the US media to broadcast footage from cameras fitted to the nose of the missiles, demonstrating what Virilio defines as the 'automation of perception', implying that machines that could navigate their way to their destinations by perceiving their surroundings.[42] Anne Balsamo argues that:

> media coverage of the Persian Gulf spectacle provided numerous examples of the deployment of a disembodied technological gaze; the bomb's-eye view was perhaps the most fascinating and therefore most disturbing example of the seductive power of a disembodied gaze to mask the violence of reality.[43]

Many commentators assert that the specific brand of warfare witnessed in the Gulf enabled combatants (and televisual spectators at home) to transfer the moral responsibility of combat onto their weaponry. Baudrillard claims that the "surgical" war in the Gulf was 'a matter of war-processing in which the enemy only appears as a computerised target'.[44] Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins extend this concept, arguing that 'it becomes possible for the allies to dissociate themselves from the pain and death that their modern weapons brought about'.[45]

To assess the impact of such radical changes in perception, it is necessary to consider how transformations to military styles in earlier conflicts affected combatants. Rapid

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[41] For detailed discussions of intelligent weaponry and the media spectacle in the Gulf, see Broughton, 'The Bomb's-Eye View: Smart Weapons and Military TV', and Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, 'Exterminating Angels: Morality, Violence, and Technology in the Gulf War'.

[42] Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. by Julie Rose (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 59.

[43] Anne Balsamo, 'The Virtual Body in Cyberspace', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 489-503 (p. 495).

[44] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p. 62.

[45] Aksoy and Robins, 'Exterminating Angels', p. 208.

developments in military technology in the early twentieth century led to substantial alterations in the sensory perception of combatants. In *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005), Santanu Das describes how important the sense of touch was to combatants during the First World War, and how warfare has since moved away from a style of combat which incorporates touch, both between troops and personal contact with the enemy. However, more recent developments in military technology cause soldiers to lose first-hand sight, instead relying on visual military technologies which provide them with what Virilio refers to as "electro-optic" images. Consequently, soldiers may be required to process information from both their eyes and the computer screen simultaneously. The experience of battle has been increasingly seen as involving a multiplicity of perception, especially by theorists such as Virilio.[46] This altered perception of battle caused a transition in the way that soldiers processed information. Eric J. Leed identifies alterations in First World War trench warfare, especially in the visual field, as leading to the loss of the ability for sequential thought:

> It could be argued that the deterioration in the visual field experienced by many in trench warfare removed those visual markers that allow an observer to direct his attention to what comes first and what later. Certain situations, like that of trench war, seem designed to disorder sequential thought processes and to disorient the participant.[47]

He suggests that instead of the combatant's thoughts forming a linear, sequential process in which ideas occur one at a time, the removal of familiar visual markers can cause the combatant to form parallel thought processes, thus carrying out 'many activities simultaneously, or at least independently'.[48] If the visual change imposed by trench warfare causes disruption to the thought processes of the combatants, it is evident that a similar

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[46] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), p. 11.

[47] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 130.

[48] Ulric Neisser, *Cognitive Psychology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), quoted in Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 129.

principle could apply to combatants in late twentieth-century warfare.[49] Leed suggests that the concept of parallel thoughts or multiple consciousnesses can enhance society's understanding of combatants' war experiences:

> This distinction between parallel thought processes, which are multilevel, diffuse, and apparently chaotic, and sequential processes which focus upon the ordered, successive solution of problems, offers a framework for the interpretation of the change of conscious state suffered by those under shellfire.[50]

If the visual change imposed by trench warfare causes disruption to the thought processes of the combatants, the same principle can be applied to the combatants in Gulf War narratives. Like those in the trenches, Gulf War soldiers lost their visual markers. This time, however, this loss has been induced by the lack of face-to-face interaction, and the increasing reliance on virtual, technologically-mediated forms of perception. Not only does the technology of these wars require its combatants to develop a split perception, but this split perception leads to a multiplicity of consciousnesses. Significantly, the alteration of a combatant's visual field can result in greater awareness of their multiple consciousnesses than soldiers of previous wars, which makes processing information and completing tasks problematic. If these parallel thought processes compete, then in order for the soldier to maintain a functional role in the combat zone, he or she must necessarily develop multiple identities to complete the multiple thought processes.

The concept of multiple consciousnesses is overt in the narratives of the Gulf conflict. The title of Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles*, does not indicate other physical battles that he has fought in, but rather the internal conflicts which Swofford endures throughout his experience in the theatre of war. One of Turnipseed's cartoon style illustrations in *Baghdad Express* depicts him standing in front of a

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[49] Moreover, this concept can also be extended to include players of photorealistic combat videogames. For a detailed discussion, see Souvik Mukherjee and Jenna Pitchford, '"Shall We Kill the Pixel Soldier?": Perceptions of Trauma and Morality in Combat Video Games', *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, 2:1 (2010), 39-51.

[50] Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 129.

mirror, witnessing his own identity fracturing into multiple selves. The reader can count six different versions of Turnipseed, but the different images of him run off the page as if there could be an infinite number of selves.[51] Many of the authors attempt to recreate combatants' confusion and disrupted consciousness in the late twentieth-century war zone for the reader through the use of a variety of narrative techniques, often reminiscent of Vietnam writers such as O'Brien. In *Heart of the Storm*, Burruss creates the sense of parallel thought by constructing several storylines which run through the novel, following a variety of different characters. He also disrupts the chronology of the narrative by beginning the novel with a snapshot from the end of the war, before the reader is taken back in time and led through the events chronologically. Blinn also disrupts the reader's sense of time, inverting the chronology of the book by starting on "Day 40", and counting down to the day that the "Aardvark" experiences the war. In other narratives, the authors literally recreate parallel thought processes for the reader by shifting the visual markers within the narrative. For example, Turnipseed inserts cartoon style illustrations into his narrative and Huebner abandons the use of speech marks, making the text more problematic for the reader to follow. The visual play in many of the Aaron Collection poems also reinforces the sense of confusion and disorientation with fragmented lines, uneven punctuation and unusual poem shape. In particular, the poems 'Hired Guns' and 'A Just War', both by Kenneth Lincoln, and 'Bug Death' by F. A. Nettelbeck use visual techniques to construct a sense of chaos, disorder and confusion.[52] Crucially, a reading of these texts highlights that to claim, as Aksoy and Robins do, that technology entirely removes moral responsibility is rather simplistic. Rather, processing the conflicting information obtained from first-hand and technologically mediated sight can make it problematic for the soldier to reconcile the images of the computer screen with the real, potentially fatal consequences of their actions.

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[51] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 18.

[52] See F. A. Nettelbeck, 'Bug Death', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2), and Kenneth Lincoln, 'Hired Guns' and 'A Just War', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).

Life Through a Lens: Virtuality, the Self, and Perception

The complexity of the Gulf War as a conflict experience has ramifications for its veterans in terms of the trauma that they suffer as a result. Although it has been assigned many different labels since it was recognised as a genuine condition in the aftermath of the First World War, "trauma", shell-shock, or post-traumatic stress disorder, has always been a source of controversy. A list of symptoms compiled by the Veterans Administration for use at outreach centers includes:

> psychic or emotional numbing; apathy; repressed anger; rage and hostility; anxiety and fears directly associated with combat; sleeplessness and recurrent nightmares; irritability; suicidal thoughts and feelings; self-destructive behaviour; survivor guilt; flashbacks to traumatic events; self-deceiving and self-punishing patterns of relating to others, inability to discuss war experiences with them, and fear of losing them; fantasies of retaliation and destruction; negative self-image; alienation and feeling different; and a sense of meaninglessness.[53]

These symptoms are widely accepted as the result of trauma, but the contentious issue is the validity of the cause of this trauma in the context of the Gulf War. Trauma is defined by Matthew Friedman, who works with the Veterans Administration as 'exposure to a traumatic event in which the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted by serious injury to others and responded with intense fear, helplessness, and horror'.[54] Many sceptics of Gulf War Syndrome insist that those deployed to the conflict cannot have suffered trauma in a war in which most never saw combat in conventional terms, and in which soldiers killed their enemies from afar with remote weaponry. The closest many combatants came to their targets was an image caught in the cross-hairs. However, Brown's approach to psychological trauma offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that trauma can be defined as something which is

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[53] Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 270-71, quoted in Mark A. Herberle, *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001), p. 12.
[54] Matthew Friedman, 'Diagnosis and Assessment of PTSD: A Report to the Institute of Medicine', quoted in Minear, *The U.S. Citizen Soldier and the Global War on Terror*, p. 31.

'outside the range of human experience'.[55] Brown categorises conventional warfare as an accepted form of traumatic experience, but explores how other extraordinary experiences can also result in trauma. By extension, the unconventional warfare that soldiers encountered in the Gulf War also situates its participants in a place outside the range of human experience. It can be argued, therefore, the combatants did experience a genuine form of trauma, which is exacerbated by the fragmentation of their identities.

As was the case in Vietnam, there are no clear boundaries or visible enemies, and death could come at any time (in the form of chemical and biological weapons attacks, landmines, and snipers), thus shifting the narratives into a new variation of nuclear anxiety. As Swofford points out in *Jarhead*, the very nature of the war itself is undefined by the government: '[c]onflicts – or even better yet, a series of operations – sound smaller and less complex and costly than wars'.[56] The specific requirements of the perceived virtual war deprived combatants of personal interaction with the enemy, instead using "smart" weapons to destroy targets. This, combined with the brevity of a conflict which, as Blinn highlights in *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, was over before some combatants had even participated, resulted in a fragmented experience of war and, furthermore, a fragmentation of the self. As the narratives describe, the characters developed many different versions of the self; the self who is afraid of war (Blinn), the self who is frustrated by the technology which deprives them of heroic opportunities (Swofford and Paine), the self who questions the motives of the US involvement in the war (Turnipseed and Swofford), and the self who has to come to terms with the harrowing experiences of combat (Hudson). The fragmentation of the experience of the Gulf War, and the consequential necessity of multiple identities, is explored in the disjointed form of the new narrative paradigm.

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[55] Brown, 'Not Outside the Range', p. 100.
[56] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 246.

Writers of US war literature have become increasingly aware of the intertextual links between their work and that of others, since each narrative forms part of the construction of the metanarrative by which their war will be understood in the future. Linda Hutcheon refers to this kind of writing as 'historiographical metafiction'[57] and explains that 'postmodern fiction merely makes overt the processes of narrative representation – of the real or the fictive and of their interrelations'.[58] However, as discussed earlier, many combatants of the Gulf War felt that their war was a second-hand legacy from the hyperreality of Vietnam films and narratives. However, it is not the authenticity of the writers' experience, or even the accuracy of their portrayal of the event of war, but rather the emulation of the loss of the unified self and the sense of fragmentation that constitutes the genuine experience of the Gulf War.

Like Huebner's narrative, Blinn's novel addresses some of the key issues associated with virtual warfare and perception, specifically concerning surveillance. The narrator (known as the Aardvark[59]) is an electronic surveillance specialist. However, here the reader witnesses a deviation from the depiction of the Gulf as a virtual war. While Blinn highlights the fact the Gulf conflict possessed an apparent absence of traditional warfare, it is the unique nature of the conflict (as well as the desert location) that prevents the Aardvark from fulfilling his surveillance role using radar screens. For the Aardvark, the technowar in the Gulf signals the end of the anti-submarine warfare era, making him superfluous. Having lost his role in the war, the Aardvark transposes his surveillance skills onto his personal life, as a means of helping him to process information. He videotapes his Gulf War experience and periodically plays sections back to himself through his deployment. Thus, his war experience becomes a fragmented, non-sequential, mediated one. Virilio identifies the Gulf War as a

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[57] For a detailed discussion see Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[58] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 36.

[59] The Aardvark is the self-styled title that the narrator appropriates, inspired by the colloquial term, 'Vark', used by the soldiers to describe their NBC protective masks. By aligning his own identity with the mask, the Aardvark not only uses a prosthetic to enable his survival, but is himself a constant reminder of the ever-present risk of a nuclear, biological or chemical weapons attack.

crucial turning point in the history of warfare; the last industrial and the first information war, in which the fourth front 'becomes the principal front and comes to supplement, indeed supplant, the strategies of land, sea and air actions'.[60] Blinn's novel is illustrative of this moment in the development of warfare; initially, the Aardvark's role appears to correlate with the concept of a war in which 'the superiority of information is more important than the capability to inflict damage'.[61] However, the information that the Aardvark gathers through surveillance is useless in a desert war. Blinn's text effectively depicts the transition from the electronic warfare of the Cold War period to contemporary forms of perceived technowar.

Blinn constructs storylines around peripheral characters to facilitate his portrayal of a soldier struggling to cope with the psychological impact of virtual warfare. The women in Blinn's novel are depicted as sexual objects representing a form of escapism. Prior to his deployment, the Aardvark stalks a young woman, Tamara, filming her in the video diary format through which he experiences (and re-experiences) his deployment. As he follows her, he refers to her as 'the target', and his 'tracking' of her mirrors his combat zone role of tracking and destroying enemy submarines. In this passage Blinn explores the idea of the Gulf conflict as a virtual war, rooted in Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum, and he uses Tamara to represent the virtual conflict. Tamara suggests that by mistaking her for a prostitute he knows and filming her as such, the Aardvark has imposed the identity of the prostitute on her, creating a new reality, thus imaging her as a prostitute.

> So I'm on this videotape and for all intents and purposes I'm a whore. Right? You've got the camera and you think, you *impose* that I'm a whore so when you watch this with your buddies or whatever kind of sickness you indulge in, you say, *That's this whore I was following.* Right? And because you say it, because the preconception is there, it's as good as true. I *am* a hooker. At least insofar as your videotape-mediated reality is concerned…… In *fact* I *am* a hooker. I mean, virtually. I am virtually a

[60] Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 48.
[61] Virilio, 'Postscript, 1997: Infowar', in *Pure War*, Virilio and Lotringer, trans. by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), p. 175.

hooker via my defacto collaboration with the simulacrum, the videoscape I've unwittingly become accomplice to. You've made me a hooker.[62]

Blinn's narrative is influenced by Baudrillardian concepts of virtuality, hyperreality and simulation throughout. These ideas form the basic premise of this text, from the Aardvark's computerised interaction with the war, to his interaction with those around him through his video camera. Indeed, the narrative is a war novel without a war, thus reflecting Baudrillard's analysis of the Gulf as a conflict with an absence of actual war. The entire narrative counts down to the moment when the Aardvark will participate in "real war", but, following the emotional turmoil he suffers in his anticipation of war and his possible death, the war ends before he and his colleagues can claim any involvement.

Blinn also draws attention to the potential uses of technology in distancing oneself from disturbing events. The Aardvark finds it impossible to comprehend the dead body of his college lecturer, Mel, without the mediation of visual technology. He is, therefore, only able to psychologically process Mel's death in the form of a virtual image rather than perceiving the scene with his own eyes. Just as televisual voyeurs in the West were able to distance themselves from the destruction of the Gulf War via the images broadcast from the noses of laser guided missiles or smart-bombs, the Aardvark is able to excuse his passive role in enabling his colleagues to abuse and ultimately murder Mel. Through the video camera, the Aardvark distances himself further, transposing the identity of the "other" onto Mel. The college lecturer is therefore posited as the enemy, thus making his death acceptable: 'He looks real, I think. He looks like a Middle-Easterner. He looks like a terrorist. He looks like an Iraqi'.[63] Ironically, the image of Mel's body is only "real" to the Aardvark when observed through the lens of the video camera. However, the virtuality of this "real" image of the college lecturer allows him to detach himself from the situation, positioning Mel as a victim.

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[62] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, pp. 122-3.
[63] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 251.

As a person killed by the Aardvark's colleagues, Mel becomes synonymous with the enemy. Consequently, the blame for Mel's death is shifted away from the Aardvark's failure to intervene, and his colleagues' abusive behaviour, and onto Mel for situating himself as the enemy. Mel therefore becomes the agent of blame for his own death, and the Aardvark's sense of guilt and moral obligation is alleviated.

Cyborg Soldiers: Symbiotic Relationships with Technology

As Blinn and many other Gulf War authors highlight, perception through technological means was crucial to the soldiers in the conflict. Whether the interaction with visual technologies took place through the television or the radar screen, the implications for the soldiers' sense of self were significant. However, the most prominent threat to combatants' selfhood was presented by their increasing dependence on technologically-mediated forms of weaponry, particularly those relying on virtual images instead of first-hand perception. If, as N. Katherine Hayles suggests, bodily boundaries are decided by informational flow and not epidermal surfaces,[64] then by means of their interaction with military technology, the combatants essentially become part of a symbiotic human/machine organism, thus incurring a fragmenting effect on their identity as human combatants. The informational flow transcends the bodily boundaries of the combatant, meaning that soldiers who, for example, act on information provided by a machine (such as radar), could be viewed as symbiotic organisms. Donna Haraway's analysis of human interaction with machines is indicative of cultural theory in the early 1990s, and much Gulf War literature supports her claim that, 'by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us

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[64] N. Katherine Hayles, How *We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 84.

our politics'.[65] Haraway's ontology has been fundamental in subsequent cultural analysis of

the new kind of warfare showcased in the Gulf War and has been adopted by several key

critics. Chris Hables Gray suggests that by the outbreak of the Gulf War combatants had

become 'cyborg soldiers'.[66] If this is indeed the case, how far could it be argued that the

responsibility for combatants' actions is transferred to the technology which enabled that

action? Potentially, the use of Tomahawk missiles, Stealth bombers, and to some extent,

tanks, sniper rifles, and anti-submarine warfare would be blameless, and thus emotionally

detached methods of killing. If, as Hayles suggests, the combatants become part of the

machine through the flow of information, then it is crucial to examine this relationship

between human and machine in Gulf and Iraq War texts. Mary Pjerrou's poem, *The Beast*,

demonstrates how the close affinity of the Gulf War generation to technology is borne out of

playing videogames. Crucially, she identifies a link between the virtual image and the

apparent absence of guilt which has been widely discussed in the media and later cultural

theory:

> - in which little boys
> mesmerized by electronic war toys
> find their dreams come true:
> a video game with real enemies to shoot at you,
> real bodies to blow up –
> a video screen that oozes blood and stinks of real war.[67]

Pjerrou's poem offers a possible explanation of why remote warfare provides a guilt-free

method of killing. All the visual markers available to the combatant are reminiscent of the

videogames that they have played since they were young children. Although they know that

in the combat zone, their actions may result in the deaths of Iraqi soldiers (and sometimes

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[65] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 150.
[66] Hables Gray, *Postmodern War*, p. 43.
[67] Pjerrou, 'The Beast', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).

civilians), their reality is mediated and their minds only process the images that are before them: a target on a computer screen.[68] There are no visual markers to identify the killing as 'real', so for the combatant, the experience is essentially the same. The perception is that the sense of satisfaction at destroying these targets is ingrained in the soldier's psyche from years of playing such war games, and overrides any resonance of guilt. However, this simplistic analysis is rather limiting, since soldiers are aware that their actions will potentially result in the death of an Iraqi. This knowledge, combined with the absence of a visual image conveying such a result, is what causes combatants to develop parallel thought processes as they struggle to reconcile these different versions of truth.

Dennis Saleh's poem, 'The Thumb' encapsulates the effects of remote warfare, overtly depicting the fragmentation of the self when the people elect a thumb as president. The only action the Thumb is capable of performing is pressing, so it presses "for the last time",[69] resulting in the destruction of the world. This theme of impending doom is a strong presence in many of the entries in the collection, with many referring to "Armageddon".[70] One contributor to the Aaron Collection, Edwin Morgan, captures this particularly well in his poem, 'An Iraqi Student', with his concluding line, 'Keep Safe; the edge is everywhere; all know it'.[71] Here, the poems situate themselves in the post-Cold War era, foregrounding the concerns that were perpetuated even after the end of the Cold War. Crucially, they capture the fear of many in the West that the war in the Gulf posed a threat not only to the individual soldier, but to the world.

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[68] 'Mediated reality' was identified by Mann as 'the concept of filtering of our vision of the real world with and by virtual information realized with a linear or non-linear filter.' Steve Mann, 'Mediated Reality', *TR 260*, (M.I.T. Media Lab Perceptual Computing Section, 1994), quoted in 'Interactive Mediated Reality', Raphael Grasset, Laurence Boissieux, Jean-D. Gascuel, and Dieter Schmalstieg (2005) <http://www.artis.imag.fr/Publications/2005/.../2005-AUIC-InteractiveMediatedReality.pdf> [accessed 4 September 2010].
[69] Dennis Saleh, 'The Thumb', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).
[70] A. D. Winans' untitled poem summarises this theme: 'Desert Shield gives birth to Desert Storm of such things Armageddon was born', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).
[71] Edwin Morgan, 'An Iraqi Student', The Aaron Collection (Folder 1).

In contrast, the themes explored in Hudson's short story *The American Green Machine* closely resemble the theoretical ideas provided by Haraway. The text also posits combatants as the passive victims of a US government strategy to recruit them into the military. With this story, Hudson explores the several ways that a notion of the cyborg manifests itself in the Gulf War. Firstly, he addresses the issue of using technology for propaganda and as a tool of persuasion with the implantation of the 720-Wireless Extended Range Data Link (WERDL) into the head of a potential Marine recruit, Clarence T. Fordham, whilst he is sleeping. The WERDL provides a direct link from the military mainframe into the recruit's head:

> with the simple flip of a switch here at our office, the WERDL manifests an artificial computer screen up on the inside rear plate of your skull, thereby prompting your mind's eye to metabolize the information on this screen through a response method innate to the modern central nervous system, known as Picking Fruit.[72]

Here, Hudson creates a device which embodies several key concerns which came to the fore during the Gulf conflict. The WERDL enables government and military propaganda to be sent directly to the brain of the person fitted with the WERDL, and Hudson clearly posits Clarence as a passive recipient in this process. Indeed, the device is fitted without his consultation. The creation of images for the recruit to see through his mind's eye appears to highlight concerns raised by cultural commentators regarding the production of the Gulf War as a media event for spectators in the West. Since this message is sent to Clarence via BRAIN-MAIL®, Hudson also highlights concerns regarding the increasing role of computers in the modern military and their impact on human combatants.[73] The implantation of the

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[72] Hudson, 'The American Green Machine', in *Dear Mr. President*, pp. 59-68 (p. 62).

[73] Although early internet and e-mail technology was just becoming available to the public in 1990-1991, Hudson has the advantage of writing this story with a decade of hindsight and the knowledge of how rapidly the internet was expanding by the turn of the century which helps to construct this futuristic image. On the other hand, it should also be noted that such narratives are typical of the 1980s cyberpunk genre. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and later films such as Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999) are based on the premise of the possibility that information could be disseminated directly into the nervous system.

WERDL in Clarence's brain represents the anticipated future developments in military technology (as predicted by DeLanda), culminating in a symbiotic relationship between human and machine.[74] Crucially, the recruiter offers Clarence the chance to become a real cyborg soldier: Clarence is offered a top of the range prosthetic GO-DURA-LIFE-LEG® in exchange for signing up to the Marine Corp. Here, Hudson echoes the concerns raised by social commentators regarding the military recruiting soldiers from poorer backgrounds with the incentive of waived college fees. In *The American Green Machine*, the potential recruit is instead offered the chance of being fitted with a prosthetic leg which supersedes the functionality of a normal leg:

> the truth is this GO-DURA-LIFE-LEG® will radically out-perform an actual human leg, because the artificial muscles have been enhanced through a cutting-edge process known as robo-gene-modification, which is to say that you will never have to exercise this leg as it is designed to achieve optimal performance no matter how small or large the task.[75]

Without the prosthetic Clarence is relegated to a world of disability, but with the leg he has the potential to obtain a physicality superior to other humans. In her analysis of *Limbo*, Hayles observes that those who choose to replace their missing limbs with atomic powered plastic prostheses obtain true a cybernetic condition. Hayles describes this process as 'the splice, the neologistic cutting, rejoining, and recircuiting that makes a cyb/ernetic org/anism into a cyborg'.[76] This process can be rationalised to some degree by Joseph Dumit's observations about what he terms cyborg envy: 'to some extent we are all afflicted by the desire for technological enhancement, understanding our bodies as somewhat deficient cyborgs'.[77] The opportunity for improving the human body is embraced by the Aardvark who

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[74] Manuel DeLanda discusses the possibility that 'both human and robot bodies would ultimately be related to a common phylogenetic line: the machinic phylum'. DeLanda, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, p. 7.
[75] Hudson, 'The American Green Machine', pp. 66-7.
[76] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 116.
[77] Joseph Dumit classifies cyborg envy as 'a sociopathic condition which was formed around the interwar period and in conjunction with various military research programs and the assistance of a technophiliac popular media'.

demonstrates his desire for the flow of information to permeate his bodily boundary with his suggestion: 'Why use my eyes? Why can't I plug it straight into my head? The senses are *so-o-o* retro'.[78] Haraway suggests that 'communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools for recrafting our bodies'.[79] However, where Haraway identified a potential route for women to obtain equality through technological advances, it can be argued that in the warzone such technology offers potential for the enhancement of both men and women. Clarence is not offered a normal life, but rather, the opportunity to become a cyborg soldier, able to exceed normal human capabilities. This recruit epitomises the symbiotic relationship between combatant and machine anticipated by DeLanda and Hables Gray, whilst simultaneously highlighting the concerns that Haraway suggests in terms of the invasion of bodily boundaries becoming a threat to the self.

Threats to the Self: The Transgression of Bodily Boundaries

In addition to the multiplicity of consciousness which emerges due to the loss of visual markers, combatants also face challenges to their bodily boundaries from the hostile environment of the combat zone. Das identifies the dissolution of the boundaries between the "slime" of the trenches and the soldiers' sense of self in the First World War:

> Slime thus endangers human subjectivity by blurring the boundaries of the body: "to touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess", giving an impression that "the slimy is myself".[80]

The concept of blurring the boundaries between the war zone and soldiers' sense of self could be extended to these more recent conflicts. Many of these narratives refer to the ubiquitous

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See Joseph Dumit, 'Brain-Mind Machines and American Technological Dream Marketing: Towards an Ethnography of Cyborg Envy', in Hables Gray, *The Cyborg Handbook*, p. 348.

[78] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 258.

[79] Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 164.

[80] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, cited in Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 48.

sand, reflecting their fear that the desert may somehow consume them. Swofford makes frequent reference to the sand as an ever-present entity throughout his narrative, blaming 'the desert' for his contemplation of suicide,[81] and so the hostile physical environment is yet another contributing factor to the creation of parallel thought processes which result in multiple consciousnesses. Swofford eventually succumbs to the desert: 'in early January I realize it's been weeks since anyone has bitched about the Desert. I know now that it has ceased to be simply a place and instead is a part of us, in us not only through the mouth, nose, ears, ass, and eyes, but in our souls'.[82] Here, Swofford highlights the potential threat posed to the self by the transcending of bodily boundaries. The possibility of such a threat is supported by Haraway's notion that foreign entities – in the case of Gulf War combatants, the physical environment as well as nuclear, biological or chemical agents – can directly threaten the identity of a human, altering its sense of self; '[t]he invaders have become an intimate part of all the cells of the infected bodies, changing human beings at the level of their most basic selves'.[83]

The threat of contamination of the body from the surrounding environment is also extended to include exposure to NBCs. Reflecting political concern regarding the use of anti-biological warfare pills issued to troops, and depleted uranium from warheads used by the US military in the Gulf War, the literature that emerged from the conflict conveys a palpable sense of paranoia, reminiscent of the nuclear anxiety expressed in texts from the Cold War period.[84] For Blinn and Swofford, breach of the bodily boundaries becomes the central concern as the protagonists grow increasingly fearful of biological weapons and come to rely on their gas masks as a lifeline. In fact, Blinn's character, the Aardvark, constructs his very

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[81] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 99.
[82] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 211.
[83] Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of the Self in Immune System Discourse', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 226.
[84] For example, Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* (1985).

identity around his mask, adopting the slang name for the mask as his own nickname. The theme is explicit in John J. Nance's *Scorpion Strike* (1992) in which the plot revolves around a US Air Force mission to retrieve canisters of a deadly biological weapon which, if unleashed, could cause devastation of the world on an apocalyptic scale. The virus is the result of a random mutation in a form of bacteria and, due to its bacterial origins, it is able to live in water and endure temperatures ranging from boiling to freezing point without losing the capacity to regenerate and kill. The potential for terrorist use of the virus is vast, with the possibility of an aqueous solution of the substance being sprayed into a cloud, meaning that it would literally be raining biological weaponry.[85] Nance's concept of a biological weapon that could be introduced into the water cycle epitomises the fear of the breaching of the bodily boundaries, with the possibility of human consumption of water containing the disease. The human immune system would not have time to develop anti-bodies as the virus progresses too rapidly and invading all the cells in the human body until, to quote Haraway again, 'the invaders have become an intimate part of all the cells of the infected bodies, changing human beings at the level of their most basic selves'.[86]

For Swofford and the Aardvark it is the military issue pills that supposedly protect them from NBC attacks which arouse their suspicions. In his collection of surreal short stories, Hudson constructs a less conventional exploration of Gulf War Syndrome and the associated paranoia. Hudson, narrating in the first person from a range of perspectives throughout the collection, depicts the psychological repercussions of the experience of the Gulf War, as well as the physically debilitating effects of Gulf War Syndrome, emphasizing that 'everybody's Gulf War Syndrome is a little bit different'.[87] In 'Dear Mr. President' (also the title of the collection), Lance Corporal Laverne describes how an ear grows out of his

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[85] John J. Nance, *Scorpion Strike* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992), p. 76.
[86] Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies', p. 226.
[87] Hudson, 'The Cure As I Found It', in *Dear Mr. President*, pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

chest, and on his return home he believes that he is growing a set of wings. 'The Cure as I Found It' details veteran Larry's struggle with Gulf War Syndrome as his bones disintegrate in the months following his return to civilian life. These absurdist scenarios perhaps can be seen as indicative of the serious underlying concerns of returning combatants as they often display symptoms which the Veterans Administration refuse to accept as authentic trauma. Hudson's narrative emulates the confusion and fragmented state of mind that are the legacies of each soldier's war. The reader joins the characters in a world in which the real and the virtual are indistinguishable, and is left to decide whether these narratives are intended to be magical realist texts or to indicate psychological instability. The bizarre symptoms that Hudson's characters display recreate the threat to the soldier's sense of self. Laverne's symptoms demonstrate an obvious presence of foreign entities, which manifest themselves as an ear and wings, whereas Larry's bone wasting illness embodies a literal disintegration of the self:

> My particular strain of Gulf War Syndrome was disintegrating my bones at a massive rate and if things kept up this way every bone in my body would be gone within a year and there was nothing he [the doctor] could do. I was going to be the human blob.[88]

When the alteration of their fundamental sense of self becomes overwhelming for Hudson's characters, both Laverne and Larry adopt the idea of flight as a means of escapism, allowing the veterans to break free of their contaminated bodily boundaries.[89]

In addition to representing the threat to the unified self, Hudson also stresses the necessity of developing multiple identities in order to function in the Gulf War. Laverne's wife growing a talking mouth on the back of her head in 'Dear Mr. President' is the most obvious demonstration of a fragmented personality, with different personalities articulated

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[88] Hudson, 'The Cure As I Found It', p. 5.
[89] Each veteran's escapism through flight is detailed in Hudson, 'The Cure as I Found It', pp. 19-20, and 'Dear Mr. President', p. 56.

from each side of her head simultaneously. In 'Cross-Dresser', Captain Dugan apparently gives up his body so that his thirteen-year-old daughter Libby can live inside it after she is killed in a road accident, indicating an internalised identity crisis. Crucially, these events leave the reader unable to reach a definitive conclusion as to whether this event is real, symptomatic of the narrator's psychological crisis, or whether the author's intentions were to demonstrate how Gulf War Syndrome affects not just the individual, but the whole family. Whichever of these conclusions the reader reaches, a re-creation of the fragmentation of the self has been achieved and the sensation of this has been simulated for the reader through their struggle to rationalise the events in the narrative.

A Hero's Welcome?: The Problem with Fighting Unpopular Wars

In addition to the unfamiliar battlefield and the constant threats to the soldier's subjectivity, the apparent lack of a justification for the war is another cause of internal conflict for many soldiers. Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen suggests that 'while war has indeed become easier, it has also made it politically much harder to justify its horrors'.[90] Staff Sergeant Bradley Kays illustrates the moral turmoil that some soldiers experienced:

> [I]t was like you've been placed in the situation by somebody else, it's not necessarily your doing… you're up against people… who wholeheartedly believe in what they are doing, that they're willing to give their lives, and that's kinda where I ran into issues… I wasn't willing to give my life for something I didn't know, I didn't understand… we were extremely good at what we did, but I don't know if that always made it right.[91]

Kays explains that his lack of conviction for the justification of the war and the absence of a 'definitive enemy' made it increasingly difficult for him to fight. In a scenario reminiscent of Joseph Heller's Second World War novel *Catch-22* (1961), Kays seems to feel that his

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[90] Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 44.
[91] Bradley Kays, (AFC 2001/001/34271), video recording, VHP (09.25).

response to the situation was the only rational one, and those soldiers who did not have issues with the impossibility of their situation are the cause for concern: 'I had a hard time doing what I did… I believe in a just cause… if it's necessary, I know I can do it, but I don't think that….the cost of oil or anything else like that is worth the loss of human life'.[92] Lacking the belief that the war that they are engaging in is a justifiable war can reinforce the development of a split consciousness. Ben Shephard points out that the level of psychiatric breakdown in the US Army was between two and three times higher in the Second World War than in the First World War. Shephard quantifies this by continuing, 'Dr. John Appel believed that this was not so much because the war had become more terrifying, but because attitudes had changed from enthusiasm and an "emotional conviction that they were fighting the war to end all wars" to a spirit of resignation'.[93] This fact is reinforced by Turnipseed's reference to US attitudes towards the Second World War. While many contemporary US war writers revere the Second World War as the "real war" depicted in the filmic and literary responses to it, Turnipseed questions such an interpretation of the conflict: 'Even the Good War was not that good for those who *fought* in it. Nearly a million World War II veterans suffered severe psychological injury, as many as were killed and wounded'.[94] US war veteran and literary critic Paul Fussell concurs with this point: '[T]here has been too much talk about the Good War, the Justified War, the Necessary War and the like. It was war and nothing else, and thus stupid and sad'.[95] Shephard points out that the same was not true of British troops who had much lower rates of psychiatric breakdown in the Second World War. Partly, this was due to the fact that, 'the war was socially sanctioned, a good war; veterans were honoured and feted when they returned'.[96] Much of this was part of a deliberate move by the British government

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[92] Kays, VHP (13.34).
[93] Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves*: *Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 327.
[94] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 68.
[95] Paul Fussell, quoted in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 325.
[96] Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 327.

to avoid the stigma of shell-shock which had become synonymous with the First World War. The US government attempted a similar strategy with the Gulf War, hoping to escape the legacy of Agent Orange in Vietnam, and again in the Iraq War, aiming to shed the associations of the 1991 conflict with Gulf War Syndrome. Put simply, the sanctioning of the war as 'good' lessened the internal conflict for troops which so often intensified the parallel thought processes which led to multiple consciousnesses. In *Baghdad Express*, Turnipseed describes how he has 'come to recognize that our adulation of the stiff-lipped hero is not only wrong-headed, it is false'.[97] This is the image of the "war hero" that the public want to see and want to hear war stories about, but Turnipseed goes on to explain how the reality of a veteran's life is very different; many are left with severe psychological injuries, causing a significant number to lose the lives they had enjoyed before being deployed, sometimes ending up homeless or committing suicide. This, as Turnipseed points out, is not the uplifting heroic story that civilians want to hear, so veterans often end up keeping their experiences locked up in their own memories: 'Of course, no one wants to hear these things, and this makes the Soldier's Tale a difficult one to tell, even when peppered with funny acronyms'.[98] Some veterans are willing to talk about their experiences, but most find it impossible to communicate the story of their war effectively. Even if they find an interested audience, they cannot fully recreate the sense of displacement and fragmentation.

The anxiety that soldiers can experience in finding a convincing justification for their participation in the conflict is present across much of the body of Gulf and Iraq War writing. One of the most overt examples can be found in Hudson's short story, 'Notes from a Bunker Along Highway 8', in which the central protagonist experiences an epiphany in which he questions his motives for participating in the war:

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[97] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 68.
[98] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 68.

> And that's when the weight of it all – the senselessness of war, the absurdity of America and its ideals, its bloody history of oppression, its macho Christian religious certainty – finally came flooding into my mind like a great white ray of liquid light. What the hell am I doing here? I asked myself.[99]

The protagonist details what he understands to be the injustices implemented by the US and decides to shed his identity as a Green Beret, instead adopting the Native-American inspired pseudonym of "Help People". After going AWOL from the rest of his company, Help People sets up base in an abandoned Iraqi research bunker which is home to a group of chimps, and from here makes it his mission to help wounded Iraqi civilians. The absurdity of the situation that Help People describes seems so implausible that the reader is left wondering whether his act of desertion was a moment of clarity or the signifier of his transgression from reality into a wartime neurosis. In fact, this blurring of the line between sanity and madness, clarity and confusion, real and the virtual, is the connecting factor across the stories in Hudson's collection, and to some degree, across the sub-genre of Gulf War literature. The central notion of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, that a person would have to be mad to want to stay and fight, is implicit in much Gulf War writing. Hudson's writing in particular emphasises the confusion of the Gulf War combat zone and the threat posed to the combatants' self from a variety of sources. It is unclear whether Hudson intends for the reader to interpret his short stories as absurdist texts or as allegories of soldiers whose traumas manifest themselves as visions and hallucinations. What is certain is that these narratives provide the reader with an insight into the multiple consciousnesses and divided self that many combatants experienced in this conflict.

The troops in the narratives examined in this chapter are clearly torn between doing their duty for their country and their ethical values. As Turnipseed summarises, 'this was cool

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[99] Hudson, 'Notes from a Bunker Along Highway 8', in *Dear Mr. President*, p. 109.

enough in its way, but I wasn't sure that we should be kicking Saddam's ass'.[100] This conflict of interests is recurrent in much Gulf and Iraq War literature, and seems to be part of a wider preoccupation in US society with the justification of the Gulf War, and even more so with the Iraq War. The US entered the Gulf War hoping to exorcise itself of "Vietnam Syndrome"; the legacy of defeat. Instead, it found itself again embroiled in a conflict with questionable motives. In effect, the US as a whole suffered a form of national trauma, which instead of being alleviated by the Gulf, has become steadily worse, increasingly so since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 by US forces. These narratives highlight that it is not only soldiers who struggle to reconcile their doubts about the justification of the war. Many American civilians found themselves assuming two identities: the first supporting the troops, the second criticising the war that those troops are fighting. Huebner's narrative clearly demonstrates internal conflicts on an individual level, but also the divisions and conflict of opinion within the US population through the story of two brothers. During the Gulf War Smith Huebner leads his tank company into battle, while his brother, Sam, remains in America, campaigning against the war. The divisions depicted within this American family are symptomatic of the wider national trauma which developed during the Gulf War, with a potentially damaging division of opinion forming between the frontline and the homefront. Consequently, it is not only the combatants of these wars who develop multiple consciousnesses, but the collective consciousness of the United States as a whole becomes fragmented. As Kaja Silverman concludes, 'the historical trauma of the war makes itself felt through the systematic demystification of the "preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms" which had previously organized "reality"'.[101] As a result of this lack of support from the American public, many veterans do not feel they are valued when they return home, as demonstrated by Don Olsen's poem, 'You Can Count On It':

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[100] Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*, p. 24.
[101] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 66.

> The day after
>
> the war ends
>
> the President
>
> will mark down
>
> the value of
>
> a soldier's life
>
> to half-price.[102]

Experiencing such a lack of governmental support, and becoming a veteran of a war that a large proportion of the public did not support, accentuates the fragmentation of identity that many soldiers had experienced in the combat zone. As discussed earlier, such failure by the Government or the military to fulfill expectations, can lead to a detachment of the combatant's ego from the military/governmental superego, leaving the soldier in a regressive state of vulnerability. [103] This experience can be just as damaging to the combatant's sense of self if it results from the lack of care from the government on their return to the US. It can be as damaging as if they were let down by the military in the context of the battlefield. Nathaniel Tarn's Gulf War poem reinforces the extent of the desperation that many veterans feel on their return home:

> Leaving for another world as the veterans of foreign wars do,
>
> pills before them in great profusion
>
> to calm nerves down and prevent suicide one more day.[104]

Towards a Literature of Unconventional Warfare: Narrative Structures

The literature of the Gulf and the Iraq wars, echoes, in some senses, the narrative traits of the Vietnam genre: 'the black humour; estrangement of the intellectual narrator from his fellows,

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[102] Don Olsen, 'You Can Count On It', The Aaron Collection (Folder 2).
[103] Grinker and Speigel in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 331.
[104] Nathaniel Tarn, 'The Army Has Announced that "Body Bags" Will From Now on Be Known as "Human Remains Pouches"', The Aaron Collection, (Folder 2).

coupled with a longing for a lost masculine collective; and the surprising pleasure of violence'.[105] We can also detect the sense of irony, the otherness of women (especially in Williams' narrative which explores this from a female perspective), and a distrust of authority. However, the literature of the Gulf and Iraq wars does not merely produce a new generation of Vietnam inspired literature. Rather, it introduces a new way of thinking about war literature, since its most crucial concept is that of reproducing the dissolution of the self for the reader to experience. The writers implement a variety of narrative devices to achieve this effect, from a fragmentation of the text itself in Hudson's *Dear Mr. President*, to the discontinuity of time which features in Blinn's narrative which counts down to the day of the Aardvark's participation in the war and Burruss' novel *Heart of the Storm: A Novel of Men and Women in the Gulf War*, which jumps backwards and forwards in time. Stylistic devices are used in both Paine's novel and Christopher John Farley in *My Favourite War*.[106] Both writers use inconsistent grammar and punctuation, with Paine's narrator adopting "surfer slang" terms and using italics for emphasis. Farley rejects convention by not using speech marks to indicate his own speech, instead opting to make it ambiguous whether his words are part of a spoken exchange or introspective musings. These techniques, along with the elements of absurdity found in Hudson's and Paine's narratives, encapsulate the essence of the Gulf War by disrupting the reading experience, and causing readers to feel the uncertainty, confusion and loss of identity that participation in the Gulf War entails. Much of the literature that emerged from the conflicts is reflexive and this is especially noticeable in poetic writing, such as Eleanor Wilner's 'Found in the Free Library' (2004), in which the last line of the poem is, '(but here the document is torn)'.[107] The abrupt "cutting off" of a historical account in this way again highlights this chapter's earlier discussion of the author's

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[105] Piedmont-Marton, 'Writing against the Vietnam War in Two Gulf War Memoirs', p. 259.
[106] Farley's novel is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
[107] Eleanor Wilner, 'Found in the Free Library', in Lorrie Goldensohn, *American War Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 365.

self-awareness of their role in constructing a narrative by which the Gulf War will be "remembered" by future generations. A poignant example of this awareness appears in C. K. Williams 'Shrapnel' (1998):

> Where was I? The nun, the nurse: the nurse leaves the room, throws up;
> the fictional soldier, the real child…
> The father… What becomes of the father? He skids from the screen,
>   from
> the page, from the mind…[108]

This passage alone encapsulates a key feature of Gulf War literature; it draws attention to itself as a narrative construct, makes use of structural devices to unsteady the reader with its erratic layout, and refers to the concept of there being two kinds of truth in warfare; the 'happening truth' and the 'story truth'. This distinction is discussed by O' Brien's Vietnam text, *The Things They Carried*, in which he suggests that 'story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth'.[109] He explains that story-truths make things present so that you can have another chance to see things that you could not bring yourself to look at first time around. He claims that this helps him to, 'attach faces to grief... I can be brave… I can make myself feel again'.[110] And perhaps sometimes such 'story-truths' are simply more effective at simulating the feeling of being at war than any 'happening truth'.

Conclusion

The reflexivity developed by the Vietnam War genre is extended by the literature of the Gulf War. Swofford's book includes lengthy passages of introspection, as do Turnipseed's and Hudson's narratives. However, the concept of O'Brien's story-truth is adapted most

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[108] C. K. Williams, 'Shrapnel', in Goldensohn, *American War Poetry*, p. 364.
[109] Tim O' Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 203- 4.
[110] O' Brien, *The Things They Carried*, p. 204.

effectively by Blinn, whose character, the Aardvark, attempts to make sense of his experience by witnessing it second-hand, just as he and his fellow combatants witness the Vietnam War; for Blinn, however, this is achieved through a camera lens. The Aardvark records his entire experience of the war on his video camera and periodically watches parts of it back, thoroughly disrupting chronology in order to extract the "truth" about *his* war. Just as civilians in the US were able to watch and re-watch footage of the Gulf War via instantaneous televisual broadcasting in order to establish its meaning, so was the Aardvark. He finds that, when confronted with the horrific reality of death, the only way in which he can comprehend it is when the image is second-hand, that is when he witnesses it through the viewfinder of the camera, and then again later when he watches the film back. This detachment from what was previously conceived of as the reality of war is symptomatic of the nature of the Gulf: the virtual has become the real.[111]

Several commentators have suggested that Gulf War literature is deeply rooted in the narrative tradition of the Vietnam War.[112] While it is true to say that it draws on this tradition, Gulf War authors also move it forward. Although many Gulf War soldiers take the image of the maverick hero as their inspiration, many display a rather different attitude towards their own part in the war. Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War* and Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express*, are particularly good examples of narratives by the "intellectual soldier writer" which characterise much Gulf War literature. Their narrators engage in philosophical debates on the justifications for the war and their own role in it. Their characters are introverted and spend a great deal of the narrative addressing their inner conflicts. This self-consciousness is reminiscent of Vietnam writers such as O'Brien, particularly his short story collection *The*

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[111] New modes of production have also allowed virtual representation of what has become known as a "virtual war". This is explored further in Chapter Two.

[112] Vietnam signalled the birth of New Journalism in the form of Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and a variation on this is built on in the Gulf with Farley's narrative about his war; that of an African American journalist reporting the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Things They Carried, in which he highlights the difficulty in communicating the experience of war. In a "technowar", it seems that the question is not how to communicate the war experience, but how to interpret one's own experience of war. Images of escapism feature across Gulf War narratives, again demonstrating influences from Vietnam texts such as those by Bobbie Ann Mason and Jayne Anne Phillips. Where Swofford contemplates suicide, and his comrades react through deviant behaviour, the characters in Hudson's surreal collection of short stories emulate the theme of flying which is present throughout Phillips' novel. Characters describe flying Stealth bombers, growing wings and having outer-body experiences. Incidentally, the character who swaps bodies with her father in 'Cross-dresser', not only enjoys flying and has outer body experiences, but by living in a man's body, also deviates from the restriction of gender norms. One could argue that this one short story encapsulates several elements of escapism in the forms they take in Vietnam narratives.

These texts possess a sense of reflexivity which not only makes the reader aware of the uniqueness of the Gulf War in its perceived virtuality, but also the repercussions of its tendency to foreground the fragmentation of combatants' selfhood. If, as O'Brien suggests, the most accurate portrayal of an event is not always to be found in the 'happening truth', then the most important point is to recreate the feeling of confusion and the dissolution of the self that is experienced by combatants and civilians in the wars. In order to gain a fuller understanding through the paradigm of story-truth, one must redefine which narrative forms constitute a literature of the Gulf War. It seems that the narrative forms which stray farthest from the conventions of war writing are those most effective at communicating the "truth" of postmodern conflict. Due to the fragmented nature of this warfare perhaps a range of media could provide a more reflective source of narrative for those suffering the fracturing effects on their sense of self to communicate their experience. Alternative kinds of narrative such as the oral histories held at the Veterans History Project must be considered as part of the

literature of global conflict in order to establish that the fragmenting effect on the identity of

soldiers is the "shell-shock" of what is perceived as "virtual warfare".

Chapter Two

A Return to "Real War"?:

The Iraq War Narrative
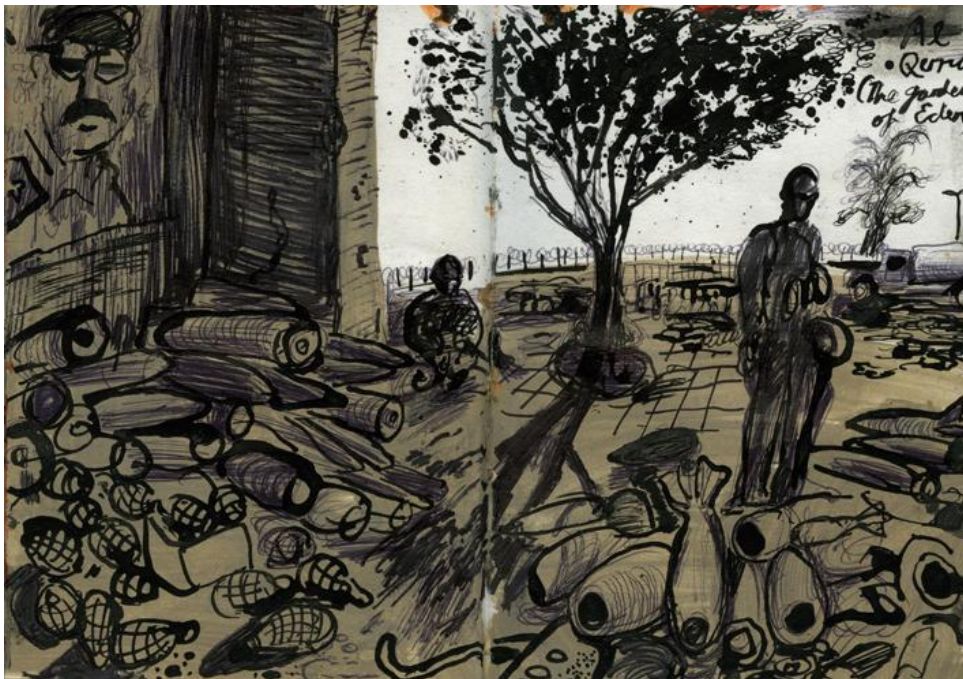
Chapter Two

A Return to "Real War"?:

The Iraq War Narrative

Imagine a war where you can call home after a bad day. Does that make it easier, more familiar?[1]

John Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*

The Iraq War is often perceived as signalling a return to "traditional" warfare due to the style of conflict in which combatants participated. The guerilla warfare which many combatants encountered in the Iraq War marked it as different to the first Gulf War and presented new challenges for the soldiers deployed to it. This chapter examines how the shift in the style of warfare opened the way for authors to reintroduce the heroic soldier figure who fought face-to-face with the enemy. However, it also challenges this idea by examining the ways in which technologically-mediated modes of warfare employed in the Iraq War also resulted in the lack of a stable frontline. The impact of this destabilisation, and the subsequent fragmented war experience, is explored in this chapter. It examines the ways in which the Iraq War can be perceived as a fragmented war experience and how this is represented in the narratives in terms of both form and content.

Unlike its predecessor, the Iraq War prompted a multitude of high profile cultural responses in a relatively short period of time. These include films such as Kathryn Bigelow's film *The Hurt Locker* (2009) and television series such as Steven Bochco and Chris

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[1] John Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier's Account of the War in Iraq* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), p. 72.

Gerolmo's *Over There* (2005) and HBO's *Generation Kill* (first aired in 2008 and adapted from Evan Wright's narrative of the same name, published in 2004). Iraq War inspired videogames include the Official US Army Game *America's Army*, Infinity Ward's *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007) and Atomic Games' *Six Days in Fallujah*, which was withdrawn in 2009 due to concern over its content. The conflict has inspired a wide range of literary responses (far more than the Gulf War). Hundreds of soldier memoirs have been published since the beginning of the occupation of Iraq in 2003, although so far, only a limited number of novels have been produced (if the Gulf War can be taken as an indication, fictional responses to the Iraq War can be expected to increase over the course of the next decade). This chapter pays particular attention to John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier's Account of the War in Iraq* (2005), Jay Kopelman's *From Baghdad, With Love* (2007), and Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2006). Crucially, literary responses to the Iraq War include many alternative narrative forms which are also examined in this chapter, including, Evan Wright's New Journalistic account, *Generation Kill* (2004), Brian Turner's poetry collection, *Here, Bullet* (2005), Anthony Lappe and Dan Goldman's graphic novel, *Shooting War* (2007), Colby Buzzell's memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005) which is adapted from his blog *CBFTW*,[2] and the blog *TurningTables* by a soldier known as Moja.[3] It also considers the significant contributions of oral narratives held at the Veterans History Project. This chapter addresses the ways in which the Iraq War has opened up unconventional forms of media through which combatants can tell their war stories. Consequently, it argues that the criteria for the qualification of narratives as critically accepted literature may need to widen in order for readers to achieve a fuller understanding of the experience of warfare.

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[2] *CBFTW* is an acronym of '*Colby Buzzell, Fuck The War*'. Buzzell's blog is available at: <http://cbftw.blogspot.com/> [accessed 20 July 2010].

[3] Moja's blog, *Turning Tables* documents the soldier's experiences from the 1 June 2003 to 31 December 2006 and is available at: <http://turningtables.blogspot.com/> [accessed 14 July 2010].

What Frontline? Twenty-First Century Warfare in Iraq

The sense of ever-present danger has become an even stronger theme in the narratives emerging from the Iraq War since 2003. In a conflict with no discernible frontline, combatants faced the possibility of their own mortality twenty-four hours a day. Although many previous wars have also lacked a stable frontline, the unique combination of old and new styles of warfare in Iraq entailed new challenges and pressures for the combatants. Many soldiers also found the inconsistency between the scenes they encountered and the media image of the Iraq War difficult to reconcile, exacerbating their awareness of their own multiple consciousnesses. Although this thesis does not focus explicitly on the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, it is crucial to preface the discussion in this chapter by recognising the impact that those events had on American foreign policy, and consequently on military strategy in the early twenty-first century. Helen Dexter observes that 'the Bush Administration's response to these attacks, the "War on Terror", is… heralded as a new way of war'.[4] For Rasmussen, September 11 signalled a new age of fear in which 'technological innovations, the rise of new types of enemy and the way they are seen to challenge Western values define the strategic environment in the twenty-first century'.[5] Integral to this apparent development in the way that the West (and specifically America) approaches warfare is the concept of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).[6] Dexter defines RMA as describing how 'technological advancements have allowed the United States and its allies to prosecute a "new" Western way of war'.[7] However, as Rasmussen argues, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate that:

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[4] Helen Dexter, 'A New Kind of War?: Narrating Conflicts in the Post-Cold War Era', *Perspectives on Conflict*, ed. by Caroline Baker, Edward Granter, Rebecca Guy, Katherine Harrison, Armin Krishnan and Joseph Maslen (Salford, UK: European Studies Research Institute, University of Salford, 2006), 142-62 (p. 142).
[5] Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War*, p. 3.
[6] The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is discussed in detail in Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War*, p. 3, and Dexter, 'A New Kind of War?', p. 142.
[7] Dexter, 'A New Kind of War?', p. 142.

this "revolution in military affairs" (RMA) is not living up to the promise of clean, fast and unproblematic wars… instead of perfecting war, technological innovation is opening up new possibilities for warfare, which in all likelihood will change warfare in the twenty-first century.[8]

Iraq War narratives highlight the disparity between the style of war hailed by the government and the reality for soldiers on the ground. Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* reveals the extent to which the author and his fellow combatants found themselves in continual danger. Whilst his narrative captures the practical manner in which many of the soldiers conducted themselves in Iraq, Crawford includes some harrowing scenes which highlight how vulnerable they were to the urban warfare that they encountered. Several of his friends are critically injured and he himself has several narrow escapes. The scene which provides the focus for the last chapter of the book depicts Crawford and his colleagues under threat from what initially appears to be a group of three young boys, aged eight or nine, playing in the distance.[9] Suddenly, Crawford realises that one of the boys is carrying an AK-47 as he begins to aim it at Crawford's Humvee. Crawford aims his weapon at them, hoping they will run away, but the boy continues to take aim so Crawford opens fire:

> I don't know if that was before or after I realised that the rest of the rifle was missing. The trigger was gone, as was the buttstock and bolt. Someone had killed a hajji there the day before and just run over his rifle with their track, rendering it useless. That kid couldn't have shot spitballs through it even if he had wanted to.[10]

In this disturbing passage, the reader witnesses the disastrous effects of making a mistake in the field. By the time Crawford realises that the boys are simply playing soldiers with a

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[8] Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War*, p. 3.

[9] The last chapter of Crawford's book was the first piece of writing he produced on his war experience and he wrote this while deployed in Iraq. The short story constructs the scene of Crawford back in his home town with his wife and friends. They ask him to tell them a war story, so he tells them the story detailed here about when he shoots a group of children because he believes them to be armed with an AK-47. Subsequently, Crawford informs the reader that he never got to tell his friends and family his war stories and that the scene in his hometown is a fantasy that he constructed to help him cope with Iraq. Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, pp. 198-210.

[10] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, pp. 208-9.

damaged AK-47, he has already pulled the trigger. Moreover, Crawford's narrative recreates the sense of confusion, fear and paranoia that the constant, ever-present danger of urban guerrilla warfare generates.

Many oral narrative accounts held at the Veterans History Project highlight the constant vulnerability that Iraq War combatants felt. Specialist Gregory Schulte, who was just eighteen at the time of his deployment, describes how many soldiers were injured by IEDs and RPG attacks. He recalls how he became aware of his own mortality when he found himself the target of sniper fire: 'I remember thinking there is somebody trying to kill me'.[11] His initial confusion as to where the sniper is shooting from reinforces the fact that the troops were fighting an unknown enemy who did not follow the traditional rules of engagement; by their very nature, the so called insurgents looked like civilians, and would attack at any time. As such, all civilians had to be viewed as a potential threat. Specialist Krystyna Kalsky recounts how her company in the Military Police had experienced civilians, especially children, running out in front of their convoy of trucks. She explains that children had sometimes been used to attack US convoys and logistically it was impossible to stop when the convoy was travelling at speed so the trucks had to keep going:

> I've seen it several times, y'know, and little kids of course do get hit, his arm gets ripped off, his leg gets ripped off. What you gonna do for him? You gonna sew it back on? You can't. He's gonna die. And you have to put him back down on the ground and walk away.[12]

Kalski highlights the difficulty that many combatants faced in distinguishing civilians from insurgents. For the drivers especially, having to keep on driving even when it meant hitting a child, called into question the very purpose of their mission. This, combined with the constant threat from RPGs and IEDs described by Schulte, made it all the more necessary for some troops to develop multiple personalities in order to cope with the different situations that they

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[11] Gregory Schulte (AFC 2001/001/30235), video recording, VHP (10.06).
[12] Krystyna Kalski (AFC 2001/001/244407), video recording, VHP (50.20).

encountered. Crucially, the concept of these twenty-first century wars as new and intrinsically different from (Arab) interstate wars 'functions as a means of distancing our purportedly civilised, humane and technologically-driven forms of warfare from their uncivilised and 'dirty' kinds of warfare'.[13] Richard Jackson suggests that 'such formulations not only express the ubiquitous and deeply Eurocentric barbarism narrative, but they act to obscure the violence and genocidal and degenerate tendencies inherent in all forms of war, especially our own'.[14] Jackson's analysis is supported by the texts that emerged from the Iraq conflict. Whereas the Gulf War has been situated as a highly censored and media controlled war from the outset, writers of Iraq War texts have been discussing for several years the discrepancy between their own experiences and the narrative constructed for the American public which until recently have been overlooked in cultural theory.[15] The obscuring of the violence of war which Jackson describes problematises any attempt to define the Iraq conflict. While many of the soldiers found themselves in constant danger, like their predecessors in the Gulf War, Iraq War combatants often failed to recognise their experiences as traumatic combat. Army Reservist, Christophe Brest, illustrates the confusion regarding the status of this kind of unconventional conflict which emerges through the narratives: 'We had a couple of people actually hit some IEDs, but we never saw any actual combat'.[16] This reservist's narrative shows us how not only society, but the soldiers themselves do not consider what they do in Iraq to be "actual combat", and it is precisely this distinction which problematises soldiers' coping mechanisms, and subsequently impacts on their sense of self. Although the Iraq War is often depicted as a return to conventional warfare, it is, in fact, the latest era in the

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[13] Richard Jackson, 'The Nature of Intrastate War', *What Causes Intrastate War? Towards an Understanding of Organised Civil Violence*, Helen Dexter and Richard Jackson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2011), cited in Dexter, 'A New Kind of War?', p. 26.

[14] Jackson, 'The Nature of Intrastate War', p. 26.

[15] Where representations of the Gulf War and September 11 were immediately perceived as dictated by the image, critics have been slower to position the Iraq War as such. In recent years, the idea of the image as essential in the construction of the Iraq War has been explored in articles such as Mark Astley's 'That's Entertainment: The War of Images in Iraq as Popular Visual Culture', *Perspectives on Conflict*, ed. by Baker, et. al., pp. 36-57.

[16] Christophe Brest (AFC 2001/001/28663), video recording, VHP (11.40).

evolution of warfare.[17] Kathryn Bigelow's film *The Hurt Locker* illustrates this seemingly contradictory evolution in warfare. The film features a masculinised bomb disposal team fighting in a gritty guerrilla war.[18] However, in many situations the disposal experts rely on bomb disposal robots with which they establish symbiotic relationships in order to perform their duties effectively. The failure of society, and the soldiers themselves, to recognise what troops encounter in the urban warfare of Iraq as a new development in the way that war is fought, leads to difficulty in both combatants' own psychological processing and their literary responses to their experiences.[19]

Real War, Real Soldiers, Real Heroes? A Return to the Picaro Warrior

The Iraq War has been perceived by some literary critics to be an opportunity to return to the war narratives of previous eras.[20] Whilst the common perception is that Iraq War literature can be most closely related to narratives from the post-Vietnam era, this chapter explores how such narratives share commonalities with other genres.[21] A multitude of soldier memoirs have emerged from the Iraq War, but this does not necessarily signal a return to the gritty war narrative of past conflicts. Matthew Hill, for example, suggests that war memoirs 'serve often as "secret histories" of conflicts, offering a counterpoint to sterilized, politicized, "official" representations of warfare, representations often awash in terms such as "glory" and "honor" and "patriotism"'.[22] Iraq War memoirs are no exception to this. Indeed, their authors often directly challenge such patriotic images and problematise over-simplified notions of honour. Brandon Lingle constructs a convincing case for considering Colby Buzzell's *My War* as an

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[17] Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War*, p. 44.
[18] *The Hurt Locker*, dir. by Kathryn Bigelow, (Summit Entertainment, 2009).
[19] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 48.
[20] Chapter Three of this thesis discusses these critics in detail.
[21] This concept is explored in Chapter Three of this thesis.
[22] Matthew Hill, 'Book Review: Colby Buzzell's *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*', *War, Literature, and the Arts Journal*, 18: 1-2 (2006), 330-4.

example of the picaresque novel. This section of Chapter Two considers how this positioning might be useful in a reading not only of Buzzell's text, but several other texts from the genre, including Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, Wright's *Generation Kill* and Lappe and Goldman's *Shooting War*. Lingle observes that 'classic Picaresque texts like *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Don Quixote*, *Moll Flanders,* and *Huckleberry Finn* revolve around the margins critiquing the centers of society'.[23] He suggests that 'picaros, or rogues, are able to both satirize and negotiate hegemonic power structures at the same time'.[24] This is certainly true of Buzzell's narrative which has been described by critics as 'uncompromising in both its criticism and its praise, willing to admit the ugliness of violence and the exhilaration that it breeds'.[25] Although Lingle asserts that he does not mean to position Buzzell as a picaro character, he identifies the characteristics that Buzzell shares with the picaro, and the commonalities between *My War* and the picaresque tradition. Howard Mancing observes that:

> a Picaresque Narrative has four basic tenets: 1) that "the major character is a picaro"; 2) that the picaro "usually tells the story of his or her own life"; 3) the text "always displays some degree of generic self-consciousness"; and 4) the text is "protean in form".[26]

Buzzell's self-conscious and malleable narrative about his war experience certainly shares these characteristics. The first two tenets would apply to many soldier narratives across different wars, and the picaresque attributes that Lingle links to Buzzell's narrative also apply to self-reflexive Gulf War texts such as Swofford and Turnipseed's. However, fewer texts from previous wars would pertain to the second two tenets which are facilitated by the mode in which Buzzell writes. The lively, gritty and apparently candid style in which Buzzell presents his experiences is shared by other Iraq war narratives, including John Crawford's *The*

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[23] Brandon Lingle, 'Colby Buzzell's *My War*: An Outsider's Voice from Inside Iraq', *War, Literature, and the Arts Journal*, 21 (2009), 11-20 (p. 12).
[24] Lingle, 'An Outsider's Voice from Inside Iraq', p. 12.
[25] Hill, 'Book Review', p. 330.
[26] Howard Mancing, 'The Protean Picaresque', in *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*, ed. by Giancarlo Maiorino (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1996), p. 281, cited in Lingle, 'An Outsider's Voice from Inside Iraq', p. 12.

Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier's Account of the War in Iraq and Evan Wright's *Generation Kill*. Like Buzzell's *My War*, both of these narratives can be perceived as possessing the tenets of a picaresque text. As a *Rolling Stone* journalist embedded with the First Recon Battalion of the US Marine's, Evan Wright is immediately positioned as an outsider. He is not a combatant or an occupied civilian, but he is nonetheless documenting a war experience. Like Michael Herr in Vietnam,[27] Wright follows the Marines into conflict situations. He often finds his life in danger as a result, but since he does not participate in combat himself, he is othered by the soldiers who refer to him as 'reporter' rather than by name.[28] Therefore, Wright observes the war from a position outside that of the soldiers (or indeed the Iraqi civilians who are subjected to the violence of the war on a daily basis). For Crawford, his position is less obvious. He participates in combat, kills Iraqis and witnesses his fellow combatants sustaining serious injuries.[29] The initial clue as to Crawford's claim to the picaresque categorisation is to be found in the full title of his narrative, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier's Account of the War in Iraq*. The second part of the title represents the fact that Crawford joined the Florida National Guard for the reduced college fees rather than out of a desire to fight for his country. He was close to graduating, had just married his college senior girlfriend, and was approaching the end of his time in the National Guard when he was deployed to Iraq. Although he and his colleagues performed the same role as the full time soldiers, Crawford describes how the career soldiers were often dismissive of National Guard soldiers: 'although they treated us with respect, there was no doubt that they considered us second class'.[30] Regardless of how often they participated in combat, Crawford and his fellow National Guard soldiers remained 'a group of college students, American boys

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[27] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).
[28] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 37.
[29] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, pp. 90-2.
[30] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 22.

who wanted nothing to do with someone else's war'.[31] His narrative therefore captures the experience of a soldier who is writing from outside of the conventional conception of the combatant on the ground. Crawford is educated, self-aware, and distinctly distanced from the career soldiers. His isolation not only accentuates his anxiety in the field, but provides the reader with a picaresque style narrative which tells a soldier's war story from an alternative perspective.

The Virtual Picaro: Unconventional Narrative Forms

Daniel W. Drezner and Harry Farrell identify the Iraq War as the point at which the art of blogging was initiated into popular culture: 'if the first Gulf War introduced the world to the "CNN effect", then the second Gulf War was blogging's coming out party'.[32] Indeed, while blog writing is often perceived as an informal outlet for personal opinions, some of the more unique and politically motivated blogs have achieved a high profile in the news media, with many networks drawing on blog accounts as their eye-witness accounts of international events.[33] However, the fact that Buzzell's text is delivered in a digital format enables him a greater level of flexibility. It also opens up questions regarding how online writing affects the literature produced, as well as Buzzell's own subjectivity. Buzzell's blog has captured the public imagination, winning him the 2007 Blooker Prize (for the best blog to subsequently be turned into a book), and inspiring a multitude of online responses. Some of these responses transcend genre defining boundaries, since they take extracts from Buzzell's narrative and transform it into video shorts. One of the most powerful examples is a pencil-sketch animated

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[31] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. xiii.
[32] Daniel W. Drezner and Henry Farrell, 'Web of Influence', *Foreign Policy*, 145 (November- December, 2004), 32-40 (p. 32).
[33] Having written a blog on events in the Middle East entitled 'Informed Comment', and authored *Engaging the Muslim World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Juan Cole was consulted by news networks and even members of the US Senate. Cole's blog, 'Informed Comment', can be accessed at <http://www.juancole.com/> [accessed 14 Oct 2010].

short called 'Men in Black', taken from a blog entry detailing an ambush. This video short was created for a PBS documentary project, 'Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience', which examines a range of soldier narratives from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (including Brian Turner whose poetry is discussed later in this chapter).[34] As well as being significant in its blurring of genre boundaries, this documentary is one of the earliest attempts to examine the literary responses to Iraq, and crucially, it allows the literature to speak for itself rather than positioning it as the new Vietnam literature.

The appeal of Buzzell's narrative, however, lies in his narrative style. Many Iraq War veterans have attempted to tell their war stories, but few have done so in the style which Joe Woodward describes as 'reminiscent of Hunter S. Thompson and Allen Ginsberg'.[35] Woodward observes that Buzzell's narrative is 'fueled by an antiauthority, punk-rock attitude'.[36] What Woodward suggests here is that Buzzell occupies a space outside of society, and, as such, is able to comment from an outsider's perspective. Crucially, Buzzell's self-aware commentary is able to come into being because he positions himself outside the military and occasionally, it appears that he speaks from an omniscient position outside his perceived self. The medium of the blog enables Buzzell to distance himself from his writing through technology, thus creating a paradoxical narrative in which technology offers access to his immediate reactions to his war experience, but also distances him from his own writing. However, the online format in which Buzzell's war experience is presented accentuates the sense that he is an outsider looking in. It is not only his writing style which positions his work as a picaresque text, but rather the fact that his writing is mediated by a machine means that he becomes something "other" to his colleagues. That Buzzell's narrative reaches readers

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[34] 'Men in Black' animated short film, adapted from Colby Buzzell's *My War*. Created for 'Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience', dir. by Tom Yellin, Richard E. Robbins, Adam Hyman, Kristin Lesko and Gillian McCarthy (Independent Television Service, 2007). Details and video short available at: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/show_operation_homecoming.html> [accessed 2 December 2010].

[35] Woodward, 'The Literature of War', pp. 12-14.

[36] Woodward, 'The Literature of War', pp. 12-14.

through a network of computers problematises his unified identity: he effectively develops both a real self and a virtual self, while his experiences are technologically-mediated. It is, however, only the virtual self that the reader witnesses. This kind of narrative production requires him to interact with the computer which immediately threatens his unified self; Buzzell becomes part of a network of informational flow in which, according to Hayles, means that, '[e]ach person… begins to envision herself or himself as a posthuman collectivity, an "I" transformed into the "we" of autonomous agents operating together to make a self'.[37] Chapter One's discussion of Hudson's *The American Green Machine* considered Haraway's notion that 'communications and biotechnologies are the crucial tools for recrafting our bodies'.[38] This is certainly helpful in terms of biotechnology, but also provides a useful framing for considering the impact of sharing stories and, perhaps more importantly, constructing identities through online mediums. Hayles' perception that posthuman subjects view themselves as part of a "posthuman collective" identifies the fact that by constructing an online identity, the author's self is already compromised. The online identity comprises elements of the author's original identity, but these are unavoidably altered by the process of transforming this identity into a virtual form. George P. Landow suggests that hypertextual writing (such as blogs) reconfigure the author.[39] Landow explains that hypertexts allow the reader to add links and text to the author's text, causing the functions of the reader and writer to become 'more deeply entwined with each other than ever before'.[40] The intertextuality of hypertext, as well as the ability of the reader to add to the construction of the text, reduces the autonomy of hypertext, and consequently, its author. In his analysis of the effect of electronic word processing, Michael Heim observes that, 'as the authoritativeness of text diminishes, so

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[37] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 6.
[38] Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 164.
[39] George P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 125.
[40] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, p. 125.

too does the recognition of the private self of the creative author'.[41] Heim claims that technology reduces the authoritativeness of a text, and consequently challenges the identity of the author. When the authoritativeness of a text is influenced by the reader, as well as mediated by technology, the figure and function of authorship is reconfigured.[42] Such an alteration of Buzzell's self does indeed raise questions about the authoritativeness of both Buzzell and his text. Questions regarding the identity of the author are further accentuated by the frequent use of pseudonyms amongst bloggers. Many bloggers in Iraq adopt pseudonyms for their own safety, whilst many soldiers use them to avoid disciplinary or censory action from the American military. The blogger known as Moja, author of the blog *TurningTables*, is one such example. His blog is prefaced with the words 'WARNING!! SPELLING AND GRAMMER [sic]: ATROCIOUS, CONTENT: SUPREME'.[43] Here, Moja summarises the impact of war blogs rather well. Their importance lies not in the aesthetics of their literary form, but in the informative, emotive and insightful content which the authors provide. Although some critics may contest their textual value, their cultural value is significant. The detailed insights that bloggers provide, and their swift delivery, is a large part of blogs' appeal in an age where consumers of information demand rapid reactions to events as well as the opportunity for interactivity. Some readers may believe blogs lack aesthetic qualities often associated with literature, but such online narratives develop the epistolary tradition which has been associated with documenting war experiences for many years. Whereas combatants in previous wars documented their experiences in letters, perhaps every few days, some Iraq War combatants were able to blog their experiences every day. Unlike many writers from previous wars whose writing takes the form of many separate documents, the blog culminates in a collection of experiences, much like that of the epistolary novel. The blog as a whole is

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[41] Michael Heim, *Electric Language: A Philosophical Study of Word Processing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 221.
[42] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, p. 126.
[43] Moja, 'Turning Tables'.

altered by each entry, making the text fluid and constantly changing. As Landow highlights, the participation of readers in the writing process also moves the epistolary style forward, creating a text which changes every day, and is produced by multiple authors: the blogger, the network, and the reader. Although the authoritativeness of blogs can be questioned (especially in terms of the author's identity), Buzzell and Moja offer readers counter-narratives which capture the fear, exhilaration, boredom, and emotional turmoil of the war experience. Consequently, war blog narratives can be perceived as one of the most valuable modes of narrating war; one that provokes the reader to challenge the dominant media narrative of a technologised war. Furthermore, by their very nature, blogs simulate the virtual, fragmented nature of the post-Cold War conflict experience. The challenge that writing war stories in blog form presents, however, is the threat to the author's identity. As authors of hypertext, Buzzell and Moja can both be conceived as texts themselves, since for authors who create hypertexts the self is 'a decentered (or centerless) network of codes that, on another level, also serves as a node within another centerless network'.[44] By using online media as a mode of production, Buzzell and Moja have transposed their original identities onto new mediated selves located within the network. Deborah Lupton explores the connection between interacting in cyberspace and a loss of the unified self:

> Computer users… are both attracted towards the promises of cyberspace, in the utopian freedom from the flesh, its denial of the body, the opportunity to achieve a cyborgian seamlessness and to "connect" with others, but are also threatened by its potential to engulf the self and expose one's vulnerability to the penetration of the enemy others... the inside of the computer body is dark and enigmatic, potentially leaky, habouring danger and contamination, vulnerable to invasion.[45]

The act of blogging brings the soldier's war story to the American public while simultaneously fracturing the identity of the author. As Haraway observes, 'communications

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[44] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, p. 127.
[45] Deborah Lupton, 'The Embodied Computer/User', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 477-488 (p. 487).

sciences and biology are constructions of natural-technical objects of knowledge in which the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred; mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms'.[46]

Unconventional War Narratives: The Graphic Novel Representing the Virtual War

The increasing importance of communication technologies in the contemporary warzone is not only represented by the number of war blogs to emerge from the Iraq War, but also by the increasing representation of such mediums in other narrative formats. Anthony Lappe and Dan Goldman's graphic novel, *Shooting War*, is set in a quasi-dystopian 2011 in which major terrorist attacks in the United States have become a regular occurrence. The central protagonist, Jimmy Burns, is thrown into the media spotlight after the live video stream to his blog captures a terrorist attack on a Starbucks coffee shop. This footage is broadcast by Global News which subsequently hires Burns as a war correspondent, to provide "no nonsense" coverage of the ongoing conflict in Iraq. The central protagonist of this narrative differs from the more complex central figures of Crawford's and Buzzell's narratives. Burns is rugged and anti-authoritarian, and at first glance signals a return to the maverick hero of the 1980s. Burns' narration, however, maintains an element of self-awareness typical of these other texts. Burns is undoubtedly a character who occupies the margins of society, rebelling against capitalist culture (until he feels that it is in his interests to accept a job with a conglomerate news network). Like Wright, Burns is a journalist reporting on someone else's war: an outsider glimpsing snapshots of the combat experience. The most picaresque feature of Lappe and Goldman's graphic novel is also its most significant feature in terms of depicting the Iraq War experience. The fragmentation of experience and the influence of military and communication technologies is clearly represented in the format of the graphic

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[46] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 165.

novel, namely through the vivid illustrations and disrupted chronology. Crucially, it is Burns'

interaction with technology, with the aim of providing an alternative to the CNN discourse

(by broadcasting his videoblog), which leads him to the Iraq War. After the editor at Global

News views his broadcast following the aftermath of a terrorist attack, Burns is sent to Iraq to

work as a war correspondent. Presenting this story as a graphic novel enables Lappe and

Goldman to emphasise the importance of communication culture in contemporary warfare.

By 2003, the images of conflict which had, in the first Gulf War, been broadcast via

television news networks, had transposed themselves onto the protean form of the internet.

Shooting War depicts Burns uploading videos to his blog and using a touchscreen mobile

phone. It depicts twenty-four hour news networks looping in the background and it features

Iraqi rebels using YouTube and other recognisable interactive sites to further their cause. The

reader is bombarded by images, reinforcing Mitchell's notion that 'some aspects of Western

philosophy and science have come to adopt a pictorial, rather than textual, view of the

world'.[47] Some of *Shooting War*'s images create an augmented reality by layering pencil

sketched images over photographs, military aerial images, and stills from television coverage.

By merging mediums in this way, the authors recreate to some extent the malleability of the

online media they represent. What Lappe and Goldman capture effectively through the

medium of the graphic novel is the endless stream of images and information that abounds on

the internet, and the subsequent contradictions and fragmentation that result from such an

influx of images from different sources. According to Mitchell, picture theory stems from:

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[47] W. J. T. Mitchell, quoted in Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Nicholas Mirzoeff: An Introduction to Visual Culture', in *American Suburb X: Photography and Culture* (1999) <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2008/01/theory-nicholas-mirzoeff-introlduction.html> [accessed 2 June 2010].

the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc) and that "visual experience" or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality.[48]

Nicholas Mirzoeff observes that 'even literary studies have been forced to conclude that the world-as-a-text has been replaced by the world-as-a-picture'.[49] He suggests that 'such world-pictures cannot be purely visual, but by the same token, the visual disrupts and challenges any attempt to define culture in purely linguistic terms'.[50] Indeed, the versatility and immediacy of new media have attracted much critical attention in recent years, and as Mirzoeff suggests, make them problematic to define. However, the important point for this study is that the visual is disruptive to the text, to the narrative. It is this feature which posits blogs and visual narratives as fitting media through which to communicate experiences of war and information. Similarly to its predecessor, many representations of the Iraq War are defined by the fragmentation of the war narrative and of the identity of the author (and narrator).

Endangering the Self: Sand and Other Hazards

As this chapter has established, Iraq War narratives share many commonalities with the literary responses to the Gulf War. Crucially, many of these centre around the fragmenting effect of technology on the experience of war. However, some narratives demonstrate that technology, particularly communication technologies, can offer some solace. Unlike many previous conflicts, the Iraq War has witnessed the widespread availability of e-mail and mobile phones for troops, enabling them to contact their families and friends frequently and

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[48] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 16.
[49] Mirzoeff, 'An Introduction to Visual Culture'.
[50] Mirzoeff, 'An Introduction to Visual Culture'.

instantaneously. In his contribution to the Veterans History Project, Iraq War veteran Travis Fisher describes how he found comfort in the e-mails that he received from his family and friends, concluding that 'it's a really good stress reliever, to be able to communicate instantly'.[51] For many combatants like Fisher, speaking to their loved ones and hearing news from home helped them to cope with the stresses of the combat zone. For others, however, processing events at home whilst deployed was problematic. Although soldiers have been able to send and receive letters for centuries, the ability to communicate instantly from the warzone is a new phenomenon. It appears that it is the immediate nature of the contact which makes it difficult for soldiers to separate their home and combat identities. Crawford considers the implications of instant communication from the combat zone:

> I thought it out. Imagine a war where you can call home after a bad day. Does that make it easier, more familiar?
>
> "Hey, honey, how was your day?"
>
> "Oh, you know, same old stuff, killing, dying. That sort of shit. How about you?"[52]

Here, Crawford highlights a significant difference between the effects of the two media. Letters may be sent every week or every month, so the writer can talk in general terms and will only pick out the key moments to share. Importantly, they have time to consider what they include and how much detail to provide. However, if a soldier is able to call home at the end of his or her day, both they and their partner will tend to discuss events immediately, without enough time to consider how this might affect the other person. Crawford illustrates just such an instance when his wife, Stephanie, complains to him that the dog has defecated in the house, much to his amusement:

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[51] Travis Fisher (AFC 2001/001/34140), video recording, VHP (00.05).
[52] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 72.

"Well, it could be worse. I mean, I'd give anything to be at home cleaning up dog shit."

"What could be grosser than cleaning up a house full of dog shit?" The disgust in her voice was palpable.

"Try cleaning up brains." I tried to catch the words and pull them back even before they left my mouth. It's hard living with a bunch of soldiers and then trying to talk like a normal person to your wife on the phone.[53]

When Stephanie asks him about what happened, Crawford decides to try to share his day with her. She is shocked by the reality of what her husband is doing in Iraq. After he tells her about his day, she replies, 'Oh my God, I didn't know. That sounds terrible'.[54] Crawford then realises that he cannot obtain the understanding and reassurance that he was seeking from his wife: 'Stephanie's voice was full of sympathy and longing, but she was right, she didn't know. No one did, and that was what made it worse, and better'.[55] Crawford's text highlights the dangers of eroding the boundary between the homefront; for Stephanie, hearing details of her husband's experiences in such a raw, immediate manner makes it difficult for her to process the disturbing information, and consequently, she finds it difficult to relate to him. Despite the horror of their own experiences, Veterans History Project contributors illustrate that soldiers in the combat zone are often more concerned by hearing about the stresses of everyday life back at home than about their own anxieties in the warzone.[56] The result is that the soldier in the warzone develops a duality of thought, with their home identities concerned with what they have just heard. This combines with the stress of the guerrilla war to culminate in conflicting anxieties which concern different aspects of the combatant's identity. As one of Crawford's fellow soldiers, Sellers, concludes, regular telephone or e-mail contact

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[53] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 137.
[54] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 143.
[55] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 143.
[56] In contrast, Christopher Farley's central protagonist in *My Favourite War* embraces the multiple identities which result from the symbiotic relationship with technology that Hayles and Haraway describe, by creating a virtual version of himself (p. 98). This online persona allows him the freedom to create his own truth about his sense of self. It also provides him with a form of escapism as he transgresses his bodily boundaries through the informational flow. Although Thurgood is only reporting on the war rather than fighting in it, his creation of a virtual self is perhaps indicative of a need for escapism amongst the troops, and perhaps even amongst American civilians during the Gulf War.

often proves too traumatic to continue over a long period of time: 'Every time we talked, I was just complaining about things here, and I think she got tired of my bitching. We haven't really had a good conversation in a while... Shit, man, I don't know what's up'.[57]

The threat posed to the self in the Iraq War does not only result from communication technologies, but the continued development and usage of long range weaponry. Contrary to much of the media coverage which depicts the Iraq War as a simple return to the "real war" of face-to-face combat, military technology was utilised in many ways. In a similar manner to the Gulf, soldiers engaged in symbiotic relationships with technology in which the distinction between human and machine blurs. As Donna Haraway suggests, 'the relation between organism and machine has been a border war'.[58] Just as it had in the Gulf War, the use of distanced weaponry problematised the combatant's identity due to the lack of opportunity to perceive the results of their actions:

> My job is actually to push the button; that's what I do... we can't see the people... we're not up close and personal like the guys in the Marines and the Army... we launch from a, I can't really say how far away, but we're a good distance away. We launch and watch them as they go down range, and that's about it.[59]

Given the distance, Wilgenhof does not directly witness the results of his firing the Tomahawk missile, and although he seems to be aware of the potential guilt attached to the consequences of his actions, it is easier for him to dismiss it. Like smart-bombs of the Gulf War, the Tomahawk missile is perceived as the possessor of responsibility, and guilt is transferred away from the human combatant. However, as Virilio suggests, it is the inability to perceive the result of his actions which enables Wilgenhof to detach himself from the moral responsibility.[60] Here, Wilgenhof highlights the point suggested by commentators such as Andrew O'Hagan that Iraq War soldiers are a generation of young people who have grown

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[57] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 172.
[58] Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 150.
[59] Jonathan Wilgenhof (AFC 2001/001/21440), video recording, VHP (2.42 – 16.18).
[60] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 11.

up playing photorealistic combat videogames. O'Hagan argues that their virtual experiences influence the way that they approach their duties in the combat zone: 'their understanding of their mission, their power, their enemy and their equipment may be highly colored by the virtual lives they have lived'.[61] Some military trainers perceive such virtual experiences as positive, hailing the current generation of First Person Shooter-trained soldiers as the 'new Spartans', suggesting that they 'probably feel less inhibited, down in their primal level, pointing their weapons at somebody'.[62] Jonathan Wilgenhof's narrative supports this claim and demonstrates how the attitude of the 'new Spartans' is perhaps necessary for the combatant to develop in order to function effectively in technologically-mediated combat:

> I wanted to cause destruction. I wanted to fight. I wanted to be part of the military force. In the Navy there's very few, y'know, long range offensive weapons, and the Tomahawk's the biggest and the baddest, so I wanted to go for that…..[63]

Like their predecessors in the Gulf War, the soldiers using remote warfare develop parallel thought processes as they struggle to reconcile the different versions of reality presented to them through their eyes and the videoscreen. However, perhaps "Generation Y" is better equipped than the Gulf War generation to cope with the multiple perceptions of technologically-mediated warfare.[64] After all, participants in the multi-player videogame develop multiple levels of awareness or 'multiple consciousness'[65] in order to cope with the reality of their fellow players and the virtual scenario on the screen. Indeed, in cases of teamplay, the effect is remarkably similar to that of the 'head-up' display (through the

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[61] Andrew O'Hagan, 'Living It', *London Review of Books* , 30: 2 (2008), 9-10 (p. 9).

[62] Jose Antonio Vargas, 'Virtual Reality Prepares Soldiers for Real War', *The Washington Post*, 14 February 2006 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/13/AR2006021302437.html> [accessed 26 March 2009].

[63] Jonathan Wilgenhof (AFC 2001/001/21440), video recording, VHP (2.42 – 16.18).

[64] For a detailed discussion of the changing role of perception in warfare, see Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 11.

[65] Souvik Mukherjee, 'I Am a Stalker, I Am a Paddle, I Am a Game', Under the Mask: Perspectives on the Gamer Conference, University of Bedfordshire (7 June 2008). <http://underthemask.wikidot.com/souvikmukherjee> [accessed 31 May 2009].

windscreen) and the 'head-down' display (on the computer screen).[66] As Virilio explains, '"post-modern" war requires a split observation, an immediate perception (with one's own eyes) and a mediated perception (video or radar)'.[67] George Gittoes, producer of the documentary *Soundtrack to War*,[68] argues that this is a 'digital war on a personal level, not just on a laser-guided bomb level'.[69] The similarities between the videogame experience and real combat, however, also cause difficulties for the combatants. Gittoes asserts that:

> most of them [the soldiers] find that war is extremely different to the game… It began in 1993 in Somalia when the soldiers were wearing night-vision goggles so they weren't seeing their enemies through their own eyes… They all said it's like a video game, but the consequences are far more serious and that's what they find so hard to deal with.[70]

Indeed, the troops in this conflict were under constant threat from IEDs, RPGs and NBCs. Although the onus had shifted towards guerrilla warfare leading to an increase in face-to-face interaction in the Iraq War, the Gulf War anxieties regarding NBCs remained, with sarin gas in IEDs succeeding the depleted uranium and nerve gas of earlier wars. Schulte explains the very real threat that sarin gas posed to his own company: 'there was a case when I got back in May… where sarin gas was used in an IED. Nobody got killed, very luckily they didn't get sick, it didn't mix right for whatever reason, it's still a very strong threat'.[71] Despite the fact that the type of war has altered between the Gulf and Iraq Wars, the danger posed by NBCs continued to threaten the soldier's self by transcending bodily boundaries. By accentuating the anxiety and paranoia resulting from fear of contamination, it also posed a threat to the self through the development of parallel thought processes.

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[66] Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 39.
[67] Virilio, *Desert* Screen, p. 39.
[68] *Soundtrack to War*, dir. by George Gittoes (Sydney: Dalton Productions, 2004) <www.soundtracktowar.com.au> [accessed 5 May 2009]
[69] Fran Molloy, 'Shoot to Thrill', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November 2007. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/articles/war-games/2007/11/21/1195321793613.html?page=fullpage> [accessed 31 May 2009].
[70] Gittoes, quoted in Molloy, 'Shoot to Thrill'.
[71] Schulte, VHP (36.06).

The fear of contamination from NBCs in this conflict continues the legacy of many twentieth-century American wars: the chlorine and mustard gas of the First World War; new nuclear technologies used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War; the anticrop and antipersonnel biological weapons of the Korean War; the continuous threat of nuclear apocalypse that persisted throughout the Cold War; Agent Orange in Vietnam; and depleted uranium in the Gulf War. However, a threat to bodily boundaries also presented itself through a different source; the environment and geography of the combat zone. Chapter One explored how Swofford represented the impact of the desert and the ability of the sand to infiltrate the body, threatening the soldier's sense of self. This threat remains consistent between the two Gulf conflicts. Iraq War poet Brian Turner encapsulates the overwhelming presence of the sand in his poem entitled 'To Sand' in his poetry collection *Here, Bullet* (2005). He describes the sand as an entity which consumes everything:

> To sand go the skeletons of war, year by year,
> To sand go the reticles of the brain[72]

In the first line Turner depicts the skeletons of soldiers being consumed by the desert, absorbed into the exotic environment, just as many Vietnam texts refer to soldiers being engulfed by the mysterious jungle.[73] The second line draws attention to how the sand crosses the bodily boundaries, contaminating the body. This theme is certainly reminiscent of Swofford's analysis of the sand as becoming part of the body, of the soldier's self. The sand specifically affects the brain, and most significantly the 'reticles of the brain', which are responsible for the brain's sense of perception. Hayles claims that selfhood is intimately bound up with the issue of boundaries in the posthuman era:

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[72] Brian Turner, 'To Sand', in *Here, Bullet* (Farmington, ME: Alice James, 2005), p. 66.
[73] For example, Tim O'Brien documents the story of his friend who is lost in the sinking mud of a field in Vietnam. See O' Brien, *The Things They Carried* (London: Flamingo, 1991), pp. 147-8.

the construction of the posthuman is also deeply involved with boundary questions, particularly when the redrawing of boundaries changes the locus of self-hood. Shift the seat of identity from brain to cell, or from neocortex to brainstem, and the nature of the subject radically changes.[74]

When these boundaries are breached, the soldier's sense of self is threatened. Turner indicates that the sand is capable of transgressing bodily boundaries and altering a person's perception. Turner does not specify here whether he is referring to the soldier's perception of the war or how they perceive themselves. The loss of perception, and the importance of other senses, is explored in Das's *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*. Das suggests that there is a 'disjunction between our optical sense of space and the soldiers' tactile perception'.[75] So the hostile physical environment requires yet another duality of experience, thus constructing it as another contributing factor to the creation of the parallel thought processes which result in multiple consciousnesses. Moreover, Sigmund Freud identifies an 'integral relation between the formation of the ego and processes of touch'.[76] He suggests that 'the ego is derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body'.[77] Consequently, the identity of some combatants (such as Wilgenhof) is compromised by a lack of physical interaction with the enemy or fellow soldiers in a ground combat situation. However, if, as Klein claims, the self can be defined as 'everything constituting an integral part of a given individual',[78] a secondary implication is that the combatant's self can be challenged by the breaching of boundaries by environmental factors. Das argues that the trenches of the First World War posed a threat 'both physical and psychic, of *dissolution into formless matter*'.[79] A comparison can be drawn between the effect of the mud of the trenches

[74] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 279.
[75] Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 3.
[76] Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 22.
[77] Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Super-Ego (The Ego Ideal)', p. 26, cited in Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 22.
[78] Klein, *Immunology,* p. 5.
[79] Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 37. (Das's emphasis.)

on those soldiers and effect of the sand and desert on Iraq War combatants. Crawford, for example, describes how 'winter storms in the desert sent sand invading the city by night, blinding our patrols'.[80] Not only does Crawford allude to the loss of visual perception as a result of the sand storm, but he constructs an analogy of invasion. The wild environment that he associates with otherness and the enemy is invading what is, in comparison to the desert, a civilized area of Iraq. Later in the narrative, Crawford explains the increasing influence that the presence of sand was having on the combatants:

> we were eating sand, drinking sand. Sand was in every orifice of our bodies. At some point, you begin to imagine that you're made of sand. It gets into you, the desert, not physically, but really into your soul until you're just pissed off.[81]

By this point, Crawford has been in Iraq for months and the constant invasion of his bodily boundaries by the sand, and by extension the desert, has become difficult to cope with. Such a persistent presence over a prolonged period of time may not have a lasting physical impact, but, as Crawford highlights, the psychological effect can be damaging to the self. Haraway suggests that invasions of the bodily boundaries can transform human beings: 'at the level of their most basic selves'.[82] If, as Haraway suggests, a breach of the bodily boundary can result in a transgression from the original identity, then the challenges to those boundaries that Iraq War narratives depict (in both physical and psychological form) pose a serious threat to the unified self of the combatant.

Coping and Comfort: Dogs of War and the Importance of Touch

Combatants develop many ways of dealing with the stresses of war and the impact on their sense of identity. As this chapter and the preceding one explore, some develop multiple

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[80] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 176.
[81] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 205.
[82] Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies', p. 226.

thought processes and adopt different personas for different situations, whereas some use writing as a kind of catharsis. However, Jay Kopelman[83] and Kayla Williams[84] identify another key coping strategy which is alluded to in several Iraq War narratives: the psychological benefits of developing relationships with animals. Dogs, in particular, feature frequently in Iraq War narratives, and despite the military's strict policy regarding pets and mascots,[85] Kopelman and Williams explain how their respective battalions adopted abandoned and stray dogs as pets. Both writers describe how they miss the company of their own pet dogs from home and Williams explains that their pets were 'extremely important for morale' and became a 'pretty big part of [their] lives'.[86] Kopelman observes that looking after Lava, the puppy that the Marines find in an abandoned building they are raiding, provides the Marines with a routine, a sense of normality, and something to focus on. This is especially true when injured marine Matt Hammond takes over the care of Lava while he is recuperating and learning to walk again.[87] When Kopelman's deployment is nearing its end, his plan to transport Lava back to America becomes 'an unprogrammable mission' that he cannot walk away from.[88]

The dogs adopted by groups of deployed soldiers also fulfilled another role. Like those in the trenches in the First World War, soldiers in the Iraq War craved human contact. The physical comfort derived from contact with another living entity is something which both Kopelman and Williams discuss in detail. Where, as Das explores, soldiers crowded together in the trenches turned to physical affection from each other for comfort, the soldiers in Iraq

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[83] Jay Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love: A Marine, the War and a Dog Named Lava* (London: Bantam Press, 2006).
[84] Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the US Army* (London: Phoenix, 2006).
[85] 'It was a violation of General Order No.1 to keep pets or mascots'. Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 187. 'Prohibited activities for service members under General Order 1-A include adopting as pets or mascots, caring for or feeding any type of domestic or wild animals'. Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, p. 39.
[86] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 188.
[87] Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, p. 93.
[88] Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, p. 75.

War narratives often relied on their pets to provide them with that physical contact.[89] Kopelman describes the importance of touch as a source of comfort from the emotional turmoil of combat: 'I couldn't sleep at night anymore unless some little fur ball was nestled up against me and breathing on my feet'.[90] For Williams, however, the opportunity to be able to show affection to another being carries even more significance:

> physical contact was more or less something I did not have during my deployment. Guys were extra careful not to touch me. As a female I was not really a part of the "good game." So having pets around was important for this reason: Here was a creature I could touch and love.[91]

Since she is a woman in a male dominated warzone, Williams feels it necessary to distance herself from her male colleagues in order to maintain an appropriate level of professionalism. Consequently, she spends months in the warzone without sharing the hugs and other forms of contact that many of her male colleagues partake in. The dogs that her battalion adopts, particularly Rak Hammer, provide her with the opportunity to express her emotions and derive comfort through touch. Crucially, the pets constitute another being for the troops to share their fears with. Soldiers can allow themselves to be open about their combat zone fears and concerns. When Kopelman wakes up having experienced harrowing nightmares, he finds comfort in sharing his trauma with Lava who also displays apparent signs of nervousness and anxiety.[92] Following his return to the US, and the subsequent successful rescue of Lava from Iraq, Kopelman observes that they are both products of their experiences in Iraq and are working through their issues together:

> We'll be driving down the road and pass some guy on the sidewalk who's minding his own business, but something about him gets Lava to thinking about Iraq, I guess, like maybe the way he walks or the way he's dressed, and Lava goes

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[89] For a detailed discussion of the importance of touch between soldiers in the trenches, see Santanu Das's chapter, '"Kiss Me Hardy": the dying kiss in the First World War Trenches', in *Touch and Intimacy*, pp. 109-136.

[90] Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, pp. 47-8.

[91] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, pp. 188-9.

[92] Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, pp. 56-7.

absolutely, certifiably, straight-to-the-moon-and-back wild… he gets lost in that zone no one, not even me, can access…. That's okay, though. I'm pretty much in the same boat in more ways than one, and we keep each other company as things straighten out.[93]

Such re-enactment is common amongst veterans, and having lived through similarly traumatic war experiences, Lava's behaviour is affected by his previous life in Iraq. Crucially, Kopelman feels that Lava provides him with the shared experience and understanding that so many veterans, such as Crawford, fail to find on their return home.

Returning to "The World": Re-integration and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

For many combatants, the trauma of war is not something which they can shed when they return to civilian life. They are left with what is now most commonly referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which can take many forms including nightmares, acute noise-sensitivity, and an inability to relate to their partners and children. One point that is highlighted by the Veterans History Project narratives is that combatants were very quickly dispersed back into society, particularly those in the National Guard (the US equivalent of the Territorial Army in Britain): 'with a wave good-bye and a pat on the back, we were civilians again'.[94] Many returned to their permanent jobs almost immediately on their return, meaning that they got very little support in terms of psychological well-being or reintegration back into everyday life.[95] Fisher illustrates how difficult it can be to adjust to everyday situations: 'we went to a mall and it was just weird 'coz I noticed, we were a group of four guys, and we were always looking over our shoulder, and it was from that routine of being on patrol'.[96] The narratives demonstrate how it is the little things in life which civilians take as everyday which can cause a veteran distress. For example, loud noises that they may mistake for sniper fire,

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[93] Kopelman, *From Baghdad, With Love*, p. 201.
[94] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. 218.
[95] Minear, *The U.S. Citizen Soldier*, p. 3.
[96] Fisher, VHP (49.36).

or being unable to cope with the demands of everyday life on a university campus, quite often due to the lack of routine. These kinds of re-enactments occur when memories that have been repressed by the conscious mind of the veteran, make their way to the surface and into the conscious mind. W. H. R. Rivers defines repression of wartime memories as 'the active or voluntary process by which it is attempted to remove some part of the mental content out of the field of attention with the aim of making it inaccessible to memory and producing the state of suppression'.[97] Unlike the Gulf War, witnessing death directly was more common for Iraq War soldiers, leaving them with disturbing memories of combat. Jason Hicks explains that such scenes construct his worst memories: 'I wish I could block it out completely out of my memory, but I can't, it's always gonna be there, and there's always going to be things that bring it back up'.[98] This division of war memories between the conscious and unconscious mind, leads to a state that Rivers describes as 'dissociation'.[99] Such a condition further supports the idea which is evident in the literature of these wars, that the kind of warfare that troops experienced in the Gulf and Iraq has caused many veterans to develop multiple consciousnesses.

Grinker and Spielgel also discuss regression in relation to war trauma, but they take a Freudian approach, claiming that 'a soldier or airman… subsumes his own ego into the military "superego" and in so doing, "regresses to a less mature, more dependent level"'.[100] While their battle experience is successful this arrangement works well, but the strains of the combat situation often break the ties between the soldier and the superego. Ben Shephard provides the following example of such an occurrence: 'the Army lets him down in some way (for example, he is shelled by his own side); or the officer or buddy on whom he depended is

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[97] W. H. R. Rivers, 'The Repression of the War Experience', paper delivered before the Section of Psychiatry, Royal Society of Medicine on 4 December 1917, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/rivers1.htm> [accessed 23 November 2007].
[98] Jason Hicks (AFC 2001/001/34151) , video recording, VHP (13.30).
[99] Rivers, 'The Repression of the War Experience'.
[100] Rivers, 'The Repression of the War Experience'.

killed – and the soldier is then left bereft, in a "passive dependent state", needing to be mothered and cosseted'.[101] John Elet describes how many of the soldiers that he was posted with in Iraq display exactly this kind of regressive behaviour on their return to the US:

> there were guys that I knew over there that completely changed once we got home, y'know, they went off the deep end, they wasted their money, I feel like I don't even know them anymore, they've become totally immature, they had so much responsibility over there. You wouldn't think these guys were soldiers if you saw them today.[102]

In some cases, such regression and vulnerability can manifest itself as behavioural changes such as those described by Elet. However, it can also be experienced by those soldiers who have experienced physical injuries in the combat zone, and on their return have to rely on their partners and families. This issue is raised in the documentary *Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq*[103] which addresses the lack of support provided by the government for veterans returning from the Iraq War as amputees. The aftercare of amputees has been a concern following most twentieth-century wars, but the amputees and other injured soldiers returning from the Gulf and Iraq wars have faced the complicating factor of their injuries not being compliant with the dominant discourse through which the US government projects the image of a sophisticated, bodyless, "technology war". The prevailing discourse militates against the broad dissemination of images of severely wounded soldiers. Alpert and Kent's documentary reinforces the need to recognise that despite the technology available, soldiers in the Iraq War (which witnessed the highest number of amputee survivors of any American war), faced a very real threat of injury and mortality.

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[101] Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 331.
[102] John Elet (AFC 2001/001/34106), video recording, VHP (46.18).
[103] *Alive Day Memories*, dir. by Alpert and Kent (HBO documentaries, 2007).

Communicating the Experience of Unpopular Wars: The Soldier's Oral Narrative

One theme which is common to many Iraq War narratives (and to the genre of war literature more widely) is the difficulty in communicating the experience of war. Kali Tal draws attention to the difficulties in communicating the experience of trauma through literature: 'Trauma literature demonstrates the unbridgeable gap between writer and reader and thus defines itself by the impossibility of its task – the communication of the traumatic experience'.[104] Unlike some narratives, Crawford describes how he attempted to communicate his experiences to his wife and friends. He finally concludes that, despite his best efforts, they do not understand the war experience. Instead, Crawford finds writing stories about his experience something of a cathartic process. However, this appears to be due to the fact that he wants to share his stories and explain what the soldiers achieved in Iraq rather than it being simply part of the personal healing process:

> I have too many of these stories to tell, and if just a few of them get read, the ones that real people will understand, then maybe someone will know what we did here. It won't assuage the suffering inside me, inside all of us. It won't bring back anyone's son or brother or wife. It will simply make people aware, if only for one glimmering moment, of what war is really like.[105]

As Crawford highlights, veterans' sense of separation from American society was accentuated by the inability of their friends and family to understand what the soldiers had experienced. It is difficult for both the soldiers themselves and their loved ones to accept that the experience has changed the veterans. One contributor to the Veterans History Project, Schulte, describes his difficulty in settling back into civilian life: 'It's still tough to be back down here, where people don't understand… it's hard to talk to people, 'coz they don't understand and they will probably never understand what it was like… I try… sometimes it's

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[104] Tal, 'Speaking the Language of Pain', p. 218.
[105] Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, p. xiv.

a lost cause'.[106] Not only did many members of the American public not understand the experience, they openly denounced troops for their involvement in an unjust war. Another young veteran, Jonathan Wilgenhof, reveals the profound effect that public displays of disapproval can have on returning veterans:

> I come home from a war and there's Americans protesting the war and protesting the military, y'know, we're just like you guys. My job involves launching missiles, your job involves making interviews… don't hate me… I'm told to launch… Don't hate the military, don't hate the soldiers, don't be mad at them, I don't want to see another Vietnam, I don't want to see guys come home and be shunned… the war might be wrong, 'coz no war's ever good, y'know, no-one wants to fight a war. But, don't hate me, all we want is a nod and a wave, and say… "the war's a bad thing, but we're happy you're back".[107]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, such a failure by the government or the military to fulfil expectations can lead to a detachment of the combatant's ego from the military/governmental superego, leaving the soldier in a regressive state of vulnerability. The fact that the Iraq War was so unpopular with the public evokes a similar sense of crisis for the soldiers, many of whom are aware that their friends back at home are some of the protestors.[108] Consequently, the fragmentation of identity that soldiers experience is accentuated by mixed feelings about their involvement in the conflict. This issue is explored to some degree by *Alive Day Memories*,[109] in which Iraq War veterans who have experienced severe physical and/or psychological trauma attempt to combat their government's concealment of their plight. The veterans talk openly about their injuries, and the viewer sees images of the amputees without their prosthetics. This reinforces the visual markers of trauma which the general public have lost sight of, due to the tendency of the US media to promote a particular image of the Gulf and Iraq conflicts.

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[106] Schulte, VHP (34.33).
[107] Wilgenhof, VHP (51.36).
[108] While many soldiers felt that the anti-war protests undermined their justifications for involvement in the war, Williams took the opinion that 'the right of the American people to say whatever they want is one reason I joined the military. It's one reason I am willing to die for my country. Those protesters are exercising their ultimate responsibility as Americans by expressing their political opinion'. Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 43.
[109] *Alive Day Memories*, dir. by Alpert and Kent.

The veterans of these conflicts contend with a plethora of thought processes; whether or not they believe the war to be justified; whether it is moral to fight in a conflict if they believe its justifications to be questionable; how the US government/military may have failed to support them, and how US civilians may have undermined their authority as "heroes" on their return. Reconciling these conflicts is almost impossible, and although many learn to live with their experience, for some, the trauma to their personalities becomes too much to process. The solution for some, like Hicks, is to try to block it out, but such a fragmentation of memory has a direct effect on the unified identity.[110] The veteran faces a battle between their civilian self and the combatant self who surfaces in the form of flashbacks. The torment caused by the fragmenting effects of war resulted in instances of complete breakdown, as Kalsky confirms: 'suicide rates were really high. People were like "screw this", I mean, you've got a loaded gun, some people see that as the answer'.[111] It seems that the fragmentation of identity that combatants suffered in these technologically-mediated wars is often not remediable, and can eventually become overwhelming.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of public reaction to the war was the general reluctance to acknowledge the veterans as heroes, either because the public is opposed to the war, or because they cannot see the heroic value of participating in the kind of war that the government presents. Even accounts by troops writing on personal blogs (including Buzzell) were censored:

> In the United States, the Pentagon invoked national security to shut down blogs written by troops stationed in Iraq. Military officials claimed that such blogs might inadvertently reveal sensitive information. But Michael O'Hanlon, a defense specialist at the Brookings Institution, told NPR that he believes "it has much less to do with operational security and classified secrets, and more to do with American politics and how the war is seen by a public that is getting increasingly shaky about the overall venture.[112]

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[110] Hicks, VHP (13.10).
[111] Kalsky, VHP, (41.43).
[112] Michael O'Hanlon, quoted in Daniel W. Drezner and Henry Farrell, 'Web of Influence', p. 40.

As Schulte observes, 'the news media… didn't talk about any of the good stuff that we did…[a]fter that, I tried to explain to people that it's not as bad as what the news says, that's only one side of it'.[113] The concept of the hero is redefined by Nathan Hale, Jr., who insists that psychoneurotic patients should not be exiled from hero status. He cites the experience of a Second World War soldier: 'I fought until most of my outfit was killed, until I lost my ability to sleep, until hollows deepened under my eyes and my weight melted away'.[114] Such images of brave combatants, whose sense of self is collapsing as the result of their experience of conflict, are far more evident in the literary responses to the Iraq war than in the media coverage of the conflict. These texts also highlight the fact that anyone in a combat zone could be vulnerable to psychological breakdown, even those combatants who most strongly conform to the stereotype of the war hero. Hale suggests that 'because of the special horrors of modern warfare, that breaking point could be reached more quickly than ever before', and this is evident in the literature.[115] Although previous wars have caused combatants to experience parallel thought processes due to the loss of visual markers, and soldiers experienced division of the self, the narratives reinforce the fact that the unique nature of these conflicts, and the increasing dependence on technology, can accelerate the combatants' descent into fragmented states of identity. The combatants of these wars interact with technology on a much more intimate level than their predecessors, thus breaking down the boundaries between human and machine to a much greater extent. Conversely, the very thing which makes the psychological impact of these wars more immediate is the one element which hinders the acceptance of this trauma suffered by combatants; that civilians find it far harder to comprehend how troops can suffer genuine trauma in what they see as a virtual and technologically-mediated war.

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[113] Schulte, VHP, (32.30).
[114] Nathan G. Hale, Jr. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 278, quoted in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 333.
[115] Hale, Jr., quoted in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 333.

Conclusion

The Iraq War is a more complex conflict than conceived by the mainstream media in the West. Although the style of warfare differs dramatically from the Gulf War, classifying the Iraq conflict simply as a return to conventional warfare or as gritty guerrilla combat would be to ignore its complexity. Combatants do encounter Iraqis on a face-to-face basis and engage in guerrilla warfare. This brings challenges for the soldiers in terms of how they deal with the horror of death and injury. However, the presence of technology and its fragmenting effect on the combatants should also be acknowledged. For some soldiers, their sense of self is still problematised by the lack of physical contact in the combat zone. The narratives examined in this chapter demonstrate that whether combatants are distanced from their actions when launching missiles or unprepared by their virtual videogame experiences for the realities of war, military and media technologies influence the way that combatants perceive their war experience. In addition to this, bodily boundaries are still transgressed by a host of entities (technology, NBC weapons, sand), further accentuating the fragmentation of the self. The conflicting images of guerrilla warfare and advanced military technology to emerge from the Iraq War also cause problems for soldiers attempting to define their war. Despite its perception as a simple return to conventional warfare, these narratives demonstrate that the Iraq War produces a multiplicity of experience and a fragmented version of war which manifests itself in the varied narrative forms that it produced.

Chapter Three

Masculinity Under Threat:

Male Narratives in an Age of Changing Warfare

Chapter Three

Masculinity Under Threat:

Male Narratives in an Age of Changing Warfare

> To be a marine, a true marine, you must kill… You consider yourself less of a marine and even less of a man for not having killed while at combat.[1]
>
> Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead*

Recent avenues of exploration in cultural studies and international relations reveal new possibilities for a reading of masculinity in Gulf and Iraq War literature. There has been much discussion regarding the impact of technology on the soldier's sense of self, exploring ideas of speed, distance, and the possibilities and drawbacks raised by cyborg theory.[2] What is yet to be fully explored, however, is how these factors have affected the trajectory of masculinity which has been thoroughly mapped through the wars of the twentieth century, and can be extended to encompass the literature of these conflicts.[3] This chapter examines the ways in which masculinity is represented and challenged in both Gulf and Iraq War narratives, specifically Swofford's *Jarhead*, Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express*, Paine's *The Pearl of Kuwait*, Buzzell's *My War*, and Wright's *Generation Kill*.

There are compelling reasons for bringing these texts together. *Jarhead*, *Baghdad Express* and *My War* are memoirs documenting their authors' deployment to the combat zone,

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[1] Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (New York: Scribner, 2003), pp. 351-2.
[2] Some of these perspectives are explored in detail in Chapter One of this thesis.
[3] In addition to Susan Jeffords' influential book *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), more recent studies include Joanna Bourke's *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996), and Das's *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature.*

whilst Paine's novel is a fictional response to the lack of opportunity for heroic action in the Gulf. Following in the journalistic tradition of Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), Wright's narrative documents his experiences as an embedded war reporter with the US Marine Corps. Crucially, Buzzell's memoir is framed by the internet blog he wrote whilst based in Iraq, and consequently, it mostly details his immediate reaction to events, only occasionally adding retrospective thoughts. Paine's, Turnipseed's, and Swofford's narratives depict the experiences of soldiers on the ground coping with feelings of superfluity as the Gulf War becomes a conflict which was primarily fought at high speed from the air and using distanced weaponry. The 'Other Battles', which Swofford refers to in the title of his memoir, indicates the psychological difficulties that Swofford faced during his deployment. Buzzell's and Wright's narratives, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate how different the Gulf War's successor was in terms of conflict style. The war that Buzzell encounters during his deployment signals an apparent return to the face-to-face guerrilla warfare experienced by soldiers in the Vietnam War. Buzzell has the opportunity to play an active combat role through direct interaction with soldiers, civilians or insurgents, and he develops a strong understanding of, and empathy towards, the Iraqi people.

The intention of this chapter is not merely to provide a simplified analysis of the Gulf War as a "technowar" posited against the guerrilla warfare action of the Iraq War. Rather, it points to the ways in which these contrasting experiences of combat impacted on the soldiers' masculinity, and consequently, how the complexities of their masculinity are depicted in the literature of the conflicts. As such, it does not only focus on the kind of Gulf War narrative which fits neatly into what one might describe as the "intellectual soldier writer category", which would provide the more obvious route through this material. Instead, it makes a comparative reading of different kinds of narrative which share some common themes and formats. Each text features a mix of characters, with narrators who demonstrate an awareness

of themselves in the warzone and question how their role is affected by modern warfare. In this way, this chapter explores how the literature of these wars can be read as portraying the impact of "technowar" on the masculinity of soldiers in the Gulf War, and the perceived return to the post-Vietnam style 'manly man' in the later Iraq War.[4] Crucially though, it explores how these narratives complicate such a simplified analysis and identifies the ways in which the technological circumstances of each conflict impact on representations of masculinity at both an individual and on a wider political level.

Making Men: Masculinities and the Military

The importance of performing masculinity effectively is first foregrounded to the reader in the narrators' descriptions of basic training during which new recruits undergo what Joshua Goldstein refers to as the "hardening" process.[5] The narratives reflect Goldstein's assertion that drill sergeants draw on 'the entire arsenal of patriarchal ideas… to turn civilian male recruits into "soldiers"'.[6] Above all, the social conditioning of the potential warrior depends heavily on the ability of the military to position the soldier in opposition to the feminine; '"The warrior, foremost among male archetypes… has been the epitome of masculinity in many societies". When training to be a soldier, a man learns to "deny all that is 'feminine' and soft in himself"'.[7] In Swofford's *Jarhead*, Drill Instructor Burke plays on the recruit's fear of being labelled either feminine or homosexual in order to undermine Swofford's masculinity (and consequently, his worth as a warrior):

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[4] For a discussion of the 'manly man', see Phillips, 'The Wars Against Iraq: Red Alert on Girly Men', *Manipulating Masculinity*, p. 191.
[5] Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 266.
[6] Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 265.
[7] Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 266.

He yelled to the recruit, "I can't believe my fucking eyes! Did you piss your trousers, boy? Did you piss your trousers like a little girl?"

"Sir no, sir!"

"You had an orgasm, is that it? You think I'm so sexy you jizzed in your trousers?..."[8]

Burke's insults escalate from accusations of cowardice to infantising Swofford by addressing him as "boy", thus undermining his sense of mature masculinity. Next, he feminises Swofford by comparing his reactions to that of a little girl, and finally his destruction of Swofford's sense of manhood culminates with the accusation of homosexual desire. Nancy Hartsock observes that 'the values of traditional masculinity are also systematically invoked in the basic training of the military. Recruits learn that to be a man is to be a soldier, not a woman'.[9] The polarisation that both Blinn and Swofford's texts highlight between the masculinised warrior and the feminised categories of the female and the homosexual are reinforced by the findings of Barrett's study of twenty-seven male officers in the US Navy:

> Discipline, obedience, compliance, and exacting detail, ideals that are depicted as 'tough' and masculine, depend upon contrasting images of the feminized 'other' – being undisciplined, scattered, emotional, unreliable.[10]

The encounter between Swofford and his drill instructor rapidly escalates into what could easily be considered by the civilian reader as bullying or even assault. Burke insults Swofford's mother and when Swofford informs Burke that his mother is dead, Burke replies, 'One less bitch I got to worry about her calling her senator because her cunt son can't handle my Marine Corps!'[11] With this statement, Burke further undermines Swofford's masculinity by equating his identity with female genitalia. Crucially, by utilising comments that alienate

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[8] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 36.
[9] Nancy C. M. Hartsock, 'Masculinity, Heroism, and the Making of War', in *Rocking the Ship of the State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics*, ed. by Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 133-152 (p. 134).
[10] Frank Barrett, 'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy' *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3:3 (2007), pp. 129-142 (p. 133).
[11] Swofford, *Jarhead*, pp. 36-37.

women and femininity in various forms, Burke distances his troops from the feminine homefront. Significantly, the film adaptation of *Jarhead* opens with this scene, which sets the masculinised tone for the adaptation which fails to draw out some of the subtleties of Swofford's character in the original text. The scene with Burke, and indeed the film adaptation in general, reinforces Goldstein's suggestion that, 'the core of military training was to equate aggression with masculinity'.[12] Swofford notes that such treatment was mild in comparison to what he would encounter in the combat zone and perceives it as a necessary part of becoming a warrior. As the epigraph to this chapter highlights, Swofford places a particular emphasis on the transition which he underwent during his military experience, 'You consider yourself less of a marine and even less of a man for not having killed while at combat'.[13] The marked change in character is further reinforced by his observation later in the passage that even if a soldier had killed someone, they would tell their mother that they had not killed anyone. Despite this she would say, 'I lost my baby boy when you went to war. You were once so sweet and gentle and now you are an angry and unhappy man'.[14] Here, Swofford constructs a crude division between the masculine war experience and the feminine domestic sphere. In her influential book *The Remasculinisation of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (1989), Susan Jeffords emphasises the importance of 'separating "masculinity" from "men" (and, of course, from male)'. She explains that 'it is possible to recognize the many ways in which no individual man embodies all of the traits of the masculine (nor any woman of the feminine)', instead preferring to use the term 'the masculine point of view', representing the disembodied voice of masculinity.[15] As such, this chapter draws on this conception of masculinity to frame its study of the impact of different kinds of warfare on the

[12] Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 264.
[13] Swofford, *Jarhead*, pp. 351-2.
[14] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 352.
[15] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. xii-xiii.

masculinity of individuals and the US military, and to problematise the perceived masculine combat zone and feminine home front.[16]

Brothers in Arms: Fraternal Bonds and Militarised Masculinity

This distinction between the masculinised combat zone and the feminised home front is reinforced further through the fraternal bonding process which is common to the majority of Gulf and Iraq War texts. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that it is essential to consider René Girard's concept of the erotic triangle when analysing what she describes as the 'homosocial'[17] bonds between men. Sedgwick describes the erotic triangle thus: 'in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved'.[18] Sedgwick observes that in Girard's formulation of the triangle, he acknowledges that 'any relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification, whether the entities occupying the corners of the triangle be heroes, heroines, gods, books, or whatever'.[19] In *Jarhead* (and by extension, in other Gulf and Iraq War narratives), the women required to construct the erotic triangle are notably absent, at least in the male narratives and on the ground. Homosocial bonding therefore has to take its form by other means, and many narratives indicate that in the combat zone (especially in a technowar) the woman is substituted by the act of war and the opportunity for heroism. In *Jarhead*, this is demonstrated when Sergeant Siek stages a football game in full MOPP gear (anti–chemical/biological/nuclear weapon suits) for the benefit of the press as part of a public relations exercise to demonstrate how "high-tech" the Marines' equipment is. Having previously been briefed on what they are permitted to say to the reporters, and reminded that

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[16] This idea will be explored further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

[17] For a detailed discussion of 'homosocial desire', see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

[18] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 21.

[19] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 23.

they gave up their freedom of speech when they joined the military, the Marines' game of football rapidly escalates out of control. The increased tension causes the football game to transcend the boundaries between sport, war and sex. As tensions run high, the Marines' frustration causes the football game to degenerate into a "field-fuck":

> Field-fuck: an act wherein marines violate one member of the unit, typically someone who has recently been a jerk or abused rank or acted antisocial, ignoring the unspoken contracts of brotherhood and camaraderie and esprit de corps and the combat family. The victim is held fast in the doggie position and his fellow marines take turns from behind.[20]

Existing critical work focuses on the importance of this event as a homosexual act, and while it is important to acknowledge this possibility, when it is considered in the context of Swofford's chapter, it is clear that there are other important connotations at work in this passage. Crucially, this chapter of the thesis argues that in her reading of this event as a literal gang rape, Phillips obscures the importance of this passage.[21] The central purpose of this apparently deviant act is not sexual pleasure, but rather to forge homosocial bonds (or communal bonds as Phillips also suggests) and as a way for the soldiers to reclaim some of their freedom of speech. This 'mock act of sexual violence', as Piedmont-Marton more accurately refers to it, works to challenge the patriarchal organisation which has deprived these marines of their freedom of speech.[22] It is not, as Phillips asserts, the seemingly homoerotic act which forges bonds, but rather the collective act of rebellion against the military hierarchy. As Sedgwick points out, 'obligatory heterosexuality' is 'built into male-dominated kinship systems', ergo 'homophobia is a necessary consequence of… patriarchal institutions'.[23] So the humiliation which the reader first believes to be aimed at Kuehn is actually directed at the military establishment, namely through Siek's humiliation at such a

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[20] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 27.
[21] Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity*, pp. 194-5.
[22] Piedmont-Marton, 'Writing Against the Vietnam War in Two Gulf War Memoirs', p. 265.
[23] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 3.

debacle ensuing in front of reporters to whom he was supposed to be demonstrating the effectiveness of the masculinised fighting force of the United States Marine Corps. The idea that the value of the "field-fuck" is to be found in its rebellion is confirmed by Swofford in a later paragraph. As Swofford observes: 'The exhilaration isn't sexual, it's communal – a pure surge of passion and violence and shared anger, a pure distillation of our confusion and hope and shared fear'.[24] Indeed, Kuehn can be perceived as simply a scapegoat, a figure to focus aggression upon. The marines are assaulting the military both metaphorically, through their actions towards Kuehn, and physically, through their sabotage of the MOPP suit demonstration for the reporters. Swofford provides the reader with an extensive list (spanning two pages of the text) of those people whom he and his fellow marines are metaphorically "fucking" during their rebellious act: 'We aren't fucking Kuehn: we're fucking the press pool colonel, and the sorry worthless MOPP suits… President Bush and Dick Cheney and the generals, and Saddam Hussein…'.[25] This list gradually becomes more abstract, and eventually Swofford's frustration becomes introspective, and he blames himself for the situation in which he finds himself:

> we're fucking the world's televisions and CNN; we're fucking the sand and the loneliness and the boredom and the potentially unfaithful wives and girlfriends… we're fucking ourselves for signing the contract… we're angry and afraid and acting the way we've been trained to kill, violently and with no remorse.[26]

However, Sedgwick's work on homosociality reveals that something more complex is unravelling in this passage. If Kuehn is operating as the substitute for a woman in terms of Girard's erotic triangle, then Phillips could be correct in her assertion that this is a sexual act. However, if, as this chapter suggests, Kuehn is not the substitute for a woman, but rather is representative of war, then the seemingly sexual nature of this act is representative of the

[24] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 28.
[25] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 28.
[26] Swofford, *Jarhead*, pp. 28-9.

soldiers' desire for actual combat. The sense in which the marines are "fucking" the military is dichotomous; the "field-fuck" is a result of the marines' desire to participate in actual combat, and their rebellion again the United States Marine Corps for sending them into a technowar in which they have little or no opportunity for heroic action. Despite Swoff's unbridled desire to participate in war, he is aware of the actions of others and of his own participation in the war lust, again displaying the metaphorical distancing, in addition to the physical distancing, of the soldier from the combat zone which is typical of Gulf narratives.

This dramatic unveiling of a brutal side of the soldier features in both Swofford's and Blinn's narratives, as does the contrasting self-awareness of their actions. In Blinn's narrative, the Aardvark draws the reader's attention to Bucket's chant, 'War, war, war… Kill shoot sex fuck'.[27] He draws our attention to the chant again later in the novel, as he ponders the events that have come to pass in a moment of internal turmoil.[28] Like Turnipseed and Swofford, the Aardvark, with his knowledge of current affairs and interest in philosophy, is perceptive of the sociological changes taking place in his colleagues, and yet more disturbingly, in himself.[29] Unlike the male bonding process in *Jarhead*, the homoerotic rituals in Blinn's narrative develop into something considerably more sinister. In their efforts to assert their own masculinity, the soldiers in *The Aardvark* participate in the ritual humiliation of Mel, the philosophy lecturer and the Aardvark's mentor. During an alcohol fuelled pre-war party, they discover Mel in the bath with a Filipino boy. Consequently, Mel becomes the victim of homophobic ridicule which escalates into a full scale attack. Sedgwick observes that homosocial bonds between heterosexual men can be characterised by 'intense homophobia,

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[27] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 191.
[28] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 252.
[29] As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Brandon Lingle suggests that Buzzell is a picaro or rogue character who is able to 'satirize and negotiate hegemonic power structures' simultaneously. This idea is explored later in the chapter, but it should be noted that the kind of self-awareness Lingle identifies is also displayed in the characters of Swofford and the Aardvark. For a detailed discussion of Buzzell as a picaro character, see Lingle's essay 'Colby Buzzell's *My War*: An Outsider's Voice from Inside Iraq' in *War, Literature and the Arts*, 21 (2009), 11-20.

fear and hatred of homosexuality'.[30] Where female homosocial and homosexual bonds are relatively continuous, there is a notable disconnection between male homosocial and homosexual bonds.[31] Through their attack on Mel, the soldiers in Blinn's novel forge their "brotherly bonds" and consequently reinforce their masculine identities. The Aardvark observes that Mel seemingly resigns himself to the role of victim in his lack of reaction and his failure to leave the room. The Aardvark removes himself from the room at several points which fragments his experience of the attack. Although his failure to defend Mel situates the Aardvark as party to the abuse, the Aardvark clearly marks himself as detached from the masculine collective in this passage. Sedgwick suggests that 'in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power'.[32] She explains that this relationship may take a variety of forms including 'ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two'.[33] In this passage of *The Aardvark*, the reader witnesses the performance of the latter of these forms. The attackers sit Mel down in the chair, referring to him as 'cocksucker' and 'fagman',[34] and physically abuse him: 'Bucket's got his dick out again and is whipping Mel's face with it… "This what you want?!" Bucket yells. "Go for it! This is it – the Real Thing! Ain't mine as yum-yum as your benny-boy buddy?"'[35] Bucket's employment of a homosexual act to reinforce homophobic values here is, as Sedgwick suggests, a highly conflicted, but intensively structured combination of ideological homophobia and ideological sexuality. The soldiers construct Mel as a scapegoat for all of the injustices they feel: 'Nerdy and Rudy, who seem to have discovered a special camaraderie in a common enemy, barrage

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[30] It should be noted that Sedgwick prefers to view homosociality in the 'orbit of desire', that is to say, the homosocial is a continuum which includes both the homosexual and homosocial. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 1.
[31] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 5.
[32] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 25.
[33] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 25.
[34] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, pp. 238-9.
[35] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 243.

Mel with sneering accusations of all the ills him and his type, whatever that is, have wreaked upon the world'.[36] These accusations span a number of subjects from: 'homosexual couplings, interracial genetic inbreeding' to the 'lack of family values and that old time religion' to the morning after pill and feminism that allows wives to 'slut around on their husbands'.[37] Many of the concerns are contradictory and have little bearing on the situation: 'interracial inbreeding'; 'kiddy porn numbers' that do not really have children on the end of the phone; and the fact that the soldiers criticise 'neo-Nazism' when they are themselves demonstrating their own extreme right views.

The similarities that can be drawn between this incident and the passage in Swofford's narrative, which seemingly violates Kuehn, are rather informative. Like the soldiers in *Jarhead*, Blinn's characters are finding a way of reclaiming their freedom of speech, and, perhaps more importantly, reasserting their masculinity. Just as with Swofford's characters, the soldiers in *The Aardvark* latch on to a scapegoat, against which they can define their own sense of masculinity. Interestingly, the soldiers in the two narratives appear to be rebelling against different things; the marines in *Jarhead* are lashing out against the right wing masculine collective, whereas the soldiers in *The Aardvark* appear to be rising up against liberal ideas from the left. What is compelling in these two passages is the way in which the soldiers in the two narratives view their own actions. The marines in *Jarhead* apparently embrace homoerotic acts as a means of rebelling against the institutionalised hegemonic masculinity of the military by reinforcing their own sense of an alternative masculine collective. Conversely, the soldiers in Blinn's novel perceive homosexuality and all of the liberal concepts that they identify as a threat, but, paradoxically, engage in such an act themselves in order to punish the deviant. Although Swofford's characters revolt against the military, and Blinn's characters rebel against liberal ideas, both of these passages in actual

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[36] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 243.
[37] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 243.

fact demonstrate a backlash against the feminisation of warfare that James Der Derian identifies in the Gulf conflict. These passages depict a demonstration against the frustration of transformations in warfare, and to some degree, a changing world. Both sets of troops are prevented from participating in combat due to the new style of distance warfare to emerge in the Gulf War. The acts of fraternal kinship that they participate in are a means to reclaim some of the sense of masculinity which they feel has been taken from them. By focusing on Kuehn and Mel, the troops express their aggression towards the feminisation of war, using the two men as representatives of feminisation, thus positing them in opposition to the masculine: 'I want some of that. I ain't seen boy ass this pretty since Korea'.[38] Kuehn actually participates in his own feminisation by saying, 'I'm the prettiest girl any of you has ever had!'[39] Mel, on the other hand, does not participate in the combatants' feminisation of him, although the Aardvark interprets Mel's subservience as participation. Rudy draws a clear distinction between himself as masculine and the feminised Mel by asking 'What's it like Mel?... I just wanna know. What's the big attraction to sucking cocks?'[40] Such a distinctive othering of Kuehn and Mel illustrates the intent of the acts in both narratives as a means for the troops to strike out against a feminised means of warfare and reassert their own sense of masculinity.

Tough and Tender: The "Feminisation" of War

The US military's failure in the Vietnam War resulted in a crisis in masculinity at both the individual and collective levels; the loss of respect for the military service which hindered the production of male virtue through means of fighting for one's country and undermined patriarchal authority; and the increased momentum of the women's movement which began

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[38] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 27.
[39] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 27.
[40] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 239.

to raise questions about many of the values associated with manhood.[41] By the 1990s, 'the push to overcome the Vietnam syndrome was as intimately related to restoring American manhood as it was to restoring the national belief in military intervention'.[42] Historically, US masculinity had been 'defined in sharp contrast to perceived feminine characteristics, roles, and responsibilities and had valourised competition, aggression, and dominance'.[43] America's defeat in Vietnam is frequently perceived as a failure to perform masculinity effectively, and consequently, the US military and the US government are apparently feminised:

> The dual characterisation of the feminine – as negotiating (the U.S. government) and as deceptive (the government of Vietnam) – allows the U.S. government's actions to be viewed as perhaps more innocent than those of the Vietnamese (the Vietnamese know there are POWs), thus maintaining a subtle racism that is transfigured as gender.[44]

The rise of anti-war protesters and the increased visibility of women in political and military arenas also led to Vietnam being framed as the war in which 'wimps and sissies' held back the 'real men' who were fighting for their country.[45] The response was a reassertion of traditional masculinity, which included a surge in the popular hyper-masculine hero in the post-Vietnam era. In the Gulf War, advances in military technology added another dimension to the feminisation of war. Martin Van Creveld suggests that the effect of the increase in the use of remote weaponry is two-fold:

> On the one hand, feminization refers to the fact that there are now many more women in the professional militaries of advanced societies; on the other hand, feminization refers to a process of decline in the capacity to engage in so-called real war.[46]

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[41] Steve Niva, 'Tough and Tender: New World Order and Masculinity in the Gulf War', in *The "Man" Question in International Relations*, ed. by Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 116.
[42] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 110.
[43] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 117.
[44] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. 151.
[45] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 117.
[46] Martin van Creveld, 'The Great Illusion: Women in the Military', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29: 2 (2000), 429-42, quoted in Kimberly Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', *Men and Masculinities*, 10:4 (June 2008), 389-404 (p. 400).

Male soldiers in the Gulf War were forced to confront the idea that advances in technology not only pushed warfare into what several commentators have termed 'posthuman war' – in which machines detracted from the warrior's potential for conventional heroism – but also led to the feminisation of war by enabling women to fight.[47] That 'military values are manly values,' and are the 'quintessence of male power' is a concept which seems under threat when reading Gulf War literature.[48] For the Gulf War generation who had been raised on the cultural legacy of post-Vietnam era remasculinisation, their experiences frequently failed to fulfil their expectations.[49] This conflict of masculinities could not continue, and as such, the US government adapted the propaganda which was disseminated to both its troops and its civilians. A new form of masculinity was required, what Steve Niva identifies as the 'new man', or more specifically, the new American man, whom he describes as both tough and tender.[50] As such, the newly valued attributes of technomasculinity were incorporated, along with other values which had previously been dismissed as feminine and unwarlike. Niva's definition of the new man is more complex than the image of the new man which frequented popular culture in 1990s; for Niva, the 'new man' is the product of the US government's reinvention of militarised masculinity, and by extension, the new image of the hegemonic masculinity which is deeply ingrained in American culture. As Niva explains:

> the most important element of this new masculinity was its slight femininization through the construction of a tough and aggressive, yet tender hearted, masculinity… Infantrymen took a backseat in war coverage to computer programmers, missile technologists, battle-tank commanders, high-tech pilots, and those appropriately equipped and educated for the new world order warfare.[51]

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[47] Kim Ponders, for example, is one of the few female authors of Gulf War literature. Her novel, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* (2005) documents the experiences of a female pilot stationed in the Gulf.

[48] Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female?*: *Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 178.

[49] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. xii.

[50] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 118.

[51] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 119.

As a marine sniper in the Surveillance and Target Acquisition Platoon, Swofford falls into precisely the category of soldier whose roles were eclipsed in the Gulf War. Although this was not the first war in which air strikes and distanced weaponry had played a key role, the proportion of fighting that comprised these methods was unprecedented. This new masculinity is evident in the texts of the Gulf War which depict a more openly sensitive, philosophical generation of combatant: a soldier who questions the justification of the war he is fighting, who questions the place of human combatants like himself in a technowar, and who considers his position in relation to the war hero paradigm.[52] Swofford suggests that 'the men who go to war and live are spared for the single purpose of spreading bad news when they return, the bad news about the way that war is fought and why'.[53] He accuses the men who return with good news about war of being liars who risk the safety of the country by not recounting the true horror of war. Swofford's memoir, does indeed offer the reader an alternative to the dominant US paradigm by depicting the human cost of surgical strikes, and the horror of the military's tactical decisions which resulted in the high number of civilian fatalities on what became known as the Highway of Death. Swofford struggles with the fact that he is fighting for a country which would adopt such military strategies,[54] and for him, the idea of an identity as a hero in a perceived technowar does not help to reconcile his internalised conflicts. As such, Swofford expresses distain for his hero status, 'I became bored with the routine and frustrated with the identity, the identity of the hero, being forced upon me'.[55] Swofford displays the tenderness that Niva describes as one of the components of the

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[52] The high proportion of Gulf War narratives written by college educated soldiers may be some indication of this new masculinity, although it should also be noted that those with a lesser level of education may have had fewer opportunities to publish their stories. Unlike the officer class soldiers of the First World War, many soldiers in the Iraq wars were from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and joined the military for the incentive of waived college fees. For many, joining the military was their only route into higher education.

[53] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 385.

[54] When he and his colleagues walk along the Highway of Death, Swofford is horrified at the charred corpses that constituted the 'epic results of American might'. He questions the justification for such action, asking 'Is this what we've done? What will I tell my mother?', p. 314.

[55] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 355.

new masculinity, but he does not get the opportunity to engage in face-to-face combat and prove his tougher side.

Niva's description of the new masculinity was apparently epitomised by President Bush who stood as the 'new American man, who was tough and highly militarized but also sensitive and compassionate'.[56] Although George Bush may be a contentious example of the new American man, many protagonists in Gulf War narratives certainly occupy this space. Whereas in previous wars the US and its soldiers had been depicted as highly masculinised, in this conflict the government was using a rejuvenated image of American masculinity in order to overcome "Vietnam Syndrome".[57] This "new man", a more sophisticated kind of soldier, distanced the US military of the 1990s from the media reports of the 1960s which depicted the US military as the perpetrators of terrible human rights offences and American soldiers as brutal rapists and "baby-killers". Instead, the new image of individual soldiers, the military, and the American government, demonstrates strength through intelligence and technological capability. Crucially, the "clean" image of US action projected the notion that the US was fighting this war in a "civilised" manner. As a consequence, the enemy was not feminised (as in previous wars), but rather Hussein was depicted as an 'anachronistic hypermacho opponent'[58] whilst the tough and tender American man represented a civilised approach to foreign policy. For the combatants who had been exposed to the hyper-masculine post-Vietnam remasculinisation of America, and had experienced a basic training regime designed to instil in them a masculine identity which excludes all that could be interpreted as feminine or weak, the identity of the "new man" presented to them could never equate to their concept of a warrior persona. Without the opportunity to go to face the enemy, they could not conceive of their participation in the war as equating to the heroic action of which they all

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[56] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 119.
[57] For further discussion of "Vietnam Syndrome", see George C. Herring, 'The "Vietnam Syndrome" and American Foreign Policy', *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Autumn 1981), 594-612.
[58] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 119.

held such high expectations. The fact that instead of being feminised (as in previous wars), the enemy was now being depicted as an 'anachronistic hypermacho opponent',[59] whilst the American soldier was depicted as the possessor of a feminised masculinity, appears to have been impossible for these soldiers to accept. Although the dominant discourse suggested that it was possible to sustain a masculinity epitomised by the 'new American man' who was both tough and tender, the literature that emerged from the Gulf War illustrates the fragmentation of identity which this produced.

"Technowar" and the Challenge to Heroic Masculinities

The majority of Gulf War authors are preoccupied by the impact of advances in military and communication technologies on their characters' experiences of the conflict. These texts highlight the connections set up between the virtual war experience and the media war in the Gulf. The influence of the media coverage features in several of the plots, most notably in Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, which focuses on the apparently virtual nature of the conflict. In terms of the effect on masculinity, the importance of such coverage lies in its ability to disrupt the boundaries between the frontline and the homefront, the combat zone and the domestic sphere, and consequently the distinction between the masculine and feminine. Due to live broadcasts by major television stations such as CNN, American civilians often knew about military operations before the troops in the combat zone had even received their orders: '*Honey, the war started today, but you already know this, you probably knew before I did*'.[60] The extent to which many of the soldiers are both physically and psychologically distanced from the combat zone itself is a trope which distinguishes this genre from the wider category of American war literature. As discussed in Chapter One,

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[59] Niva, 'Tough and Tender', p. 119.
[60] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 253. (Swofford's emphasis.)

Virilio identifies the Gulf War as the point at which warfare develops a fourth front: the front of information. He suggests that this fourth front 'becomes the principal front and comes to supplement, indeed supplant, the strategies of land, sea and air actions'.[61] This concern is well documented in the literature of the Gulf War, and as a sniper, Swofford is acutely aware of his own superfluity. One of his colleagues raises this concern at a briefing: 'I don't know if *we'll* be needed. The war's going to be moving too fast… It'll last about five minutes out here, if you ask me'.[62]

For Hartsock, masculinity can be identified as 'one of the key underlying causes of war', whereas Joshua Goldstein asserts that it is actually the 'social practice of war that requires the production and reproduction of masculine men'.[63] The threat that technology poses to traditional masculinity has been explored by several cultural theorists (as well as by literary writers), with some notable contributions from Der Derian, Coker, Hartsock and Hutchings.[64] As Swofford highlights in the above quotation, the Gulf War marked a point at which physical strength (having been highly esteemed in the world wars and Vietnam) had been eclipsed by what Der Derian identifies as 'technomasculinity'.[65] Der Derian defines technomasculinity as a new form of masculinity in which 'information and speed become the crucial values'.[66] This builds on Virilio's concept of the fourth front of information and confirms the changes in warfare that novels such as Swofford's and Blinn's describe, specifically, that the American ideals of the masculinised hero were modified during the Gulf War. Swofford reinforces this with a passage in which Swofford and his team locate and have the enemy within their rifle sights, only for a captain to call in an air strike on their target,

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[61] Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 47-8.
[62] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 222.
[63] Hartsock and Goldstein, quoted in Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', p. 391.
[64] Several other useful articles on masculinity in war can be found in Harris and King, eds., *Rocking the Ship of the State: Towards a Feminist Peace Politics* (1989) and Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds., *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
[65] James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), in Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', p. 400.
[66] Der Derian in Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', p. 400.

thus depriving them of using their skills in heroic action. Subsequently, Swofford concludes that he is 'completely dispensable'.[67] Such technomasculinity does not sit comfortably with those soldiers raised on the films of the post-Vietnam period during what Jeffords refers to as 'the remasculinization of America'. Jeffords defines this 'remasculinization' as a primary mechanism for the 'renegotiation of patriarchal relations' which occurred in the aftermath of the Vietnam conflict, and suggests that it took the form of 'a revival of the images, abilities, and evaluations of men and masculinities in dominant US culture'.[68] Fundamental to this revival was the concept of the heroic warrior, the criteria for which are identified by Goldstein as: physical courage, endurance, strength and skill, and honour.[69] For many Gulf War soldiers, these qualities are threatened by the lack of opportunity to face their enemy and prove their heroism. The issue of honour, however, is also complicated by the technological nature of the Gulf War. Hartsock suggests that 'the honor of the warrior-hero depends importantly on the ranking of his fellow contestants', asserting that 'The greatest victories are those won from the greatest warriors'.[70] As one can glean from the literature of the Gulf, the asymmetrical conflict was far from a contest between equals. Swofford's fellow marine, Troy, highlights this inequality: 'I feel sorry for these poor bastards. They didn't have a chance'.[71]

The dual experience which results from the incongruence between hyper-masculine expectations and the technomasculinity that combatants experienced in the Gulf is illustrated by Swofford who looks to the traditional heroism of Homer's *Iliad* in order to help him to 'acquire a target' whilst deployed in a high speed technowar.[72] This is symptomatic of the

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[67] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 273.
[68] Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, p. xii.
[69] Goldstein, *War and Gender*, pp. 266-7.
[70] Hartsock, *Masculinity, Heroism, and the Making of War*, p. 142. Hartsock later suggests that rather than a war conducted by "surgical strikes" with "clean bombs" detracting from the ideology of the hero, thus making heroic status unattainable, "abstraction" actually is a fundamental component of heroic action, pp. 147-8.
[71] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 315.
[72] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 216.

'preoccupation with an epic return to male-conquest mythology'[73] which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[74] Through her reading of the *Iliad*, Hartsock proposes that heroic action is a 'complex construction that consists of deliberately facing the cessation of existence, a flirtation with death'.[75] This concept was problematised in the Gulf War by the fact that many recruits had few opportunities to face the possibility of their own death in a war which was defined by its distanced weaponry and surgical strikes. According to Hartsock, 'the warrior's social role is defined by the fact that he must go to meet those who would kill him'.[76] Many soldiers departed for the Gulf with expectations of such an opportunity, influenced by post-Vietnam narratives and with the cultural legacy of the Vietnam War firmly embedded in their psyche. These individuals were seeking a chance to prove their worth as men, and craved the opportunity to establish themselves as heroes of American war history.

Whereas critics such as Piedmont-Marton situate Gulf War literature as the unworthy successor of the Vietnam War,[77] novelist Paine foregrounds the need for heroic fulfilment, but also demonstrates the need to write against Vietnam literature and the hyper-masculinised hero of the post-Vietnam period. By the end of the Gulf War, the two key protagonists in *The Pearl of Kuwait* have been denied the opportunity to prove their heroism: 'that was the whole problem with the official Gulf War for Trang and me: from start to finish it was boring'.[78] Instead, they embark on their own mission or "ghazzu"[79] to rescue the beautiful Kuwaiti Princess Lulu from her oppressors. Set in the aftermath of the Gulf War, the rescue of Lulu

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[73] Lynda E. Boose, 'Techno-muscularity and the "Boy Eternal": From the Quagmire to the Gulf', in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woolacott (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 67.
[74] Boose, 'Techno-muscularity and the "Boy Eternal"', p. 67.
[75] Hartsock, 'Masculinity, Heroism and the Making of War', pp. 140-141.
[76] Hartsock, 'Masculinity, Heroism, and the Making of War', p. 140.
[77] See Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', pp. 433-443.
[78] Tom Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Inc., 2003), p. 38.
[79] Carmichael and Trang embark on a Middle Eastern traditional adventure or mission known as a "ghazzu" in order to prove their heroic capabilities.

can easily be interpreted as a metaphor for the liberation of Kuwait by US forces. This is particularly apparent when, in a fanciful twist towards the end of the narrative, the protagonists' ghazzu witnesses them attempting to capture Saddam Hussein.[80] Early in the novel, the reader learns that one of the protagonists, Tommy Trang,[81] is the product of a rape by a US marine on a twelve year old Vietnamese girl during the Vietnam War.[82] Given their history, fellow marine Cody Carmichael questions why Trang's mother would choose to move to America and Trang would join the Marines. Trang simply replies: 'Get this straight in your head, man. *America* didn't rape her. And the *Marine Corps* didn't rape her'.[83] Trang emphasises the difference between the actions of his mother's rapist and the integrity of America and the US Marine Corp. Crucially, unlike other Gulf War protagonists, Paine's characters do not aspire to hyper-masculinised post-Vietnam "Rambo" characters, but rather, they are influenced by figures from previous wars: 'we are all whooping and charging out of that bird *like we are taking the beaches at Normandy!*'.[84] Inspired by World War II soldiers and the desert missions of legendary figures such as Captain Shakespear, Gulf War soldiers Trang and Carmichael live by the mantra, "DIE A HERO!"[85] Like most Gulf War narratives, Paine's novel emphasises the effects of the "technowar" on the soldier's experiences and they are devastated to learn from an Air Force officer that they are unlikely to be involved in combat: 'Truth is, marine, if all goes well with the air war as we expect, there may not even be a ground war…. This is a new kind of war and with any luck, we won't need your

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[80] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, pp. 307-8.
[81] It is perhaps more than coincidence that Paine's masculinised Vietnamese American character Trang is situated in opposition to the feminised Vietnamese Colonel Trang in *Missing in Action*, dir. Joseph Zito (Cannon Films, 1984). See Jeffords, *The Remasculinisation of America*, pp. 150-1 for a discussion of the gendering of Zito's Trang.
[82] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, pp. 54-55.
[83] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 55.
[84] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 53. (Paine's emphasis.)
[85] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 6.

services'.[86] Just as in Swofford's narrative, there is a strong sense that the air war in the Gulf has deprived the ground soldiers of the opportunity for heroic action:

> Trang was stuck on the idea that the pilots had taken *his* war away from him, and from then on he had like a real dislike of planes and pilots. He seemed to want to pretend the air war wasn't happening, that the modern age wasn't even happening…[87]

Here, Paine highlights the disparity between the expectations of the troops and the reality with which they were faced in the Gulf. The recurring theme in Gulf War texts of the crisis of the self, a crisis in the soldier's sense of manhood,[88] results from the incongruous ambitions of soldiers to prove their masculinity in traditional terms by fighting a non-traditional conflict. As Swofford summarises, 'the most complex and dangerous conflicts, the most harrowing operations, and the most deadly wars, occur in the head'.[89] Whilst Paine offers the reader an insight into the psychological effects of the technowar, unlike Swofford and Turnipseed's narratives, *The Pearl of Kuwait* provides an alternative to the familiar image of the Gulf as a virtual technowar. In constructing an old fashioned ghazzu mission, Paine enables his characters to explore the desert landscape, to encounter Kuwaitis, witness the effects of American action on civilians, and crucially to face their Iraqi enemy. The narrator acknowledges the use of remote and surgical devices such as "drone" (or unpiloted) aircraft,[90] but also draws attention to the use of napalm on oil-filled Iraqi trenches and anti-personnel weapons such as the devastating "daisy-cutter" bomb.[91] Paine's portrayal of Iraqi soldiers illustrates the broad cross-section of Iraqis who were enlisted, from the scared men whom the

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[86] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, pp. 59-60.
[87] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 60.
[88] For example, Swofford's *Jarhead*, Paine's *The Pearl of Kuwait*, Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express*, Hudson's *Dear Mr. President*, and Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War*.
[89] Swofford, *Jarhead*, p. 352. These, of course, are the "other battles" that Swofford refers to in the title of the memoir.
[90] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 151.
[91] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 186. For two opposing discussions regarding the use of the controversial Daisy-cutter bomb please see 'Fact File: Daisy-cutter bombs', BBC, 6 November 2001 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1641411.stm> [accessed 2 August 2010], and Carolyn Lauer, 'The Daisy Cutter Bomb: The Largest Conventional Bomb in Existence' (University of Notre Dame, 2002) <http://www.nd.edu/~techrev/Archive/Spring2002/a8.html> [accessed 22 May 2009].

American troops first encounter,[92] to the brutal enemy who cut out Corporal Euclid Krebes'

heart and drag his body along behind their motorbike.[93] By constructing the Iraqi (and other

Middle Eastern groups) as a notable presence, Paine writes back to the absence of Iraqi

figures in the media coverage of the conflict and challenges the widely accepted notion of the

Gulf as a "bodyless" conflict.[94] As a result, Paine's characters provide a contrast to the

protagonists in many other Gulf War texts in that they are able to overcome the sense of

superfluity and subsequently the crisis of the self that is associated with the failure to perform

heroic action.

The Remasculinisation of the Warrior?: The Iraq War

Just as the defeat in Vietnam and the perceived technowar in the Gulf resulted in

transformations in US masculinity, the events of September 11 2001 also marked a defining

moment in American masculinity.[95] Patricia Leigh Brown claims that this is the point at

which the US moves on from 'past eras of touchy-feeliness' such as Alan Alda's character in

M*A*S*H to a new epoch in which men can proudly flaunt '"physical strength" as their

primary virtue'.[96] Unlike the soldiers of the Gulf War, those fighting in 2003 did not struggle

to reconcile competing internalised identities as a result of unfulfilled aspirations, but rather

they experienced the horrors of war and were given the chance to go to meet their enemy.

This is reflected by the proliferation of post-2001 comics and films featuring hyper-

masculinised heroes. These film narratives are Hollywood's response to the need to reassert

the image of the US as a strong, hegemonically masculine protector, following the revelation

on September 11 that the US is, in fact, fallible. Films such as Batman, Spiderman, the Hulk,

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[92] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 56.
[93] Paine, *The Pearl of Kuwait*, p. 179.
[94] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 44.
[95] Patricia Leigh Brown, 'Heavy Lifting Required: The Return of Manly Men', *The New York Times*, 28 October 2001: WK-5, quoted in Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity*, p. 193.
[96] Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity*, p. 193.

and other Marvel comic book characters have all enjoyed reincarnations in various forms since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It could be argued that US film makers' eagerness to produce *Jarhead* was for the same reason. The film, after all, depicts a notably different version of Swofford's Gulf War experience than the original memoir. Although the film does show some of Swofford's moments of weakness, the emphasis is very much on the way that he overcomes these. By comparison, in Swofford's memoir, the reader is presented with an introverted version of events, which not only acknowledges, but moreover, focuses on, Swofford's internal battles. This is overtly shown by the full title of Swofford's narrative, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles*, in which the 'other battles' refer to Swofford's internalised turmoil, and which was shortened by the film makers to simply *Jarhead*, purely focusing on Swofford's identity as a stereotypical US marine.

Buzzell's *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* is an excellent example of how the tone of the war narrative changed between the Gulf and the Iraq Wars. The double meaning of its title immediately sets the narrative up as a different kind of war story from the virtual, philosophical, and often surreal styles of the Gulf War narratives. The title emphasises the personal nature of this experience, with Buzzell claiming immediate ownership over his experience of the war. Like the novels and memoirs that emerged from the Gulf War, the ambiguous subtitle 'Killing Time in Iraq' acknowledges the boredom and frustration that troops experienced in Iraq. However, this part of the title also denotes a darker meaning; the sense that the time to kill the enemy has arrived in Iraq. Buzzell's narrative could be categorised to some extent as a memoir, but in fact the basis of his narrative is formed out of the blog entries that he posted whilst stationed in Iraq. Buzzell became one of the most recognised mil-bloggers (military bloggers) in Iraq and for a substantial period of time, his blog granted him the opportunity to communicate in ways that had been denied to soldiers of

previous wars. Unlike the soldiers in Swofford's narrative who were forced to rebel against the military's censorship through means of deviant behaviour, Buzzell is able to construct his protest by sharing his war experience and his opinions with other soldiers, and arguably more importantly, with civilians across the world. When Buzzell's colleagues realise that he is the author of the blog that many of them have been reading online, they thank him for telling the 'truth' about the Iraq War experience:

> the Pfc told me that he thought what I was doing was telling the truth, and it's about time somebody told the fucking truth and was telling our story here in Iraq, since nobody else was, and went off on the media, and about how they don't report shit[97]

Like Swofford, Buzzell acknowledges that many of the everyday battles he faced were psychological. As such, he viewed writing his blog as catharsis, quoting Charles Bukowski, 'These words I write keep me from total madness'.[98] When army officials identify Buzzell as the author of the blog, they ban him from going on missions and decide that his entries should be censored by the Army. Consequently, Buzzell removes his existing blog posts and ceases to post new entries because he feels that unless he can tell his own, uncensored story, then there is no point in continuing with the blog. The freedom that had been so appealing about the medium of blogging had been taken away by the military. However, the book that results from Buzzell's original entries provides a fascinating account of the realities of war in Iraq, about how US identity and masculinity have altered since September 11 2001, and some interesting perceptions about the Iraqis he encountered.

Throughout Buzzell's narrative it is clear that, for some combatants, the softer technomasculinity of the Gulf War has been replaced by a desire to return to the physically strong and inspirational warrior hero of the post-Vietnam period. Buzzell's best friend, Sergeant Horrocks, decorates his side of the room with what Buzzell describes as the

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[97] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 329.
[98] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 320.

'"September 12" look': 'He had a huge American flag hanging up on his wall, his folding chair was red, white and blue, and he had a miniature American flag hanging up by his window'.[99] This overt display of US patriotism is symbolic of the remasculinisation of America following September 11. The national strength that it was necessary for the US to demonstrate to the world is personified through the re-emergence of the 'manly man',[100] the heroic warrior.

In contrast to *Jarhead*, Buzzell's memoir demonstrates how it is no longer the technologically minded intellectual who is prized in warfare – Buzzell's fear of being labelled a geek for writing an internet blog is evidence enough of that – but rather, it is the traditional war hero, the John Wayne and Rambo figures who were prized in Vietnam, that provide inspiration for the young troops in Iraq. Buzzell and his colleagues are not influenced by the events of the Gulf War, but rather they emulate the characters from post-Vietnam War movies and westerns who typify the hyper-masculine American hero. Buzzell lists the films that the soldiers watch before deployment, including *Apocalypse Now, Full Metal Jacket and Platoon*, adding, 'most of us grew up watching these movies over and over again… most of us were probably here in the Army because we watched these movies one too many times'.[101] The narrative is littered with references likening Buzzell and his friends to figures from these movies. The playlist that Buzzell chooses for his iPod is also revealing, including the theme song from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, 'Stars and Stripes Forever', 'Ride of the Valkyries' by Richard Wagner (which provides the score for the infamous scene in *Apocalypse Now* depicting the helicopters flying in to attack a Vietnamese village), and 'Danger Zone' by Kenny Loggins which features in *Top Gun*.[102] It seems that the idea of the

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[99] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 206.
[100] Phillips, *Manipulating Masculinity*, p. 191.
[101] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 89.
[102] Buzzell, *My War*, pp. 174-5.

autonomous hero which was so popular following the Vietnam conflict is again in demand following the commencement of the War on Terror.

The obvious distinction between the Gulf and Iraq wars is the fact that, as depicted in Buzzell's narrative, troops were once again going to meet their enemy, thus adhering to the conventional war hero paradigm. Moreover, just as was the case with the defeat in Vietnam, the terrorist attacks of September 11 have shown America to be vulnerable again. As a result, a similar remasculinisation is occurring in the cultural responses to the conflict. Following the most dangerous fire fight in Buzzell's narrative, Sergeant Horrocks reveals that at one point, Buzzell's behaviour scared him, 'He told me later that when I jerked back around to look at him, I had this crazed wide eyed look in my eyes that freaked him out'.[103] The war lust that Buzzell describes throughout the book is typified by this passage, with Buzzell harbouring a distinct likeness to maverick heroes such as Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore from *Apocalypse Now*. Wright's *Generation Kill* highlights a similar passion for combat in the Iraq War generation as Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick observes: 'When we take fire, not one of them hesitates to shoot back… Did you see what they did to that town? They fucking destroyed it. These guys have no problem with killing'.[104] Here, Fick highlights the eagerness for combat that is encapsulated by the unofficial Marine Corps chant of 'Get Some!'[105] and throughout Wright's account many of the soldiers are depicted as thoroughly enjoying the killing aspect of their job:

> Now Trombley is curled over his weapon, firing away. Every time he gets a possible kill, he yells, "I got one, Sergeant!" Sometimes he adds details: "Hajji in the alley. Zipped him low. I seen his knee explode!"[106]

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[103] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 293.
[104] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 20.
[105] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 14.
[106] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 17.

For some readers of Wright's and Buzzell's narratives, it may be surprising to find that they and their fellow troops experienced such a high level of close interaction with the Iraqi people, both civilians and the enemy. Although the media acknowledges the high number of soldiers injured in IED attacks, the real danger that surrounds soldiers engaged in this new era of warfare in which 'Urban areas are power centres, the centre of gravity, and thus the future battlefield' is often omitted.[107] Buzzell's narrative depicts scenes reminiscent of traditional war zones, particularly those found in Vietnam literature. He creates a sense of an enemy who could appear at any time and can disappear into the urban landscape just as the Viet Cong disappeared into the jungle. Despite this, he shows a distinct disregard for the advice his father, a decorated Vietnam veteran, offers: 'Don't go over there and try to be a hero and get yourself killed, because ten, twenty, thirty years from now, nobody is going to care anyway'.[108] Buzzell regards him as an anti-hero, expressing exactly the sort of attitude that he and his contemporaries are rebelling against by demonstrating their capacity for heroism. He shuns the softer Army policies including the use of euphemisms which became common place during the Gulf War:

> Mounted patrols are also known as "movement to contact" missions. The Army used to call them "search and destroy" missions, but since we're a kinder, gentler Army, we now refer to them as "movement to contact."… "Pussification" of the Army is what I call all that garbage.[109]

Here, Buzzell draws the reader's attention to the tension between the traditionally masculinised military and the new modes of masculinity that were introduced in the early 1990s. He demonstrates that the detached discourse that was acceptable in the Gulf War is not applicable to the Iraq War, and the "pussification" that he refers to equates the Army with femininity. Carol Cohn suggests that the epithet "pussy" conjoins the imagery of 'harmless

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[107] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 48.
[108] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 91.
[109] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 199.

domesticated (read demasculinised) pets with contemptuous reference to women's gentials'.[110] By extension, Buzzell situates the modern US Army as ineffective at performing the form of masculinity by which it is defined historically. Crucially, Buzzell positions the Army as not only female, but also domesticised, thus aligning it with the feminised homefront instead of the masculinised combat zone. Buzzell also explains the disconnection in the way that the enemy is described by military forces: 'we can't call the enemy the enemy anymore. Instead we call them "anti-Iraqi forces". We used to call them "non-compliant forces"'.[111] Buzzell's narrative effectively portrays the shift into a new era of the warrior, partly triggered by the events of September 11, but more heavily influenced by the increased contact with enemy forces.

Multiplicities of Gendered War: Heroic Masculinity via Feminisation

Unlike many writers of Gulf War literature, Buzzell and his colleagues had first-hand experience of face-to-face combat, of killing, and of losing friends in combat. He emphasises that combat is not like its cultural representations (such as videogames and movies) in which soldiers leave the bodies of the dead and move on.[112] In contrast to the Gulf War perception of the enemy as an abstract image on a radar, Buzzell provides a detailed description of how he and his colleagues collected the bodies of the dead and encountered some difficult scenes: 'The zipper on the body bag was busted, and blood was drooling all over the place'.[113] By extension, Buzzell also differentiates the war experience in the 2000s from the "bodyless" war of 1990-1. The scenes that Buzzell describes are far more reminiscent of conventional warfare; 'our FOB was getting attacked and we had soldiers lying down in the prone position

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[110] Carol Cohn, 'Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War', in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. by Cooke and Woollacott, p. 235.
[111] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 199.
[112] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 284.
[113] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 284.

up against the berm on the outer perimeter of the FOB firing their weapons'.[114] This image conjures up associations for the reader of entrenched soldiers in the First World War, or troops taking cover in the jungle in Vietnam. One of the most powerful sections of the memoir describes when Buzzell's platoon is ambushed by the enemy in Mosul. There is no doubt at this point that Buzzell is being engaged in face-to-face combat;

> I glanced over to the left side of the vehicle, at which time I observed a man, dressed all in black with a terrorist beard, jump out all of a sudden from the side of a building, he pointed his AK-47 barrel right at my fucking pupils, I froze and then a split second later, I saw the fire from his muzzle flash leaving the end of his barrel and brass shell casings exiting the side of his AK as he was shooting directly at me. I heard and felt the bullets whiz literally inches from my head…[115]

This passage has all of the necessary components to be categorised as a conventional war story; the enemy appearing from the strange surroundings; a sense of the enemy as an exotic and dangerous "other"; direct engagement with the enemy; and the soldier being shot at with a very real possibility of death. Several of Buzzell's colleagues are killed in this encounter so he experiences losing friends in combat. He describes the fear that he feels: 'I've never felt fear like this. I was like, this is it, I'm going to die. I cannot put into words how scared I was'.[116] Crucially, in contrast to the 'fearless hero' figures of the post-Vietnam era, Buzzell acknowledges his fear. However, Buzzell describes how he overcomes this when he and his platoon are asked to return to the site of their ambush soon after they arrive back at the base. Such an achievement is certainly reminiscent of war stories from earlier conflicts in US history, even as far back as Stephen Crane's Civil War narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895).

Buzzell also describes one of his colleagues, Private Malcolm, for whom the combat experience takes its toll. Malcolm was involved in an IED explosion in which several people

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[114] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 290.
[115] Buzzell, *My War*, pp. 290-1.
[116] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 292.

died and he struggles to cope with his resulting trauma. Interestingly, Buzzell's only point of reference in how to deal with this situation is the actions of characters in films. He finally manages to calm Private Malcolm with some 'half-truths'.[117] He tells Malcolm that he will be alright, and this eventually reassures him enough to carry on with the mission. Here, Buzzell fulfils the role of the "male mother" which is evident in the literature of earlier wars, particularly in the First World War. He offers Private Malcolm the support and empathy that he requires. However, adopting such a role does not compromise Buzzell's masculinity. Indeed, his performance of feminine behaviour results in the successful completion of the mission thus enabling him to fulfil his warrior potential. Perhaps Buzzell's lack of preparedness for Malcolm's combat trauma is due to the expectations of the military of what a second war in Iraq would involve. It seems from Buzzell's narrative that in many ways, the soldiers were not fully prepared for the experience that awaited them in Iraq. The one thing that the Iraq War did provide Buzzell and his contemporaries with, however, was the opportunity for heroic action, which meant that they could affirm their sense of masculinity on both an individual and a collective level.

Towards a New Reading of American Masculinity

Whilst it could be argued that the apparently remote nature of the Gulf War situates it as a feminised war and the Iraq conflict in 2003 as a point at which masculinity is reclaimed, the literary responses to each conflict demonstrate that something more complex is at work. The literature of the Iraq War indicates that van Creveld's concept of the feminisation of war can be applied to the Iraq War as well as the Gulf War. Contrary to the popular perception of the Iraq conflict as a return to gritty masculinised warfare, narratives such as Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You*, indicate a greater presence of female American soldiers on the

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[117] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 283.

battlefield than in any previous conflict with one in seven military personnel being female.[118]

However, in this arena it is not distanced weaponry that makes the role of the traditional hero superfluous and allows women to participate in war from control rooms behind the lines, but rather it is the guerrilla nature of the Iraq War which places women in the combat zone. As is explored in Chapter Four, women trained in the traditional female roles involving communication, such as interpreters, find themselves on the frontlines. This dual feminisation of war is evident in texts from both the Gulf and Iraq. Although the nature of the Iraq War has placed more women in the battle zone, male authors such as Buzzell and Wright remain reluctant to feature women in their narratives. These male writers acknowledge the presence of women by referring to token unnamed female characters, but focus on the feminisation of the Iraq War in terms of the technomasculinity required to operate technology effectively. The performance of this specific brand of masculinity is foregrounded by male authors, demonstrating that objectives can be achieved and thus heroic masculinity reclaimed by male solders in the Iraq War. However, the increase in numbers of women soldiers in the combat zone remains largely overlooked.

In terms of technology on the battlefield, Wright's *Generation Kill*, Buzzell's *My War*, and the unlikely winner of six Academy Awards, *The Hurt Locker*, all demonstrate the necessity of the intimate relationship between masculinised physical combat and a comprehensive understanding of technology. Indeed, it would be misleading to claim that the Iraq War combat zone is devoid of new technologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, for Buzzell, a symbiotic relationship with technology is not only essential for his combat missions, but also for the dissemination of his experiences via his blog. It appears that, as Wiegman suggests, technological capability is not an indicator of the feminisation of the

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[118] Linda Wertheimer, 'Wounded in War: The Women Serving in Iraq', NPR, 14 March 2005
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4534450> [accessed on the 25 June 2010].

warrior persona, but rather an integral part of the masculinised identity.[119] In addition to challenging van Creveld's concept of the feminisation of war, Wiegman's assertions problematise the classification of Gulf War and Iraq War combatants as technomasculine and remasculinised warriors respectively. Gulf War characters such as *Jarhead*'s Swofford, and *The Pearl of Kuwait*'s Trang and Carmichael, are all sensitive and philosophical characters whose heroic aspirations have been frustrated by the lack of opportunity to participate in combat. However, all of these characters also demonstrate a tougher side to their characters over the course of the narratives. Buzzell and Wright provide an analysis of Iraq War troops as both conventional warriors, and reflective, sensitive individuals akin to Niva's tough and tender 'new man' of the 1990s. In the opening pages of Wright's narrative the reader finds a perfect example of the masculinised warrior who also possesses the qualities associated with the technomasculinity of the Gulf War:

> Though he considers himself a "Marine Corps killer," he's also a nerd who listens to Barry Manilow, Air Supply and practically all of the music of the 1980s except rap. He is passionate about gadgets: He collects vintage video-game consoles and wears a massive wristwatch that can only properly be "configured" by plugging it into his PC. He is the last guy you would picture at the tip of the spear of the invasion forces in Iraq.[120]

Conclusion: The Evolution of American Masculinities

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the impact of technology on the soldiers in the Gulf War and guerrilla warfare on those deployed in the Iraq War, a reading of the narratives from these conflicts highlights the necessity of challenging such a simplified analysis. These narratives suggest that although masculinity has undoubtedly been influenced by these conflicts, it is possible to perceive the characters from both conflicts as tough and tender.

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[119] Robyn Wiegman, 'Missiles and Melodrama (Masculinity and the Televisual War)', in *Seeing Through the Media*, ed. by Jeffords and Rabinovitz, pp. 171-88 (p. 174).
[120] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 15.

Crucially, these narratives demonstrate that far from the Gulf War being an unworthy successor to the Vietnam conflict in terms of cultural legacy, the new brand of masculinity that emerged from it has actually shaped the masculinity of the Iraq War generation. Whilst the guerrilla warfare they engage in has certainly resulted in a resurgence of masculinised behaviour, like those in the Gulf conflict, combatants in the Iraq War also demonstrate a philosophical and sensitive outlook.

These narratives clearly depict the important challenges and changes that have threatened and altered the masculinity of combatants in two very different, but inextricably linked conflicts. They demonstrate how important it is to consider war narratives as a serious contribution to cultural critiques of war. Narratives such as those by Swofford, Paine, Buzzell and Wright, raise issues regarding the changing nature of masculinity in war which have only recently become visible within cultural theory. Moreover, these narratives explore the effects of changing warfare not just in a theoretical context, but through tangible characters in both memoirs and novels.

Chapter Four

From Carer to Combatant:

Women's Tales of the Wars without Frontlines

On way to deliver portacabin to school. Christmas Eve 2008 Basra Arch 10.10 hrs
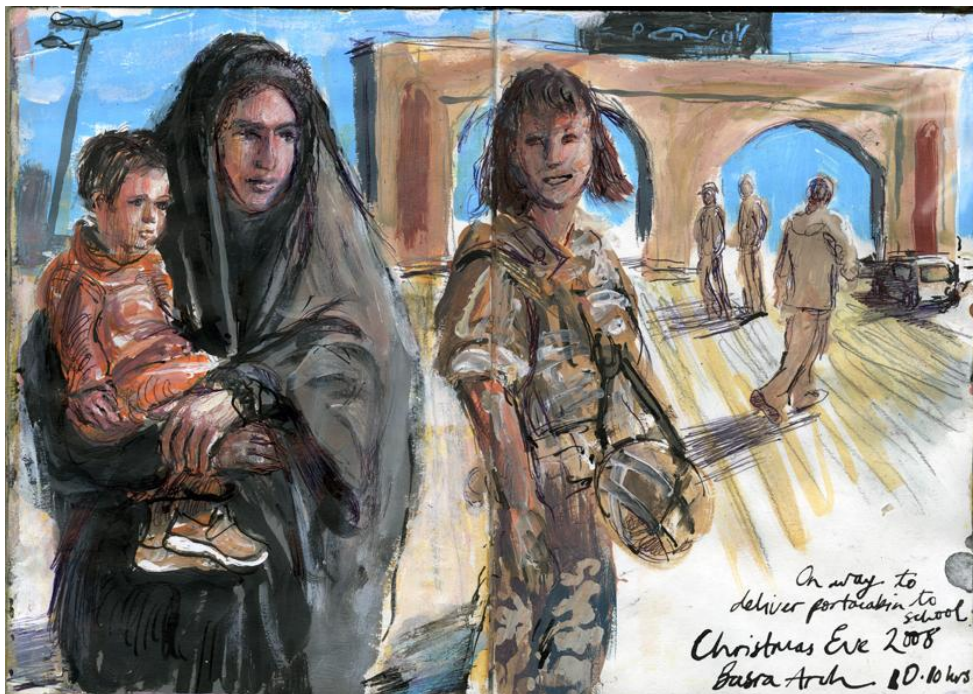
Chapter Four

From Carer to Combatant:

Women's Tales of the Wars without Frontlines

> There are no women in the artillery, no women in the infantry… So people conclude that girls don't do combat zones… We are Marines. We are Military Police… We carry weapons – and we use them.[1]

> Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*

In much twentieth-century war literature, women have been largely posited as civilians in the occupied country, wives and girlfriends on the home front, or nurses and carers in military field hospitals. Narratives written by both men and women emphasise the gulf between the male soldier in the combat zone and the woman at home, and frequently reinforce the notion that women were distanced from the reality of warfare.[2] Indeed, observing women's inability to understand the war experience that their lovers had been through, Vera Brittain asserted in 1933 that war could place 'a barrier of indescribable experience between men and the women they loved'.[3] Although the Vietnam War and Gulf conflict saw a significant increase in the number of women assuming senior roles in the US military, the notion articulated in Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* that 'Women weren't over there... so they can't really understand'[4] has been perpetuated through much twentieth century war literature.

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[1] Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young, Female and in the US Army* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 15-6.
[2] For example, Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), and Tim O'Brien *The Things They Carried* (London: Flamingo, 1991).
[3] Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 143.
[4] Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), p. 107.

In the Gulf War, advances in military technology produced a conflict which was largely fought by air and remote weaponry, enabling some women to be deployed in combat roles such as pilots or Navy officers. Despite the fact that they were not in the midst of the combat zone, these female troops lived in fear of NBC attacks. The few Gulf War narratives authored by women are indicative of the shift in the way that war is fought and the importance of technology in bringing women into the warzone.

In addition to the advances in military technology, the later conflict in 2003 witnessed a high level of interaction with the Iraqi people which led to increased demand for personnel in Military Intelligence roles (of which women comprised almost one third).[5] Consequently, the Iraq War saw a greater presence of female American soldiers on the battlefield than in any previous conflict with one in seven military personnel being female.[6] Due to the guerrilla nature of the conflict and the consequential dissolution of a stable frontline, female soldiers routinely found themselves in the combat zone, engaging with the local people in both peaceful and combative capacities. As a result, more women have been killed or wounded in the Iraq War than any previous US conflict. In a report for Congress published in 2008, it was reported that 2.3 per cent of Operation Iraqi Freedom and 2.7 per cent of Operation Enduring Freedom fatalities were women.[7] Consequently, the Iraq War signals a shift in the way that American women write about war; for the first time, they write not from the home front or as nurses, but rather they document their experiences of ground war: firing at the enemy, raiding Iraqi homes, and actively participating in interrogations.[8]

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[5] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 16.
[6] Wertheimer, 'Wounded in War: The Women Serving in Iraq', NPR, 14 March 2005 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4534450> [accessed 25 June 2010].
[7] Hannah Fischer, 'Congressional Research Service Report for Congress: "United States Military Casualty Statistics: Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom"', Information Research Specialist Knowledge Services Group, 18 March 2008 <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA498363> [accessed 2 June 2010], p. 2.
[8] It should be noted that narratives such as Kim Ponders' Gulf War novel *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* (2005) have explored the idea of women at war, but depict women as pilots rather than engaged in face-to-face combat.

This chapter explores the ways in which the unique circumstances of the Gulf War and the Iraq War have impacted on the body of women's war narratives to emerge from these conflicts. It specifically focuses on how these narratives signal a shift in women's war writing and offer new perspectives on women's experiences of contemporary warfare. In particular, this chapter explores how these narratives problematise some of the cultural commentaries on the "feminisation" of war which were explored in the previous chapter. These narratives raise crucial questions regarding the impact of the Gulf and Iraq wars on the women involved and the different ways in which technological advances have enabled these women to offer new kinds of war narratives. This chapter pays particular attention to Ponders' Gulf War narrative, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* and Williams' Iraq War memoir, *Love My Rifle More Than You*. It also examines how oral history narratives (which have enjoyed a revival in recent years with the advent of audio, video, and digital technologies) can offer new ways for women to communicate their experiences of war. It specifically focuses on the Gulf War narrative of Commander Darlene Iskra (US Navy), and the Iraq War accounts of Specialist Krystyna Kalski (Military Police) and Lieutenant Commander Holly Harrison (Coast Guard).

Women at the Peripheries: Male Representations of Women and War

The role of women in Gulf War texts is frequently one of absence, with a notable lack of female central protagonists. This is also the case with many Iraq War narratives, however, since literary responses to the Iraq War genre are, thus far, dominated by memoirs, authors have a lesser scope for artistic license so only discuss women soldiers if they actually served with them. Since the Gulf War has inspired a proportionately greater number of novels, the opportunity is open to these authors to represent some of the increasing numbers of women who were deployed to the Gulf. Although women feature at the peripheries of some Gulf War texts, male-authored narratives tend to reinforce the concept of the combat zone as an

exclusively male domain. Writers such as Swofford and Huebner omit female characters from the warzone entirely, situating female characters firmly in the US. Others, such as Paine, Burruss, and Blinn introduce a select few female characters who appear in the texts in order to fulfil specific functions in the narrative rather than featuring as central characters.

Whilst Iraqi women are notably absent from Gulf War texts, providing a contemporary image of Gayatri Spivak's notion of the doubly-silenced subaltern,[9] the reader encounters examples of Kuwaiti women who conform to Edward Said's exoticised "other"[10] in both Paine's and Burruss' novels. These authors construct images of sexualised and independent women, and in doing so, they posit them against the invisible Iraqi women who are consequentially constructed as de-sexualised and oppressed. In Paine's *The Pearl of Kuwait*, the only women that Paine's characters encounter are Kuwaiti women. The only acknowledgement of American or Western women is a brief reference to Carmichael's ex-girlfriend. The most prominent female character is headstrong Princess Lulu who is described by the narrator, Carmichael, as a beautiful and intelligent free spirit who prefers living in the desert with the nomadic Bedouin to the patriarchal oppression of the palace. The self-imposed mission to "rescue" Princess Lulu from subjugation operates as a rather obvious metaphor for the American military's liberation of Kuwait from oppressive Iraq. It also acts as a vehicle for the male protagonists to prove their heroism, and consequently, their masculinity following a war which did not provide them with such an opportunity. Whilst it seems that this may have been a sincere attempt by Paine to include Arab characters in the novel, the ironic result is that Kuwaiti characters are cast as "other" while Iraqi figures remain entirely absent. Similarly, in *Heart of the Storm*, Burruss' attempts to include Arab

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[9] 'If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'. Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, ed. by. Patrick Williams and Laura Chisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 66-111 (pp.82-3).
[10] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979), pp. 2-3.

characters are subject to comparable obstacles. Abir is a sheik's wife who joins the Kuwaiti resistance and demonstrates intelligence, initiative and mental strength over the course of the novel. Her character is presumably constructed in order to challenge the Western perception of Middle Eastern women as quiet, uneducated and submissive. This is crudely illustrated when the narrator declares that American protagonist, Bill Kernan, 'had always thought that Arab women were so submissive'.[11] Despite positing Abir as a contrast to the subaltern, her character fails to achieve her own voice. Instead, her relationship with Kernan and subsequent pregnancy conforms to orientalist notions of colonisation. Abir's relationship with Kernan follows the breakdown of her marriage to the sheik who deserted her as Kuwait was invaded, thus positing Arab men as untrustworthy. Abir does not challenge the patriarchy, but rather accepts colonisation by a patriarchal global force.

Burruss' representations of Arab men are characterised by what Sina Muscati refers to as the demonised Arab.[12] Crucially, non-Western women in the novel are described as very Westernised both in appearance and behaviour. The few male Arab characters are represented as caricatures, not even referred to by name, but rather the Kuwaiti men are depicted as weak and the Iraqi men as brutal. The reader witnesses the subjugation of these women by these male characters. The educated Dr. Singh's work with the Kuwaiti resistance is punished by Iraqi soldiers who blind her by gouging out her eyes. This prevents the continuation of Dr. Singh's work with the resistance and as a physician, and moreover, deprives her of independence. Burruss' narrative stresses the brutality of Iraqi men, most notably in the section describing the rape of Abir's servants, Mara and Sanaa.[13] At first glance, this scene appears to be constructed as a literal representation of the "rape of Kuwait" metaphor projected in the Western media: 'Iraq is villain, the US is hero, Kuwait is victim, the crime is

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[11] Buruss, *Heart of the Storm*, p. 59.

[12] Sina Ali Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness": The Role of Racial Constructions in the Gulf War and the Continuing Crisis with Iraq', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22: 1 (2002), 131-148 (p. 133).

[13] Burruss, *Heart of the Storm*, pp. 51-54.

kidnap and rape'.[14] Crucially though, Burruss problematises a simplified analysis of this event by revealing that Kernan finds it easier to identify with the perpetrators than with the victims. When Kernan is alone with Abir later in the narrative, he fantasises about being in the place of the Iraqi soldier who had been about to rape Abir when Kernan had killed the attacker.[15] On another occasion, Kernan has a dream in which he has consensual sexual intercourse with the exoticised Sanaa, then Mara, and finally rapes Abir.[16] Although Kernan is appalled at the actions of the Iraqi soldiers, and disturbed by his own thoughts, it is fundamental to his character that he finds it easier to identify with the sexual aggressors, the dominant forces (the colonisers), than with Sanaa, Mara and Abir as the victims (the colonised). This passage is open to interpretation. However, Kernan's sense of identification with the Iraqi colonisers could be read as representative of the conflicting justifications under which the US entered the Gulf War. Additionally, this passage reinforces the point made earlier in this chapter that male authors of Gulf War literature employ female characters in order to illustrate specific arguments or facilitate narrative devices.

In contrast to Paine, Burruss acknowledges the role of the female soldier in the Gulf War. Staff Sergeant Michelle "Mickey" Myers, is depicted as a brave and capable military woman. However, Burruss undermines her identity as a soldier from the first passage where she is introduced to the reader by immediately situating her as Larry Redmond's potential romantic partner. She demonstrates her disapproval of sexist comments made by Redmond and his colleagues, but Burruss immediately undermines this with Myers' internalised

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[14] George Lakoff, 'Metaphor and War,' quoted in Susan Jeffords, 'Rape and the New World Order,' *Cultural Critique*, 19, The Economies of War (Autumn 1991), 203-215 (p. 204). Fears over the implications for women in the Iraq War are explored in H. Patricia Hynes, 'On the battlefield of women's bodies: An overview of the harm of war to women', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27 (2004), 431-455. For further discussion on war and sexual violence, see Cynthia Enloe, 'When Soldiers Rape', in *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkley, L.A.: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 108-152.

[15] Burruss, *Heart of the Storm*, p. 60.

[16] Burruss, *Heart of the Storm*, pp. 107-8.

dialogue: 'You may be an arrogant bastard, but you sure are a good looking one'.[17] In addition, Myers obscures her true role in the war so as not to intimidate Redmond, instead claiming that she is a Red Cross 'donut dolly'.[18] Although Burruss uses Myers' and Redmond's interactions to raise some crucial issues regarding the gender-integrated military, his construction of Myers counteracts any possibility for useful discourse on the subject. This is further accentuated when Burruss describes how Myers saves Larry and his colleagues, but fails to take the credit for it. When Myers loses both of her legs in a landmine explosion whilst saving an injured Iraqi, she persists in perceiving herself as secondary to the male soldiers. Towards the end of the novel, Myers' actions are revealed and the result is admiration from her male colleagues. Even this, however, is not enough to earn her true warrior status: Myers' is repeatedly described as 'a very brave woman',[19] but fails to achieve recognition as a 'great soldier'. Burruss apparently attempts to provide female soldiers and Kuwaiti civilians with a voice within the Gulf War genre. To some extent he achieves this aim, raising important issues regarding gender and war. However, like Edward Zwick's 1996 filmic response to these issues, *Courage Under Fire*, Burruss' text creates more problems in terms of representing women in war than it addresses.[20]

Unlike Paine and Burruss, Blinn firmly situates his female characters firmly away from the battlefield, and alludes to them purely as objects of male sexual desire. Crucially, female characters are employed to reveal more about the personalities and histories of the male protagonists. The Aardvark's encounter with Tamara is symbolic of the potential problems in gendering the Gulf War, and of his own difficulty in engaging with it. The Aardvark has the opportunity to engage with Tamara and the Gulf War, however, both

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[17] Burruss, *Heart of the Storm*, p. 177.
[18] Burruss, Heart of the Storm, p. 178.
[19] Burruss, *Heart of the Storm*, p. 380 and p. 382.
[20] For a compelling discussion of the representation of the gender-intergrated military in *Courage Under Fire*, see Susan E. Linville, '"The Mother of All Battles": Courage Under Fire and the Gender-Integrated Military', *Cinema Journal*, 39: 2 (Winter, 2000), 100-120.

present him with dualities which ultimately prevent him from doing so. Firstly, there is a clear alignment of the concept of participation in sexual encounters with participation in the act of war. Secondly, the dualities that prevent the Aardvark from participation in either activity present some key ideas to consider in a gendered reading of Gulf war literature. The Aardvark's prospects of intercourse with Tamara are threatened by the possibility that she is transgender, or at least cannot be clearly defined as female.[21] Although he analogises his genitals as weaponry,[22] this problematises the Aardvark's exclusively masculine role in the encounter, and he fails to have intercourse with Tamara. Parallels can be drawn here with his failure to engage in the Gulf War. Throughout the novel, Blinn emphasises the fact that the Aardvark's training in anti-submarine warfare has been rendered obsolete by the new kind of warfare encountered in the Gulf War. If, as Martin Van Creveld suggests, the Gulf War marks a transition into a feminised mode of war, then it could be argued that the Aardvark's struggle to come to terms with potential participation in the war is due to its feminised status. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Aardvark's sense of identity and role in the war are challenged by the 'more nuanced masculine interiority represented in the post-Cold war media ideals of masculinity'.[23]

Through interactions with Rudy's wife Anita and other female characters, Blinn contrasts the Aardvark's introspective and philosophical nature with Rudy's chauvinistic attitude and violent behaviour. Rudy sexually assaults an exotic dancer, in the presence of a baying crowd, positing Rudy as an animalistic and Neanderthal being,[24] who 'reaches out, piercing the boundary, invading her space'.[25] In the extended description that Blinn provides,

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[21] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, pp. 139-40.
[22] Blinn describes the encounter: 'she's got my cock in her hand and it's torpedo hard'. Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 134.
[23] Wiegman, 'Missiles and Melodrama', p. 176.
[24] Blinn describes Rudy as, 'a crazy ape' whose 'oversized heart is pounding out a flood of wild animal blood'. The Aardvark pictures Rudy dragging the dancer 'off to his cave' to 'have at her with all the crazy juice boiling up inside him', pp. 98-9.
[25] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 98.

the reader witnesses the Aardvark struggling to summon the courage to prevent Rudy from progressing with the assault. In this passage, Blinn unpacks several issues raised by cultural commentators in terms of gendering war. Although Blinn does not posit female characters in the warzone, these peripheral characters function to problematise the gendering of the Gulf War as feminine. The character of the stripper characterises several conflicting concepts associated with war and sexuality. Rudy's violation of her bodily boundaries situates her as the feminised enemy occupied by the American soldier. If, as Freud suggests, the male organ finds symbolic equivalents in objects which 'resemble it in shape' and, in function, specifically in 'objects which share with the thing they represent the characteristic of penetrating into the body and injuring - thus sharp weapons of every kind, knives, daggers, spears, sabres, but also fire-arms, rifles, pistols, and revolvers',[26] then the radar gun that the stripper uses in her performance[27] can be read as a prosthetic which enhances her masculinity. Through her use of weaponry in her performance, the stripper transcends the boundaries of masculinity, and by extension, into the world of war. Here, Blinn constructs a scenario which is analogous with the Gulf War as the first war in which 'men and women served in integrated units over a period of months'.[28] Crucially, the Aardvark both de-sexualises and dehumanises the stripper:

> [she is] almost cute if you squint and ignore the dead eyes… She arches her back, delineating every rib, every line of muscle, tits stretched so flat so she looks like a little boy… scrawny, skin white as a maggot, almost transparent so you can see the green veins lacing her chest together and tracking the insides of her thighs.[29]

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[26] Sigmund Freud, 'Dreams', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 15 (London: Hogarth, 1953), p. 154.

[27] The Aardvark describes the exotic dancer performing with the gun: 'She comes up with this weird looking gun which she rubs up and down her belly and into her top, all over her tits. She dances over and I see it's a cop radar gun. Lip- synching and rubbing that radar gun all over her thighs and up her crotch like she's hot as hell for it', Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 96.

[28] Linville, 'Courage Under Fire and the Gender-Integrated Military', p. 104.

[29] Blinn, *The Aardvark is Ready for War*, p. 96.

If, as Robyn Wiegman asserts, combat technologies remain rigidly aligned with masculinist ideas of power,[30] then the dancer's radar gun, and phallic technologies such as laser-guided missiles, serve to 'neutralize the threat that the presence of female combatants posed to the reborn masculinity of the Gulf war – and to war in general as a privileged arena of masculine display'.[31] In this way, the female characters that Blinn includes in his narrative symbolise the absence of women in Gulf War literature, and the neutralising of the feminine in the war itself. In contrast with many Gulf War narratives, and in line with increasing numbers of women deployed in the later conflict, Iraq War narratives do feature women more frequently. However, the fact remains that women only occupy the space of central protagonist in literature written by women. Most male writers of contemporary war fiction continue to leave women in the combat zone largely unacknowledged, and as such, a significant proportion of this chapter is concerned with women's responses to the two Gulf conflicts and how these narratives can offer new perspectives on contemporary warfare and literary responses to it.

The Subject Which is Not One:

Articulating Female War Stories and the Need for New Modes of Discourse

The absence of female characters in male written narratives could be read as indicative of Simone de Beauvoir's concept that 'women are the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself'.[32] However, Luce Irigaray asserts that a whole new system of signification is necessary in order to represent women. If, as Irigaray maintains, the Satrean model of signifying-subject and signifying-Other is inadequate, then this poses a problem for representations of women in all literature, and as this chapter explores,

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[30] Wiegman, 'Missiles and Melodrama', pp. 171-187.
[31] Linville, 'The Mother of All Battles', p. 104.
[32] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, cited in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 13.

specifically in such traditionally male dominated genres as war literature. If the system of signification – that is to say the language that is used – is inadequate to describe the female subject, then women become un-representable. As Irigaray summarises, women become 'the sex which is not one',[33] and moreover, women as a subject become 'the subject which is not one'.[34] So the task of representing women in war develops a problem; authors of war literature, whether they are male or female, attempt to write using an inadequate form of language for their purpose. This potential problem in using male narrative tradition to represent women's experiences of war has become all the more problematic because the Gulf and Iraq wars witnessed higher numbers of female deployment, ground war action, injury and fatality than any previous war. Although female writers of previous war literature have sometimes adopted male narrative traditions, frequently, the experiences of war that they communicate are as wives and mothers or in support roles such as nurses. As such, it is possible for the authors to draw on genres outside of war literature, since in most instances their narratives are not communicating first-hand experiences of combat. In the case of female Gulf and Iraq War authors, this problem is two-fold; not only does the female author not have an adequate form of language available to her, but she also faces the lack of a war literature tradition which seeks to represent women's experiences of combat. The increased presence of women in the combat zone in the Gulf and Iraq wars demands a female narrative which is effective in disseminating the female experience of combat.

So what kind of form should such a narrative take? Many of the characteristics of the war narrative are intimately linked with masculinity and the male experience of war. It could be argued that characteristics of the male war narrative tradition should be retained in order to identify such texts as part of that genre. However, since the female experience of war often raises different issues from the male experience, a female war narrative tradition should be

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[33] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, cited in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 13.
[34] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 15.

adapted to acknowledge this. Janice Haaken observes that historically women have been situated as 'receptacles and bearers of emotionally laden cultural knowledge', and argues that as such, women have been 'valourized and villianized'.[35] Such an alignment of the feminine with emotion, sexuality, and the body in Western thought threatens to undermine the authority of narratives produced by female authors. As a woman who has for many years reported from volatile warzones, Kate Adie observes that within journalism, 'the "man in the street" was always asked: "What do you *think* about the war?" while women were asked: "How do you *feel* about it?"'.[36] The perceived tendency of women's narratives to be influenced by emotion, or rather the preconception that such is the case, hinders the female soldier in communicating her experiences. Haaken suggests that the limits that society imposes on the possibilities of a woman's social world, 'perpetually redirects female mindfulness toward an interior landscape'.[37] Naturally, this awareness of an interior landscape induced by social conventions lends female writers a different style to that of their male counterparts. If the narrative tendency of women is to be descriptive and relate events to their internal reactions and emotions, then the female war narrative should reflect this. Previous conceptions that a war narrative presented through an interior or emotional landscape is somehow less reliable are challenged by the emergence of the intellectual soldier writer in the Gulf War. The narratives produced by these writers are examples of what Niva terms the "new man", which Wiegman suggests resulted from the fragmentation of masculinity into two opposing masculinities.[38] Early on in her novel, Williams emphasises

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[35] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, p. 12.

[36] Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War* (London: Coronet, 2003), pp. 251-2.

[37] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, p. 13.

[38] This is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Wiegman defines the two opposing masculinities that can be identified as: 'the "remasculinized" warrior ideals of the post-Vietnam era, with their impenetrable "smart" technological armor', and 'the "more nuanced masculine interiority" represented in the post-Cold War media ideals of masculinity'. See Wiegman, 'Missiles and Melodrama', p. 174.

the importance of communicating the feeling of being a soldier: 'I wanted to write a book to let people know what it *feels* like to be a woman soldier in peace and war'.[39]

Far from limiting the credibility of women's narratives, the expression of emotional responses is a necessary component of female narrative and holds the potential to enhance the effectiveness of war stories. However, if it is the case that, as Irigaray suggests, the system of signification is not adequate for women to express themselves, then it is necessary to employ narrative forms that are better suited to the female narrative style. The importance of female narratives, however, lies in the fact that they have enabled the creation of the new spaces of discourse that Theresa de Lauretis claimed were necessary for women to articulate themselves. Adopting new narrative styles, presenting previously unseen perspectives, and employing new media forms offer the opportunity for women to 'create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective – a view from "elsewhere"'.[40] The key point to note is that the evolution of new technologies has enabled female combatants deployed to the Gulf and Iraq wars to construct this 'view from elsewhere' in several ways. Advances in military technology have enabled women to take a more active role in warfare (thus equipping them with the combat experience to base their writings on) and new communication technologies offer new methods of disseminating these experiences. Although van Creveld's idea of the feminisation of war can be problematic from a sociological perspective, in terms of literary output, technology has enabled at least two forms of narrative that women have embraced. The first development is that military technologies have opened up new combat experiences for women, therefore blurring the distinction between the feminised homefront and masculinised combat zone. For the first

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[39] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 15 (Williams' emphasis). Williams also stresses the need to differentiate herself and her female colleagues from highly publicised female soldiers such as Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England. She explains that their stories are not an accurate representation of a woman's experience in the military, 'I'm not either of them, and neither are any of the real women I know in the service', p. 15.

[40] Theresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 25.

time, women are writing to describe the experience of participating in combat. The second is that new media enable narratives to be told in a variety of modes, for example, the digitalised audio visual narratives from the Veterans History Project. Crucially, it could be argued that both of these developments have made the genre of the combat narrative more accessible to women. Although Ponders and Williams adopt narrative styles which at times resemble many male writers, unlike women writers in previous wars, they have a claim to the kind of war experience that this narrative style is suited to presenting. The oral narratives from the Veterans History Project allow the narrators to communicate in a familiar narrative style and, as can be seen clearly from Kalski's narrative, the viewer of her narrative gleans far more about her experience of the war by attaining a sense of her emphasis, body language and personality. Indeed, the literariness of these narratives is rooted in their effectiveness at communicating each veteran's own story of their war. Since the female soldiers who have written narratives in response to the Gulf wars have stressed the importance of communicating the feeling of being a woman in war, narratives that achieve this should be considered as an important element of the genre (even, and perhaps especially, those in new media formats). In addition to the pitfalls of attaching hierarchical literary value to texts which have received much critical attention in recent years, new considerations are raised by the development of new media and digital technologies. This is particularly true in an era in which the lines between "traditional" printed forms of text and digital forms are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, the blogs that are examined in Chapter Six of this thesis were first published in digital format on websites, but were later published in printed volumes. With the increasingly popularity of e-books and virtual libraries, it would be unwise to disregard the value of alternative forms as literary narrative.

Warrior Women and the Feminisation of Contemporary Warfare

Van Creveld argues that war has been transformed by the increased presence of women in combat roles (due to advances in military technology) and the dissolution of a stable front line.[41] This transition into a phase of warfare in which those in non-frontline roles were placed under constant threat is clearly depicted in the narratives of both conflicts. In the Gulf War, career routes in the Air Force and Navy were open to women. Although these branches of the military were positioned away from the frontline, the threats that van Creveld identifies as characteristics of small, low-intensity wars place the soldiers under threat. The narratives that emerged from the Gulf War challenge the idea perpetuated by the Western media that advanced military technologies meant that the Gulf was "safe" for American soldiers. In contrast to the images of surgical strikes carried out by Stealth bomber aircraft, Commander Darlene Iskra describes how she and her crew lived in fear of SCUD missile attacks during Operation Desert Storm:

> there was a lot of fear because nobody knew what was going on… there weren't enough… CBR kits, Chemical, Biological, and Radiation kits, on board to cover everybody in the crew… we didn't know whether the SCUD missile that they were sending to Israel had the range to make it to our little ship in the Med, or whether those SCUD missiles had the capability of having a chemical warhead, or any of that stuff… we didn't know anything, and I found out that we didn't even have the books on board to look this stuff up… so there was a lot of fear'.[42]

Crucially, Iskra identifies the most terrifying aspect of the situation as the lack of information available about their situation. She and her crew are denied the appropriate level of information and as such are afraid of the possibilities of NBC. Conversely, in *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, Ponders uses the participation of the protagonist Lieutenant Annie Shaw in the Gulf War as a vehicle to explore the opportunities opened up to women by advances in

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[41] Martin van Creveld, 'The Great Illusion: Women in the Military', quoted in Kimberly Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', p. 400.

[42] Darlene Iskra (AFC 2001/001/3482), video recording, VHP (47.05).

military technology. As something of a late arrival in the Gulf War genre (only reaching publication in 2005), Ponders provides a contrast to many of the absurdist narratives by male writers, instead writing in a manner reminiscent of Vietnam narratives such as Mason's *In Country* (1985) and Phillips' *Machine Dreams* (1984). Like Mason, Ponders explores the experience of war through a female bildungsroman. The central protagonists of both novels are introduced when they are young and the reader witnesses their search for a connection with their fathers and for their own, seemingly elusive identities. Ponders builds on the feminist discourses of the late twentieth century, scrutinising the relationship between women and technology. The importance placed on the liberatory potential of technology in science fiction novels such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1979) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) have influenced later women authors who write on "masculine" topics such as war. Both Piercy and Russ allude to the possibilities that technological advancement can offer women. However, Russ also stresses the necessity of war to the liberation of women.[43] Phillips' Vietnam narrative *Machine Dreams* (1984) is not only an example of this, but can be seen as a precursor text to Ponders' narrative. Where the female characters in Phillips' text attempt to connect with the experience of war through technologies that are accessible to them, in Ponders' narrative, Annie's desire to fly F-15 Stealth aircraft is what enables her to participate in warfare, and is the means through which she obtains escapism. Like Phillips' novel, Mason's *In Country* features a young woman attempting to come to terms with 'a history that is presented as the exclusive province of men, and that her literary education is a male one too'.[44] Just as in these texts, Ponders attempts to map what had previously been the territory of men, with only a male literary

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[43] The three scenarios set up by Russ in *The Female Man* are: a world populated only by women; a patriarchal society similar to Western society in the 1970s; and a world in which World War II never happened. Through these scenarios, Russ is able to explore the crucial part that both technological advances and war play in enabling women to regain power. Russ, *The Female Man* (London: Bantam, 1978).

[44] Kenneth Millard, *Contemporary American Fiction: An Introduction to American Fiction since 1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 49.

tradition to draw on. However, such masculine territory is opened up to Ponders through her own experience as a military pilot, and by the technologised Gulf War. While it is possible to use Haraway's concept of the cyborg in a reading of *Machine Dreams*, its appropriation in a reading of *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* is not only useful, but necessary. The fact that women were not permitted to fly fighter jets in the Gulf War means that Ponders is not able to capitalise on the slick image of the F-15 Stealth fighter. The E-3 transport aircraft that Annie flies does not hold the same allure as the Stealth, but unlike many other Gulf War narratives, Ponders' focuses on the symbolism of flight. Even the title of the novel carries a duality of meaning between Annie's experiences of aerial flight and her characteristic emotional flight from difficult situations.[45] Rather than placing emphasis on the aircraft as an extension of Annie, Ponders employs the image of the aircraft to embody Annie:

> Here is something she knows: Weight and drag are negative forces. An airplane compensates with its smooth metal skin and buoyant wings. It wants to sail through the air, make itself lighter than lift. Reduce drag. Leave baggage behind. Make herself a sleeker, more efficient traveller.[46]

Here, Ponders creates a gradual transition from the description of the plane to the description of Annie. This imagery exemplifies Haraway's concept of the transgression of boundaries between body and machine, constructing the difference between natural and artificial as 'thoroughly ambiguous'.[47] Although it has been suggested that Ponders' text 'not only lacks, but arguably actually resists the feminist discourses in which it is culturally and historically implicated',[48] this is not the case. It is true that traditional feminist debates of the 1960s and 1970s are not foregrounded in the text. However, the Gulf War coincides with the emergence of postmodern feminist discourses, most notably Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs', which argues for the liberatory capacities of new technologies. Although it may lack overt dialogue

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[45] It is important to note that this duality is between aerial and emotional flight. It is not, as Piedmont-Marton suggests, 'actual and metaphorical'. Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', p. 438.
[46] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 71.
[47] Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 152.
[48] Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', p. 439.

about women and war, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* addresses many of the issues raised by the female engagement in war which is enabled by symbiotic relationships with machines.

In the Iraq War, the shape of the threat metamorphosed from the NBC warfare of the Gulf War into a return to the guerrilla warfare which had been so feared in the Vietnam War. Although advances in military technologies were enabling women to participate as pilots and in the Navy, the Iraq conflict also witnesses the arrival of greater numbers of women in support roles such as translators and military police. Despite the fact that infantry units remain closed to women,[49] the guerrilla nature of the war, and the resultant dissolution of a stable frontline means that more women found themselves in the combat zone than in any previous war. Ambushes and IED attacks became the US military's most significant nemesis, placing troops such as Kalski, who served in the Military Police, in constant danger. Kalski describes how she had first-hand experience of the IED attacks which account for 40.7% of all US military fatalities since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003:[50]

> an IED went off where one of our trucks was… and the shrapnel got into one of our truck drivers, crashed the glass and everything like that, and, a big cloud of smoke, and I saw it happen, I mean , I'm driving and I just see this thing blow up.[51]

Kalski's graphic description captures the scene and her own sense of horror at the thought that one of her colleagues may have been injured or killed in the blast. She also communicates the sense of ever-present danger which is the natural bedfellow of such an unpredictable conflict. Although military women have undergone full weaponry training for many years never have so many found themselves having to put those skills to the test. Kalski explains how the style of warfare that troops were exposed to caused her to engage in direct

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[49] At the time of writing, infantry units remain closed to women in both the American and British militaries.
[50] The Brookings Institution, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 24 April 2008 <http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspx> [accessed 02 May 2008].
[51] Krystyna Kalski (AFC 2001/001/24407), video recording, VHP (11.25).

combat with the Iraqi people, despite the fact that she was assigned to the Military Police rather than frontline infantry:

> this guy's running and I'm yelling, and I'm telling him to stop, I shoot off a warning shot, and he doesn't stop, and I shoot off another warning shot, and he doesn't stop, so I had to shoot him. I didn't shoot him to kill him, I shot him in the knee, to stop him.[52]

In such a theatre of conflict, female soldiers deployed in supporting roles are propelled into performing combat roles identical to those executed by the traditional frontline infantry. Unlike accounts from previous conflicts, many of which depict either an absence of women, or peripheral female characters whose stories are told from the male narrator's perspective, Kalski's story describes a woman's experience of face-to-face warfare from her own point of view. It undoubtedly challenges the dominant assertion which runs through Vietnam War literature that, 'Women weren't over there… so they can't really understand'.[53] Kalski's narrative powerfully illustrates the facts about her experiences in Iraq, highlighting that she was indeed over there, participated in combat, and therefore thoroughly understands the experience of war. Kalski's narrative also subverts the traditional gender roles of a war story; by shooting the Iraqi man, Kalski saves the life of her male team leader, thus challenging the gender designations of the male protector and the vulnerable female.[54] Consequently, these narratives not only problematize what it is to be a woman at war, but also what it means for the US military when its heroes are women.

Masculinised/Militarised: Performing Masculinity in Feminised Conflict

Despite the ever increasing numbers of women enlisting in the US military, the institution itself remains highly masculinised. The female narratives that emerged from both conflicts

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[52] Kalski, VHP (24.55).
[53] Mason, *In Country*, p. 107.
[54] Lakoff, 'Metaphor and War,' quoted in Jeffords, 'Rape and the New World Order', p. 204.

demonstrate an acute awareness that, in order to be taken seriously, women in the military must surpass the standards set for both female and male recruits: 'As a woman pilot, you had to do everything twice as well'.[55] By extension, if women in the military make a mistake, the punishments are likely to be more severe than for her male counterparts. As Annie summarises in *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, 'a male lieutenant could recover from a stupid move, but a female lieutenant would be separated and judged, her abilities questioned. Annie had kept her head down, earned her wings, and made rank quietly'.[56]

The prologue of Williams' memoir challenges popular conceptions of the role of the female soldier: 'There are no women in the artillery, no women in the infantry… So people conclude that girls don't do combat zones… We are Marines. We are Military Police… We carry weapons – and we use them'.[57] By defining female soldiers according to their roles in the military rather than as 'women', or as 'female soldiers' (whereby the military role is modified by their gender), Williams suggests that it is necessary to disassociate the term 'soldier' from associations with the masculine. Butler argues that, 'if one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive'.[58] Consequently, if the role of soldier is gendered as masculine, the female soldier is required to identify herself as both a woman and as a soldier. Indeed, almost twenty years after Lynne Segal stated that 'military values are manly values',[59] Williams finds her worth as a soldier being measured against her ability to adhere to masculine standards of physical strength, endurance and behaviour. She describes her fellow soldiers as 'basically good guys', but describes how they teased female soldiers about the differences in the standards required for men and women on their physical training

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[55] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 65.
[56] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 64.
[57] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than* You, pp. 15-6.
[58] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 4.
[59] '[M]ilitary values are manly values. They promote the "rational" use of force, skill and technology to establish power over others… the quintessense of male power'. Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, p. 178.

tests, frequently claiming that 'Girls get off easy' and 'Girls can't hack it'.[60] Williams'

response to their comments was to ensure that her performance matched the standards

required for male soldiers. She says:

> guys couldn't bitch if we passed the male tests... I was eventually able to
> surpass the male minimum standard for push ups for my age group. I also
> worked hard to get my run to where I'd meet the male standards.[61]

Although many of the other women chose to only meet the female standards, for Williams, it

was a necessity to prove her worth as a soldier: not as a 'female soldier', but as a 'soldier'. As

such, Williams transcends gender boundaries by proving her strength and endurance by male

standards. Despite the fact that by 2005 ninety-one per cent of all Army career fields were

open to women, Williams' narrative indicates that warrior status is still reserved for those who

can perform masculinity effectively. This poses a problem for military women, who risk their

identities by performing masculinity effectively. Paradoxically, in order to perform

masculinity, these women often align themselves with homosexual identities, since 'the

assumption remains that boy traits will lead to a desire for women, and girl traits will leads to

a desire for men'.[62] Such positioning compromises their performance of the militarised

masculinity which prohibits homosexual character traits.[63] Riki Wilchins observes that,

'gendered identifications are only meaningful within a binary framework in which one term's

separation from the other gives it meaning'.[64] In the literature of the Gulf Wars, however, this

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[60] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 44.

[61] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 44.

[62] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 79.

[63] For a full discussion of the implications of homosexuality in the military and the policy of "don't ask, don't tell", see Carol Cohn, 'Gays in the Military: Texts and Subtexts,' *The "Man" Question in International Relations*, ed. by Zalewski and Parpart, pp. 129-49. Cohn explains how Bill Clinton attempted to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military when he was elected to office and was greeted with intense outrage. In 2010, Barack Obama also attempted to repeal the ban on openly homosexual combatants, and was initially greeted by a similar backlash. In December 2010, the US senate approved legislation to overturn the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and allow openly homosexual soldiers to serve in the military. See 'US Senate lifts "don't ask, don't tell" gay soldier ban', BBC, 18 December 2010 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12028657> [accessed 19 December 2010].

[64] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* (Los Angeles: Alyson, 2004), p. 130.

definition of gender identifications is problematised. Annie perceives herself as different from other women and she distances herself from associations with civilian women:

> I'm not like other women, she wants to say. And thank God. She learned at the Academy how not to be like a woman, how not to be weak, how not to cry, how not to have PMS, or even periods, as if to be female meant to put forth a constant effusion of unpleasant secretions, as if to be a man was to withhold.[65]

Here, Ponders draws on the conventional association of the feminine with nature, reproduction, emotion, and weakness. Crucially, Annie describes how the academy trained the feminine qualities out of her, including the physical ones. Annie's analysis of gender is interesting in terms of its simplification and her repulsion at such femininity is summarised in her definition of being female as putting forth 'a constant effusion of unpleasant secretions'. This constructs a notion of the female as at the mercy of nature, a passive entity which is the vessel for those things essential to reproduction, including emotion. To be male, on the other hand, is described as to be capable of restraint, to be in charge of one's own actions. Annie's desire to follow in her father's footsteps in terms of both career and lifestyle reinforce her conviction that the worldly masculine sphere is superior to the domestic female domain. Annie demonstrates this in her early years by refusing to sit with her mother, instead choosing to sit with her father and his Air Force colleagues: 'She caught my fingers just as they were about to close upon one of the delicate stemmed glasses. But I shook loose, would not be held, and sat on the floor by my father… I thought I could somehow absorb the secrets behind the stories they told and the lives they lived away from home'.[66] Annie describes the feminine, domestic world symbolised by her mother as something which will trap her. The way in which Annie is drawn to the masculine and her rejection of the feminine is the catalyst for her flight, in both senses of the word. Like the other women in these narratives, however,

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[65] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 62.
[66] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 13.

it is impossible for Annie to occupy either the realm of the feminine or the masculine. For Annie, performing a military identity requires the ability to perform elements of each. Consequently, two clearly defined separate gender identities cannot exist in the military. If "woman" was to exist as the other to "man" in the military, then military women would not be performing appropriately to earn soldier status. Consequently, military women are consistently required to transcend gender boundaries. However, Butler's assertion that 'those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished'[67] is also highlighted by these narratives. Ponders explores the difficulty of constructing an identity under such circumstances: 'If Annie's sex counted against her, it was because any deviation from the norm was singled out and used for the purpose of humiliation'.[68] Here, Annie has successfully fulfilled the masculine requirements, but despite this is still singled out by her colleagues as "different". The reader is again made aware of the impossible situation in which military women are situated.

'Now I Love My M-16':[69] Warrior Girls and Loaded Guns

The pursuit of recognition as a soldier (as opposed to a female soldier) is central to these narratives. However, the hegemonic masculinity of the US military problematises the female appropriation of masculine character traits, including the desire that many of the narrators and central characters display for military weaponry. David E. Jones suggests that in societies and institutions in which 'females are not seen as warriors, their aspirations – the warrior prerogatives of power, choice, and control – become suspect as natural or unwomanlike. Indeed, women who exemplify the warrior are often viewed as socially suspect or neurotic'.[70]

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[67] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40: 4 (1988), 519-31 (p. 522).
[68] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 45.
[69] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, Epigraph.
[70] David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History* (Oxford: Brassey's, 1997), p. xii.

The title of Williams' memoir, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, presents the soldier's passion for weapons (specifically her M16 rifle)[71] before the reader even opens the book, while Kalski's narrative communicates her enthusiasm for weapons when talking about her M16 rifle with a grenade launcher on it:

> it's like a little grenade… and it would go BOOM! I mean, it was really cool. That thing would take down a building, I think, maybe, it would put a hole in something, that's for sure….Then there was the mark 19… that was mine, my toy…. That was my speciality was the mark 19, that fucker, that'd take down a building… the range on it, I think, it's over 1500 meters…. and then we would get fun toys for them, y'know, we would get night scopes and lasers… it was pretty cool to go out there and blow some shit up.[72]

It is not just what Kalski says here which indicates that she is straying into the realm of masculinity, but rather, it is the manner in which she says it. In her narrative, Kalski's speech might be considered more conversationally feminine, but it also intersects with her use of direct and taboo language (typically features of masculine speech). Through the medium of the oral narrative, Kalski can communicate how passionately she feels about her weapons and her job. In her enthusiastic description of her favourite weapon, Kalski demonstrates an attachment to an object that many war narratives depict as a sexualised, and moreover, feminised piece of weaponry. Thus, in expressing her enthusiasm for an object which is usually depicted as the focus of male desire, Kalski strays from her gender binary. Within the heterosexual discourse of the military, she risks being perceived as homosexual which still carries a heavy stigma in the US forces, due to the enforcement of their "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy". Conversely, the mark 19 could be read as possessing a phallic symbolism. If this is the case, then the narrative illustrates yet another instance in which these conflicts demand a duality, or even a multiplicity, of identity.

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[71] The epigraph of Williams' narrative is the following Army Marching Cadence: 'Cindy, Cindy, Cindy Lou, Love my rifle more than you, You used to be my beauty queen, Now I love my M-16'.
[72] Kalski, VHP (44.28).

Although Harrison discusses her war experience in more general terms, she also challenges stereotypically feminine character traits in her enthusiasm for her line of work:

> People always ask me, how long are you staying in the Coast Guard? … And I always say to them, I'm going to stay in until they throw me out, or I stop having fun. And that's not the party line. I'm having fun.[73]

It would be less contentious for Harrison to say that she enjoyed her work or that she felt satisfied that she is making a difference, but her choice of lexicon in the word "fun" challenges the stereotypical image of the female; the fact that a woman describes such a potentially dangerous job as "fun" indicates the possession of the warrior aspirations that Jones claims can posit women as 'socially suspect or neurotic'.[74]

Integral to her performance of masculinity, Williams stresses the centrality of sex to the female soldier's war experience. In stark contrast to many female authors in previous conflicts, she reflects on the sexual needs and desires of both men and women, and how these affect the inter-gender power relations within the US military: 'Sex is key to any woman soldier's experiences in the American military. No one likes to acknowledge it, but there's a strange sexual allure to being a woman and a soldier'.[75] Rather than depicting women as passive entities in warzone sexual encounters, or as victims of sexual violence,[76] Williams' narrative describes women reclaiming control over sex, explaining that female soldiers are generally proactive in their own sexual desires. She likens the Army to a massive fraternity party with girls and guns, but with one distinguishing feature: '[t]he guys are there for the taking too. And we took. I took'.[77] Although Williams details her indignation at being defined purely by her gender (as she explains, physical attractiveness is of little consequence: 'what

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[73] Holly Harrison (AFC 2001/001/46660), transcript of video recording, VHP.
[74] Jones, *Warrior Women*, p. xii.
[75] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 18.
[76] A discussion of the violence which is experienced by many women in the warzone can be found in Hynes, 'On the Battlefield of Women's Bodies', 431-45.
[77] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 21.

counts is that you are female'),[78] Williams admits that she enjoys the power that her gender equips her with: 'the attention, the admiration, the need: they make you powerful'.[79] Unlike Vietnam narratives which depict male soldiers sleeping with exoticised locals and prostitutes in the Philippines, sex was a rare commodity in Iraq and, as a woman, Williams was one of the few people deployed who could potentially provide it.[80]

However, Williams addresses the problems that such sexual activity can create for female soldiers, including the risk of pregnancy. She explains how twenty female soldiers from one unit got sent home from Iraq pregnant.[81] In recent years, the increasing numbers of women in the military have prompted the US military to add new sections to their regulations that deal with pregnancy in detail. As Adie observes, 'there are pages of regulations, orders and advice on the subject, and lots of variations to uniforms as the months progress'.[82] Williams also voices her disapproval of some female soldiers who performed non-reciprocal sex acts on their male colleagues (which prompted some of the male soldiers to suggest that such acts were part of the 'Advanced Individual Training' for female soldiers):

> It made it easy for guys over there to treat females as if we were less reliable.
> Which is enraging, since our skills as soldiers are what landed us in this war
> in the first place.[83]

This raises some interesting issues in terms of the performance of masculinity which is apparently necessary to achieve warrior status. Traditionally, heterosexuality has been one of the benchmark requirements for the masculinised soldier. However, since soldiers on the frontline in previous wars were generally male, previous war narratives have linked the desire

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[78] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 14.
[79] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 14.
[80] Williams later admits to feeling angry and upset on the occasions when she walked through the mess hall and *did not* feel the many eyes of her male counterparts burning into her. Here, Williams exposes the complex situation that female soldiers deployed to Iraq found themselves in and catalogues her own emotional experience of the war.
[81] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 19.
[82] Adie, *Corsets and Camouflage*, p.270.
[83] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 19.

for men, to the femininity from which soldiers seek to distance themselves.[84] It therefore seems impossible for the female soldier to walk the line between performing the masculinity required of a warrior and performing the femininity which marks them as heterosexual. As Melissa Herbert asserts, military women are faced with a choice: 'Act "too masculine" and you're a dyke; act "too feminine" and you're either accused of sleeping around, or you're not serious; you're just there to get a man'.[85] Williams reinforces this idea, explaining how a woman's behaviour can categorise her: 'So if she's nice or friendly, outgoing or chatty – she's a slut. If she's distant or reserved or professional – she's a bitch'.[86] Out of the two choices, Williams opts for the category of "bitch", which positions her as cold, but professional.

In Ponders' narrative, Annie also faces this dilemma. She goes to a lap dancing club with the male members of her company, performing a perceived masculine and soldierly role. When Jago buys Annie a lapdance, she maintains a calm exterior, even wrapping a lock of the girl's hair around her fingers and touching her breast. The importance of this passage lies in what is at stake for Annie in this scene. The way in which she performs masculinity at this point is crucial in the construction of her military identity. Annie feels she has to perform masculinity in order to gain respect from her male colleagues, but is simultaneously aware of the risks of participating in masculine activities: 'It would probably earn her a new call sign. Some might even start calling her a closet lesbian'.[87] Annie's husband, Dexter, questions Annie's actions, asking her, 'You really think you're just another guy? Tell me something, which one of those boys wants you? Is it Jago? Or is it all of them?'[88] Dexter perceives Jago's actions not as an initiation into the military fraternity, but instead as objectifying Annie, positing her as the subject of sexual desire. Annie rejects this, saying: 'It's not like

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[84] See Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, pp. 109-136.
[85] Melissa S. Herbert, *Camouflage Isn't Only For Combat* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 112.
[86] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than* You, p. 13.
[87] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, pp. 64-5.
[88] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 69.

that. It's not about sex. I know it sounds stupid, but you're either in or out. There's no being a woman. There's no room for that'.[89] Having performed masculinity effectively without damaging her heterosexual image, Annie concludes, 'I'm one of them now'.[90] Unconvinced by her rationalisation of the situation, Dexter simply responds, 'You're fooling yourself, Annie, or you're fooling me. Maybe both'.[91] For Annie, performing masculinity is unavailable; whichever way she performs it, her actions either posit her as homosexual or as a sexualised object of male desire.

Walking the Line: Retaining Feminine Identities Whilst Achieving "Soldier" Status

In *Corsets to Camouflage*, Adie examines the role that women have historically taken in war and highlights the potential problems in performing masculinity too effectively in their contemporary roles: '[e]ven though they weren't combat troops they looked like them: identical to the infantry soldiers from heavy boots to cropped hair under bulletproof Kevlar helmets… from a distance, there was nothing to say that they were women'.[92] Although the women's narratives to emerge from these conflicts emphasise the necessity to perform masculinity effectively and achieve soldier status, they also stress the importance of retaining some elements of femininity. Without some feminine attributes, women in the military could be categorised as homosexual, which consequently situates them as paradoxically feminised, thus preventing them from achieving warrior status. According to these texts, women in the combat zone seem to be aware of the danger of straying too far from their own gender binaries, and develop their own strategies for retaining some of their femininity within a masculinised institution, thus maintaining the necessary balance between their masculinised

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[89] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 70.
[90] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 69.
[91] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 70.
[92] Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, p. 261.

soldier identities and their identities as women. Moreover, the narratives highlight the necessity for warrior women to develop multiple, often conflicting, identities.

Previous war literature, such as the short story 'Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong' in O' Brien's *The Things They Carried*, stresses the dangers for women who venture out of the gender binary. When Mary Anne Bell flies out to the combat zone in Vietnam to be with her high school sweetheart, she develops an intense fascination with the war and Vietnam itself, and eventually sheds every aspect of her Western femininity. As she transcends gender boundaries to perform masculinity without retaining any elements of her feminine identity, she becomes unrecognisable as female in a Western context. Thus she is perceived as "other" by those around her, both as a woman and as a part of the exotic landscape into which she is absorbed. As Butler suggests, it is, precisely because certain kinds of gender identities fail to conform to norms of cultural intelligibility, that they appear as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain.[93]

Mary Anne is unable to reconcile her femininity with her fascination with the war, and consequently, she is silenced, unable to communicate her own war story. Instead, her story is told by multiple male narrators. Since these narrators cannot tell Mary Anne's story effectively, she therefore becomes unrepresentable. Indeed, the silence and absence of women resonates throughout Vietnam literature. Butler suggests that 'the "sex which is not one" is thus femininity understood precisely as what cannot be captured by number'.[94] If gender does not simply consist of masculine and feminine binaries but is a continuum, a multiplicity of sexual difference, then female soldiers in Gulf and Iraq texts have developed strategies to avoid becoming similarly ostracised. The key, it seems, is to walk the line between masculinity and femininity, occupying a new space along the continuum. In other

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[93] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 17.
[94] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 43.

words, women must demonstrate their capabilities as members of the US military, but also forge a new soldier identity which retains some feminine characteristics.

Through Dexter, the reader is repeatedly reminded of Annie's multiplicity of identities. He consistently focuses on her femininity, despite her performance of masculinity. Where Dexter interprets Annie's inability to complete certain tasks as indicative of her vulnerability, Annie deems such tasks as unimportant and thus underserving of her full attention and effort.[95] Echoing Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Annie says, 'Smell that? Kevlar, son. I love the smell of Kevlar in the morning'.[96] Here, Annie clearly performs masculinity, or rather, she performs the popularly accepted performance of masculinity. Moreover, her performance is reminiscent of a father with his son. Despite this, Dexter interprets Annie's masculinised enthusiasm for her Kevlar vest as an enhancement of her feminine sexuality:

> He sees the glow in her face, enjoys the renewed vigour with which she keeps her legs smooth, her toenails painted.
> "Come here, soldier," he says.[97]

Although Dexter imposes a certain degree of femininity onto Annie, like many military women, she retains certain aspects of femininity by painting her nails and shaving her legs.[98] Indeed, when Annie is later introduced to Jago's wife, she observes how very different from herself she is: 'I could remember little about her except her short, practical hair and stocky

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[95] Ponders demonstrates this when Annie shows herself to be incapable of packing her duffel bag before her deployment. Annie packs in a haphazard manner, and Dexter eventually takes over and re-packs the bag, while Annie sits and watches him like a child watching her mother. Dexter sees this as a demonstration of her vulnerability: 'I worry about you out in the world, Annie. You can't even pack a duffel bag'. However, Annie sees this episode from a typically masculine perspective in the sense that she considers herself too worldly to be concerned with such a trivial task: '[s]he feels that packing is inconsequential, that her hands are reserved, monogamously, for the controls of an E-3'. Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 72.

[96] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 54.

[97] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 54.

[98] In our meeting at the Library of Congress in 2007, Darlene Iskra explained that in her experience it is very common for military women to take small measures to retain elements of femininity which cannot be openly detected. For example, many women will paint their toe nails or wear attractive items of underwear to counter-balance their sense of gender identity.

legs (she had been a competition water skier), and that we looked nothing alike'.[99] This distinction between the woman at home and the woman at war is a crucial one to highlight. The female soldier, whom society would expect to assume more masculine attributes, perceives the wife who stays at home as the more masculine, drawing attention exclusively to her masculine features, her 'practical hair' and 'stocky legs'. However, Annie distances herself from this woman's attributes, emphasising the distinction between her feminised self and the masculinised wife of Jago. Here, Ponders reinforces the way in which military women walk the line between their masculine and feminine identifies, and crucially, the necessity of avoiding categorisation as homosexual. Again, Ponders reasserts the fact that women at war do not strive to become wholly masculinised, but rather adopt the masculine attributes necessary in establishing a strong warrior identity, whilst retaining some feminine qualities.

Kalski's and Harrison's narratives also depict feminine characteristics, both in terms of content and through the narrative language used. Both women use a conversational style throughout their narrations, with noticeable features of feminine speech such as false starts and hesitations. Since these oral narratives are recorded in audio visual form, the viewer also has access to visual information about the narrators. Both women have mid-length hair, although both have their hair tied back. In addition to the narrative features mentioned above, both women are forthcoming with details of how the war experience impacted on their emotions. Kalski describes how the Iraqi children reminded her of her nieces and nephews, making it extremely difficult to cope when they got hurt. She describes seeing children run over by US military vehicles because they run out in front of the convoy, providing the reader with an impression of the magnitude of the emotional strain to which troops are subjected. Kalski emphasises how difficult it is to leave the injured children when there is nothing she

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[99] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 125.

and her colleagues can do for them. In contrast to some of the extracts discussed earlier in this chapter, Kalski exposes a nurturing and caring side to her personality, explaining how she asked her mother to send her colouring books and crayons for the children to get them out of the road. Despite her position as commander, Harrison openly talks about getting 'teary-eyed' when she was writing her speech for Veterans' Day, reflecting on her war time experiences.[100] When watching these narratives it is noticeable that the female veterans tell of their experiences using feminine narrative styles, for example, providing detailed description and anecdotes. Female narrators also discuss their relationships with their fellow combatants to a greater extent than their male counterparts. These narratives indicate that female soldiers were more willing to acknowledge their fear in combat situations and eager to stress how their status as women presented different challenges from those faced by their male colleagues.

Kalski indicates her own personal development, describing how she made a difficult decision and acted on it in an assertive manner, demonstrating her perceptiveness, decision-making skills and her marksmanship. These are qualities that, while desirable in a soldier, could problematise Kalski's feminine persona, since US military expectations are rather ambiguous. The US military's guidelines on appearance exemplify the general ambiguity of the expectations set for female soldiers: even when advising the hair length of female soldiers, military guidelines state that, although a woman's hair must not fall beneath the bottom of her collar, it 'must not be cut so short as to appear masculine'.[101] In order to be considered a soldier, rather than a woman, military women must perform a unique brand of masculinity; one which encapsulates the essential elements of the warrior persona whilst maintaining the correct traits of femininity. Ultimately, they can achieve the status of 'female soldier', but to

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[100] Harrison, VHP (transcript).
[101] Herbert, *Camouflage Isn't Only For Combat*, p. 45.

be considered a 'soldier', the military woman must be prepared to compromise her identity as a woman.

Judith Halberstam's focus on homosexual female masculinity in *Female Masculinity* highlights the associations drawn between female masculinity and 'sexual variance'.[102] The fact that Halberstam only begins to address the issue of heterosexual female masculinity in the final chapter indicates that, although she addresses female masculinity through its most obvious route, she is laying the foundations for future studies to expand the field through explorations of heterosexual masculinity. Halberstam's discussion of female boxers forms a useful point of comparison for a discussion of female soldiers. Halberstam notes that there is a 'subtle level of homophobia built into the defense of femininity by any female fighter'.[103] She observes that 'a charge of masculinity coupled with active female strength… must add up to lesbianism'.[104] Crucially, Halberstam observes that 'it is the charge of lesbianism that the women in this article and the sports writer seem anxious to avoid'.[105] Halberstam's observations could just as easily be applied to women performing masculinity in the US military. The narratives that this chapter explores are largely preoccupied with the necessity to balance masculine and feminine identities effectively, a behaviour which Halberstam identifies as characteristic of heterosexual female masculinity.[106] Since there is a notable absence of openly homosexual female writers in Gulf and Iraq War literature, the figure of the heterosexual female performing masculinity is foregrounded. These women appropriate attributes which Susan Cahn argues have long been defined as masculine such as skill,

[102] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 268.
[103] Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 271.
[104] Seth Linder, 'Women in the Ring', *Cosmopolitan*, October 1995, p.31, in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, pp. 270-1.
[105] Linder, 'Women in the Ring', pp. 270-1.
[106] See Chapter Eight, 'Raging Bull (Dyke): New Masculinities', in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, pp. 267-277.

strength, speed, physical dominance and an uninhibited use of space and motion.[107] Where Cahn argues for these as 'human qualities', Halberstam maintains that gender boundaries should be refigured to 'extend to women as masculinity'.[108] This situates the women in this literature as important figures in the study of heterosexual female masculinity and goes someway to explaining why such women have been overlooked in previous studies of female masculinity: if they perform masculinity and femininity appropriately, these women will not be identified as lesbian and therefore not as the masculine female which society deems to be exclusively homosexual. As Halberstam observes, female femininity and male femininity are also 'important locations for the struggle against binary gender'.[109]

Warrior Women 'Breaking Through the "Brass" Ceiling'[110]

Although women are undertaking increasingly active combat roles in the US military, sociologist and ex-Lieutenant Commander in the US Navy, Darlene Iskra observes that women remain unlikely to achieve the most senior roles: 'Women are a rarity at the highest echelons of the military services. Since they traditionally have been in either the professional, technical, or support communities, they have held three-star rank (O-9) in all branches of the military, but there has yet to be a woman four-star Admiral or General'.[111] Iskra concludes that 'The four-star ranks are reserved for "war fighters", those who are in the combatant arms on the ground, in the air, and at sea'.[112] Iskra's research reveals that many obstacles stand in the way of the career progression of the female combatant: lack of access to the ground forces

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[107] Susan Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 279, cited in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 272.
[108] Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 272.
[109] Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 273.
[110] Darlene Iskra, 'Breaking Through the "Brass" Ceiling: Elite Military Women's Strategies for Success', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Maryland, 2007).
[111] Iskra, 'Breaking Through the "Brass" Ceiling,' p. 78.
[112] Iskra, 'Breaking Through the "Brass" Ceiling,' p. 78.

such as the infantry, harassment by male colleagues, and conflicting interests in terms of relationships and especially child-bearing.

However, these narratives also draw our attention to the experiences of the increasing number of women who manage the difficult ascent to the higher ranks. In her oral narrative documenting her deployment in the Gulf War Iskra describes the reception she received from her one hundred male crew members when she became the first woman to command a ship in the US Navy:

> [a]pprehension; y'know the guys had no clue what it was going to be like having a woman commanding officer, of course, because there had never been one at sea… I said, "don't treat me any differently… I am the Commander, and that's it… I'm not a *woman* commanding officer, I'm just the commanding officer and its business as usual".[113]

She describes an incident during the Gulf War when her salvage ship, the *USS Opportune*, was approached by three Soviet ships. She was called to the bridge by one of her crew and, since she had been exercising, she was just wearing her PT gear (T-shirt and shorts). Iskra describes with some amusement how the Soviet helicopter that was sent to investigate them hovered over her ship, whilst she and the Soviet officer stared at each other in bemusement. As Iskra points out, she was the only woman on the ship standing there in her PT gear, and she could sense the surprise of the Soviet officer that she was the commanding officer. Iskra also describes an occasion when she went to meet a British Senior Officer to obtain clearance to remain in port. They sent a boat to collect Iskra to take her to the shore. Iskra recalls that the female coxswain who came to collect her was amused that the commander that she had come to collect was a woman and was looking forward to seeing the Admiral's reaction when he realised that Iskra was female. Iskra describes when she met the British Admiral: 'The guy

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[113] Iskra, VHP (46.50).

stands up and he's looking at me like, "Couldn't your commanding officer make it?' and I'm like, 'Sir, I *am* the commanding officer'".[114]

Lieutenant Commander Holly Harrison served in the US Coast Guards, the smallest of the armed services, and she was the first woman from the Coast Guards to be awarded the Bronze Star for her service as Commander of the USCG Aquidneck during Operation Iraqi Freedom. In her narrative, Harrison describes how she found that rather than her male colleagues drawing attention to her gender, it was the local people she encountered:

> I'd send my crews over to do these boardings. Well, I'd be the one on the bridge they'd be talking to on the radio, and my XO would come back… and he'd tell me… "Hey Captain, they all want to know if you're the cook, and they want to know why the cook is on the radio."[115]

The transformation of the theatre of war which brings female soldiers onto the frontline also problematizes their identity as women at war. As Harrison's narrative demonstrates, even though her colleagues were quite happy to accept her dual identities as a captain and a woman, the perception that the locals held of her was often more problematic.

'This Blond Girl Speaking Arabic': Iraqi Perceptions of the Woman Warrior

Williams' difficulty in reconciling her conflicting gender identities is evident in the responses of the Iraqi people to her presence: 'They are interested in me, this blond girl speaking Arabic, this girl in the Army – I am an anomaly, a distraction'.[116] Although Williams' status as a woman sometimes presents her with the opportunity for friendship with the locals, her gender often places her in objectionable positions during her deployment. She describes how she was asked to participate in the interrogation of a suspected Iraqi insurgent where her presence was intended to accentuate the humiliation of the prisoner. She describes the scene:

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[114] Iskra, VHP (51.02).
[115] Harrison, VHP (transcript).
[116] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 105.

> The civilian interpreter and the interrogator (who also speaks Arabic) mock the prisoner. Mock his manhood. Mock his sexual prowess. Ridicule the size of his genitals. Point to me. Remind him that he is being humiliated in the presence of this blond American female.[117]

Having previously dated a Muslim man, Williams finds the deliberate attack on the prisoner's cultural values repulsive. Confirming the assertions of theorists such as Samuel P. Huntington[118] and Richard Crockatt[119] regarding the causes of anti-Americanism, Williams suggests that if the suspects are not terrorists before the interrogations, then there is a high probability that they will be after experiencing such treatment at the hands of American troops.[120] Williams condemns the practices used in US interrogations and regrets the fact that she not only participated in the interrogation, but that she failed to file a complaint about the treatment of the suspect.[121] Crucially, Williams highlights the fact that American actions have a direct impact on the way that other peoples define themselves against US identity, and are often responsible for shaping their beliefs and behaviour.

A Barrier of Indescribable Experience: Soldiers and Civilians

Like Phillips' Vietnam novel *Machine Dreams*, Ponders' narrative switches between narrators. However, in *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, the switch between first-person and third-person narration is indicative of Annie's sense of dual identities. The third-person narration of Annie's home life posits her as a spectator of her own life. In contrast, the first-person narration of Annie's war experience portrays how Annie prefers to perceive herself, in her masculinised soldierly identity. Far from being 'distracting',[122] as Piedmont-Marton

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[117] Williams, *Love My Rifle*, p. 247.
[118] Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: America's Great Debate* (London: The Free Press, 2004).
[119] Richard Crockatt, *America Embattled: September 11, Anti-Americanism and the Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2003) and *After 9/11: Cultural Dimensions of American Global Power* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[120] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 250.
[121] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 252.
[122] Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', p. 437.

describes it, this switching between first- and third-person narrators functions to recreate for the reader the sense of detachment that Annie feels from domesticity and the importance that she places on worldly roles. Ponders communicates Annie's priorities when Dexter helps her to pack for her deployment: 'She feels that packing is inconsequential, that her hands are reserved, monogamously, for the controls of an E-3. She lifts her hands, examines them, proud of them for what they know, the shapes and movements they understand'.[123] Reinforcing this division between the domestic and worldly is Annie's relationship with her reliable and loyal husband, and her relationship with the daring and exciting Jago. In their dismissal of Dexter Shaw's appearance in the novel as 'so unexplained that the "stork must have brought him"', Piedmont-Marton and Ron Charles overlook a fundamental plot device.[124] Traditionally, women represent the fixed point in the universe that men leave and return to in times of war.[125] When these fixed points become fluid, the dynamic between home front and the frontline becomes unsettled. Cynthia Enloe suggests that when the 'military wife' is man, the situation presents certain 'ideological hazards'.[126] Unlike the female spouse of the military man, the husband of the female combatant 'is not expected to play the same helping, nurturing, soothing role'.[127] Enloe details how this can put pressure on the military woman's relationships and family life, since her husband is not expected to facilitate her career by, for example, relocating on a regular basis. However, Dexter appears to embrace the role traditionally reserved for the military wife. He cares for Annie, helps her to pack, waves her off, and waits for her to return from combat. Crucially, Annie's warrior persona problematises Dexter's gender identity. Ponders demonstrates the sense of

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[123] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 72.

[124] Piedmont-Marton, 'Gulf War Fiction and Discursive Space', and Ron Charles' review of *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* by Kim Ponders, 'The Wild Blue Yonder: A female combat pilot has the right stuff, but her first novel has trouble staying aloft', in *The Washington Post Book World*, 9 October 2005, BW6.

[125] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, p. 1.

[126] Cynthia Enloe, 'If a Woman is "Married to the Military," Who is the Husband?' in *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkley, L. A.: University of California Press, 2000), p. 183.

[127] Enloe, 'If a Woman is "Married to the Military," Who is the Husband?', p. 183.

entrapment that a woman soldier can feel at home: 'she fidgets awkwardly to be out from under his gaze. It's a burden to be loved so much'.[128] Just as the woman soldier's presence in the domestic sphere problematizes her masculinised warrior identity, it also alters the dynamics of the home, casting her male partner into a passive role from which he can find it difficult to assert his masculinity. When Dexter neatly repacks Annie's duffle bag, Annie comments, 'You'd have made a great officer', to which Dexter observes, 'Instead, I'm just a great officer's wife'.[129]

In Ponders' narrative, it is Dexter who symbolises home, domesticity, security and predictability. Ponders' exploration of his relationship with Annie facilitates a discourse of how the frontline and the homefront are reconfigured when women are in the warzone and provides the anchor for Annie's journey of self-discovery. Where Dexter represents Annie's "home" identity, Jago represents Annie's "war" experience: exotic, excitement and the danger of war. Unlike Dexter, Jago encourages Annie to develop her masculinised and sexualised wartime identity. The first-person narrative corresponds with Annie's war experience and Jago's presence, indicating that this life is the one she desires. Jago epitomises US military ideals, but Ponders constructs the wartime Jago that Annie reveres, as a façade. Jago is not his real name, only his call sign, but it is the only version of him that Annie knows. It is this wartime identity: his strength, combat ability, excitement and the escapism that he offers, which seduces Annie. Despite her strong feelings, Ponders suggests that Annie would not be attracted to Jago in civilian life. Although Dexter represents restriction and a lack of excitement, Annie never wants to see the more complex side to him. Annie, like the character of Prior in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991), establishes her life at

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[128] Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 72.
[129] Nevertheless, Dexter seems content with his role as a military spouse and later expresses his wish to be interviewed as 'the husband of the first woman to be awarded the DFC'. Interestingly, Dexter turns down the only offer of an interview on the basis that the newspaper was 'looking for an angle on how the rise of professional military women was eroding home values'. Ponders, *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, p. 73.

war and her life at home with her partner as separate, to ensure that she has the sanctuary of Dexter's ignorance (from the horrors of war) to come back to after her deployment. As Barker's character, Prior, concedes when deciding against sharing his experiences in the First World War with his partner, Sarah;

> She would never know, because he would never tell her. Somehow if she'd known the worst parts, she couldn't have gone on being a haven for him… he needed her ignorance to hide in.[130]

Although the gender roles have been inverted, Dexter is Annie's sanctuary. It is Annie who keeps Dexter in the dark, not only about her affair with Jago, but about the majority of her war experience. She seems to justify this as protecting Dexter, but perhaps she is simply ensuring that her sanctuary is kept intact. In the combat zone, Jago and Annie both need someone to confide in who actually understands what it is like to be in a war environment. In previous wars, this was a one-way process, with the male soldier imparting his war stories to the few female nurses and other support staff that were deployed with them. As one Vietnam nurse explains: 'We found ourselves spending many hours in the lounge just listening to the men "ventilate"… they would just relate their war stories'.[131] Another identifies the crucial role that she and her colleagues played: 'The few women that were there had to fill in as mother, sister, sweetheart, confidante; you know, we filled every gap we could'.[132] With Annie and Jago, Ponders depicts how this dynamic has altered in recent conflicts, becoming a two way process in which men and women confide in each other. While they are in the Gulf Annie and Jago need each other, but once they return home, they each need someone in whose ignorance they can hide. This escapism is something that they can never provide for one another. Similarly to the wives and girlfriends, mothers and sisters who create a

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[130] Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 216.
[131] Georgeanne Duffy Andreason, quoted in Paul Budra and Michael Zeitlin, *Soldier Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 200.
[132] Linda J. McClenahan, quoted in Budra and Zeitlin, *Soldier Talk*, p. 200.

sanctuary and aid the rehabilitation of the heroes of the literature of previous wars, Dexter can provide Annie with the sanctuary and the escapism that she needs from the war.

This difficulty in reconciling the partners' identity as husband and carer is also demonstrated in Williams' *Love My Rifle*, in which she describes how her civilian husband urges her to leave the military after they are married because he is concerned for her safety. His concern is exemplified in Williams' recollection of his reaction to *Black Hawk Down*, which they watched shortly following her assignment to the air assault division: 'when he saw the helicopter crash in the movie my husband freaked over what might happen to me in a combat zone. *I* was freaked because the movie made him cry – in public'.[133] Here, Williams aligns her husband's reaction with the conventionally feminine attributes of emotion and vulnerability. Williams is embarrassed that her husband should cry in public and uses derogatory terms of female anatomy (and therefore synonymous with weakness) to feminise him: 'It made him look like a big pussy'.[134] This passage demonstrates that women's presence in the war zone not only leaves them open to being punished for performing their gender badly,[135] but also has the potential to alter the dynamic in the home, thus also problematising the gender identities of their male partners.

Conclusion: Women Writing the Wars without Frontlines

To conclude, this chapter has explored the ways in which female American soldiers refigured the boundaries between the role of soldier and their femininity in the Gulf and Iraq wars. None of the authors claim to communicate a definitive 'truth' about war through their narratives, but rather set out to provide an insight into their own experiences of war. As Williams explains, she wanted to 'write a book to let people know what it *feels* like to be a

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[133] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 51.
[134] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 51.
[135] Butler, 'Performative Acts', p. 522.

woman soldier in peace and war'.[136] It is clear that the female experience of war demands a different narrative form to that of previous writers documenting combat from a male perspective or to that of female personnel in caring or support roles. As such, women writing war texts have evolved their own form of narrative, drawing on some tropes from previous war literature and making use of postmodern narrative devices to reflect the fragmentary experience of combat in these wars (for example, Ponders' use of fragmented chronology). These narratives also reveal feminine narrative techniques such as the use of detailed description, tangential information and inclusion of emotional responses. In addition to this, the medium of the oral narrative enables women to communicate their experiences of war in a medium suited to female narrative style. Such narratives communicate effectively the female experience and the necessity of establishing a balanced gender identity in the construction of a soldier identity. It certainly could be argued that the oral narrative offers the opportunity for women to 'create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective', enabling them to tell their story of war with 'a view from "elsewhere"'.[137]

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[136] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 15.
[137] de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p. 25.

Chapter Five

Nation and Difference:

US Perspectives on National Identities

Chapter Five

Nation and Difference:

US Perspectives on National Identities

We hope the rest of the world
Understands this at least
The United States of America
Is the enforcer of peace…..[1]

SGT Steven A. Tuck SVC Btry

This stanza from Sergeant Steven A. Tuck's Gulf War poem, 'The Enforcers of Peace', raises a contentious issue which, since the terrorist attacks in 2001 and the occurrence of the Iraq War in 2003, is more pertinent than ever: how does the rest of the world see the US? Do other nations, as Tuck suggests, see the US as the enforcer of peace? More specifically, how do the inhabitants of the Middle East see the US and its actions? In order to explore how the US is perceived within the Middle East, and, more broadly, the rest of the world, it is first necessary to examine how the US perceives itself. In the case of the US, and more broadly, the West, the "other" is the non-Westerner, and more specifically, is frequently the non-White "other". This chapter begins by addressing how national identity is constructed in a selection of Gulf War poems from the unit journal of the 4th Battalion, 5th Field Artillery, from which the epigraph of this chapter is taken. It contrasts these representations with those texts written by civilians, specifically, with poems from the Aaron Collection of Persian Gulf War Poetry

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[1] Steven A. Tuck SVC Btry, 'The Enforcer of Peace', Washington, D.C., The US Army Center of Military History, MS Unit Journal of the 4th Battalion Field Artillery.

which was collated as a 'peace packet' by Richard Emmet Aaron. Crucially, it examines the impact of the how the US defines the "other", including the alienation of many of its own citizens who may even find themselves identifying with the enemy as a result. Facilitated by a discussion of Christopher John Farley's *My Favourite War*, this chapter challenges the concept of a singular US national identity. There is a severe deficit in the number of Gulf War narratives by ethnic minorities, particularly from African American and Hispanic communities, disproportionate to the significant numbers of soldiers from these communities deployed to the Gulf conflicts. Farley's novel is the story of an African American journalist who reports on the Gulf from the war zone, rather than actually engaging in the fighting. However, his narrative raises key issues affecting the United States and specifically minority communities in the early 1990s. Farley suggests that the desire to distract the population from problematic issues in the US, such as poverty, was the catalyst for the Bush administration's push to war. Finally, this chapter draws attention to the notable absence of the Iraqi figure in American Gulf War literature. By way of contrast, the final section also explores how Iraqis are portrayed in the literary responses to the more recent 2003 conflict, specifically in Buzzell's *My War* and Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You*. This section addresses how the significantly different nature of this conflict from the earlier Persian Gulf War provided increased opportunities for face-to-face interaction with Iraqis, thus paving the way for a better understanding of the 'other', or conversely, for aggravating US-Iraq relations. This evaluation of a range of texts from the two conflicts considers the complexities of representing US identity, and the difficulties of portraying the Iraqi nation collectively and its citizens as individuals.

Writing US National Identity: The Protectors

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri cite the Gulf War as a defining moment in the development of the US as a global power: 'the importance of the Gulf War derives… from the fact that it presented the United States as the only power able to manage international justice, *not as a function of its own national motives, but in the name of global right*'.[2] Although the poetry in the Gulf War unit journal of the 4th Battalion is not authored by professional writers, and although some readers may question the literary value of the pieces, these poems are culturally significant. They are certainly revealing in their overt construction of the US as 'the enforcer of peace'.[3] Like many of the poems in the unit journal, Sergeant Steven Tuck's poem promotes the ideals of the first Bush administration, constructing US forces as the saviours of the world. He refers to the military might of the 'US War Machine',[4] and draws on superhero images[5] to emphasise both the strength and virtue of the American military. Tuck makes little reference to the allied forces also fighting in Iraq, instead promoting the 'US Top Guns'[6] whom he depicts as the driving force behind the success in Iraq, thus illustrating Huntington's assertion that, '[I]dentities are imagined selves: they are what we think we are and what we want to be'.[7] The image of the US as the ultimate force for good is projected by many of the soldier writers of the 4th Battalion. Roy Miller's untitled poem reinforces the US as an unbeatable fighting force, fulfilling the masculine ideals in his description of it as the 'toughest force'[8] that Hussein had ever seen. Moreover, Miller situates

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[2] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 180.
[3] Tuck, 'The Enforcer of Peace'.
[4] Tuck, 'The Enforcer of Peace,' twenty-second stanza.
[5] Tuck, 'The Enforcer of Peace,' twelfth stanza.
[6] Tuck, 'The Enforcer of Peace,' tenth stanza.
[7] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 23.
[8] Roy Miller, untitled, Unit Journal.

the US as the 'number one power',[9] not merely referring to their performance in the Gulf conflict, but rather situating the US as the premier superpower on the global political stage.[10]

In PFC Joseph A. Barrow's 'The U.S. of A', the figure of the Iraqi is entirely absent. Barrow's focus is purely on his pride at being an American,[11] even describing the colours of the American flag, which Huntington identifies as a crucial marker of national pride.[12] As Sina Muscati suggests, following a crisis, there naturally develops a need to reinforce the national identity of the country so increased numbers of people flying the US flag and other displays of patriotism are perhaps to be expected. However, constant overt patriotism has apparently become a necessary element of American identity. Perhaps, as Huntington suggests, this is a result of the immigrant origins of the nation, since immigrants feel a stronger need to prove their patriotism than naturalised citizens.[13] For Tuck, Saddam Hussein represents a dangerous and irrational, but ultimately flawed, enemy who can be subdued by the powerful US military.[14] National identity, similarly to individual identity, is created out of interaction with others, albeit on the level of nations rather than individuals. Huntington defines identity as referring to 'the images of individuality and distinctiveness ("selfhood") held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant "others"'.[15] In short, our sense of self is formed out of our awareness of our difference from others; we define ourselves against what we are not. Hence, the US defines itself against nations or people which it perceives to have different values from itself. Much of Tuck's poem focuses on Hussein's "stubbornness" and his unwillingness to succumb to the "reasonable" demands of the US and the coalition forces. This unwillingness to surrender

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[9] Miller, untitled, Unit Journal.
[10] Miller, untitled, Unit Journal.
[11] Joseph A. Barrow states 'nothing is better than the U.S.A' and emphasises how proud he is to be American. Barrow, 'The U.S. of A', Unit Journal.
[12] See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995) for a more detailed discussion of the importance of the flag for nationalism.
[13] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 202.
[14] Tuck, 'The Enforcers of Peace', second stanza.
[15] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 22.

to the "rational" demands of US forces is perceived by Tuck as stupidity and reinforces the notion of the Iraqi as less civilised.[16] The only time the Iraqi soldiers are mentioned is when the poets describe their surrender,[17] where they are depicted as weak and cowardly in comparison to their American opponents. For Tuck, Iraqi deaths are an unfortunate side-effect of the US victory, more victims of the "collateral damage" for which the Gulf War was known. Much literature produced in previous wars features US troops feeling remorse for the deaths of their enemy who were, like them, fighting for their country. Other literature depicts soldiers with no remorse because they believe their enemy to be evil. What the poems from the 4th Battalion do, however, is to depict the Iraqi soldiers as an empty space, an absence (presumably this is indicative of the lack of face-to-face contact between 4th Battalion and the enemy). As a result of this absence, for these US soldier writers, and for a significant proportion of the public at home, Iraq is represented, not by its under-prepared and ill-armed soldiers, but by its notorious leader, Saddam Hussein. Lederman observes that during the Gulf conflict, journalists deliberately created 'sharply defined and vivid characters',[18] using rhetoric which aligns Hussein with public perceptions of evil: 'President Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait is proof of his Hitlerian determination to get his own way'.[19] For the soldier writers here, Hussein fulfils the personification of evil, by standing against the US values of 'liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, the rule of law, and private property embodied in the American Creed'.[20] What the US as a nation fails to see, according to Crockatt, is that it is precisely the image that they project of themselves onto the world which causes other nations to dislike the US so strongly. The very ideals which they seek to promote are perceived as hypocritical by many nations. Some question why non-Western

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[16] Tuck, 'The Enforcers of Peace', twentieth stanza.
[17] Tuck, 'The Enforcers of Peace', twenty-first stanza.
[18] Jim Lederman, *Battle Lines: The American Media and the Intifada* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), p. 18, in Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press*, p. 71.
[19] Extract from *The Telegraph*, 3 August 1990. Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press*, p. 65.
[20] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 46.

nations like Iraq are prevented from possessing powerful weapons when America has possessed such technology for several decades. Perhaps there is some truth in Huntington's suggestion that 'Competition and conflict can only occur between entities that are in the same universe or arena. In some sense… "the enemy" has to be "like us"'.[21]

As the poems of the 4th Battalion demonstrate, the creation of an enemy – however much that enemy might be a caricature which is used to represent a nation – is enough to scare many members of the public and the military into believing that action must be taken. Hardt and Negri suggest that it is increasingly difficult for the US to name a 'single, unifed enemy'. Instead, they observe 'there seem to be minor and elusive enemies everywhere'.[22] As Pal Ahluwalia asserts, the government discourse leads the public in the US to the conclusion that 'my life is threatened by the existence of the other, which means that in order to secure the potential of my life and security it is necessary to kill the other'.[23] The disconnection that is demonstrated by the 4th Battalion authors is representative of the Gulf War more broadly. However, it is crucial to note that the only significant acknowledgement of Iraqi soldiers (rather than Iraq as represented by Hussein or by the Iraqi Army) in Tuck's poem follows the ground attack where soldiers encountered Iraqis face-to-face. The significance of this moment lies in the fact that it highlights the tendency of technowar to foster exaggerated othering of the enemy.

Refiguring National Identities: The Peacemakers

The contributions to the Aaron Collection of Persian Gulf War Poetry offer some stark counter-narratives to the media coverage of the conflict. The collection comprises three peace

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[21] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 26.
[22] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 189.
[23] Pal Ahluwalia, 'Death and Politics: Empire and the "New" Politics of Resistance', in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. by Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 166-177 (p. 171).

packets resulting from forums which responded to Richard Aaron's appeal for anti-war material to raise awareness of the reality of what was happening in Iraq. The poetry, letters, newspaper clippings and articles examine the impact of US action in Iraq on American soldiers and Iraqi civilians. These poems provide a stark contrast to the poems from the 4th Battalion. It is important to note that most, although not all, of the contributors to the Aaron Collection are more experienced poets, in comparison to the soldiers of the 4th Battalion. However, in all cases, it is true to say that these poems provide their authors with an outlet through which to share their emotions and opinions, and document their own experiences of the Gulf War, be it protesting the war at home, or fighting 'in country'. Across the contributions, there is an overwhelming sense of the Gulf War as signalling the demise of humanity, with many of the poems referring to 'apocalypse' and 'Armageddon'.[24] The technological showcase of the Gulf War, combined with the legacy of the Cold War which was still fresh in the minds of Americans at this time, result in a sense that events in the Gulf could change the course of history. As one contributor, John Clarke, observes, such technology was 'in hands that would change eternity way too abruptly'.[25] Although an analysis of all of the contributions to the Aaron Collection is beyond the scope of this thesis, this chapter examines a small selection of the poems in order to provide a sense of the collection, and explore its importance in the mapping of Gulf War literature.

Howard McCord's 'What To Do In The War' begins by quoting Joseph Conrad's famous line from *Heart of Darkness*: 'Exterminate the Brutes'.[26] What is particularly curious about this poem (and this is true of several contributions to the collection) is its apparent reinforcement of the perception of Iraqis as the evil other which is perpetuated by

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[24] For example, 'annihilation, apocalypse' in Ronnie Buck, 'Millenial Missive', and 'Desert Shield gives birth to Desert Storm, of such things Armageddon was born', A. D. Winans, untitled poem, both in The Aaron Collection.

[25] John Clarke, 'Hysterical Cohesion', The Aaron Collection (Folder 1).

[26] Howard McCord, 'What To Do In The War', The Aaron Collection. Quote adapted from 'Exterminate all the brutes!' in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Dover, 1990, originally published by William Blackwood & Sons in 1902), p. 46.

contemporaneous media discourse and in the writings of the 4th Battalion. McCord's first stanza wishes all manner of ill on the people of Iraq, justifying this in the final lines: 'Saddam Hussein is wicked and his people too, for they countenance his wickedness with glee'.[27] He continues on to point out that the world 'groans under the weight of humanity and its filth, and will know peace only when most of us are dead'.[28] He suggests, 'Why not start with the other?' Here, the reader realises McCord's real objective: to draw attention to the absurdity of the US government's (and more broadly, US society's) attitude towards the other. He concurs with Ahluwalia's observation that the US belief is that if one's sense of self is threatened by the other, the only apparent course of action is to eliminate the other:

> We may not even have to pretend
> To be good to destroy the wicked.
> We may just do it.
> And once we finish with the wicked
> We can start on the less-than ourselves.[29]

McCord satirises such opinions by suggesting that the 'less-than-ourselves' (the fat, the ugly, Yuppies, the ignorant, the homeless, the Eastern Literary Establishment) should also be eliminated with the end goal of a pure world: 'We want a world pure enough for a few million hardy hunter-gatherer-esthetes and nobody else'.[30] McCord demonstrates how the Imperialist values with which the US entered Iraq are of the kind that have led to mass genocide in the past (it is impossible to overlook the echoes of Nazi ideals in the poem). Where McCord's poem begins in a tone which could be construed as anti-Iraqi, it rapidly emerges that he merely appropriates the stand-point of the US fundamentalist in order to satirise the ideology, and highlight the dangers of holding such beliefs. Far from being a

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[27] McCord, 'What To Do In The War'.
[28] McCord, 'What To Do In The War'.
[29] McCord, 'What To Do In The War'.
[30] McCord, 'What To Do In The War'.

poem about the Iraqi as the evil other, it is a poem which draws attention to the ills of US culture and attitudes.

In his letter to Richard Aaron, Bill Bikales plainly articulates the underlying message of many of the poems: 'Instead of confronting our crumbling cities, our deteriorating educational system, our inadequate health care, we pour resources into crushing another people in a futile attempt to reassure ourselves of our undiminished greatness'.[31] This is very much the perspective from which Mary Pjerrou's poem, 'The Beast' is written. The 'Beast' that Pjerrou refers to here is never explicitly described, but in the opening paragraph she describes the number 666 as, 'the number of the Beast that feasts on the machinery of war and shits out blood and gore'.[32] Under this premise, Pjerrou constructs a revealing commentary on US culture and highlights the immorality of bribing young people to risk their lives with the promise of employment and waived university fees:

> This is the sort of country
> the Beast wanted
> in which hospitals and school go bankrupt as the
> war machine devours the poor;
> in which unemployment and fear
> of unemployment condition
> folks to go to war.[33]

She describes a society in which people have become desensitised to the suffering of others, pointing out how drivers react to fatal accidents with indignation at their own inconvenience, rather than with compassion for the victims. Pjerrou later refers to the war in the Gulf as 'Armageddon Bowl'. Like several other contributors to the Aaron Collection, and many cultural commentators (most notably Chomsky who declared that 'Just having them watch

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[31] Bill Bikales, a letter of support to Richard Aaron, The Aaron Collection.
[32] Mary Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.
[33] Mary Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.

the Superbowl and the sitcoms may not be enough. You have to whip them up into fear of enemies'[34]), Pjerrou draws the readers' attention to the war as entertainment, as a diversionary tactic to avert the public's attention from the problems at home, and as fulfilling the necessary requirement of the contemporary US for a threatening other against which it can define itself. She elaborates on this metaphor when describing the world:

> – in which little boys
> mesmerized by electronic war toys
> find their dreams come true:
> a video game with real enemies to shoot at you,
> real bodies to blow up –
> a video screen that oozes
> blood and stinks of real war.[35]

As this thesis suggested in Chapter One, this poem can be read in terms of the link that Pjerrou observes between the Gulf War generation's computer games and their affinity with the technology of the perceived virtual war. Pjerrou draws attention to the common perception of the Gulf War as a videogame here, but, in the same breath, she undermines the argument for the Gulf as a virtual war. She indicates that the generation of young men raised on videogames are particularly in tune with the technology utilised in the Gulf, but she clearly marks the experience of playing a computer game as different from the experience of going to war: in contrast to videogames, war possesses the potential for real enemies, real bodies, and real blood. She goes on to describe a world 'where the fun begins and ends with thumbs pressing buttons to imaginary guns annihilating thousands of blips on video screens'.[36] So, while Pjerrou clearly distinguishes the war as different from videogames, she reinforces the sense that in the elements of the war that are conducted using distanced

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[34] Chomsky, *Media Control*: *The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2nd Edition (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), p. 43.
[35] Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.
[36] Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.

weaponry, the Iraqi enemy figure is perceived, not as a living, breathing person, but rather, as a blip on a screen. In this manner, Pjerrou highlights the absence of the Iraqi figure, a fact which resonates in many of the poems in the collection. Although the majority of the poems demonstrate a sense of empathy towards the victims of the US campaign in Iraq, most do not actually describe individual Iraqis. This is, of course, reflective of the media censorship of the coverage of the conflict. The image of the Iraqi as innately evil, which was perpetuated by the US government and media, is merely one of a long line of 'enemies' of the US. America relies on the existence of an enemy which threatens its way of life as a means of maintaining fear, and consequently order, in the US. Pjerrou overtly labels these enemies as creations of the President: 'the President creates enemies we can be proud to hate – Manuel Noreiga, Khadafi, Willie Horton, and now Saddam Hussein – '.[37] While McCord speculates about where the US's othering may lead in the future, Pjerrou claims that it is already well established, and moreover, is the central motivation for Bush's war in the Gulf:

> with queers and bums and homeless and the poor;
> and lesbians and hippies and environmentalists
> against the war
> aligned with all the sand-niggers
> and gooks we fought before.
> This is the blame-throwing, flame-throwing
> bestial politics of George Bush's war.[38]

Some of the poets problematise the concept of the enemy by inverting the common perception: 'The experts are right to warn you don't know the enemy until you go to war'.[39] In 'American Flag', by an anonymous author, the US is openly depicted as the enemy against its own people. In fact, this poem transgresses the boundary between US and Iraqi

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[37] Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.
[38] Pjerrou, 'The Beast'.
[39] Ken Varane, 'Home Front', The Aaron Collection.

perspectives. Although it begins in Queens in the US, in the final stanza of the poem, it becomes clear that the author's perspective has shifted:

> Who are we fighting, America?
> The enemy who has taken our land
> the land we love, and extracted
> from our resources his wealth, the enemy
> who has taken control of our laws,
> and mesmerized our minds and bodies,
> does not live in the desert –
> he wears an American face.[40]

These poems capture a unique point in US history; the intersection of the fear and cynicism of the post-Cold War era, and the promise of a new age in warfare by the highly censored media, is present throughout the literature of the Gulf. The absence of Iraqi bodies excites some in the US about the developments in intelligent weaponry, but simultaneously alerts others to the extent to which the US media is heavily censoring the coverage of wars and, rather than informing the US public, it is providing them with 'disinformation' (as Chomsky refers to it). Crucially, some narratives that emerged from the Gulf highlight the fact that it was not only injured and dead Iraqis who were absent from the media coverage, but also, soldiers from ethnic minority communities. Moreover, these figures are also absent in the majority of narratives about the Gulf. As the following section of this thesis explores, one exception is Christopher John Farley's fictional account of an African American journalist working in the Gulf, *My Favourite War*.

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[40] Anon, 'American Flags', The Aaron Collection (Folder 3).

The American "Other": Race and National Identity

The inauguration of Barack Obama as US President in January 2009 marked the end of an era in American history which had been defined by the terrorist attacks of September 11 and George W. Bush's subsequent global war on terror. The new President's apparent commitment to bringing change to the US signalled the beginning of a new epoch of hope for many Americans, epitomised by immediate policy changes such as the decision to withdraw American troops from Iraq. Although it may be problematic and premature to claim that the election of America's first mixed-race President signalled that US attitudes had changed, it would, nevertheless, be reasonable to suggest that his election to office indicated the beginning of a period in which Americans felt empowered to redefine American identity: 'The American people gave me this extraordinary honour. That tells you a lot about where the country's at'.[41] Obama's election to the White House was the direct result of an unprecedented turn-out of minority communities among the electorate who believed that this was a candidate who would act in the best interests of all Americans. More than any of his predecessors, Obama is the product of one part of the American "melting pot" of cultures, challenging previous manifestations of a unified "American" identity. The multi-racial America that was announced by Obama's election did not indicate the creation of a new multi-ethnic state, but rather, the importance of retaining and foregrounding existing ethnic identities. As Obama points out, 'It's important to realise that I was actually black before the election'.[42] The differing approaches of Obama and of George Bush Sr. and George W. Bush on the issue of Iraq is indicative of a wider issue; the question of what constitutes American identity and American values.

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[41]Barack Obama, quoted in Andrew Clark, '"I was black before the election" Obama tells David Letterman', *The Guardian*, 22 September 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/22/obama-letterman-racism> [accessed 23 September 2009].
[42] Obama, quoted in Clark, 'I was black before the election'.

Facilitated by a discussion of the African American writer Farley's *My Favourite War*, this section of the chapter challenges the concept of US national identity as a coherent and unified entity in official military and governmental discourses by suggesting that it comprises several conflicting identities. Despite the high numbers of ethnic minorities deployed to the Gulf War, very few narratives have been produced by authors of minority ethnic origin, and, consequently, the enemy is almost exclusively represented from the vantage point of the white American. The two dimensional "token black man" obtains a brief moment of recognition in a few written narratives, as well as in the films *Three Kings* (1999) and *Jarhead* (2005). Hudson's collection of short stories features a peripheral Hispanic character who is murdered by a young Iraqi boy, reinforcing the position of soldiers of ethnic origin as secondary characters. Although Farley's novel is the story of an African American journalist who reports on the Gulf from the war zone, rather than actually engaging in combat, his narrative raises the key issues affecting minority communities in the US at the time of the Gulf War. The growing public awareness of these concerns, it has since been argued by cultural commentators, was the primary catalyst for the government's push to war. His work captures and expresses the concerns of many in black communities in the US in the early 1990s before these concerns apparently gained legitimacy in the twenty-first century through Obama's election. Crucially, this study seeks to establish that Farley's novel provokes important questions about whether the possible lack of a homogenous US identity impacts on the level of empathy that ethnic minorities experience for the Iraqi enemy. Moreover, it identifies the ways that this impacts on minorities' attitudes in the novel towards the Gulf War, and how these anticipate future developments, both in cultural criticism and on the political stage.

To preface this discussion of Farley's novel, it is important briefly to contextualise some of the issues that his narrative raises. Documents held at the Veterans History Project

reveal that high numbers of ethnic minority soldiers comprised the total number of troops deployed to the Gulf War. Moreover, the number deployed was out of proportion with the percentage that these minorities made up of the total US population. Holly Sklar confirms this observation in her essay, 'Brave New World': 'On the front lines in the Gulf, Blacks and other people of color made up one-third of U.S. Army troops; nearly half of the over 35,000 military women in the Gulf were Black'.[43] Similarly, in her essay 'Minorities in the Military', Rachel L. Jones suggests that the numbers of ethnic minorities in Gulf may have been even higher than this, with African Americans making up forty percent of the military, and fifty percent when other minorities such as Hispanic and Native American recruits are included. She highlights the fact that whether the Department of Defense's figures of 30-35 percent or these higher estimates are more accurate, the number of African Americans deployed to the Gulf was disproportionately high when compared to their representation with the US population as a whole (in this context comprising twelve percent). Jones also points out that within certain geographic regions of the US, the percentage is significantly higher, with eighty percent of military personnel from the city of Chicago being of ethnic minority origin.[44] These statistics are reiterated in several other articles on the subject, and are essential to consider when reading Farley's novel. The percentage of African Americans in the military overall has decreased significantly since the Gulf War. By 2006, only nineteen percent of military personnel comprised African Americans compared to thirteen percent of the civilian population.[45] Although it should not be cited as a definitive cause, it is important to note that the decreased numbers of African American new recruits coincides with a notable decline in

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[43] Holly Sklar, 'Brave New World Order', in *Collateral Damage: The New World Order at Home and Abroad* ed. by Cynthia Peters (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), pp. 3-46 (p. 34).

[44] According to the Department of Defense, 'Of the 540,000 soldiers deployed for Desert Storm, 24.5 percent were Black, 5 percent Latino, 0.6 percent Native American, 2.1 percent Asian, and 1.7 percent "other".' For a detailed discussion, see Rachel L. Jones, 'Minorities in the Military', in Peters, *Collateral Damage*, pp. 237-254 (pp. 238-9).

[45] 'Population Representation in the Military Services 2006', a report by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

support for the war in Iraq, particularly amongst young African Americans. The revelation that by 2005, 'black youth especially identify having to fight for a cause they don't support as a barrier to military service',[46] is anticipated by Farley's observations regarding African American responses to the first Gulf War and the associated societal issues of the early 1990s.

As one of the few Gulf War texts authored by ethnic minority writers, Farley's *My Favourite War* is particularly effective in his questioning of what causes so many young people from ethnic minorities to choose careers in the military. More broadly, he highlights the inequalities which persisted for young African Americans into the early 1990s and beyond, particularly in the education system and the work place.[47] Through the eyes of his central protagonist, Thurgood Brinkman, Farley captures the fatalist attitude which characterises many Gulf War narratives,[48] and was typical of the post-Cold War era. More uniquely, however, the character of Thurgood presents us with an insight into the broader societal disillusionment of a generation of young African American men. Farley's young black characters provide a frank insight into the experiences of African Americans in their teens and twenties, and their subsequent opinions on the society into which they are forging their rite of passage. What makes Thurgood's character particularly intriguing is the fact that, far from being an under-privileged African American from a deprived area, Thurgood is from a wealthy, middle class background. His parents are lawyers (it is perhaps more than a coincidence that Farley's character shares his name with Thurgood Marshall who was a

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[46] Cindy Williams, 'Filling the Army's Ranks For the Iraq War', *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom* (Massachusetts: MIT Security Studies Program, July 2005)
<http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_6_05_Williams.pdf> [accessed 5 July 2008].
[47] For a detailed discussion of African Americans disadvantaged by the education system, see Kati Haycock, 'Closing the Achievement Gap', *Educational Leadership*, 58: 6 (March 2001), 6-11.
[48] Swofford's *Jarhead* and Turnipseed's less well publicised *Baghdad Express* typify the fatalistic tone of many Gulf War texts. Like Thurgood in Farley's novel, the central protagonists of these narratives construct a rather cynical analysis of the wider cultural issues contributing to their involvement in the Gulf.

leading black attorney in the 1940s),[49] and both he and his sister have attended elite American universities. Thurgood is assertive in pointing out that, 'my home was a dysfunction-free zone and we didn't suffer through any of that I'm pathological, you're pathological, and we-all-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings bullshit that the media loves to see in black families'.[50] Yet, at twenty-nine years old, he still finds himself a struggling reporter for the low brow *National Now!* newspaper, and living in a shared house in a deprived area of Washington D.C. Other characters in the novel also act as an outlet for Farley's opinions on the state of US society. Thurgood's romantic interest Sojourner Truth Zapander[51] expresses the feelings of many members of the black community in the 1990s United States in her assertion that: 'We do twice the work and get half the credit. Here in America, a white high school grad earns as much as a black college graduate'.[52] With this statement, Farley anticipates one of the arguments which later re-entered the public arena on a larger scale following the Gulf War. In his 2003 article in the *Boston Globe*, Derrick Z. Jackson echoes Sojourner's sentiments:

> the nation has yet to join African-Americans on the mission to rid the United States of its quiet weapons of mass destruction: bad schools for the poor and discrimination for striving African-Americans with the same qualifications as white Americans.[53]

All of Farley's central characters are intelligent and ambitious young African Americans for whom opportunities to further their careers do not arise. Ebony is a particularly good example of a victim of the US system. Ebony is eighteen and has lived on her own after moving out of

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[49] Thurgood Marshall is quoted as declaring in 1948: 'Classifications and distinctions based on race or color have no moral or legal validity in our society'. Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 2004), p. 149.
[50] Christopher John Farley, *My Favourite War* (London: Granta, 1996), p. 25.
[51] Farley's Sojourner Truth shares her name with Isabella Baumfree, an African American abolitionist and women's rights activist. Baumfree was born into slavery, but obtained freedom and adopted the name of Sojourner Truth in 1843. She is best known for her emotive speech 'Ain't I a Woman,' delivered in 1851. For more information on Sojourner Truth see, The Sojourner Truth Institute <http://www.sojournertruth.org/> [accessed 2 July 2008].
[52] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 28.
[53] Derrick Z. Jackson, 'Blacks Have Good Cause to Oppose War in Iraq', *Boston Globe*, 26 February 2003.

her adoptive home at fourteen. Thurgood discovers she is a talented writer, but knows that Ebony is limited by her low achieving school. In order to give herself a chance of success, Ebony asks Thurgood to mentor her and read her assignments. She has to juggle her commitments, and work far harder than her white counterparts, in order to even gain work experience at the newspaper. She goes to the newspaper before and after school, staying until ten o'clock at night when she comes home to do her homework.[54] Ebony is symbolic of all the young people with aspirations who find society working against them. Crucially, the fact that she is ten years younger than Sojourner and Thurgood is a clear message from Farley that these problems have not been addressed, and consequently, young talented people are still being held back. Sojourner is also quick to point out that politicians are more inclined towards initiating a war if it is largely those from the poorer sectors of society who are likely to be in danger, and draws comparisons with the draft during the Vietnam War: 'even rich white blond boys… were in danger of being sent to Vietnam. This whole thing is safe. The only people who are being sent here are the people who didn't have the cash to pay for college and went ROTC'.[55] In her 1991 article for the *New York Times*, Isobel Wilkerson offers a similar analysis of the situation to that presented by Sojourner and refers to critics of the recruitment system who argue that enlistment of those who have been forced into the military by economic conditions is tantamount to a 'poverty draft'.[56] She goes on to highlight the fact that 'unlike white enlistees who tend to be poorer and less educated than their civilian counterparts, most black men and women in the military are high school graduates or better'.[57]

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[54] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 235.
[55] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 171. See the US Army's website at http://www.goarmy.com/rotc/ for information on the Reserve Officers' Training Corps [accessed 25 June 2008]. Programmes are also offered by the other branches of the US military.
[56] Isabel Wilkerson, 'War In The Gulf: The Troops; Blacks Wary of Their Big Role as Troops', *New York Times*, 25 January, 1991.
[57] Wilkerson, 'Blacks Wary of Their Big Role as Troops'.

Like Sojourner, Thurgood muses over the place of the young black person in contemporary America, and he highlights the fact that the lack of opportunities has caused young African Americans to isolate themselves from society as a whole, and, in many cases, from the rest of African American society: 'a whole generation of black young men seemed to be missing. I guess they were outside the church, in the community, in the 'hood, doing all the sinning that the preacher was preaching against today'.[58] Here, Farley only draws attention to the young black men that have been claimed from the community by drugs, but throughout his narrative he highlights the fact that the military has taken many others. This idea is summarised by Wilkerson: 'the black communities who have already lost great numbers of men to drugs and crime will now lose "the good ones" to war'.[59] There is willingness in Farley's writing to acknowledge the flaws of those in black communities, but also to provide explanations for some of these behaviours. Farley's narrative is particularly effective at identifying this feeling of isolation and explaining the implications of striving for success when society is biased against the black person with aspirations: 'since society is hostile to black people in general, success in mainstream terms necessitates a kind of self-destruction. Golfing with the boss. Marrying a white woman'.[60] This process is epitomised in the novel by the character of W.W. who, in order to further his career, joins Bush's Republican Party as a script writer. The Republicans represent everything that Thurgood and W.W. stand against, but W.W. insists that this step is necessary in order for him to be successful. Thurgood, however, adopts John Locke's thesis that, 'a person's identity was intimately bound up in his work, that you put part of yourself into what you do',[61] and

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[58] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 128.
[59] Wilkerson, 'Blacks Wary of Their Big Role as Troops'.
[60] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 209.
[61] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 11.

therefore insists that W.W., and other African Americans who adopt white attitudes and sacrifice their own identities in order to progress, have lost the sense of who they are.[62]

Farley also highlights that is not only African American communities who face such discrimination. He cites the case of a Hispanic woman who works as a cleaner in the *National Now!* building. Gisella Hernandez is the latest of several women working at the building to have experienced problems in pregnancy and childbirth and there is a strong belief that these cases are linked to the health and safety conditions within the building. Previously, the women had not drawn attention to their situation because they feared deportation. However, when Gisella's baby is born with deformities she takes her story to Sojourner at *The Washington Post*. At the time, Gisella's husband is deployed in Iraq with the US military, and it is his role as a US soldier which is responsible for raising the family's status to that of US citizens with human rights.[63] With this anecdote, Farley raises the reader's awareness of the fact that those from ethnic minorities are required to go over and above what is required of white Americans in order to prove their value as US citizens. One of the few other Gulf War narratives to portray a character from an ethnic minority background in any detail is Paine's novel *The Pearl of Kuwait*. Paine's narrative addresses the ways in which Tommy Trang's heritage as part of the Vietnam War affects him in the Gulf. Vietnamese-American, Trang, is the product of the rape of a twelve year old Vietnamese girl by a gang of US marines during the Vietnam War. The marines attacked her and hung her up in a tree by her ankles where she was left for days looking at her grandfather's dead body. Despite this, she was determined to bring her baby up in America; she even requested that she was buried with an American flag. What is particularly provocative is the extent to which Trang believes in US values. Trang has grown to be fiercely patriotic and is passionate about the US Bill of Rights, recalling sections of it on a frequent basis. This is possibly the most intriguing thing about Trang: he

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[62] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 77.
[63] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 110.

fits into the category of the American "other" who sacrifices his own identity to become part of the US, and moreover, prove their patriotism by joining the US military.

In the US, ethnic minorities are "othered" by default, and the easiest way for many to achieve those equal rights is by joining the military. To quote Huntington, it would appear that, '[I]dentities are imagined selves: they are what we think we are and what we want to be'.[64] Jones points out minorities have joined the US military for financial reasons (which are more prevalent in the US where there is a direct correlation between race and class)[65] and in order to prove their patriotism towards the US, for generations, even as far back as the American Civil War. Many in the US hold the belief that, 'the only institution in America that has any kind of progressive program, where there's any inkling of being an equal and having a fair shot at success, is the military'.[66]

Throughout his narrative, Farley highlights the manner in which black Americans are made to feel that they occupy the role of the "other" in their own country. However, in seeking to offer a balanced account, Thurgood and the other characters often draw attention to the necessity for a change in attitudes and the need for those in black communities to take the initiative to help themselves. For instance, Thurgood notes that it is a rarity for African Americans to start what he refers to as "grass-roots" businesses like their fellow minorities, 'I almost never see brothers running these grass-roots operations. We as a people have got to get our fucking act together'.[67] He identifies the lack of positive black role models as a core problem: 'So South Africa's got its leader. Who do we have in America?.... Who else is

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[64] Huntington, *Who Are We?,* p. 23. Huntington comments further that in the Iraq War, occurring in the wake of September 11, 'Resident aliens made up 5 percent of the armed forces, and Latin American immigrants figured prominently among the casualties of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan', p. 202.

[65] Edwin Dorn of the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C. says 'Class and race are very different things conceptually, but it's very difficult to disaggregate their effects… Is a minority recruit confronting a lousy opportunity structure because he's poor, or because he's Black or Hispanic? Well, in large measure, he's poor because he's Black or Hispanic. Because you can't do anything about either of those things, you do what you have to do. You're more likely to sign on the dotted line'. Quoted in Jones, 'Minorities in the Military', p. 241.

[66] Carlos Melendrez, quoted in Jones, 'Minorities in the Military', p. 240.

[67] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 59.

there? Name a single solitary national black leader. And this year's NBA scoring champion doesn't count'.[68] This is one example of how Farley sets up heated debates between his characters in order to highlight political issues throughout the book. These discussions happen most frequently between the well-educated black characters in their teens and twenties, and are an effective way of communicating Farley's own concerns about American society with the reader. This distinct lack of a black role model (that is, a role model who has not sold out to white ideals in order to achieve success) is a continuous theme throughout the novel, and seems particularly poignant as an influencing factor on the generation which has, almost two decades on, witnessed the election of America's first mixed race president.

It is often Sojourner, pigeon-holed as a columnist whose writing focuses on exclusively on black issues, who voices those concerns which may sit least comfortably with some members of the US public. She suggests that there is a deliberate motive behind the UN deadline being on the 15th January which holds significance for African Americans because it is Martin Luther King's birthday.

> You know Bush and his cronies planned that shit out. Wars are never just about killing people, they're about destroying symbols too. When Bush finally launched his war, a day that once represented a man of peace would forever be remembered as a day of blood.[69]

She goes on to point out that the most irony is to be found in the fact that white people always praised King for taking the peaceful route and pleaded with black communities to be non-violent, but 'the minute that white interests are threatened, the big guns come out, the fighting commences, never even a whisper about non-violence'.[70]

Farley spends a large proportion of the narrative setting the scene for Thurgood's involvement in the Gulf War, and as a consequence, the reader has little opportunity to glean

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[68] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 89.
[69] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 169.
[70] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 169.

a detailed impression of Iraq or its people from the narrative. The extensive scene-setting could be frustrating for the reader, but this is where the strength of this novel is to be found. The lengthy lead up to Desert Storm is well documented in media accounts in both the mainstream and alternative press, and is also a major focus in many other Gulf War narratives such as Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War* and Swofford's *Jarhead*. Waiting and frustration are key themes of Gulf War literature which Farley recreates for the reader in his procrastination before telling the reader about Iraq. Moreover, it is Farley's observation about the relationship of African American communities to white society, and their resulting perception of the war which makes the narrative a crucial text in the study of this conflict, from both a literary and a political standpoint. In the early part of the narrative, Thurgood is uninterested in the war. He sees it as another instance of white interests being pursued at the cost of people of colour. As Jackson summarises; 'an America that has not been true to black patriotism might want to question just how true the White House is to them'.[71] As the novel progresses, his commentary on the place of the African American in US society becomes more influenced by his perception of the war and vice versa. Thurgood eventually takes a job as Sojourner's assistant on her Gulf War assignment in order to secure a job at *The Washington Post*. He is deeply indignant that he is forced to take a demotion in order to join an organisation with improved prospects; 'How come it's always the black man who's asked to take two steps down to take a step up?' he says.[72] Like those young African Americans who join the military in order to improve their prospects, Thurgood finds himself setting off for the Gulf in order to further his career. Most crucially, Farley foregrounds the idea that the desire to escape domestic issues, rather than a genuine interest in the fate of Kuwait is the driving force behind both the government's initiation of the war, and Thurgood's decision to

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[71] Jackson, 'Blacks Have Good Cause to Oppose War in Iraq'.
[72] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 151.

travel to the Middle East to report on it. Thurgood's inner monologue overtly constructs this link between domestic issues and international political action:

> America was losing the war on poverty, losing the war against drugs, losing the war to achieve racial equality, and now macho, thousand-points-of-light, read-my-lips warmongers like General Pinpoint had to go start up some new conflict over oil and sand a million miles away.[73]

Here, Farley again uses his characters to identify and articulate concerns which have been well documented in cultural theory circles both during and since the Gulf War. Chomsky argues that government propaganda was designed to 'divert the bewildered herd'[74] from problematic domestic issues such as unemployment, homelessness, health, education and the rising crime rates. Ahluwalia elaborates on the idea of creating enemies as a means of keeping the US public afraid, reliant and obedient, in her discussion of Susan Buck-Morss' work on the concept: 'For Buck-Morss, there are two Americas – a democratically elected republic under threat since the Bush election and the security state that always requires an enemy'.[75] Ahluwalia continues to explain what this means for the US and how it raises some unsettling contradictions about US ideals:

> For the U.S. security state, the biggest threat is that the enemy might disappear. It has to constantly reinvent enemies, which paradoxically means "that the undemocratic state claims absolute power over the citizens of a free and democratic nation.[76]

Farley's novel works in a documentary mode, and like many Gulf War texts, seeks to capture the sense of the Gulf as an impending Armageddon.[77] The legacy of the Cold War remained embedded in the population's psyche and US government sources were painting the Iraqis as

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[73] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 48.
[74] Chomsky, *Media Control*, p. 43.
[75] Ahluwalia, 'Death and Politics', p. 173.
[76] Ahluwalia, 'Death and Politics', p. 173.
[77] See, for example, Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War*. My research in the US also revealed that many poems included in relatively unknown collections such as The Aaron Collection have a strong sense of impending catastrophe. The examples from Buck's and Winans' poems, discussed earlier in this chapter, construct a direct causal relationship between the Gulf War and Armageddon.

a ferocious opponent: 'Saddam Hussein had over a half million troops in the Gulf, they said. The U.S.A. had over 300,000 and the number was growing. The world was preparing for a bloodbath'.[78] According to Wilkerson, this 'sense of impending disaster'[79] was particularly strong in black churches and inner-city schools, where almost everybody knew at least one person deployed to the conflict. Whereas the government was seeking a distraction from inadequate health, education and employment, Thurgood is fleeing the responsibility of fathering Ebony's baby as a result of a one-off encounter: 'I began to empathize with Bush's decision to send the troops. It was so liberating to leave one's domestic troubles behind for a chance at greatness or disaster in a foreign land'.[80] The crucial point to note is that, rather than being a novel about fighting in the Gulf War, Farley's narrative highlights the injustices and unrest on the homefront, and suggests that these formed the catalyst for the government's action in Iraq. Incidentally, this storyline is yet another example of how "reality" is not always reliable. Thurgood flees the news of Ebony's pregnancy, but Ebony later reveals that she faked the pregnancy in order to establish whether Thurgood was really serious about committing to their relationship.

Farley certainly gives the reader an insight into the experiences of a young black man living in the US during the 1990s. He outlines some of the key concerns of those in African American communities and makes observations about human behaviour and the nature of othering in order to go some way to explaining the situation, and in doing so, often transcends the reader's expectations. Farley identifies the negative associations of black culture through the unusual character of Professor Ice who is a white rapper, or as Thurgood describes him, 'pale-skinned, red-haired, and green-eyed, [and] likes to say he's a black man trapped in a

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[78] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 163.
[79] Reverend George H. Clements, pastor of Holy Angles Roman Catholic Church in Chicago, quoted in Wilkerson, 'Blacks Wary of Their Big Role as Troops'.
[80] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 164.

white man's body'.[81] Ice adopts what he sees as the essence of African American culture into his way of life, but Thurgood argues that he only represents the negative aspects of black culture:

> It's all about pimps and glocks and gangstas. This isn't what black people are about. The media defines our culture as this crap and then y'all think you know us. Why don't you rap about something positive, like the first black female astronaut in space or Kwanzaa or something?[82]

Thurgood objects even more strongly to Ice "reclaiming" the word "nigga", pointing out that because white men wrote all the dictionaries, 'there wasn't even a word we could yell back at you after you finished calling us jungle bunny and coon and shine and tar baby and nigga'.[83] This raises the question of whether those in minority communities can other (and therefore discriminate) in the same way. Although white people are othered by several characters throughout the novel, Thurgood points out that 'It's easier for blacks to be anti-Semetic, to be against another similarly oppressed group than it is to challenge the real power structure'.[84] Thurgood is disturbed by Arizona's anti-Semitism, but he others women, and is particularly vocal in his condemnation of mixed race couples. It would seem that Huntington is accurate in his suggestion that, identity 'refers to the images of individuality and distinctiveness ('selfhood') held and projected by an actor and formed (and modified over time) through relations with significant "others"'.[85] In short, our sense of self is formed out of an awareness of our difference to others; we define ourselves against what we are not. Farley challenges the validity of othering as a strategy of identification: his attention to the othering of various groups by black characters – in addition to the othering that the African American characters experience from white communities – constructs a complex concept of identity. Increasingly as the narrative progresses, Farley communicates to the reader the importance of challenging

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[81] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 66.
[82] Farley, *My Favourite War*, pp. 67-8.
[83] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 68.
[84] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 43.
[85] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 22.

the concept of a unified US identity, and draws attention to the impact of possible multiple identities as a source of contention within ethnic minority communities and in their attitudes towards both the US soldiers and the Iraqis involved in the Gulf conflict.

Farley's novel reveals identity to be increasingly complex and challenges the idea of the enemy as the 'archetypal evil Arab/Muslim'.[86] The first difficulty in reading representations of the enemy in these texts is the absence of the Iraqi figure, and crucially, the lack of Iraqi bodies. Unfortunately, this is reflective of the US public's collective experience of the Gulf War. In representations of the Vietnam War, for example, Vietnamese people have been visible, whereas in literary and filmic responses to the Gulf conflict, Iraqi people are notably absent. However, this high impact coverage was believed to have been at the root of the impassioned protests of Americans against the war. Consequently, the US government ensured that no such coverage would be broadcast from Iraq. Instead the myth of the conflict as what Hardt and Negri refer to as a "bodyless" conflict would be perpetuated. Hardt and Negri summarise the Gulf conflict as a period in which: 'the bodies of US soldiers are kept free of risk, the enemy combatants are killed efficiently and invisibly'.[87] Many of the viewers who came to regard CNN's highly censored coverage of the conflict as a, rather contrived, form of entertainment were seduced by the technology of the "surgical war", with the showcase of the US military's arsenal of state-of-the-art fighter jets and "intelligent" missiles:

> The "smartness" or "brilliance" of computer-controlled rocket systems and of Tomahawk missiles seduced us into thinking that Iraq's murderous violence was being confronted by efficient and rational systems whose objectives were, not to murder, but simply to "clean out" enemy targets.[88]

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[86] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 133.
[87] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 44.
[88] Aksoy and Robins, 'Exterminating Angels', p. 205.

Regardless of their attitudes to the war, viewers found themselves admiring the impressive planes: 'We don't think of them as weapons'.[89] Several cultural commentators have observed that the appeal of techno-combat took viewers close up to the realms of science fiction, thus removing them from their emotions. Viewing the destruction from such a unique "remote-intimate" vantage point, courtesy of cameras attached to smart bombs, led to a moral detachment for the televisual spectator. Consequently, the enemy became "a faceless alien":[90] 'We watched the war on our television screens, but our screen culture had come to sustain our moral blindness and moral passivity'.[91] The propaganda machine was keen to stress the notion of "modern" warfare and weaponry as being entirely different from the "primitive" Iraqi warfare, with a much reduced death rate, but only for the US forces. Government officials are reported as saying that:

> Bush assumes the American public will be mainly concerned about the number of US casualties, not the tens of thousands of Iraqis who stand to die or be maimed in a massive air assault, and that even the killing of thousands of civilians – including women and children – probably would not undermine American support for the war effort.[92]

However, throughout *My Favourite War*, Thurgood shares an empathy with the Iraqi people in their opposition to white Americans influencing their way of life. He, like the Iraqi people, is othered by white US society, and at various points in the narrative, Thurgood clearly finds it easier to identify himself as a "person of colour" than as an "American". He aligns himself with the Iraqis in a stance where ethnicity overrules his sense of nationhood. This apparent opposition to the Republican government and their impending war in Iraq makes his representation of the Iraqi characters, when they finally appear, perhaps a little surprising.

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[89] Farrel Corcoran, 'War Reporting: Collateral Damage in the European Theatre', in Mowlana et al., *Triumph of the Image*, p. 109. Corcoran observes that even anti-war campaigners found themselves seduced by the "high technology" as they watched on their televisions.
[90] Kevin Robins and Les Levidow, 'Eye of the Storm', *Screen*, 32:3 (Autumn 1991), 324-328 (p. 325).
[91] Aksoy and Robins, 'Exterminating Angels', p. 206.
[92] Jack Nelson, chief of the Los Angeles Times, quoted by Christopher Hitchens, in *The Nation*, 11 March 1991. Both quoted in Tariq Ali, *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonisation of Iraq* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 252.

The first Iraqis that the reader encounters are Iraqi soldiers who take Thurgood and Sojourner prisoner. They are described as handling the hostages roughly, tying them up, and throwing them in the back of the truck. Thurgood makes us aware that some of these Iraqis have a good education; he describes how they can speak a multitude of languages, all that is, except English. However, the characters are two underdeveloped caricatures of "the Arab". They have no shared language and there is a sense that the connection that Thurgood had previously felt with the Iraqi people has been shattered. Ironically, the only way in which he and Sojourner manage to communicate with the Iraqis is through Western pop music by white artists such as Madonna and Celine Dion, to which the Iraqi soldiers encourage them to sing along.[93] When the Iraqi captors grow bored with the singing, they lock their two hostages in the boot of the truck. Their captors are rather heavy handed, but Thurgood and Sojourner soon meet an enemy which is incongruent to the US government and media's representation of the fearsome 500,000 strong Iraqi army (which after the war it would be admitted was probably closer to 183,000 in number).[94] Thurgood provides a detailed description of the Iraqi army that he and Sojourner encounter:

> these were troops only in the loosest possible sense of the word. These were scared kids playing with guns. Many of the Iraqi soldiers couldn't have been older than thirteen. I also saw old men, with potbellies, white hair, and humped backs. I saw kids and old men digging holes in the ground to hide in.[95]

He goes on to describe the desperation of these troops. Despite the fact that Thurgood and Sojourner had already been stripped of their belongings by their captors, other Iraqi soldiers, dressed in rags and shoeless, would come up to the truck in which they were being transported and beg them for food.[96] With this depiction of the enemy, not only does Farley reclaim some of the solidarity which Thurgood demonstrated towards Iraqis in the first half

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[93] Farley, *My Favourite War*, pp. 195-6.
[94] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 197.
[95] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 97.
[96] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 197.

of the novel, but he also challenges the government line and its manipulation of the media to political ends.

At this point in the narrative Thurgood and Sojourner are being held hostage in a hotel room in a strange reality which returns them to a Western experience of the war: they find themselves held in a hotel belonging to the US chain Howard Johnson's, watching the news on CNN, and experiencing the war through western eyes, or more accurately, as western telespectators. From their hotel room, Sojourner is outraged at the lack of bodies in the media coverage of the war, and bemoans the media censorship facilitated by the press pool system. Farley's novel suggests that the press pools in the Gulf were designed to ensure that the war was reported from a white male perspective and Sojourner as a black female reporter in particular finds it doubly difficult to circumnavigate the red tape.[97] In fact, one point which Farley highlights particularly well is that the only demographic more limiting than race is gender. Thurgood successfully negotiates time in the field by bonding with a fellow Naverton graduate. He is conscious that his ethnicity might act against him here, but he and Colonel Willard strike up a connection through common experience.[98] Thurgood finally achieves inclusion through the marginalisation of women in his misogynistic banter, thus proving that in order to create a sense of identity, there must first be an "other" to posit one's self against. Indeed, Thurgood demonstrates his ability to assume varying identities in different situations. Thurgood elaborates on the contradiction between what he and Sojourner witness in Iraq and how the media are representing the war:

[97] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 173.
[98] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 179.

> this was a neat and tidy war, with all the crusts carefully cut off. From what we could hear, commentators were talking about a Nintendo war, super-accurate smart bombs, precision attacks against military targets. From what we saw on the roof, from what we could feel in our little room, the walls shaking, the city shuddering, this was not a precision war, a neat and tucked-in and folded little war.[99]

Consequently, in the narratives that emerged from the conflict, the Iraqi figure inhabits a similar space of absence. Some narratives attempt to highlight the injustices suffered by the Iraqi people,[100] but those written by white authors frequently depict Iraqis as other, often casting them in roles that resonate with the Western stereotype of the Arab. Thurgood details how, after the war, it emerged that the "smart bombs" comprised only seven percent of all the bombs used and the others were the 'old-fashioned stupid bombs, idiot bombs, drooling dumb bombs'[101] which were less than twenty-five percent accurate. Thurgood is deeply troubled by the immorality of leading the US public to believe that this war is in some way humane, whilst the reality is that approximately 200,000 Iraqis were estimated to have been killed in Iraq, and around half of those killed were thought to be civilians.[102] Thurgood has done his research, so Bush's presumption that the American people are not so concerned with foreign casualties appears to be mistaken. Farley's articulation of these figures through Thurgood is very effective, since the reader arrives at these facts from Thurgood's apparently empathetic perspective, oddly substantiating the truth about the war with a fictional authority. Eric Hooglund confirms the severity of the misinformation which the US public received with regards to the real consequences of the US intervention on the Iraqi people in his essay, 'The Other Face of War'. He questions the morality of the fact that although precise numbers of US casualties were recorded – 144 fatalities and 479 wounded – there is no definitive data

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[99] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 203.
[100] For examples, see Burruss' *Heart of the Storm* and Paine's *The Pearl of Kuwait*.
[101] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 204.
[102] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 204.

on the Iraqi casualties.[103] Hooglund reaffirms Thurgood's claims, arguing that 'at least 100,000 and possibly as many as 200,000 Iraqis, civilian and military, perished as a consequence of the U.S.-led military campaign and subsequent civil strife'.[104]

Despite his empathy with the Iraqi people, Thurgood finds it difficult to override his media-influenced preconceptions about, and fear of, the Iraqi soldiers. When their captors come into the room suddenly during an air raid, Thurgood is convinced that they have come to kill Sojourner and himself: 'The door to our room burst open. Iraqi troops. This was it. They were going to execute us'.[105] Instead, the troops take the captives up onto the roof and leave them there, from which point they witness the "clean war" from the Iraqis' perspective. Although he acknowledges the horror of the bombings on the city, Thurgood is captivated by the "ghastly loveliness" of what he is witnessing: 'How could anything so horrible be so beautiful?'[106] Despite being in the middle of the US bombardment, Thurgood feels a sense of detachment from, rather than a unity with, the Iraqi people: 'It felt like it was happening to someone else's country, someone else's city. It was someone else's war'.[107]

This statement reveals the complexity of Thurgood's sense of identity in relation to the US and to Iraq. He experiences a divided view of the war, an inner conflict between his US cultural identity and his ethnic identity. Following the air raid, Thurgood has a shared experience with the Iraqis, but in their eyes he is associated with the perpetrators of the bombings:

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[103] Eric Hooglund points out that the government estimates the figures as ranging from 75,000 to 105,000 killed and possibly as many as three times that number injured, in 'The Other Face of War', in Peters, *Collateral Damage*, pp. 181-96 (pp. 182-83).
[104] Hooglund, 'The Other Face of War', p. 183.
[105] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 201.
[106] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 201.
[107] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 202.

> There was a sense, between captors and captives, that something new, something different, now both united us and set us apart. Sojourner and I had become witnesses to the unstoppable force that Iraq would have to endure; we had become potential empathizers. But we were also representatives of the country that had rained fire on Baghdad that very night.[108]

Perhaps the manner in which Farley reveals the complexity of African American identities here can shed new light on Muscati's claim that 'the Black man at home and the Arab/Muslim abroad, represent essentially the same threat; only the weapons used against them differ'.[109] While Thurgood's othering by white US society leads him to identify with the Iraqi people and empathise with their plight, his American nationality remains a part of his identity. As Huntington points out, US identity is difficult to define. As an immigrant nation, the majority of its inhabitants have a strong affinity to their family's country of origin in addition to their identity as Americans. Perhaps we should, as Huntington does, ask whether we should view Americans as one people or as several peoples.[110] A similar approach can be adopted when assessing the identity of individuals. It is necessary to question not what one's *identity is*, but rather what one's *identities are*. Farley leaves the reader to ponder this question, and what it means for the relationship between ethnic minorities in America and the Iraqi people, in the final lines of the narrative:

> The cabdriver glanced back at both of us in the rear-view mirror. I could see his face in the reflection. He was a Middle Easterner. Iraqi?
>
> "Tell me, my friends," the driver asked in a singsong accent. "Are we together?"[111]

The Iraqi Image: Representations of the Iraqi in US Narratives of the Iraq War

So does the literature of the more recent conflict in Iraq offer an alternative to the absence of Iraqi characters in the narratives of its predecessor? Or do readers find themselves faced with

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[108] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 202.
[109] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 133.
[110] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 9.
[111] Farley, *My Favourite War*, p. 260.

the same lack of fully developed characters, often a complete absence of non-US representation, and the repeated "othering" of the enemy nation and its people? Just as with the Gulf War, military personnel deployed in the 2003 Iraq War found themselves lacking a traditional front line. However, due to the guerilla warfare element of the latter conflict, the dissolution of a traditional front line resulted in these troops having continuous interaction with the Iraqi people, both as friends and as enemies.

This section of the chapter argues that it is precisely this increased level of contact with Iraqi soldiers, insurgents, and civilians, which sets the literature of the Iraq War apart from its predecessors in terms of portraying the enemy. In Gulf War narratives, the Iraqi figure is all but invisible, with the exception of the occasional caricatured figure who fulfils the prevailing Western stereotype of the Arab as 'inherently violent and threatening'.[112] These characters are often depicted as somehow subhuman, and only capable of understanding the language of force. Hardt and Negri summarise the Gulf conflict as a period in which war transformed into a virtual event and the "enemy" is notably missing.[113] Thus, the primary role of Iraqis in Gulf War narratives is one of absence. Indeed, it has been suggested that tele-spectators in the West found themselves identifying with the seductive smart-bombs rather than the faceless victims of US military strikes.[114] In stark contrast, the Iraq War became a guerrilla warfare battleground in which ambushes, RPG attacks, and IED attacks posed a constant threat. Although combatants had faced guerilla warfare in previous conflicts, the Iraq War indicates a new era of warfare in which, 'Urban terrain is likely to be one of the most significant future areas of operations for American forces throughout the world'.[115] The transformation of the battlefield which took place between the two conflicts had a direct impact on the level of empathy that the soldiers, and by extension, the public, felt

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[112] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 133.
[113] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 44.
[114] Broughton, 'The Bomb's-Eye View', p. 152.
[115] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 48.

for the Iraqi people. The narratives that were produced in the wake of the Iraq War clearly mark this paradigmatic shift in cultural attitudes. This section pays particular attention to the ways in which two Iraq War memoirs, Buzzell's *My War*, and Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You*, depict Iraqis, both in individual terms, and Iraq as a nation. It considers whether the increased visibility of Iraqi characters leads to a reinforcement of "othering" or, conversely, the possibility that these narratives may offer new avenues of representation for enemy figures, challenging the paradigms constructed by previous war literature.

In contrast to Gulf War narratives in which the Iraqi people appear 'as blank spaces characterized by ontological emptiness',[116] the narratives which emerged from the Iraq War demonstrate a marked difference in the ways that US soldiers interact with, and therefore represent the Iraqi people. The authors of both memoirs come into regular contact with Iraqi civilians, Iraqi National Guard personnel, and insurgents. Buzzell is a machine gunner in the US Army's first ever Stryker Brigade Combat Team, stationed in Mosul. During his deployment, Buzzell posted his experiences on his internet blog, becoming one of the first and most famous 'milbloggers' (military bloggers) of the Iraq War. His memoir is based on his blog entries, but also includes his post-deployment reflections on his war experiences. Williams is an Arabic translator in the Military Intelligence Battalion of the 101st Airbourne Division, stationed in Baghdad and Mosul, as well as in a remote mountain location on the Syrian border. Both memoirs include many interactions with the local people, and in general, it seems that this enables the soldiers to gain a fuller understanding of the language, customs, and behaviour of the Iraqi people.

The presence of Iraqi figures in the narratives is the first distinct difference to be noted in contrast to the invisible population which inhabited the narratives of the Gulf War. Both authors describe scenes of children following them, playing, begging for food or water, and of

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[116] Hamdi Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 191.

locals trying to sell their goods to the US soldiers. Both memoirs depict the Iraqi people demonstrating their support for, and gratitude towards, the US troops. This comes as the first surprise to Buzzell who explains that he was under the impression that Iraqis hated the Americans, but that 'these people seemed to be happy that we were entering their country and they let us know it which felt kinda good'.[117] These scenes support the premise of the Iraq War as a 'just war', casting the US into the role of what Slavoj Žižek describes as a 'global policeman' responsible for restoring order.[118] Muscati furthers this argument, suggesting that 'under the guise of justice, the US can project its politics onto the world'.[119] However, these narratives do not provide such a simplistic account of the US intervention. The authors, perhaps unsurprisingly, adopt the stance of the US as the liberators of Iraq, but refreshingly, they attempt to understand the complexities of the situation in Iraq and, moreover, convey these to the reader. Although Buzzell discusses the terrorist influence in Iraq, he also provides a counter to the dominant discourse by posting a quote from Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*, which challenges the definition of a terrorist:

> guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a war of the people… the guerilla fighter is a social reformer… he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors… he fights in order to change the social system.[120]

The level of awareness that Buzzell demonstrates here provides an intriguing alternative to the stereotypical gung-ho soldier, but also to the disillusioned liberal soldier that was so typical of Vietnam and Gulf War literature. Buzzell and Williams are fully aware that the US Government's justification for the war may be fallible, but they also see the positive effects of their presence in Iraq. The gratitude and hospitality with which they are met by Iraqi citizens

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[117] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 107.
[118] Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 19.
[119] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 135.
[120] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 191.

serve to confirm their belief that they are doing some good on a small scale, even if they remain less convinced about the large scale motivation of their government.

What is especially informative about these narratives is that the authors do not simply provide readers with a more detailed account of the average Iraqi citizen, but rather they convey the richness and diversity of the culture that they encountered in Iraq. The majority of readers would already be aware of the presence of the Sunni, Sh'ia and Kurdish communities in Iraq, but Buzzell and Williams also draw attention to other groups. Both authors describe how radically different they found the Christian neighbourhoods in Iraq to be: 'The women… usually wear the traditional dresses with scarves around their heads, and they hardly ever make eye contact with you… In this neck of the woods… the women… wore T-shirts and summer pants and sandals…' In addition to the different attire of the locals, Buzzell observes another cultural difference in the non-Muslim areas of Iraq: 'I noticed a little liquor store on a street corner. (!!!!) I've NEVER seen a liquor store here in Iraq before, ever'.[121] Like Buzzell, Williams finds it odd when one of her missions includes searching a monastery: 'I know on some level that Iraq has a small Christian minority, but finding this monastery astounds me'.[122] Williams also draws the reader's attention to the lesser-known peoples of Iraq, such as the Yezidis, with whom she develops a good relationship whilst in the mountain camp on the Syrian border.

> These local people were Yezidis. They observed a religion that was not Islam. So far as I could gather, it was a nature-based religion that may predate not only Christianity but Judaism as well, and it also seemed to involve angels… They were not Kurdish, they told us, although Kurdish was their language.[123]

Williams goes on to describe the Yezidis as generous despite their extreme poverty. She explains that the Yezidi people would come to visit the small group of soldiers, bringing gifts

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[121] Buzzell, *My War*, pp. 268-9.
[122] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 114.
[123] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 162.

of food. In exchange, Williams and her colleagues would offer the Yezidis magazines, water, and sometimes toiletries such as hand lotion. She points out that explaining the purpose of such items proved difficult with the language barrier because Williams can speak Arabic, but not Kurdish, and on one occasion a local man ended up spraying deodorant directly onto his shirt. During her deployment, Williams befriended some of the locals whom she describes in great detail in her memoir. One young Yezidi man, Jasu, has an 'endless fascination' with America. He is astounded by a photograph that he sees in a copy of *Newsweek* that the soldiers have given him. It depicts a man and woman in swimsuits walking along holding hands on the beach. He asks Williams whether people can dress like this and hold hands in public in America. Jasu also asks whether women can go to the cinema, even when they are married. He then concludes, 'I want to go to America… Find another wife. A better wife'.[124] One of the soldiers passes Jasu a copy of *Hustler* magazine, suggesting that Jasu might find his 'better wife' in there. Jasu is so delighted with the risqué magazine that he drops the issue of *Newsweek* in the dirt. Despite her apparent understanding of Arab culture, Williams recounts another conversation that she has with Jasu in which she unintentionally posits him as "other". She tells Jasu how lucky he is to live in such a beautiful place and that his way of life is better than the stress of life in America. Jasu politely responds, saying simply, 'We have no electricity'.[125] As Williams reflects on his reaction, she suggests what he may really have been thinking:

> He was way too polite. What he meant to say was: "Don't go and romanticize my poverty, my isolation, my 'exotic' existence. What I want is what you Americans already have: opportunities, a car, a television, an education for my little brother. Money.[126]

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[124] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 163.
[125] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 164.
[126] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 164.

These passages are particularly vivid representations of how American soldiers and local Iraqis interacted and attempted, sometimes unsuccessfully, to understand each other's cultural values.

Both Buzzell and Williams observe with interest the reaction of the Iraqis to their presence. As observed in Chapter Four, this is particularly fascinating for Williams since the locals do not only react to her presence as an American, but also as a woman: 'They are interested in me, this blond girl speaking Arabic, this girl in the Army – I am an anomaly, a distraction'.[127] The women that Williams encounters seem particularly curious about her. One of the Yezidi girls, Leila, is excited by Williams' presence because she is only permitted to talk to women. She frequently visits Williams, and they exchange gifts. By this point in her deployment, Williams is equally as grateful for female company as Leila is. Over the course of his time in Iraq, Buzzell also develops friendships with a few of the Iraqi interpreters. In spite of the fact that Buzzell never discloses his name for security reasons, his description of the second interpreter is detailed and personal. Before he leaves Iraq, Buzzell interviews the interpreter, the transcript of which he posted on his blog. By reading this transcript, we discover that, perhaps surprisingly, some Iraqis were happy to accept the invasion of Iraq by US forces as a route to a new future for their country. Buzzell describes the interpreter as 'one of the coolest, most down to earth, friendliest human beings I've ever met'.[128] Buzzell says that he as much time with him as he could and that the interpreter always went out of his way to help Buzzell. Poignantly, Buzzell believes him to be one of the many interpreters who were murdered shortly after Buzzell left because they had been working for the American Army.

In their relatively reflexive narratives, both Williams and Buzzell describe instances where they imagine how their own actions must appear quite inexplicable to the Iraqis, 'What

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127 Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 105.
128 Buzzell, *My War*, p. 387.

are those American doing now? It was a damn good question'.[129] This awareness of how their actions may be interpreted demonstrates that the authors do not perceive the locals as an alien "other", but rather they can identify with them to the extent that they are able to imagine how the US troops might look through Iraqi eyes. One of the most powerful passages in Buzzell's narrative is when the inhabitants of Mosul flee following a night of bombing by the American forces. Buzzell is manning one of the security checkpoints, searching people as they leave the city. As the number in the crowd increases, he receives orders to shut down the checkpoint, turn the evacuees around and send them back to a checkpoint on a street that was two hundred meters away. Buzzell tries to imagine what the Iraqis must be thinking:

> They all looked at me like, "Come on, give me a break, let us through, please!"… This one man who was assisting his elderly grandfather who could barely walk came up to me, holding the old man, and he started saying… probably something like, "Please mista, look at us, look at this old man, he can barely walk, please let us through."[130]

Williams' knowledge of the language and training for her job in military intelligence perhaps prepares her better for her interactions with the people than Buzzell. She also explains that her relationship with her ex-boyfriend Tariq, a Palestinian Muslim, provides her with a better grasp of the language, and an insight into the Islamic way of life: 'No doubt my experiences with Rick gave me more sympathy, understanding and respect for the people in Iraq…'. She emphasises that she did not perceive them as other: 'I never looked at them as having some freakish or weird religion. I didn't look at them as being foreign'.[131]

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[129]Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 95. Also in Buzzell, *My War*; 'all the Iraqis… were… wondering what the fuck those crazy Americans were doing now?', p. 199.
[130] Buzzell, *My War*, pp. 353-4.
[131] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 109.

Othering the Iraqi: A Necessary Evil?

Throughout her narrative, Williams takes a more sympathetic stance towards the people of Iraq than Buzzell. The nature of her job – talking to the locals to ascertain whether there are weapons or insurgents present in the area – demanded high levels of diplomacy and conversational skills. Her success invariably depended on the level of rapport that she was able to strike up with the locals. However, it is eventually her empathy with the Iraqis which makes it difficult for her to make the split-second decisions about whether someone is friendly or the enemy. When the US forces are told to step up security, Williams worries that they will lose the 'hearts and minds' of the Iraqi people, and consequently, the locals would begin to think of the Americans as occupiers rather than liberators.[132] As Williams predicts, there is a distinct change in the attitude of Iraqis towards the US soldiers. She writes, 'you had to wonder… whether when you cut people's access off to their religious shrines and began to treat them like criminals, they then maybe started to act like criminals? At least *I* had to wonder'.[133] Following her own involvement with the interrogation of an Iraqi suspect, Williams suggests that, if the suspects are not terrorists before the interrogations, then there is a high probability that they will be after experiencing such treatment at the hands of Americans.[134] Such a statement interprets this possible outcome as a rational response to a traumatic experience, thus countering the frequent US perception of Arabs as 'angry, violent, dangerous and fanatical'.[135] It also supports Huntington's argument that, '[h]ow Americans define themselves determines their role in the world, but how the world views that role also shapes American identity'.[136] Crucially, Williams' example extends Huntington's argument to include the notion that the role which the US assumes in the world, and its resulting

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[132] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 200.
[133] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 201.
[134] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 250.
[135] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 137.
[136] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, pp. 366-367.

behaviour, has an exponential impact on the way that other peoples define themselves against US identity, and is often directly responsible for shaping their beliefs and behaviour. Williams condemns the practices used in US interrogations and regrets the fact that she not only participated in an interrogation, but that she failed to file a complaint about the treatment of the suspect.[137] Williams finds the new restrictions detrimental to her job and explains that one cannot build relationships with the civilian population if she has to treat everyone as a threat.[138] Soldiers on the ground, in what was becoming an increasingly hostile situation, were required to make split-second decisions about whether to treat approaching locals as friendly or the enemy. Williams explains that a soldier can only cope with that kind of pressure for a certain period of time before they find themselves treating everyone as the enemy.[139] Buzzell also points out that although not everyone in Iraq is a terrorist, soldiers cannot take the risk of treating everyone as friendly either.[140] Eventually, it seems, this unprecedented type of combat requires a new, more aggressive, approach.

Perhaps due to the nature of his role as a machine gunner, Buzzell's memoir depicts a degree of Othering of the Iraqi people throughout his deployment in order to cope. Even early on in his narrative, Buzzell comments, 'I hate to say this, because it's extremely racist, but every single… person there looked like a goddam terrorist to me. Every single one of them'.[141] He also describes one of the ambushers in Mosul as having a 'terrorist beard'.[142] Despite his earlier, more liberal account of terrorists, once in combat, Buzzell casts the enemy in the role of the immoral terrorist, thus enabling him to, as his battalion commander puts it, 'Punish the Deserving'.[143] Hardt and Negri explain this phenomenon thus: 'posing the

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[137] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 252.
[138] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 237.
[139] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, pp. 237-8.
[140] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 227.
[141] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 109.
[142] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 290.
[143] Buzzell, *My War*, p. 291.

enemy as evil serves to make the enemy and the struggle against it absolute'.[144] Although Williams' life experience and training as a translator have taught her to sympathise with Iraqis, her combat training has taught her that treating the locals as a collective enemy is often necessary in the combat zone:

> The first thing any soldier did in a combat situation was learn to dehumanize the enemy. In prior wars we called them *nips* or *chinks* or *gooks* or *krauts* or *slopes*. In Iraq we called them *hajjis*, but we also called them… *towelheads*. *Ragheads. Camel jockeys…* Words that ensured that we didn't see our enemy as people…[145]

Williams experiences conflicting emotions, mainly due to the dual roles which the Army requires of her. Her role in military intelligence provides her with a much higher level of understanding of the local people than many of her colleagues in other branches of the Army, however, due to the 360 degree nature of the warfare in Iraq, she also has to adopt a combat zone mental position which requires her to other the enemy.[146]

These texts are crucial in depicting the complexity of the situation in Iraq since 2003. In contrast to the literature of the Gulf War, Iraqi figures feature frequently in these narratives. Moreover, the reader is given the sense that these are real people, some of whom Buzzell and Williams came to know quite well and regard as friends. The narrators offer the reader a compelling insight into the richness and diversity of the population of Iraq and frequently speak of the generosity of the locals. Crucially, these memoirs also raise the issue of how the soldiers cope with the conflicting interests of the roles that the nature of the war in Iraq demands of them. Williams in particular finds it incredibly difficult to reconcile her roles. These narratives leave us to ponder whether it is inevitable that in a conflict such as the Iraq War, soldiers need to Other or dehumanizing the enemy in order to react to situations effectively. If the enemy can no longer be killed 'efficiently and invisibly', as Hardt and

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[144] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 16.
[145] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 200.
[146] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 253.

Negri suggested was in the case in the Gulf War, then perhaps it is necessary to posit the enemy as evil, enabling the US soldier to perform their duties whilst feeling their actions are justified.

Conclusion

This chapter explores a range of texts and draws attention to the perception that the citizens of the US have of themselves and their country, and how they perceive others. It is clear that the image that the US projects of itself, through government and media discourses, and also through its literature, has a direct impact on the way that the world perceives it, but also that US behaviour shapes the actions of other nations and their people. Othering the enemy is, in some ways, as prevalent in the second war in Iraq as it was in the first. The difference lies in the way that this "othering" occurs. Whereas in the Gulf War, Iraqi people were absent from the American psyche, and replaced by a caricature of the evil Arab in the form of Saddam Hussein, in the Iraq War, othering was developed as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress and trauma of a guerrilla conflict.

These texts, particularly those from the Aaron Collection and Farley's novel, demonstrate that the US people cannot be broadly characterised any more than the Iraqi people can be. To be American is not necessarily to belong to a single nation, and American national identity cannot be easily defined. As citizens of an immigrant nation, almost every American identifies themselves under more than one, perhaps many, umbrellas of nationality. It is these multiple affinities to nations outside of the US, and smaller communities within the US, which make the idea of a singular US identity so problematic. Furthermore, it is these identities which are 'other' to a person's US identity that can lead to a stronger identification with the enemy in foreign wars. Consequently, many US citizens feel an even stronger need

to prove their patriotism and their loyalty to the US. Some achieve this by flying the US flag, others by joining the US military. The travesty that is highlighted by this chapter is to be found in the lack of soldier characters or authors of memoirs by African Americans, Hispanics, Asians or Native Americans. Similarly to the female authors examined in the fourth chapter of this thesis, ethnic minorities are under-represented in the literature of these conflicts, disproportionately to the significant numbers of women and minorities who were actually deployed to the conflicts.

Although Buzzell's and Williams's memoirs demonstrate a much greater awareness of Iraqi culture, and represent individual Iraqi figures in a more rounded way than the lack of Iraqi presence in the Gulf War texts, it is clear that there is still a long way to go before Iraqi perspectives are effectively represented in Western accounts of the war. The reader is provided with a more detailed account of how the writer or the character perceives, and possibly empathises with, the Iraqi figure, or with the Iraqis as a people, but Iraqi voices remain notably missing. In US narratives, it seems that, for now at least, Iraqi characters remain understated or absent. Farley's narrative raises some important questions, engages with contemporary cultural debate, and anticipates several later developments in cultural commentary. His novel captures a specific moment in US history, at which the US government's desire to remove "Vietnam Syndrome" from the American psyche, and the necessity to create enemies to divert the attention of the American public from domestic concerns, culminated in the decision to deploy troops to the Gulf War. Crucially, Farley's novel anticipates Huntington's later writings which problematise the idea of a unified US identity. Moreover, his framing of the novel against the backdrop of the Gulf War allows Farley to inform the reader about the reasons for the disproportionately high numbers of minorities in the military. These high numbers of minority soldiers, and Thurgood's own multiple identities, are both consequences of the "othering" of ethnic minorities within

civilian US society. Since the policymakers in the US make it increasingly difficult for Thurgood to identify himself with them as American, his identification with the Iraqi people as "other" to white US society becomes stronger. Consequently, his empathy towards Iraqis and opposition to the war increases. Perhaps Muscati was justified in her assertion that the black man and the Arab represent the same threat to white US society. It is left to the reader to decide what Thurgood's answer to the taxi driver's question might be.

Chapter Six

Writing Back Through Technology:

Iraqi Narratives and the Virtual "Other"

Chapter Six

Writing Back Through Technology:

Iraqi Narratives and the Virtual "Other"

> You know what really bugs me about posting on the internet, chat rooms or message boards? The first reaction (usually from Americans) is 'You're lying, you're not Iraqi'. Why am I not Iraqi, well because a. I have internet access (Iraqis have no internet), b. I know how to use the internet (Iraqis don't know what computers are) and c. Iraqis don't know how to speak English (I must be a Liberal).[1]
>
> Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning*

Having established a sense of how the US represents itself in the narratives of both wars, this chapter addresses the question: how do the other nations of the world, and specifically Iraqi citizens, see the US and, in particular, its actions in the Middle East? Perhaps unsurprisingly, very few Iraqi narratives documenting the Gulf and Iraq wars have been widely broadcast in the West. This is not to say that Iraqi writers have not produced valuable literature in recent years. A great many Iraqi authored texts have emerged, however, the majority of the narratives that have reached the West focus on the Iran-Iraq conflict of the 1980s and the persecution of Iraq's own Kurdish communities by Saddam Hussein.[2] It has taken a significant time for these narratives, which depict life under Saddam's regime, to achieve international recognition, and the surfacing of these accounts is, in many cases, only made

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[1] Riverbend, 'Another Day, Monday August 18, 2003', *Baghdad Burning*
<http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_riverbendblog_archive.html> [accessed 2 August 2010] and *Baghdad Burning* (London: Marion Boyers, 2006), p. 32.

[2] These include Jean Sasson's *Mayada: Daughter of Iraq* (London: Bantam, 2003). Sasson documents the true story of an elite Iraqi woman, Mayada, who falls from grace and finds herself imprisoned in what she describes as Saddam Hussein's torture jail, accused of producing anti-government propaganda. Sasson's account of this Iraqi woman's remarkable story provides a context in which to consider the narratives which emerged from the Gulf conflict and, perhaps to a greater extent, the Iraq War. Through her exploration of Mayada's life, Sasson informs the reader about what Iraq was like before the occupation and provides an insight into what the regime meant for Iraqi citizens.

possible by Saddam's fall from power. It is possible that recognition of the literary responses to the Gulf and Iraq wars may follow a similar pattern. However, this chapter suggests that Iraqi responses to the Gulf War will remain under-represented, thus reinforcing the absence of Iraqi figures that is evident in the media coverage of the conflict.[3] The basis for this assertion is the fact that some Iraqi narratives have already emerged from the more recent Iraq War in 2003, whereas Iraqi Gulf War narratives remain notably absent. As chapters One and Two have argued, the brevity of the Gulf War and the difficulty in defining the conflict reduced the scope for literary responses to the conflict (both American and Iraqi). Iraqi writers attempting to publish work in the post-Gulf War period were also subject to heavy censorship by their government and were at risk of compromising their safety (and that of their families) if they attempted to publish material that the censors deemed inappropriate or dangerous.

In contrast, the Iraq War has inspired a multitude of literary texts, and although many represent a Western viewpoint, several texts have emerged which are narrated from an Iraqi perspective. Many of these narratives are written by authors of non-Iraqi origin, necessarily providing the reader with an imagined projection of the Iraqi perspective rather than directly presenting the account of the Iraqi experience of the conflict that they purport to offer. This chapter maps some of these contributions offered by authors who, although not actually Iraqi, align themselves with the Iraqi people. Crucially, this chapter argues, new forms of media which were not available in previous wars have enabled Iraqi people living through the conflict in 2003 to communicate their experiences with the rest of the world. It focuses primarily on the weblog and subsequent printed memoir contributions made by the Iraqi bloggers Salam Pax and Riverbend, who wrote from Iraq during the conflict, and considers the possibilities that this form of publication offers. It pays particular attention to the ways in

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[3] This is evidenced in Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press* (1998).

which Iraqi identity is represented by Iraqi citizens and how they perceive their American occupiers, on both an individual and a national level. Crucially, this chapter examines the ways in which Iraqi narratives write back to those Western discourses of the conflict. It also draws on Iraqi experiences documented by British journalist Rory McCarthy, who lived in Iraq during, and in the period following, the 2003 war.

The first distinction to be identified between US-authored and Iraqi-authored texts is the level of attention each pays to the complexities of the political situation in Iraq. On the rare occasions that US writers address Iraqi politics, they tend to provide simplistic accounts with little or no information about the history of the country, the origins or the beliefs of the various religious, tribal and political groups, or the ramifications of these beliefs for Iraqis. As discussed in the previous chapter, Williams and Buzzell make frequent observations about, and display compassion for, the Iraqi people, but in no way do they really attempt to engage with or explain the political situation in Iraq to the reader. This may be a deliberate decision by the authors. It is possible they feel that stories of their own personal experiences in Iraq might be overshadowed by the inclusion of such background material. Perhaps they do not perceive the complexities of the political situation as being part of their own experience of the war in Iraq, or, one could conclude, perhaps the absence of such subtleties is actually indicative of a wider lack of knowledge of the Iraqi political and cultural system amongst the coalition troops deployed to the country. After all, if soldiers are not educated effectively regarding Iraqi politics and culture, their experiences and subsequent narratives will naturally depict encounters with the exotic "other" in a foreign land, rather than understanding and feeling compassion for Iraqi citizens. Rather than communicating the complexities of Iraqi politics, it is easier for the US Government to maintain the mythology surrounding its enemy by perpetuating the idea that the political system is, and by extension, Iraqis are, unfathomable and irrational, and that their way of life is backward and uncivilised.

As explored in Chapter Five of this thesis, several US writers make some acknowledgement of the Iraqi people or aspects of Iraqi life as 'surprisingly Westernised', but in many cases, Iraqis are depicted as having a somewhat primitive lifestyle.[4] It is this "othering" of Iraqis that Iraqi Arab authors, as well as Arab writers from outside Iraq, write back to.

Through the Eyes of Brothers and Sisters:

Arab Perspectives from Outside and Inside Iraq

The absence of discussion about Iraqi political factors in US narratives about the war, and the small number of Iraqi narratives to be produced thus far, make contributions by authors of other nationalities all the more crucial to consider when constructing a reading of Iraq War literature. As Nazim Muhanna observed in 2006, 'with a few exceptions of Iraqi writers and artists, the continuous bloodshed in Iraq has failed to elicit any poetry or prose from the Arab men of letters'.[5] Many texts have emerged by writers who are not Iraqi, but, to some extent, seek to identify with the Iraqi people, have shared religious or political ideals, or offer an imagined projection of Iraqi experience. Whereas the majority of US and Iraqi authored texts take the form of memoir, drawing on personal experiences in the region, it is crucial to note that this category of Arab authors from outside Iraq have made the largest contribution to the fiction of the Iraq War. Writers from outside Iraq (whether they are of other nationalities, or in some cases, Iraqi exiles living abroad) have adapted the events in Iraq into fictional form with apparent ease.

Although the focus of this chapter is on narratives by Iraqi authors, it is worth taking a moment here to acknowledge some of the most engaging contributions to the category of

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[4] For example, Buzzell and Williams.

[5] Very few Iraqi literary narratives have been published discussing the Iraq War, and yet fewer have been published in English. For Nazim Muhanna's full discussion, see 'Where is the Iraqi War Literature?', *Asharq Alawsat Newspaper*, 13 December 2006 <http://www.aawsat.com/english/print.asp?artid=id7322> [accessed 3 August 2010].

narratives by non-Iraqi Arab authors writing about the Iraq War. *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2007) documents the series of events which leads a respectable young Iraqi man to join the insurgency. The novel is written by a former Algerian army officer, Mohammed Moulessehoul, who published under the female pseudonym "Yasmina Khadra" to ensure his personal safety. *Baghdad Spy* (2005) and *Jasmine's Tortoise* (2007), written by Corinne Souza, depict how international affairs have an impact on ordinary people in Iraq. Souza is of mixed English, Iraqi and Indian descent, and was raised in Baghdad and London by her father who was employed by the British intelligence services. Much of Souza's writing is influenced by this link to the British intelligence services. The award winning Iraqi journalist Iqbal Al-Qazwini has been living in exile in Berlin ever since Saddam Hussein came to power in 1978. Her debut novel *Zubaida's Window: A Novel of Iraqi Exile* (2008) documents the struggle of an Iraqi woman, Zubaida who lives in exile in Germany, but witnesses the war as a tele-spectator. Although Zubaida is safe in Germany, she longs for her homeland and the novel describes her memories of Iraq, both good and bad, and her desire to return home. All of these narratives begin to address the experiences of the Iraqi people, albeit through imagined projection rather than direct experience.

Whereas the accounts by the non-Iraqi writers introduced above are often fictional, most Iraqi accounts (including those communicated via Western reporters) tend to take documentary or memoir form. Several accounts have emerged since the recent Iraq War that are written by British and American authors who have interviewed people living in Iraq throughout the war and the following occupation. These include Mike Tucker's *Hell Is Over: Voices of the Kurds After Saddam* (2006) and Andrew Carroll's *Behind the Lines* (2005). Unlike many Western authors, the journalistic background of these writers enables them to provide a detailed sense of the personal stories of life in Iraq. Mike Tucker's *Hell is Over* documents the experiences of Iraqis in the Kurdish community following the removal of the

Ba'athist regime. Although its title seems to announce prematurely that the suffering is over in Iraq, Tucker documents the stories of many Kurdish Iraqis who believe that Iraq is entering a new era which may mark the end of their persecution. Crucially, by describing Iraq through the eyes of Kurdish Iraqis, Tucker's narrative provides an insight into the history of the country, life in Iraq under the Ba'athist regime, and the hopes of Kurds following the war and occupation. Andrew Carroll's *Behind the Lines* is a collection of American and foreign war letters spanning from the letters written in the American Revolution to e-mails sent in the Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan. What is particularly intriguing about this collection is the insight gained from the inclusion of letters by Iraqi citizens as well as American troops.

McCarthy's *Nobody Told Us We Were Defeated* (2006) documents the *Guardian* reporter's time in Iraq prior to, and during, the 2003 occupation. In contrast to Tucker's narrative which focuses on the stories of Kurdish communities, McCarthy's book documents the experiences and opinions of several Iraqis from a range of different backgrounds. McCarthy's reporting of Iraqi stories provides the reader with a detailed insight into the complexities of the political situation and events in Iraq. He provides a powerful account of what it was like to live as a westerner in Iraq during the war. Crucial to McCarthy's experience was that he immersed himself in Iraqi culture and, as far as was possible, integrated himself with the community: 'I didn't live in the fortified bubble that the Americans call the Green Zone, and apart from a week at most, I wasn't embedded with a military unit. I lived in a house on an ordinary Iraqi street'.[6] This sense of immersion provides McCarthy with a unique perspective on the Iraqi experience of war. Like John Hersey's accounts of victims in *Hiroshima*,[7] McCarthy's text positions the reader in a place

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[6] Rory McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us We Were Defeated: Stories from the New Iraq* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), p. 1.

[7] See John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). First published in the *New Yorker* in August 1946, Hersey's article provides a haunting insight into the experiences of the people of Hiroshima following the dropping of the atomic bomb 'Little Boy' by the United States on the 6th August 1945.

other than that which they are used to seeing. McCarthy meets many Iraqis from different religious and political backgrounds, all of whom have a story to tell about Iraq, the war, and the occupation. Consequently, he provides the reader with a broad insight into Iraqi perceptions of the regime under Saddam, their experiences of the recent conflict, and their impressions of the American occupiers, albeit as reported by a Westerner. Indeed, the strength of McCarthy's narrative lies in the sheer breadth of the cross-section of Iraqis whose stories he documents. Although it is crucial to note that *Nobody Told Us* is, of course, written by a British war correspondent, and not by the Iraqi citizens themselves, the narrative makes an important contribution to the body of Iraqi narratives to emerge from the recent conflict in that it constructs tangible links for the reader between the news headlines in the Western media and real human experience. A significant proportion of the Iraqis McCarthy talks to are strongly opposed to Saddam's regime, but many others joined and were active members of the Ba'athist Party. Within this group of Ba'athists, there were a wide range of reasons for joining the party, ranging from a solid conviction in the party's policies to improving their career prospects. Most unsettlingly, McCarthy meets victims of some of the atrocities committed by Saddam and the Ba'athists, such as Ali Abid Hassan who narrowly escaped being killed and buried in a mass grave at Mahawil.[8] Indeed, almost immediately McCarthy's text presents the reader with the disturbing images of dead Iraqis which are absent from so many Western accounts of the war. His description of his visit to Mahawil is particularly haunting:

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[8] McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us*, pp. 16-23.

> To one side were rows of large, clear plastic bags. The bags were spaced neatly a few feet apart and each was filled with old clothes and beneath the clothes, human bones... Some of the skulls still had rags tied around the eye-sockets, others were small enough to have belonged to children... Scores of men and women were walking from one bag to the next looking at the identity cards and trying to recognise the pictures... It was several minutes before I noticed here and there small tufts of what was unmistakably human hair protruding from the caked ground beneath me. I began to look out for them and tiptoe carefully around them.[9]

McCarthy's book depicts the brutality of life under the Ba'athist regime, and communicates the sense of abandonment felt by many Iraqis towards the US in the 1990-1 conflict. Many of the Iraqis McCarthy interviewed believed that if the US had supported them in overthrowing Saddam in 1991, many of the subsequent atrocities could have been avoided. McCarthy summarises the failure of the rebellion: 'for a few days his [Saddam's] regime seemed in grave danger. Then he dealt the rebels a swift and severe blow. The grave I saw was just one of many left from the crushing of the 1991 spring *intifada*'.[10] McCarthy's detailed account of the effects of the removal of the regime and the subsequent occupation on lives of people in Iraq is explored later in the chapter.

Unexpected Narratives: Saddam Hussein's Literary Responses to the West

Whilst it was problematic for many Iraqi people to communicate their experiences in recent years, the country's leader, Saddam Hussein, published several books on various topics, including four novels (which he is believed to have written, although it is possible that he employed ghost-writers).[11] Although these texts are not central to the focus of this thesis due

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[9] McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us*, pp. 4-5.

[10] McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us*, p. 8.

[11] Several sources corroborate that Hussein 'authored' four novels (detailed above), although it should be noted that the extent of his involvement with their production has not been verified. See 'Saddam's New Book: *Begone, Accursed One!*', MEMRI: Middle East Media Research Institute, Washington D.C., 30 May 2003 <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/871.htm#_edn3> [accessed 2 September 2010]; Daniel Pipes' 'Saddam the Novelist', FrontPageMagazine.com, 9 July 2004 <http://www.danielpipes.org/1947/saddam-the-

to questions of authenticity, the potential unreliability of translations, and that they do not explicitly address the 2003 occupation (despite the fact that the analogies used are often thinly veiled), it is worth providing a brief overview of the key themes in these texts. Each of the novels is controversial in its apparent commentary on wider political events. *Zabiba and the King* (published in Arabic in 2000, published in English in 2004),[12] is supposedly Hussein's first novel. It is an allegorical story of a relationship between the King (possibly representing Hussein) and a peasant girl, Zabiba (seemingly representing the Iraqi people). Zabiba is married to an unloving husband who forces himself upon her, apparently representative of US attempts to force its ideals on the Iraqi people.

Perhaps the most controversial of Hussein's works is his last novel which he is alleged to have finished writing only a day before US forces occupied Iraq in 2003. The novel entitled *Get Out, Damned One*, was banned in Jordan, but was finally published in Japan under the title *Devil's Dance* in 2006. The novel is particularly controversial because it tells the story of a Zionist-Christian conspiracy against Arabs and Muslims. In the book, the Arab army finally defeats the Christians after invading their country and destroying two large towers. Due to the ambiguous production history and issues of translations concerning these novels, this thesis makes reference to them only in order to provide a context for the examination of other Iraqi texts. Hussein is also believed to have written two other novels: *The Fortified Castle* (2002) and *Men and the City* (date unknown). The majority of his books are non-fiction commentaries on Iraqi culture, and in more recent years, were largely concerned with Western interventions in the Middle East.[13] After Hussein's removal from

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novelist> [accessed 2 September 2010]; BBC Arts, 'Saddam "second novel" in print', 20 December 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1721628.stm> [accessed 20 August 2010].

[12] Saddam Hussein, *Zabiba and the King: By its Author Saddam Hussein*, trans. by Robert Lawrence (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing, 2004).

[13] These commentaries include: *Saddam Hussein on Current Events in Iraq* (1977), *Social and Foreign Affairs in Iraq* (1979), *On Iraq & International Politics* (1981), *One trench or two?* (1981), *The Revolution and Woman in Iraq* (1981), *The Revolution and the Young* (1981), *On history, heritage and religion* (1981), and *Saddam speaks on the Gulf crisis: A collection of documents* (1992).

power, an increasing number of publications discussing Iraqi issues began to circulate in Iraq (and beyond), but these publications, such as Ali A. Allawi's *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (2007), tend to take the form of political commentaries rather than imparting personal war stories.

MyWarStory.com: Writing Back Through Technology

For the Iraqis who remained in Iraq during the war and occupation, sharing their stories with the rest of the world was far from straightforward. Prior to the fall of Hussein's regime, publications were heavily monitored and only certain texts were approved. In addition, the volatile political and economic situation in the country following the US occupation led to significant practical difficulties. Certainly any author who was openly critical of Hussein or his regime would have risked their safety. Consequently, the world, and the West in particular, were provided with little understanding of the repercussions of the occupation for Iraq, its politics, and its people. Just as in the Gulf conflict, Iraqi citizens were largely absent in Western discourses and, as a result, were unable to provide counter-narratives to images of the war represented in the media.

As discussed in Chapter Two, online blogs became a popular means of communicating personal war experiences during the Iraq War. They enabled Iraqi civilians to share their stories of life under Hussein's regime and how the occupation by coalition forces impacted on this way of life.[14] Crucially, these narratives write back to the proliferation of narratives by US authors, as well as Western media discourses. Since the war was mediated in new ways, readers were able to perceive the war from previously unavailable perspectives. The consequences of this are two-fold: firstly, Iraqi voices entered the public domain despite

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[14] It should be noted that due to the high numbers of US troops based in the Baghdad area, the majority of texts emphasise the impact of the US military, rather than the coalition forces more broadly, as the instrumental force in the occupation.

governmental restrictions and practical obstacles such as frequent power cuts, and secondly, blogs allowed less well educated people (whose writing may not have been accepted by publishers) to communicate their stories to the outside world. Iraqi novelist Shaker al Anbari suggests that 'the occupation has inadvertently triggered all the latent problems that have been dormant – but the Americans did not plan to unleash them'. He asserts that, 'dissolving the state… and the collapse in security that ensued led to all these problems'. Anbari goes on to argue that 'the Arab intellectual cannot apprehend these details because he/she is distanced from them'.[15] As such, it is crucial to the body of Iraqi literature that people who witnessed first-hand the effects of the occupation were able to communicate their stories. Two of the best known Iraqi bloggers of this period were Pax and Riverbend, who lived in Baghdad throughout the 2003 Iraq conflict and during the subsequent years of civil unrest.[16] Pax (also known as the "Baghdad Blogger") began writing *Where is Raed?* in December 2002 and Riverbend began recording her responses on her blog, *Baghdad Burning*, in August 2003. McCarthy was the first Western journalist to secure an interview with Pax,[17] and following their interview, Pax wrote fortnightly articles for *The Guardian*, thus communicating his experiences to a whole new audience. His blog was later published as a book, simply entitled, *The Baghdad Blog*.[18] Riverbend's blog has since been published in two book volumes.[19] The fact that Pax and Riverbend had originally been able to communicate their experiences via their blogs eventually resulted in their stories being disseminated through a variety of media and reaching many readers across the Western world.

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[15] Shaker al Anbari, quoted in 'Where is the Iraqi War Literature?', Muhanna.
[16] Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning,* <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/> from August 2003 to October 2008. Salam Pax, *Where is Raed?,* <http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/> from September 2002 to August 2004. Pax maintains a new blog, *Salam Pax: The Baghdad Blogger*, at <http://salampax.wordpress.com/> which dates from September 2003 to the present day. Both blogs have been adapted into book format, and as such, page numbers for the printed versions are provided throughout this chapter in addition to the title of each blog entry.
[17] Rory McCarthy, 'Salam's Story', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/may/30/iraq.digitalmedia> [accessed 12 January 2010].
[18] Salam Pax, *The Baghdad Blog* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).
[19] Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog From Iraq* (London: Marion Boyars, 2006) and Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning: The Unfolding Story, Volume 2* (London: Marion Boyars, 2006).

Both Pax's and Riverbend's blogs document the experiences of their authors throughout the occupation and beyond. While it would be problematic to suggest that these texts are representative of "ordinary Iraqi experience", the blogs should certainly be considered as crucial counter-narratives, informing the Western reader about some of the difficulties facing Iraqi civilians, both under the regime and under occupation by coalition forces. These texts echo the epistolary tradition of previous wars, and adopt something of a documentary tone. They represent what David Gauntlett identifies as a transitional phase in how people interact with the media. He suggests that in the early 2000s, members of the public began to reject their position as consumers of media, instead becoming actively involved in making and creating their own different forms of media.[20] Through such an analysis, it can be argued that blogs should be considered in literary terms, not only for their cultural value, but also in terms of the creativity involved in their production. Gauntlett suggests that the increasing popularity of creating media is indicative of the shift in authority from the "expert" to the audience.[21] With opportunities for creating media becoming available to more people, and in new forms, the distinctions between genres are becoming increasingly blurred. Since blogs possess both documentary and fictional qualities, they complicate the distinction between journalistic responses and the novel. Indeed, the impact of blogs on war writing has been significant, with a wide range of Iraqi voices able to share their war stories and providing Western readers with new insights into the experience of war. Although Pax and Riverbend often challenge the image of Iraq depicted by broadcasters such as CNN, they do not claim to provide "the Iraqi view", but rather alternative narrations of the occupation and its aftermath framed by their own experiences. As Riverbend observes, her

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[20] David Gauntlett, 'Chapter One: Introduction', in *Making is Connecting: The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity Press, forthcoming 2011), p. 2. Sample extracts of 'Chapter One: Introduction' and 'Chapter Nine: Conclusion' are available at: <http://www.makingisconnecting.org/> [accessed 3 January 2011].

[21] Gauntlett, 'Media Studies, 2.0', Theory.org, (2007) <http://www.theory.org.uk/mediastudies2.htm> [accessed 21 December 2010].

blog allowed those in other countries to 'share a very small part of [her] daily reality'.[22] The rapid production of the blog as a medium and its potential for intertextuality facilitates Riverbend in her mission to counter what Therese Saliba identifies as the invisibility of the Arab woman in the Western media.[23] Saliba's analysis of the Arab woman as absent from the image of the Gulf conflict can be extended to include women in the Iraq War, and indeed, all Iraqi citizens. As Lederman and Muscati highlight, the primary image of the Iraqi as depicted in Western media discourse was a caricatured version of Hussein as evil, irrational and violent.[24] Through their narratives, Pax and Riverbend challenge some of the misconceptions about Iraqis projected by the Western media and provide alternative views of Iraqi politics, society and culture. Significantly, blogs by Iraqi writers challenge the ideas of self and other explored throughout this thesis in terms of their capacity to de-stabilise the narrative position from inside the US. As discussed in Chapter Two, the production of a blog involves the author, network and readers. Consequently, the blog is not only broadcast to the reader via the computer screen located in the US, but due to the interactivity of the medium, there is a high possibility that sections of it may have also been produced via a computer screen in the US.[25] Furthermore, blogs destabilise the location of the original author. If, as Hayles suggests, bodily boundaries are decided by informational flow and not epidermal surfaces,[26] then Pax and Riverbend essentially become part of the network, creating virtual versions of their selves. Whilst in some ways, the idea of becoming part of the network in the way that Hayles and Landow suggest problematises the identity of the bloggers,[27] the

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[22] Riverbend, 'About Riverbend, August 24, 2003', *Baghdad Burning*, pp. 47-8.

[23] Therese Saliba, 'Military Presences and Absences: Arab Women and the Persian Gulf War', in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, ed. by Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 263-84.

[24] Lederman, *Battle Lines: The American Media and the Intifada*, p. 18, and Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 134.

[25] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, pp. 136-43.

[26] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 84.

[27] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 84, and Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, pp. 125-31 and pp. 135-6.

creation of virtual selves also enables them to claim visibility in the West in a way which had been denied to them previously.

There are also implications for the text itself. Just as Landow suggests digitalisation of a printed text alters its textuality,[28] the same can be observed when the process is reversed. The printed form of Riverbend's narrative offers a very different reading experience to that of the original blog. The print version is similar to the blog in the sense that it maintains a less standardised form of English. However, it is evident that many defining features of the blog do not translate so well into print. Indeed, in the transition to printed text, the blog loses many of the features that define its form; its constant evolution, interactivity, and intertextuality. It certainly could be argued that the layout of the original blog format is more engaging and more aesthetically pleasing than the printed text. It also enables the reader to access further information which is unavailable to the reader of the printed text. Landow suggests that the author of hypertext can be frustrated when required to work in printed text due to the necessity of 'closing off connections and abandoning lines of investigation that hypertextuality would have made available'.[29] It is easy to understand what writers finds appealing about the hypertext format. On the right hand side of the text, Riverbend's blog contains an archive of her blog entries, and links to other websites. The intertextual dimension of the blog also allows Riverbend to include links to other sources of discourse which contextualise her own entries. The blog includes links to the news networks that Riverbend finds most reliable, including *BBC News*, *Al-Jazeera in English* and *Iraq Today*, as well as satirical sites such as *The Onion* and *Dilbert*. Riverbend includes links to sites such as *Iraq Occupation Watch* and *Iraq Body Count* which provide a stark counter to much of the information which is disseminated by the Western media about the real human cost of the occupation. There are links to the blogs of other Iraqis such as Pax (author of *Where Is*

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[28] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, pp. 83-4.
[29] Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, p. 131.

Raed?) and American soldier blogger Moja (author of *TurningTables*), with whom she builds online relationships through mutual interests in the political situation in Iraq. There is also a link from which the reader can e-mail Riverbend, thus enabling a truly interactive reading experience. Significantly, blogs enable Iraqi citizens to share something of their culture with those who would not otherwise have access to it. Riverbend is keen to share the richness and diversity of Iraqi culture with her readers in the West, and, as such, includes a link to an Iraqi music website and a link to a page called *Is Something Burning?* on which she posts the recipes for some of her favourite Iraqi dishes. Although the focus of her blog is on war, politics and occupation, the cultural information that Riverbend includes on her page enables the reader to build up a more rounded impression of both Riverbend as an individual and of Iraqi culture more broadly. Piet Bakker suggests that this is a crucial feature for blogs and websites created by 'people who have lost or left their homeland'.[30] Although she lived in Iraq until 2007, Riverbend's blog certainly conveys a strong sense of national and cultural pride, and crucially, it describes the increasing threat to Iraqi national identity as the country moves towards life after occupation. For those suffering cultural trauma, Bakker claims, new media such as blogs facilitate the creation of a sense of unity and maintain cultural heritage. Crucially, as Landow suggests, the blog format changes the nature of authorship, enabling a collaborative creation of text between the author, the network and the audience. In the case of Iraqi bloggers, some of the most revealing exchanges are enabled by the intertextuality and collaborative potential of the medium and the capacity of the blog to provide a context for the narrative it presents. Significantly, the blog format invites a new analysis of Iraqi identity since the creation of a virtual self not only enables Iraqis to achieve global visibility, but also situates Iraqis inside and outside Iraq simultaneously. As such, blogs allow the author to transcend the boundaries between the warzone and homefront, occupier and

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[30] Piet Bakker, 'Reinventing Roots; New Media and National Identity', *Media and Open Societies* (2000), 205-211 (p. 205).

occupied, self and other. The potential to re-situate the Iraqi citizen provides a new context for a reading of the perceived rise of anti-Americanism in Iraq.

Changing Attitudes: The "Rise of Anti-Americanism" in Iraq

In the aftermath of 9/11, the journal *New Republic* announced that 'we are living in a new era of anti-Americanism'.[31] However, far from 9/11 signalling the launch of a global shift towards "anti-Americanism", a reading of the Iraqi responses to emerge since the 2003 Iraq War suggests that the change in attitudes towards America, and the West more broadly, can be traced back to the manner in which the American government responded to the terrorist attacks. In the earlier sections of Riverbend's blog, the writer introduces herself as a young Iraqi woman who has been educated abroad and embraces many aspects of Western culture. Riverbend is eager to silence the critics who have made contact through her blog and have accused her of "anti-Americanism": 'I don't hate Americans, contrary to what many people seem to believe. Not because I love Americans, but simply because I don't hate Americans, like I don't hate the French, Canadians, Brits, Saudis, Jordanians, Micronesians'.[32] Although her blog entries indicate that she is deeply troubled by the American invasion, they also reveal her attempts to empathise with those on both sides. In the years that follow, however, Riverbend's blog portrays a marked change in her own opinions and in those of the Iraqi people more broadly. By December 2006, Riverbend describes how the experiences of the way that her family and friends have been treated by the soldiers, and the hardships that they have endured as a consequence of the occupation, have changed her outlook dramatically:

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[31] *New Republic*, 24 September 2001, p. 100, cited in Richard Crockatt, *American Embattled: September 11, Anti-Americanism and the Global Order* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 43.
[32] Riverbend, 'Setting the Record Straight, August 22, 2003', *Baghdad Burning,* p. 40.

Nearly four years ago, I cringed every time I heard about the death of an American soldier. They were occupiers, but they were humans also and the knowledge that they were being killed in my country gave me sleepless nights. Never mind they had crossed oceans to attack the country, I felt for them. Had I not chronicled those feelings of agitation on this very blog, I wouldn't believe them now. Today, they simply represent numbers. 3000 Americans dead over nearly four years? Really? That's the number of Iraqis dead in less than a month. The Americans had families? Too bad. So do we. So do the corpses in the streets and the ones waiting for identification in the morgue. Is the American soldier that died today in Anbar more important than a cousin I have who was shot last month on the night of his engagement to a woman he's wanted to marry for the last six years? I don't think so.[33]

This passage of Riverbend's blog provides the reader in the West with a vivid explanation for the rapid change in Iraqi attitudes towards the occupying forces, and challenges Paul Hollander's definition of "anti-Americanism" as 'an unfocused and largely irrational, often visceral aversion toward the United States, its government, domestic institutions, foreign policies, prevailing values, culture, and people'.[34] It also reinforces the observation made by US soldier Williams in her Iraq War memoir, that the increased levels of security and suspicion by US troops towards the Iraqis had a direct impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the Iraqi people.[35]

Ivan Krastev claims that anti-Americanism is becoming 'a defining feature of our time',[36] and suggests that we are currently entering what may come to be known as 'the anti-American century'.[37] Crucially, many Iraq War narratives raise similar questions to the one which Ivan Krastev poses in his introduction to *The Anti-American Century*: '[A]re the

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[33] Riverbend, 'End of another year…, December 29, 2006,' *Baghdad Burning*. (Online only: the second volume of Riverbend's blog entries conclude on 5 August 2006. Online blog entries are available up to October 2008.)

[34] Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Critiques at Home and Abroad, 1965–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 334-5.

[35] Williams discusses the possible connection between increased security measures and deterioration in relations between American troops and Iraqi civilians: 'You had to wonder if the subsequent souring of relations with the locals was connected to the escalation in our security. Whether when we cut people's access off to their religious shrines and began to treat them like criminals, they then maybe started to act like criminals?', Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 201. She goes on to observe, 'you are never going to build relationships with the civilian population, or win hearts and minds, when you treat everybody as a threat. It's impossible to walk that line', Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 237.

[36] Ivan Krastev and Alan McPherson, eds., *The Anti-American Century* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2007), p. 1.

[37] Krastev, 'The Anti-American Century?' in *The Anti-American Century*, ed. by Krastev and McPherson, p. 7.

sources of the global revolt against America to be found in the US's policies, in the US's values or in America's hegemonic role in the world order?'.[38] Throughout the narratives, the authors' descriptions of the transition of attitudes towards America begin, to some extent, to address Krastev's question. Krastev identifies two distinct strands of anti-Americanism: 'murderous anti-Americanism' and anti-Americanism "lite"'. He outlines what he perceives as the difference between the two:

> The first is the anti-Americanism of fanatical terrorists who hate the United States, its power, its values, its policies – and who are willing to kill and die in order to harm it. The second is the anti-Americanism of those who take to the streets and the media to campaign against the United States, but do not seek its destruction.[39]

Krastev suggests that 'The first kind can be dealt with only by "hard power"', but that the second 'must be better understood in order to devise effective strategies to counter it'.[40] Although Krastev does not depict anti-Americanism simply as an irrational reaction in the same way as Hollander, he is apparently dismissive of the anti-American opinions of the "fanatical terrorists" as he refers to them. For Krastev, it seems that only the second group are worthy of attention, although such categorisation also raises questions regarding the perceived relationship between disagreeing with government policy and anti-Americanism. What Iraqi narratives can offer readers, then, is a challenge to the simplicity of such a definition. Riverbend chronicles how in the early days of the occupation many Iraqis were against the presence of coalition forces, but they did not display hostility towards the soldiers. However, as the occupation continued and increasing numbers of Iraqis became aware of family or friends who had been killed, injured or mistreated by US soldiers, attitudes changed dramatically. These blogs offer accounts of the immediate reactions of Iraqis to the events that unfolded in their country and provide a valuable insight into the complexity of the

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[38] Krastev and McPherson, *The Anti-American Century*, p. 2.
[39] Krastev, 'The Anti-American Century', p. 8.
[40] Krastev, 'The Anti-American Century', p. 8.

situation in Iraq. Significantly, they emphasise the importance of differentiating between anti-Americanism and opposition to American foreign policy, and explore the dangers of blurring that distinction.

Riverbend's blog entry, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14 2004', depicts the apparent "rise of anti-Americanism" in Iraq. It depicts Riverbend's frustration at the condemnation of the way that Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia reported the riots and fighting in Falloojeh, suggesting that the US objection to these reports might stem from the fact that the sheer volume of Iraqi dead shown in the reports is somewhat incongruent to the US line that the dead are "military targets" being killed with "intelligent weaponry".[41] The government discourse that Riverbend refers to is reminiscent of US, and to some extent British, news coverage of the Gulf War. Here, Riverbend highlights the fact that in the rapidly evolving digital age, it has become increasingly problematic for the US media to present the West with a 'bodyless war'[42] as was apparently the case in the Gulf War. She expresses her exasperation at the "collective punishment", as she refers to it, being suffered by ordinary Iraqis: 'Is he [the US spokesman] implying that the 600 civilians who died during the bombing and the thousands injured and maimed were all "insurgents?" Are houses, shops and mosques now military targets?'[43] In the Iraq War, the wealth of information available and the rapid nature of its delivery through outlets such as Al-Jazeera and blogs such as Riverbend's, made it increasingly difficult to construct a version of the war in which there were no visible casualties. Despite the use of advanced military technology in the recent Iraq conflict, the guerrilla style of warfare and advances in communication technology render any claim of the Iraq War as a virtual war (in Baudrillardian terms) deeply problematic. Few cyborg soldiers remained in the combat zone,

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[41] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004', *Baghdad Burning,* p. 294.
[42] 'War thus becomes virtual from the technological point of view and bodyless from the military point of view; the bodies of US soldiers are kept free of risk, the enemy combatants are killed efficiently and invisibly', Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, pp. 44-5.
[43] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004'*Baghdad Burning*, pp. 294-5.

and for most soldiers in this conflict, the Iraqi people were not pixelated targets on a videoscreen, but real people who could communicate with those in the West via the internet before images of events had even made it as far as the television screen. Although it is important to acknowledge that the use of technology in the Iraq War problematised its status as a guerrilla conflict, it cannot be classified as a technowar. The nature of the guerrilla-style combat in Iraq resulted in US soldiers encountering Iraqis face-to-face; in combat Iraqis were no longer represented as pixel images. However, developments in communication technologies, and the subsequent proliferation of Iraq War bloggers, resulted in the birth of a new virtual Iraqi. In this conflict, technology does not render Iraqis invisible, but rather has provided them with a framework in which to communicate their stories and reclaim their visibility.

Under Occupation: Changing Lives in "Liberated" Iraq

Like Williams, Riverbend documents the direct impact of US military action in Iraq on the attitudes of the Iraqi people towards America. In contrast to Williams' memoir, Riverbend's narrative provides a more familiar premise, in that the narrative of the occupied civilian woman is reminiscent of many accounts from the Second World War and Vietnam. The importance of the narrative, however, lies in the fact that new technologies, such as blogs, enabled the creation of the new spaces of discourse that, as discussed in Chapter Four, de Lauretis claimed were necessary for women to articulate themselves. The content of Riverbend's narrative reveals that the occupation resulted in societal transformations which reinforced the invisibility of Iraqi women within their own country, forcing them to abandon their careers and adopt traditionally feminine roles within the home. Riverbend suggests that if some of the people who e-mailed her from the safety of their computers in non-occupied countries experienced the war in Baghdad, those who accused her of being anti-American or

unreasonable in her assertions may have reconsidered their positions. Certainly, the impression that the reader gleans from Riverbend's blog is not that of an irrational fanatic, but of a woman who has endured emotional and cultural upheaval. What she attempts to communicate to the readers of her blog, from the early entries right through to the last entry in October 2007, is the sense that war and occupation alter a person's perception and sense of normality in ways that are unimaginable to one who has not experienced them for themselves. The detailed description that Riverbend provides seeks to communicate how everyday life in Iraq had altered dramatically. Prior to the occupation, most Iraqi men and women worked. However, following the arrival of coalition forces, many people lost their jobs as part of the complex de-Ba'athification process,[44] and women in particular were intimidated into staying at home by the threat of violence from street gangs. Far from the demonised image of the fanatical Ba'athist which is often perpetuated in the Western media, many members of the Ba'athist Party had originally joined to further their careers or to secure their family's safety. Pax and Riverbend map the complexity of the situation in a way that is distinctly lacking in the Western media and literary responses to the conflict. The Iraqi narratives help to disperse the simplified Western perception of Sunnis (and specifically Ba'athists) as evil, and of the Shia and Kurds as victims. Instead, Pax and Riverbend provide the reader with alternative perspectives which emphasise the fact that they would choose to categorise themselves by their nationality rather than by their religious or political views.

By providing a political and historical context, a reading of Iraqi narratives helps the Western reader to gain an understanding of the complexity of Iraqi identities and of their affiliations within Iraqi society. Some Iraqis, like Riverbend, had worked in computer and IT related jobs and maintained Western lifestyles prior to the occupation. Riverbend highlights the fact that before the 2003 war, around fifty per cent of the workforce in Iraq consisted of

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[44] See Rory McCarthy's *Nobody Told Us* for a detailed explanation of the de-bathification process and its impact on Iraqi citizens.

women, and these women were paid exactly the same as the men doing equivalent jobs. As Riverbend points out, 'females in Iraq were a lot better off than females in other parts of the Arab world (and some parts of the Western world – we had equal salaries!)'.[45] Following the occupation, however, her existence revolved around ensuring that the family collected enough water during the brief reinstatement of the supply to ensure that they would not run out during the next break. Riverbend explains how, like many Iraqi women, she lived in fear of attack from 'extremists and fanatics who were liberated by the occupation',[46] and by August 2006 the situation had deteriorated to the extent where she, and even her Christian friends, felt that it was no longer safe to leave the house without wearing a hijab. Riverbend explains that Iraqis had reached a point at which they had become tired of defying the extremists and instead felt the need to blend in, to become invisible, 'If you're female, you don't want the attention – you don't want it from Iraqi Police, you don't want it from the black-clad militia man, you don't want it from the American soldier'.[47] In a very short space of time, the Iraqi people had been forced to adjust to the removal of all of the modern amenities to which they had been accustomed for decades. This is one of the most striking things about Riverbend's narrative: it reinforces to the reader just how similar the pre-occupation lives of many Iraqis were to those of readers in the West. This sense of identification with the Iraqi people intensifies the reader's experience of reading Iraqi narratives about the impact of the war on their lives. Riverbend observes how quickly a person's, and perhaps more importantly, a nation's, outlook can be transformed by such experiences:

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[45] Riverbend, 'Will Work for Food, August 24, 2003', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 49.
[46] Riverbend, 'Summer of Goodbyes, August 5, 2006', *Baghdad Burning, Volume 2*, p. 253.
[47] Riverbend, 'Summer of Goodbyes, August 5, 2006', *Baghdad Burning Volume 2*, p. 253.

It's amazing how as things get worse, you begin to require less and less. We have a saying for that in Iraq, "Ili yishoof il mawt, yirdha bil iskhooneh." Which means, "If you see death, you settle for a fever." We've given up on democracy, security and even electricity. Just bring back the water.[48]

Although Iraqis, and specifically Iraqi women, were losing visibility in society, new technologies facilitated them in achieving visibility in global terms. Blogs provided Iraqis with the means to inform Western readers of the impact of the occupation on Iraqi citizens. For Riverbend, it seems that, as Haraway suggests, technological advances can offer some liberating elements. Unfortunately, this liberation does not transcend technological boundaries into the physical world since the effect of the occupation resulted in a more restrictive society for women. Due to blogs like Riverbend's, Iraqi women have transcended their physical boundaries to establish their visibility in virtual spaces, enabling them to create a global presence, if not a domestic one. It certainly could be argued that the malleable medium of the blog offers the opportunity for Iraqi women to create the new spaces of discourse that de Lauretis suggests are necessary for women to articulate themselves effectively.[49] In the case of Iraqi women, technology enables them to overcome their silenced subaltern positioning as female and "other", providing them with a global voice (albeit a virtual one).

The "Borrowed Kettle": Justifying the Occupation

Riverbend uses her blog to communicate her opinions on the political situation surrounding the Iraq War, and her exasperation at the "collective punishment", as she refers to it, suffered by ordinary Iraqis: 'Is he [the US spokesman] implying that the 600 civilians who died during the bombing and the thousands injured and maimed were all "insurgents?" Are houses, shops

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[48] Riverbend, 'A Bleak Eid, January 22, 2005', *Baghdad Burning Volume 2*, p. 62.
[49] de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p. 25.

and mosques now military targets?'[50] She suggests that the increasing Iraqi hostility towards US forces was not a result of anti-American news coverage, but rather a consequence of the US action in Iraq. It is the experiences of the Iraqi people at the hands of American troops which shaped attitudes towards the occupying forces. In McCarthy's collection of interviews, another Iraqi woman, Um Sour, represents the views of many Iraqis who were sceptical about the American presence in Iraq from the beginning. She observes:

> They didn't like Saddam but now they must do better for Iraq... The roads are dirty, you see dirt everywhere. We don't just want mobiles and satellite televisions. What we need is peace. We are rich in oil and they take our oil. The Americans are destroying our country.[51]

For Riverbend and Um Sour, the reasons for the US occupation have become blurred and lack a single or definitive justification. The effect of this seems to be a mistrust of American foreign policy, the government that constructs it and the military that implements it. Um Sour's words echo Naomi Klein's assertion that the US administration was motivated by economic principles: 'the architects of the invasion had unleashed ferocious violence because they could not crack open the closed economies of the Middle East by peaceful means'.[52] Žižek offers an explanation as to what is responsible for the mixed messages that both Iraqis and Americans have received regarding the intervention in Iraq. In *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, he refers to Freud's strange logic of dreams, whereby a series of explanations for an event or an action is offered, but some of the reasons contradict the others. In the case of interventions in Iraq, Žižek argues, there were inconsistencies between the different reasons provided by the US administration.[53] Firstly, the administration claimed that Hussein possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). When no WMDs could be found, it was claimed that Hussein had been involved with al-Qaeda in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and that

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[50] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 294.
[51] McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us*, p. 90.
[52] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007), p. 327.
[53] Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, pp. 1-2.

he should be punished to prevent any further attacks. When no evidence could be found of a link between Hussein and 9/11, the justification for occupation was that 'Saddam's regime is a ruthless dictatorial regime, a threat to its neighbours and a catastrophe to its own people, and this fact alone provides reason enough to topple it'.[54] The narratives by Riverbend, Pax, and the Iraqis that McCarthy meets demonstrate how the lack of a definitive justification for the occupation has damaged the relationship between the US and the Iraqi people.[55]

It is not only the presence of US troops which damaged this relationship. The situation was exacerbated by the treatment of the war by the Western media as a glamorised Hollywood version of combat. Despite the emergence of new avenues of information in the form of blogs and television channels such as Al-Jazeera, the Western media still tended to present a sanitised version of the war. Riverbend questions where the images of the real destruction were:

> What about the destruction that comes with war and occupation? What about the death? I don't mean just the images of dead Iraqis scattered all over, but dead Americans too. People should *have* to see those images. Why is it not okay to show dead Iraqis and American troops in Iraq, but it's fine to show the catastrophe of September 11 over and over again?[56]

Although it should be noted that bodies are, in most cases, absent from the footage broadcast of 9/11, Riverbend raises an intriguing point regarding the dissemination of images depicting harrowing acts of violence. If the reason for the absence of bodies in media representations of the Iraq War was to maintain the illusion of a "clean" war in which the US forces are in control, then what is the rationale for the events of September 11 featuring so highly in US media representations? The use of emotive images from 9/11 would certainly support the

[54] Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, p. 2.
[55] In the early days of the occupation, liberal Najwa had welcomed the Americans, waving to them and taking drinks out to them. She explains that over the last year, her perspective has changed. She identifies the strain of intermittent electricity supplies, rising prices and increased violence which seemingly goes unchecked by the Americans. She explains that now she finds the Americans rude and aggressive and this upsets her. McCarthy, *Nobody Told Us*, pp. 105-6.
[56] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 295.

second justification that Žižek identifies. Although the link between Hussein and the terrorist attacks has not been substantiated, the US government's "war on terror" which encompasses military operations across the Middle East creates a convenient association between the Arab and terrorism. As discussed in Chapter Five, Muscati explores the representation of the Arab/Muslim, providing examples of the ways in which Western rhetoric "others" and dehumanises Iraqi citizens. She argues that the figure of the Arab as the threatening "other" was borne out of a necessity for a focal enemy following the end of the Cold War. She quotes a *New York Times* headline which appears to encapsulate this 'The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam'.[57] Muscati observes that:

> while we can continue to homogenize the Arab/Muslim "Other" and accuse it of being backwards and traditionalist, our constantly doing so means that we too religiously practise a form of traditionalism, one that irrationally denounces the "other" as symbolising absolute evil.[58]

Hussein was frequently depicted as synonymous with evil in the Western media during the Gulf War,[59] but the terrorist attacks of September 11 saw the point at which many American citizens came to consider all Arabs and Muslims as a potential threat to their personal security.[60] Although it could be argued that the Obama administration has sought to address many of the policies initiated by the Bush administration, the "othering" of Middle Eastern nations and peoples continues to influence public opinion. Writers like Pax and Riverbend problematise such a concept, and offer the Western reader an alternative to the hegemonic discourse.

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[57] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 133.
[58] Muscati, 'Arab/Muslim "Otherness"', p. 134.
[59] As a brief perusal of the titles of the many books published about Hussein illustrates, he is frequently portrayed as the epitome of evil and representative of all that is wrong with Iraq. *Saddam Hussein: The Butcher of Baghdad* by Biographiq (2008) and *The Devil's Double* by Latif Yahia (2003) are excellent examples of demonic representations of the Iraqi leader by Western authors.
[60] This fear of Islam amongst the citizens of America has been demonstrated by rumours circulated about Barack Obama shortly after he came to office, claiming that he is Muslim as a means of tarnishing his popularity. More recently, the public condemnation of the proposal that a new mosque should be located within the vicinity of Ground Zero is indicative of a perceived synonymy between Muslims and the perpetrators of 9/11.

Democracy Promotion and the Failures of the Past

Although the citizens of the 'enemy nation' are often unrepresented in war narratives, previous wars have, of course, produced literature which has attempted to provide an insight into the war experience of the citizens of the enemy nation, such as Hersey's *Hiroshima*. As discussed earlier in this chapter, writers like McCarthy have produced books documenting the experiences of Iraqi people in this particular conflict. However, the rapid production of online blogs offers something beyond the act of providing a voice for an under-represented group of people or providing readers with an instant reaction of someone living in Iraq to events during the conflict. Whilst the soldier in the combat zone rarely perceived the pixelated image of an Iraqi enemy, communication technologies enabled a revealing online dialogue between US soldiers and Iraqi citizens in a manner unimaginable in previous conflicts. The availability of online media provided US soldiers and Iraqi civilians with a unique insight into how those on "the other side" experienced the war. As Pax confirms, many Iraqis will have followed the blogs of particular US soldiers with great interest. Riverbend also mentions that she follows the blog of 'Turning Tables', another US soldier blogger. What is interesting about these blogs is that the authors on both sides communicated on a personal level with each other. They seemed not to assume the role of occupier and occupied, but rather of two people from different backgrounds discussing the politics of what they witnessed. Such interactions have been rare in previous conflicts and Pax admits that the first time he received an e-mail from the American soldier, he was unsure how to react. He is quick to point out that he does not think of the soldier as "one of the American occupiers" because he realises that the soldier would much rather be at home and he is only in Iraq because those in control have deemed it necessary to send him there.[61] Intriguingly, the soldier asks for Pax's opinion on the way that the US military conducted operations in the first Gulf War. Here, the American

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[61] Pax, 'Thursday, February 12, 2004', *Where is Raed?* <http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/>. (Online only: the printed volume of Pax's blog concludes on 28 June 2003.)

soldier appears to be turning to Pax for answers, possibly even for a justification for his and his country's most recent intervention in Iraq. Pax's online discussion with an American soldier, to whom he refers as [Mr.Somewhere-in-the-north-of-Iraq],[62] exposes the deep-seated mistrust which has its roots not in the events of September 11, or even in the American reaction to it, but rather in the abandonment that many Iraqis felt when American forces failed to help them overthrow Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991 (which led to the massacre at Hilla and numerous others). As Pax explains, a large proportion of Iraqis were ready to rise up against Hussein at that time, but they were denied the help of the US military forces:

> More than two thirds of Iraq was out of Saddam's control. There was a sense that people have achieved things for themselves, truly proud revolutionaries not the scared people who had to be helped by an outsider they are now. But what did the US administration do? It pooped on them; it allowed Saddam to start a persecution of Shia that was so extreme; [sic] it left the country with deep scars that will take a long time to heal.[63]

As Pax observes in an earlier entry, such historical events resulted in a situation in which 'Fear is deep [in many Iraqi cities] and trust in the people-from-Foreign is not high'.[64] The Gulf conflict was a defining moment in America's development as a global power, and in the way the nation presented itself as 'the only power able to manage international justice, *not as a function of its own national motives, but in the name of global right*'.[65] Richard Crockatt points out that 'democracy promotion' has become a central goal of post-Cold War foreign policy and that 'the tendency of the right is to deny the significance of cultural factors on the grounds that democracy is a universal good which can and should be applied everywhere'.[66] He suggests the conviction of the US administration that 'the American nation and its

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[62] Pax, '12 February, 2004', *Where is Raed?*.

[63] Pax, '12 February, 2004', *Where is Raed?*.

[64] Pax, '24 March 2003', *Where is Raed?* and *The Baghdad Blog*, p. 133.

[65] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 180.

[66] Richard Crockatt, *After 9/11: Cultural dimensions of American global power* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 56.

peculiar destiny'[67] should enforce its values on the world is what causes many nations to perceive the US as hostile. Crockatt's observations are confirmed by Riverbend's analysis of Iraqi perceptions regarding American interventions in Iraq: 'like millions of Iraqis, I was also brought up to respect other cultures, nations and religions. Iraqi people are inquisitive, by nature, and accepting of different values – as long as you do not try to impose those values and beliefs upon them'.[68] Here, Riverbend clearly communicates that many Iraqis objected, not to America or its values, but to the idea of promoting those values on a universal level through the application of force. With this statement, Riverbend identifies one of the key arguments raised by Huntington who asserts that key to many nations' objections to Americanism is the idea of American exceptionalism. He suggests that the idea of the 'American creed' which encapsulates US values, 'allows Americans to hold that theirs is an "exceptional" country because unlike other nations its identity is defined by principle rather than ascription and, at the same time, to claim that America is a "universal" nation because its principles are applicable to all human societies'.[69] Historically, this sense of American exceptionalism has been embodied by concepts such as Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century.[70] In contemporary society, it is the idea of the universalism of American values and the US mission to 'remake the world'[71] which is so strongly objected. As Riverbend concludes, Iraqis (and most other societies) object to having American principles imposed upon them. She draws the reader's attention to the way in which many Iraqis interpret US attitudes to other nations and cultures. This challenges the accounts of many western writers, such as Williams, who frequently presume to project their own American ideas onto the

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[67] Crockatt, *After 9/11*, p. 56.

[68] Riverbend, 'Setting the Record Straight, August 22, 2003', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 40.

[69] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p. 48.

[70] The term was first coined in the 1840s by a New York journalist John L. O'Sullivan to describe what, over the course of the nineteenth century, became a widely accepted concept. For a detailed discussion of Manifest Destiny, see Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), p. 290.

[71] Michael Ledeen (of the American Enterprise Institute), cited in *Empire's Law: The American Imperial Project and the 'War to Remake the World'*, ed. by Amy Bartholomew (London: Pluto Press, 2006), p. 1.

Iraqis that they meet. Although Williams' narrative is sympathetic towards Iraqi people, she perceives "freedom" to mean accessibility to material goods such as money and a car.[72] Williams' analysis is intriguing: she appreciates the simplicity of the lifestyle that many Iraqis lead, but when they say they want a better life, she takes this to mean that they want a Westernised lifestyle, when they might have a different sense of cultural value. For many Iraqis, a better life means freedom, safety, the right to work, and the right to be proud of their own identity. There is a sense in these narratives that Iraqi people feel that the US endeavours to impose its values on the rest of the world; that it sees its version of democracy as superior to others and capitalism as the route to a better life, and that the rest of the world should not only be encouraged to follow its example, but forcibly compelled to do so. Huntington summarises the logic of non-Western attitudes towards the West thus: 'The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do'.[73] At the 'World Tribunal on Iraq' held in Istanbul in 2005, the Jury of Conscience condemned the war in Iraq as an exercise in asserting imperial power:

> In pursuit of their agenda of empire, the Bush and Blair [Administrations] blatantly ignored the massive opposition to the war expressed by millions of people around the world. They embarked upon one of the most unjust, immoral and cowardly wars in history.[74]

The promotion of democracy that the US administration has frequently used as justification for the intervention in Iraq is apparently one of the factors at the centre of its failure. Pax cites a passage from *The Economist* which summarises the consequences of the American pursuit of democracy promotion, 'We'll happily watch the American bullets fly over our heads at

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[72] Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*, p. 164.

[73] Epigraph to Pax's *The Baghdad Blog*, quoted from Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: The Free Press,1996), p. 51.

[74] Preliminary Declaration of the Jury of Conscience, World Tribunal on Iraq, Istanbul, 23-27 June 2005. The jury included figures such as François Houtart, David Krieger, Chandra Muzzafar, Arundhati Roy and Eve Ensler. <http://www.worldtribunal.org/main/?b=1>. Cited in Bartholomew, *Empire's Law*, p. 1.

first… But after a two-year honeymoon we'll be shooting at them. Iraqis will never, ever be ruled by foreigners'.[75] These blogs confirm that this prediction from October 2002 was disturbingly accurate.

Aspirations and Apprehension: The Shaping of Future Iraq

One of the most notable themes in both Riverbend's and Pax's blogs is a focus on the possible outcomes of the occupation for future Iraq. As Rosemary Hollis has observed, '[W]hat happens to Iraq now is of great import, not only for the Iraqi people and the surrounding region, but also for the post-Cold War, post-11 September international order'.[76] In addition to the religious segregation taking place in Iraq (which is a cause of concern for both bloggers), there is the shaping of the "new Iraq" by the interim "Puppet Government", as Riverbend refers to it. What Riverbend seems to find most unsettling about this is the American influence which manifests itself in the new policies, attitudes and rhetoric of the Iraqi governing council. Riverbend expresses concern about the fact that most of the members of this government have not even been living in Iraq in recent years and many of them still live mainly abroad, despite their positions in the governing council. In an entry entitled, 'Of Chalabi, Flags and Anthems', Riverbend suggests that the "new Iraq" is being shaped according to US ideals, rather than Iraqi ones. Crucially, her narrative demonstrates that it is the imposing of American ideals on the new Iraq which is one of the significant factors in the rise of anti-American feeling in the country. This substantiates Huntington's theory that 'in this new [post-Cold War] world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined

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[75] 'Waiting, with bravado and anxiety', 17 October 2002, *The Economist*, <www.economist.com>, cited in Pax, *Where is Raed?* and *The Baghdad Blog*, p. 19.
[76] Rosemary Hollis, 'Getting Out of the Iraq Trap', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 79: 1 (January 2003), 23-35 (p. 23).

groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural identities'.[77] He identifies the forcing of universal values onto rapidly developing nations as the single most significant threat to peace: 'as their power and self-confidence increase, non-Western societies increasingly assert their own cultural values and reject those "imposed" on them by the West'.[78] Riverbend's opposition to the proposed division of the country into separate states and the new Iraqi flag are symbolic of Iraqi resistance to building their country on US ideals. Riverbend anticipates that the next new US contribution to building a new Iraq will come in the form of a pledge of allegiance written by an American, and then she wryly suggests that the new Iraqi national anthem might be a 'gaudy, Iraqi version of "Lady Marmalade"' featuring Chalabi, Allawi, Hakeem and Talabani.[79]

Pax and Riverbend discuss the idea of dividing Iraq into states according to ethnic lines; an idea which has been proposed by various parties including the US government and Iraq's new governing council. The problems with this notion are explained in detail by the Iraqi citizens in both the blogs. The suggestion of segregation and the subsequent discussions on Iraqi national identity are one of the points at which the reader witnesses intertextual exchanges of opinion between the blogs. Riverbend draws the reader's attention to Pax's entry on the subject in order to set up her own discussion. She then responds to his entry in order to provide her own perspective on the issue. Riverbend exposes the complexities of Iraqi identity, making it clear that it is problematic to suggest a unified Iraqi identity, and, moreover, that it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so in light of the resurgence of extreme Islamic groups imposing their ideals on the ordinary people. Pax immediately draws the reader's attention to the fact that such divisions in Iraq are not only a bad idea, but would be impossible to achieve due to the way that Iraqi society has evolved since Britain and

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[77] Huntington, *Clash of Civilisations*, p. 28.
[78] Huntington, *Clash of Civilisations*, pp. 21-28.
[79] Riverbend, 'Of Chalabi, Flags and Anthems, April 26, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, pp. 297-99.

France created Iraq following the First World War. He points out that segregation in today's Iraq would divide neighbourhoods and even families: Pax's own father is Sunni, his mother is Shia, and their neighbours are Kurds. Riverbend repeatedly expresses her frustration at the way that the occupation has transformed Iraqi life and is eager to emphasise how she and her generation led Westernised lives before the war. She expresses her wish that the distinctions that have been accentuated between different ethnic groups in Iraq could be removed and return to the way they were before the war:

> We all lived together before – we can live together in the future. Iraqis are proud of their different ethnicities, but in the end, we all identify ourselves as "Iraqi." Every Iraqi's worst nightmare is to wake up one morning and find Iraq split into several different parts based on ethnicity and religion. Salam said it best when he said, "There are no lines and none should exist…"[80]

Pax does indeed summarise the situation well, and candidly discusses his reactions to it. Although he is adamant that there should be no divisions in Iraq, he accepts that the situation is more complex than that. If federalisation should come to Iraq then, Pax points out, the best outcome would not be the three state model which the government seems to favour, comprising of 'Kurdistan in the north, Sunni-stan in the middle and Sh'ia-stan in the south'.[81] If federalism were absolutely unavoidable, then a better approach, Pax suggests, would be to also create independent states around Baghdad, Samaweh, and Basra. Pax summarises his own feelings on the subject rather poignantly: 'it is all one Iraq for me'.[82]

Given the experiences of the Iraqis that McCarthy's narrative documents, it would be reasonable to question whether the views that Riverbend and Pax express in their blogs, particularly regarding pre-occupation Iraq and their hopes for a peaceful future, are perhaps slightly idealistic. Several of the Iraqis that McCarthy interviewed recount a pre-occupation Iraq under Hussein's rule in which they were subject to persecution and genocide. It is worth

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[80] Riverbend, 'Splitting Iraq, January 8, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 220.
[81] Pax, 'January 6, 2004', *Where is Raed?*.
[82] Pax, 'January 6, 2004', *Where is Raed?*.

considering that Pax and Riverbend living in Baghdad in the pre-occupation era may have enjoyed a more comfortable, and crucially, more metropolitan existence, than many people living in different areas, such as the victims of the atrocities that were committed at Hilla (where mass graves from the 1991 massacre were uncovered in 2003). It could be inferred that those Iraqis who have access to computers and the internet, and who are proficient in their use of English are likely to be middle class and therefore wealthier than some of the people that McCarthy spoke to. One might even speculate as to the possibility of such authors having been linked, as many middle class Iraqi families were, to the Ba'athists in the past. If this were the case, then their impressions of pre-occupation Iraq, and consequently, their hopes for the future, may differ from those of other Iraqis. Even with the advent of the internet, the Western reader's only exposure to the stories of poorer and working class Iraqis is through accounts like McCarthy's. In this sense, blogs can be seen as exclusionary for certain groups, thus exacerbating the invisibility of certain groups of Iraqis in the global sphere. Although the documenting of narratives via a British journalist does not avoid the disadvantages associated with translation, it does enable another group of Iraqis, who otherwise would be silenced, to develop a voice on the international stage. In this sense, McCarthy's text provides a sense of diversity which is lacking in the Iraqi authored blogs, simply because it draws on the stories of Iraqis from a range of ethnic and economic backgrounds. Some of these accounts provide a stark contrast to the liberal attitudes that Riverbend and Pax suggest is typical of the majority of Iraqis, highlighting that the situation may not be the same across all of the regions and within all of the ethnic groups in Iraq.

Challenging Western Definitions of "Anti-Americanism"

In her commentary, Riverbend also identifies another crucial distinction which anticipates many later cultural commentaries: she asks, 'Why does being anti-Bush and anti-occupation

have to mean that a person is anti-American? We watch American movies, listen to everything from Britney Spears to Nirvana and refer to every single brown, fizzy drink as "Pepsi"'.[83] Here, Riverbend highlights an issue which has been raised in other texts from the Iraq War and previous wars, as well as by cultural commentators such as Huntington and Crockatt. She points to the perceived relationship in America between positioning oneself as anti-war and lacking a sense of patriotism. Riverbend's argues that it is essential to differentiate between anti-Americanism and positioning oneself against American foreign policy. This is something which both Riverbend and Pax make clear in their accounts. The producers of cultural representations often interpret American nationalism as intrinsically connected to the American government and the US military.[84] Since much of the world perceives America via this increasingly militarised image, the distinction between "America" and American foreign policy begins to blur, making it problematic for other nations to separate their distrust of the American government and its foreign policy from their feelings towards America and the American people:

> I hate American foreign policy and its constant meddling in the region… I hate American tanks in Baghdad and American soldiers on our streets and in our homes on occasion… why does that mean I hate America and Americans? Are tanks, troops, and violence the only face of America? If the Pentagon, Department of Defense and Condi are "America" then yes – I hate America.[85]

Here, Riverbend highlights the apparent willingness of many Americans to align their identity with the nation's militarised image. She suggests that if this is the image that America projects of itself, it is difficult for citizens of other nations to differentiate between US foreign policy and America as a nation. This reinforces Huntington's assertion that '[H]ow Americans define themselves determines their role in the world, but how the world

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[83] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 295.
[84] This is perhaps most evident in outputs such as *Generation Kill*, originally written by Evan Wright in 2004, and adapted into an HBO television drama by David Simon, Ed Burns, and Evan Wright in 2008.
[85] Riverbend, 'Media and Falloojeh, April 14, 2004, *Baghdad Burning*, p. 295.

views that role also shapes American identity'.[86] Crockatt extends this idea, explaining that although Americans are responsible for defining their identity, there is a significant gulf between the perception that they have of their own identity, and the way that identity is perceived by other nations. He suggests that 'Americans too need to understand how others see their country and in particular the huge gap which often exists between their own sense of themselves and the images which others have of them'.[87] It is possible that Riverbend questions the representation of the US as militarised because she has grown up with the results of a militarised government in Iraq. Indeed, many Iraqis perceive Hussein's most significant mistake as his militarisation of his own identity and that of his government. It is also worth noting that although Riverbend never discloses the identity of the country in which she spent her youth, her discourse carries a 'slight American inflection',[88] leading her readers to conclude that her time abroad as a child was possibly spent in America (or in a Westernised country which is influenced by American culture). Consequently, the idea that she is perceived by some American readers to be anti-American would perhaps be all the more insulting to her. In addition to challenging Hollander's definition of anti-Americanism, Riverbend's commentary reinforces Muscati's assertions regarding the 'Othering' of the Arab/Muslim:

> It has nothing to do with Islam – just as this war and occupation have nothing to do with Christianity and Jesus – no matter how much Bush tries to pretend it does. That's part of the problem – many people feel this war and the current situation is a crusade of sorts. "Islam" is the new communism. It's the new Cold War to frighten Americans into arming themselves to arming themselves to the teeth and attacking other nations in "self-defense." It's the best way to set up "Terror Alerts" and frighten people into discrimination against Arabs, in general, and Muslims specifically… just as this war is helping to breed anger and hate towards Westerners in general, and Americans specifically.[89]

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[86] Huntington, *Who Are We?*, pp. 366-367.
[87] Crockatt, *After 9/11*, p. 2.
[88] James Ridgeway, 'Introduction' in Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning*, p. iv.
[89] Riverbend, 'Clashes and Churches, August 7, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 324.

She concludes by pointing out that any person 'who lost their parent, child or home to this war and occupation will take it very personally and will probably want revenge – it won't matter if they are Muslim or Christian'.[90] Here, Riverbend's observations seem rather prophetic of the souring of relations between America and Iraq. Indeed, after six years of conflict in Iraq, and its repercussions around the world, there are many angry families in both America and Iraq who seek revenge for the death of their loved ones. The evidence of increasing anti-Americanism over the course of Riverbend's blog, and other Iraq War narratives (both Iraqi and American) is remarkably reminiscent of a Vietnamese Buddhist leader, Thich Nhat Hanh's observations on the effects of American action in Vietnam (quoted by Rev. Martin Luther King in 1967):

> Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory, do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism.[91]

This militarised image of America is indeed the one which has emerged above all others as America enters the twenty-first century. As in the Vietnam War, it can be argued that it is government policy and military action that alienates the citizens of the 'enemy' nation. Indeed, Morris Berman suggests that the US policy of military containment in the late twentieth century 'proved to be especially destructive in its application to countries such as Iran and Iraq'.[92] He concludes that, given such history, 'the events of September 11 were the

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[90] Riverbend, 'Clashes and Churches, August 7, 2004', *Baghdad Burning*, p. 324.
[91] Vietnamese Buddhist leader, Thich Nhat Hanh, quoted by Rev. Martin Luther in his speech, 'Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence', delivered at a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church in New York City on the 4 April 1967. < http://www.ssc.msu.edu/~sw/mlk/brkslnc.htm > [accessed 3 March 2010].
[92] Morris Berman, *Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), p. 159.

tragic but inevitable outcome of [American] foreign policy in that part of the world'.[93] As Richard Parker anticipated as far back as 1988, 'we can expect further acts of violence against Americans, but it does not mean they are a result of an inevitable Muslim or Arab animosity. They are a reaction to the invasion of American culture, not an inherent and unavoidable phenomenon of race and religion'.[94]

Conclusion

These online accounts describe the experience of Iraqis living through the occupation, and, moreover, they provide a detailed background of how historical events (for example, the British colonisation following the First World War, and US action in the Gulf War) have shaped contemporary Iraqi opinions about the West, and specifically about America. The rapid production and protean mode of this online medium offers a perspective which had previously been unavailable to the Western reader and informs our analysis of the relationship between the occupation of Iraq and the perceived shift towards anti-Americanism in Iraq. Riverbend and Pax highlight the complexity of the situation in Iraq, and challenge the definitions of "anti-Americanism" offered by earlier commentators such as Hollander and Krastev. Crucially, a reading of these texts suggests that to identify the terrorist attacks of 2001 as the beginning of a new era of "anti-Americanism" is rather simplistic. Moreover, it is inaccurate to posit anti-Americanism as a justification for occupying Iraq, when, according to the Iraqi narratives, anti-Americanism has only gathered momentum in Iraq as a result of American action in the country. These blogs inform the Western reader about events in Iraqi history which shape Iraqi perceptions about the West and its ideals. Moreover, Riverbend and Pax demonstrate that, despite a historically strained relationship between Iraq and the US, it

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[93] Berman, *Dark Ages America*, p. 159.
[94] Richard B. Parker, 'Anti-American Attitudes in the Arab World', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 497, Anti-Americanism: Origins and Context (May 1988), 46-57 (p. 57).

is a severe misrepresentation to suggest that the Iraqi people are simply "anti-American". They draw a sharp distinction between their objections to US foreign policy and America itself. Crucially, these narratives indicate that rather than situating 9/11 as the first move in a campaign of "anti-Americanism", it could be argued that it is the American government's reaction to the attacks, and the impact of the subsequent occupation of Iraq, which acted as a catalyst for the growth of "anti-Americanism" in Iraq.

Although accounts by Western journalists interviewing Iraqis and blogs by English speaking Iraqis are crucial in mapping Iraqi concepts of national identity and perceptions of their US occupiers, it should be noted that these texts can only be viewed as indicative of some individual opinions in Iraq. Like the texts by authors from other Middle Eastern countries, journalists can only really take a sympathetic stance, albeit one substantiated by Iraqi experiences. It is worth noting though, that texts like McCarthy's provide Western readers with a greater insight into the variety of experiences and opinions of Iraqi citizens due to the diversity of the sample of Iraqis interviewed. However, since these Iraqi stories are, more often than not, related via an interpreter, they cannot be considered as wholly reliable accounts of events. It is also problematic to claim that the Iraqi blogs are representative of the opinions of the varied Iraqi population, due to the fact the authors of the blogs are well educated middle class English language speakers. The only way that the Iraqi voice could be truly represented is if Iraqis were able to write their stories of war and occupation in their own language, and if those in the West were able to understand them. Since this is something of an impossibility, blogs authored by bilingual Iraqis like Riverbend and Salam, and collections of Iraqi stories by Western journalists are, at present, a Western reader's best opportunity to understand something of the complexity of Iraqi identity and life since the war.

Crucially, bloggers such as Pax and Riverbend counteract the marginalising effects of technology on the Iraqi image. Technologically-mediated warfare and the virtual media war may have led to a perceived absence of Iraqi civilians in the Gulf conflict (and to some extent in the more recent conflict), but communications technologies have served the opposite function in the Iraq War. Through the act of blogging, writers such as Pax and Riverbend have transcended the borders of the nation-state and reclaimed visibility for Iraqis, thus making spectators in the West acutely aware of the everyday impact of US interventions on the lives of Iraqi civilians. Pax's and Riverbend's mode of narrative production requires an interactive relationship with technology (and other internet users). In their creation of virtual selves, the Iraqi bloggers develop "cybernetic identities" which enable them to counter-act the silencing effect of military and Western media technologies. Significantly, these new modes of discourse provide a space in which Iraqis can provide global counter-narratives to Western discourses.

Conclusion

Towards New Literatures of War

Conclusion

Towards New Literatures of War

Know Thyself.

Turnipseed, *Baghdad Express*

This thesis has constructed a reading of how transformations in the contemporary combat zone impacted on representations of US identities in Persian Gulf and Iraq War narratives. By examining several texts in each chapter, this thesis begins to map a significant body of work that has emerged from these conflicts, which has been largely overlooked by literary critics thus far. The framing of this thesis by the specificity of the wars enables a close examination of how technology impacts on the combatant's sense of self, the gendering of the combat zone, and US and Iraqi national identities.

Transitions in Warfare and the Literature of Conflict

The first section of this thesis warns against a simplified categorisation of the Gulf War as a "technowar" and the Iraq War as a return to conventional warfare. It explores how the narratives of each conflict represent the complexity of the wars, with combatants of both conflicts being affected by new forms of trauma resulting from advances in military and communication technologies, in addition to more conventional forms of traumatic experience. Crucially, it argues that for some combatants, such conflicting war experiences result in a specific fragmentation of the self, and moreover, an increased awareness of the threat to their selfhood. This section also challenges the notion of the Gulf War as the unworthy successor

of the Vietnam War. Although it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of the Vietnam conflict on the Gulf War generation, it is crucial to explore the ways in which Gulf War writers move their literature forward adequately to portray the new challenges of a very different kind of war. Gulf War writers are largely aware of the positioning of their war in terms of its cultural and historical context. Several soldiers quote philosophers such as Nietzsche, and cultural commentators such as Baudrillard and Chomsky. The authors demonstrate their awareness that the Gulf has been perceived as a virtual war, and whilst some reinforce this in their writing, many challenge the meaning of such a definition, citing examples from their own experiences which position the Gulf as anything but virtual, or at least complicate what 'virtual' might mean.

Iraq War authors, on the other hand, demonstrate a self-awareness of their war's categorisation as a gritty guerrilla war. Whilst sections of their narratives concur with this definition, each text contains elements which challenge such a simplistic analysis. Buzzell, for example, is initially posited as a traditionally heroic warrior. However, he soon reveals that he is also a reflective character who feels detached from much of what occurs around him (and who is afraid of his fellow combatants labelling him a computer geek for writing his blog). It is, this section concludes, the unique mix of conventional combat and exposure to new forms of technology that causes the development of fragmented or multiple identities in both conflicts. This crisis of the self is exacerbated by society's perception of the wars as easily classifiable conflicts. For the combatants of the Gulf and Iraq wars, it is difficult to reconcile their own experiences with this simplified conception of each war as technowar or traditional combat respectively.

Crucially, the authors of Gulf and Iraq War literature develop narrative techniques in order to communicate the war experience to the reader effectively and challenge perceptions propagated in media discourse. The emphasis here is not necessarily on factually accurate

accounts of the war experience, but rather on recreating the feeling of fragmentation and crisis of the self that many soldiers experienced. As such, Gulf War writers disrupt the chronology of their texts and use visual play to disconcert readers. Writers like Hudson and Paine create surreal storylines which disorient readers and force them to distinguish between reality and fiction. Like the Gulf War soldier attempting to process multiple sources of information, the reader must consider multiple possibilities. For Iraq War writers, literary form and modes of production are important in representing the conflicting influences of guerrilla warfare and the advances in military and communication technologies. Despite the perceived return to a grittier kind of warfare, these narratives reveal that Iraq War soldiers were vulnerable to both traditional and unfamiliar forms of trauma and fragmentation of the self. Indeed, in the case of the soldier bloggers, it is their chosen mode of literary production which problematises their unified identities.

Gendering the Changing Face of Warfare

The second section of the thesis explores how advances in military technology have led to a re-gendering of the contemporary warzone. It explores van Creveld's notion of the feminisation of war in two forms: the first being the introduction of new military technologies onto the battlefield (thus providing less opportunity for physical combat), and the second being the increasing presence of women in the combat zone as a result of the changing nature of warfare. Chapters Three and Four explore this concept in terms of the impact on the identities of both male and female combatants. Crucially, this section examines how the narratives of both wars indicate the necessity for both men and women to adapt their gender performances for the combat zone. However, unlike many previous wars, combatants in the Gulf and Iraq wars were not required simply to perform masculinised identities. Rather, it was necessary for both men and women to perform a particular brand of militarised

masculinity which incorporates traditionally feminine characteristics such as sensitivity. These narratives indicate that, in many cases, combatants found themselves creating different selves in order to perform these differently gendered identities effectively. Communicating the fragmenting experience of re-gendered warfare in the post-Cold War period is problematic, but alternative forms offer some possibilities for new discourses. Female soldiers, in particular, lack a tradition of combat narratives authored by women within which to frame their own stories. The existing war story paradigms developed by male combatants may not be appropriate for communicating the experience of female warriors. As such, alternative modes of production, such as oral narratives, offer a flexible medium which is perhaps better suited to female story-telling.

Writing National Identity in Contemporary Warfare

The final section of the thesis explores the impact of technological developments, in terms of both military and communication, on national identities and perceptions of the "other". The fifth chapter addresses the ways in which many American responses challenge US patriotism and highlight the absence of both American ethnic minorities and the Iraqi "other" in media coverage of the conflicts and many US literary responses. Farley's *My Favourite War* explores both these absences in detail and examines how this problematises American identity for African American soldiers and civilians. Farley claims that due to othering of non-white American citizens through both policy making and media coverage, many are faced with the choice of identifying with Americans (who do not share their interests) or with the Iraqi "other" (with whom they can empathise). This presents a crisis of the self since many feel that their loyalty is divided. Although narratives from the more recent Iraq War do not present the Iraqi figure as absent in the same way as the Gulf, the representation of the Iraqi figure remains problematic.

Chapter Six addresses this issue by examining how Iraqi authored texts write back to American narratives and the Western media. Blogs such as Riverbend's and Pax's offer a counter to these sources, providing an insight into Iraqi life before and during the American occupation. Iraqis communicating their experiences via the internet do not only give a voice to the Iraqi civilian, but they achieve this on a global scale with readers around the world following their blogs. Both writers emphasise that prior to the conflict, many Iraqis embraced Western culture in a variety of ways: women worked and attended university, many Iraqi homes had the ordinary luxuries of televisions and computers, and most Iraqis wore Western clothes. Over the course of their blogs, both writers document the breakdown in Iraqi society that resulted from the occupation. Crucially, they discuss Iraqi perceptions of their American occupiers and explain that initially most Iraqis were receptive to the soldiers, even offering them refreshments. Riverbend and Pax explain, however, that this relationship began to break down as Iraqi citizens heard of their friends and family experiencing violent treatment at the hands of American soldiers. Here, these writers provide some valuable insights into the perceived development of anti-Americanism in Iraq which had been observed by Williams and Buzzell. Crucially, the communication technology of the blog has facilitated Iraqi citizens in achieving the visibility in global terms that has been denied to them in the media coverage and literary responses of both the Gulf and Iraq wars.

Towards New Literatures of War

This thesis has begun to map the literature of the Gulf and Iraq wars by examining the impact of transformations in the combat zone. Since the sub-genres of Gulf and Iraq War literature remain emergent, there is, as yet, little in the way of fictional responses to the recent Iraq War. However, if the Gulf War can be taken as an indicator, then the next fifteen to twenty years will witness the emergence of many more novels, short stories, and other narratives.

These will provide significant points of comparison to the memoir and blog accounts of the conflict, and to the fictional responses to the Gulf War. The relatively new medium of the blog also offers new avenues of exploration, some of which have been considered in this study.

Given that the embryonic forms of this research project were conceived during the early stages of the US occupation in Iraq, it seems apt that as the project entered its final stages, US combat troops began withdrawing from the country. US combat troops officially stepped down from operations on 31st August 2010. Since the new administration came to office in January 2009, it has been widely suggested that President Barack Obama is leading the United States into a new era in which it will be forced to construct a new identity for itself. Although it is clear that it will be necessary for America to create a new identity, at the present time it is unclear as to what form this will take. The only certainty is that US identities will continue to be shaped by the country's role in global politics and its interactions with the rest of the world.

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