AMERICAN CULTURE

Frank Usbeck

Ceremonial Storytelling

Ritual and Narrative in Post-9/11 US Wars

14

PETER LANG

US society has controversially debated civil-military relationships and war trauma since the Vietnam War. Civic activists today promote Indigenous warrior traditions as role models for non-Native veteran reintegration and health care. They particularly stress the role of ritual and narrative for civil-military negotiations of war experience and for trauma therapy. Applying a cultural-comparative lens, this book reads non-Native soldiers' and veterans' life writing from post-9/11 wars as "ceremonial storytelling." It analyzes activist academic texts, "milblogs" written in the war zone, as well as "homecoming scenarios." Soldiers' and veterans' interactions with civilians constitute jointly constructed, narrative civic rituals that discuss the meaning of war experience and homecoming.

Frank Usbeck studied at Leipzig University and at the University of Arizona. He earned his PhD at Leipzig with a work on German "Indianthusiasm" in Nazi ideology (2010). His research interests focus on Native American studies, cultural and media history, military history, nationalism, and museum studies.

Ceremonial Storytelling

AMERICAN CULTURE

Herausgegeben von
Astrid Böger, Bettina Friedl, Michaela Hampf und Martin Klepper

BAND 14

Frank Usbeck

Ceremonial Storytelling

Ritual and Narrative in Post-9/11 US Wars

PETER LANG

Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

This research project, as well as the resulting monograph, were supported by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – DFG), under grant KA 3731/1-2.

ISSN 1615-567X • ISBN 978-3-631-77145-7 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-631-78294-1 (E-PDF) • E-ISBN 978-3-631-78295-8 (EPUB)
E-ISBN 978-3-631-78296-5 (MOBI) • DOI 10.3726/b15345

Peter Lang – Berlin · Bern · Bruxelles · New York · Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed.

Printed in Germany

www.peterlang.com

Contents

1. Introduction

Studies from around the world show that recovering from war—from any trauma—is heavily influenced by the society one belongs to, and there are societies that make that process relatively easy. Modern society does not seem to be one of them.[1]

Time and again since the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, public discourse in the US has revolved around society's relationship with its soldiers. Apart from medialized farewell and welcome-home ceremonies, yellow-ribbon campaigns and "I-support-the-troops" bumper stickers, protagonists within this discourse have increasingly expressed concern about how soldiers come to terms with war experience. The public's obsession with war experience reveals a prominent discursive motif, a sense of crisis and anxiety about the state of civil-military relationships, as the psychosocial aftereffects of war, e.g., veterans' reintegration troubles and psychological injuries such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), permeate debates about US wars. These aftereffects are argued over in broad swaths of academic literature ranging from psychology to sociology, media studies, literary studies, and beyond. The debate about them fuels the nationwide proliferation of veterans' centers and programs at university campuses. They are central themes in countless self-help books written by and for veterans and their families, as well as mental-health specialists. Civic-activist projects and NGOs foster public discourse about these effects of war experience. They promote alternative therapies for psychological injury, engage in social work, and encourage veterans to share their experience with the public either in fiction, life writing, performance, or creative arts. Reinforcing this discursive phenomenon, droves of first-person narratives about post-9/11 wars in print memoirs and documentary films reflect this cultural anxiety about war experience. Perhaps most importantly, the integration of such firsthand narratives in the new media, be they blogs written from the war zone or conversations in soldiers' and veterans' private social media accounts, vastly expanded and intensified public discourse on war in the last two decades. All these practices

1 Junger, *Tribe*, 90.

manifest US society's urge to make sense of its contemporary wars and to (re) negotiate its relationship with those who fight them.

Yet, public discourse on war experience also reveals the historical roots of this sense of crisis in US society. To a large extent, it is tied to the Vietnam War, to how this conflict has since been commemorated, and to how constructions of collective memory helped shape US foreign and domestic politics. The ongoing discourse on war experience since Vietnam also affected the US military's culture, its social and institutional structure, and society's relationship with the military in general. The Vietnam War provoked domestic strife while it lasted, and debates have raged ever since over its political justification, its results, its legacy, and its morality.[2] Vietnam also brought war trauma to the public's attention. The war produced thousands of cases of psychological injuries that afflict veterans' lives as well as their social environments. Owing to public attention and to the gnawing perception of war trauma as a relevant social problem, activist psychologists of the Vietnam era campaigned to develop and define a diagnostic assessment for PTSD which, since its official designation in 1980, has in turn created more controversy over war trauma, its diagnostic parameters, and appropriate therapy methods since then.[3]

In the American cultural imagination of the Vietnam War, fueled by countless films, novels, and memoirs, US society at large bears responsibility for veterans' psychological afflictions. Regardless of political affiliation, various perspectives have contributed to this notion of social responsibility, be it the allegation that the US government sent its citizens into an unnecessary and unjust war, or that the antiwar movement at home caused the military defeat overseas, or that (all of) civil society unjustly blamed the returning soldiers for the war's ills, that it abandoned them, and thus compounded their trauma.[4] While public protestations of support for the troops at the start of the post-9/11 wars insisted that the country would not abandon the troops again, the legacy of Vietnam once more cast a shadow both because large segments of US society questioned the validity of the cause for the invasion of Iraq, and because Afghanistan and

2 Cf., among others, Hagopian, *Vietnam War*; Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*; Gardner and Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn from the Past*; Good et al., *Mythologizing the Vietnam War*; Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War*; Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*.

3 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 49–78; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*.

4 Leikauf, "*Welcome to My Bunker,*" 76–90. In this context, see also Leikauf's observations on the narrowed subjectivity in these imaginings, that is, the reduction to exclusively US, white, male, combat infantry perspectives of Vietnam. Leikauf, 115, 353–54, 375.

Iraq, having quickly turned into similarly indecisive quagmires like Vietnam, produced equally horrendous numbers of moral dilemmas and psychological casualties among US soldiers. The post-9/11 wars, then, although they did not generate nearly as much domestic strife or as many US casualties as Vietnam, drove the public to draw parallels to that earlier war and, as a result, voice anxieties over the well-being of US soldiers and veterans. Influenced by the cultural imagination of Vietnam, activists feared that the new wars might reproduce traumatization and reintegration troubles—especially since the increasing social segregation between civil society and members of the military suggests civilian neglect[5]—and that US society might once more 'abandon' the soldiers, that is, fail to uphold its responsibilities for the soldiers sent to war on its behalf.

Because the anxiety about war experience and trauma during the post-9/11 wars is shaped by the ongoing discourse on civil-military relationships since the 1970s, it appears that US civil society has renewed its efforts at scrutinizing, renegotiating, and reaffirming these relationships since the early 2000s. In this context, it is not surprising that Ken Burns' and Lynn Novick's 2017 documentary series on Vietnam helped rekindle the public debate about contemporary domestic struggles and US civil-military relations and that Vietnam-era veteran writers, such as Tim O'Brien and Karl Marlantes, feature prominently in the series.[6] This rekindled debate on war experience manifests itself in diverse political perspectives and ideas, cultural practices, and media, pointing to the mutual responsibilities of the civil-military social contract. It rests on a self-reflective public exchange involving soldiers, veterans, and members of civil society to promote a medialized cycle of narrating personal war experiences and civilian responses to renegotiate civil-military relationships. These practices argue that coming to terms with individual experiences necessitates coming to terms on a collective level. The script of narrating and acknowledging war experience in these practices serves to reassert the social contract, to pledge support, and to construct ceremonial frames for these negotiations.

This book expands previous approaches to firsthand war narratives and carves out a new field of intercultural and interdisciplinary knowledge production by anchoring its methodological perspectives in these cultural practices' ceremonial frames. It will investigate how public discourse during the post-9/11 wars addresses personal war experience and its potential psychological effects, and how it constructs ritual scripts to interweave the making of individual and

5 Cf. Thompson, "The Other 1 %."

6 *The Vietnam War.*

collective meaning. It will employ a cultural-studies framework for its multidisciplinary approach, integrating questions, concepts, and techniques from related fields such as cultural anthropology, cultural history, literary studies, ritual studies, (new) media studies, narratology, performance studies, and veteran studies, to pinpoint the production of knowledge within this discourse. Focusing on the sense of crisis in these negotiations of war experience, this study will draw its primary sources from three major sets of texts and practices. Firstly, an analysis of activist texts in psychology, social work, and veterans' self-help elucidates how cultural pessimism fuels a desire for cross-cultural role models in constructions of war-related social therapy. This comparative approach will then be applied to the other sources, reading, secondly, 'milblogs' written by deployed soldiers and 'homecoming scenarios' (narrative rituals of veteran reintegration) as ceremonial negotiations of war experience and of civil-military relationships between soldiers, veterans, and civilian audiences.

The epistemological purpose of this study draws on activists' discursive practices about war experience particularly because their invocations of therapy determine their cultural work and their social significance: they treat war experience as a social concern and, thus, diagnose psychological war injuries as social and cultural problems, rather than as individual afflictions. Consequently, they argue that cultural comparison with and role modeling of the community-oriented warrior traditions of some non-'Western' cultures offer solutions, and that rituals and narratives are key components therein. Their focus on ritual and narrative not only helps disseminate creative mental-health therapies for veterans. It also self-reflectively invokes the therapeutic attributes inherent in civil-military discourse itself. That is, activists promote firsthand war narratives as social-therapy vehicles to facilitate healing through a public, ritualized conversation on war experience among soldiers, veterans, and civil society. My study applies this perspective to its analysis of milblogs and veterans' storytelling projects, reading them as narrative rituals whose cultural and social relevance revolves around the ongoing discourse on war experience, on civil-military relationships, and on social therapy.

This book, thus, explores how activist transcultural references to war-related traditions illustrate the activists' cultural criticism and elucidate the ceremonial framework in negotiations of war experience, trauma, and civil-military relationships in US society since Vietnam. Where their discourse portrays psychological injuries as a social ill, the outline of modern US society at large comes under critical scrutiny.[7] Activists frequently contrast Indigenous, particularly

7 One example of an overall criticism of contemporary 'Western' society's negative effects on the social fabric is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. While not explicitly

Native North American, community-oriented war traditions against the assumption that overt individualism and competition in US society have caused widespread isolation and alienation, compounding psychological problems among veterans.[8] To illustrate the cultural-pessimist impulse in the ceremonial framework of activist discourse with an example, consider acclaimed war journalist Sebastian Junger.[9] In his 2016 nonfiction book *Tribe*, Junger portrays "post-traumatic stress [as] a medical term for a cultural problem"[10], i.e., he attributes US veterans' shock, their sense of loss, of alienation, and the social problems around war experience to a lack of communality, of social responsibility, and of mutual aid in US society. As he argues, facing extreme danger, violence, and suffering requires people to support and rely upon each other for survival. Among soldiers, this experience results in tight personal bonds that are sorely missed once they return to a civil society grounded in competition and individualism. Junger observes that Indigenous societies have developed ceremonial practices to preserve and transform these bonds and mutual obligations for support between warriors and their communities so that communities can absorb the warriors' shock and memories of violence. He concludes in the above motto that modern 'Western' society lacks these social mechanisms. His book proposes to reorient US society toward what he understands as "tribal way[s]"[11], to closer social bonds, to mutual aid and responsibilities in order to remedy many of the social and psychological problems veterans face today.[12]

---

addressing war experience, it represents a form of cultural anxiety that leads civic activists discussed in the present study to emulate community-oriented practices of other cultures to remedy their own society's perceived malfunctions.

8 As the final chapter discusses, references to other cultures, such as ancient Greece or to the Samurai culture of Japan, are also popular. Cf. Morie, Haynes, and Chance, "Warriors' Journey"; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 220.

9 He and co-producer Tim Hetherington won international recognition with the documentary film *Restrepo*, filmed during an embedded tour with a US unit in Afghanistan.

10 Crawford, "Sebastian Junger's 'Tribe.'"

11 Junger, *Tribe*, 131.

12 While many reviewers praise Junger's sociocultural perspective on war-related stress, others reject his ideas vehemently. Some critics, arguing that the book amounts to "yet another primitivism fantasy" (Marlowe), seem to take issue with Junger's notion of tribal life. Since public debates often misunderstand and overgeneralize 'tribalism' by charging the term with ethnocentric and colonialist notions of savagery, it would go beyond the scope of this study to analyze the book's merits and shortcomings in detail in this respect. However, the fact that Junger is so widely discussed illustrates the appeal of the discourse. The following chapter critically engages additional examples

My study will employ Indigenous traditions as an analytic lens, factoring in how activists utilize cultural comparison and transfer to create, negotiate, and disseminate knowledge: I argue that an analysis of activist references to and role-modeling of Indigenous war-related ceremonies serves, in turn, to understand milblogs and homecoming scenarios as civic rituals, regardless of whether they actually invoke Native American traditions to make their point. By perceiving milblogs and homecoming scenarios through the lens of Indigenous traditions, this study reveals functional equivalencies among Indigenous and non-Native cultural contexts that would otherwise not become apparent. This analytic lens, thus, opens up an avenue to glean nuances and complexity in the cultural work of these non-Native war-related practices.

Applying this analytic lens of Indigenous war-related traditions to milblogs and homecoming scenarios, I understand them as forms of 'ceremonial storytelling,' as ritualized practices of relationship-building and mutual rapprochement among US soldiers, veterans, and civilians. As Indigenous warriors narrate their war experience, their communities respond by acknowledging this experience (including hardships, suffering, and loss), expressing gratitude, and pledging to uphold their responsibility to reintegrate the survivors into community life and to tend to their well-being. In their respective cultural contexts, milblogs and homecoming scenarios feature similar discursive functions. On an abstract level, then, both Native and non-Native practices symbolically reaffirm the social contract between their respective societies and members of the military. The symbolic exchange of narrating and acknowledging experience negotiates citizenship and group cohesion (i.e., cultural, national identity) and, if necessary, addresses emotional distress, in a public setting. It is this abstract understanding that social and academic activists seek to transfer into the non-Native discourse on war and that this study observes in milblogs and homecoming scenarios.

To do justice to the complexity of this topic and to the diversity of the source corpus, my cultural-comparative perspective integrates methodological approaches and concepts from a number of disciplines. While several are addressed in detail in the chapters below to apply specific analytic perspectives to different source types,[13] I discuss some methodological approaches in the

in more detail to highlight how activist cultural-comparative perspectives influence public perceptions of and discourses about contemporary first-person war narratives.

13 Chapter Three applies methodology from ritual studies and media studies to pinpoint processes of ritualization in milblog communication. Chapter Four applies cognitive and developmental psychology and Native American studies concepts to investigate

following subsections to explain this study's working concept and situate it in related academic traditions. First, I outline the interdisciplinary background for my approach to narrative and ritual in the reading of ceremonial storytelling among milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Second, I focus on the specific mediality and textuality of milblogs and homecoming scenarios to examine their embeddedness in the tradition of US firsthand war narratives. Third, I briefly discuss milblogs as source types from a cultural-history perspective to highlight the 2000s as a unique moment in the historical development of war writing owing to major transitions in communications technology and cultural practices of media use and to illustrate the resulting selection of my milblog sample, before outlining the chapter structure for the readings.

Ritual, Narrative, and War: Disciplinary and Methodological Approaches

Situated in American studies, this project opens up productive interfaces of cultural studies, literary studies, cultural anthropology, cultural history, ritual studies, (new) media studies, and performance studies. It further expands the interdisciplinary traditions of the field, drawing on the social sciences and psychology. Its approach aligns American studies with the focus on culture and on social topics in the field of new military history, as well as the emerging transdisciplinary veterans studies. Perceiving milblogs and homecoming scenarios through the comparative lens of Indigenous war rituals, my project grasps them as cultural practices, as sets of events and texts anchored around ritualized narrative negotiations of war experience, expressed and promoted in diverse media and genres, and embedded in generic and cultural traditions. In short, it observes practices of 'ceremonial storytelling' about war experience whose cultural work lies in constructing, negotiating, and asserting collective identity and civil-military relationships. In doing so, this book also expands earlier scholarship on these practices that, until now, have mainly addressed particular, individual practices or text types, and explored specific, narrow disciplinary foci in literary and cultural studies, (new) media studies, or sociology.

This section serves to explain how my approach integrates methods, questions, and concepts from the above disciplines to interpret the cultural work

how milblogs process experience and mend social relationships. Finally, Chapter Five delves into performance studies to address ritualization and theatricality in veterans' civic projects.

of my sources. It will specifically introduce disciplinary influences on my conceptualization of narrative and ritual from literary and cultural studies, media studies, and ritual studies, and discuss parameters informing the book's cultural-comparative approach and its analytic lens of Indigenous war-related traditions through cultural anthropology and Native American studies.

My project draws on literary studies both regarding its subject matter and its methodology. US literature has (con)textualized war experience from the beginning; this book elucidates how blogs and homecoming scenarios write forth this tradition by mediating between society, veterans, and the military with the technological opportunities of the twenty-first century. My approach shares its interest in typical themes of war experience with traditional war fiction, such as suffering, loss, cognitive dissonance and shock, trauma, soldiers' liminality, and the postulation of an experiential gap between returning veterans and their communities. These issues pervade traditional war fiction and poetry and have repeatedly been discussed in literary scholarship.[14] Veteran writers, such as Ambrose Bierce, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Heller, and Tim O'Brien have contributed classic works to war literature and frequently shaped scholarship on war narratives.[15] Literary studies have also generated an extensive body of scholarship on war-related autobiography and life writing, including the study of war letters, memoirs, and diaries.[16] In the wake of the post-9/11 wars, vast numbers of memoirs have been published and are currently popular subjects of rapidly expanding literary scholarship.[17]

This book, thus, draws a major methodological impulse from literary studies, expressing how contemporary discourse on war experience is embedded in these literary traditions. It discusses in how far activists invoke the literary classics to

---

14 Cf., among many others, Masur, *Real War*; Limon, *Writing After War*; Jason, *Fourteen Landing Zones*; Anderson, *Aftermath*. My thanks to Anne Koenen for bringing these works to my attention, as well as for her invaluable comments and suggestions. The post-9/11 wars, in turn, have already produced a wide range of fictitious accounts and scholarship, e.g., Bonenberger and Castner, *The Road Ahead*; Gallagher and Scranton, *Fire and Forget*; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*.

15 Bierce, *Occurrence*; Hemingway, *Farewell*; Heller, *Catch-22*; O'Brien, *Things*.

16 Cf., e.g., Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*; Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*; Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*; Carroll, *War Letters*.

17 In German American studies alone, several dissertation theses and articles on post-9/11 war life writing were published in recent years, and more are in preparation, cf. Schwär, *Storyfying War*; Günther, *War Experience*; Spychala, "Military Femininities." The final chapter details a selection of US publications and social-work projects in this context.

promote war narratives as vehicles of negotiation and healing within the discourse, self-consciously reflecting on the cultural work and social relevance of their own storytelling practices.[18] Academic traditions, e.g., methodologies for the analysis of first-person writing, serve to contextualize current war narratives. Finally, literary studies shape the general methodological outline of this study because its analysis of activist scholarship and nonfiction, of milblogs, and of homecoming scenarios, treats these sources as literary texts and carves out their cultural work in close readings.

My analysis involves classics in war narratives to elucidate how earlier representations of war experience helped shape the cultural imagination of war among contemporary firsthand authors. Cultural studies—particularly film studies—offer productive contextualization in this regard. Some of the earliest events captured on film depicted war, and Hollywood has shaped the perception of what war supposedly looks and feels like, not only for civilians but also for generations of US soldiers who had to question their preconceived notions of war once they were confronted with its reality.[19] Studies of visual representations of war illustrate the allure, spectacle, and persistence of war-related imagery. As the chapter readings demonstrate, contemporary soldiers frequently contrast their own experience with these cultural images.

Cultural studies are central to this project because they provide and open up the interfaces on which my interdisciplinary approach relies. The book's focus on the cultural work conducted within the discourse on war experience, its interest in how cultural practices negotiate social problems and relationships, applies cultural-studies perspectives to related fields: Cultural history provides the major concepts of experience, memory, and identity construction. Media studies explain how technology determines the specific textuality of communicative practices which, in turn, shape a community's social cohesion. Ritual studies contribute perspectives on how formalized communication self-consciously performs and asserts this social cohesion.

Since the current discourse on war experience emerged from historical discursive traditions, particularly those related to Vietnam, this book integrates concepts and approaches in cultural history. Historians in the US and Europe

18 The final chapter, e.g., discusses the project "Operation Homecoming," sponsored by the National Endowment of the Arts, as a life writing project among contemporary soldiers in the tradition of the classics.

19 Cf. Geiger, "Taking Aim," 156–57; Westwell, *War Cinema*, 1; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 29–30.

turned to the study of war experience in force during the 1980s as part of a longer development of a "history of war from below"[20] that extended its focus beyond social structures to include observations on how people's everyday activities and behavior were shaped by specific social conditions and cultural processes. Emerging as a new field, the cultural history of war sought to grasp war experience as a process driven by interrelated determining factors. Established in the 1990s in Tübingen, Germany, the collaborative research center on war experience (SFB 437) concludes: "Experience of war includes the actions and immediate perceptions of those who were present during the battle, but it also goes further. The term experience emphasizes the multiple and often contradictory effects of wars on individuals and societies."[21] The center's researchers describe the reality of war as a "perpetual process of social communication in which perception, interpretation, and action relate to each other."[22] The study of war experience, then, not only asks how soldiers perceive battle, but it also investigates how cultural representations of earlier wars shaped soldiers' expectations about war, how these expectations inform a state's justifications and explanations for war, how soldiers remember and relate their firsthand experience to their families and communities, how individuals, communities and the general public interpret the meaning of these events and, eventually, how these public exchanges in turn influence the social structures, attitudes, and behavior of future generations.[23] In accordance with this complex, process-oriented cultural-history perspective on war experience, my approach to firsthand representations of the post-9/11 wars considers the debates and cultural practices related to the Vietnam War and its aftermath as a necessary precursor to understand current social structures and practices of meaning-making related to war, and it sets representations of individual experience in relation to patterns and themes of the broader public debate on war today.

Emanating from these premises, this study makes operable the diverse interrelations of cultural history with other disciplines, particularly regarding memory and identity. Early new media studies draw on classics, such as

20 Doering-Manteuffel, "Die Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges und neue Herausforderungen. Thesen zur Verschränkung von Zeitgeschehen und historischer Problemwahrnehmung," 275, 277.

21 Schild, introduction to *The American Experience of War*, 9.

22 Beyrau, Hochgeschwender, and Langewiesche, "Einführung: zur Klassifikation von Kriegen," 10.

23 Schild, introduction to *The American Experience of War*, 10; Beyrau, Hochgeschwender, and Langewiesche, "Einführung," 10; Doering-Manteuffel, "Erfahrungsgeschichte," 279.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, to explain identity construction and social cohesion in online cultural practices, which informs my perspective on the community-constituting attributes of milblogs.[24] I discuss constructions of collective memory[25] and war-related memorial culture[26] to interpret, e.g., conversations about death in milblogs as practices of a "virtual sepulchral culture."[27] In addition, the urgency of references to trauma in activist discourse since Vietnam will be a major focal point throughout the study. I integrate the close readings of activist texts with trauma scholarship to highlight how thoroughly historiography, cultural studies, and psychology are intertwined in their perspectives on trauma.[28] In this context, the following chapter also analyzes activist scholarship in psychology, illustrating their growing influence on the public discourse on war experience since Vietnam.[29]

This project draws on media studies, particularly new media studies, to contextualize the mediality and specific textuality of its sources, as well as the actors driving the discourse. It utilizes previous studies' empirical and often quantitative approaches within this field (e.g., content analyses), as springboards to reflect on patterns of media use and social interaction, forming a foundation for close readings of the cultural work conducted in milblogs and homecoming scenarios.[30] Their work allows me to extend my perspective beyond literary and cultural studies which, apart from explicit reader-response approaches, usually do not include in their analysis the discourse among authors and their audiences, nor the wider public discussions about a particular text. Integrating (new) media-studies approaches emphasizes the role of communication through

24 Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing"; Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*.

25 Cf. Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*; Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity"; Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*.

26 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*; Doss, *Memorial Mania*; Savage, *Monument Wars*; Gessner, *Kollektive Erinnerung als Katharsis?*; Leikauf, "*Welcome*."

27 Leikauf, "*Welcome*," 200. This will be particularly relevant in the discussion of ritualization in milblogs in Chapter Three.

28 Cf. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*; Herman, Judith L., *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*; Caplan, *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home*.

29 Cf. Tick, *War and the Soul*; Shay, *Achilles*; Scurfield and Platoni, *Healing War Trauma*.

30 Cf. Rettberg, *Blogging*; Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere*; Kaye and Tremayne, "Blog Use Motivations."

and about war narratives in my sources, and it expands the analysis to the level of social actors, e.g., to describe discourse among bloggers and their audience in comments in chapters Three and Four, or to explain the network of texts and actors in civic projects in Chapter Five. Cultural-studies inflections within new media studies, such as scholarship on fan communities in popular culture, helps conceptualize the discourse on war experience in my sources as practices constituting community,[31] and they facilitate analyses of cumulative and collaborative texts, that is, of conversation threads among soldiers, veterans, and civilians.[32]

The expanding field of ritual studies offers a major starting point for my cultural-comparative lens where it emphasizes the social and cultural functions of rituals rather than formal and structural attributes with a theological focus. It integrates the study of religion with cultural anthropology but, increasingly, also with sociology, cultural philosophy, and cultural studies. This disciplinary tradition goes back to Émile Durkheim who examined ritual's role in forging social cohesion.[33] Roy A. Rappaport interprets rituals as vehicles to negotiate and enact meaning and to assign morality to conventions, concluding that rituals thus not only represent, but actually constitute social contracts.[34] This understanding makes 'ritual' a particularly productive concept for a cultural-studies perspective as it underscores my emphasis on cultural work, that is, the production and affirmation of knowledge, values, and meaning—and, thus, of civil-military relationships and of the social contract—in my reading of war-related cultural practices.[35]

This American-studies perspective on war-related discourse makes previous works in ritual studies productive not least because of their interest in the cultural functions of communication since the 1970s. Describing rituals, e.g., as a "culturally constructed system of symbolic communication,"[36] these expanded

31 Cf. Baym, *Tune in, Log On*; Booth, *Digital Fandom*.

32 The following subsection gives the integration of media-studies contexts in my cultural-studies framework more detailed attention.

33 Stausberg, "Reflexive Ritualisationen," 55–56.

34 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 138.

35 Rappaport also addresses terminological arguments regarding 'ritual' and 'ceremony' within the discipline, questioning whether subtle structural contentions warrant a distinction between both terms pertaining to their social and cultural functions. Rappaport, *Ritual*, 38–39. As these disciplinary distinctions do not affect my more abstract and functional perspective on social cohesion and on the social contract, I follow Rappaport and use 'ritual' and 'ceremony' interchangeably.

36 Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," 128.

perspectives inform my reading of the exchange between soldiers, veterans and civilians as civic rituals. This is especially significant where they discuss features, such as conventionality and redundancy, to identify degrees of "ritualization"[37] in communicative practice. Their perspective of "symbolic communication" facilitates applications of 'ritual' outside of the immediate realm of religion and serves to integrate it with the cultural-studies paradigm of cultural work, particularly given the strong traditions of semiotics in cultural-studies methodology. Chapter Three further conceptualizes and dialogs ritual with 'civil religion' to situate the readings of milblogs and homecoming scenarios in prevalent methodologies in American studies and sociology.

Emphasizing the communicative aspects of enacting meaning in ritual also brings issues of storytelling to the fore; a reading of firsthand representations of war experience as rituals, thus, is suitable for methodological approaches to narrative. Of particular interest in this regard is the development of 'postclassical narratology' since the 1990s. The new period diverged from its 'classical' predecessor in expanding traditional research interests beyond the structure and formal attributes of fiction. It complemented text analysis with a focus on readers and contexts.[38] Notably, postclassical narratology became interested in the "world-making"[39] attributes and the politicality of narrative by situating narratives in their cultural contexts.[40] In the course of these developments, postclassical narratology diversified. It explored and integrated contexts, methodologies, and themes beyond literary studies, receiving methodological feedback from the expansion of narratological scholarship throughout the humanities, social sciences, and psychology, in the wake of the 'Narrative Turn.'[41]

This diversification process fosters the synergistic interaction of ritual studies with narratology as both fields recognize overlap and potential to complement their respective methodologies and research questions. Joint projects posit "that narrative structures and the telling of stories play an important role in ritual

37 Tambiah, 128; Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 13.

38 Alber and Fludernik, introduction to *Postclassical Narratology*, 3–6; Nünning, "Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term," 243–44. Cf. Herman, David, "Introduction: Narratologies."

39 Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 9.

40 Alber and Fludernik, introduction to *Postclassical Narratology,* 5–6; Ryan, introduction to *Narrative across Media,* 4–6. Cf. Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making."

41 Alber and Fludernik, Introduction to *Postclassical Narratology,* 3, 5; Herman, David, "Introduction: Narratologies."

and ritual practice, just as ritual can be an important dimension of narrative."[42] They identify a set of interfaces between narrative and ritual, of which, e.g., experientiality, performative power, the power to create and change worlds, and self-referentiality[43] are particularly significant for my analysis of the discourse on war experience. They foster the communicative production and negotiation of knowledge and values, and thus, of collective identity.

Diversification in narratological methodology shifted the field's focus to "natural-language data,"[44] that is, postclassical narratology not only explores narrative discourse within a single text, it also investigates how the social discourse represented in cumulative texts constructs an overall narrative. This is pertinent to discussions of new and, especially, social media where hypertext and communication threads among different people produce individual but interrelated text segments.[45] The subchapter below discusses how new media studies serve to interpret online cultural practices as collaborative and cumulative contributions to a narrative, how their performance of communal interaction determines ritualization, and how discourse on war experience and cultural contexts further ritualize narratives.

These methodological interfaces between narratology, ritual studies, and American cultural studies, then, mutually reinforce my reading of milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of 'ceremonial storytelling.' They help carve out how the representation of war experience in a firsthand narrative, paired with audience response, not only describes, but also enacts the symbolic negotiation of the social contract: It is at once a war narrative and a communal ritual about war experience. It forges social cohesion by representing and negotiating cultural knowledge and values.

The focus on ritual and narrative in negotiations of war experience and citizenship transmits both epistemological aspects central for my reading of these practices' cultural work. Through this lens, their discursive contexts and traditions become apparent. It exposes their symbolism, their production and dissemination of knowledge, their construction of meaning, and their constitution of group identity. Yet, by contextualizing milblogs and homecoming scenarios with activist discourse on psychological injury and mental health care,

42 Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 2.

43 Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and their Potential for Ritual Studies," 54–58.

44 Herman, David, "Toward," 222.

45 Cf. Ryan, "Will New Media"; Booth, *Digital Fandom*.

this approach also acknowledges the dominant role of individual suffering and of the social-therapeutic thrust in the discourse's cultural work.

This lens on ritual and narrative also avoids pitfalls inherent in strictly disciplinary approaches. On the one hand, it moves the study beyond the dominant focus within cultural studies on the politics and power relations behind warfare. By 'zooming in,' it takes note of the suffering and social struggles of concrete, individual people and observes how activists propose that US society should acknowledge and remedy these struggles. On the other hand, the study's interest in the practices' cultural work and in their discursive traditions avoids a depoliticized perspective on war experience. Some activist psychological approaches portray the protagonists of ceremonial storytelling practices merely as victims of a psychological condition, rendering their experience devoid of any social, political, and cultural contexts and interrelations.[46] A narrow psychological perspective would also face the conundrum inherent in activist discourse on war experience: In postulating a social crisis in veterans' affairs, highlighting the psychological aspects of war experience, the suffering of individual veterans, and civil society's responsibility for veterans according to the social contract, activists run the risk of overgeneralizing, of associating all war experience with psychological injury and trauma and, thus, of pathologizing and victimizing all veterans.[47]

In taking up the epistemological impulse from activist transcultural comparison in war-related discourse, this book chisels out functional equivalencies between Indigenous ceremonies, non-Native milblogs, and homecoming scenarios. It highlights two major themes within the discourse: a) the cognitive and social psychology of war and b) the discursive context, that is, the practices' self-conscious and self-reflective representation of discourse on war experience as a vehicle to construct group belonging and to negotiate citizenship. First, both Indigenous and non-Native practices address how war experience affects personality and social relationships. Ceremonial storytelling in both cultural contexts represents a group effort to help soldiers and veterans come to terms with their individual war experiences and to relate them to both individual and group identity. Hence, the collective search for meaning helps an individual make sense

46 See the subsection on civil religion and sacrifice in Chapter Three, particularly its discussion on the ambiguity of notions of 'healing' in war-related memorial culture.

47 Cf. Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 10–16. The following chapter, as well as Chapter Four, discuss the fallacy of pathologizing war experience in public discourse in more detail.

of his or her own experiences and put them into perspective. Even when it is not conducted in an explicitly therapeutic setting, such as a soldier's blog entry about a mission to deliver humanitarian aid to an Afghan village, the group (i.e., the audience) responds by acknowledging the experience thus shared and by expressing their support. In the same way, a Native American veteran dancer would perform his or her experience during a ceremony and receive symbolic support and appreciation in the form of corresponding dance steps and applause. Basically, the sequence of narrating experience and group response in these distinct cultural contexts serves to (re)affirm the narrator's relationship with the group. Activist perspectives in psychology, as the following chapter explores in detail, believe that this equivalence carries inherent social-therapeutic potential, which explains their focus on Indigenous role models.

Second, the discursive context marks another functional equivalence between these practices on a more abstract level. If the ceremonial, public exchange of individual narration and affirmative responses serves to constitute meaning and to renew the relationship between Indigenous warriors and their community, then the entire ceremonial setting will also constitute a symbolic negotiation of the group's sense of community and the relationships among its members in general. That is, the audience acknowledges the warrior's soldierly commitment to the group, but also their own responsibility for the warrior's well-being, working toward restoring social and spiritual equilibrium. Tribal cosmology becomes critical in this context. Warriors' actions in war are interpreted by their communities in relation to tribal creation stories, tangible and intangible powers, the interrelations between human beings and the supernatural and the metaphysical, worldviews, and social structures. The discourse on the warriors' participation in battle serves to negotiate and disseminate cultural norms, values, and knowledges.[48] The corresponding ceremonies, thus, symbolize and reconstitute the tribes' social contract and define parameters of group belonging. This has been relevant for both the era of intertribal and frontier warfare as well as for contemporary Indigenous veteran traditions that were revived and adapted after World War II.

Apart from their interest in specific aspects of trauma therapy regarding Native American war-related rituals, activist proponents of transcultural comparison are primarily fascinated by exactly these Indigenous traditions of achieving social equilibrium through ceremonial negotiations of war experience. Some advertise such ritualized reciprocal pledges to support among

48 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 39, 85–93; Clevenger, *America's First Warriors*, 70–90.

civilians and veterans in homecoming scenarios. The therapeutic motif within US war narratives' cultural work, then, also manifests itself in how the discourse about war experience seeks to restore relationships and to achieve social equilibrium. In adopting this philosophical perspective from Indigenous traditions, social activist discourse works to contain the risk of generally pathologizing war experience; it primarily acknowledges the fact that war disrupts social structures and relationships—with potentially dangerous psychological consequences for individuals. Activists, thus, hold communities (and US civil society in general) accountable to help veterans mend and reforge these structures and relationships upon their return.

I argue that the notion of social equilibrium also serves to explain the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios. It makes apparent the ceremonial properties and the symbolic negotiation of US citizenship and national identity where the communication among soldiers, veterans, and civilian audiences expresses gratitude and support. I adopt the term "cosmology"[49] from cultural anthropology in this regard because, once more, the way Indigenous communities interpret war experience in the context of tribal creation stories and world views opens up comparative avenues, pointing to metaphysical aspects in non-Native discourse on war: Protagonists utilize the social-contract motif and the paradigm of civil religion as vehicles to negotiate and correlate war, social cohesion, national identity, and citizenship. The individual's role in civics is, thus, shrouded in the metaphysical. Attributes of US citizenship (e.g., military service and the franchise) are assigned quasi-religious qualities. I posit that non-Native discourse on war experience and identity constructions is as much embedded in its respective, culturally determined cosmology as Indigenous traditions are tied to tribal creation stories and religions. In the non-Native case, the nation and US civil society represent the primary community. Society's relationship to its soldiers is determined by a metaphysically charged set of mutual obligations and pledges to support, notions of sacrifice for the group, a sense belonging and citizenship and the underlying rights and responsibilities.[50] As much as tribal practices integrate creation stories in their forms of war-related ceremonial storytelling, non-Native practices are imbued with myths and constructions of national and cultural identity. Indigenous war-related traditions, thus, help us perceive the non-Native discourse on war as ceremonial storytelling practices to assert and renew civil-military relationships through collective identity constructions. From this point

49 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 37–45.
50 Cf. Brænder, *Justifying*, 21–43.

of view, Sebastian Junger's proposal that US society should turn toward "tribal ways" is mistakenly perceived as an embrace of "primitivism." Rather, it can be interpreted as a patriotic call to civic responsibility.

However, observations on the functional equivalences between Indigenous and non-Native practices should beware of overlooking critical distinctions between them. Obviously, the different cultural contexts play a major role. Compared to 'Western' mainstream societies, Native American cultures tend to be based on much tighter and more elaborate kinship systems, resulting in complex social relationships.[51] Because US mass society is marked by relatively loose kinship relations beyond the immediate core family, this study is careful not to claim generalizing equivalences between Indigenous and non-Native practices, and it takes note of how activist discourse approaches its cultural comparison in this regard. Likewise, I also consider social and regional differences within segments of US society.[52] To avoid generalizations toward ahistorical timelessness, this study addresses historical changes in its depiction of Indigenous traditions. It refers to particular tribal customs and practices whenever possible and, if necessary, points out their historical adaptations over time (e.g., the development of military and veterans' societies, and the gradual secularization of particular customs).[53]

---

51 Extended kinship relations in Indigenous societies entail far-reaching social responsibilities, but also guarantees of protection and mutual aid, determining the interactions among community members.

52 This concerns social segregation in US society, as military personnel increasingly originates from rural communities in the South and the West. Thompson, "The Other 1 %," 36. Some scholars suggest that rural non-Native communities have social ties close enough to resemble Indigenous kinship and support structures. Egendorf, *Legacies of Vietnam*, 278–79; Holm, "Culture," 148. When necessary, I will address how milblog discourse sometimes idealizes these areas as representing the 'real' America, in contrast to the presumably liberal, urban coastal regions.

53 Cross-cultural distinctions also entail a critical perspective on terminology: I will be talking about 'warriors' in the present tense to denote present-day Native American soldiers and veterans engaging in cultural practices relevant to their current relationships with tribal communities, embedded in their respective cultural traditions and customs. The following chapter problematizes the widespread designation of the term 'warrior' for non-Native soldiers and veterans. When discussing non-Native practices, I will use 'soldier' and 'veteran.' The former denotes any enrolled member of the US military, with distinctions by branch of the military, such as 'Marine' or 'Sailor,' if necessary. Cf. Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 20. The term 'veteran' involves subtleties and technicalities, which becomes significant where legal claims to benefits are at stake. Generally, 'veteran' denotes "*Any* person who served for *Any* length of time in

The context of cultural comparison and transfer also necessitates a few thoughts on cultural appropriation. My analytic lens on milblogs and homecoming scenarios draws its epistemological impetus from both Native and non-Native activist propositions for such comparative perspectives in the discourse on war experience. My readings take note of how social activists and scholars engage in cultural comparison, how they reflect on their approaches to Indigenous knowledge and artifacts (e.g., obtaining permissions, respecting taboos) and how they seek to break up colonial hierarchies and subject perspectives.[54] They critically detail how activist texts in psychology and veterans' affairs explore war experience and therapy in cross-cultural contexts. My approach takes up the comparative impulse without proposing transfer myself: This book does not aim to 'indigenize' US veteran reintegration and traumatology (for which I would be neither authorized nor qualified). Rather, I apply academic sources on Indigenous epistemology and traditions to the readings of the discourse on war experience in order to grasp the function of non-Native war-related cultural practices. In this context, I discuss cultural comparison on abstract levels, such as the above observations on cosmology, to avoid generalizations or faulty cross-cultural contextualization, and I evaluate functional equivalences and their cultural restrictions within the primary sources' particular discursive practices.

Finally, Native American war-related ceremonies, non-Native milblogs, and homecoming scenarios are practiced not only in different cultural contexts, but also in vastly different formats, genres and media. This study therefore places emphasis on aspects such as space, embodiment, absence, and presence to scrutinize how these practices facilitate a particular textuality that engenders these functional equivalences. Acknowledging the practices' multimediality also entails observations on the generic traditions in which they are embedded. The following sections, therefore, contextualize milblogs and homecoming scenarios with their genre traditions and with (new) media approaches to motivate them

---

Any military service branch" and who was honorably discharged. Coleman, "What Is a Veteran?"; Sherrard, "Veterans Day- Who Is a Veteran?" Within this general concept, there sometimes are specific distinctions such as 'war veteran' to denote persons who have been deployed to a war zone, regardless if they have seen combat. As this study is concerned with experience gained in a war zone, and not so much with enrollment status, usage of 'veteran' will be tied to experience and simply denote a person who has returned from deployment. If necessary, I will specify whether this person is still enlisted or has returned to civilian status.

54 In the final chapter, I discuss a conflict between Indigenous veterans and a non-Native healer in more detail to explicate the dangers of unqualified cultural transfer.

as productive primary sources for a historical, cultural-comparative perspective on firsthand representations of war experience in the US.

New Media, Community, and the Traditions of Firsthand US War Narratives

Soldiers and veterans of the post-9/11 wars eagerly embraced the technological opportunities of Web 2.0 to maintain contact with their social environments during deployment and to document and reflect on their experiences. Their activities continue a long tradition of war narratives. They simply harnessed new technologies to boost the velocity, reach, and interactivity of time-honored practices. I perceive these traditional practices in new media as forms of ceremonial storytelling, and their media platforms as convergence sites, that is, as substitutes for a concrete ritual space, because of the greatly improved spectrum of how fast and far soldiers and their audiences interact and jointly interpret the soldiers' and veterans' war experience. This section briefly discusses the emergence of (mil)blogs as elements of the new-and-social-media phenomenon of the 2000s, as well as their specific textuality, to contextualize them with traditional US war narratives, to elucidate how technological specifics help interpret them as civic rituals, and to motivate the selection of milblogs as primary sources for this study. This discussion correlates with a brief introduction to homecoming scenarios: first, to point out that milblogs usually end with the soldiers' return and do not cover readjustment and corresponding social and psychological problems as a critical part of war experience, and, second, because these civic projects illustrate the performativity of ritualized interaction between veterans and civilians.

The emergence of 'Web 2.0' during the 2000s led to new text types and cultural practices. This study's observations on milblogs focus on this transitioning phase since deployed soldiers participated in the development of these practices and actively utilized new technological and textual attributes for their specific purposes. Web 2.0 revolutionized content production, editing, and interaction online,[55] rendering new-media activities such as blogging as a "cumulative process."[56] This development transformed traditional notions of authorship; the cycle of posting and commenting, e.g., in blogs, leads scholars to consider

55 Kaplan and Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," 61.

56 Rettberg, *Blogging*, 4.

bloggers and commenters as the coauthors of a joint narrative.[57] Early sociological media studies investigated how these technological attributes affect communication. They were specifically interested in how far the enhanced interactivity and collaborative authorship of blogs and social media services allowed their users to form (virtual) communities, what cultural practices such communities engaged in and what social uses they might entail.[58]

I draw on some of these media-studies perspectives here because their interpretations pose typical questions relevant to American cultural studies, exploring the cultural work of online practices. Graham Lampa integrates Benedict Anderson's cultural-history concept of "imagined communities," particularly his observations on the ritualized construction of national identity. He posits that the sense of community within the blogosphere (i.e., a community of bloggers) "is coaxed into existence within the minds of its members in a style that stems from the instant publishing medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, online imagined community."[59] Arguing with Anderson, Lampa further states that, although bloggers and their audience rarely meet in person, they use their medium to express and interpret shared identity, cultural consciousness (knowledge and values), worldviews, and experience. With these recurrent and mutual expressions of like-mindedness and identity, they perform community-constituting rituals. In short, bloggers construct their communities through the communal and ritualized activities associated with blogging.

My project's cultural-studies framework adds to this perspective, primarily in conjunction with popular-culture scholarship on fan communities: Even before the emergence of collaborative content production in Web 2.0, Henry Jenkins introduced the notion of fans as "textual poachers" who make sense of a television series by debating its meaning. Their activities "bring more and more of the series narrative under their control,"[60] which strengthens their sense of shared identity and knowledge. Nancy Baym adds an ethnographic perspective

57 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 44.

58 Gurak et al., *Into the Blogosphere*; Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere"; Keren, *Blogosphere*; Rosenberg, *Say Everything*; Rettberg, *Blogging*. See Kaye, "It's a Blog, Blog, Blog World"; Tremayne, *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*; Johnson and Kaye, "Wag the Blog" for early analyses of the social motivation and affects of blogging in media studies. See Usbeck, "My Blog"; Usbeck, "Don't Forget"; Usbeck, "Keep that Fan Mail Coming" for discussions of media-studies perspectives on the community-building attributes of milblogs.

59 Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere"; cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

60 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 283–84.

in which fans form interpretive "communities of practice," i.e., they 'practice' their community into existence. Their activities illustrate "how the verbal (and, to a lesser extent, the nonverbal) communicative practices […] can explain 'the genesis, reproduction, and change of form and meaning of a given social/cultural whole.' "[61] Paul Booth emphasizes how blogs' textuality boosts interactivity in this context: "[T]o integrate the comments into our notion of the blog is to allow a new reading of ritual communication as it establishes a community."[62] He interprets the sequence of blog posts and comments as collaborative, ritualized meaning-making, as collective contributions to the narrative. Hence, Booth introduces the term "narractivity" to describe how fans' online activities shape the overall narrative of a popular-culture text, such as a television series.[63] Similar observations on the communality of social media have been made for other relevant practices, such as the cathartic discourse in cancer blogs,[64] grief processing in online mourning practices,[65] or ritual and community-building in online expressions of religiosity and worship.[66] If we, thus, perceive bloggers and their audience as a community of coauthors engaged in collaborative, communal, and ritualized meaning-making, this study's interpretation of milblogs as forms of ceremonial storytelling about war experience comes into focus once more.

US military interests have influenced the development of the new media and contributed military and war-related topics to the earliest online discourses, be they strategic deliberations on networks and information warfare,[67] military veterans'—particularly Vietnam veterans'—activities in chat rooms, webrings,

61 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 24.

62 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 45.

63 103–26. See Herwig, "Die 140-Zeichen-Frage" for a conceptualization of community construction in social-media platforms such as Twitter.

64 Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals"; Nagel and Palumbo, "The Role of Blogging in Mental Health." Cf. "Cancer Blog Directory." See also the observations on emerging practices in narrative therapy and online technology in mental health care in the following chapter.

65 Gebert, *Carina unvergessen*; Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death on Facebook. Examining the Roles of Social Media Communication for the Bereaved"; Roberts, "The Living and the Dead"; Carlson and Frazer, " 'It's Like Going to a Cemetery and Lighting a Candle.' Aboriginal Australians, Sorry Business, and Social Media"; Acton, *Grief in Wartime*.

66 Howard, "Enacting a Virtual 'Ekklesia': Online Christian Fundamentalism as Vernacular Religion' "; Wagner, *Godwired*; Campbell, *Digital Religion*.

67 Cf. Usbeck, "Power," 316–18.

and forums since the 1990s,[68] or self-help mentoring platforms for best practice in leadership among career officers.[69] According to Johanna Roering, the first war-related blogs emerged during the buildup toward the invasion of Iraq in late 2002. They discussed the political escalation of the conflict, described the troops' preparations and deployment to launch zones, as well as Iraqi life, from various perspectives.[70]

For the purpose of this study, my working concept employs the term 'milblog' to denote soldiers' blogs written from deployment. Previous scholars have developed more ramified terminology to suit disciplinary perspectives. Roering distinguishes war blogs and milblogs, summarizing the former as political news blogs about war, which could be interested authors' second-hand information gleaned from mainstream media, journalists' accounts, or civilians' firsthand reports[71] from the war zone. For the latter, Roering develops a concept based on bloggers' identities and their situatedness regarding war and the military—for her purposes, a milblog might be any blog on military issues, written by an author who associates with the military (e.g., soldiers, veterans, or family members) or they might denote a deployed soldier's blog, featuring attributes of both news blog and diary-type blogging.[72] In addition to my own understanding of 'milblogs,' focusing on the negotiation of firsthand war experience, I denote other forms of military-associated blogging by their specific context, such as 'spouse blogs,' to distinguish them from soldiers' perspectives of the war zone.[73]

To fully grasp milblogs as a unique and productive source that fueled the discourse on post-9/11 war experience, it is necessary to discuss their role as transitional media between traditional war narratives and social media platforms, particularly their early phase. These early days were marked by the novelty of

68 Cf. Shay, *Odysseus*, 180–201; Dare, "The Internet as Healer"; Leikauf, "*Welcome.*"

69 Cf. Rid, "War 2.0."

70 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 80–84.

71 One such blog was *Where is Raed?*, written under the pseudonym Salam Pax in 2002-03. It attracted worldwide media attention, informing readers about the Iraqi civilian perspective on the invasion. Roering, *Krieg Bloggen,* 81; Brænder, *Justifying*, 98.

72 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 15–17.

73 Morten Brænder denotes "milblogs" as any war-related blogs, regardless of the author's background, and "front-line blogs" as blogs written by soldiers during deployment. Brænder, *Justifying*, 97–98. As his work explores bloggers' public justifications for placing their own lives at risk in combat, his distinction and emphasis on the "front-line" perspective discussing the bloggers' own contributions to combat is logical. It would be less significant for my own emphasis on negotiations of war experience, that is, on deployment in general, which does not exclusively concern combat.

the medium, by public excitement about the Iraq War, and by the difficulties accessing firsthand information on the war.[74] This condition also determined the early relationship between milbloggers and mainstream media: Deployed soldiers had specialist information about the inner workings of the war machine from which news media were often excluded. Their accounts were neither constrained by professional journalistic procedures, nor by editorial or market pressures. Roering emphasizes many bloggers' self-perception and reputation as "warrior citizen journalists" whose work served to complement, contradict, or contextualize professional news media content.[75] At the same time, news media eagerly gathered and featured bloggers' insider information. The media's attention immensely popularized the new genre and generated feedback loops of mutual influence during the early war years in 2003–07.[76] This mutual influence also facilitated the remedialization of blogs: Bloggers frequently posted reports and e-mails sent to them by other soldiers; their posts would be republished in print media, were included in print collections, and, in some cases, became the blueprint for feature films.[77]

The rapid popularization of milblogs, however, activated institutional pressures as it raised security concerns among military leaders. Colby Buzzell explains how soldiers took photographs and videos of combat and of military equipment, widely sharing them online. He also describes soldiers strapping digital cameras to their helmets to privately film raids on suspected insurgents in Iraq.[78] Milblog scholars frequently cite Buzzell's post "Men in Black" in this regard. He details how an insurgents' ambush on his unit in Mosul in August 2004 erupts into a major firefight that kills many insurgents and wounds several US troops. The post becomes particularly sensitive because Buzzell contradicts a CNN report which, from his perspective, had downplayed the significance of the event.[79]

---

74 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 81–84.

75 Roering, 113–47, 181–218; cf. also Fricke, "Erzählstimmen aus dem Terror. Warblogs Amerikanischer Soldaten," 175–78.

76 Cf. Robbins, "Muddy Boots 10"; Bennett, "5 Riveting Soldier Blogs"; Grossman, "Meet Joe Blog"; Hamilton, "Best of the War Blogs." Colby Buzzell, a frequently quoted milblogger from Iraq, states that he was inspired to write his own blog after reading one of these early print media reports on the new genre. Buzzell, "I'm Soo Fucked"; Grossman, "Meet Joe Blog."

77 Greyhawk, "A Brief History of Milblogs." See Usbeck, "Don't Forget" for a detailed analysis of a remedialized blog post. Cf. Burden, *The Blog of War*; Burden, "Taking Chance Home"; *Taking Chance*; Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*.

78 Buzzell, *My War*, 159, 164, 402–03.

79 Buzzell, "Men In Black"; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 90; Brænder, *Justifying*, 117.

Blog readers then learn about the post's consequences as Buzzell documents the unfolding escalation during the following weeks. Because the post goes viral and is republished and referenced by news media, the military is forced to respond. Its detailed depiction of the event reveals enough insider knowledge to compromise Buzzell's cover of anonymity. Buzzell relates his superiors' frantic attempts to gain control, such as forcing bloggers to submit texts to their superiors for approval before posting, or threatening to exclude him from further missions beyond the camp perimeter. These measures eventually lead him to terminate the blog, but censorship efforts generally also fuel a public debate about soldiers' private use of social media during deployment.[80]

As Roering emphasizes, military leaders' initial response to milblogs illustrates their anxiety about losing control. Information control had been a primary military paradigm for decades, both regarding information the military was ready to share with the media and information soldiers disseminated in their private communication. The emergence of Web 2.0 and social media, especially the popularization of milblogs amid a controversial war, had swiftly rendered the military incapable of retaining total control over either aspect through censorship.[81] Thus, a phase of uncoordinated measures on various levels of the command structure ensued. It interrelated with public debates and lasted until approximately 2010. The military maintained that private Internet use such as milblogs might, unwittingly, compromise operational security (OPSEC) by providing critical information to the enemy, that is, information about US military "activities, intentions, capabilities, or limitations that an adversary seeks in order to gain a military, political, diplomatic, economic, or technical advantage."[82]

Milbloggers had mixed responses to the leadership's efforts to control, censor, or even outright ban the private use of social media by deployed soldiers. Colby Buzzell defiantly posted the text of the First Amendment when pressure bore down on him. He initially believed the military should not interfere with his

80 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 90; cf. Buzzell, "I'm Soo Fucked"; Buzzell, "Sniper Fire."

81 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter," 2; Usbeck, "Power," 323–24.

82 Camoroda, "Social Media – DoD's Greatest Information Sharing Tool or Weakest Security Link?," 19, 1–2; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 91–95. Such security concerns also signify interrelated risks to private data security and enemy incursion, e.g., when the military asked Facebook to take down two Navy men's accounts who were believed to have been captured by the Taliban in 2010 and whose Facebook profiles might, thus, have been tampered with by their captors. Moe, "Social Media and the U.S. Army: Maintaining a Balance," 1.

right to free speech. Media reporting on his case argued that censorship was motivated more by military concerns over public relations at a time of increasing civilian reservations about the war, rather than operational security.[83]

While a few bloggers invoked free speech, others adamantly proclaimed their common interests with the military. The emergence of Internet communication and networks had resulted in new military paradigms such as Information Operations and Strategic Communication since the 1990s. They not only entailed new strategic concepts such as cyber war, but also adapted military public affairs and communication strategies to the opportunities and risks of Web 2.0. Many bloggers now argued that milblogs were not a threat but a public-relations opportunity. After a new regulation sought to prohibit any use of social media sites on government-run computers in the war zone in 2007, bloggers insisted that their work "ha[d] significant benefit in helping to tell the military story […] By restricting access to YouTube and MySpace, the military is also restricting the ability of any service member to help engage in the 'hearts and minds' war."[84] These arguments went hand in glove with early strategic notions of "netwars," arguing that future wars would be dominated by how adversaries employed online media to sway global public opinion. If "'[i]n the Information Age, success is not merely the result of whose Army wins, but also whose story wins,'"[85] then military public relations and a clear and convincing representation of one's identity and goals vis–à–vis an adversary's become major attributes of winning "the battle of perception."[86]

Many milbloggers thus posited that their representations of military life, their popularity and resulting reach, and their interaction with civilian audiences contributed to this "battle of perception." Military strategists, publishing a series of reports on social media use at the time, agreed and urged the leadership to regard bloggers as particular assets because they were not only expert insiders, but their private conversation would not be perceived by the (potentially skeptical) public

83 Buzzell, "Stay Tuned"; Buzzell, *My War*, 336.

84 Qtd. in Lawson, "Loosing The Blogs Of War," 14. See Usbeck, "Power," for a detailed analysis of the US military's efforts to embrace social media for public relations, and the role of "popular narratology" in developing new self-representations regarding social media.

85 Eder, *Leading the Narrative. The Case for Strategic Communication*, 11; cf. Lawson, "Loosing The Blogs Of War," 20; Ronfeldt and Arquilla, "What Next for Networks and Netwars?," 328.

86 Wille, "Every Soldier a Messenger: Using Social Media in the Contemporary Operating Environment," 1.

as official military statements: Seemingly acting as private citizens who wrote about the intricacies of their specialist job, milbloggers would operate as "third-party validators" and " 'force multipliers' that enhance the stickiness of U.S. strategic communication and propaganda-countering efforts."[87]

In addition, the debate over milblogs and censorship also touched upon the issue of troop morale. Some of the strategic reports pointed out that the generation of young soldiers had grown up with various digital communication and networking platforms; they were "digital natives"[88] whose social environment was anchored in the practices and gadgets of the Internet age. Their connection to families and friends depended on access to Web 2.0 in the war zone as much as back home.[89] As leaders became aware that the military's rank and file were so imbued in the new cultural practices, they realized that strict suppression of social media use would cut deployed soldiers off from their social relations and drastically deteriorate morale.

These interrelated considerations influenced the military's outlook on social media and eventually determined decisions toward a more permissive approach emphasizing intensive OPSEC and data security training in order to instill awareness and self-policing habits among troops who wanted to use social media. Directive 09–026, issued in February 2010, ended the series of contradictory individual regulations for the time being, promoting the "Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-Based Capabilities."[90] In the following years, branches of the military issued and frequently updated "Social Media Handbooks" stipulating best practice regarding security regulations toward the desired "responsible use."[91]

With this historical development in mind, it must be noted that only the very early milblogs, such as Colby Buzzell's, provide an unfiltered glimpse into actual combat experience because (self-)censorship after 2004 restricted the depiction of combat, weapons, and tactics under OPSEC regulations. It is possible that

87 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs," 4; Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 102–04. Cf. also Moe, "Social Media and the U.S. Army"; Smith, "The World Wide Web of War"; Camoroda, "Social Media."

88 Moe, "Social Media and the U.S. Army," 10.

89 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs," 5; Moe, "Social Media," 3.

90 United States. Deputy Secretary of Defense, "Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 09-026"; Moe, "Social Media," 1; Camoroda, "Social Media," 1–2; cf. Shachtman, "Army Squeezes Soldier Blogs, Maybe to Death."

91 U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Online and Social Media Division, "Army Social Media Handbook."

this restriction discouraged readership to an extent, for part of the appeal of milblogs is to imagine what war 'feels' like, including, for many civilians, the alluring spectacle of violence.[92] Yet, milblogs still provide enough insider information to satisfy civilians' curiosity about the living conditions and everyday lives of both soldiers and locals in the war zone. They still facilitate informative platforms to discuss and acknowledge soldiers' individual war experience, disseminating soldiers' impressions, memories, and opinions and even relating moments of emotional distress and self-doubts over moral issues. As such, they are extraordinary sources on the negotiation of war experience among soldiers and civilians in post-9/11 wars.

Their role as content sources and platforms for the discourse on war experience ties milblogs to military considerations on public affairs and to traditional firsthand war narratives in US literature. Contemporary soldiers' and veterans' accounts continue traditions that reach back to the War of Independence.[93] Some print memoirs originated as milblogs, highlighting the interrelations of both text types.[94] Yet, this study particularly focuses on milblogs, rather than veterans' memoirs, because they present war experience and the soldiers' reflections in near real-time, promising immediacy because there is almost no temporal gap between experienced events and their representation, between narrated time and narrating time.[95] Audiences become involved in online discussions because the blogs' firsthand witness-protagonist perspectives seem to immerse them, to take them closer to the mystified 'reality of war' that nonveterans cannot grasp because of cognitive and emotional gaps between their own and soldiers' and veterans' lives. The exchange between authors and audience about recent events also allows for public debate on the war, its goals, conduct, and interpretations of its meaning, and it fosters affect-driven, ritualized expressions of empathy. In this, milblogs continue traditions of public discourse from earlier wars, e.g., when family members and friends circulated soldiers' letters during the Civil War and, eventually, published them in newspapers.[96] Milblogs' innovation is their harnessing of the technological opportunities of the Internet to vastly

92 Hit numbers among the results of a YouTube search for the terms "combat footage" and "Afghanistan" support this assumption.

93 See Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*; Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*; Carroll, *War Letters*.

94 See Buzzell, *My War*; Morris, *The Babylon Blog*; Burden, *The Blog of War*.

95 Brænder, *Justifying*, 99.

96 Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media," 4.

expand the interactivity and velocity (as well as the reach and inclusiveness) of such public exchanges.

Thus, the military leadership's decision to perceive bloggers as both protagonists and validators of the military's 'story' appears as a logical choice. As public discourse keeps reverting to the notion of an experiential divide between civilians and the military in debates over the psychosocial impact of war experience since Vietnam, it is particularly significant to note how many observers of post-9/11 war narratives have argued that public, ceremonial storytelling among soldiers, veterans, and civilians facilitates bridging this divide.[97] The readings of milblogs in chapters Three and Four illustrate this role of storytelling for civil-military relationships.

However, milblogs do not represent the full story of war experience. They tend to fall short of addressing the civil-military experiential gap when it surfaces most forcefully and causes the most critical emotional impact, i.e., at the moment when soldiers return home from deployment and immerse themselves in the normalcy of a civilian society at peace. Johanna Roering identifies this moment as a "blank space"[98] in milblogs' discussion of war experience. Most blogs end with the soldiers' return home, others peter out in a few more posts at lengthening intervals. They rarely discuss the process of homecoming, the transition phase and the corresponding mental readjustment returning soldiers have to undergo. Nor can they represent the emotional struggles related to war experience and readjustment because these problems typically surface after return from deployment. Investigating public discourse on war experience in milblogs alone would, thus, not grasp the full complexity of the phenomenon. Particularly because this discourse is so charged with historical references to veterans struggling with readjustment and PTSD since Vietnam, this study extends its source base beyond milblogs in order to fill in this blank space and discuss the discourse on war experience among veterans and civilians back home.

The final chapter, thus, explores civilians' engagement in homecoming and veterans' affairs, scrutinizing moments where the discourse addresses veteran readjustment and psychological injuries. My perspective on these practices once more activates a cultural-studies inflection to interface them with milblogs as it considers the performativity of these narrative rituals about homecoming and contextualizes them with the specific textuality of milblogs. Like milblogs, these

97 Pawlyk, "Seeking Ways to Bridge 'Civilian-Military Gap'"; Mallamo, "Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide With Stories"; cf. Thompson, "The Other 1 %."

98 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 110.

practices nurture active audience responses to veterans' narrations of their experience. They, too, perform scripts of ritualized, symbolic assertions of the social contract, of mutual responsibilities and pledges to mutual aid among veterans and civil society. These events are usually performed, documented, and promoted in diverse, interrelated media. Because of their wide range of activities and expressions, they cannot adequately be grasped with the concept of 'text' alone, even in its broadly framed cultural-studies understanding: Their functionality is determined by the interaction and complementary implementation of diverse practices in a variety of media, it frequently utilizes elements of ritualized performance and often requires physical presence. My approach to these cultural practices, thus, employs Diana Taylor's term "scenario," derived from performance studies to complement text-centered concepts.[99]

I read these activist projects as 'homecoming scenarios,' that is, as a growing corpus of medially and modally heterogeneous scripts of civic homecoming rituals, an agglomerate of diverse cultural practices. A scenario might negotiate homecoming experience in texts such as life writing, documentary films, or websites, but it also often requires embodied acts, such as town hall meetings, group therapy sessions, or visits to schools, which are then frequently debated on, amended, and archived in online texts. The 'homecoming scenario' comprises the sum and the synergistic cultural work of all these elements. It entails the narration of experience, but also the scripts of ritualized performances for the public discourse (i.e., as civilian audiences acknowledge veterans' experience and embrace them in symbolic reconstructions of communal identity), as well as documentation and metanarrative promotion of these practices in multimedial text form.

In this sense, the analytic lens of Indigenous war-related ceremonies once more helps pinpoint the discourse's cultural work. Diana Taylor's concept draws on her observations of epistemology among nonliterate, Indigenous cultures; it helps understand homecoming scenarios as "repertoire," as a performance-based and embodied "system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge"[100] that relies on, but is not restricted to, narrative description. Homecoming scenarios bring together both veterans and civilians for the communal performance of civic rituals that are not simply theatrical events staged for a passive audience but require all participants' active contribution to negotiate the meaning of war and war experience for both veterans and for civil society.

99 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.
100 Taylor, 16.

Hence, while most readings in the final chapter refer to texts and discuss how their textuality determines their cultural work, it is critical to keep in mind that my adaptation of Diana Taylor's concept reads scenarios as superordinate, ritualized scripts iterated in embodied performances and accompanied by narrative, textual representations (e.g., websites, online forums, films, oral history collections). To further emphasize how homecoming scenarios fill in the "blank space" and seek to ameliorate the civil-military experiential divide, this final chapter not so much focuses on an analysis of the discourse itself as the discussion of milblogs does in the preceding chapters. Rather, it elucidates how social activists motivate, initiate, and publicize their ritual scripts in these various formats in order to negotiate meaning, disseminate knowledge, and propagate their perceptions of community (re)building.

Milblogs and New Media as Primary Sources in a Historiographic Context

Having established that milblogs and homecoming scenarios are productive sources to illustrate public discourse on war and war experience in post-9/11 wars, I will now apply a cultural-history perspective to milblogs as source types. This study addresses the historical roots of current war-related discourse, covering representations of war in a variety of media and genres, asking how their specific textuality determines their cultural work. With respect to milblogs, it also explores in how far the sources illuminate a specific historical moment of transition among media and cultural practices around war experience. This section, therefore, evaluates new media (and milblogs in particular) as sources for a historiographic perspective on war-related discourse.[101] In this context, it takes a closer look at social conditions determining this discourse in milblogs, not least because the following questions also determine source selection: What are the drivers, motives, and restraints behind a milblog? How do the circumstances of the soldiers' deployment and their technological ability to reach large audiences almost instantly affect a milblog's content? What are the conditions for lively interaction with commenters? How do milblogs and their textual specifics fit into the historical range of firsthand war narrative text types and genres? Finally,

101 Because the homecoming scenarios employ very diverse practices, media, and text types, I discuss their textual and historical-contextual specifics where I introduce individual projects in the final chapter.

this section discusses source selection criteria, introduces the major primary sources, and outlines their significance and the research interest for each chapter.

First and foremost, the content and extent of life writing from the combat zone is determined by the support of soldiers' basic needs. Historical scholarship on US war letters and diaries states that, generally, soldiers were more inclined to write in detail during a particular war once military infrastructure and the combat situation covered these needs, and milblogging seems to follow similar patterns.[102] A potential milblogger must find favorable technological conditions on site. Johanna Roering notes that the US military in Iraq offered infrastructure to make life in the war zone easier.[103] This includes communication with home. While soldiers up to World War II wrote letters, Vietnam-era soldiers used voice messages and tape recorders.[104] The twenty-first century offered more immediate means. In addition to telephones and video phone capabilities at camp stores (Post Exchange, or PX), military bases in Iraq provided Internet access and continually sought to improve connectivity. Civilian contractors introduced satellite broadband, enabling Internet-based phone connections. Some local providers operated Internet cafes at military bases, and several bases even offered soldiers the option to purchase Internet access at their quarters.[105]

Milblogger Richard Phillips points out that Internet access was determined by the size of the camp and the ratio of public Internet-capable devices per soldier at a given time.[106] While bigger camps were more likely to provide a large WMR facility (welfare, morale, and recreation) well-equipped with computers, or an Internet cafe operated by a contractor, remote Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and the smaller Command Outposts (COP) might only have communication devices restricted to exclusive military use. In addition, WMR facilities tended to restrict the duration of individual sessions on public computers (e.g., 30 minutes per soldier at one time) to ensure high turnover and better access.[107] Such limits would affect a user's ability to compose longer texts, to answer many

102 Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 8–11; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 15–16.

103 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 86.

104 Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 9; Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media," 4.

105 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 86.

106 Phillips speaks about his experience in Afghanistan. Regarding access to the Internet and communication, I did not encounter sources indicating major differences between his own experience and the conditions in Iraq.

107 Phillips, "Crazy Mud."

comments, or edit and upload photos if they could not prepare them offline on a private device or even have Internet access in their own quarters.[108] Apart from camp infrastructure, bloggers' social backgrounds determine their writing. The relevant criteria for this study include bloggers' duty stations, their military rank, their education, and age.[109] Duty stations, assignments, and rank determine, e.g., access privileges, privacy, and leisure time. Soldiers assigned to camp duties or as mentors for the Iraqi and Afghan national contingents were likely to have less experience with combat situations beyond camp, but they might have more leisure time and access to computers, and they might develop closer bonds with local interpreters, civilian contractors, and troops at the camps which would be reflected in their writing.[110]

It also stands to reason that education and age affect motivation and capabilities to blog, as well as one's willingness to express experience and emotions publicly in writing. Most of the sources in the selection are written by well-educated men over forty years of age. It appears that their age and experience as career soldiers enhanced their abilities and willingness to reflect on their deployment in the blogs.[111] Phillips responds to audience inquiries about deployed soldiers'

---

108 Phillips, "Bloggers," "Week 12."

109 This list might also open up a transnational comparative perspective and include bloggers from other national contingents. My search for German milblogs from Afghanistan, however, revealed that the *Bundeswehr* has been very restrictive regarding the private use of social media among deployed soldiers until recently so that a transatlantic focus could not be pursued further within the scope of this study. Boris Barschow claims that his *Afghanistan-Blog* was the only exception to the rule, controversially approved by his commanding officer due to Barschow's professional background as a freelance journalist. In the wake of suspending conscription and gradually morphing into an all-volunteer force dependent on recruitment after 2011, the *Bundeswehr* followed the US paradigm of cautious encouragement, security training, control, and appropriation, issuing its own social-media guidelines. Telephone interview with Barschow, 4 March 2011; Barschow, "Bundeswehr und Social Media"; Wiegold, "Wenn möglich auch mit Humor"; Stoltenow and Wiegold, "Die Digital Natives ziehen in den Krieg"; Steffen, "Internet und Krieg." A future focus on Afghanistan and ISAF might also open up a comparative approach including further national contingents, such as Sweden's. See Hellman, "Milblogs and Soldier Representations of the Afghanistan War."

110 The readings in chapters Three and Four illustrate that the bloggers frequently reflected on security concerns, e.g., when discussing casualties or injuries at their camp, even if they were not personally involved in combat, and they will discuss bloggers' transcultural perspectives in their interaction with locals.

111 My thanks to Brian Schneider for bringing these social considerations to my attention.

communication habits, suggesting that a soldier's personality will affect his or her writing, as well. Extroverted personalities would likely also engage in more elaborate communication with home during deployment. However, as Phillips cautions, the course of deployment might affect their inclination to share experience and memories with their social environment: some events might be too emotionally distressing for soldiers to put into words, and they might want to protect relatives from the emotional stress and concern for the soldiers' well-being related to these memories.[112] On the other end of the scale, Phillips finds that monotonous everyday routines and boredom, which he calls "groundhog days," might be considered too insignificant or too tiresome to share with the world.[113] In general, traditions of hypermasculine, stoic endurance of war's hardships are only slowly overcome. The military culture of silence is, therefore, a central issue in civic engagement in veterans affairs and social therapy. Activists hope to overcome this silence by promoting reintegration through ceremonial narrative. The chapters below will frequently address these tensions between the urges to bury and to share one's war experiences.

While gender specifics are beyond the scope of this study to address in particular detail, the growing role of women in the military is reflected in war narratives, such as discussions about female soldiers in combat roles and other gender-related topics. Thus, in addition to the selection criteria that resulted in a primarily male corpus of bloggers, I made it a point to integrate voices of female bloggers wherever they are available.[114] It might also be worthwhile to contextualize women's milblogs with female veterans' life writing in future works, the latter having been researched and documented more thoroughly to date. My own research of publications emerging from veterans' writing projects and of the homecoming scenarios discussed in the final chapter suggests that gender-specific topics, such as the influence of military service on gender roles in spousal relationships, motherhood, or the physical challenges of military training and deployment for women will be recurring themes in deployed women's blogs.[115] The collaborative blog CaptainMolly.com, embedded in the site Military.com,

112 For observations on the "*in*articulation of violence" in milblogs in this context, see Brænder, *Justifying*, 15.

113 Phillips, "Bloggers."

114 Cf. the subsection "Ritualized Negotiations of Stress During (and after) Deployment" in Chapter Three, where a female soldier reflects on emotional affects of deployment, e.g., regarding motherhood.

115 See examples of women's writing in Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*; Leche, *Outside the Wire*; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*.

discusses female identity in the military in general and is not restricted to deployed female troops. It also engages with sensitive issues such as rape and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).[116]

Milblogs frequently address their authors' motivations to blog, reflecting results of new-media-studies research on general blog use motivations. They include authors' desires to share expert information and opinions, to stay in contact with their social environment, or to release emotional tensions through cathartic writing and discourse.[117] The blogs consulted for this study relate to their individual motivations in a number of posts where authors reflect on their state of mind as well as on their relationship with their audience. They address their desire to document life in the war zone (both their own and the locals'), to express insider conclusions about the war's progress, to communicate with friends and family, to flesh out, complement, or contradict news media accounts, or even to educate readers about cultural and social differences between US and Afghan society.[118] Given the controversies over security and Strategic Communication among milbloggers and the military leadership in the mid-2000s, it is not surprising that some bloggers also meta-referentially propagate their role as semi-independent "force multipliers"[119] for the military's public affairs efforts.[120]

As stated above, milblogs represent a transitional phase in war writing. The post-9/11 wars coincided with rapid developments in communications

116 "About Women in the Military." My thanks to Svetlana Makeyeva for pointing me to this website and for our discussion of female online war writing during the workshop "Storytelling from the Combat Zone—Military Blogs as Contemporary War Narratives" in Dresden, November 2012. Generally, one might speculate that women on active duty (and, thus, also female soldiers during deployment) are probably more hesitant to discuss sexism and sexual abuse openly online than discharged female veterans who do not have to face future harassment, repercussions by superiors, and a corresponding institutional culture of silence as much.

117 Kaye and Tremayne, "Blog Use Motivations," 131–41. Cf. Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht, "Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?"; Kinniburgh and Denning, *Blogs and Military Information Strategy*, 6–7; Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media," 3.

118 Cf. Traversa, "From Cats"; Traversa, "Terrible"; Temple, "The Writer."

119 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter," 4.

120 See Burden, *The Blog of War*, 22. See also the subsection "Winning this War with Education" in Chapter Four for detailed discussions on the ambiguities in notions of independence and private opinioneering in milblogs, particularly in the context of (self-)censorship and military public relations.

technology and with corresponding shifts in cultural practices. The discourse on war experience of the 2000s reflects these shifts in its intermingling and fluctuating use of different media and genres. This study documents these shifts in its source selection and its analysis of specific functions among various media and genres. As Roering observes, while blogs reporting from deployment rapidly became very popular, their number decreased in the late 2000s, as well as the number of news media reports on milblogs. She cites protagonists within the milblogosphere musing that this decline might in part be due to OPSEC restrictions, but it also reflects a more general change in user patterns, as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms enjoyed rapidly increasing clienteles and established dominant market positions since then.[121] The blog host site Milblogging.com, integrated into the semiofficial site Military.com and featuring 3,900 military blogs in some fifty countries with over 23,000 registered members in December 2013, migrated to Facebook shortly thereafter and is no longer available as a stand-alone website.[122] Many individual blogs also transferred their content to interlinked accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and other services.[123] As Roering and others did for the milblog phenomenon, media studies have already begun to pursue these more recent practices of social-media use in the military.[124] It would be worthwhile expanding their analyses by approaching soldiers' and veterans' use of social media from a cultural-history and cultural-studies perspective, by contextualizing user practices with the tradition of firsthand war narratives and with the negotiation of war experience, of which milblogs had been the latest innovations in the early 2000s. It would be particularly fascinating to apply a perspective of ritualized public discourse on war experience to the analysis of these new social-media practices; they promise to reveal more networked exchange among soldiers and civilian audiences than even milblogs. However, platforms like Twitter and Facebook accentuate the everyday and the mundane, reflected in quick links and text snippets, and they confront participants with much more, and more diverse information by more people than a blog, that is, a user must put considerable effort into selecting bits and pieces relevant to his or her interests from the overall pile.[125] Blogs, however,

121 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 108–09.

122 Haigh and Pfau, "Examining the Content of Milblogs and Their Influence on Public Support for War," 260–61; Brænder, *Justifying*, 100; "Milblogging.Com."

123 Cf. Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 395, 397–98.

124 Cf. Silvestri, *Friended at the Front*; Emery, review of *Friended at the Front*.

125 The chapters below will recur to this observation, discussing how some veteran protagonists within the discourse warn that social media's bombardment with

are frequented by readers who are interested in the blogger's choice of topics; their textuality invites thoughtful reflection, giving room for epistolary narration that resembles the traditional text types of war narratives (e.g., diaries, memoirs, letters). Blogs' textuality activates processes of communicative ritualization in ways that social media cannot.

Possibly, then, future scholarship might consider milblogs an intense, albeit brief, phase in the history of firsthand war narratives. Owing to the pioneering and initially chaotic, free-for-all situation of early Web 2.0 use among soldiers in Iraq after 2003, to the resulting attempts by military leaders to restrict, channel, and harness the phenomenon, as much as to the accelerating pace of media hypes and the emergence of new media products such as Facebook, milblogs provide a glimpse into the public negotiation of war experience from Iraq and Afghanistan that is at once very deep and very narrow: They offer seemingly unfiltered access to how soldiers perceive, represent, and contextualize their war experience. The speed and global scale of their communication is unprecedented compared to earlier war narratives. Never before had so many civilians such immediate and relatively unfiltered access to soldiers' private reflections on war. Yet, dynamic institutional conditions, the pace of technological innovation, and corresponding changes in media use influenced the cultural practice of milblogging in a way that future scholars might perceive it as unique to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—(self-)censorship now thoroughly filters the content, and communication has generally migrated to other platforms generating their own, unique, textuality.

Milblogs' function as historical primary sources should, thus, also be considered in this context. Roland Leikauf provides an excellent primer for his own veteran website sources, and most of his observations are relevant for a critical analysis of (mil)blogs, as well. Online content has already begun to challenge historical research methods and will do so much more intensely once online media and cultural practices become regular subjects for research in social, cultural, and media history. This is not least a concern because of the instability of online data: websites and blogs can suddenly be taken offline, providers might cease operations in a highly volatile market, and media hypes cause users to migrate

mundane aspects of everyday civilian life distracts deployed soldiers from mentally immersing themselves in their mission, rather than granting them respite from the stresses of war. Cf. Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 25.

their content between formats, platforms, and providers.[126] Online content—particularly in Web 2.0—might be continually edited, and supplemented, after the researcher's last visit and save. The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (web.archive.org) helps researchers track down some of these changes; it allows them to locate and save other users' "momentary captures"[127] of earlier versions of a website or blog.[128] Generally, the instability of data forces researchers to archive their work diligently, compartmentalize and document individual research steps, acknowledge the volatility of their sources, and consider the blank spots on the map, i.e., be aware that significant sources might remain beyond their grasp.[129]

Leikauf also addresses issues of authorship that are particularly relevant when we consider blogs, as discussed above, as collaborative and cumulative efforts in the production of a narrative.[130] As with some of Leikauf's websites, some early milblogs (e.g., Buzzell's) were written anonymously, which raises the issue of authenticity in analyzing them as primary sources if the author's identity remains unknown. Fortunately, all of my major milblog sources clarified authorship; they wrote at a time when military authorities would not have tolerated an anonymous blog from deployment. To pay credit to the collaborative effort of blogging, I treat commenters and cohosts as coauthors. Regarding blog posts as "ultimately authored by both blogger and commenter,"[131] I understand them as 'parent items' and will list them in the bibliography under the blogger's name,

126 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 138. Leikauf states that over two hundred websites from his source pool went offline during his research. I faced similar problems with blogs, albeit on a much smaller scale.

127 Leikauf, 138.

128 The Wayback Machine enabled me to work with Buzzell's and other bloggers' posts and comments that were taken offline before and during my research. I also used it to document relevant changes in the layout of one of my primary milblogs and to contextualize them with significant events during the soldier's deployment. However, research using the Wayback Machine is still limited to what other web users saved; it cannot retrieve all deleted content.

129 Research relying on online sources such as websites also has to consider search engine's algorithms and their influence on result ranking, or on customized results based on the researcher's previous search patterns and user profile. Cf. Cadwalladr, "Google, Democracy and the Truth about Internet Search."

130 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 139–40. In Leikauf's particular case, working with a large pool of interrelated websites, the researcher faces challenges in identifying which person contributed which content elements (such as photos, or text segments) to a website, and how to determine, e.g., ownership and copyrights.

131 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 44.

but reference audience comments or text segments written by a cohost in the footnotes as: (Commenter/Cohost Name, in "Post Title") to disambiguate. In cases where vivid discussions ensued over extended periods, inviting numerous comments by the same person(s), I add the comment's date and time stamp in the reference.

Considering these technological, institutional, and sociocultural determinants in the use of milblogs, I have devised a set of selection criteria for my primary sources to suit the purpose and analytic interest of this study. Previous scholars were often interested in the technological specifics and specific user practices of milblogging, its embeddedness in generic and medial traditions, its typologies, and its social factors.[132] My own study understands milblogs as a vehicle to explore the public discourse on war experience and its dominant themes centering on civil-military relations, community, ritual, and emotional stress. Therefore, my selection is more focused on finding detailed manifestations of this discourse and integrating them with my transcultural and historical perspective, rather than analyzing, quantifying, or classifying the diversity and breadth of expressions and authors' social backgrounds within the medium. Consequently, my focus results in a smaller and more homogeneous sample of blogs from which I derive my readings.

First and foremost, my approach requires a few readings of long-term blogs covering an entire tour of deployment and providing a steady sequence of relatively detailed entries in short intervals. It is important to anchor them in the tradition of epistolary firsthand war narratives, such as letters, diaries, or memoirs, for better comparability of "dense" material.[133] Due to my chief interest in civil-military discourse, my sources naturally need a large readership, as well as many comments in order to depict vivid interaction. For that reason, I searched

132 Cf., e.g., Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*; Brænder, *Justifying*; Shapiro and Humphreys, "Exploring Old and New Media"; Chouliaraki, "From War Memoirs to Milblogs"; Estes, "Writing the War"; Mark et al., "Blogs as a Collective War Diary."

133 Brænder, *Justifying*, 100. Future analyses of war experience on social networking sites can draw on early social-media-studies concepts to adapt their methodologies to the brevity of content prevalent in microblogging formats such as Twitter, or integrate visual-studies methodologies for image-centered formats such as Instagram and YouTube. However, the discourse among authors and audience in YouTube comments or Facebook discussion threads would follow similar criteria and could be analyzed in similar fashion as the one in milblogs. Cf. Herwig, "Die 140-Zeichen-Frage: Microblogging, Twitter und die liminoide Verhandlung des Sozialen im Web 2.0."

Milblogging.com's "Top 100" blog list section to reflect popularity and then spot-searched featured blogs, such as winners of the blogging community's annual "Milbloggie" Award. Within this selection, I searched for blogs with frequent comments, which led to critical reflection on comment policies and practices. A blog host site such as Wordpress.com enables its users to determine rules for commenting, e.g., to automatically publish incoming readers' comments, to approve comments manually, to force commenters to identify themselves, to close comments after a specific period, or to disable comments in general. These measures control spam, serve to police inappropriate behavior, or to shield the blogger from any public response if so desired. Hence, my selection relies on blogs that exercise the highest-possible openness toward incoming comments and generate a platform for public discourse and collaborative storytelling and meaning-making.[134] In addition, my analysis takes into account that, unless a blogger explicitly outlines procedures, it remains unclear whether and why particular comments (e.g., criticism of the bloggers' thoughts and opinions) might have been disapproved or edited out.[135] Although not as encompassing as the veterans' website authors discussed in Leikauf's work,[136] bloggers thus retain a degree of control over the discourse and its ritualized proceedings in their editorial roles as blog hosts.

My selection also entails a spatial criterion. With respect to deployment blogs, this study focuses primarily on blogs from Afghanistan (apart from historical contextualization and select examples for particular problems, as with Buzzell's blog). Troop withdrawal from Iraq was already being discussed and the end of US military engagement seemed in sight when I began to work on this project; Afghanistan thus 'promised' a continual replenishment of sources and opportunities for related projects while my research progressed. In addition, much of the early scholarship and media attention to milblogs was centered on Iraq so that my focus on Afghanistan extends the source base in the field. As the readings reveal, this also allows me to scrutinize notions of Afghanistan as the 'forgotten war' in the discourse among bloggers' and commenters.

With these underlying conditions determining my source sample, the readings in chapters Three and Four are based on the complete study of three

134 I, thus, disregarded several blogs with huge audiences that were also frequently cross-referenced in news media, but featured no publicly accessible comment section.

135 I have briefly discussed bloggers' public reflections on dissenting comments before, and include explanations throughout this study when necessary. Usbeck, "Don't Forget," 103.

136 See Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 338–39.

blogs by middle-aged, white, male career soldiers whose (primarily) noncombat positions provided the time and the means to post detailed entries covering their entire deployment regularly, sometimes also their training and homecoming. They are complemented by individual posts from other blogs to illuminate specific aspects of war experience which do not need to consider the full term of these bloggers' deployment. The readings are organized by topic, rather than by sources, and discuss entries from all blogs where they pertain to the question at hand. The first major blog, *Afghanistan Without a Clue*, is authored by Captain Douglas Traversa, an Air Force career officer who spent one year as an embedded trainer (ETT) for the Afghan National Army's logistics department in 2006–07. Traversa is in his mid-forties at the time of writing, and was selected for the post under complicated and unforeseen circumstances. He did not expect to deploy and felt ill-prepared for the assignment—hence the blog's title. Consequently, he directs much of his writing to discussing aspects of training, the challenges of deployment, and collaboration with the Afghan contingent to help future replacements prepare for their tasks.[137] The blog illustrates transcultural communication in intense, detailed debates between Traversa and his Afghan interpreters. It also reflects how US soldiers seek to retain a sense of civilian normalcy during deployment, frequently engaging US popular culture (e.g., films, sports, computer games, television shows, and history).

The second blog, *Afghanistan: My Last Tour*, is authored by Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Rex Temple during his deployment in 2009–10. Temple is also over forty years of age, and his deployment to the Middle East is his fourth and last major assignment before retirement. Temple also serves as an embedded trainer with the Afghan National Army.[138] His blog contributes a significant aspect to this study because, during his deployment, Temple launches an expansive donation drive for school supplies among his readers, distributing items among children during humanitarian missions.[139] The blog vividly reflects the discourse between soldiers and US civilians over the conduct and meaning of the Afghanistan War, using Temple's civic engagement as examples in nation-building. It also illuminates the ambiguities of milblogging as Temple's private engagement increasingly blends in with his military tasks, such as serving as his unit's public affairs official, which is echoed in his writing.

137 Traversa, "Introduction"; E-mail message to author, 23 October 2012.

138 Temple, "The Writer."

139 See the subsection "Winning this War with Education" in Chapter Three for a close reading of how this drive is represented in the blog.

The third blog, *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan*, is written by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Phillips between 2007 and 2010. At a similar age as the previous bloggers, Phillips serves a fifteen-month deployment in 2007–08 and redeploys to Afghanistan in early 2010. He is a surgeon in charge of a field hospital, but also serves as a US liaison officer to other national ISAF contingents. His blog frequently discusses the challenges of nation-building as he describes the lives of Afghan civilians treated in his hospital, as well as the construction of a new hospital building. Yet, his writing is also significant because it addresses emotional struggles during deployment and reintegration, explicating the author's depression and search for a sense of purpose back home which, eventually, leads him to redeploy.[140]

This core source sample necessarily results from my interest in blogs with a large and active audience whose authors are in positions not only to gain war experience, but also to share this experience online regularly, and it is contrasted by more heterogeneous sources regarding gender and ethnicity in the final chapter on homecoming scenarios. None of these bloggers were assigned to primary combat roles, and their tasks required heightened transcultural sensitivity which is reflected in the choice of topics and the authors' perspectives on Afghan culture. It is possible that these perspectives would appear bleaker and darker had they been assigned to combat infantry tasks, resulting in frequent ambushes and repeatedly challenging them to distinguish insurgents from civilian bystanders. However, such tasks would, in turn, probably have inhibited their ability to write. The resulting material also reflects erstwhile gender roles in a war context, that is, apart from some of the complementary individual posts, women appear in nurturing roles as spouses, relatives, civic activists, and interested readers in the comments section. Similarly, the racial composition of the source pool and the final selection stand out, as the selection criteria produced a homogeneously white sample. The racial background of current US firsthand war narratives would likely offer a fascinating research perspective, but it would be beyond the scope of this study to systematically explore or even speculate about plausible interpretations in how far, and why, the ethnic and racial composition of the US armed forces would diverge from that of deployed or veteran writers.[141] Nevertheless, the milblog readings address ethnicity in the white

140 Phillips, "Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan."

141 A 2014 collection on the benefits and challenges of writing instruction for student veterans bemoans the lack of current research about ethnic and racial affiliations in the military regarding "literacy practices, degree attainment, and employment opportunities." Doe and Langstraat, introduction to *Generation Vet: Composition,*

bloggers' perspectives on the Afghan locals with whom they interact, and they reveal the bloggers' reflections on ethnic and ethnocentric subjectivity regarding the war in US public opinion. In this sense, the blogs not only represent public discourse on war experience, but also on race relations and ethnicity.

This study is organized in four major content chapters to investigate the discursive phenomenon around war experience. While it conducts readings of three diverse primary source types and media—activist scholarship and nonfiction in Chapter Two, milblogs in chapters Three and Four, and homecoming scenarios (represented in essay collections, documentary films, and websites) in Chapter Five—they all contribute to the discourse through self-reflective, ritualized narrations of war experience, as well as interactive communication among soldiers, veterans, and civilians about these narratives.

Chapter Two is the stepping stone to understand milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, of negotiating war experience in a ritualized, narrative setting. It combines a descriptive, cultural-anthropological introduction of Indigenous war-related traditions with close readings of activist texts in (military) psychology, nonfiction, news media, and social work, to carve out the functional equivalencies between Indigenous and non-Native traditions of narrating war and, thus, to explain the appeal Indigenous traditions have for non-Native activist discourse on war experience. Ultimately, I argue that the complex cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios only becomes apparent when they are understood from the perspective of these Native war-related traditions, and integrated with observations on activists' transcultural role modeling. The chapter discusses how the focus on war experience and psychological war injury serves to postulate a social crisis in civil-military relations and it explores how academic and social activists operationalize ritual and narrative as major themes in their constructions of communal practices to alleviate this crisis.

Chapter Three investigates ritual as a vehicle to negotiate social cohesion and to promote individual and social therapy regarding war experience. It applies the concept to a first reading of milblogs, having theorized ritual further in the context of anthropology, ritual studies, as well as media and cultural studies. Drawing on the cultural-comparative lens of Indigenous ceremonies, it argues

---

Student Veterans, and the Post-9/11 University, 22. I would add that this research could extend to inquiries into the racial and ethnic composition of academic and community writing courses and groups, as well as online first-person-narrative networks, such as milblogs and social media platforms.

that rituals provide a discursive context to construct and assert collective identity as they enact values, knowledge, and meaning in symbolic communication. Non-Native war-related practices such as milblogs can, thus, be perceived as rituals, rendering milbloggers and civilian commenters as a discourse community engaging in symbolic negotiations of war experience. The cultural significance of Indigenous war-related ceremonies, thus, offers a central methodological instrument for the understanding of milblogs in a similar discursive, albeit different cultural context. The chapter explores this discursive context with reference to US cultural traditions and concepts such as civil religion, particularly to related notions of 'sacrifice' in discourses on war and citizenship. The readings of milblogs in this chapter draw on representations of mourning for war casualties to discuss how symbolic, ceremonial negotiations of death and sacrifice serve to process grief, to construct identity and memory and, explicitly, to maintain civil-military relationships.

Chapter Four asks how the impact of war experience on soldiers' personalities serves to negotiate and reconstruct civil-military relationships. Further delving into readings of milblogs, it outlines the narrative and ritualistic patterns through which bloggers render the process of gaining experience and share their conclusions with their audience, before analyzing the cultural knowledge they create. In addition to reflecting the soldiers' often painful learning process, this analysis of milblog interaction emphasizes the authors' dedication and their audience's encouragement to grasp extreme experiences not only as a burden, but also as an asset worth sharing. Discussions on the meaning of war experience, as the readings illustrate, facilitate building and maintaining relationships within the virtual milblog community and, thus, symbolize the social contract between civilians and the military. In addressing how the blogs reflect their authors' sense of mission beyond their assigned duties, the chapter also foreshadows practices of communal war discourse and reintegration after deployment.

Finally, Chapter Five explores 'homecoming' as a liminal and often protracted process of mental and emotional readjustment. It analyzes the role of narrative and ritual in civic-activist communal practices designed to help veterans reintegrate into civilian life. The chapter takes up the discussion where most milblogs leave a gap. They usually end their narrative with their authors' physical arrival at home, neglecting the veterans' transition process and liminal status. This fifth chapter, therefore, emphasizes the ritualizing role of the returnee's immersion into embodied communal practices. It investigates how social activists raise public awareness and utilize notions of ritual, community, and social therapy to propose reforms in veteran reintegration. The primary sources for this chapter are conceptualized as 'homecoming scenarios,' that is,

as transmedial, heterogeneous, ceremonial scripts about homecoming, designed to foster exchange and to mend relationships among veterans and civilians but also to engage in social-therapeutic practices. The chapter offers close readings of textual representations, such as autobiographical writing, documentary film, and websites, to illustrate how homecoming scenarios interweave diverse media to conduct, document, and promote their civic rituals. Of particular interest is the ritualization of performance practices (e.g., in town hall meetings and theater plays) and the scenarios' explicit cultural reference to performative and ceremonial traditions of negotiating war experience, such as Indigenous rituals or ancient Greek tragedy. Taking their cue from three different primary source types in diverse media formats and genres, the readings in these chapters, thus, elucidate how various forms of ceremonial storytelling embrace narrative and ritual in the discourse on war experience to address the sense of social crisis and to self-consciously propose community-oriented solutions.

2. Narrating War: Activist Discourse and Cultural Comparison

Contemporary America is a secular society that obviously can't just borrow from Indian culture to heal its own psychic wounds. But the spirit of community healing and connection that forms the basis of these ceremonies is one that a modern society might draw on.[1]

The wars of the twenty-first century have rekindled public discourse on war experience that had been pervaded by notions of social crisis since Vietnam. Because, like Vietnam, the new wars could not be concluded quickly and decisively, they forced the US public to revise relationships between civil society and the military. Initially, the discourse was marked by fervent and well-medialized public support for the troops, regardless of controversies over the political justification of the war in Iraq. As the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on and casualties mounted, the debate increasingly revolved around concerns about psychological injuries, physical disabilities, veterans' reintegration struggles, and veterans' suicides. Over time, the media's focus shifted and immediate attention to military operations waned, while activist observers decried a social segregation between a small professional force, largely comprised of consecutive generations of military families in mostly rural areas, and civil society. This social gap presumably safely allows US civilians to ignore the wars as not immediately relevant to their own lives which, ostensibly, compounds veterans' problems.[2] All these various manifestations illustrate how segments of US society reflect on civil-military relationships and call upon civil society to more actively acknowledge the social contract and live up to its responsibilities toward soldiers and veterans. It is this civic-activist environment in which references to Indigenous war-related practices, such as Sebastian Junger's suggestion in the above motto,

1 Junger, *Tribe*, 121.

2 Among others, see Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 4–5, 41–43; Thompson, "The Other 1 %." The following chapters will recur to this issue and describe how some milbloggers echo the sentiment that civil society does not seem to care about the wars and about the soldiers' experience.

emerged in recent years, with protagonists promoting their agenda in academia, therapeutic practice, among veterans, and the general public.

This chapter, therefore, analyzes how activist discourse on war experience operationalizes cultural comparison with Native American war-related traditions. It explores how recourse to Indigenous community-oriented practices serves to promote the communal within the discourse. This emphasis on communality entails the philosophical notions of the civil-military social contract and the corresponding social responsibilities, and implementations of these responsibilities in activist efforts regarding social therapy and social work. This chapter particularly carves out how activist discourse negotiates these communal responsibilities and relationships through self-conscious invocations of narrative and ritual, i.e., it investigates the role of ceremonial storytelling about war experience within the discourse. In this respect, it discusses how non-Native activist transcultural comparison with Indigenous traditions seeks to create communal rituals of narrating war experience in civil society which often explicitly serve social-therapeutic functions.

My discussion of these practices, ultimately, argues that extending these activists' cultural comparison based on ceremonial storytelling to my analysis of the cultural work of milblogs carves out a new field of intercultural knowledge production. My analysis of the functional equivalencies between Indigenous and non-Native activist war-related practices is key to understanding milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, of negotiating war experience and the resulting relationship between members of the military and civil society in a public and ritualized setting. I argue that the complex cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios only becomes apparent when they are perceived from the perspective of these Native war-related traditions, when they are contextualized with the activists' emphasis on communality and on the therapeutic in cultural comparison and role-modeling. In their practices, narrative and ritual become transcultural concepts to create knowledge about war experience and to combine notions of communality with therapy in order to construct solutions for the postulated social crisis.

The chief interest in Indigenous practices among activists lies in working towards social equilibrium through ceremonial negotiations of war experience. My reading highlights that the activists' cultural-comparative thrust is motivated by cultural skepticism (and corresponding exoticism), by anxiety about the state of civil-military relationships and about how the social fabric of US society is reflected in its military. The notion of the social contract, expressed through civil religion, serves as a vehicle in non-Native activist discourse to translate Indigenous cosmology into mainstream society perspectives on the interrelation

of war, social cohesion, national identity, and citizenship. Comparing US society with Indigenous traditions, activists emphasize the role of mutual obligations and pledges for support, attributing quasi-religious qualities to citizenship and civil-military relationships. This chapter, thus, explores how ritual and narrative entail notions of social therapy in these transcultural comparisons and, in doing so, it prepares the analysis of ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Dialoging transcultural comparison in activist discourse with the cultural practices of milblogs and homecoming scenarios discussed in chapters Three and Four reveals that they conduct similar cultural work, serving similar discursive functions and employing similar concepts.

As this study is interested in determining how narrating individual military experience and civilian responses serve a community to symbolically negotiate both the meaning of war for an individual's sense of self and for the group's sense of belonging, it pays particular attention to elements of symbolic communication. The examples below consider tribally specific cultural contexts, but the focus remains on these practices' discursive context—i.e., how narrating war experience conducts cultural work and in how far similar discursive practices might affect similar work in other cultural contexts—which then provides the analytic lens for my discussion of non-Native milblogs and homecoming scenarios. While this approach must necessarily leave some aspects of a deep ethnographic perspective aside, its interest in discursive contexts and cultural work enables cultural comparison and reveals the gist (and the limitations) of non-Native activists' attempts at cultural transfer and their practices of role modeling. The subsections also interface further disciplinary approaches with the cultural-studies thrust of this project. The part on Indigenous traditions draws on texts and concepts in Native American studies (which primarily follow historical, anthropological, and religious-studies approaches). The sections on cultural transfer, non-Native civic activism, and psychology provide an overview of major concepts in veteran studies, in the fields of psychology relevant to military issues, as well as cultural history, narratology, and media studies.

The subsection below applies an anthropological-historical perspective, taking a closer look at Native American military traditions and at scholarship on select tribal and pan-tribal ceremonies. This overview contextualizes non-Native activist discourse on Indigenous traditions and explains how and why civic activism makes notions of narrative and ritual productive for non-Native cultural practice in veterans' affairs. It describes how Indigenous traditions negotiate the effect of war experience on warriors' personalities and how, in turn, communal relationships need to address these changes. The following subsections (as well as Chapter Four) refer to these aspects and discuss how non-Native civil

society addresses war experience, war's impact on soldiers' personality, and civil-military relationships. They investigate how activist discourse seeks to identify transhistorical and transcultural aspects of war experience, postulating universality, especially in conjunction with research on archetypes. This perspective also considers the traditions in which activist discourse is embedded, namely the discussions on national identity and character regarding the American Frontier, modernity, and 'Western' civilization since the late nineteenth century.

The reading sections focus on protagonists in psychology, psychotherapeutic practice, and activism in social therapy and veteran reintegration. They analyze the frequently explicit attempts to reform veteran support and trauma therapy with reference to Indigenous role models. They introduce debates over the depiction of non-Native US soldiers as 'warriors,' and the notion of civil-military relationships as a social contract inherent to group belonging and citizenship. The readings, thus, illuminate the interrelations between public debate and specialist discourse communities, such as psychology and mental health care; I trace these interfaces and address particular elements informing both the specialist and the more general debate, namely the growing role of 'narrative' for specialist and popular notions of healing. These interfaces, once more, highlight the prominence of ceremonial storytelling within the discourse.

Native American Traditions of Warrior Reintegration

> *We Indians are grateful that the United States became such a militaristic country because it has provided us with an acceptable way to continue our warrior ways.*[3]

In the history of Native American cultures, warfare is a prominent feature. It generated elaborate war-related cultural practices and produced innumerable famous warriors and war leaders. The history and historiography of Native American warfare, however, are determined by their colonial context: Popular culture, especially the romanticizing genre of the Western, emphasized war and warriorhood in Euro-American interpretations of Indigenous cultures and shaped national-historical self-perceptions in the United States. The image of the fierce Native American warrior helped both justify and glorify the colonization of the continent. As Cherokee-Creek scholar Tom Holm quips, "[i]f we Natives had been a bunch of pacifists, the American national saga of conquest would

3 Joking remark by an anonymous Ute man in Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 12.

have no great spiritual or symbolic meaning."[4] In this context, the historiography of Indigenous warfare has reflected colonial perspectives, frequently revolving around notions of primitivism and savagery.[5] The discussion of Indigenous war-related traditions below draws on historical-anthropological perspectives from Native American studies since the 1970s because they detail these traditions as practices of sophisticated and complex societies, designed to integrate warfare into a specific cultural cosmos. They do not attempt to replace the image of the primitive brute with that of the noble savage, but highlight that Indigenous war-related cultural practices served (and still serve) to construct social cohesion and communal relationships, and that they reflected historical changes in cultural contact and conflict over time.

Regardless of regional cultural specializations in war-related traditions, many North American Indigenous cultures regarded war as a radical event beyond ordinary human experience and norms of behavior. Some, such as the Tohono O'odham of the Sonoran desert, understood it as a form of chaos, or even as outright insanity.[6] With respect to its extraordinary qualities, Native societies have sought to compartmentalize war and war experience and to separate it from regular peacetime activities in order to prevent the effects of violence from spilling over into, or even dominating ordinary community life. This was usually done by rigidly framing war with preparatory, cleansing, honoring, and/or healing ceremonies to symbolize the twofold crossing of a line between order and chaos, as well as particular social institutions for war activities, such as war priests, war chiefs, and warrior sodalities.[7] War-related ceremonies emphasized that this symbolic separation of—and the warriors' transition between—war and peace was critical for their personality and identity, but also for their entire community: Warriors first needed to be prepared for the chaos of battle and the shock of violence and, upon their return, had to be cleansed, welcomed and reintegrated into a peace-oriented social cosmos. Communities had to prepare themselves for casualties. When the warriors returned from battle, the communities acknowledged their own responsibility for sending them into harm's way, helped the warriors interpret their actions in the context of tribal cosmology and group identity and, on a practical level, finding a place for the returnees to

4 Qtd. in Schmidt, "Indians in the Military." Cf. also Holm, "Strong Hearts: Native Service," 138; Usbeck, "Fighting"; Usbeck, "Selling."

5 Cf. Turney-High, *Primitive War*; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*; LeBlanc, *Constant Battles*.

6 Holm, "Culture," 243.

7 Holm, 243.

contribute their experience for the benefit of the group.[8] The community was responsible for collective meaning-making and for the construction of collective memory regarding war, but also for helping veterans make sense of their individual experience and to employ this experience for their postwar lives. In doing so, both sides generated cultural knowledge and negotiated values and norms by following particular scripts addressing their mutual responsibilities, services, and relationships.

At the closing of the frontier in the 1890s, the era of the 'Indian wars' and intertribal warfare had ended. US-Indian policy exerted pressure on the tribes to assimilate into the white mainstream, that is, to abandon cultural identity and customs. Tribes no longer had immediate opportunities to continue war-related cultural practices, and reservation officials actively suppressed tribal ceremonies.[9] However, as with all wars since the founding of the US, Native American individuals often participated in the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in much larger proportions than other ethnic groups relative to their population numbers.[10] Their contributions to these military campaigns, as the above motto ironically put it, allowed the tribes to "continue [their] warrior ways" because the wars offered opportunities to renew tribal military traditions. This development created a unique relationship between Native Americans and the US military. In the words of Al Carroll whose comprehensive study investigates this relationship's complex impact on both Indigenous and non-Native cultures and perceptions of war, "American Indians used military institutions to preserve, protect, defend, and revive Native cultures, institutions, and spiritual and cultural practices"[11] so that these military traditions are still—or, where they had been dormant during the early twentieth century, once more—practiced today.[12]

---

8 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 85–93; Holm, "Culture," 246; Holm, "PTSD," 84.

9 See Ellis, "We Don't Want Your Rations, We Want This Dance" for a study on Indigenous resistance to the pressure of assimilation during the Reservation era, and how these conflicts led to cultural adaptation and to the secularization of some war-related traditions.

10 See United States. Veterans Administration, "American Indian and Alaska Native Servicemembers and Veterans," especially 4–5.

11 Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 2.

12 Holm published a number of articles and books on the development of Indigenous traditions in correlation with twentieth-century US warfare, e.g., *Strong Hearts*; "PTSD"; "American Indian Warfare." William Meadows contributed extensive accounts on the revival and pan-tribal dissemination of southern Plains warrior sodalities and ceremonies, e.g., *Kiowa*; *Kiowa Military Societies*. The continuation of these traditions has also been addressed in museum exhibitions and popular nonfiction books, cf.

This section is, thus, informed by how Native American societies today follow these traditional scripts of ceremonially separating war and peace. It explores how they perceive the warriors' individual—and often traumatic—experience, how warriors and their communities negotiate its impact on the warriors' personalities, its repercussions on the relationship between warriors/veterans and their communities and, thus, what cultural knowledge this relationship generates. This is relevant because non-Native activist discourse relies on scholarship about Native soldiers of the twentieth century. Tom Holm, for example, analyzed the role of war-related ceremonies for the reintegration and culturally specific mental health care of Native Vietnam veterans and, thus, pioneered the field of Indigenous veteran and war studies.[13] The readings of milblogs and homecoming scenarios in the following chapters draw on notions of community support and relationships in both scholarship and activist discourse to highlight their functional equivalencies with these traditions and to contextualize the cultural work of narrative practices in their specific cultural background.[14]

In this regard, it is critical to bear the role of cosmology in mind in the respective war-related cultural contexts. Most of the activist texts discussed in the sections below acknowledge the cultural specificity of Indigenous traditions. However, their frequently expressed notions of a universality of war experience allow many activists to engage in cultural transfer, that is, to inspect Indigenous war-related traditions for aspects and practices that might serve veteran reintegration and military psychology in non-Native cultural contexts. The following discussion of Native military traditions also correlates with discourses on the relationship between soldiers and civil society and the notion of social equilibrium in renegotiating and affirming the social contract through ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. My discussion of Indigenous military traditions should, thus, be read in relation to abstract and highly symbolic concepts and ideas about war experience, personality, and group identity that invite cultural comparison to equivalent discourses in non-Native US society.

Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*; Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*; Clevenger, *America's First Warriors*.

13 Holm, "PTSD," 83–84.

14 Especially Chapter Four follows the three-step outline to investigate how military psychology interprets the effects of war experience on soldiers' personality and on civil-military relationships; the chapter's readings of milblogs details how bloggers and their (generally) civilian audience debate these aspects, as well.

Individual Experience

Because war is usually understood as an extraordinary event that might cause enormous psychological stress among its participants as well as their social environment, it is not surprising that many Native American cultures attribute considerable symbolic significance to individual warrior experience. This significance results from the need to protect both the warriors from the long-term effects of their experience beyond the threshold between war and peace and to protect their communities from the social and spiritual turmoil resulting from the warriors' violent experience. At the same time, to recognize the warriors' liminality acknowledges the opportunities in addition to the dangers of war experience. Returning warriors are considered to bring back insider knowledge about both order and chaos. Their extreme experiences, in the eyes of their communities, taught them about the fragility of order and human life, and they are now expected to use that knowledge to protect order and life back home. This cognition has often been bought dearly and is frequently fraught with grief, horror, loss, and guilt; Indigenous communities work with veterans to help them transform their experience into memories that, ultimately, allow the individual to contribute his or her experience for the benefit of the community and thus reinstate order and equilibrium within the group. This form of acknowledgment of the warrior's experience and sacrifices, along with "moral and material sustenance,"[15] is often ceremonially expressed by the community's women who, during particular dances, wear their husbands' or sons' warrior insignia or items captured from the enemy to symbolize the absorption of war experience by the community, thereby acknowledging responsibility as well as expressing pride.[16]

The notion of the threshold, thus, gains such symbolic power because it marks the distinction between between life and death as well as between order and chaos, on a personal psychological level, but also in terms of collective identity, social order, and spirituality. While this worldview acknowledges how war experience disrupts an individual warrior's personality development, it also interprets war experience as a contribution to the cultural integrity of the community.[17] As Holm states, Native American cultures are, thus, among the few human societies that "treat [war experience] positively."[18] In contrast, most cultures have come

15 Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 123.

16 Carocci, *Warriors*, 123–24; Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 185–208.

17 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 40, 44–45.

18 Holm, "PTSD," 85. As discussed above, the emphasis on cultural integrity derives from the unique systems of ritualized intertribal warfare in which a constant state of war with traditional enemies served as a controlled outlet of aggression and as a means to

to focus on the clinical and moral aspects of war experience and thus treat it primarily as a burden, enhanced in US discourse by the prevalence of debates about high PTSD and suicide rates since Vietnam which, as some scholars observe, leads many people to victimize all veterans.[19] In conjunction with an increasing public abhorrence of war in late twentieth-century 'Western' societies as a reaction to the excesses of nationalistic militarism during the first half of the century, debates on PTSD since Vietnam often helped construct war experience as pathological per se. In this sense, scholarly perspectives in Native American studies avoid stereotypical readings of warfare at both ends of the scale: By emphasizing that individual war experience, albeit dangerous and extreme, can be an asset to a community if it is negotiated in elaborate culture-specific ceremonies, Holm's and others' works refute the notion of primitivism, savagery, and militaristic machismo in Indigenous cultures, and they also forestall tendencies to pathologize war experience in general.

Pursuing such a balanced cultural approach, studies of Native American warrior traditions explain the impact of war experience on Native veterans' status in tribal societies with the concept of 'age acceleration.' This notion posits that learning about the fragility of life and social order by crossing the threshold between peace and war not only disrupts personality development, but also carries the potential for a maturation process within the individual that might prove beneficial for the community.[20] This is not to suggest that, historically, Native American masculinity could only be expressed through war, or that young men could only gain social status as warriors, nor that warrior roles were exclusively male affairs, but that warfare was regarded as a unique way of maturing and gaining status by acquiring specific experience and outlooks on life under extraordinary circumstances.[21] Young warriors are confronted with death, they witness and inflict death on others at primarily similar young age while encounters with death are ordinarily associated with old age.[22] This extraordinary experience, thus, causes young warriors to "think about, in some cases focus on, mortality."[23] The sudden proximity of death, forcibly becoming aware of one's own mortality, and the corresponding conclusions on the mortality

reassure group identity, rather than as a vehicle for extermination. See Holm, *Strong Hearts,* 38–45.

19 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 10–13.

20 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 7, 40.

21 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 41, 44, 67; Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 208.

22 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 7.

23 Holm, "Culture," 246.

of one's relatives and peers are believed to teach young warriors how to make responsible decisions to protect the integrity of their community. Combat experience "transforms the youthful naive fledgling warrior into a hardened professional, old beyond his or her actual age."[24] As psychologists John P. Wilson and Steven M. Silver argue, warriors thus gain a "new perspective on self and the world" that the home community must help interpret and put into context.[25] The Native veterans' communities often acknowledge this maturation and contextualization by granting them heightened social status and trusting them to employ their experience in new positions within the tribal social structure.

War experience poses a danger to both its bearers and to the communities to which they return; it necessitates cleansing to protect both the veteran and the community. Yet, Holm cites a Winnebago elder to emphasize that ceremonies also signify trust and appreciation of the veterans' experience: "We honor our veterans for their bravery and because by seeing death on the battlefield they truly know the greatness of life."[26] Thus, as Silver and Wilson observe, warriors carry "uniquely acquired wisdom"[27] when they return from beyond the threshold. Describing the traditions of the Cherokee, Holm elucidates the significance of war experience for both warriors and communities: Before the Reservation Era, young Cherokee men were neither involved in vital economic nor social functions within their communities, while women gained status through child-rearing and through their positions in the matrilineal social structure of the communities. Leaving the community to go to war was a traditional way to gain status for Cherokee men, not simply by proving one's commitment to protecting the community, but also by one's willingness to learn from dreadful experiences. Upon their return, the warriors underwent rituals to inform their elders about their exploits who then helped them interpret their experiences in the context of tribal cosmology and culture. The knowledge thus gained gave the returnees heightened social status, promised social rewards, and opened previously inaccessible functions and positions in the tribal social order.[28]

As postcolonial Indigenous scholarly perspectives insist, these traditions were embedded in a system of highly ritualized intertribal warfare that entailed frequent raiding, but rarely decisive battles and wars of extinction, resulting in

24 Holm, "PTSD," 85.
25 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 343.
26 Holm, "PTSD," 85.
27 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 342.
28 Holm, "Culture," 247.

relatively few casualties up until the late nineteenth century. Thus, war did not threaten the existence of tribal communities per se.[29] However, notions of age acceleration through war experience permeate Native North American military traditions regarding Indigenous participation in US wars since the twentieth century. Holm describes practices of maturation through separation from the community among contemporary traditional Cherokees in which not only military service, but also migrant labor and alternating phases of urban and reservation life serve contemporary young men to gain status.[30]

In this context, it is important to regard the ongoing disputes between Indigenous scholarly perspectives on the one hand, and many historians and anthropologists on the other. These disputes concern the degree of ritualization, compartmentalization, and restraint—and, ultimately, mortality—in intertribal warfare, but they also call tribal societies' capability to organize a complex military infrastructure and to engage in decisive battles into question. While Indigenous perspectives criticize notions of "primitive" tribal war as perpetuating the stereotypical imagery of savages, their emphasis on levels of restraint in tribal warfare is sometimes refuted in turn as politically opportunist invocations of the noble savage.[31] To use an example relevant to psychological perspectives on war experience, the idea of age acceleration has been used to portray tribal warfare as a brutish, unrestrained, and primitive affair. Robert Laufer distinguishes between a presumed primarily 'Western' perception that war is "out of the range of normal human experience,"[32] apparently leading nation-states throughout history toward increasing attempts to restrain it, and a vaguely

29 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 27; Dyer, *War*, 6–9.

30 Holm, "Culture," 247. Some activist scholars invoke postcolonial theory in this regard to warn against subscribing to militaristic and, by implication, imperialistic US policies, in order to preserve Native war-related cultural practices. They posit that contemporary tribes should place more emphasis on alternative ways of maturation and age acceleration. In this reading, the US military poses an inherent threat of engendering a colonial attitude among Native soldiers, and it potentially supports American imperialist practices that have victimized Native nations since first contact. To support tribal self-determination and Indigenous self-consciousness, Al Carroll suggests a more central role for tribal police, firefighters, and rescue and health care services in tribal ceremonies because they provide similarly extreme experiences and engender similar community support, but are politically less ambivalent. Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 227–28; cf. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers*.

31 Cf. Holm, "American Indian Warfare," 154–55; Turney-High, *Primitive War*; LeBlanc, *Constant Battles*; Helbling, *Tribale Kriege*; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*.

32 Laufer, "Serial Self," 35.

primordial 'warriorhood' based on masculine identity striving for dominance—both domestically and in intertribal warfare. This reading leads into precarious ideological territory. Laufer implicitly denies the possibility of war trauma in tribal warfare because, in emphasizing the interruption and fragmentation of the self through extraordinary experience, he premises sanctions against violence under normal circumstances in a civilized society. He implies that tribal societies were not peaceful, that tribal wars were anything but restrained, and that tribal warriors grew up in a culture where violence (both intra- and intertribally) was the primary means for men to vie for status. In this reading, 'primitive' warriors could not be traumatized by violence as they supposedly grew up immersed in it. Indigenous scholarly perspectives on tribal traditions such as the concept of age acceleration, thus, not only refute hierarchical ethnocentric thinking, they also appeal to non-Native activist discourse. Showing tribal war-related traditions as viable ways to negotiate the extraordinary psychological and social effects of war experience in a complex society, they seem to invite cultural comparison and notions of universality much more than the clear hierarchical binary relation of 'primitive' versus 'civilized.'

Personality

If war experience means that warriors gain a "new perspective on self and the world,"[33] they have not only acquired experience and wisdom, but their experience might have affected their personality dramatically. Ceremonies for returning warriors, therefore, not only serve to reintegrate them into the social structure but address changes in self-perception, as well. War experience, in that sense, confronts warriors with extraordinary events but, on a more fundamental level, it radically questions the warriors' learned behavior and codes of conduct. The sudden proximity of death uproots the social order to which the primarily young warrior has grown accustomed during childhood and adolescence. Warrior readjustment requires the relearning of and return to these social norms and codes of behavior while, at the same time, coming to terms with the memory of death and chaos.[34] Native American war-related rituals are, thus, supposed to make the transition between war and peace, the twofold crossing of the threshold, less destructive for the individual warrior's sense of self. Integrating the cultural context in their developmental-psychology perspective, Silver and Wilson conclude that these transitional rituals "decondition the intense emotions produced and

33 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 343.
34 Laufer, "Serial Self," 36.

learned in combat. Ritual purification, embedded in cultural meaning, begins a process of transformation in identity and role expectation."[35]

In her study on ceremonial "war talk" among Vietnam veterans of Indigenous cultures on the northern Plains, Theresa O'Neill observes elements of ritual narration that further highlight the significance of personality development through war experience. She differentiates between *iglata*, a "paradigmatically joking"[36] form of Native veteran talk, and *waktoglaka*, which she identifies as critical for readjustment and for overcoming traumatic experience. *Iglata*, connoting "to brag in excess"[37] in the tribal language, is a form of war talk where veterans share stories that are supposed to be funny or to evoke fear. It primarily occurs among peers in the same age group, often in a very informal setting and involving alcohol. However, *iglata* is not relevant to the Native veteran's position in the community, and it does not reveal essential personal information about the veteran. In contrast, *waktoglaka* is performed in a formal setting for an intergenerational audience. The narrator shares intimate and personal insight and, by doing so, negotiates how his battle experience affected his personality and relationship with the community in interaction with the audience. O'Neill argues that in *waktoglaka*, as opposed to *iglata*, narrators speak "in the voice of mature(d) men."[38] O'Neill discusses male veterans; her study does not provide insight into whether and how social roles and relationships of female warriors would change, both in tribal tradition and in participation in the contemporary, gender-integrated US military. Obviously, gender roles and tribal traditions of masculinity are influential factors here, but a deep discussion of Indigenous masculinity would be beyond the scope of this study, especially since my focus on the discourse about war experience emphasizes the relationship and frictions between soldiers, veterans, and civilians, rather than along gender lines. However, Native American studies have increasingly begun to analyze notions and roles of masculinity in historical and contemporary Indigenous cultures, and their discussion is bound to interweave with new military history and veteran studies in the future.[39]

---

35 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 343.

36 O'Neill, "Coming Home," 454.

37 O'Neill, 450.

38 O'Neill, 455.

39 In German American studies, Matthias Voigt is currently working on a dissertation thesis at Frankfurt University to explore, among others, the interrelations of masculinity and warrior-veteran status among Native activists of the Red Power era

The voice change between the two forms of war talk observed by O'Neill, as well as the shift from a joking to a formal, ceremonial setting demonstrate the veterans' maturation—not simply because they have gleaned wisdom from extreme experience, but because they acknowledge the change in self-perception by taking new responsibilities for the group:

> As formal, tragic, and sacred talk, waktoglaka shifts the identity of the speaker from young man to elder, thereby transforming war experience from an experience that is limited in its significance to a given time and place to an experience that encompasses what it means to be a "real" Indian and what it means to be a "real" man.[40]

From a 'Western' perspective, we could read *waktoglaka* as a form of individual purification by way of catharsis, similar to the multitude of war novels and autobiographies that portray war experience as a rite of passage, or in the tradition of the bildungsroman. However, O'Neill warns that employing the concepts of Western psychology one-to-one to discuss Indigenous cultural practices such as *iglata* and *waktoglaka* precludes a comprehension of their cultural significance. *Waktoglaka* represents a specific form of cultural knowledge about warriorhood and veteran reintegration, it is a specific cultural practice engendered through such knowledge, and it circulates meaning and values in a culturally specific way and in relation to tribal cosmology, that is, the cultural understanding how tangible and intangible powers are linked to warfare and to aspects of war experience.[41] O'Neill argues that the individual's ability to come to terms with war experience depends less on purification through merely formal narration than on the negotiation of a new relationship between the individual veteran and the community within their cultural context, and this negotiation is expressed through ritual scripts in the discursive context of war-related ceremonies.[42] To a large extent, then, the question about the impact of war experience on a warrior's personality depends on social support and on that warrior's relationships to his or her community.

Warriorhood as a Relationship

Holm makes an intriguing observation in his study of culture-specific readjustment and stress reduction among Native veterans after the Vietnam War,

---

(WT *Native American Warrior Heroes during the Red Power Era: Between Indigenous Traditions and American Nationalism, 1969–1978*). Cf. also McKegney, *Masculindians*.

40 O'Neill, "Coming Home," 456.

41 Cf. Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 37–45, 84–93.

42 O'Neill "Coming Home," 442–43.

emphasizing a significant distinction between warriorhood and soldiering. Traditional Native American warriorhood was "not as much a social role as it was a relationship with the rest of the community."[43] 'Western' soldiers, he argues, are primarily seen as servants of the state, i.e., as "functionaries of a larger, very impersonal institution rather than as contributors to the contiguous community,"[44] and their relationship to their country, their branch of service, or their unit gains importance over relationships to family and community while they fulfill their role. In this respect, Native American Vietnam veterans undergoing war-related ceremonies had better chances to cope with, or even recover from war stress than their fellow non-Native soldiers. In addition to their role as US soldiers, they were also warriors, that is, many entertained and ceremonially renewed their relationship with their community after their return.[45] This notion of a perpetual relationship is further enhanced by the social structure of many Native tribes. It defines and regulates social status and interaction through kinship relations which often serve as substitute for blood relations and, thus, facilitates mutual responsibilities and closer bonds between individuals who are not immediate family. Returning warriors, therefore, have obligations and can expect support from both their families, clans, and wider community based on these close-knit social relationships. In this view, non-Native soldiering primarily constitutes a social role that, for many Vietnam veterans, could not bridge the gap or ease the transition between war and peace, nor prevent a general feeling of abandonment and alienation from society, even if the veteran's relations to his immediate family could be restored after his return.[46]

In addition, the function of soldiering in most 'Western' societies is defined as protecting the state against external, and in some cases also domestic, enemies by use of force. With only a few exceptions, such as first aid during natural catastrophes, other functions and other forms of protection are reserved

43 Holm, "PTSD," 84.

44 Holm, 84.

45 Holm, "PTSD," 84. However, studies report the prevalence of PTSD and other war-related psychological problems among Indigenous veterans in higher proportions than among white veterans. United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, "Mental Health," 84–85.

46 Holm refers to the seminal study *Legacies of Vietnam* to muse on similarities in social support and social absorption through a veteran's community between Native American tribes and non-Native rural communities to further emphasize the role of relationships between veterans and their community for stress reduction. Holm, "Culture," 248; Egendorf, *Legacies of Vietnam*, 278–79.

for different public and nongovernment institutions, such as police, firefighters, diplomats, as well as health care and social services. Traditional Native American notions of warriors protecting their communities are attuned to the close-knit, kinship-oriented social structure of the tribes. They go beyond the narrow confines of soldiering, and encompass many of the additional functions outlined above. The following oral-history account of a frontier-era Navajo warrior is worth citing at length as it elucidates the broad perception of warriorhood as a dedication to community service and, consequently, the relationships between warriors and their communities:

> In Navajo, a warrior means someone who can get through the snowstorm when no one else can. In Navajo, a warrior is the one that doesn't get the flu when everyone else does—the only one walking around, making a fire for the sick, giving them medicine, feeding them food, making them strong to fight the flu. In Navajo, a warrior is the one who can use words so everyone knows they are part of the same family. In Navajo, a warrior says what is in the people's hearts. Talks about what the land means to them. Brings them together to fight for it.[47]

This statement entails many of Holm's elements of distinguishing the roles of soldiers from the relationships of warriors. It makes clear that warriorhood encompasses more responsibilities toward the community than the mere protective use of force. Although, like the often macho and hypermasculine depictions of soldiers in 'Western' cultural expressions, it emphasizes strength and prowess, this notion of warriorhood portrays the warrior first as a selfless caregiver, provider, orator, diplomat, mediator, motivator, and, only in the last instance, as a fighter.

If we thus perceive warriorhood as a relationship, the cultural significance of ceremonies to welcome, cleanse, and honor returning veterans becomes clearer as their reciprocal function gains more emphasis. The community guides veterans back into the realm of order and peace and cleanses them to protect both veterans and civilians from the taint of violence. Community members thank the veterans for their sacrifice and their willingness to share their hard-earned experience. Yet, the ceremonies also mark the warriors' commitment to culturally specific customs and practices by honoring their relationships. Their participation in both war and ceremonies, therefore, constitutes a promise to protect and uphold cultural identity.[48] Both sides demonstrate their faithfulness to the social contract, the reciprocal commitment to protection and support.[49]

---

47 Bighorse, *Bighorse the Warrior*, xxiv.

48 Holm, "Culture," 246; O'Neill, "Coming Home," 457.

49 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 342.

The relationships between warriors and their communities become evident in diverse facets of historical and contemporary Native community life. Military societies and sodalities have institutionalized reciprocal support for centuries and—despite organizational, functional, and formal adaptations since the late nineteenth century—provide opportunities for warriors to serve in both military, spiritual, economic, and social roles today. This interdependence and interweaving of functions enhances "tribal integration," as William Meadows has it.[50] Unlike 'Western' customs of gift exchange, the honored veterans (or their families) in many tribal ceremonies do not receive gifts but rather hand out presents to those who facilitated their accomplishments (or to anyone in need), which demonstrates a change in social status of the honored, shows the sense of mutual obligations and gratitude and, at the same time, strengthens relationships through reciprocal economic and social support.[51] The fraternity and bonds among war veterans and warriors are a common theme, particularly among Native military societies, and they tie in with the emphasis on relationships between warriors and their communities. The current initiative Project Moccasin adapted an old war-related tradition. While relatives used to prepare moccasins and protective, sacred items for warriors departing to war in the past, this role is now filled by Native veterans in this project, fulfilling their obligation to share their experience and to serve as role models and mentors.[52]

To illustrate warrior relationships in a final current example, consider the website and accompanying DVD "Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing," published by the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) within the US Department of Health and Human Services.[53] The guide to both the website and the DVD offers examples of writing but also "facilitation questions" designed both to help Indigenous veterans record stories, accustom relatives to using these narratives to understand their own veterans' experience, and to provide cues and discussion prompts for educators. These questions vividly discuss relationships between veterans, their families and communities.[54] They encourage contributors to consider and describe changes in their own relationships during the transition from civilian to Native soldier to veteran, and they advise readers/viewers to look for these descriptions in the narratives in which they are about to

50 Meadows, *Kiowa*, 10.

51 Viola, *Warriors in Uniform*, 195.

52 Viola, *Warriors in Uniform,* 201, 205.

53 "Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing."

54 The website speaks of "roles," rather than relationships, but the context makes clear that it refers to functions/roles within relationships.

engage and to contextualize them with the cultural or tribal background of the veteran storyteller.

These observations on Native American practices illustrate that many tribal societies have found ways to reintegrate returning warriors and to employ the veterans' experience in new, often leading positions and functions within the tribal structure. The integration of the veterans' war experience in the diplomatic and judiciary tasks of tribal peace chiefs is a case in point.[55] Similarly, charity, healing and education, often institutionalized in military societies, point to a utilization of war experience for civilian tasks.[56]

These discussions of war experience, personality, and relationships in Native American warrior traditions and current practices elucidate common responses to war experience expressed in a specific cultural context. The following section explores recent engagement with Native military traditions in non-Native discourse on war experience and discusses how current US military psychology and civic activists seek to incorporate these elements of warrior tradition into their own social, community-oriented approaches to veteran reintegration and therapy, promoting Indigenous traditions as role models for non-Native practice. These examples of transcultural references make apparent the anxiety and cultural pessimism within discourses about civil-military relationships. They also set the stage to explain the philosophical ideas behind civic engagement in milblogs' comment sections and in homecoming scenarios.

Role Modeling Indigenous Traditions in Psychology and Veterans' Affairs

Lessons from the Chiefs of Old.[57]

As Sebastian Junger states, the study of Indigenous war-related traditions and ceremonies reveals to many non-Native observers a "spirit of community healing and connection" that they find lacking in their own culture's practices of veteran reintegration and negotiation of war experience. Joining a host of similar

55 Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 38, 40.

56 See Wilson, "Culture-Specific Pathways to Healing and Transformation for War Veterans Suffering PTSD," 56–57, for a description of the Lakota Red Feather ceremony during which wounded veterans pledge to serve as caregivers for elders, while the community promises financial support in exchange. This ceremony constitutes the veterans' spiritual healing by transforming them into "generative healers" themselves.

57 Chapter title in Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 175.

activist statements, he concludes that modern society "might draw on"[58] these Indigenous traditions to reform and improve their own. Similarly, psychologist and mythologist Edward Tick dedicates an entire chapter to Indigenous war-related traditions in *Warrior's Return* to promote a philosophy of ceremonial, community-oriented veteran reintegration in US society anchored around warriorhood and mutual aid. These observations and suggestions are informed by a number of interrelated concepts and ideas, such as historical traditions of cultural pessimism in the US, notions of universality regarding war experience, and the influence of mythological and literary archetypes on the discourse about war.

The extensive reflections on Indigenous warrior traditions in non-Native discourse express traditional anxieties in American culture that link negotiations of modernity with colonization and national identity. After the official closing of the frontier in 1890, Frederick Jackson Turner's influential Frontier Theory argued that the American environment had forced European settlers to go back to the most 'primitive' states of humankind, to use the most primitive tools for subsistence, and that it took away their more refined European traditions. In short, "the wilderness master[ed] the colonist."[59] Similarly, Theodore Roosevelt praised "barbarian virtues"[60] which the American character should retain and defend against the influence of what Matthew Frye Jacobson ironically calls "effete overcivilization."[61] According to Jacobson, US self-perception around 1900 suffered from the "deep irony"[62] that civilization seemed the driver of American culture and colonialist expansion. Civilization was portrayed as an ideal to which Euro-Americans, the Natives whose land they colonized, as well as newly arriving immigrants should strive. Yet, this very ideal seemed to carry within it the root of decay and decadence, manifest in the material wealth, amenities, and splendor of industrialized cities. In effect, US society sought to eradicate Native Americans' 'primitivism' at the same time that it praised primitive traits as cornerstones of American character.

This irony becomes apparent where Euro-Americans promoted Native American culture as role models for self-improvement throughout history. One case seems particularly relevant for this discussion of transcultural role modeling

58 Junger, *Tribe*, 121.
59 Turner, *Frontier and Section*, 39.
60 Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 51.
61 Jacobson, 3.
62 Jacobson, 3.

in the context of war experience and community relationships. John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, had become fascinated with Native American culture while developing a philosophy of social reform based on communality in the early 1900s.[63] He praised Native people's "personality-forming institutions, even now unweakened, which had survived repeated and immense historical shocks, and which were going right on in the productions of states of mind, attitudes of mind, earth-loyalties and human loyalties, amid a context of beauty which suffused all the life of the group."[64] Collier is referring to the history of oppression and forced assimilation to which the US subjected Native nations, and through which their cultural focus on communal ways of living persisted. He adds: "[I]t might be that only the Indians, among the peoples of this hemisphere at least, were still the possessors and users of the fundamental secret of human life—the secret of building great personality through the instrumentality of social institutions."[65] In his emphasis on the power of social institutions, a parallel with the major thrust in contemporary community-oriented discourse on war experience and trauma becomes evident: In times of crisis, soul-searching in US society seems to resort to notions of primordial communality, unveiling the "irony" in national character, i.e., the perpetual rivalry between rugged individualism and self-reliance on the one hand, and communality, collaboration, and mutual aid on the other.

This recurrent cultural pessimism has resurfaced in the discourse on war experience since Vietnam, where activists engage in transcultural role modeling to learn from Native American traditions how "great personality" can be built from war experience "through the instrumentality of social institutions," to use Collier's words. Since Vietnam, these activist references also seem to have become more frequent and embedded in academic debates as Native American studies have become a popular field in the humanities since the 1980s, and because studies on Native American veterans have boosted research on cultural, social, and ethnic aspects of military psychology and veteran studies since Vietnam.[66]

---

63 Prucha, foreword to *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* by Kenneth Philp.

64 Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 126.

65 Collier, 126.

66 For examples of sociological and psychological research among Indigenous (veteran) communities, see, among others, Bassett, Buchwald, and Manson, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Symptoms among American Indians and Alaska Natives"; United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, "Mental Health"; Gurley et al., "Comparative Use of Biomedical Services"; Brooks et al., "Reaching Rural Communities with Culturally Appropriate Care"; Dillard et al., "Conduct

These activist voices have also become more self-conscious and critical of colonial perspectives in their comparative efforts.

In addition, many cross-cultural references emerge from the notion that the experience of war and violence has universal attributes which presumably resurface across cultures and across time. This is due in part to 'Western' traditions of evolutionary thinking, the presumption that human development is linear, that societies evolved from a common human 'origin point' and that, consequently, an 'advanced' society need only study 'primitive' cultures in order to learn more about its own forgotten origins, among them, its members' psychological response to war. Bolstering this notion of universality is the widespread acknowledgment of the hero archetype in academic and literary discussions of war and war narratives. These works frequently integrate Joseph Campbell's comparative mythology and his promotion of the archetypal hero figure into their arguments.[67]

In the context of ceremonial storytelling, the hero archetype gains even more importance. Not only does it occur in so many narratives well-known and well-received among proponents of community-oriented veteran reintegration, but the stories are also assertive metanarratives. They feature a hero going off to war, surviving ordeals, and returning as a matured man who literally 'lived to tell the tale.' In doing so, they prescribe the relationships between soldiers/warriors and their communities. To complete the journey, the hero cannot simply return, he must also tell the tale, and his community needs to be there to hear and bear witness to it. Many Native American ceremonies or elements of ceremonies, such as the formal war talk described by O'Neill, or the mimed representation of a Plains warrior's experience in counting 'coup,' symbolically negotiate the relationship between a warrior and his or her community through narrative.[68] Non-Native

---

Disorder"; Gross, "Assisting"; Hobbs, "VA and IHS"; Kaufmann et al., "Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR) Training Program"; Kramer et al., "Do Correlates of Dual Use"; Noe et al., "Providing Culturally Competent Services"; Reifel et al., "American Indian Veterans' Views about Their Choices in Health Care"; Scurfield, "Healing the Warrior"; Ross, *American Indians at Risk*.

67 Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*; Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 18; Tick, *Warrior's Return*, xvi.

68 In counting 'coup' on an enemy in battle, a warrior gains prestige and spiritual power by touching the enemy with his bare hands or with a special sacred item, or by taking the enemy's weapons away from him in close combat. Upon return from battle, the deed is discussed, evaluated and affirmed by fellow warriors, sometimes by the whole community, in a ceremony. When the event is reenacted in a ceremonial dance or narrated in ceremonial war talk, the acquired spiritual power is enhanced further, as

observers of transhistorical and transcultural aspects of war experience see a node to transfer presumably universal knowledge from the Indigenous cultural context to their own in order to restore what they perceive as a broken relationship between soldiers/veterans and civil society.[69] Telling stories of war to a responsive and affirmative civilian audience in a public setting is seen as a cornerstone for a number of community-oriented approaches in social work, psychology, and psychotherapy. Yet, even disregarding these explicit civic activist engagements, the chapters below argue that these Indigenous cultural practices also open an avenue to understand other forms of 'war talk' in non-Native US society. When we read milblogs and homecoming scenarios as forms of ceremonial storytelling, it will become clear that both they and the Indigenous ceremonies employ the same discursive context, conducting cultural work in their respective cultural contexts and cosmologies. They constitute community and (re)assert the relationship between civilians and those who wage war on behalf of civil society.

Civil-Military Relationships and Non-Native 'Warriors'

The following discussion selects particular aspects of cultural comparison to carve out how Indigenous traditions inform non-Native civic activism and how they sharpen the analytic lens on non-Native narrative practices in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. First, it explores how the reference to Native practices among civic activists serves to portray civil-military relationships as part of the

---

is the enemy's humiliation. In ceremonies following twentieth-century wars, Native American soldiers and their communities counted coup with items captured from enemy soldiers, such as flags, weapons, or pieces of military equipment. Carocci, *Warriors of the Plains*, 93–94; Holm, "Strong Hearts: Native Service," 135; Holm, "PTSD," 84; Medicine Crow and Viola, *Counting Coup*, 107–17; Laubin and Laubin, *Indian Dances of North America*, 168.

69 To cite but a few examples, the activist self-help website Healing Combat Trauma lists philosophical, war-related quotes from historical Native American leaders, as well as texts on Indigenous traditions of communal trauma treatment. Casura, "Native Americans." The University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies has been instrumental in developing trauma treatment options using virtual reality in recent years. Their project "Warriors' Journey is one such activity that engages participants in stories to emphasize and reinforce common ideals of honorable warriors throughout history." Morie, Haynes, and Chance, "Warriors' Journey," 17. The project employs warrior stories from North America and around the world to help clients find access to cathartic narrative approaches to healing.

social contract and how activists, thus, demand that civil society take a more active role in veteran reintegration to reciprocate for the veterans' contributions. Second, it returns to the notion of warriorhood and discusses in how far the frequent and public depiction of US soldiers and veterans as 'warriors' affects non-Native discourse on civil-military relationships and war experience.

Unsurprisingly, the realization that Native Americans' cleansing, honoring and healing ceremonies work toward social reintegration and that they helped many Native Vietnam veterans cope with their experiences makes the cultural and therapeutic functions of such ceremonies all the more attractive to proponents of social psychology and communality in veterans' affairs. Activists focus on the cyclic sequence of narrating war experience and bearing witness as much as on ritualizing the narration. The cultural practices observed among Native Americans are, thus, not simply perceived as alternative treatments to individual psychological conditions, they seem to offer a blueprint for how a community could negotiate the relationship between its civilians and members of its military, and how assertions of this relationship serve to constitute the community's cultural integrity and cohesion. It is, therefore, critical to note the proponents' emphasis on spirituality in this cultural comparison as well as their interest in the rituality of these practices.

To cite a few brief examples of how contemporary activist psychologists utilize cultural comparison and criticism in their observations on civil-military relationships, consider Edward Tick's work. He has integrated Indigenous war-related philosophy into his therapeutic practice with US veterans. In his latest book on communal approaches to veteran reintegration, he employs an analogy to Plains tribes' traditions from the frontier era. Tribal warriors, he argues, were posted as lookouts in a line of defense along the periphery of the villages to protect their families in the center. After battle, the warriors returned to the village, that is, to the center:

> Now the civilians gave thanks, honor and duty through tending their returning warriors. They became a circle of welcome. They witnessed their stories, grieved or celebrated with them, attended to their necessary purification and healing rituals. In mainstream society the survivor becomes a misunderstood outcast. In indigenous healing 'the man of the dreary edge becomes the center.'[70]

Tick highlights the alternating sequence of taking up positions at the periphery and the center, of being protector and protected in Plains societies, that symbolize the mutual responsibilities of their members. He also criticizes "mainstream

70 Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 131.

society" for expecting soldiers to go to the periphery—i.e., to deploy to a war zone to protect US interests—without acknowledging its own responsibility to form a welcoming, protective, and healing circle around the veterans to aid their return. Obviously, his comparative perspective regards Indigenous social institutions for war as preferable to current US society's practices, and he suggests that reforms in veteran reintegration should emulate the Indigenous role model to reestablish social equilibrium and to build "great personalities" among veterans, as John Collier mused decades earlier.

Tick further elaborates on his concept of alternating protective circles as he employs the gist of his Indigenous example to criticize contemporary US society. Bemoaning that the professional, all-volunteer US army no longer represents a cross-section of society, which allows most civilians to ignore military matters, he notes:

> The proper relationship and implicit social contract between warriors and civilians are interchangeable concentric circles of protection and caring. Society is responsible for warriors' well-being in preparation before, support during, and tending after conflict. This includes how any society uses its warriors, takes responsibility for their actions during [war] and provides for their well-being afterward.[71]

Tick adds examples from tribal societies around the world to state that the increasing social segregation of the US military from the rest of society obscures civil society's responsibilities toward its "warriors," which further isolates them and, as he cautions, precariously increases veterans' stress levels upon return from war. He cites a Pend d'Orielle Vietnam veteran to make his point: "We must not only help the veterans but also educate nonveterans on their responsibilities if they let our leaders continue to start wars."[72] He expands his observations on culture-specific practices to the universal level by arguing that the sequence of reciprocal protection and support in these practices constitutes a "healthy social order."[73] Turning his attention to Vietnam, to the high numbers of psychological injuries among US soldiers, and, implicitly, to the general social, psychological, and political outline of civil-military relationships, Tick understands war-related psychological injury as much as a matter of battle experience as of homecoming. US society's failure to form protective circles around its returning veterans increases their moral and emotional predicament, he posits:

71 Tick, 120.
72 qtd. in Tick, 121.
73 Tick, 131.

> In contrast, countless Americans who served in our politically and economically motivated wars feel broken because they betrayed the warrior's purpose and code, because the war was not unquestionably and purely defensive, because society and the government refused their tending tasks and judged and blamed veterans for their psychological problems afterward, and because both government and citizenry refuted collective responsibility. For all these reasons American troops experience that only they and not their country went to war.[74]

Derived from Tick's examples of Native traditions, US civil society and its social contract are clearly at the center of his conclusions about PTSD and his approach to therapy. Tick is particularly adamant in his emphasis on how moral aspects of political (or economic) decisions over war affect soldiers' psyches. Not all proponents of Indigenous role models for veteran reintegration follow this argumentation, even when they agree with his statements on civil society's responsibility for veterans within the social contract. However, many other activists voice similar concerns. Raymond Scurfield identifies a set of intertwined relationships relevant to veterans' mental health, one of them being veterans' relationships with representatives of their own government and civil society whose visible, sincere, and trustworthy commitment to veterans' well-being is necessary for social reintegration.[75] His ideas were inspired by a project on veteran reintegration through the engagement of elders, women, and priests among the Native tribes on the Plateau.[76]

John Becknell takes up Tick's work at healing retreats for veterans, likening these retreats to the symbolic role reversal and mutual responsibilities in Native practice. Like Tick and Junger, he identifies the tradition of overt individualism in US society as part of the problem: "We have come to view individual rights as more important than communal responsibilities […] Veterans return to a society that is so self-preoccupied it has no room to recognize that the suffering that follows them home from war is a social suffering that needs a communal bearing and holding, not just therapy and medication."[77] From his perspective on these therapeutic retreats, once more, Indigenous war-related practices of

74 Tick, 136.

75 Scurfield, "Innovative Healing Approaches." The other relationships relevant to his approach are ties among fellow veterans, and between veterans and nonveteran members of their social environments, such as family, friends, neighbors, or members of the same religion.

76 Scurfield, 5–7.

77 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 96.

mutual aid and communal responsibility appear preferable to the practices of modern US society.

Becknell also refers to Indigenous notions of age acceleration and the social absorption of war experience when he criticizes the blanket pathologizing of veterans in US society. Rather than as victims, he argues, returning veterans should be considered "bearers of gifts" from whom US civil society could learn.[78] Proponents of community-based veteran support thus pursue ways through which civil society explicitly, symbolically, and ceremonially fulfills the "sacred covenant" by telling veterans "we are responsible for you, for what you did and for the consequences."[79] Having participated as a civilian volunteer witness in Tick's experimental retreats for traumatized veterans, Becknell envisions a ceremonial welcome message presented to returning veterans. Its symbolism resembles the functions and cultural work of Native American cleansing and honoring ceremonies:

> We've been waiting for you. Welcome home. We needed your military service and are deeply grateful for your sacrifice. Now, we need what you bring home—your warriorhood, your triumphs and losses, your wounds of body and soul, your heroism, your doubts, your haunting fears, your nightmares, your disillusionment, your boredom, your burdens—we need it all. You have been where we will never go. Those of us who did not go need to hear you and be with you.[80]

Once more, this proposed welcoming ritual transfers Indigenous notions of mutual responsibility, as much as it promises veterans new social status, earned by hardships endured on behalf of society. In addressing society's "need" for what veterans "bring home," this message also introduces the notion of continued service beyond battle, that is, it adopts Indigenous conceptualizations of warriorhood as a relationship that goes beyond the social role of professional soldiering, as discussed above.

Similar calls to action (if less focused on spirituality) abound in public discourse. On a Marines' support website, one Colonel Tim Hanifen, recently returned from Iraq, suggested in 2003 that "understanding, affirmation, and support" were "gifts" society could give to veterans that would "last them a

78 Becknell, 54–61.

79 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 237.

80 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 2. In the same vein, Sebastian Junger concludes from his examples of Native American ceremonial traditions that US society should construct their own civic ceremonies for veterans where they share their experience with civilians in order to "finally return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought." Junger, *Tribe*, 123.

lifetime."[81] Psychologist Jonathan Shay, in turn, proposes "religious and cultural therapies"[82] because they reaffirm belonging and group (e.g., cultural, national) identity. He suggests that these therapies be comprised of rituals for entire communities to publicly assert group cohesion and to symbolize veterans' reentrance into their community:

> I believe this is something to be done jointly by people from all our religions, from the arts, from the mental health professions, and from the ranks of combat veterans—not from the government. What I have in mind is a communal ritual with religious force that recognizes that everyone who has shed blood, no matter how blamelessly, is in need of purification […] The community as a whole, which sent these young people to train in the profession of arms and to use those arms, is no less in need of purification. Such rituals must be communal with the returning veterans, not something done to or for them before they return to civilian life.[83]

Tick, Becknell, Hanifen, Shay and other scholars, veterans, and activists who address the social issue of war-related stress and PTSD, thus, propose specific ceremonies, and they envision and formulate corresponding attitudes, symbols, and codes of conduct. Yet, their ideas about reintegration and trauma do not merely prescribe and call for specific community behavior. Their texts and scripts on ceremonialism and community support have meta-ritualistic features because they perform sample ceremonies to teach their audiences how civil society should approach its returning veterans. By showcasing such behavior and values, they themselves are part of the current civic engagement efforts to nurture and maintain relationships between soldiers, veterans, and civil society, and thus confront reintegration and trauma from a social and communal perspective by way of a ritual script. Hence, these messages entail many of the aspects discussed in this chapter so far. If Native American (or ancient 'Western') military traditions of ceremonially resuming community relationships after war were to provide role models for US veteran reintegration, civilians can be expected to assume responsibility for sending soldiers to war and to communicate to returning veterans that their experience will be acknowledged and their (possibly traumatic) memories soothed, that they will not be left alone during readjustment, and that their experience will serve to further support the community in a mutual process of cultural as well as cognitive meaning-making.

81 Hanifen, "Three Gifts You Can Give Returning Veterans."
82 Shay, *Odysseus*, 152.
83 Shay, 245.

However, any attempts at such transcultural role modeling run the risk of overlooking critical contextual differences. Recall that Holm distinguishes between the relationships of warriors and the social roles of soldiers. Because texts in military psychology and veterans' affairs frequently portray US soldiers as 'warriors,' their use of the term requires more detailed scrutiny at this point. It seems logical that, if many protagonists in the discourse on war experience and veterans subscribe to the notion of universality and to the archetype of the warrior hero, they also find striking similarities between US soldiers' and veterans' experience and that of tribal or even ancient mythical warriors and heroes. From this perspective, the term 'warrior' places a contemporary US veteran in a universal masculine tradition that is apparently as old as humanity. The veterans and soldiers thus depicted not only acquire a certain sense of 'coolness,' their connection to this tradition suggests that there must be time-honored and effective solutions to the problems associated with their ancient profession.

Yet, to many critical observers, the unqualified use of 'warrior' in the modern US military context signifies machismo and militarism as it seems to subscribe to the image of the savage: it links masculinity with ferocity and physical superiority. In this context, using the term with reference to non-Native soldiers and veterans once more reveals an ethnocentric understanding of tribal societies as 'primitive.' It perceives tribal warriors as overtly masculine savages whose gender role and social status is supposedly anchored in physical strength, virility, and violence. These notions resemble the alleged praise of 'positive' tribal features in some sports mascots featuring Native Americans—from this perspective, too, praise for 'warrior' traditions in US society can be interpreted as a veiled celebration and reinstatement of the national myth. It is the notion that Euro-American strength and cleverness overcame the fierce Indigenous warriors for the conquest of the West, and, by calling the soldiers (or athletes) 'warriors,' proponents might, in fact, appropriate the image of Indigenous ferocity to construct and uphold their own colonialist national myths.[84]

These ethnocentric perspectives might also serve to oppose the use of 'warrior' for US soldiers and veterans. Consider the following US veteran's blog post: The author argues that the frequent reference to presumably primitive, tribal, and ancient societies (he includes the popular reference to Spartans and Romans here) diminishes the achievements, discipline, and professional skills of modern US soldiers.[85] Similarly, an article in *Military Review* explicitly distinguishes

84 See the discussion in Schmidt, "Indians in the Military," especially Holm's contribution on mascots.

85 pptsapper, "Stop Calling Us Warriors."

between 'soldier' and 'warrior,' constructing a hierarchy: "Historically, the name warrior has connoted an advocate of war, one not only skilled but also bloody-minded and primitive."[86] The author depicts warriors as undisciplined and selfish, emphasizing that soldiers know their function and role in a state's war machinery and do not succumb to blood lust in battle, whereby "[m]arketing a warrior mentality sends the wrong messages."[87] Clearly, this perspective, in referring to historical mythology and literature about ancient wars, ascribes primitive traits to warrior culture and, thus, refuses to acknowledge the term 'warrior' as a useful concept for contemporary professional US soldiering.

However, activists with a penchant for Indigenous role models might propose a perspective that does not construct hierarchical primitive-civilized binary oppositions, but emphasizes the community relationships of warriors as critical attributes. Their thrust would argue that warriorhood and modern US soldiering should not be understood in such distinctive terms of community relationships versus social roles, as Holm has it. Their approach, bringing in cultural criticism once more, allows a US soldier to be seen as a 'warrior' within the social contract. In the ritualized and highly spiritual context where civil-military relationships are understood as a "sacred covenant,"[88] this 'warrior' would not so much appear as an anonymous functionary of the state, but as a community servant embedded in the spiritual fabric of that community.[89]

This perspective becomes obvious in Tick's use of the term which explicitly looks to Native American war-related traditions and philosophy when he traces the idea of the US 'warrior' back to the warrior archetype.[90] His explanation incorporates warriorhood as a set of community relationships, especially where he draws on a definition attributed to Sitting Bull: "Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another life. The warrior is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those

86 Fromm, "Warriors, the Army Ethos, and the Sacred Trust of Soldiers," 20.

87 Fromm, 23. Cf. also the discussion about warrior imagery in Gomez, "The Ethics of the Marine Corps Urination Case."

88 Scurfield, "Innovative Approaches," 5; cf. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 40; Zacchea, "Veteran's Advocacy: Social Justice and Healing through Activism," 37.

89 The degree of immediacy and interactivity in milblogs explored below will also quickly dissolve the notions of anonymity and reveal an atmosphere of familiarity among bloggers and their audience, albeit not in a formalized structure of (substitute) kinship relations as evident in Native American warrior traditions.

90 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 178–84.

who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity."[91] Tick emphasizes a devotion to causes that are greater than self-interest or personal relationships—once more, a perspective on transcending the individual[92]—he highlights the warrior's service to the community which entails "guiding, protecting, and passing on information and wisdom," and he hints at how this wisdom is to be employed: "Having confronted death, a warrior knows how precious and fragile life is and does not abuse or profane it."[93] He stresses that (Indigenous) warrior training and guidance include a highly personal sense of interrelationships with society; warriors are made aware that their own survival matters to community elders and that their experience is critical to cultural preservation.[94] Determining how modern US soldiering apparently abandoned this archetypal warrior function, he criticizes the loss of community interaction in US mainstream society, i.e., the soldiers' guidance from and advice for elders. To him, today's soldiers are not trained to be warriors but "to behave as part of a mass machine of destruction."[95] This depiction reveals the challenges of discussing archetypes of the human psyche in the context of war—it necessarily ignores political aspects and the common practice of warfare which evoke numerous contradictory historical examples. Regardless of underlying political and social systems, the dehumanization of the enemy is often a standard procedure in warfare which breeds hatred and is frequently the cause for atrocities. It is in this context of dehumanization that public discourse frequently activates notions of soldiers as primitive savages who go on an avenging rampage against the enemy's wickedness.[96] To argue that the military-industrial complex and aggressive foreign policy have turned US soldiers away from an ideal of clean warfare implies that there had once been an original state in which US soldiers did embody the (nurturing and ethical) warrior archetype. However, in the context of civil-military relationships, Tick's argument resembles Holm's notion that soldiers today primarily fulfill social roles, while warriors are tied to their communities in complex, reciprocal relationships, and it makes apparent the community-oriented thrust of Tick's comparative approach.

In his latest book, Tick draws conclusions from this philosophy to propose reforms in US veterans' affairs. He explains how tribal "medicine chiefs"

91 Qtd. in Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 128.
92 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 5.
93 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 177.
94 Tick, 178–79.
95 Tick, 182.
96 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 53; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 243.

provide "warrior medicine" to combatants, that is, they serve as spiritual and moral counselors and guides.[97] He infers that US military chaplains should take on similar roles, providing "warrior medicine" for the "preparation, protection, and restoration of warrior's souls," to introduce soldiers to the notion of universality in war experience, and to the worldwide traditions of coming to terms with such experience. Basically, these chaplains would serve as ceremonial leaders in soldiers' spiritual initiation processes.[98] Tick cites a chaplain who, before deploying to Afghanistan, had learned from and been blessed by Lakota spiritual elders: "This ritual helped me develop my own self-understanding and establish my role and identity as a warrior medicine chief, which was not nurtured or developed at seminary or the Army Chaplain School. Grounded in this identity, I provided restorative and transformational ministry to my soldiers throughout the deployment cycle."[99] From his analogy of the subsequent and reciprocal circles of protection in Plains societies, Tick identifies warriorhood for US soldiers by invoking the social contract: "During threat, warriors encircle and protect the rest of us. When they return, it is our responsibility to encircle and protect and tend them. Instead, today, our wounded and veterans are shuffled out of view and their care left to experts or agencies that are understaffed and ill-equipped to respond," concluding that, in establishing communal war-related practices modeled after those of tribal societies "[w]e would help heal not just our veterans but our entire society. Wandering and wounded warriors need a tribe waiting to receive and heal them. If we are that tribe, they will come home to us. Healing our veterans heals us all."[100] His view on veteran reintegration, thus, harks back to Junger's praise of the mutual aid and reciprocity in tribal societies. Clearly, envisioned through this lens, the idealized non-Native warrior would resemble a community servant in a reciprocal relationship more than a professional soldier who simply does his or her job.

Tick bemoans that US society does not provide its "legions of veterans" and "uninitiated men" with elders to offer them guidance.[101] In this context, Becknell refers to psychologist Robert J. Lifton's notion of the "socialized warrior" who, unlike the archetypal "hero warrior," is trained to kill and avoid being killed, "but in the end his specific acts of killing and dying are not transcendent in a way that

97 Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 177.
98 Tick, 189.
99 Qtd. in Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 190. The text does not specify if this chaplain is Native or Euro-American.
100 Tick, "What Is a Warrior."
101 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 184.

provides a new vision of existence; rather these acts are revered in themselves, and in the service of group aggrandizement."[102] In order to "create mature elders" and to reconnect the decision-making about, objectives of, and learning from war, Tick proposes that American society should restore the warrior archetype through "an amalgamation of traditional wisdom and practices coupled with the insights of modern depth psychology and the social sciences."[103] Regardless of the political justification of a war, he argues, a society should be aware that, by sending soldiers out to do the killing on its behalf it must be held responsible and actively contribute to prepare soldiers before leaving and to reintegrate the veterans and help them live with the consequences of killing upon their return.

While the term 'warrior' in publications on veterans' affairs often does not contextualize such cultural-philosophical considerations and simply denotes any person adept at and experienced in combat, others load it with religious connotations, albeit not related to tribal traditions.[104] Charles Moskos, musing about the repercussions of transforming the military from the draft system to an all-volunteer army in the 1970s, does not use the term 'warrior' but expresses concern that a mere understanding of soldiering as an "occupation" rather than a "calling" would make soldiers abandon notions of self-sacrifice and role dedication.[105] His concern derives from the philosophical tradition of the American citizen soldier who was bound to sacrifice himself for the republic as part of the social contract. The draft for the Civil War and some of the twentieth-century wars rested on the idea of sacrificing one's individual liberties (and ultimately, one's life) for the nation.[106] Anthony King interprets the American sense of modern warriorhood in a nation-specific religious context with an increasing global emphasis on soldierly professionalism. While the American "warrior ethos" emphasizes "preparedness," manifest in physical, intellectual, as well as mental and emotional resilience which is shared by other national forces,[107] King

102 Qtd. in Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 48–49; Lifton, *Home from the War*, 29.

103 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 184.

104 See Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, xxii; Grossman and Christensen, *On Combat*, xix. In the official Soldier's Creed of the US Army, the interchangeability of the terms is manifest in the first two lines: "I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior and a member of a team." "Soldier's Creed—Army Values." This is also why proponents of a hierarchical distinction between the terms criticize its interchangeable use. Cf. Fromm, "Warriors."

105 Moskos, "The All-Volunteer Military: Calling, Profession, or Occupation," 2.

106 Cf. Monnet, "War and National Renewal"; Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*.

107 King, *The Combat Soldier*, 330.

detects an additional, uniquely American element that resembles Moskos's notion of the "calling":

> [T]he professional US military is generally infused with a religiosity which is both unusual in comparison with its allies and provides officers with a shared culture. This religiosity is closely related to the US concept of duty, honour, and national mission to create a warrior ethos by which the American military as an institution understands itself. Many serving personnel actively see themselves not only as fulfilling their civic obligations but that those commitments are divinely inspired.[108]

This apparent religiosity and sense of crusadership is a recurring motif in American military history, expressing a belief in the universality of US war objectives (e.g., the protection of democratic values) that was traditionally used to rally the nation behind the flag but also to justify a war internationally.[109] While these 'Western' notions of warriorhood usually do not define a 'warrior' in the Indigenous sense of mutual obligations for protection, service, and support in a close-knit kinship system, they invoke the concept of 'civil religion,' that is, a quasi-religious attitude toward national institutions that transcends the individual and engenders collective identity through individuals' (blood) sacrifice in the name of the group.[110] In both proposing a sacrificial attitude and exerting this attitude as part of military culture, officers as described by King engage in the meta-ritualistic performance of values and knowledges that they deem as ideal in their cultural context.[111]

---

108 King, 427.

109 Moon, *Confines of Concept*, 75; Snow and Drew, *From Lexington to Desert Storm and Beyond*, 11–13.

110 Cf. Brænder, *Justifying*; Monnet, "War and National Renewal"; Haberski, *God and War*; Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*. Civil religion is discussed at length in the next chapter to explore how milblogs can be understood as rituals of negotiating war experience. Regarding the concept of 'warrior,' but also of the social context of war experience and psychological injury in general, quite a few texts address spiritualism as an avenue for meaning-making. Cf. Dugal, "Affirming the Soldier's Spirit Through Intentional Dialogue"; Adsit, *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual*; Fr. Stephen, "A New Tribe, Babylon Diaries Reader."

111 See also Haldén and Jackson, *Transforming Warriors*, 2, for analyses of the "metaphysical aspects of war." This collection was published while the present study was being prepared for print and could thus not be analyzed in detail. However, its reference to Scandinavian warrior traditions (such as the berserker) employs a similar cultural-comparative approach as this study, and it suggests universal elements of war experience when it looks into traditions of ritualized transformation between civilians and 'warriors.'

Apart from these philosophical considerations of how Native American traditions and imagery influence civic activism in veterans' affairs, activist psychologists and psychotherapists have begun to incorporate elements of these traditions into conventional therapeutic practice for veterans. This development originates in part from a desire and from tribal demands to improve mental health care for the Native American population and from a realization that traditional Indigenous, culturally specific approaches to mental health might complement conventional medicine.[112] However, the studies on the effect of traditional therapies, along with an increased interest in the ethnography of these Indigenous practices among medical researchers, also served as springboards to investigate in how far such methods might serve non-Native populations and improve trauma therapy and veterans' mental health care in general. I introduce a few select approaches and proponents here to illustrate their pronounced interest in the psychological processes of meaning-making through narrative and community support, and to discuss how their activism impacts mental health care for veterans in general.

John P. Wilson and Steven M. Silver were among the early proponents of alternative therapies who took cues from Indigenous practices. In a 1988 essay, they argue that the relatively young field of mental health care had so far not considered spirituality as a serious factor because it was dependent on quantifiable, reliable, and repeatable results, which spirituality was considered too intangible to provide. However, they posit that spirituality should be considered a relevant criterion because of the psychological processes involved in ritual, and because of the holistic worldview prevalent among traditional societies—if a particular segment of the population believes that body, mind, and spirit are inseparably interrelated, mental health care for this group could not unveil the core of a person's emotional problems unless it also considered possible spiritual aspects.[113] In addition, and especially regarding practices such as the sweat lodge ceremony,

112 In the wake of long-term studies on the psychological effects of war among various ethnic groups of Vietnam veterans in the 1980s and 1990s, the US Public Health Service proposed better, culturally sensitive care for the respective communities and client populations. Since then, clinical research has produced a significant number of studies on how traditional and conventional approaches can support one another to provide more balanced and client-centered care. Cf. United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, "Mental Health"; Kramer et al., "Do Correlates of Dual Use"; Hobbs, "VA and IHS"; Gurley et al., "Comparative Use of Biomedical Services."

113 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 339–40.

the authors identify transcultural therapeutic dimensions that transcend specific cultural cosmology and could be employed for adapted PTSD treatments, of which the promotion of self-disclosure in a situation of close physical and emotional bonding is particularly significant for this study.[114] They conclude:

> [A]lthough it is undoubtedly the case that the ceremony is more powerful in terms of its symbolic and culturally specific meaning to Native Americans, it is our belief that it has a core psychological process that is universal in its effects. Although we do not wish to diminish the spiritual aspects of this ritual to Native Americans, it is believed that controlled scientific studies would demonstrate the efficacy of this ritual as a therapeutic tool for the treatment of PTSD.[115]

Since these early explorations, Wilson and his colleagues have argued that this "core psychological process" should enable a set of "cross-cultural rituals,"[116] of which many revolve around cathartic disclosure and community building. Especially Wilson's emphasis on narrative should be considered here:

> Narrative, the story, the history of experience is the other key theme. Aboriginal people have a strong narrative tradition and their stories and healing are accepted intertwining processes. Narrative therapy has been seen as a valuable framework, by Aboriginal people in Australia and incorporated as a model for psychotherapy and counselling; narrative is a strong component of many 'healing' programmes dealing with the distress experienced by those of the 'Stolen Generations'. Furthermore the 'story' of experience, of concerns, of feelings, of distress is the core of all clinical history taking and thus familiar to good clinicians.[117]

Since mental health professionals see the sharing of experience as the core of their diagnostic work, it is no coincidence that Wilson and others found the therapeutic work and the construction of group cohesion through public narrative in Indigenous ceremonies particularly appealing. Wilson points out repeatedly that societies throughout history have developed healing rituals tailored to their respective cultural contexts, and that research and therapy should identify these rituals' cross-cultural elements to apply these elements in therapy within one's own cultural contexts. He lists a number of purpose-oriented practices that might be designed as cross-cultural rituals, such as rituals of purification (e.g., sweat lodge ceremonies), recognition ceremonies to honor survivors (e.g.,

114 Silver and Wilson, 347.
115 Silver and Wilson, 351.
116 Wilson, "Culture-Specific Pathways to Healing and Transformation for War Veterans Suffering PTSD," 48.
117 Wilson and Tang, *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, 353.

Memorial Day), homecomings and reunions, or rituals of "unfinished business" to confront traumatized veterans with their memories and to reach closure.[118]

During the last several decades, psychologists and psychotherapists have developed a variety of such community-oriented therapeutic methods anchored around the notion of ritual and cathartic narrative. Many of them seek to define and integrate universal elements from culture-specific practices. They all emphasize the necessity to integrate friends and families into the therapeutic setup, they create formal settings and situations explicitly as 'rituals,' and they frequently rely on an exchange of sharing experience and bearing witness to generate moments of social absorption. One text reports on innovative PTSD therapy at a medical center, arguing that "[c]eremonies compartmentalize the review of the trauma, provide symbolic enactments of transformation of previously shattered relationships, and reestablish connections among family and with society in general […] Ritual and ceremony are highly efficient vehicles for accessing and containing intense emotions evoked by traumatic experience."[119] This approach seeks to learn from Indigenous war-related ceremonies, to create ritualized, symbolic situations of homecoming (e.g., veterans meet their relatives during a hike), releasing of burdens (e.g., burning problems and memories symbolized by material items in a ceremonial fire), or transformation (e.g., veterans plant trees to signify rebirth and the beginning of a new phase in their lives).[120]

However, it is critical to note that the authors are careful to maintain cultural distinctiveness in their application of cross-cultural elements and to consider the limits of spirituality in a therapeutic setting. They warn that other cultures' rituals generally

> do not match the cultural perspective of most Vietnam veterans. The effectiveness of these rituals is presumably at least partly determined by their embeddedness in the warrior's culture, family, and friendship network […] Using a ceremony, however elegant, out of context of the veteran's family and society is questionable practice. The need for Vietnam veterans to return to and be fully integrated by American society requires ceremonies designed within a more secular context.[121]

The practitioners in this example emphasize the importance of cultural context for the success of therapy. While they, like Wilson, recognize the value of

118 Wilson, "Culture-Specific Pathways," 48.
119 Johnson et al., "The Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 283.
120 Johnson et al., 283–84.
121 Johnson et al., 284.

war-related rituals for Native American warriors and communities, they are aware that therapy for non-Native veterans requires building a therapeutic setting with which the clients feel familiar. After all, they are supposed to 'come home' and to reintegrate into the 'normalcy' of their social civilian environments. Staying too close to the Indigenous origins of the rituals might make the therapy too exotic to be comfortable for some non-Native clients, hence the reference to a "more secular context." This consideration, of course, is geared towards the non-Native veteran clients' cultural perspective and does not address the issue of cultural appropriation that would immediately emerge as a concern if the Native American perspective of such a cross-cultural transfer was regarded. The final chapter returns to this issue in more detail as it explores a homecoming scenario for an ethnically mixed group of veterans in which Native American ritual elements are taken out of context and used by the non-Native ceremonial leader, creating a crisis for the Native veterans in the group but also seemingly making some non-Native veterans uncomfortable with the unfamiliar cultural context of the setting.

Psychological research and therapeutic practice, however, frequently address the issue of appropriation in cross-cultural therapy. Indigenous scholar Lawrence Gross proposes ecumenical memorial services and communal rituals, urging Native American religious leaders and scholars to help non-Native civil society and caregivers develop war-related rituals based on the Indigenous model, yet geared toward the cultural expectations and contexts of non-Native mainstream society.[122] Gerald Mohatt shares conclusions from his own medical practice working with traditional healers in stating that cultural appropriation occurs as soon as non-Native actors employ Indigenous knowledge and materials "for their own ends."[123] He adds that: "to get beyond the level of appropriation, we had to become part of an exchange process and become peers in sharing, to become learners and teachers."[124] In this spirit of mutual learning, a number of publications and academic networks have recently begun to integrate Indigenous knowledge and epistemology into psychology and therapeutic practice. The cross-cultural virtues of practices such as the sweat lodge ceremony

122 Gross, "Assisting," 384–85, 401; Gross, "Native American." Note also how carefully Gross emphasizes the gaps in his own initiation to Anishinaabe ceremonial practices, how they restrict his capability to conduct tribal healing ceremonies and guide his work toward developing ceremonies for non-Native veterans in a respectful manner. Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways*, 1.

123 Mohatt and Eagle Elk, *The Price of a Gift*, 186.

124 Mohatt and Eagle Elk, 186.

feature prominently once more.[125] In addition, the protagonists are concerned with the interaction between traditional and conventional medicine (to benefit both Indigenous and non-Native populations) as well as with ethical issues.[126] To provide another example of cross-cultural therapy for veterans initiated by Native protagonists, the Yakama nation of Washington State established a healing camp for Indigenous veterans in the 1990s. The project has explicitly invited Veterans Administration and non-Native medical personnel to raise awareness for culturally specific problems among Native veterans in the VA system, but, because interest in the project grew over the years, it has also included healing retreats for both Indigenous and non-Native veterans, based on the experience of and conducted by Indigenous traditional healers.[127]

As these above observations and examples have illustrated, public discourse on war experience and trauma since Vietnam in US society was accompanied by an increasing interest in psychology and veterans affairs. It caused both the field of psychology and civic activists in veterans affairs to venture into disciplines such as cultural anthropology and religion to expand their perspectives on veteran reintegration and trauma and to include social and community-centered approaches in their agendas, models, and activities. The realization that Native American cultures have developed efficient traditions of veteran reintegration not only helped health care providers include traditional medicine to improve care for Indigenous communities. Scholars in psychology and Native American studies, but also civic activists from both ethnic groups have come forward to promote community-oriented ceremonies and therapies for non-Native veterans, to benefit from Indigenous experience. However, this phenomenon is also interrelated with another, parallel development: Psychology and the field of veteran studies have increasingly become invested with the notions of the narrative. The following subchapter thus complements the discussion on the social aspects of war experience and therapy by exploring how psychology and psychiatry have incorporated narrative into their work and, thus, how notions of sharing experience and storytelling have gained ground in the field.

---

125 Smith, "The Sweat Lodge as Psychotherapy. Congruence between Traditional and Modern Healing."

126 Moodley and West, *Integrating Traditional Healing Practices Into Counseling and Psychotherapy*; Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, "Indigenizing Psychology Symposium. Indigenous Education Network (IEN)."

127 Flores, *Camp Chaparral Native Americans Show VA Caregivers How to Deal with PTSD*; "Camp Chaparral Welcome Home."

Narrative in Psychology and Mental Health Care

People tell stories and share their experience with other people. Listening, acknowledging, and responding to these narratives sets in motion processes of meaning-making among the participants; their communication through and about narrative transmits and negotiates knowledge, values and norms, that is, it conducts cultural work and constructs identity. Yet narrative has not become a relevant focus of interest in psychology for its communal and cultural properties alone. The mere act of formulating one's experience into a narrative already helps an individual to process and order his or her memories. Psychology has, thus, sought to employ both the communal and the cognitive aspects of narrative for its work. At the start of treatment, therapists seek to identify the nature and roots of a client's emotional distress through verbalization; many therapeutic approaches rely on extensive communication between therapist and client that aim toward meaning-making. During the 1990s, the role of narrative in expressing and learning to negotiate memories and the corresponding emotions became a significant research interest in the field. This is in part owing to the 'Narrative Turn' that, since the 1970s, has impacted and reshaped epistemological paradigms not only in literary theory, but also in cultural studies, history, the social sciences and, increasingly, psychology and psychiatry. Psychologists interested in "posttraumatic growth" argue that a structuralist and formalist perspective on narratives in psychology might prove the link between social support and recovery from trauma.[128] In addition, the understanding in postclassical narratology that narratives are vehicles for world-making serves psychologists to help clients contextualize emotional memories with their identity and their social environments.[129]

The following subsection argues that the influence of narrative on psychology helps understand how notions of ceremonial storytelling permeate the discourse of war experience because psychology and its recent approaches

128 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 90; cf. Neimeyer, "Re-Storying Loss. Fostering Growth in the Post-Traumatic Narrative." As Bradley Lewis has it in his proposal to open his field further to narratological questions and methodologies, the "narrative ferment" serves not only to reorient and reevaluate psychiatry itself, but also vis-a-vis other disciplines in academia as it offers a "deeper reflection about the way psychiatry makes meaning and constructs its models." Lewis, "Taking a Narrative Turn in Psychiatry," 23.

129 Alber and Fludernik, "Introduction," 5–6; Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 9; Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 61; cf. Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making."

and perspectives feature so prominently in the discourse. I will address a few select aspects of the influence of narrative on psychology and psychiatry for two reasons: First, they further elucidate interrelations with arguments in promoting social perspectives on war experience, such as the popularity of the community-oriented Indigenous ceremonies described above, particularly where approaches seek to integrate rituality into the therapeutic process. Second, psychological research has produced a number of studies on how talking or writing about emotional distress enhances an individual's cognitive processing of such distressing memories. These works and their therapeutic solutions illustrate the awareness about these concepts in the public, and they further explain how notions of the therapeutic influence the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios. That is, they serve to explore how the analytic lens of Indigenous war-related ceremonies reveals that many participants understand these cultural practices as informal and implicitly social-therapeutic settings, which underscores their cultural and social functions.

Their recent focus on narrative affects mental health research and therapy in its broad applications. Frequently, studies interested in constructions of meaning through disclosure in therapy combine their research thrust with considerations about ritual, that is, they assume a sense and the active participation of community to share in the meaning-making process and to help clients (re)construct their selves in relation to a particular group identity and relationships with their group.[130] Research and therapeutic approaches integrate narrative and mental health care in the field of ritual theater and creative therapy,[131] in palliative care[132] and, of course, in veterans' mental health care. Because narrative exploration is so tied to meaning constructions, it is no surprise that civic activism in veterans' affairs is also keen on the issue and eager to integrate scholarship from various fields for social work.

Conventional and widely applied therapies for trauma and PTSD already involve narrative elements. Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment (CBT) and variants of exposure therapy all require the verbalization, sequencing, and contextualization of memories and emotions via extended communication between therapists and clients, and they aim to construct a coherent 'narrative' integrating the

130 The notion of meaning-making through ritual recurs in the detailed readings of milblogs in the following chapter.

131 Cf. Schrader, *Ritual Theatre*. The final chapter on homecoming scenarios will return to theater when it explores social activists' projects of veteran reintegration.

132 Cf. Romanoff and Thompson, "Meaning Construction in Palliative Care."

clients' memories into their selves.[133] However, these conventional methods face criticism in the context of war trauma treatment: They are bound to the definitions and diagnostic parameters in the various editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (*DSM*), which are still being controversially debated. Some scholars argue that these definitions and parameters are too vague to grasp and pinpoint all aspects of war-related stress and trauma. In addition, statistics suggest that these treatments are not available to, nor useful for all veterans, and only about half of the conventional treatment programs begun by US veterans are both completed *and* deemed successful.[134] In contrast, alternative approaches frequently face resistance among scholars because they are not determined by *DSM* procedures and guided by *DSM* diagnostic protocols, and because treatment has not yet produced much reliable empirical clinical data; their claims to success have in large part been based on positive feedback from clients and their relatives, with empirical results to be expected only in the coming years.[135] Still, the recent dissemination of studies about alternative and community-oriented treatments to war stress and trauma suggests a much greater interest in them in the public and reflects their popularity among clients and their relatives.

Charles Hoge served as a therapist but also administered mental health care programs for veterans of the post-9/11 wars. In his self-help book for veterans, he outlines conventional trauma therapies but also promotes alternative and easy-to-use stress regulation methods (e.g., meditation) to support veterans' readjustment processes upon return from deployment. He dedicates an entire chapter to the role of memory negotiation through narrative. While he lists prominent reasons why veterans tend to be wary of disclosure (e.g., apprehension that civilians will not comprehend or be appalled by their experience, or anxiety about triggering uncontrollable emotions[136]) he refers to the notion of universal

133 Among others, narratology discusses the situatedness, sequentiality, experientiality, perspectivization, self-reflexivity, and the embedding of cultural values and norms as relevant attributes of narratives for (social) psychology. Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 8–14.

134 Scurfield, "Innovative Approaches," 1–2.

135 Scurfield, 2–4.

136 The military culture of hypermasculinity, of enduring adversity and hardship without complaint, also contributes to this wariness. Admitting emotional distress, to many soldiers and veterans, would damage a well-honed image, be it that of the imperturbable masculine 'warrior' or of the resilient professional soldier. This culture of silence is also reflected in milblogger Colby Buzzell's comments: He feared his fellow soldiers might suspect he was gay if they learned that he kept a diary. Buzzell, *My War*, 124, 138.

warrior traditions in stating that telling war stories has always been a central part of veterans' rituals and that "narration is essential for making a successful transition home."[137] Narrating experiences, Hoge emphasizes, connects emotions to particular events, and, when narrators learn about similar (even if not war-related) experiences from their audience in response, they realize that they are not alone and that others share and can relate to their emotions. Most important, however, is the way narrating for an audience helps negotiate emotions:

> In order to even acknowledge our deepest feelings, we need to know that there is someone who cares and who's willing to listen without judgment as we struggle to express ourselves. This is the power of narration, and the reason why ministers, rabbis, and therapists will always be able to make a living. There is something very healing in being able to put our experiences, thoughts, emotions, and feelings into words.[138]

It is striking that Hoge invokes religious leaders and therapists in the same breath. Some proponents of narrative therapy argue along similar lines as they explore the psychological mechanics of therapeutic disclosure: "Translating important psychological events into words is uniquely human. Therapists and religious leaders have known this intuitively for generations."[139] This perspective, thus, integrates meaning-making and the construction of identity with community relationships, spirituality, and mental health. Individual war experience, to these proponents, ultimately carries social significance, and making sense of it requires social responses and group efforts. The interpretation of this meaning—for the bearer of war experience as much as for his or her social environment—cannot be restricted to therapists alone. Again, meaning-making (and healing) are portrayed as social, communal responsibilities.

Among the alternative pathways to war experience and trauma extending beyond cognitive and neurological perspectives, social approaches seek to include peer bonding among veterans and support from their families and communities. One of the most prominent proponents of such approaches is Jonathan Shay. He argues that "recovery happens only in community" and that the one-on-one interaction between client and therapist does not constitute a community, yet.[140] Communal healing requires members of the veterans' social environment to bear witness to their narration and to express acknowledgment and support. Unsurprisingly, a recent anthology of essays on alternative approaches to war

137 Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, 116.
138 Hoge, 117.
139 Pennebaker, "Writing About Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process," 165.
140 Shay, *Odysseus*, 4.

trauma presents various related community-oriented and narrative-driven therapies and projects and frequently refers to proponents of (ceremonial) narratives such as Jonathan Shay, Edward Tick, or Ron Capps.[141]

Psychology has borrowed from narratological literary studies as much as literary and cultural studies have profited from traumatology in recent decades. Jonathan Shay pioneered this expansion of interest within the mental health care professions by relating aspects of war trauma that he encountered in his therapeutic practice to ancient Greek literature, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, since the late 1980s.[142] In a similar vein, British psychologist Nigel C. Hunt addresses war narratives in his exploratory book *Memory, War, and Trauma*. He argues that, since people construct memory influenced by the social and cultural contexts of events that they experience, these social and cultural contexts should rate as influencing criteria in trauma studies, as well: "No matter what the Zeitgeist says […] in the end we depend on culture and we depend on each other. These are essential to psychological health. This is why social support consistently comes out as being the most important factor concerning how people deal with stress and difficulties in their lives."[143] He adds that narratives convey these contexts. Consequently, "[i]f we are to understand the nature of war, and the impact it has on people, then we must examine other approaches through, for example, literature, history, and the media."[144] His main argument for an interdisciplinary perspective on (traumatic) war experience and memory is that, while the focus on narrative reveals self and identity construction within an individual's social and cultural context, psychology contributes empirical data on "fundamental underlying universals regarding memory, the stress and fear response and other variables which also determine the response to traumatic experiences such as war."[145] He refers to a model developed by his team which

141 Scurfield and Platoni, *Healing War Trauma*. The phenomenon is also evident in the prevalence of veteran writing programs at universities, e.g., "Fallout. In the Aftermath of War"; "Collateral"; "Military Experience and the Arts," and programs organized by social workers and civic activists. Many invoke the Indigenous practice of ceremonial storytelling or the universal hero archetype in their reference to the warrior ethos, e.g., Morie, Haynes, and Chance, "Warriors' Journey"; "Warrior Writers."

142 Shay, "Trials." The final chapter details his work and discusses his influence on psychology and civic activism, especially regarding Greek tragedy with samples of modern, therapeutic theater projects.

143 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 3.

144 Hunt, 3.

145 Hunt, 6.

analyzes semi-structured interviews with veterans for narrative content (about the role of social support for reintegration and healing) and form (e.g., subjective truths, interpretations, emotions, integration, purpose, meaning).[146]

Hunt seeks to benefit from hermeneutic and structuralist traditions of analyzing (war) narratives and their cultural and social contexts, but his approach seems to struggle with the constraints of interdisciplinary research. Having to rely on quantifiable data, his project resorts to content analysis, opening itself up to criticism from the humanities and social sciences. His work does not fully realize the potential of narratology—and postclassical narratology would open up more avenues for interdisciplinary work as they extend beyond structuralist and formalist perspectives and take in social and cultural contexts that would be relevant for war-trauma therapy. In addition, his approach is criticized for ignoring methods that would boost his interest in the social and cultural construction of memory, such as ethnography and oral history.[147] Other critics bemoan his method's neglect of stringent empiricism.[148] These apparently contradictory critiques illustrate the conundrum of interdisciplinary research in general, and of alternative therapies to war trauma in particular. In embracing the strengths of approaches beyond his disciplinary home turf, Hunt runs the risk of watering down his own strengths as much as failing to fully operationalize the ones that he introduces to his discipline (or safeguarding against their weaknesses). Generally, however, Hunt's study shows the productivity of interfacing psychology with narratology.

The following observations on the emerging field of narrative therapy similarly interface these perspectives and add to the previous discussion of social and community-oriented approaches in military psychology and veterans' affairs. It has been established that narratives in mental health care require an active and responsive audience, but the mere construction of narratives based on critical experience such as war already helps order and integrate memories. This is especially significant for a perspective on milblogs. Their cultural work emerges through the interaction between authors and audience, but, as the readings in the following chapters illustrate, authors and audience also recognize a therapeutic potential in their practice largely deriving from the authors' ability to put

146 Hunt, 128–29. See also Burnell, Hunt, and Coleman, "Using"; Burnell, Hunt, and Coleman, "Developing," for a detailed overview of their interviews and narrative analysis.

147 Jessee, review of *Memory, War, and Trauma*.

148 Ashbaugh and Brunet, review of *Memory, War, and Trauma*.

their memories into words, to release them in the various public forums of new and social media, and to initiate conversation about these memories. This does not mean that milbloggers are traumatized or that they all intentionally blog to process troubling emotions. The observations on narrative therapy and narrative in psychology discussed here simply contextualize the process of ordering memories and experience in narrative construction, both for individual writers and for the joint, communal narrative construction in forums and blog comments. As the chapters below reveal, bloggers frequently experience this process as therapeutic and as a boost for their general mental well-being during deployment, regardless of their motivations to write. This attention to the therapeutic, then, should also be contextualized with the growing emphasis on narrative therapy in the discourse on war experience as it further helps explain the appeal of ceremonial storytelling.

Proponents of narrative therapy explore the role of narrative for meaning-making in emotionally distressing situations. They discuss two major theories about this role: first, that an individual's inability to disclose memories of critical events inhibits psychological functioning and mental well-being and, second, that "writing helps people reorganize thoughts and feelings"[149] about these events, eventually giving them a greater sense of control over their memories, making experience manageable, and "facilitat[ing] a sense of resolution" that allows troubling memories to be forgotten.[150] In a series of studies in which subjects were asked to write about emotional experience, narrative-therapy researchers confirmed this effect of story construction on memory.[151] They discuss the mechanics of writing benefits by emphasizing elements of narrative construction such as the sequencing of events and their logical arrangement of causes and effects, as well as contextualizing the corresponding emotions.[152] Such structural

149 Graybeal, Sexton, and Pennebaker, "The Role of Story-Making in Disclosure Writing," 571–72.

150 Pennebaker and Seagal, "Forming a Story," 1243. In the same vein, Great Plains warrior traditions hold that combat veterans can only truly 'come home' when they learn to 'forget' (i.e., leave behind) the war, achieved by talking about their memories in communal ceremonies. O'Neill, "Coming Home," 446.

151 Pennebaker and Seagal, "Forming a Story," 1243–45. However, the authors also caution that in many of their subjects who suffered from a form of PTSD, writing about traumatic memory triggered symptoms. Consequently, they suggest to use therapeutic writing only under guidance and by training additional coping skills. Pennebaker and Seagal, 1245.

152 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1248.

elements enhance the coherence of the narrative, allow the memory of the event to be organized, and reduce compulsive mulling over the same experience:

> The beauty of a narrative is that it allows us to tie all of the changes in our life into a broad comprehensive story. That is, in the same story we can talk both about the cause of the event and its many implications. Much as in any story there can be overarching themes, plots, and subplots—many of them arranged logically and/or hierarchically. Through this process, the many facets of the presumed single event are organized into a more coherent whole.[153]

The authors add that the contextualization and structuring, in the end, simplify the memories of the event and prepare the individual to gradually forget its horrifying aspects. Unsurprisingly, they conclude from their writing experiments that mental health clients should be encouraged to keep diaries to complement therapeutic practice.[154]

Narrative therapy has recently begun to propose structured therapy methods including diary writing, but increasingly also harnessed the technological opportunities of new and social media. A collection of essays published in 2010 introduces such approaches to new technologies in mental health.[155] One of its contributions discusses websites, blogs, and wikis as "psychoeducation" tools to prepare clients for treatment and thus decrease time and effort in discussing basics during therapeutic sessions, but it also explicates how blogging might produce similar self-therapeutic effects as did the writing experiments by Pennebaker and others discussed above.[156] The author points out that "since most blogs allow others to comment on each entry, readers can provide beneficial (or harmful[157]) feedback to the author about what they've written […] This continuous feedback loop provides another level of potentially therapeutic work outside the therapy session."[158] Note the author's interest in the audience's ability to respond to the narrative and to engage in social therapy through a joint construction of meaning.[159]

---

153 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1250.

154 Pennebaker and Seagal, 1251.

155 Anthony, Nagel, and Goss, *Use of Technology*. See also Bolton et al., *Writing Cures*, for studies on writing techniques and methods in mental health care.

156 Grohol, "Using Websites, Blogs, and Wikis Within Mental Health," 68–71.

157 Grohol, 71. This author, as well, is aware of the general risk of triggering trauma patients in uncontrolled therapeutic writing situations and considers precautions to establish control.

158 Grohol, 71.

159 See Nagel and Palumbo, "The Role of Blogging in Mental Health," for an overview of how therapists manage their client base through blogs, on dangers of blogging in

Along these lines, one article promotes online forums for client peer support as a continuation of traditional self-help groups since the 1930s.[160] As in all forms of group therapy, the forums and chat rooms share knowledge, provide guidance, and encourage mutual aid.[161] Yet their particular textuality adds other benefits that might support disinhibition and disclosure where face-to-face group therapy would run into obstacles: They offer anonymity and privacy, they do not require synchronous participation, they allow browsing among and engagement with archived discussion threads at leisure, they enable external links to further information, they are relatively inexpensive and easy to use, and—speaking of the broad genre of online forums—they have become an incremental part of social media culture and are thus a familiar medium to many users.[162] The authors relate to other protagonists in the field, such as James Pennebaker, to emphasize the process of ordering thoughts through writing:

> In addition to mere ventilation, the writer is focused on herself or himself while writing, allowing for an examination and re-examination of thoughts, for clarification, explanation and eventually—unlike in face-to-face interactions—the choice of whether to transmit the text to the group. This reflective process contributes to self-awareness, awareness of others and a developing sense of control […] all in a safer place than the participants' offline environment.[163]

These technological capabilities and functions enable a range of psychological effects. They decrease anxiety, offer a sense of empowerment, and support both giving and accepting advice and building relationships.[164] Jonathan Shay made similar observations regarding online self-help groups among Vietnam veterans, adding to the above lists that the asynchronous participation reduces self-confident and articulate members' tendencies to dominate discussions, allowing everybody to raise any issue at any time.[165] The professionals who describe these types

---

the mental health care environment (e.g., privacy issues, trigger situations), but also on benefits of mutual support from the audience in critical life situations, such as in the subgenre of cancer blogs. See Tan, "Psychotherapy 2.0: MySpace® Blogging as Self-Therapy," for a tentative discussion of self-therapeutic blogging in social media networks.

160 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, "Using Forums to Enhance Client Peer Support."

161 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

162 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 47–50.

163 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

164 Barak and Boniel-Nissim, 50.

165 Shay, *Odysseus*, 200. He, too, warns against uncontrolled forums for explicitly therapeutic settings, suggesting that therapists or confidantes should monitor such forums

of forums and writing projects, while pointing out some risks, wholeheartedly endorse the settings, both for the social support they contribute to psychological treatment and because the cognitive processes attributed to writing involve psychological work that bolsters the respective treatments. Narrative therapy, thus, contributes valuable concepts and ideas to the overall discourse on war experience and informs its activist thrust at crisis solution through ceremonial storytelling.

Conclusion

These examples of psychological scholarship on war experience, ritual, and narrative discuss more or less explicit therapeutic settings, designed for and by those affected by emotional distress due to the critical life events that they experienced. In many cases, they are activist voices in the overall discourse on war experience. Their specialist professional backgrounds feed academic concepts and theories, cross-cultural and historical knowledge, general ideas, and practical crisis solutions into the discourse. I propose to use these activist voices for a better understanding of the cultural work of firsthand post-9/11 war narratives. This is not to suggest that war veterans per se are psychologically inhibited or traumatized and, thus, that war experience as such is pathological. However, it is a critical life event exerting significant stress and affecting veterans' personalities and sense of self, and veterans produce their narratives in a cultural environment that is sensitized to these affects. Their narratives are part of the overall, crisis-centered discourse phenomenon. In this context, it is critical to note that activist cultural comparison keenly observes how Native American cultures have negotiated war experience and how they designed elaborate welcoming, cleansing and healing ceremonies to address war's psychological impact when reintegrating their veterans into their communities, and to reconstitute these communities in pointing out the significance of the warriors' experience for the social fabric. Non-Native social and academic activists seek to embed their observations of Indigenous cultural practices in scientific studies on war-related psychology to develop veteran reintegration programs and therapies, but also explicit civic ceremonies, to achieve similar social and therapeutic effects in US mainstream society. Their proposals and activities transpose Indigenous traditions, and look for universal elements within these traditions, by comparing how discursive war-related practices serve to restore social equilibrium in their respective cultural contexts.

---

for destructive behavior that puts the well-being of other group members in jeopardy, and for signs of suicidal thoughts among members. Shay, 201.

These observations on activist discourse, especially its cultural-comparative thrust, can be made productive for our understanding of the cultural work of ceremonial storytelling in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. Serving as a lens to scrutinize non-Native cultural practice, Indigenous war-related rituals operationalize functional equivalences in these otherwise disparate cultural contexts. They focus attention on the discursive context of negotiating war experience, while the concept of rituality reveals the cultural work and civic activism in these practices, that is, the way in which they constitute community and construct group identity. These observations on cultural criticism and on the construction of Indigenous role models for non-Native civic and academic activism illustrate the protagonists' sense of crisis regarding veteran reintegration. They manifest the widespread acknowledgment of the social and communal dimensions of war trauma in scholarship and public debate. They help explain the civic-engagement thrust and emotional commitment to relationship-building behind many of the audience responses in milblogs and homecoming scenarios. The fascination with narrative in psychology further highlights this popularity of social and community-oriented approaches in mental health care and civil society as it centers on meaning-making by negotiating experience.

In addition, contextualizing milblogs with the cultural comparisons and with the focus on the therapeutic in activist discourse allows us to draw further conclusions about their cultural work. Although most authors and many readers of a blog do not explicitly intend or expect their conversation to be therapeutic, the following chapters demonstrate that many are aware of and frequently discuss the therapeutic potential and effects inherent in their joint narratives, e.g., when bloggers comment on how the interaction with their audience helps reduce stress and assuage anxiety about being abandoned by society.[166] Even when a discussion of such therapeutic effects is lacking in the blogs, the lens of narrative and performative practices in Indigenous ceremonies sheds light on the blogs' cultural work and social-therapeutic function imminent in their communal and ceremonial negotiation of war experience and of the social contract. In short, the cultural work of milblogs and homecoming scenarios primarily becomes manifest because this study's comparison with Indigenous war-related ceremonies reveals the complex cultural, social, and psychological functions inherent in their ceremonial storytelling practices.

166 See Traversa, "From Cats," for a milblogger's reflection on how important audience support became for his well-being and connections to civilian society back home. In the homecoming scenarios discussed in the final chapter, social-therapeutic intent becomes even more obvious.

3. Milblogs as Rituals: War, Citizenship, and the Sacred

Once he filed his after action report, Corporal Jennings willed his exhausted body over to the camp's Internet kiosk to continue his daily ritual. Mentally and physically drained, he mustered enough energy to recount the details of the day's event to inform those back home on the war's progress. In his mind, this was a duty as solemn as the one he took an oath to uphold when he enlisted.
And so he sat down to write his military web log…[1]

Introduction

The above quote from a 2007 Naval War College report on the surge in private, social media use among military personnel is part of the narrative, *in-medias-res* beginning of a formal document. It introduces its readers to the everyday life of a US soldier deployed to Iraq in an informal, essayistic voice, casually mentioning the hardships of war and depicting life in a military camp. It also invokes a vernacular understanding of 'ritual' in the author's reference to blogging: To many, ritual seems to be an activity that is of some importance to those involved, yet is so repetitive that they often perform it without thinking, even merely endure it when they are "mentally and physically drained." However, unwittingly and implicitly, the author's narrative of the exhausted milblogger also reveals a cultural understanding of 'ritual' as deeply significant: The soldier considers his "daily ritual" of reporting on the war in his blog "a solemn duty," as important as his oath of enlistment. This ritual, then, albeit not tied to any explicit religious practice, is shrouded in an aura of the sacred; it is part of what defines the author not merely as a soldier, but as a citizen in the military.

While Keyes's voice in the prologue to his report implies a vernacular notion of ritual as repetitive, often boring and even bothersome everyday activity, it, at the same time, marks the sociocultural significance of milblogging. It raises

1 Keyes, "Live from the Front: Operational Ramifications of Military Web Logs in Combat Zones," 1.

questions of citizenship, duty, and civil-military relations, and it conveys underlying social norms and values.[2] Furthermore, if we look at milblogs through the lens of Indigenous warrior ceremonies, the exhaustion of Keyes's blogger comes into focus: Sharing his experience online bears the promise of support and appreciation from his audience, that is, his daily ritual anticipates a reward in the form of a communal remedy to the hardships of war, symbolic public acknowledgment of his exhaustion that the audience reads as a sacrifice on behalf of society. Recourse to Indigenous warrior rituals in this context offers a frame of reference to describe the processes of 'ceremonial storytelling' in milblogs, i.e., to highlight the functional equivalence of these distinct cultural practices and media.

This chapter takes up the idea and discusses how the concept of 'ritual' serves this analysis of milblogs on several levels. Reading milblogs as rituals brings into focus their cultural work. 'Ritual' becomes a conceptual vehicle to illustrate the complexity of war, of its representation, and of academic discussions thereof. Within a traditional cultural-studies perspective, 'ritual' helps grasp concepts such as 'civil religion' and 'sacrifice' which serve political and military leaders, civil society, and deployed soldiers to explain, justify, and, at times, to glorify war. These concepts bring to the fore how public discourse on war inevitably seeks to protect the status quo in a society and, with it, its elites and power structures, a traditional focus of critical and political cultural-studies scholarship. However, this focus tends to neglect another level, i.e., the psychological and social problems of individuals affected by war which, while tied into existing political power structures, cannot fully be explained by a traditional cultural-studies perspective alone. This is where cultural comparison comes into play: The lens of Indigenous war traditions, applied to non-Native milblogs, offers an opportunity to discuss individual war experience, emotional and psychological stress, and veteran reintegration in war narratives from a new angle, and its contextualization with activist discourse highlights the emphasis on the therapeutic in many contributions to this conversation. The comparative angle fosters a different analytic layer of 'ritual' which

2 The fact that an official military report praises these features of milblogs explains why military leaders eventually overcame their initial resistance to private, social media use among its soldiers and, instead, sought to exploit it as a popular source of seemingly independent PR. For a detailed discussion of these debates among military leaders and of the role of "popular narratology" in military reports on social media use among soldiers, see Usbeck, "Power"; cf. Herrmann, " 'To Tell a Story to the American People': Reading the Surge of 'Narrative' in Contemporary Discussions of US Elections as 'Popular Narratology.' "

helps elucidate both the individual experiences and the various communal efforts to address resulting social problems. 'Ritual,' in this context, operationalizes social sciences, Indigenous studies, and psychology for the cultural-studies perspective on the discourse about war experience in the US, addressing the complicated social interrelations regarding war and providing a more nuanced and integrated approach to war experience, discourse, and representation.

The observations on war-related ceremonial traditions among Native North American communities in the previous chapter have established the significance of ritual as a productive methodological concept to grasp not only these Native practices' cultural work, but also their role in social therapy in their respective cultural context. Perceiving US military-related cultural practices as rituals allows us to understand milbloggers, veterans, and civilian participants as a discourse community whose narrative-performative exchange of personal recollections, bearing witness, and mutual acknowledgment symbolically negotiates the meaning of war experience both for individual veterans and for the entire group, i.e., the nation. Through these symbolic negotiations, the community creates and disseminates cultural knowledge and values, contributing to the construction of collective and cultural identity, and reinforcing social order. The cultural significance of ritual in Indigenous war-related ceremonies, thus, offers a central methodological instrument for an understanding of milblogs in a similar discursive context.

This chapter applies and extends this concept to explore the cultural work of milblogs. Indigenous war-related ceremonies serve as a frame of reference for milblogs, allowing us to interpret them as narrative cultural practices that, like Native warrior ceremonies, establish discourse communities of their own to symbolically negotiate the meaning of war experience. Milblogs' construction and circulation of knowledge and values takes place in discursive contexts—shaped by their mediality—and often follows particular scripts that engender corresponding self-conscious and explicitly ritualistic performances of social order. The mutual acknowledgment and support expressed among soldiers and their civilian audiences symbolically enact the social contract between civil society and the military and, at the same time, prescribe procedures and conditions for such symbolic negotiations of meaning. The performance of these procedures and conditions not only describes a social ideal, it validates it by enacting it. Like other rituals, milblogs could, thus, be characterized as meta-performative symbolic practices because they call for the fulfillment of the social contract, while their symbolic enactment of it both showcases their understanding of how this fulfillment could ideally be reached and, at the same time, actively rehearses these civic practices. This general context of war-related discourse communities

engaged in cultural practices of symbolic, ritualized, and meta-performative communication informs the further discussion throughout the book. Beyond a direct comparison between Native rituals and milblogs, it also integrates brief historical contextualizations with other forms of American war narratives as well as the observations on homecoming scenarios in the final chapter.

As Keyes's example illustrates, milblogs invoke traditional tropes and concepts of US culture, such as the citizen soldier, and understand commitment to the nation, to its symbols and its ideals as 'civil religion.' Like Indigenous warrior ceremonies, these invocations can be perceived as representations as well as an enactment of this particular discourse community's attributes of group identity, their cosmology, traditions, and values. Both the representation and the affirmative enactment of the ideal help negotiate and constitute identity. Thus, reading milblogs as rituals brings to the fore their cultural work of negotiating meaning, of constructing community, and of reinforcing social order.

Ritual does not only help elucidate milblogs' sociocultural significance, it is also a highly productive concept to discuss the complex nature of their medium-specific textuality. As constituents of the growing corpus of new and social media since the early 2000s, milblogs employ typical Web 2.0 features, generating a distinct textuality which nurtures a sense of community and common interest among participants. Their accessibility, ease-of-use, publicity, and interactivity facilitate a high level of participatory agency for both bloggers and their audience. Hypertextual elements such as links and comments further support the participants' ability to contribute to the text and shape the overall narrative. Through the repetition of individual statements, contributors express like-mindedness and amplify a sense of belonging and common purpose in ways that have been described as ritualistic.[3] In addition, by reporting on rituals such as military memorial services in Afghanistan, bloggers recreate such rituals online; their remedialization of the ritual turns the report into a ritual in its own right, extending the circle of ritual participants by immersing the blog audience into the event. The theoretical discussions in the following sections explore how this specific textuality of milblogs, while taking place in a different medium and a different culture than Indigenous warrior ceremonies, represents equivalent cultural functions in terms of cultural work, ritualized narrative practices, and discursive, affect-driven contexts.

3 Cf. Autenrieth, "Gemeinschaft"; Booth, *Digital Fandom*; Herwig, "Die 140-Zeichen-Frage"; Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere"; Wagner, *Godwired*.

This chapter, therefore, argues that, even when they are not comprised of elements that would mark them as explicitly religious practices—e.g., being conducted by anointed ceremonial leaders or following a specific, prescribed liturgy—milblogs manifest ritualistic qualities both in their textual form and their sociocultural function. The chapter carves out how these ritualistic qualities reveal milblogs' cultural work as well as their embeddedness in the public discourse on post-9/11 war experience explored above. This perspective necessarily employs a broader conceptualization of ritual that goes beyond the traditional focus on religious practices and structures in ritual studies. It will avoid the trenches of decades-long interdisciplinary debates over typology in the field. This approach draws on scholarship focusing on the cultural functions of ritual and selectively discusses structuralist perspectives where they help pinpoint ritualistic features of milblogs' medium-specific textuality. It profits from the integration of ritual studies in Native American studies as well as the tradition of cultural-anthropological perspectives in American cultural studies.[4]

The first of the following three theoretical sections, thus, offers an overview of select ritual-studies scholarship relevant to my perspective on the ritualized communication of milblogs. It discusses the performativity of rituals and explores how traditional notions of the 'sacred' in ritual can be made productive for a perspective focusing on cultural work, rather than on religiosity. To accommodate this study's interest in the mediality and textuality of milblogs, the section discusses readings of ritual as symbolic communication, and contextualizes them with processual and narratological approaches to integrate with (new) media-studies perspectives on ritual. This selection helps forge a working approach to 'ritual' for the discussion of milblogs and, at the same time, explores how cultural studies activates various disciplinary perspectives on ritual such as cultural anthropology, religious studies, and narratology.

These methodological considerations are then contextualized in the second section with a discussion of traditional American cultural ideas, such as civil religion, to situate milblogs in the diverse body of historical US war narratives and in public discourse on war experience. These cultural ideas and national myths manifest the equivalent to the cosmology represented and reinforced in Indigenous warrior ceremonies; they reveal that, in a similar discursive context,

4 Cf., among others, Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

Native and non-Native American communities reinforce their respective cultural identities by invoking creation stories tied to particular values and norms, in their war-related rituals. The above story of the exhausted milblogger in Iraq portrayed milblogging as an embodied ritual of civic duty. Consequently, this section makes productive scholarship on the concepts of sacrifice and the citizen soldier, highlighting how they lend themselves to emotionally and politically charged public discourse on war as well as to symbolic, ritualized negotiations of war experience. It also dwells on US traditions of memorial culture and how war memorials shape collective memory through notions of the sacred and of ritual to construct community and social order.

The chapter's final theoretical section focuses on the changing mediality of rituals. It picks up the discussions on 'Western' memorial culture and Indigenous ceremonial practices from earlier sections to explore how Web 2.0 has influenced rituals in recent years. To understand milblogs as online rituals about war experience, a contextualization with emerging, Web 2.0-based cultural practices such as online memorials and "virtual cemeteries" is productive. The section provides brief examples how some Indigenous peoples adapt their ritual traditions and cultural practices to new and social media, and what role medium specifics play for cultural change. To further contextualize milblogs within traditional public discourses on and representations of war in the US, this section also explores scholarship on selected texts, such as Vietnam veteran websites, and online hypertext adaptations of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Finally, a close reading discusses ritual features of select milblog posts and ties together representations of collective and individual meaning-making. One subsection interprets tributes to deceased soldiers as versions of online memorials in which collective memory is constructed to reinforce national identity and which serve to justify both the nation's and individual soldiers' commitment to the war. The other subsection looks into individual representations of war stress in the blogs and how milbloggers and civilian commenters address these individual circumstances in the context of social therapy. In both instances, I read the exchanges between bloggers and their audience as symbolic, ritualized communication that serves to negotiate war experience, to construct meaning and a sense of community, and to discuss and reinforce values and social order. The readings emphasize how the textuality of blogs, their medium-specific features, facilitate ritualization and how the participants employ such features and communicative gestures in order to highlight the significance of their communicative process.

Relevant Disciplinary Approaches in Ritual Studies

> *The public is not used to deploying the concept of ritual except perhaps to describe empty, redundant, or overtly religious acts, and if it is understood to be essentially religious, then ritual space is often imagined as a zone in which MP3 players, cell phones, and other electronic fads have no place.*[5]

The disciplinary history of ritual studies is tied to cultural comparisons between 'Western' and Indigenous societies and to discussions about modernity. Early pioneers of ritual studies came from academic backgrounds in cultural anthropology and religious studies; their interest was driven by their observations on secularization in Europe as well as their notions of universality in human behavior and by an evolutionist belief in a common origin of humanity, represented by contemporary Indigenous peoples. For my perspective of milblogs, it is important to note that ritual studies began to drift away from a primarily religious focus toward a culture-based perspective on ritual during the late nineteenth century. Most of the scholars whose work informed this study build on, or in some way engage, Émile Durkheim's notion that religion had been replaced by science as the central pillar of negotiating an understanding of the world in 'Western' societies but that, nevertheless, ritual's sociocultural functions prevailed in Christian ceremonies as much as in modern civics. For both realms, rituals evoked emotions, through which social cohesion could be reinforced.[6] This most basic and broad understanding of ritual forms the premise of my reading of milblogs as platforms to symbolically negotiate community relationships, cultural knowledge, and values. The following overview of ritual-studies scholarship discusses select approaches within the field to make them productive for my analysis of this discursive context.

Major discussions in ritual studies historically break down into two larger traditions. Prominent figures, such as Roy Rappaport and Victor Turner, have developed seemingly contradictory interpretations of ritual's cultural function, yet both understand it as a force working toward social cohesion.[7] Rappaport's

5 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 9.

6 Stausberg, "Reflexive Ritualisationen," 55–56; Brænder, *Justifying*, 30–31.

7 Rappaport's perspective on ritual and social cohesion has been described as more conservative, in that ritual seeks to protect the status quo, while Turner's focus on creativity and social change adopts Arnold van Gennep's concept of liminality in ritual. Their interest in the liminal emphasizes change; it understands ritual as intent on restoring

work is particularly significant for my approach. He acknowledges ritual's socially cohesive properties, but also finds these properties enhanced by its performative elements: "In enunciating, accepting, and making conventions moral, ritual contains within itself not simply a symbolic representation of social contract, but tacit social contract itself. As such, ritual, which also establishes, guards, and bridges boundaries between public systems and private processes, is *the* basic social act."[8] This reading introduces a major aspect of ritual studies, i.e., the realization that rituals are performed, and that their performativity helps explain both their structural forms and their cultural functions. Yet, Rappaport addresses both the act itself and the assertive representation thereof, he conceptualizes ritual as being at once performative *and* meta-performative. In this reading, rituals are cultural practices that negotiate principles of social order (i.e., norms, values) by performing symbolic acts. At the same time, they negotiate communicative conditions and rules and rehearse practices under which social order can be symbolically negotiated. Ritual not only uses, but, through rehearsed performance, "actively establishes convention[s of obligation],"[9] and its participants "*substantiate* the order as it *informs* them."[10]

In Rappaport's model, "to perform a rite is to establish and accept a canonical order."[11] Although this perspective remains in the realm of religion, it informs the approach to milblogs as ritualized cultural practices. In the meta-performative sense, ritual defines and promotes social norms through rehearsing and enacting them, all the while representing these norms as ideal and desirable social conditions. To give two examples for illustration, the Navajo Enemy Way ceremony represents tribal cosmology. It reenacts the creation story of the Hero Twins who rid the world of monsters but who suffered from the experience of violence so that the people had to cleanse and heal the twins to foster their safe

equilibrium in times of crisis, even if this seems to undermine the preeminent social order at first glance. Grimes, *Rite*, 141–42; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 14–16. At least, their approach to ritual acknowledges changes in social relationships (e.g. death, marriage) "without threatening the overall social order." Johnson et al., "The Therapeutic Use of Ritual," 285. Turner is praised for building on this concept of liminality and transition because it moved ritual studies away from Durkheim's static to a more processual perspective. Kapferer, "Beyond Ritual as Performance. Towards Ritual as Dynamics and Virtuality," 233.

8 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 138.

9 Grimes, *Rite*, 142.

10 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 125. Cf. Lambek, "Religion and Morality," 346–48.

11 Grimes, *Rite*, 142.

reintegration into the community. That is, the ritual shows both the ideal of veteran reintegration because it explains reintegration by way of tribal cosmology, and it engages community members and veterans to bring forth healing and reintegration through the story's enactment in the ritual.[12] Similar procedures are at work in milblogs because an exchange in which commenters assure a milblogger of their social support, then, defines these commenters' ideal of a supportive and appreciative civilian home front. It also invokes national and civic cosmology by way of civil-religious reference, and it exemplifies these ideas through the performance of the ritual, by showing appreciation and support through telling.

Ronald Grimes argues that Rappaport's model encapsulates a paradox because ritual performers "create[…] God" by following a liturgy and, thus, "construct[…] meaning" without knowing it.[13] However, even if their performance serves to "fabricate" a "sacred truth" that only has relevance because it is enacted, i.e., constructed,[14] this fabrication or construct serves its purpose among the performers simply because it creates meaning. This becomes obvious if we leave the realm of religion and consider cultural-historical scholarship on group cohesion, such as Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," Werner Sollors's "invented ethnicity," or Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's "invented traditions": In all cases, cultural practices construct an ideal of social cohesion and order, often by way of symbolic communication.[15] That is, what presents itself as a conundrum and a paradox from a religious-studies perspective is logical and evident from a cultural-studies and a cultural-history perspective. Even if one disagrees with Rappaport's notion of liturgy anchored in a strictly religious understanding of ritual, the above example of milblog commenters reveals that this ritual, if not establishing an outright "canonical" order, creates social pressure to conform to the conventions laid out in the performance, and, thus, reinforces social order.[16] This cultural-history perspective

12 Holm, "Culture," 245; Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 343.

13 Grimes, *Rite*, 143.

14 Grimes, 144.

15 Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Sollors, *Invention of Ethnicity*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

16 This might also be aligned with Bruce Kapferer's thrust towards a reading of ritual's dynamics rather than its structure and processes: "Although the representational, meaning-driven, symbolic perspective continues to be important, there is a shift to viewing ritual as a dynamic for the production of meaning rather than seeing it as necessarily predominantly meaningful in itself." Kapferer, "Beyond Ritual as Performance," 247. In this understanding, the negotiation of order gains more weight—there is no

also dampens Grimes's criticism of the validity of the 'sacred' as being fabricated. As the subsection on civil religion and sacrifice elucidates, sacralizing the civic equips war-related rituals with quasi-religious qualities and serves a similar cultural purpose. Fabricating or constructing the sacred makes it no less significant and valid to those who invoke it in their attempts to generate social order.

The integration of performance studies into discussions of ritual has opened the field to new productive concepts to explore ritual's structures and processes. At the same time, it has complicated its definition and the discussion on its form. While performativity has proven to be a fruitful concept, many scholars emphasize the conditions distinguishing ritual from the theatrical. They argue that a performance is usually conducted in front of an audience which does not participate and which is aware of the fictionality of action and characters, while rituals are comprised of congregations (or participants) who accept roles and actions, or at least "sequester" ritual's fictionality.[17] More important for this distinction in the context of milblogs is the notion that rituals constitute communities, while modern theater audiences are consumers who "do not feel obligated to look out for each other's welfare," as Grimes has it.[18]

This criticism confines itself to a narrow focus on the theatrical element of performance, however. Bruce Kapferer calls for ritual studies to move beyond this "theatrical metaphor" in order to "reconceive ritual performance as a dynamic field of force in whose virtual space human psychological, cognitive, and social realities are forged anew, so that ritual participants are both reoriented to their ordinary realities and embodied with potencies to restore or reconstruct their lived world."[19] Kapferer's reservation manifests his concern that, from a perspective on ritual emphasizing interpretation and reflexivity, "everything can be conceived as a performance in one sense or another—even the relatively self-enclosed practice of writing and reading."[20] He, thus, considers performance in general an "overused"[21] concept to study ritual with cultural-anthropology and religious-studies perspectives.

However, I argue that a performance-based approach is productive for discussions of cultural practices (e.g. milblogs) as rituals. This approach would

---

preordained set of principles, and order is generated through the enactment of ritual, i.e., through the communicative negotiation of norms and values, as the below reading of exchanges between milbloggers and their readers illustrates.

17 Grimes, *Craft*, 297; Ryan, "Ritual Studies," 29; Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 15.

18 Grimes, *Craft*, 297.

19 Kapferer, "Beyond Ritual as Performance," 247.

20 Kapferer, "Beyond Ritual as Performance," 247.

21 Kapferer, 247.

have to extend beyond the explicit metaphor of theater and fiction and, in a broader sense, understand performance as a particular cultural practice engaging in the transfer of social knowledge, memory, and identity. Like the broader, not exclusively religious take on ritual, performance can be interpreted as "reiterated," "rehearsed," and "conventional" behavior set apart from the mundane.[22] Proponents of this perspective, such as Diana Taylor, argue that it also opens up methodological opportunities for an analysis of culture: "Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere. To understand these as performance suggests that performance also functions as an epistemology. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing."[23]

In this sense, we can read the exhausted milblogger's action introduced above not only as a ritual, but also as a performance through which that soldier expresses his sense of citizenship and his identity as a citizen soldier. He performs what he perceives as a civic duty by informing the public about the war's progress and his personal contribution to it. He does so in a new medium that provides the ritual space (e.g., the blog's comment section, fostering interaction with the audience) but that is embedded in and incorporates diverse elements of American cultural traditions regarding war narratives, e.g., diaries, memoirs, and war reporting—in this case, citizen (soldier) journalism. The audience uses this space to acknowledge both the war effort and the performance of reporting on it, and they do so in ritualized form, e.g., in stylized, repetitive, rehearsed language, and symbolic gestures.

The full import of this exchange's sociocultural relevance becomes clear when we contextualize it through cultural comparison. The lens of Indigenous war-related ceremonies helps grasp this blogger's activity as a civic ritual, and comparison with concrete Native war rituals, such as the Plains tribes' ceremonial practice of counting 'coup' discussed above, conveys the equivalences in their cultural function. Both examples illustrate different manifestations of transmission and mediality (e.g., blogging, dancing), and different cultural contexts (e.g., social media use in US 'mainstream' society, Native North American tribal ceremony), but they share the discursive context of the performed, ritualized negotiation of war experience among an individual soldier/warrior and civilians that, eventually, serves to construct community. While the Native dancer's performance is tied to his community's ceremonial grounds and embodied through prescribed moves, steps, and song elements, the blogger's embodied practice

22 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 2–3.

23 Taylor, 3.

and the space of his ritual performance are defined by his medium—they may include a keyboard, an Internet cafe at a military base or a private mobile device kept at the soldier's quarters, and the communications technology of the World Wide Web to connect with his audience and community. The blogger's representation of war is, furthermore, determined by textual conventions that evolved from traditions of American war narratives and are specific to milblogs as a new genre. As this chapter's close readings discuss, these conventions set milblog writing apart from mundane, everyday activities, they are rehearsed and reiterated and thus increase the sense of a performed civic ritual.

Literary studies and narratology have influenced ritual studies in the previous decades, bolstering a beginning focus on ritual as communication, which I briefly discuss here to explicate my perspective on milblogs as narrative rituals, i.e., as forms of ceremonial storytelling. Since the 1970s, anthropologists have explored ritual's communicative aspects, especially regarding its performative elements. Describing ritual as a "system of symbolic communication," Stanley Tambiah notes ritual's "patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)."[24] His notion of a scale with varying degrees of ritualization manifest in the presence or absence of the different criteria opens the field to a broader discussion of ritual that serves this study's perspective of milblogs' cultural work. It allows for applications of 'ritual' beyond an explicit religious context, yet avoids a blanket understanding of any activity as outright ritualistic or performative, as the below discussion exemplifies.[25] These criteria also invite a more processual perspective of ritual than the previous, static ones, an understanding of what ritual does more than what it is supposed to be.

Like Tambiah, Wolfgang Braungart emphasizes the interrelatedness and interdependence of the major approaches in ritual studies. While some scholars perceive ritual primarily as a social-communicative act, as a "message," others point out its symbolism, its execution and immediate experience. However, as Braungart argues, "ritual can serve its specific communicative functions only because it is enacted, expressive, and symbolic."[26] Literary and cultural studies

24 Tambiah,"A Performative Approach to Ritual," 128.

25 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 13.

26 Braungart, *Ritual und Literatur*, 119. "Das Ritual kann seine spezifischen kommunikativen Funktionen nur wahrnehmen, weil es inszeniert, expressiv und symbolisch ist. Das Ritual ist als kommunikative Handlung inszeniert, expressiv und symbolisch."

have broadened the previously dominant focus on the embodied act among cultural anthropologists and, since the late twentieth century, inspired a trend to see ritual as interactive communication in a system of cultural codes.[27] Braungart's model of intertwined symbolic and communicative perspectives adds another aspect, making a reading of milblogs as rituals more productive: "[Ritual] is […] not merely a regulated and emphasized communicative and socially meaningful symbolic act expressing a religious and social value. Religious rite also presents and manifests the sacred. It occurs, comes to pass […] Therefore, ritual must be acknowledged, it does not suffice to simply recognize it. This is why it is also affirmative."[28] The affirmative condition expresses the social and cultural norms, values, and knowledge negotiated in ritual. To acknowledge this negotiation is to accept these norms and values, to postulate and nurture a sense of belonging to the community, and to affirm group identity, be it in symbols of the explicitly religious sacred (e.g., references to the Hero Twins in Navajo war rituals) or in manifestations of the sacralized civic, as discussions of sacrifice and of the nation in the following subsection and in the readings below highlight and contextualize.

In more concrete applications of communicative aspects during recent decades, a narratological approach has discussed the interrelationships of ritual and narrative in structure, perspective, and function.[29] Postclassical narratology embraced the study of ritual to interpret narrative's cultural functions while it informed ritual studies to broaden its structural, communicative, and cultural perspectives. Here, the reference to storytelling proves particularly significant for my work because "[s]torytelling often has an explicitly ritualistic character, especially where everyday stories are concerned. We indulge in telling and listening to stories to derive a tried-and-tested sense of meaning and aesthetic pleasure, similar to that which we glean from participating in a ritual."[30] Stories of life in a military camp, of mourning for fellow soldiers, or of feeling tired after long missions and setbacks may, thus, be ceremonial stories in that they negotiate the meaning of these experiences among authors and audience. Similar stories

27 Braungart, 120.

28 Braungart, 128. "Es ist auch nicht nur ein geregelter und heraugehobener kommunikativer und sozial-funktionaler, symbolischer Akt, in dem ein religiöser oder sozialer Wert zum Ausdruck kommt. Das Heilige wird im religösen Ritus auch präsentiert und so präsent. Es vollzieht, es ereignet sich…Darum muss man das Ritual anerkennen, es zu erkennen genügt nicht. Darum ist es auch affirmativ."

29 Cf. Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 52–53.

30 Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction," 2.

can be found both in the cultural context of Indigenous and ancient European traditions.[31]

Vera and Ansgar Nünning explore a range of "interfaces" between ritual and narrative, such as situatedness (events set apart from the mundane), perspectivity and experientiality (the restraints and insights of a subjective experience of the event), performative power and self-referentiality (elements highlighting the performance of the ritualist-narrator, and the way rituals relate to their own history), or the structure of agency (a negotiation of who acts, and whose story is represented).[32] This narrative perspective also identifies significant differences between ritual and narrative. As rituals tend to be repetitive, narratives are more prone to be innovative and to function as "revisionist counter-discourses": "[W]hile the generally dominant features of rituals are the self-presentation of the prevailing order and the establishment, visualization and preservation of community- and consensus-creating value-orientations, this only holds true for certain, culturally dominant or collective narratives."[33] As the references to Victor Turner have shown above, however, ritual may well incite social change, even through rehearsal and reenactment of traditional ideas and concepts. Furthermore, Diana Taylor's above quote observes that performance occurs in acts of civil obedience as well as resistance, and ritual, likewise, serves acts of expressing political power as much as of resistance. Milblogs, when read as rituals, can represent both perspectives, as well because we could interpret civilians' milblog comments as expressions of a culturally dominant idea that troops are being honored regardless of one's support for the war and for the current administration, or as attempts by the participants of these communicative rituals to turn a perceived general neglect of the soldiers' hardships among civil society into the dominant narrative that the nation indeed supports its troops. That is, they would attempt to establish conventions, define obligations, and create social pressure through massive, repetitive, and sacralized manifestations. As the readings below reveal, the interaction on the blogs also illustrates how different, overlapping communities and public spheres seek to establish control over the discourse, claiming to deliver the only valid representation of civil-military relationships by way of ritualization within their narrative.

---

31 Cf. Shay, *Achilles*; Shay, *Odysseus*. See also the discussion on veteran projects such as the New York Aquila Theatre which integrates veterans' interpretations of classical Greek tragedy with their own war stories in Chapter Five.

32 Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 54–58.

33 Nünning and Nünning, 59.

From a perspective of cultural history, ritual and narrative share a number of cultural functions that support a reading of milblogs as rituals because they help order and structure, thus make meaningful the "endless flow of experiences,"[34] which reduces complexity and provides normative patterns of action (e.g., socially acceptable behavior). They both engender community-building and consensus-making through coherence and continuity, which also entails patterns of inclusion within the group and of exclusion toward outsiders. They serve the construction and negotiation of cultural memory and collective identity and thus help shape plans for future courses of action.[35] Integrated analyses of ritual and narrative, thus, not only help scholars of culture devise a "thicker," multidimensional description[36] of cultural phenomena than the previous, distinct approaches would offer, they facilitate cultural-comparative work and insights into both the structure and the functions of ritual and narrative, respectively.

While the infusion of research questions, concepts, and ideas from cultural studies, narratology, and literary theory into the field of ritual studies has informed a cultural perspective on ritual, it has also introduced typical conundrums and complications of these disciplines. Among them, scholars expressed frustration with the tendency in cultural studies to regard virtually all cultural expressions as 'texts,' arguing that 'text' does not conceptually grasp all activities in ritual. From a perspective of ritual, texts are not the sole meaningful structures of cultural expression.[37] Because this study looks into how the same discursive context—the public negotiation of war experience—is applied in different cultures (Indigenous and 'mainstream' US-American) and in different cultural practices and modes (warrior ceremonies, milblogs, and civic engagement toward veteran readjustment), Diana Taylor's performance-studies concept of 'scenario' is particularly productive for a discussion of ritual contexts. This study's adaptation of 'scenarios' describes them as superordinate, ritualized narrative structures which are usually iterated in embodied performances.[38] In this context, scenario means both the performance—i.e., the embodied and spatially determined acts executed during the ritual scenarios—and the overarching

34 Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 65.

35 Nünning and Nünning, 65–69; Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 14–15.

36 Nünning and Nünning, "On the Narrativity of Rituals," 70–71.

37 Braungart, *Ritual und Literatur*, 122–23; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 16.

38 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 16. She describes scenarios as "formulaic structures" and "portable frameworks." *Taylor,* 31, 28. A scenario, she adds, "includes features well theorized in literary analysis, such as narrative and plot, but demands that

narrative structure, the ritual pattern, whose manifestation and circulation can be determined by various media and modes, such as dance, milblogs, or communal welcome ceremonies.[39]

The discussion so far has presented an overview of select, major questions of and disciplinary perspectives on ritual studies and raised awareness of complications and constraints in approaches to the structure of ritual. Considering these problems, it will be more productive for the analysis of milblogs to explore what milblogs do and how their function can be grasped through the functions of ritual rather than asking whether milblogs are truly rituals. In this, I will follow Ronald Grimes's approach and employ his notions of "ritualization" for the reading of milblogs.[40] Based, among others, on Julian Huxley's reading of ritualization as "the adaptive formalization and canalization of motivated human activities so as to secure more effective communicatory ('signalling') function, reduction of intra-group damage, or better intra-group bonding,"[41] Grimes notes that "[a]ll human behavior is to some degree ritualized. Ritualizing is the activity of increasing the degree of this ritualization […] An action that is merely repeated is less ritualized than an act that is both repeated and stylized. If an action is repeated, stylized, prescribed, and sacralized, it becomes more ritualistic."[42] This understanding covers the explicitly religious and formal warrior ceremonies of Native American communities, as well as exchanges between milbloggers and their audiences, or welcome ceremonies for US veterans at stateside military bases. As the readings below discuss, repetition marks stability, reinforces order, and signals belonging in perpetuity, increasing the symbolic weight of an exchange. It is a critical element in explicitly religious activities as much as in storytelling and

---

we also pay attention to milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language." Taylor, 28. This distinction becomes particularly important in the chapter on homecoming scenarios, but aspects of embodiment and place are discussed here, as well.

39 Taylor's concept of scenario encompasses both the "setup" of performative practices and their "action," i.e., enactment. Taylor, 28, 31. She emphasizes: "[T]he transmission of a scenario reflects the multifaceted systems at work in the scenario itself: […]writing, telling, reenactment, mime, *gestus*, dance, singing." Taylor, 31. Thus, her concept grasps not only the multidimensionality of performance and meta-performance underlying this study, but also the generic and medial diversity of its corpus.

40 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 14.

41 Huxley, "A Discussion on Ritualization of Behaviour in Animals and Man," 251.

42 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 13.

poetry. Stylized language, e.g., a phrase such as "thank you for your service," becomes a marker for the symbolism of communication, as does liturgy in religious texts and rituals, which increases its effect on the participants if repeated. Sacralized language, in the context of milblogs, frequently materializes in explicit references to the sacred in order to emphasize the importance of what is being discussed. The notion of sacrifice is particularly important in these discussions, but also explicit religious reference, e.g., in depictions of deceased soldiers as "archangels."[43]

Thus, understanding rituals as symbolic communication with varying degrees of ritualization allows to explore how specific cultural knowledge is transmitted and reinforced in these activities, and what role embodiment, space, and mediality play in the degrees of repetition, stylizing, prescribing, and sacralizing of these activities. Grimes's processual perspective proves all the more productive as it provides a working paradigm for the analysis of ritual in mediated conflicts. His focus on ritualization facilitates discussions of military casualties and ritualized media reporting on death in wartime[44] as well as a closer look into how cultural practices adapt to the emergence of new technology, such as Web 2.0.[45]

After establishing a working understanding of ritual for the exploration of cultural work in milblogs, a few reflections on ritual content are in order. The previous chapter provided a context in that Indigenous war-related ceremonies help prepare warriors for war and, after their return, reintegrate them into their communities by reconstituting the community's unifying fabric. That is, they affirm the validity of the group's cosmos and its members' place within it, as well as negotiate the meaning of the warriors' participation in war for the individual warrior as much as for the entire group. The following section engages the 'cosmology' of mainstream US society as far as communal notions of war and national identity are concerned. It scrutinizes the concept of civil religion and its sense of sacrifice, to elucidate their cohesive roles for the ceremonial constitution of community in milblogs.

---

43 alexakim, in Temple, "Somber News."

44 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 16–21; Hammer, "How to Commemorate a Fallen Soldier: Ritual and Narrative in the Bundeswehr."

45 Cf. Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals"; Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death on Facebook. Examining the Roles of Social Media Communication for the Bereaved"; Gebert, *Carina unvergessen*.

Civil Religion, Sacrifice, and War-Related Memorial Culture in the US

> *We are winning the war in Afghanistan, with great sacrifice and at great cost to US and Afghan and Coalition Soldiers. I get tired of this job, and I get tired of being away from home and I get tired of war, but then I think of those who have sacrificed so much more than I have, and then I'm not tired anymore. I just hope America doesn't get tired.*[46]

Public discourse on war in the US has traditionally evoked ideas central to American self-perception, and the crisis-centered discourse on war experience since Vietnam has focused on these interrelations of experience, suffering, and collective identity. This is not surprising if we follow a cultural-history perspective and perceive public discourse as the defining factor distinguishing war from other forms of killing—discourse serves to justify the killing and negotiates its meaning for the group involved.[47] US politicians, soldiers, the media, and civil society have, time and again, depicted ideas as universal values during wartime, and their discussion and promotion of these values usually entailed a notion of the divine and the sacred. Abraham Lincoln's consecration of the Gettysburg battlefield as "hallowed ground" is one of the most prominent examples.[48] War experience, as a particularly extreme form of cultural knowledge, was frequently shrouded in religious language to set it aside from mundane everyday life, and to link it to group identity. These discourses portrayed war casualties and soldiers' hardships as sacrifices for the survival (or the renewal) of the nation; religious references and terminology gave meaning to the deaths and rallied the populace to the cause. It is obvious that religious thinking affects how the nation explains its existence, how it negotiates its coherence, and how it discusses its violent crises.

---

46 Phillips, "Week 21."

47 Hüppauf, *Was ist Krieg?*, 28–37.

48 Both battle sites and, since their institutionalization during the Civil War, national cemeteries have been described in these terms, sacralizing the battles as events, those who fought them, and those who became casualties on the American side. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 99. During the Spanish-American War, Army nurse Amy Wingreen commented on American graves at the site of the battle of San Juan Hill: "These graves are sacred places, and God and the angels and men hold the ground holy." Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 245.

War narratives have been carriers of these discourses, and they reveal the influence of civil religion, a complex set of ideas, myths, and practices, on American self-perception and self-representation. The following section provides a brief contextualization of civil religion and sacrifice as discursive concepts (especially their 'religious' aspects) to invoke national 'cosmology' in public discourse on war, and of memorial culture as a civil-religious practice to illustrate how milblogs are embedded in this tradition and how milblog communication reflects activist discourse on war experience. I draw on examples of war discourse throughout US history to situate milblogs in the tradition of US war narratives. Understood as symbolic, performed, and ritualized communication, milblogs employ the notion of sacrifice for a discursive explanation and justification of the nation. Their specific textuality continues and extends traditions of commemoration in a new medium.

The perspective of civil religion, then, perceives milblogs (as well as the homecoming scenarios discussed in the final chapter) as civic rituals that reconstitute national identity; they serve to transcend individual war experience for the negotiation of group cohesion. A comparative perspective further elucidates the cultural functions of these practices: As Native American warrior traditions invoke creation stories and mythical heroes such as the Navajo Hero Twins in their war rituals, milblogs and homecoming scenarios employ civil religion. Acknowledging this functional equivalence, in turn, helps interface research interests in cultural studies and cultural history with sociological and psychological approaches. If civil religion and notions of sacrifice can be understood as a national cosmology that reinforces group identity through ritual, they help explain both the negotiation and legitimization of social norms, values, cultural knowledge, and power structures in wartime. Yet they also discuss concrete social repercussions of war experience for individual participants and illuminate activist practices geared to remedy such problems through collective social therapy. Like Indigenous war-related rituals, thus, milblogs (and homecoming scenarios) are ritualized cultural practices that have social formative power.

Civil Religion and Sacrifice

The concept of 'civil religion' has been discussed as an element of modernity since 'Western' societies became aware of the sociocultural impacts of modernization. The term goes back to Rousseau; it is informed by Émile Durkheim's observation on ritual and religious elements in civics and nationalism affected by secularization. In the US, Robert N. Bellah's article "Civil Religion in America" introduced the concept to American sociological and political scholarship in

1967.[49] Since then, scholars have defined various components of civil religion with individual foci on either religious or civic aspects, and many forcefully disagree with one another's definitions and approaches.[50] The field's major common understanding, however, seems to be that civil religion in the US facilitates social cohesion through civic rituals; some would even go as far as describing it as "worship" of society, its symbols and institutions.[51]

From among the competing approaches, typologies, and definitions, Agnieszka Monnet has developed a specifically potent reading of civil religion for a discussion of ritualization in war narratives which is worth quoting at length. She describes civil religion as:

> the way in which national institutions, rituals and ideologies function like a religion: dividing the world into sacred and profane spheres, providing constituents with a sense of supra-individual transcendence and collective continuity, and offering an emotionally satisfying frame for coping with death. If national civil religion resembles traditional religions in these three aspects, the modern nation has wrested from religion a fourth aspect that it now monopolizes completely: the power to kill non-members for the sake of its self-preservation and to ask members to die in its name. Currently, only the nation-state legitimately holds this right, which is why the nation can be said to have replaced religion in the social organization of death.[52]

In this chapter's readings, the separation of experience into profane and sacred, the notion of transcendence and social cohesion, and the role of affect in discussing death are recurring themes. Monnet's focus on death is significant because many of the discourses in milblogs revolve around death, both the experience of death in tribute and memorial posts and the more general notion that the proximity of death alone, of being authorized to kill and of being in mortal danger, elevates war experience to the level of the sacred. It concerns not only the "social organization of death" in the sense of who assumes authority over life and killing, but also of caring for dead bodies as well as for the bereaved, and it hinges on how war narratives negotiate the meaning of death for those left behind. In discourse on war, then, the "worshiping" of the nation becomes particularly poignant.[53]

---

49 Bellah, "Civil Religion in America"; Brænder, *Justifying*, 30–32; Haberski, *God and War*, 3–4.

50 Cf. Brænder, *Justifying*, 30–42.

51 Brænder, 32–34.

52 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 5.

53 Morten Brænder similarly emphasizes this war-related aspect when he explains civil religion's definition of American group membership "as guided by divine providence,

Because civil religion, as a "hybrid of nationalism and traditional religion,"[54] provides rituals for the "mobilization of cultural symbols in the service of a sacralized we/they dualism" during wartime,[55] it makes for highly emotional discourse. Its recourse to affect renders civil religious negotiations of war so complicated, as it provides a "common creed" for Americans to unify, but also gives them a "means to evaluate their nation's actions."[56] This might remind Americans of their "common culture and heritage,"[57] but it could also incite bitter conflicts over a war's aims and conduct, or raise issues of morality and guilt in discussions of individual soldiers' trauma, as public discourse on the Vietnam War illustrates. A ritualistic invocation of sacrifice in debates on death during war tends to boost affect and might emphasize both directions, it might be used to assert power and to ensure the loyalty of the populace during war, or it could provide arguments to resist a particular war's aims and development. As the motto for this subsection shows, milbloggers employ the idea for the motivation and justification of their own war efforts and thus embed themselves in the tradition of civil religion in war discourse.

Victor Turner describes sacrifice, i.e., "martyrdom for the sake of an altruistic cause," as a "root paradigm" of human existence.[58] In fact, René Girard and other scholars of group identity since the 1960s have argued that the cohesion of modern nations requires "blood sacrifice"—the death of one's own citizens in war.[59] Sacrifice is believed to be "essential"[60] to group cohesion because it marks the willingness of its members to defend the group in crisis, especially the group's leaders'—in this case, the US government's—"power […] to ask members to die in its name."[61] The group's very existence is protected by its members' willing submission to an authority that has the power to kill (i.e., to send soldiers off to war

as subject to divine judgement or as a national community that reaches beyond death." Brænder, *Justifying*, 42.

54 Haberski, *God and War,* 5.

55 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 23; cf. Smith, "Codes and Conflict: Toward a Theory of War as Ritual."

56 Haberski, *God and War,* 4.

57 Haberski, 4.

58 Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 15.

59 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," paras. 2, 20; cf. Girard and Gregory, *Violence and the Sacred*; Marvin and Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation"; Koenigsberg, "Aztec Warriors/Western Soldiers. The Body Politic Feeds upon Human Bodies."

60 Monnet, para. 1.

61 Monnet, para. 5; Haberski, *God and War*, 2.

and to persecute resistance) and by its members' public, ritualized execution of civic obligations.[62] US military chaplains emphasize the sacredness of this sacrifice when they invoke the notion of soldiers as "suffering servant[s]" in Isaiah 53,[63] in a terminological intermingling of 'warrior' and 'soldier,' with the implications of community service as discussed earlier. In the context of both Indigenous warrior ceremonies and milblogs, the sequence of sharing and acknowledging experience ritualistically enacts the social contract and, thus, symbolizes the reinforcement of group cohesion. By dancing, miming, or narrating, the warriors or soldiers publicly demonstrate their willing execution of their obligations to the group, while the ritual participants' or the milblog audience's public bearing of witness acknowledges the fulfillment of this obligation.[64]

The discussion of sacrifice in US civil religion lays bare a paradox in many Americans' self-perception. Its interplay of both reason and belief frequently contradicts core assumptions about national identity, character, and creed:

> Civil religion seems to capture the intersection between faith and civic obligation in a way that allows a mixing of truth claims without manipulation—as if a president doesn't play on the religious faith of his audience and the people don't mythologize the meaning of their nation. Yet civil religion is significant precisely because its promise is so racked by peril. There is a fundamental irony of American civil religion—the nation lives with a misbegotten confidence born from a union of religion and reason.[65]

This irony surfaces particularly in the emotionally charged contexts of war and death. Because of the sacralization of death through sacrificial imagery in war discourse, Monnet argues that the boundaries between "'appropriate' martyrdom" and "religious fanaticism" become exceedingly blurry at times.[66] Similarly, Kelly Denton-Borhaug criticizes the religious aspect of US "war-culture." While insisting on a sense of self in a secular society built on rationalist principles, public rhetoric during the War on Terror denounces the "irrationalism" of Islamist fundamentalism: "These labels rationalize the armed force of the United States as the only possible response to the 'irrational religious violence' of others, and create the mechanism for shielding and justifying the nature, causes and

62 Marvin and Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation," 771; Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, xv.
63 Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 13.
64 Cf. Tick, 120–22.
65 Haberski, *God and War*, 5.
66 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 2.

consequences of our own violent character and actions."[67] Denton-Borhaug points out the paradox in civil religion underlying "sacrificial ideology": "In contrast to societies that openly espouse religious governance, people of the United States are largely heedless to the deep intertwining of sacrificial practices that unite popular Christian understandings with militaristic, supposedly 'secular' civil, political and governmental values and functions."[68]

Tied in with this—at once religious and rationalized worshiping of society—is the notion of transcendence, above all where sacrifice is concerned. A willingness to die for a nation's cause or even for the nation's sheer existence involves the "giving up of self."[69] That means continued group existence (or a central feature of its self-perception, such as 'freedom') is 'bought' for the price of the sacrificed life, but it also signifies that the individual is taken up in something larger than himself or herself because not only is this sacrifice justified by the survival of the group, but the whole group also acquires meaning and a right (or even the obligation) to exist through it.[70] The notion that military service is a—some argue the only—meaningful contribution to 'something larger than oneself' is a recurring theme in milblogs, especially regarding American casualties. Monnet concludes: "Death, figured and understood as willing sacrifice, invests the nation with a sense of purpose, collective feeling, and renewed unity."[71] This section's motto exemplifies this theme: Phillips cannot afford to become tired because he remembers those who sacrificed their lives. From this perspective, if he—or, worse, America as a whole—should tire of the war, their sacrifices would have been in vain.

These notions build on traditional American of invocations of sacrifice and civil religion in wartime. The following examples trace their historical depth. Some of President Lincoln's speeches during the Civil War already equate sacrifice with national existence. He describes the casualties at Gettysburg as sacred sacrifices because they gave meaning to the war, they helped renew the nation (implying that the battle itself was sacred, symbolizing the collective experience of the nation), and their deaths inspired the living to dedicate themselves to the cause, that

67 Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*, 5.

68 Denton-Borhaug, 5.

69 Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference*, xv.

70 For a transatlantic perspective, cf. Hammer for a contextualizing perspective of recent public memorial services for deceased German soldiers in Afghanistan, particularly the reference to freedom in one of then-Secretary of Defense Thomas de Maizière's (CDU) commemorative speeches. Hammer, "How to Commemorate," 34.

71 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 9.

is, to renew the force behind it.[72] In his second Inaugural Address, he claimed that the covenant among the people, and between the people and God, had been broken and that the war was an aspect of the American Jeremiad, a call to return 'home,' to restore and, ultimately, redeem the nation.[73] If war and its sacrifices transcend the nation, redeem it, and give its existence meaning, however, it is implied that the nation needs war to exist "in perpetuity," and that it needs recurring wars to renew its purpose in being, as some scholars have warned.[74]

Like many other texts on civil religion, David Marvin's and Carolyn Ingle's much-cited article invokes Durkheim's references to tribal societies and employs the concepts of the totem and the taboo to reiterate ritualistic aspects in American notions of blood sacrifice in war. According to Monnet, reverence for the US flag in civic and military proceedings signifies the flag as a totem, "an embodied symbol of American sovereignty."[75] Marvin and Ingle compare the flag to the Cross symbolizing Jesus Christ's sacrifice for humankind because "[t]he flag in high patriotic ritual is treated with an awe and deference that marks it as the sacred object of the religion of patriotism."[76] The prescriptions on handling the flag during formal occasions reveal its totemic status and its representation of the nation, the body politic, and the bodies of individual soldiers. Relatives of a deceased soldier, presented with a flag by military officials during a funeral service, receive the symbolized body of their relative as much as the symbolized gratitude of the nation in exchange for their relative's "willing sacrifice" on behalf of the nation.[77] Flag symbolism is, not surprisingly, also prominent in milblogs. It plays a major role in ritualizing blog posts and interaction, as this chapter's readings discuss.

---

72 Monnet, paras. 8, 9, 20; Denton-Borhaug, review of *War and the American Difference* by Hauerwas.

73 Haberski, *God and War*, 7–8.

74 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 21; Denton-Borhaug, review of *War and the American Difference* by Hauerwas.

75 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 18. Although historians seem to have ignored the totemic aspect of flag symbolism until recently, research on this aspect is gaining ground: A conference of the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA, 2014) explored the symbolic meaning of flags in the context of civil religion. DeLear, "Flag Experts Explore Symbols, Their History and Role as 'Civil Religion.' "

76 Marvin and Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation," 77.

77 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 19; Koenigsberg, "Aztec Warriors/Western Soldiers." For the same reason, the US expends vast resources on repatriating the human remains of deceased soldiers and on recovering soldiers listed as MIA (missing in action) in foreign theaters of war, to reunite their bodies with the 'body politic,' and thus, to make the nation 'whole' again. Cf. Samet, "Leaving No Warriors Behind";

The oath of enlistment serves as another powerful religious symbol, explicitly tying soldiering to citizenship. The oath binds soldiers to the constitution and to the president,[78] and thus to "the most sacred sites, objects and moments in national life," offering "the promise of unassailable national credentials."[79] This link to citizenship is evident in the US tradition of the citizen soldier, the civilian who joined the military in times of need, who embodied the combination of citizenship privilege with civic duty, and whose civilian background ensured that the military "remained thoroughly, even raucously democratic."[80] Monnet posits that this link to citizenship offers an explanation why, historically, ethnic minorities and women have demanded access to the service.[81] The concept of the citizen-soldier also invites a perspective on ritual that helps illuminate negotiations of civil-military relationships since Vietnam. As Monnet explains, their proximity to killing and dying makes soldiers "objects of intense popular ambivalence"[82] and nurtures civilians' suspicion of them being naive and uncritical because civilian life is focused on pleasure, profit, and individualism, while soldiers, entering the service, must thoroughly deindividualize and shed attributes of a civilian. From the perspective of the military, this facilitates training, integrates soldiers into the institutional hierarchy, and ensures that they stand up to the pressures of battle, yet "an anthropological view would focus on the ritualistic aspect of practices that organize access to legalized murder and self-sacrifice."[83] In this view, the soldier's status is even more elevated, it marks him as a member of a "priestly order."[84]

Hawley, "Bodies and Border Practices"; Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 167; Usbeck, " 'Taking Chance Home.' "

78 Yet, as Monnet remarks, the oath does not mention the flag, which marks it as a "taboo" and, thus, demonstrates its supreme significance as a sacred object. Monnet explains that soldiers would risk their lives saving a flag from desecration or capture, but not a copy of the Constitution. Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 23.

79 Monnet, para. 24.

80 Bacevich, *New American*, 49. To name but one example, many Civil War career officers were concerned about discipline and leadership, complaining that the new-founded volunteer regiments insisted on electing their own officers. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 326–27.

81 Monnet, "War and National Renewal," para. 24.

82 Monnet, para. 25.

83 Monnet, para. 26.

84 Monnet, para. 22. This notion would be supported by Anthony King's observation on the quasi-religious creed among US soldiers, especially the religious connotations in their self-portrayal as 'warriors.' King, *The Combat Soldier*, 427.

These considerations on ritualization in civil-religious discussions of military service and death as sacrifice automatically raise questions about grief and ritualized mourning practices. They also invite the following exploration of memorial culture. It is a traditional cultural practice to negotiate (military) death that milblogs and other social media features have taken online and adapted to the technological opportunities of the virtual world. In various examples of US wars, scholars have pointed out the role of public mourning for community constructions. When death is heralded as a sacrifice on behalf of the community, it serves to channel private grief for the purpose of public mourning. To invoke sacrifice as a noble and selfless deed gives meaning to death as much as to the cohesion of the community. This is elevated even more in the notion of soldierly death as the 'ultimate sacrifice,' as the highest, noblest, and most "worthy" commitment a citizen can make to the nation.[85] As Drew Gilpin Faust's work on mourning practices in the Confederacy illustrates:

> Woman's role was not simply to make sacrifices herself but also to celebrate and sanctify the martyrdom of others. In the Confederacy mourning became a significant social, cultural, and spiritual duty. Through rituals of public grief, personal loss could be redefined as transcendent communal gain. Women's tears consecrated the deaths of their men, ensuring their immortality—in Southern memory as in the arms of God—and ratifying soldiers' individual martyrdom.[86]

It is exactly the notion of "transcendent communal gain" that demonstrates the power of sacrificial ideology. Exerting accountability for the care and burial of the dead and publicly praising them as paragons of the nation's virtues, state institutions not only reconcile the bereaved with the state responsible for their loss, they also involve the bereaved and the public in the ritualized construction of consent and community.[87]

As Faust illustrates in her monograph on suffering and mourning during the Civil War, private grief often turned into a demonstration of public mourning as friends and strangers joined mortuary services and left signs of sympathy at cemeteries. In these rituals,

85 Brænder, *Justifying*, esp. 24–26, 30; Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 177–78.

86 Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 1214.

87 Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, 9; Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 2–3.

> the fallen were being transformed into an imagined community for the Confederacy, becoming a collective in which a name or identity was no longer necessary. These men were now part of the Confederate Dead, a shadow nation of sacrificed lives to be honored or invoked less for themselves than for the purposes of the nation and the society struggling to survive them.[88]

Since then, representatives of the state have initiated or appropriated these wartime rituals because their transformation of private grief into public mourning served to reinforce a sense of belonging, gave meaning to the mourned deaths, and strengthened the citizens' resolve to prevail.[89] As a result, these rituals foster catharsis and at least suggest closure, both concepts associated with healing, especially in the context of trauma.[90] It is, therefore, in the interest of national cohesion during war to conduct such rituals. By acknowledging the wounds within the collective (loss of life, grief and, possibly, terror among survivors) and ritually igniting and strengthening its resolve, the renewed construction of the community symbolizes its 'healing.'

The notion of 'healing' is another example of how ambivalent and complicated a nuanced representation of war becomes. As the following subsection discusses, memorials offer a space for such collective rituals of grief and consensus construction. The example of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial illustrates that, while rituals tied to cultural practices regarding the memorial may help individual soldiers address their trauma, the civil-religious notion of sacrifice, according to some critical scholars,[91] imposes an understanding of social healing

88 Faust, *Republic*, 83.

89 The accumulative effects that these rituals have for the construction of community also explain why so many debates over the continuation of an inconclusive war employ sacrificial ideology to argue that giving up would render the sacrifice of previous casualties meaningless. The milblogger in the motto above implies a similar rationale. It also explains that this argument, because it is shrouded in the gravitas of ritual, generates social pressure: Ascribing meaning to death seeks to transform grief into pride; the clear binaries of good versus bad and friend versus foe involved in sacrificial ideology during war raise the risk of being associated with the enemy in case of nonconformance. Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 5; Kitch, "Mourning in America," 213.

90 Military grief management training for units who suffered casualties seeks to produce similar effects because the courses provide information about the psychological processes of grief, and enable catharsis through sharing stories. They follow similar sequencing as public memorial services. Hallman and Pischke, "US Army Combat," 261.

91 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*.

that, in fact, merely muted dissent and, thus, reinforced the social order without truly addressing social problems festering as a result of the Vietnam War.

Memorials and Ritual

If ritualized discourse on sacrifice and mourning provides such a powerful device to manufacture consensus and a sense of belonging because of its appeal to emotions, affect also plays a central role for the cultural work of memorials. Memorials are described as "archives of public affect, 'repositories of feelings and emotions,'" created under "affective conditions" which reveal insights into American constructions of memory and identity.[92] It is important to note that affect influences the negotiation of identity and meaning so severely—especially during war—that a Habermasian perspective on public debate (i.e., based on rationalism) cannot grasp the forces involved in this discursive context, especially when the role of affect to muster support and to retain and exercise state power in wartime is considered.[93] It is more productive to explain these negotiations and practices with the concept of ritual, especially considering sociological and anthropological perspectives arguing that memorials in modern nations took over the cultural functions of many religious rituals.[94]

I briefly discuss the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. at this point to contextualize mourning rituals and commemoration in milblogs with public discourse on war experience, mourning and sacrifice since Vietnam. A host of scholarly works has investigated the public debates around the design, planning, and reception of the memorial.[95] When the memorial was proposed and planned, the US was still preoccupied with bitter domestic arguments over the justification of the Vietnam War, over political decisions affecting the war, and the moral aspects of its conduct. At the same time, the public became aware of the scope of traumatization among Vietnam veterans. Activist scholars and therapists published profusely on the effects of war trauma, and they lobbied with politicians and health care administrators to recognize, explain, and implement programs for therapy, leading to the first, albeit controversial, definition of PTSD in the third edition of the *Diagnostic*

92 Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 13.

93 Doss, 15; Anderson, "Modulating the Excess of Affect. Morale in a State of 'Total War.'"

94 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 173.

95 Cf., among others, Hass, *Sacrificing*; Hass, *Carried*; Hagopian, *Vietnam War*; Hagopian, "Personal Legacy"; Doss, *Memorial Mania*; Gessner, *Kollektive Erinnerung als Katharsis?*; Leikauf, *"Welcome";* Savage, *Monument Wars*; Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*.

and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM III*).[96] All these debates were already shaping the cultural memory of the Vietnam War and its legacy; the perception of Vietnam veterans was increasingly influenced by public discourse on PTSD and it fueled a perspective of the entire veteran population as emotionally troubled or even traumatized. This notion, borne from public awareness of the scale of traumatization among Vietnam veterans, has since been more and more generalized so that, today, war experience is frequently assumed to be traumatic and pathological per se.[97] Both the persevering internal tensions of politics and morality of the Vietnam War and this evolving public debate on veterans' issues influenced the planning of the memorial.

In order to dodge these debates, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund stipulated that the designs must list the names of all US war dead, and that the memorial should discourage political interpretation and exploitation.[98] As a result, Maya Lin's winning design, although it faced fierce opposition from the start and was eventually complemented by additions that introduced a degree of political interpretation, after all, focused on the war dead to represent the experience of all Vietnam veterans.[99] The original design consists of a wall of polished black granite panels, partially sunk into the greens of the National Mall, on which the names of the c. 58,000 dead are inscribed. The memorial's stark shape has dominated public attention so much that it was soon known as the "Vietnam Wall."[100] This perspective centered the memorial around death and invited visitors to engage with soldiers' suffering, both with dying and losing comrades, and coming to terms with one's own survival. The design strives to work as the "first therapeutic memorial," as Kirk Savage has it, because it was supposed to help individual veterans face trauma and reach closure, and to help the nation overcome the deep divisions over the political and moral aspects of the war.[101]

Many of the memorial's academic interpretations comment on its therapeutic function. Visitors have introduced practices of mourning that, by now, have become traditions integrated into the memorial's official presentation. Offerings left by visitors at the Wall include notes, personal memorabilia, typical items of soldiering (e.g., boots), and medals. Since its dedication, several exhibitions have

96 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 8; Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 49–78; Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 89–117.

97 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 10–17, 50–54; Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 401.

98 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 267.

99 Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 109–12; Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 69–110, 166–201.

100 Hagopian, 96–97.

101 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 267–68.

presented these offerings to the public and interpreted them as ritual offerings aimed at catharsis and closure. They have given the Wall the aura of a shrine.[102] Another tradition quickly emerged from Lin's plan to enable a diverse 'feel' of the memorial, to encourage visitors to touch and interact with it. Many visitors rub or trace an inscribed name on paper and, thus, take a 'piece' of the Wall back home. It has been observed that touching and rubbing a name has become a rite of catharsis among many visitors.[103]

The memorial thus provides a space for public mourning and discourse on mourning that the visitors fill with their own creative practices.[104] As a national memorial, it represents and shapes public memory by initiating a perspective on healing through public, ritualized mourning. Its visitors have appropriated it in their enactments of private grief in this public space, and they have shaped traditions and customs of public mourning in doing so.[105] The memorial fulfilled its intended function of giving Vietnam veterans public recognition and raising awareness of their postwar struggles. Scholars, such as Patrick Hagopian, however, question in how far the memorial and its cultural practices are, in fact, 'healing' the nation. While Hagopian grants that veterans and therapists use the Wall for therapeutic, cathartic visits,[106] he bemoans the Park Service's restrictions on political manifestations at the memorial because they prevent a critical, public, and necessarily controversial discourse on the morality and the politics of the war that he regards as the prerequisite of 'healing': "Only some voices were permitted to partake of the sacred atmosphere of the memorial, and their role was sacerdotal: their words gained weight from the borrowed sanctity of the wall, and they undertook the priestly task of giving meaning to the lives and deaths its inscriptions recalled."[107] The suffering commemorated here is, thus, once more depicted as a necessary sacrifice.[108] According to Hagopian, the memorial merely employs a "bowdlerized and simplistic concept of healing"[109] because the debate since the memorial's inception shied away from addressing moral issues haunting the memory of the Vietnam War and its conduct.[110] The

102 Cf. Hagopian, "Personal Legacy"; Hass, *Carried*; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 74–81.
103 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 365, 385, 389; Hass, *Carried*, 14, 21, 24, 27; Gessner, *Kollektive Erinnerung als Katharsis?*, 102.
104 Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 100.
105 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 365.
106 Hagopian, 192.
107 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 201.
108 Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 111; cf. Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture*, 9, 92–126.
109 Hagopian, *Vietnam War,* 404.
110 Hagopian, 401–05.

"sacerdotal" utilization of the Wall by official representatives, then, illustrates how civil religion enacts rituals of national cohesion, merging patriotic ideology with quasi-religious terminology and procedure. This might not signify the actual 'healing' of the wounds of the Vietnam War because it selectively excludes dissent, but it symbolizes the renewal of cohesion, if only on the surface. As the following section shows, the memorial practices described here have migrated to the Internet and established medium-specific practices of ritual and mourning. The technology of new and social media boosts these practices in supporting agency and participation, it enables a negotiation of group identity and war experience on a much wider scale.

Memorial and Ritual 2.0: Medial Adaptations of Traditional Cultural Practices

> *The question […] is not so much whether digital rituals can replace real-life actions, but rather in what ways Internet rituals meet people's needs for ritual experience.*[111]

The popular understanding of ritual addressed at the beginning of this chapter usually does not grant room for ritual outside of explicitly religious contexts, and, to recall Grimes's observations on vernacular ritualism from above, religious ritual space does not seem to invite "MP3 players, cell phones, and other electronic fads."[112] It appears that religion and ritual are typically associated with tradition and conservatism, and this view ties them to the ritual space of churches, temples, and sacred sites. However, the previous observations have marked rituals as vibrant cultural practices that often accompany or even initiate cultural change. The digital revolution is an ideal example to illustrate this point and to draw the connection between Native American warrior ceremonies, civil religion, and milblogs.

Web 2.0 enabled people to perpetuate traditional cultural practices on a much broader scale, providing new media and technology for adapted, hybrid, and new practices and expressions. In some instances, one could say that not only do "electronic fads" have a place in ritual, they sometimes even become its medium. To use an example from popular culture, fan cultures have eagerly adopted new and

111 Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals," 149.

112 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 9.

social media to connect, exchange ideas, and engage in fan activities consisting of ritualistic elements nurtured by the media's specific textuality.[113] Nancy Baym conceptualizes (fan) communities as "communities of practice"[114] whose interaction, contributions, arguments, and expressions of like-mindedness "collaboratively coconstruct the values, relationships, identities, and conventions that make a group feel like community."[115] Recent new-and-social-media scholarship has also borrowed from traditional sociological concepts of community, such as those pioneered by Ferdinand Toennies and Max Weber, as well as from anthropology (e.g., Victor Turner) to integrate the study of online community practices with notions of ritual and to describe virtual reality as a liminoid, ritual space in which community is constituted.[116] Baym details fan practices and textual elements of fan sites to describe a "ritualized space for friendliness."[117] Similarly, Paul Booth argues that the interactivity facilitated by comments generates "ritual communication as it establishes a community."[118]

Web 2.0 provides a space for cultural practices that contain, or nurture ritual, and it has become a site to construct community through ritual, and even to negotiate religious identity, to engage in religious "world-building," or "cosmos construction."[119] As Rachel Wagner observes, traditional religious practices, online religious services,[120] as well as many of our online activities, including video games, "imagin[e…] a world in which we are in control, in which things make sense, in which what we do has profound meaning, and in which we can

113 This is not only obvious in the "worship" attributes of fan culture, but also in the interactivity of blog comments and threads on platforms such as Facebook. Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 45; Klemm, "Doing Being a Fan im Web 2.0. Selbstdarstellung, Soziale Stile und Aneignungspraktiken in Fanforen," 4; cf. Schmidt-Lux, "Fans und Religion."

114 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 4, 21–24, 120–21.

115 Baym, 201.

116 Autenrieth, "Gemeinschaft," 13–16; Herwig, "Die 140-Zeichen-Frage," 198–200.

117 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 129, 133–34. Baym discusses conventions for managing topical coherence in a communications thread, or for "unlurking," i.e., terminating passive online readership and introducing oneself to the group in a first contribution. Baym, 134. This perspective does not ignore the vitriol found in many platforms' comments, such as YouTube, it focuses on expressions of like-mindedness among a specified fan group sharing interests (e.g., their love for music groups, films, or computer games).

118 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 45.

119 Mahan, review of *Godwired* by Rachel Wagner, 86; Wagner, *Godwired*, 2; Howard, "Enacting a Virtual 'Ekklesia.'"

120 Wagner mentions, e.g., the opportunity to go on a *hajj* on Second Life, or the Dalai Lama's endorsement of virtual prayer wheels. Wagner, *Godwired*, 1.

enact our ideal selves: activities that have long been viewed as forms of religious imagination."[121] The emergence of new and social media, thus, transferred traditional practices of community construction and negotiations of group identity to a new medium and adapted these practices' ritualized, symbolic language to the new medium as well.

These technology-induced cultural changes also affected other practices beyond the realm of popular culture, such as narrating war, or mourning. They had an impact on practices in different ethnic, national, and cultural contexts on a global scale. The following brief examples will illustrate how the digital revolution helped transmit the cultural function of ritual to different notions of embodiment, of ritual space, and of medium, both among 'Western' societies and Indigenous groups, to set the stage for a better understanding of milblogs as rituals that emerged out of particular cultural traditions and transformed conventions of these traditions to a new medium and to new technological conditions.

Indigenous cultures are usually—and often stereotypically—associated with a traditionalist stance toward cultural change, especially where spiritualism is concerned (the history of colonialism and of forced cultural assimilation explains protective instincts among communities in these matters). However, new and social media are widespread platforms for adapted cultural practices among Indigenous communities, such as Australian Aboriginals, to carry on tribal traditions. This could mean that some traditional rituals retain their function but migrate to the new medium, or are complemented by it. In some of these new ritual scenarios, the medium, in fact, becomes the ritual space. This seems especially significant as many scholars in traditional ritual studies emphasize the role of place in ritual by referring to traditional societies.[122]

Scholars observe a global trend among Indigenous peoples to engage in social media. Because many communities are isolated from one another and from large population centers, social media bridge geographical distances and allow continued connection and participation in important cultural practices.[123] In Bronwyn Carlson's and Ryan Frazer's Australian case example, the geographical predicament is enhanced by two factors: First, the results of colonialism,

121 Wagner, 2.

122 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction"; Grimes, *Rite*; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 29. For a classic on the role of place in Native American cosmology and spirituality, see Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*.

123 Carlson and Frazer, "'It's Like Going to a Cemetery and Lighting a Candle.' Aboriginal Australians, Sorry Business, and Social Media," 212.

e.g., forced relocation, the boarding school system, and the bleak job market in the communities have scattered their members across the continent, making it extremely difficult to fulfill social obligations in person.[124] Second, the cultural context, particularly regarding the cultural practices of mourning which Australian Aboriginals conceptualize as "Sorry Business," increases social pressure because most mourning activities require personal involvement within a very complex and close-knit kinship system. Compliance with these obligations reflects on the social standing of one's entire family.[125] Carlson also addresses another prominent aspect raised in ritual studies, i.e., that ritual is not only defined by space, but also as an embodied practice, which would disqualify a perspective of Web 2.0 practices as rituals. Carlson, however, argues that:

> Aboriginal people embody rather than disembody their identity and cultural engagements when interacting online on social media sites […] Online identities are the product of cultural practices by real social agents that, while not inhabiting the same spatio-temporal domain, are still very much subject to the same scrutiny and regulations as face-to-face interactions.[126]

Thus, the migration of the cultural practice to the new medium as such makes it no less effective or meaningful. The fact that participants do not "inhabit the same spatio-temporal domain" does not diminish the practice's cultural function and value, because the emphasis is on the performance of cultural identity by "real social agents," embodied by operating communications technology and by the performance of symbolic communication.[127] Because of their discussion of the

124 Carlson and Frazer, 214, 218–20; Carlson, "The 'New Frontier,'" 159–60; Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals." To further link this discussion on spatiality with veteran issues and trauma recovery, I would like to refer at this point to recent programs in the US pioneering in "telemental health" using new and social media to improve psychological health care services for Indigenous veterans on remote reservations. Shore et al., "Review of American Indian Veteran Telemental Health."

125 Carlson and Frazer, "'It's Like Going to a Cemetery" 214.

126 Carlson, "The 'New Frontier,'" 148. Cf. also Hine for notions of embodied practice in her development of an "Ethnography for the Internet." Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet*.

127 Carlson, "The 'New Frontier,'" 150. However, this should not obscure the cultural challenges Carlson and Frazer discuss in the context of mourning, such as specific tribal taboos on depicting or naming deceased persons, or typical social media challenges discussed for 'mainstream' society users as well. Carlson and Frazer, "'It's Like Going to a Cemetery," 214, 218–20; Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death

practices' complexity, Carlson's and Frazer's work on Sorry Business is especially fascinating for this chapter's focus as it provides material for cultural comparison on mourning rituals through the same medium. " 'Doing' Aboriginality"[128] and, for example, "doing being a fan,"[129] then, are different ritualized cultural practices enacted in different ethnic and discursive contexts, but they share structures, functions, and the effect of community affirmation with 'doing soldiery' and with the negotiation of war experience and civil-military relationships in milblogs.

In 'Western' societies, Web 2.0, and particularly social media have become sites of changes in mourning practices, as well. The postmodern emphasis on individual experience and personalization generated alternative funeral practices, such as natural or sea burials, as well as personalized narrative practices of life crisis management and commemoration, such as cancer blogs and virtual cemeteries. These practices also became early subjects of research in new media studies and sociology during the mid-2000s.[130] Similar to Carlson's work on Sorry Business, these studies noted substantial benefits for participants in online mourning practices in terms of ease of information (e.g., accessibility and reach), preservation and commemoration (e.g., individualized mementos), and community-building through shared practice in public (e.g., platforms as empowering convergence spaces).[131] Social media, thus, provide a space for online memorials and mourning rituals which serve an individual's grief processing as much as they nurture a sense of group identity through shared purpose and ritualized practice.

Similar effects have been observed in online memorial practice among veterans. The negotiation of Vietnam War experience and of grief over lost fellow soldiers was among the earliest commemorative and therapeutic practices on the Internet.[132] Roland Leikauf's dense study on Vietnam veteran websites and webrings demonstrates that online memorial practice as iterated so far in this section is a major element in representations of Vietnam War experience. His work adds a critical factor to the previously discussed benefit of individualized practices of remembering. The authors in his source corpus not only gain public

on Facebook." For a similar cultural comparison on rituals in Web 2.0, cf. Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals."

128 Carlson, "The 'New Frontier,' " 151.

129 Klemm, "Doing Being a Fan im Web 2.0."

130 Gebert, *Carina unvergessen*; Roberts, "The Living and the Dead"; Altena, Notermans, and Widlok, "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals."

131 Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death on Facebook."

132 Cf. Dare, "The Internet as Healer," 68.

recognition, but they also retain control over their message and over the content produced and collected on their sites. This is significant because previous representations of Vietnam (e.g., movies, print memoirs, and novels) did not grant authors a similar degree of agency. A confounding aspect is that control over one's private expressions (e.g., of grief) allows an author to counter (seemingly) hegemonic representations.

This notion of resistance against a hegemonic representation of events ties in with Pierre Nora's argument that history's tendency to fix reconstructions of the past overwhelmed memory's "living past" representations during the nineteenth century in order to construct dominant narratives in the service of imagined national identities. Memory-studies scholars argue that the rising popularity of oral history during the late twentieth century results from a widespread desire to engage in personalized, non-hegemonic, fluid representations of the past, which are often perceived as counter-narratives. The appeal of Vietnam veteran's websites and their interest in overcoming (perceived) hegemonic narratives of the war and its legacy apparently reinforces the perspective of this struggle between history and memory, of promoting heterogeneous voices through agency in narrating experience.[133]

In addition, Leikauf observes that Vietnam veterans' websites and online adaptations of the Wall seem to be intent to retain control over the discourse and to limit opportunities for outsider's content production, which indicates their resistance against a perceived hegemonic representation.[134] Particularly their emphasis on resistance against an evident hegemonic narrative brings into focus the viability of Roy Rappaport's notion of ritual's meta-performativity: Not only do these websites envision an ideal way to commemorate Vietnam experience from the veterans' perspective, they bring it into being, that is, they manufacture it through practice. A recurring theme in these practices is the Vietnam Wall and its official purpose to grant veterans the previously denied public recognition.[135] It is not surprising, then, that the Vietnam Wall features prominently in these online representations of veteran experience and that many of the sites Leikauf

133 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 101; Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 167; Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis.*

134 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 189. In contrast, most milblogs I have studied actively invite public comments. The pro-military and pro-war homogeneity on many blogs seems a result of self-regulating convergence of like-minded users, rather than of strict comment editing and channeling on the part of the soldier-blogger hosts.

135 Leikauf, 104, 163, 190–92.

identified are online memorials to soldiers and veterans similar to the civilian memorials and grief platforms discussed above.[136]

Visual representations of the Wall abound in Vietnam veterans' websites. The medium facilitates easy editing of illustrations to emphasize or transform particular elements. Leikauf remarks that the mirror effect of the actual Wall's polished granite panels, inviting visitors to establish contact with the dead, can be reinforced online: "Behind the names, the living and the dead are finally reunited."[137] Editing software also allows site hosts to bring the complementary sculpture of the three infantry men closer and in more direct interaction with the Wall, inextricably linking the original memorial's message of suffering and persevering with soldierly values.[138] Note that the effect of interactivity at the physical memorial, of touching the wall, leaving offerings, or making tracings of names, is adopted and enhanced by online technology. Hypertext allows visitors to 'touch,' i.e., click a name which then leads to an online memorial or additional biographical context for that person. One of the most prominent such sites is the "Virtual Wall."[139] Illustrations of tracings of names are popular visual elements on the websites, creating the effect of the name emerging from the "fog of war" that "compensates the Wall's physical distance and, at the same time, seems to make the names comprehensible."[140] Lists of names with a connected hypertext background thus transform into "true artifacts" which enhance the feeling of physicality; Leikauf compares the effect to a shoe box filled with personal memorabilia.[141] Transferring offering practices at the Wall into the realm

136 Leikauf, 124. However, Leikauf also notes that the veterans' anxiety about retaining control over their message prevents them from fully operationalizing the potential of their medium to exact publicity—they do not seem interested in unedited audience input, which restricts the kind of public exchange on Vietnam that their sites so vehemently call for. Leikauf, 338–39.

137 Leikauf, 186.

138 Leikauf, 186.

139 Leikauf, 187; "Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall - The Virtual Wall." Other websites have taken up the structure and function of the Virtual Wall: The "Suicide Wall" commemorates veterans who committed suicide after returning home from deployment. This memorial includes veterans from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 198; "Suicide Wall."

140 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 194; Kethcart, "Dedications." In this instance, Leikauf plays with the German term "be-greifbar," connoting both the promise of comprehension and tactile experience, that is, physical interaction.

141 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 179, 194.

of online memorials creates a similar effect: Hypertext invites visitors to leave messages, stories, notes, and photos.[142] Generally, Leikauf interprets these private adaptations of the memorial, in conjunction with veterans' impetus to control the message, as attempts to inscribe into memorial culture pride in veterans' identity and military experience that the physical Wall, because of its political restrictions, does not provide.[143]

The discussion so far has read rituals as symbolic, performed communication aimed at enhancing community cohesion. This broad understanding takes a processual perspective geared toward elucidating cultural work in a variety of cultural and discursive contexts. It provides insights into the structures and functions of explicitly religious practices, but it also serves to identify and explain ritualized practices in popular culture that, at first glance, appear utterly secular. The integration of performance studies concepts, such as 'scenarios,' opens up the discussion for the cultural comparison of ritual among performance-based Indigenous cultures with the texts of 'Western,' writing-based cultures. Within this cultural comparison, it generates an inclusive discussion of various modes, genres, and media, such as religious rituals, films, memoirs, websites, or social media platforms. This perspective on symbolic, performed communication, thus, employs the concept of ritual to subsume practices such as 'counting coup' and other Native American war-related ceremonies, 'Western' war memoirs, and milblogs under the discursive context of how cultures negotiate war experience and how their negotiation of values and knowledge constructs meaning and group cohesion. The following reading of sample milblog posts, thus, complements and integrates the above discussion of ritual scenarios in diverse modes and media.

142 Leikauf, 175, 188. He adds that this practice seemingly helps some veterans because they are not required to be present in the public space of the Wall, leave actual offerings behind, come in contact other visitors, or experience their reactions, all of which might comprise trigger situations for a traumatized person. Leikauf, 188. What some scholars identify as a challenge of online mourning because it may lead to, or perpetuate isolating behavior, could, however, be a benefit to some veterans if it shields them from such stressors. Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death on Facebook," 976.

143 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 192–93.

"You Are Appreciated, All of You." Ceremonial Storytelling in Milblogs

Memorials and Tributes

This discussion of ritual in milblogs begins with mourning and commemorative practices. A second section looks into ritualized negotiations of war stress. While the remaining chapters more frequently address hope and strength in milblogs and homecoming scenarios, the blog samples in this reading primarily focus on grief, loss, and doubts. Death is ubiquitous in representations of war. Soldiers are aware of its proximity, and they must come to terms with the likelihood of having to kill, with avoiding death, with losing fellow soldiers, and with encountering dead bodies in the war zone. Milblogs reflect on many such aspects of death, and they transfer cultural practices around death and grief to this new medium. While operational security requirements prevent milbloggers from discussing incidents in which soldiers had to kill,[144] mourning for fellow soldiers is a widespread theme. The examples above illustrated that new and social media lend themselves to such forms of public mourning and grief processing, and that they are already practiced widely among civilians and veterans.[145] It is only natural that deployed soldiers would use a similar medium and mode.

Memorial and tribute posts are very common in milblogs, they comprise a rich content category next to depictions of camp life and of the locals' lives in the war zone. Rex Temple's blog *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* features more than twenty such posts between May and September 2009, the first few months of his deployment. I draw most examples for the following analysis from his blog. Like online memorials on Vietnam veteran websites or civilian mourning sites, these posts serve three basic interrelated functions: they seek to disseminate news about the death of a soldier, they preserve his or her memory and enable or retain bloggers' relationships with the dead, and they form a community of mourners, often even several overlapping communities.[146] The aspect of information dissemination can be further specified in this context. In addition to news about the death of

144 This is a frequently discussed topic in memoirs, however, where authors are no longer subject to military security regulations. Cf. Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 26–37; Bellavia, *House to House*, 240–69.

145 See also Shay for an analysis of cathartic and community-building effects of grief processing in traumatized Vietnam veterans' online discussion forums. Shay, *Odysseus*, 180–201.

146 Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, "Death on Facebook," 974, 987–90.

a soldier, reporting on memorial practices performed in camps in the war zone provides insights into military life, explains procedures, symbolically depicts the military's (and, by extension, the state's) care for citizens who died in its service. Thus, it further serves to maintain civil-military relationships. Milblogs' specific textuality enhances these functions: memorial and tribute posts can comprise brief references to soldiers' deaths within a larger entry, an entry dedicated to one specific person or group of persons, or they emerge into a series of entries with multiple links and cross-references. Among the blogs studied closely for this project, these posts are also usually the ones eliciting the most comments from the audience.

Many tribute and memorial posts inform their readers about soldiers' deaths essentially in the form of online obituaries, a practice also common on civilian mourning websites, on websites set up by civilians to commemorate their deceased military relatives, or tributes posted on Memorial Day or at anniversaries of soldier's deaths.[147] They often provide a photo of the dead, brief biographical information, some details on the circumstances of death, and links to news media reports if operational security does not allow the bloggers to offer more details themselves.[148] The desire to disseminate information in these posts goes beyond civilian obituaries' intent to reach out to extended family members, friends, and acquaintances of the deceased because the military officially informs next of kin, who would then spread the news through their own networks.[149] Milbloggers' additional efforts address the—largely anonymous—audience in a gesture of 'you should know' which seems particularly significant with milblogs from Afghanistan. The Afghanistan mission is often seen as the "forgotten war" because public interest in post-9/11 wars was so fixed on Iraq. Telling one's audience about soldiers dying in Afghanistan raises awareness of this 'other' war and of the ongoing struggles of US soldiers. Afghanistan is also an important example because many returning soldiers complain that the US public does not seem to be aware of the war effort at all, and that soldiers' struggles and sacrifices

147 Rossetto, Lannutti, and Strauman, 979; Acton, *Grief in Wartime*. For an example of a tribute prepared by the sister of a deceased soldier, cf. Spragins, "For My Brother"; Spragins, "Thankfulness(Squared)." For tributes to Native American soldiers, e.g., Lori Piestewa (Hopi) who was killed during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, making her the first Native American woman to die in combat as a member of US Armed Forces, cf. Schilling, "Memorial Day Tribute"; FancyShawlDancr, "Pfc. Lori Ann Piestewa *Tribute*."

148 Cf. Temple, "In Memory"; Temple, "Honoring Maj Rocco Barnes."

149 Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 282–86.

are not appreciated by civil society.[150] As in the above discussion of ritualization in the commemoration of Vietnam, the desire to spread news about Afghanistan already entails a desire for a ceremonial acknowledgment of the soldiers' war effort—and, thus, of the social contract—by civil society. This notion becomes obvious in the following example.

In July 2009, the aunt of a recently killed soldier wrote a letter to the *Washington Post* to criticize the imbalance in media coverage: Her nephew had been killed on 25 June, the day of Michael Jackson's death, and she criticized the paper's marginal treatment of the incident involving her nephew, compared to coverage of the pop star's demise. The *Post* published her letter and received a wide response, many replies coming from members of the military. Rex Temple's blog then republished a transport airplane crew's message who repatriated that soldier's body to the US. Their post details ceremonies conducted by the soldier's unit as they loaded his casket onto the plane. It concludes by addressing the soldier's aunt: "Though there may not have been any media coverage, Brian's death did not go unnoticed. You are not alone with your grief. We mourn Brian's loss and celebrate his life with you. Brian is a true hero, and he will not be forgotten by those who served with him."[151] One month later, Temple cross-posts a YouTube video in which the soldier's aunt describes the hometown funeral service and the locals' condolences, once more criticizing the media's neglect of war deaths. She then emphasizes her impetus of bringing war casualties back into public focus in a comment to Temple's post where she points out that, by going public, she did not intend to glorify her nephew, but to highlight his family's grief as exemplary for those of other US war casualties. She writes: "Brian is the particular and special young man that we are mourning. But there are over 4,000 families out there mourning their own loved one."[152] By republishing the air crew's letter and the aunt's video, Temple not only offers information to his readers, he also signals to them that he cares about the larger issue and implies that they should not only

150 Cf. the film *Forgotten War* (2010), and Jones, "The Forgotten War: 12 Years in Afghanistan down the Memory Hole."

151 Temple, "A Soldier's Final." In other blog posts, civilians remind soldiers that they are aware of Afghanistan and of the soldiers' efforts, in order to quell their doubts. As one comment to a depressed guest entry in Phillips's blog states: "We DO know there is a war in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq. We DO know that your living conditions and work conditions are stressful EVERY day. We DO know that there are days when you would rather just pull the covers up over your head and stay there. Most of all please know that we CARE!!!!" Leta, in Webbs, "As I Sit."

152 marthagillis, 22 Oct 2009, in Temple, "CBS News Sunday Morning."

know, but care, as well. Illustrating both the soldiers' ceremony in Afghanistan and the funeral service at home, Temple's blog reproduces the ritual features of these respective physical rituals (discussing flags displayed, salutes, and music), transfers them to the medium of his online platform, and amplifies both the message and the ritualization of the symbolic act.

Beyond this purpose to highlight the Afghanistan campaign and to raise awareness among Americans that "there's still a war on in Afghanistan,"[153] blog reports on military memorial services also inform their readers about military procedures concerning the treatment of deceased soldiers' human remains. As the example above shows, they are supposed to tell the bereaved that their dead relative's fellow soldiers share their grief. On a more abstract level, they symbolize the military's—and, generally, the state's—respect for those who died in its service. This message often addresses the bereaved; Temple shares a few of the photos that he took at a funeral service on his blog and directs relatives to the unit's Casualty Assistance Officer for copies of the entire album.[154] In terms of community construction, these posts gain even more significance since blog readers come to represent civil society as such. Reporting on military funeral rites and repatriation procedures, thus, reproduces and mirrors civil-religious rites negotiating citizenship, national survival and renewal, and, most importantly, individual sacrifice on behalf of the nation, in the form of ceremonial storytelling.

Such reports have been a tradition since the Civil War, where Union and Confederate governments had to take responsibility for massive unforeseen casualties and were forced not only to institute centralized systems of recruitment to replenish their forces, but also of recovering and burying the war dead. As Drew Gilpin Faust aptly explains, the emergence of total war between modern mass armies resulted in fundamental reevaluations of citizen-government relationships in both the North and the South. Citizens exerted increasing social and political pressure on their governments to make widespread commitments to the citizenry regarding the status of soldiers and their relatives. "Soldiers were not […] simply cogs in a machinery of increasingly industrialized warfare. Citizens were selves—bodies and names that lived beyond their own deaths, individuals who were the literal lifeblood of the nation."[155] Similarly, Michael Sledge argues that both living soldiers and their dead bodies represent the

153 Owen, "Why General Campbell's Right About Airstrikes."
154 Temple, "Memorial Service."
155 Faust, *Republic*, 269.

nation: "How a government views the corpses of its soldiers is indicative of how it views its citizens" and, therefore, the government's care for the dead bodies of its soldiers "indicate[s] that the nation's leaders expend political capital on matters of significance to its people."[156] In Temple's republished report by the transport air crew, the authors highlight their particular experience as exemplary for the war effort in general: "For one brief moment, the war stopped to honor Lt. Brian Bradshaw. This is the case for all of the fallen in Afghanistan. It is our way of recognizing the sacrifice and loss of our brothers and sisters in arms."[157] This perspective explains how sacrificial ideology justifies soldiers' commitment to war and elucidates the enormous efforts to recover and repatriate soldiers' remains back to the US. If soldiers are the "lifeblood of the nation," returning their bodies into the 'body politic' is a prerequisite to make the nation 'whole' again.[158] Not only the sacrifice of the soldiers, also the government's care for their bodies give death and war meaning and, thus, serve to reconstitute the nation.

Temple's painstaking description of some memorial services held at camps in Afghanistan, thus, is not simply sharing information with his audience from the position of a specialist insider, Temple also serves as a representative of the state, proving to his civilian audience that the state takes responsibility for the casualties its war has produced. In one example, he describes the scenery and lists elements of the service, e.g., the different lined-up troop contingents, bugler, and flags, as well as a table with the soldier's photograph, an Army hat and the typical arrangement of a bayoneted rifle planted upside down, the soldier's helmet resting on the rifle's butt, and a pair of empty boots in front of it.[159] Temple further immerses his audience in this reproduction and medialization of the ritual by describing music ("Amazing Grace" and "Taps," the traditional bugle call played at flag ceremonies and funeral services) as well as significant sequences of the ensuing ceremony, such as a roll call during which the name of the deceased soldier is called out three times without response, and a twenty-one-gun salute by a Marine honor guard.[160] Listing all these ritual elements, Temple posits that

156 Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 26.

157 Temple, "A Soldier's Final."

158 For discussions of repatriation efforts and their ritual aspects, cf. Usbeck, "'Taking Chance Home'"; Usbeck, "Don't Forget."

159 Temple, "Memorial Service."

160 Note the elements of repetition (of calls), of accumulation (of fired salutes), and of formalization (prescribed salutes, ways of handling a flag, and of issuing bugle calls) in this mirroring of the campside ceremony, which all increase the degree of ritualization within the entire event, and its medialization.

"[a] military memorial service is the most dignified and professional ceremony you will ever witness."[161]

The blogs' specific textuality supports the construction of an online memorial (and its participatory elements nurture the "coconstruction" in Baym's sense, as the discussion on 'narractive mourning' below will illustrate). Many of the visual elements reproduce the flag symbolism of the physical memorial service. Temple's photos show flags displayed during the service, and the header on his blog's main page shows an American flag waving from a sandbagged bunker in front of a backdrop of Afghan mountains. The role of the flag as the nation's totem is thus transferred to the online medium. In addition, hypertext promotes the effect of the "shoe box" of memorabilia Leikauf observes among Vietnam veteran websites.[162] Temple posts photos and links to official online obituaries or media reports relevant to mourning the dead, e.g., reports on firefights, accidents, the repatriation of human remains, and on stateside funeral services.[163] If the blogger knew the deceased soldier personally, the post might also include personal stories and memories and invite readers to share.[164] The Anglo-Saxon tradition of sharing stories about deceased persons at a funeral service to celebrate their lives adapts to the new medium; it even overcomes the temporal obstacle of a physical ritual—contributors now do not have to be present during the funeral in order to share their stories.

The shoe-box effect is further enhanced when a blogger posts several entries on the same incident or person. On 9 August 2009, Temple reports on a firefight two days earlier in which a US soldier had died and a friend of Temple's was wounded. This initial post explains that military protocol requires shutting down private Internet use on affected camps after such incidents in order to give authorities time to notify next of kin so that they do not learn the troubling news through the (social) media. Temple only posts this information after the military has officially confirmed the incident, death, and injury.[165] He announces

161 Temple, "Memorial Service"; cf. Temple, "Camp Memorial Service." Posting the air crew's letter on the service before departure of the transport flight described above, Temple takes on a similar role, and he serves as a multiplier by republishing the text and confirming it through his expertise as a military representative. Temple, "A Soldier's Final." A similar example with a political message that attempts to contextualize death with the war effort would be Douglas Traversa's tribute to a soldier from his hometown who was killed during Traversa's tour. Traversa, "Sgt. David Stephens."

162 Leikauf, "*Welcome,*" 179.

163 Cf. Temple, "Memorial Service"; Temple, "3 US Soldiers Killed"; Temple, "In Memory."

164 Cf. Molin, "The Post-9/11 Condition."

165 Temple, "Honoring Capt Freeman."

his research plans to gather information for a "tribute" and his wife follows up the next day with additional links to conventional media reports. While Temple speaks of a future tribute post here, I would regard the entire series of posts as such, because all posts cumulatively serve the purpose of honoring and commemoration related to that incident and those involved. In follow-up posts over the next few weeks, Temple and his wife provide details on the firefight,[166] on the memorial service held in Afghanistan,[167] on stateside services,[168] and on the progress of his wounded friend's recovery.[169]

These posts soon emerge into virtual convergence sites for military personnel, bereaved family members, and civilian readers alike.[170] The wounded soldier's cousin states that he "immediately came to this site that Kit had told me about to see if there was any news."[171] One commenter addresses Temple and the other contributors: "As a long-time family friend of the Freemans, I appreciate your reports from the field. It's been a rough week knowing that I will never again see the remarkable young man that I watched grow from an engaging toddler. Reading and seeing how Matt was honored by his brothers-in-arms is a comfort. Thank you."[172] She positions herself within the community and explicitly thanks Temple (and his fellow soldiers) for their memorial ceremony, for reporting on it, and for providing the space where they are currently converging to mourn. Other commenters contribute to the "shoe box" by sharing their own insider information with the community: "I, along with thousands of others, lined the streets of Richmond Hill, Georgia today to show our respect and support as Capt Freeman's motorcade returned him home for the final time. His mother's eyes showed exactly what all military families ultimately fear when their loved ones are deployed."[173] This commenter added information about the hometown service, complemented with personalized observations and interpretations.

---

166 Temple, "Combat Heroes."

167 Temple, "Camp Memorial Service"; Temple, "Update on SPC Lowe."

168 Temple, Liisa. "Tributes to Captain Matthew Freeman"; Temple, "Saying Goodbye"; Temple, "Captain Freeman's Annapolis."

169 Temple, "Combat Heroes"; Temple, "Wounded Soldier"; Temple, Liisa, "Update about SPC Chris 'Kit' Lowe's Recovery." Many of the posts' embedded and linked videos are no longer available, an example of how ephemeral social media sources challenge historical research. Cf. also Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 138–40.

170 Mark et al., "Blogs as a Collective War Diary," 38.

171 Robert Feus, in Temple, "Combat Heroes."

172 Liz, in Temple, "Camp."

173 Kristin B., in Temple, "Combat Heroes."

The collective entity of these contributions, then, provides both facts on the incident, on the ensuing ceremonies (collecting individual posts, links, photos, videos, and stories), and expressions of empathy. It constructs a memorial to the dead that, like the Vietnam Wall and its online versions, commemorates the dead and gathers the survivors together to share grief and ultimately, to negotiate the meaning of the events and their consequences. The underlying cultural tradition historically relied on various media to collect these memorabilia. Silvan Niedermeier describes a photo album from the Philippine-American War (1899–1902) with similar content and functions: The album documents the stages of a soldier's journey to the war, such as sailing from San Francisco and posing with buddies in exotic settings, but it also depicts the place were the soldier was killed and shows his family at his grave site at the national cemetery in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Obviously, comrades of the deceased took some of the photos after his death and sent the album to the widow whose family eventually completed and used it as a personal memorial and mourning device.[174] The final image showing the family at the grave documents the dead soldier's eventual return to the family, as well as into the body politic (his body is repatriated to a national cemetery that also serves as a memorial), and thus signals closure. Similar private practices around commemorative albums are recorded from World War I, "collecting together letters from the dead man, obituary notices, letters of condolence as well as photographs, war records and perhaps a photograph of the grave in France."[175] Milblogs and other online memorials, thus, perpetuate a tradition that already intermingled private grief processing with public mourning; the blog posts take over the function of a "shoe box" and a photo album.

As the exploration of fan practices above has illustrated, mourners can be described as a "community of practice" whose ritualized activities "collaboratively coconstruct the values, relationships, identities, and conventions" that help constitute community.[176] These communal American mourning practices stem partly from the Christian tradition of *ars moriendi* ("the art of dying"), a prescribed set of rituals, e.g., praying with the dying, witnessing last words, enacting the 'Good Death' predominant in the US during the nineteenth century.[177] Because women had the traditional role of domestic caretakers, they tended to dying persons, and the Civil War's massive relocation of death from

174 Niedermeier, "Imperial Narratives," 13–20.
175 Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 23.
176 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 201.
177 Faust, *Republic*, 8–14.

the private sphere of family and household to battlefields and hospitals required a dramatic reorientation. Now, doctors, nurses, and fellow soldiers had to take over and provide dying soldiers with equivalents to perpetuate the tradition.[178] Nurses in particular became substitute family during a soldier's last moments and were praised in songs and poems in this new role. The public recognition of this role, says Faust, "represented an interchange, a nationwide conversation between soldiers and civilians, between men and women, as they worked together to reconstruct the Good Death amid the disruptions of war."[179] The evolving custom of strangers coming together to join mourners during funerals must be understood in the same tradition, it symbolizes the bonding of citizens in the 'national family' during times of crisis.[180] Milblogs' representations of military ceremonies and the bloggers' interaction with civilians write forth this "nationwide conversation" between soldiers and the 'national family' in constituting a community of mourning practices, but their medium gives them much more efficacy.

The technological specifics of the new medium result in an increased publicity of the practice, involving more people and giving each more agency to contribute to the process. First, soldiers' initiative carries more weight because their position as insiders (both to the practice of war and to the war zone far from home) gives them expertise and access to specialized and restricted knowledge (e.g., on camp memorial services or on the circumstances of death). Second, social media provide the technological means to disseminate that information faster and wider than previous soldierly practices could. I would argue that publicity and immediacy enhance the bloggers' investment and emotional gratification from these practices because, like a representation of such a ritual by the news media, the bloggers' medialization and reproduction of ritual elements (sacralizing the dead, stylized language, depictions of formal, liturgical elements, such as salutes), their posts' publicity, the language used in post and comments, cumulatively ritualize the original military ritual even further.[181]

The importance of such a personal investment in a military ritual for its participants' process of meaning-making and gratification becomes clear in the following exemplary readings. Veteran writer Karl Marlantes comments on war-zone memorial services, doubting their emotional benefit in an example from his

178 Faust, 11.
179 Faust, 13.
180 Faust, 83.
181 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 20–21.

own Vietnam experience. He writes: "The service was meaningless because we were all still out in the bush, psychologically, and the people leading the service hadn't been out there with us."[182] The military chaplain mentioned here had not shared in the battle experience and could therefore not relate to Marlantes's and his fellow soldiers' emotional state. Marlantes adds that a service conducted for soldiers, rather than with them or by them, leaves them too passive to become emotionally involved and to engage their own grief.[183]

Rex Temple's reports on soldiers' memorial services at camps in Afghanistan render these military rituals anything but meaningless. When he describes these services as "the most dignified and professional ceremon[ies] you will ever witness,"[184] Temple refers not only to the initialization of ritualized communication between the military and civil society to show the bereaved as well as engaged strangers that soldiers mourn for their comrades and that the state treats its war casualties with respect. He also hints at the emotional release for the participating soldiers. In the same post, he describes his own distress as he "watched the emotions of others through the camera lens." He is particularly moved when "Amazing Grace" is played during the ceremony. In Temple's description of a ceremony prior to loading a soldier's casket on the transport plane, a member of the dead soldier's unit approaches the plane's crew and, "with tears running down his face," transfers responsibility for the body to the pilots with the words "[t]hat's my platoon leader, please take care of him."[185] In his memorial series introduced

182 Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 205. Being "out in the Bush, psychologically," refers to Marlantes's argument on immersion in the "Temple of Mars." Marlantes, 1–25. He posits that the frequent contact with home and the opportunities to travel quickly between home and the war zone since Vietnam, in fact, complicate psychological problems, because "the chances of transformative psychological experiences are decreased enormously when you wage war with all the comforts of home." Marlantes, 19; cf. Scurfield and Platoni, "Myths," 25. This means that soldiers cannot fully commit themselves psychologically to the tasks and burden of killing, because the proximity of 'home' and its trivial everyday problems distract them from the mission. I cannot refute Marlantes's personal observations on immersion and confusion over the blurred lines between home and the war zone; his argument seems very plausible. However, many of the milblogs that I have studied discuss psychological benefits from sharing their experiences online and staying in contact with the civilian world through social media. This is obvious in tribute and memorial posts were blog entries and civilian audience replies are particularly emotional.

183 Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 205.

184 Temple, "Memorial Service."

185 Temple, "A Soldier's Final."

above, Temple describes the camp service in great detail. After the ceremonial functions performed by the unit, soldiers individually approach the altar where portrait, upended gun, helmet, identification tags, and empty boots are displayed. They kneel down and perform their own farewells. Some place personal mementos on the table, others touch the helmet or the identification tags draped over the gun. Temple comments: "Although I stood a few paces away, I could feel the powerful emotions expressed by [the dead soldier's] teammates."[186] His post shows several pictures of marines standing at attention during the ceremony, but also of bareheaded individuals, taking a knee in front of the memorial altar, and bowing their heads. Temple is aware of his role as an outsider to these men, being an Air Force sergeant working at an Army detail, invited to participate, document, and report on this Marine service: "It's not easy taking these pictures because at times I feel as though I'm violating a person's privacy. But at the same time, I also know the families appreciate them."[187] Because he is invited to the service, though, he also functions as an insider who can relate the information and emotions to his civilian audience.

In a similar gesture, Phillips cross-posts a forwarded e-mail describing soldiers' emotions during a military memorial service in Afghanistan:

> I am sure no one back home knows that this kid's commander, who is in charge of 7000 men, helped wash the blood from this kid's face and prepare him for the trip home. I bet they don't know that his buddies, all rough and tough and not a sissy among them, stand like brothers, hold hands, cry and exchange hugs…I bet they don't know that the command staff, all senior officers, marched behind the ambulance with tears streaming down their faces and carefully loaded his body onto the plane.[188]

He concludes that "[t]his young man has two families," and that his military family who are currently mourning and crying will "wipe the tears from their eyes and head right back to the fight."[189] This notion of a military and a natural family recurs in the following discussions of blogs. It is frequently a deliberate assertion of overlapping communities, such as the immediate family of the

186 Temple, "Camp Memorial Service."

187 Temple, "Camp Memorial Service."

188 Phillips, "I Belong." Note the repetition of the phrase "I bet they don't know." Content-wise, it reinforces the milblogger's position as the insider who shares this information with an urge to let the people "know," and it lists elements of military memorials that civilians might not know but should know and care about. The repetition of the phrase brings in an element of stylized language that further increases the post's ritualization.

189 Phillips, "I Belong."

deceased, the 'family' of fellow soldiers, and, as constituted through the symbolic exchange between soldiers and civilians on the blogs, the national 'family.'

Obviously, these ceremonies generate and portray emotional release. Although they are mediated by Temple and Phillips (otherwise we would not know about them), they provide sufficient privacy for members of a unit to mourn in a ritual setting. The ceremony creates a space for both the unit to renew the spirit of the collective through communal mourning embedded in military symbolism, and to express grief individually. The creation of a (somewhat) protected space allows members of the unit to express emotions that would otherwise have to be restrained. Like Critical Incident Debriefings, memorial ceremonies are activities where, e.g., crying is permissible and where the usual expectations of virile manliness in military culture are exempt because here, soldiers' ability to function as part of a group under extreme stress is actively replenished by respite and communal stress negotiation. Group bonding and affirmative interaction serve to provide immediate help in working through loss.[190] A camp memorial service, thus, helps surviving soldiers "to dispel the wanton randomness of death in battle, and the performance of even simple rites helps the soldiers make contact with a reality that they have left behind and hope to regain."[191] If these ceremonies can be understood as transformative because of their reaffirmation of membership and their reconstitution of the military community, then they conduct similar cultural work as ceremonial war talk, or *waktoglaka*, among Northern Plains tribes, and other performed and narrative Indigenous war ceremonies discussed above.[192] In addition, these services' representation in milblogs demonstrates how the bloggers actively engage civil society in these rituals and initiate the (re)constitution of civil-military relationships.

I also argue that these memorial services and their medializations in milblogs are meaningful in another respect. Marlantes criticizes the service that he experienced as too passive for the soldiers to relate to. The services described in Temple's and Phillips's posts are more participatory. Soldiers and marines actively contribute to the overall effect of the scenario both as a group and individually—they

190 Grossman and Christensen, *On Combat*, 318–19; Hallman and Pischke, "US Army Combat," 257–61. While Grossman and Christensen warn that debriefings should not turn into "sob fests," they emphasize the permissiveness regarding emotionality in these communal mourning and reflection scenarios. Grossman and Christensen, 319. Edward Tick's therapeutic reconciliation retreats provide similar protected spaces for cathartic reflection. Tick, *War and the Soul*, 224–31.

191 Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 17.

192 O'Neill, "Coming Home."

do not simply provide a backdrop. They follow the prescribed elements of military liturgy, such as precision salutes, but they also kneel down in front of the altar, they create a connection with the dead by touching the helmet and identification tags, by marching in tears behind the ambulance, or by asking pilots to "take care" of their fellow soldiers' bodies. Because these rituals are mediated —i.e., reproduced—on milblogs, the blog posts themselves become rituals that enhance their participatory properties. Temple and Phillips contribute by making a decision to publish, by selecting photos, and crafting a report. Unlike veterans from earlier wars who were dependent on publishers to tell their story in public, the blog hosts gain agency by spreading the news and by controlling the message, but the openness of their medium ensures visible participation and agency for the audience, as well.[193] The blog's mediality invites more widespread participation: commenters, be they other soldiers who add stories and photos to Temple's report, the bereaved family members, or complete strangers among the audience all contribute to the ritual and help fill the "shoe box."

Finally, the meaning of tributes and memorial services in milblogs derives from the participation of civilians. As in Native American warrior ceremonies, the civilian response to the soldiers' emotionally charged narration of war experience symbolizes acknowledgment and appreciation. Because, as deployed soldiers, milbloggers are still subject to further danger and stress in the war zone, I argue that these ritualized gestures are especially important because expressing sympathy for the dead and solace for the living strives toward closure for a returning veteran to come to terms with the hardships of the past. For a deployed soldier, these gestures also offer encouragement for the challenges to come. The interaction between bloggers and their audience illustrates vividly how symbolic communication becomes ritualized, and that added degrees of ritualization, such as repetition, sacralized, and stylized language, increase the interaction's symbolic significance.[194] The following discussion explores how milblogs' comment function serves to ritualize memorial and tribute posts.

At the beginning of this chapter, I addressed the popular notion of ritual as an empty repetitive activity. Repetition, however, is a crucial, stability-inducing element of ritual. Blog users frequently repeat ideas and phrases, especially in emotional situations such as memorial and tribute posts. These repetitions confirm commitment and like-mindedness on an individual level, and the sum of such recurring statements amplifies the unified voice of community in a

193 Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 94; Leikauf, *"Welcome,"* 176–77, 189.
194 Grimes, "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction," 13.

snowball effect. Because blog communication is supposedly asynchronous, i.e., not all participants are online and active at the same time, Cory Ondrejka, technical director of Second Life, once claimed it cannot constitute a community. Rather, he argued, a blogger is like a person standing on a hill and shouting into a bullhorn, that is, into the void.[195] This analogy does not work, nor does it do blogs justice. Scholarship on fan cultures in social media (among many other fields) demonstrated the community-building property of social-media interaction, emphasizing the participation and the commitment to contribution among participants. Synchronicity is a negligible aspect in this context.[196]

Many milbloggers address their audience directly. Many already bring a core of readers into the conversations from among their family and friends, and the commenters quickly introduce themselves, so that many bloggers have a relatively clear idea about sizable segments of their audience. This awareness extends like ripples in a pond as the blog gains popularity and more readers chime in. Introducing oneself to the community is often a performed, ritualized practice, as Baym's fandom example of "unlurking" describes.[197] Even when blogger and audience are not online at the same time, entries and comments are shared, public commitments to the same issues as much as they are contributions to the common and jointly constructed narrative.[198] To integrate Booth's term from his discussion of fan practices, we could speak of a practice of *narractive mourning*, of collective ritualized contributions to a narrative negotiating the meaning of death in war whose community-building effect lies in its mutual, ritualized, "narractive" construction.[199]

As in Native American warrior ceremonies, blog interaction takes place on both a personal and a collective, representative level. Participants address each other as individuals, but both the blogging soldiers and their civilian audience also address one another as representatives of the military and of civil society, respectively. This interaction is different from, e.g., a victory parade, where the

195 Rettberg, *Blogging*, 64–66.

196 Cf. Baym, *Tune in, Log On*; Booth, *Digital Fandom*. See Shay, *Odysseus*, 200, for a list of advantages of veterans' online communities over group therapy sessions, many owing to the medium's specific textuality, such as contributing on one's own time, at one's own pace, and with one's own intensity, and the capacity to find more respondents who find one's own topic relevant.

197 Baym, *Tune in, Log On*, 132–33.

198 Nagel and Anthony, "Writing Therapy Using New Technologies," 41–45; Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 45, 48.

199 Booth, 104–05.

civilian audience cannot establish rapport with returning veterans on an individual level.[200] Comments addressing the blogger directly, then, do establish individual rapport. At the same time, they confirm the commenters' like-mindedness to the blogger and other audience members, especially if they repeat the blogger's or other commenters' phrasing and if that phrasing and terminology is stylized and sacralized.

It will suffice here to return to an entry in Temple's series of memorial and tribute posts about the incident that killed a marine and wounded Temple's friend to exemplify this phenomenon. In "Combat Heroes […]," Temple provides information on the wounded soldier's National Guard unit and then goes on to detail the events leading to the injury and death, as far as operational security allows him. The post has generated twenty-four comments to date, a relatively high number in comparison to the blog's other entries. The commenters address recurring themes and use standard phrases. Several of them thank Temple for providing the information, especially on the injury, and chime in to his complaints about the media's sensationalist focus on fatalities (e.g., alexakim, Membrain, MaryAnn). Some explicitly express hopes and best wishes for the injured soldier's speedy recovery (e.g., C. Springer, Amber, dennis). Commenters extend prayers to Temple and his wife (as many do routinely) but also to the relatives of the deceased marine, and to the injured soldier and his family (e.g., Tony, Angela, Janet, Amber). The phrase "God bless" recurs as a standard expression of well-wishing across posts, as well as in this example (e.g., Bev Gladin, C. Springer). Finally, many commenters pick up Temple's usage of the term "hero" for both soldiers depicted here (e.g., Tammy, dennis, Membrain).[201]

These repetitions amplify the commenters' expressions of affect and personal care for the blogger and, by extension, for the bereaved and for the blogger's fellow soldiers. The snowball effect evolves from the commenters' personal, affirmative urge. They might be aware that others have expressed similar thoughts and wishes using similar phrasing before, but they have a desire to share their own emotional involvement in personal dialog with the blogger. At the same time, they confirm like-mindedness and values shared among the entire

200 For a detailed discussion of how military parades negotiate the relationship between civil society and the military, cf. Jobs, *Welcome Home, Boys!*

201 In other milblogs, commenters explicitly state that a post about a dead soldier made them cry. See Usbeck, "Don't Forget," 108, for a detailed discussion of crying as an element of ritualization. Although much less frequent as a category in his blog, Douglas Traversa's memorial posts generate similar ritualized comments. Cf. Traversa, "Sgt David Stephens."

community. The blogger receives these expressions as individual addresses to himself or herself, but their sum forms the voice of the whole group. The above bullhorn analogy fails here because the comments clearly signify that answers are, in fact, wafting back from the presumed 'void'—it might be better to speak of a group of people standing on a hill and shouting the same message repeatedly for a long time, attracting more and more listeners and active contributors, and drawing gratification from the fact that they helped each other craft and disseminate that message. The ritual, then, lies in the explicit and collective crafting and spreading of the message which, in turn, constitutes the participants' sense of belonging to this community.

The repetition of particular terms and phrases, and the invocation of prayer and God's blessings also reveal other elements of ritualization. Phrases such as "thank you for your service" cannot necessarily be understood as prescribed in the sense of religious liturgy, but their dominance in public discourse on veteran issues and civil-military relationships illustrates liturgical usage and in itself generates social pressure to use them in this sense. As such, these phrases have become typical, stylized, and often thoughtlessly repeated language which adds to the discourse's ritualization. The popularity of the phrase and its dominance in veteran discourse must be seen in the historical context of Vietnam. It results from the notion that civil society did not appreciate the soldiers' efforts, that it blamed the soldiers for the politics of an unpopular war, and that this neglect and blame worsened the veterans' traumatization.[202] The phrase, albeit well-meaning, is sometimes perceived as shallow and self-serving, generally when those who express thanks suggest that the soldiers sacrificed themselves on their behalf. To some veterans (and critical observers), it seems an easy way for civil society to wash their hands of the responsibility of "sending a volunteer army to wage war at great distance—physically, spiritually, economically."[203] Yet, many of the milblog commenters take great pains in establishing rapport with the bloggers and add personal notes, ideas, and encouragements to their comments so that, in most cases I have studied more closely, such statements carry a deeper meaning than merely that of a simple, shallow, and offhand remark. When Paul Booth finds that fan websites' comments are ritually community-building because they demonstrate audience commitment to a cause,[204] this is also relevant for milblogs as

202 Hence, the psychological term "sanctuarial stress." Parson, "Post-Traumatic Self Disorders."

203 Richtel, "Please Don't Thank Me for My Service."

204 Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 48.

the "narractivity" of commenters invests in building their relationships with the soldiers, enacted in ritualized language, on both personal and symbolic levels.

Other phrases and terms move an additional aspect to the fore. The recurring reference to the terms 'sacrifice' and 'hero' suggest that these exchanges sacralize the ritual's language through sacrificial ideology, at times with explicit religious reference. As discussed above, the notion of soldierly sacrifice—especially 'ultimate' sacrifice as the highest form of commitment to a cause—serves to justify wars, give death in war meaning, and construct national identity. Many memorial and tribute posts invoke sacrifice in this spirit.[205] Richard Phillips talks about soldiers' motivation to overcome grief over lost comrades when he writes that "[they] feel a sense of duty to the fallen to continue the fight, to win the fight, and honor the sacrifices of their brothers and sisters in arms."[206] One of Matthew Burden's blog posts discusses the repatriation of a soldier from Iraq. It went viral and, eventually, was remediated in the HBO feature film *Taking Chance*. It ignites vivid invocations of sacrifice.[207]

Temple similarly refers to sacrifice in his frequent memorial posts. His followers take up the context and phrasing. The brother of a deceased soldier commemorated in Temple's posts transforms grief about the loss into pride about its meaning for the nation when he writes: "I am very proud of his commitment to duty and ultimately his sacrifice for the country, despite the unbearable pain of missing him."[208] As the discussion of sacrifice above has illustrated, only the successful transformation of private grief into public pride serves to constitute and justify the national community in war.[209] Commenting on a spouse post intended to "keep the blog warm" while Internet access is too erratic at camp, a reader thanks Temple's wife Liisa and adds: "My heart goes out to all our military and their families for doing the ultimate sacrifice, serving your country."[210] Many of these remarks use their reference to sacrifice as repetitive, stylized phrases that imply an awareness and appreciation of the social contract between the nation and its soldiers and place the soldiers thus thanked and commemorated on a pedestal by giving their actions sacred qualities: "His sacrifice for freedom and

205 Morten Brænder's comprehensive work on sacrifice in milbloggers' justifications identifies a number of different sacrificial types, such as "buddy sacrifice," which I cannot discuss in detail here. Brænder, *Justifying*, 60–68.

206 Phillips, "Week 21."

207 Burden, "Taking Chance Home"; Usbeck, "Don't Forget."

208 Michael Beale, in Temple, "In Memory."

209 Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 5; Kitch, "Mourning in America," 213.

210 Cheryll Lawand, in Temple, Liisa, "Back Safely."

his country allow so many to live safe and secure existences. Thank you for the images and may God keep you and the soldiers until the work there is done."[211] Comments such as this repeat phrases about sacrifice, heroism, and thanks from previous replies. They manifest the home front's awareness that the soldiers have a difficult "job" to do, that the hardships are endured on behalf of US society, and they express encouragement do endure further hardships in the future. In phrases such as "I am so very humbled by the selfless bravery of Cpt. Freeman,"[212] they also exalt the soldiers' tasks and persons which gives these exchanges further sacrificial, even sacred quality.

This exaltation becomes obvious in one of Temple's memorial posts about the death of a marine and injury of his friend. Several times, he calls the wounded soldier a "hero" and adds that he and his contribution to the war effort need to be "recognized" in public.[213] He mentions his phone call with the soldier at the hospital in Germany and relates the following exchange: "I told him he was a hero! He said, 'Senior,[214] I am not a hero, I was only doing my job.' "[215] This exchange is typical for the hero discourse in the context of sacrificial ideology. The soldier's humility enhances Temple's (and many commenters') exaltation even more. Like countless other soldiers in similar situations, he downplays his own role and refers to the creed of professionalism in the all-volunteer force by saying it was his "job" to face these risks. Similarly, Douglas Traversa reflects on his blog's appeal to the audience arguing they could relate to him because he was "just an average Joe being put through the wringer."[216] Veteran John Kuehn discusses his speech at a Memorial Day ceremony on H-War, the academic online forum on military history, where he argues that people should not thank veterans for their service because the service was "not some gift that i gave my nation out of the goodness of my heart. It was a gift the citizens of the united states gave me, a sacred trust, to serve something greater than myself for a far greater purpose than i had ever been given the chance to serve [sic]."[217]

---

211 Casey McCormick, in Temple, "Camp Memorial Service."

212 Casey McCormick, in Temple, "Camp Memorial Service."

213 Temple, "Combat Heroes."

214 This odd-looking form of address probably refers to Temple's rank as Senior Master Sergeant.

215 Temple, "Combat Heroes."

216 Traversa, "18 Years."

217 Kuehn, "Thank You for Your Service? No, Thank You." It is interesting to note that one commenter to this forum post still insists on thanking him because he himself had "missed a common sacrifice, a feeling that I had contributed something beyond myself and my family and paying my taxes" by being "too young for Korea and too

When soldiers insist on being "average Joe[s]" while commenters continue to call them "heroes" whose sacrifice served 'something greater than themselves,' their military service, in the context of civil religion, signifies the transcendence of the individual to the body politic of the nation. These terms and phrases sacralize the exchanges on the milblogs and forums by employing religious terminology. The juxtaposition of soldiers' humility and civilian readers' hero worship even places soldiers in a position comparable to that of the Savior because they sacrifice their lives on behalf of all members of the community, as in depictions of fallen soldiers as the "newest archangels received by God in His house [who] serve now in overwatch of Our Troops who continue to toil in harm's way."[218] This exaltation becomes even more prominent where commenters spell the word "HERO" in capital letters, evoking the custom of referring to God and Christ as "HE" in English writing.[219] In the context of the evolution of cultural practices on the Internet, writing "HERO" in capital letters generally appears as a form of exaltation. If 'all caps' is considered as shouting in online practice,[220] commenters, in the new convention of stylized language, selectively underline their emphasis of the heroic and their sacralization of the soldiers' activity.

This interaction between soldiers ritually humbling themselves on the one hand and of supportive commenters' exaltation on the other hand leads to an issue Hynes raises in his generalizing analysis of personal war narratives. He argues that soldiers tend to depict what happened and how it felt, but that they rarely discuss the "why" of war. They must assume there is an answer to "why," or the war would not make sense. Yet, as he posits: "*Why* is the momentum behind the narratives, but it isn't the story."[221] Milbloggers' humility about their own contribution and role in the war supports Hynes's claim, but the specific textuality of milblogs raises doubts: Even if soldiers themselves do not explicate the "why" of war—and some of Temple's and others' explanations on 'winning hearts and minds' suggest that they, in fact, frequently do,[222] the commenters' expressions

old for Vietnam." Stanley Sandler, in Kuehn, "Thank You." The commenter places the author on a pedestal despite Kuehn's protestations, expressing his sorrow that he himself had not been given the chance to contribute and sacrifice in the same way. Although author and commenter disagree, both portray military service as a civic distinction. Note the references to both sacrifice and transcendence of the individual in this construction of the social contract through civil religion.

218 alexakim, in Temple, "Somber News."

219 Cf. dennis, in Temple, "Combat Heroes"; J. Callihan, in Burden, "Taking Chance Home."

220 Robb, "How Capital Letters Became Internet Code for Shouting."

221 Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 12.

222 Cf. Temple, "Winning."

of heroism and sacrifice automatically raise the "why," along with corresponding justifications and postulations of national identity.

The invocation of the social contract, finally, becomes evident in constructions of a community of mourners, as the 'national family' coming together on the blog to commemorate the dead and to strengthen the collective's resolve to stay the course. In terms of textual contributions to a memorial post, this means that commenters often explain their relationship to the deceased person at the beginning to establish a connection with the group. This may include immediate relatives, such as wives, aunts, or in-laws,[223] fellow soldiers or veterans,[224] or members of the 'military family,' that is, commenters who relate to the situation by mentioning relatives who also serve.[225] The commenters thus position themselves within several overlapping communities and assert familiarity.[226] Associating with the restricted circle of mourners (immediate family and friends of the deceased), commenters open it up to include the deceased's buddies (his unit), fellow military personnel in general, friends and family of all soldiers and, eventually, the national family. Issues and problems that initially might have been of concern only to this small circle can now be presented as concerns of national, or even universal relevance. Going back to the example of the soldier whose death seemed droned out by the public outcry over Michael Jackson, his aunt's indignation eventually concerned everybody, and representatives of both the military and civil society assured each other that they, indeed, cared about the war in Afghanistan and about the soldiers who fight it and die in it. A minority issue can thus be boosted and presented as the social ideal in the dominant narrative that the whole nation should, and indeed, does care about the war. Both the elements of ritualization in the blogs' language and the different layers of familiarity and symbolic representation among their participants facilitate this ritual in which civil-military relationships are negotiated around the transformation of private grief into public mourning and the construction of meaning.

The nation thus symbolically joins milbloggers in a community of narractive mourners to discuss death in war. Their interaction focuses on the dead and their relatives and friends. Coming together as a national family of mourners,

223 Cf. Kimberly Morales, Loretta Lance, and Travis Cochran, in Temple, "Memorial Service."

224 SPC Banquez, LEO, in Temple, "Memorial Service."

225 Cf. Fr. Paul Williams, Morales' CAO's wife, and Enrique LOPEZ, in Temple, "Memorial Service." Cf. also Burden, "Taking Chance Home"; Temple, "Camp Memorial Service," for similar assertions of relationships within different, overlapping communities.

226 Cf. Usbeck, "Don't Forget," 98–100.

the participants bring in their respective military and civilian points of view. Bloggers are at the center in so far as they provide their blogs as the ritual space, they function as quasi ritual leaders given their position as blog hosts/moderators, and because their individual military experience represents the military in general. However, these negotiations of the meaning of death in war do not concern their own emotions, thoughts, and memories too much because the narrative centers on the deceased person, the circumstances of death, and its consequences. In the following section, attention shifts to the bloggers and their points of view, as their negotiations with the audience about stressful situations and about their doubts regarding their own and their nation's role in the war come into focus. While this reading so far focused on traditional cultural-studies research interests, i.e., the negotiation of collective identities and power relations through the practice of collective mourning, the following section shifts attention to issues of social psychology, particularly to how the blog community discusses concrete, personal and emotional problems and how it interprets them to engage in practices of social therapy.

Ritualized Negotiations of Stress during (and after) Deployment

Native American warrior ceremonies address both moments of elation, such as emerging unharmed from a dangerous situation, or defeating an enemy in single combat, as well as critical situations that raise doubts and feelings of guilt. John Becknell has aptly utilized the concept of "bearing witness" in his explanations of how Native American community members approach these situations to help their returning warriors come to terms with doubts and guilt. He traces the therapeutic benefits underlying US civilians' ceremonial practices of listening and bearing witness to veterans' narratives of war. His fieldwork on veterans' reconciliation and therapy retreats illuminates the potential of cultural comparison regarding these practices.[227] His own and other activist scholars' work formulates models how US mainstream society could improve veteran reintegration and trauma therapy through explicit and ceremonial cultural practices of bearing witness. This concept enhances the general conclusion in trauma scholarship that the process of working through trauma requires both narrating the traumatizing event and reciprocal response by a listener, e.g., a therapist and/or empathetic supporters.[228] With this premise, some of the exchanges in milblogs,

227 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 75–124.

228 Goldberg, "Trauma, Narrative, and Two Forms of Death," 122; Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 8; Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 49–50; Shay, *Odysseus*, 4.

although they do not discuss explicitly traumatic events and usually are not therapeutically motivated, can be grasped from a perspective of ceremonial, war-related practices of bearing witness. Bloggers narrate their experience, at times signal emotional distress, and their (primarily) civilian audience acknowledges these accounts and emotions. Like the ceremonial response in warrior rituals (e.g., stylized expressions of applause, pride, and empathy), blog commenters offer solace in individual dialog, but their response as a group also symbolizes the appreciation of society for the military as a whole.

In the following, I discuss a few select situations where milbloggers address emotional distress and receive empathetic responses from their audience. The exchanges highlight the audience's efforts to offer soldiers "affirmation, understanding, and support," gestures that have been called for as "three gifts" civilians should give returning veterans.[229] The blog conversations, like Native warrior ceremonies, comprise ritual scenarios aimed at soothing the individual's distress through social support and, at the same time, ceremonially reconstitute the community, that is, they affirm the social contract between civil society and the military, and promise reintegration after the soldiers' return.

Richard Phillips's blog provides a number of examples where he openly addresses the emotional toll his work at a military hospital takes. While he did not participate in combat himself, he emphasizes that he saw "the cost of war up close, the cost in lives and property."[230] One entry already signals his distress in its brevity. The full post, ominously titled "Week 15—A Week to Forget," reads:

> Some weeks should pass without comment. Too hard, too dark, too sad.
> Week 15 is one such week.
> I'm sure there will be others.
> Phillips Out.[231]

The reader does not learn any facts about the events of the week, whether they are subject to operational security, whether Phillips simply cannot express himself regarding them, or whether he thinks the events should not be discussed in public. The only confirmed effect relayed in the post is Phillips's distress over these events and his guarded optimism that the future might be brighter than this. His standard closing line "Phillips Out" makes the post seem even harsher. The phrase "I'm sure there will be others" might be interpreted as pessimistic foreshadowing, as well, but the context of his other posts and frequently

229 Hanifen, "Three Gifts You Can Give Returning Veterans."
230 Phillips, "Back in the Saddle."
231 Phillips, "Week 15."

expressed thoughts, especially in the following week, suggests that this line is supposed to brighten the dark mood of the post. Although the author does not directly address his audience or ask for help, he implicitly invites readers to comment. He reports on past events, however briefly, and states his feelings about them. Reporting in spite of his distress shows his sense of responsibility for his audience: He knows that they are waiting for news, and he must assume that they will be concerned if posts suddenly cease to come in the usual regular weekly pattern.[232]

Commenters take care to send uplifting replies to this particular post. They address his troubles and express sympathy on a personal level. In addition, they take their responses to a symbolic level. They speak as representatives of civil society and address him as a representative of the military, interpreting meaning by emphasizing their gratitude and reminding him of the cause for which he endures these troubles. The first response states: "Since you are out of comments for the week, allow me. Thank you for your service. I am sorry that this week has been so very hard. I appreciate all that you do. Knowing that the hospital staff is top notch is a comfort for a mom of a soldier stationed there."[233] Another reader follows up not much later:

> As Margo said, Thank you for your service. I do not have close family over there, but I appreciate what you and your group do for everyone that passes through your care. Yours is a special calling, and I appreciate it. I wish there was something I could say or do to share the burden, add light, tweak a smile. Know that I and many others would, if we could. I do surround all of you with my prayers, and appreciate ALL you do.[234]

As in memorial and tribute posts, these two examples reveal many functional and structural elements of ceremonial storytelling. Both situate themselves within the overlapping layers of community in the milblogosphere and establish

232 In Colby Buzzell's post "Men in Black," depicting a battle in Mosul that had happened the day before, commenters remark on his missing an entry on the day of the battle, wondering if something out of the ordinary had happened: "I was worried about you all day yesterday. And today I said, 'I'm sure what they said on the news was only the tip of the iceberg in Mosul yesterday because he didn't post.' " justrose, in Buzzell, "Men In Black"; see also Sara, in Buzzell. Civic activist Lily Casura discusses similar problems with audience expectations and concerns in self-help PTSD blogs, arguing that cathartic writing "needs to be balanced against the harm that can be done when a website or forum goes 'dark' because the leader is struggling personally." Casura, "Healing War Trauma," 234.

233 Margo, in Phillips, "Week 15."

234 Rejenia, in Phillips, "Week 15."

their relationship with the group. Margo identifies herself as a deployed soldier's mother, which creates rapport with the blogging soldier, highlights her momentary commenter's role as a caretaker, and gives her statement weight and reliability. Rejenia emphasizes her emotional commitment. Her relationship is constructed through her role as a supportive civilian, a member of the 'national family.'[235] Both commenters express sympathy for Phillips and his predicament, stating that they are sorry for him and that they would like to share his burden. With this statement, although Rejenia believes she cannot help him at that moment, she already engages in a similar sort of "social absorption" as in the performance of civilian audiences in Native warrior ceremonies, or of volunteer listeners in Soldier's Heart reconciliation retreats, by explicitly offering to "share the burden" and to accompany the soldier on his 'journey.'[236] The commenters' engagement also becomes clear in their outspoken appreciation, one of the "three gifts" Hanifen called for from civilians. Both Margo and Rejenia dwell on Phillips's work at the hospital, offering him their personalized appreciation for his role in the war, regardless of the setbacks that caused his current dark mood, in addition to their more general expressions of empathy. In short, these commenters listen, they express their willingness to lend their support, and they already engage in support, that is, they bear witness to his story.

Even if one were inclined to read some of their expressions as empty phrases, both commenters take on their role as participants in the ritual both as an individual dialog and on the more abstract representative level. A few observations on structural elements further underscore the ritualization in this example of ceremonial storytelling, namely its stylized, formalized, and repetitive language. As described in the discussion of memorial and tribute posts above, statements such as "thank you for your service" have become staple phrases in exchanges between civilians and representatives of the military, they can be read as stylized and conventional, as elements of emerging civic liturgy. They gain more weight in this instance because they are uttered in personal dialog with the blogger and complemented by individual, more personal statements. Other elements of stylized, even sacralized language include references to Phillips' "special calling" and the invocation of prayers. Since both commenters use similar phrasing—Rejenia is obviously aware of her predecessor's comment ("as Margo said")—the second commenter's repetition of ideas (gratitude, appreciation) is significant for our understanding of the entire post. She explicitly adds her own gestures

235 Rejenia is identical with Haole Wahine, Phillips's eventual blog cohost.

236 Holm, "Culture," 247; Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 75–124, esp. 122–24.

of understanding, appreciation, and support to Margo's. She engages in her own personal dialog with the blogger, and the author is presented with a string of several similar responses that are at once individual gestures and a cumulative shout-out from the community.

In his next post one week later, Phillips responds to these supportive comments.[237] Its subtitle "The Sun Comes Out Again" already hints at improvements in his disposition and he starts: "I guess no matter how dark the night, the sun does eventually come back out." He then immediately addresses his audience: "Thanks to all who were concerned about me. I appreciate the emails and comments and prayers and kind thoughts. I did not mean to alarm anyone, but it is important for me to post each week, the good and the bad." He acknowledges his audience's expressions of concern for his well-being (in various media and modes) and goes on to nourish his relationship with them by further explaining. He is aware that sharing his emotions about the troubling events of the previous week will have raised concerns even more (as much as a blogger's sudden silence might alarm readers). The fact that he explains his urge to document the negative aspects of deployment, as well, reveals the blog's role for his process of working through his war experience.

This process becomes even more obvious in the eleven comments to this follow-up. One reader suggests: "[K]eep open to other 'glorious, wonderful' days before departing. It's not uncommon for vets (who couldn't wait to escape from theatre) to be consumed with nostalgia for the intensity and 'reality' of their war experience. And, in any case, attention fixed on escape will perhaps seriously undercut awareness of roses and booby traps by your feet."[238] His remark on "glorious, wonderful days" refers to the end of the post where Phillips longs for the last day of his deployment to come.[239] Rejenia's reply includes the uplifting lyrics of Lee Ann Womack's song "I Hope You Dance," and Patty Brand posts the words of Psalm 27:1–3 ("The LORD is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"). All these comments obviously intend to further enhance audience support for the author.

It is remarkable that Brian's suggestion even embeds advice from several works in military social psychology and veterans' issues: Soldiers tend to indulge

237 Phillips, "Week 16."

238 Brian, in Phillips, "Week 16."

239 It does not become quite clear, but part of his emotional struggle might come from insecurity about which recent regulation would apply to his enlistment status and, thus, determine the duration of his deployment.

in the intensity of war experience and often feel drained and purposeless upon their return.[240] Brian's last sentence in particular highlights his advisory role. He warns against escapism with a twofold argument. First, keeping his mind fixed on return home would distract Phillips from the mission at hand (i.e., dangers, symbolized here by "booby traps," might go unnoticed). Second, and more important for Brian's advice on emotional well-being, he suggests that Phillips acknowledge "roses," i.e., positive experience and moments of beauty where they can be had in the war zone. Next to this advice, obviously, posting Bible verse and song lyrics clearly brings in stylized language and reference to the sacred, further illuminating the ceremonial attributes of this exchange.

Phillips and his audience engage in narractive ceremonial storytelling. They negotiate war-related emotional distress in both individual dialog and representative group discussion. These exchanges bolster his own process of working through experience, started by reflecting on recent events in writing and, significantly, in public. They also exemplify the meta-performativity of the ritual in Rappaport's sense in that the entire exchange is a process of working through, enabled by civilian audience members who bear witness to his narrative. At the same time, the exchange discusses processes and goals of working through the war memories, that is, it showcases an ideal—the social contract between soldiers and civilians, promising mutual protection, support, and integration—by performing and, thus, affirming it.

At this point, it is worthwhile to return to the discussion above on whether or not war narratives engage the "why" of war. Consider milbloggers' reflections on the political implications of the war in Afghanistan and their role as soldiers. The blogs scrutinized for this study usually do not question the Afghanistan campaign as such, and often refer to 9/11 and terrorism as a personal motivating factor. Many follow an American tradition in the military not to challenge the civilian leadership over political decisions regarding war. This tradition goes back to the experience of colonial rule, the War of Independence, and the formative years of the US.[241] It reflects fears of a military taking over political roles and exerting political power. Douglas Traversa has expressed this stance in his

240 Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 183; Hedges, *War Is a Force*, 3; Junger, *Tribe*, 35–70. A few months later, having returned home, Phillips will report on exactly these struggles of reintegration in "Back in the Saddle."

241 Skelton, "Officers and Politicians. The Origins of Army Politics in the United States before the Civil War"; Muehlbauer and Ulbrich, *Ways of War*, 109–11.

post "Tool Time," arguing that the US military is a "political tool" wielded by the civilian government. This understanding requires that members of the military subordinate their own political preferences to the government's decisions, which might result in having to fight a war with which they personally do not agree: "But when it comes time to do your duty, you set aside your feelings and opinions and obey orders. Fighting a war is not a democratic process. It involves lots of unpleasantness, and requires disciplined troops willing to follow orders."[242] Hence, many of the political discussions on milblogs either deal with soldiers' roles as "tools," or they address civil-military relationships, particularly when soldiers feel ignored or misunderstood, as some of the examples above have already implied. The reading of the following post, thus, highlights how soldiers and their civilian audience negotiate their relationship in a debate on how they understand their respective civic privileges and obligations to contribute to the war. It underscores how content and language ritualize this negotiation.

In October 2007, Haole Wahine, Phillips's cohost who is engaged in veteran and troop support, posts a guest entry by Staff Sergeant Christina Webbs. The post's title vividly suggests doubts and reflections on "how many people truly appreciate" the soldiers' efforts.[243] Webbs comments on the heated debates back home over a US withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan that resulted from ever-increasing casualty numbers and from the seeming lack of progress. She evokes the memory of 9/11 as the initial motivation for these wars. In addition, she mirrors Traversa's "Tool Time" post in stating that, while the home front might argue over a continuation of military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers "have no choice" because "it's our job," even if "some of us may not agree with being here." She then lists the hardships of employment, such as missing her son (and critical phases of his growing up) and her boyfriend, as well as everyday amenities American civilians can take for granted.

242 Traversa, "Tool Time." Traversa makes clear that all orders have to be followed as long as they are legal, and he uses this central political orientation from military instruction courses to show that soldiers disagreeing with the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 had no choice but to comply. One might engage in a political discussion on the legality of the invasion in terms of international law at this point, for which this project cannot afford the space. It will suffice here to state that Traversa echoes many soldiers' views that the decision to join the military is a voluntary one, but, for soldiers, the decision whether to go to Iraq was not theirs to make.

243 Webbs, "As I Sit."

She ends her post criticizing the proponents of withdrawal by calling their patriotism into question when she writes: "I wonder if the people who want us to stop defending America would be willing to make such a sacrifice as myself and the thousands of other military members do time after time. Especially when it seems like not many people appreciate it…"[244] This statement is typical of public debates and political divisions since the Bush era when criticism of President George W. Bush's decisions and approach to politics was frequently mingled with general debates on the war, and where topical issues easily flared into personal, ideological attacks across the aisle. To this soldier-blogger here, the discussion on troop withdrawal amounts to treason, as she equates it with betrayal of the cause with which the war is associated, i.e., fighting terror, particularly in response to the 9/11 attacks. Like similar statements discussed above, she considers the soldiers' sacrifices to have been in vain should the US decide to withdraw the troops at this point. Unlike many of the above soldiers' explicit expressions of humility, however, she cites her own sacrifices (exemplary for all other soldiers') as a reason to behold in this debate.

The fourteen topical comments to this post all go into detail to quell these doubts, and some explicitly take up her "tool" analogy. Dave Phillips introduces himself as a retired Army colonel. Apart from his personal observations on how respectfully military personnel are treated back home (e.g., soldiers being upgraded to First Class on commercial flights), he tackles her interpretation of the debate. He states that government officials had ignored some military leaders' warnings about the post-invasion strategy taken in Iraq when the operation was first planned, and that these military leaders' criticism had the interest of the country and the safety of the troops at heart. They "have lots of legitimate concerns about our efforts" that only now (2007) were finally being considered to revise strategy. The commenter further states that these were "rational" debates and adds that they alerted "the people who got us into a difficult situation" to the unnecessary risks that the current strategy posed for soldiers. Addressing Webbs's equation of government criticism with lack of patriotism, he cautions that "[m]any of the people asking pointed questions are not some leftist elite, but are people with years of miitary experience who are looking out for the long term interests of the country and all of it's citizens. And your long

244 This last sentence is set as a new paragraph, emboldened and in larger font type, visibly demonstrating the soldier's doubts. While not in 'all caps,' i.e., not actually 'shouting,' the typesetting highlights her emphasis and the vigor of the speech act.

term interests are part of that [sic]."[245] He pointedly calls upon her own invocation of the "tool" analogy, concluding: "So—do your job and trust us."[246] This comment takes up the political debate on several layers. It dismantles Webbs's argument on patriotism, but it also reassures her on the underlying issue, that is, her anxiety about being abandoned by the home front. It thus generates rapport on a level of the 'military family' as two persons with a military background argue over the military's role in the war's politics. It also reconstitutes the threatened civil-military relationship in that the commenter emphasizes his position as a retired military leader who can now more freely criticize the government's decisions on the war and who has retained an engaged insider's view into political decision-making on military matters. His final statement demonstrates the symbolic level of the debate as he identifies with "us"—the members of government and civil society back home who are having "rational" debates on behalf of the soldiers. Therefore, he argues that soldiers such as Webbs should trust "us" and continue doing their "jobs."

In terms of ritual(ized) content, the audience takes up Webbs's notion of soldierly sacrifice. One commenter posts a long entry in which she describes her own reflections on the hardships soldiers face when she was startled by the tired eyes of a marine in a television documentary one day. She acknowledges the cognitive gap between civilian and military experience, saying she cannot imagine what soldiers go through, but reassures Webbs: "I know they sacrifice not just time, putting themselves in harms way or a good job, but more than that—a part of themselves they won't getback…not ever [sic]."[247] She follows this thread of sacrifice addressing stressful experience and emotions that will have an existential impact on the soldiers' personality. She adds that "[t]his sacrifice of self coupled with missing that first step or word [of a child, referring to Webbs's remarks about her son], a promotion, graduation, the strain on relationships—all of it, it is so hard to wrap my mind around I employ the luxury I have—which they bought for me, of not thinking about it too often. It hurts my heart to [sic]." In this, Hope acknowledges Webbs's anxiety about abandonment. She grants that she—representing civil society—can afford the luxury of not thinking about soldiers' sacrifices too often, but she emphasizes her awareness of them, and her empathy for the soldiers because of them.

245 Cf. also Anonymous, (1 October 2007), in Webbs, "As I Sit."
246 Dave Phillips, in Webbs, "As I Sit."
247 Hope, in Webbs, "As I Sit."

Acknowledgment and appreciation in Hope's response are then transformed into a pledge for civic engagement which explicitly employs the blog as a platform:

> Love from one human to another on its own merits and free from obligation must, in some way,mitigate the hurt they will suffer even if they come back physically unscathed. I believe that what we do here is ciritical to how they return to us and to their own lives. If they suffer, but they know they are loved than the suffering is lessened. If they suffer and they feel forgotten or unloved than the suffering is magnified [sic].[248]

The commenter argues that if, in the sense of sacrificial ideology, soldiers take the hardships of war upon themselves on behalf of society, civilians should take responsibility for these hardships and for their consequences by sharing the burden and extending gestures of "love." She implies Webbs's concerns about an unappreciative civil society back home and posits that the blog's audience can "mitigate" both the "hurt" of war experience and the fear of abandonment by engaging the soldiers through the medium of the blog. She accepts that these gestures will not prevent or even 'heal' all war-related suffering among the soldiers, but posits that they can prevent what military psychology calls "sanctuarial stress"—suffering caused by the impression of a broken promise of welcome and reintegration upon homecoming.[249] In addressing these issues, her comment represents crisis-centered public discourse on war stress and civil-military relationships since Vietnam in a nutshell: It reflects discourses on veteran reintegration, on soldiers' double predicament in an unpopular war (both having to wage it and, possibly, being associated with its negative aspects in stereotypical generalizations), and it illustrates attempts to avoid the 'mistakes of Vietnam' by organized public manifestations of support for the troops.[250] This reflection and call for action manifests a civic ritual of reintegration as Becknell envisions it in his work on how civilians bear witness to narratives of war and, thus, how they can symbolically assume responsibility for the soldiers' experience.[251] In her comment, Hope takes on the role, to borrow a German term,

248 Hope, in Webbs, "As I Sit."

249 Cf. Parson, "Post-Traumatic Self Disorders."

250 Following Hagopian's criticism of the notion of 'healing' in the context of the Vietnam memorial, one might add that it also reflects the conflict-avoiding tradition in public discourse to focus entirely on the suffering of soldiers rather than on political decisions and moral implications regarding war.

251 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 2.

of a *Seelsorgerin*, literally a caretaker in matters of spirit and soul,[252] merging individual care for a troubled person with the representative role of civil society bearing witness to and taking responsibility for the soldiers' military experience. Since her comment not only identifies, affirms, and promotes, but also self-consciously rehearses and enacts this civic ritual of bearing witness by setting an example, and because it addresses both Webbs, other soldiers, and the rest of the presumed civilian audience, this comment also vibrantly illustrates the meta-performativity of these rituals in milblogs.

The remaining comments echo this appreciative, understanding, and supportive thrust. Many also manifest further elements of ritualization, such as stylized and repetitive language. Leta responds to the cognitive gap, wondering: "How do you 'talk' to a person you don't even know? How do you tell them without sounding patronizing that you really DO understand how difficult it must be to be away from home, family, friends, comforts," adding that she struggles to find the right words.[253] Although such statements are less stylized than "thank you for your service" and similar phrases, they are frequent examples of how readers seek to establish rapport with milbloggers by bridging the cognitive gap, acknowledging the difficulties in doing so, but visibly making an attempt. Many express this struggle in stylized phrases, such as Leta's self-introduction as an "American who cannot say enough or do enough to tell and show you all how much we care."

Repetition, selective emphasis, and rhythm further exemplify ritualization in these responses:

> But do know one thing: we DO appreciate you more than any words or actions can show you. We DO know the sacrifices you and your loved ones make EVERY day. We DO know there is a war in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq. We DO know that your living conditions and work conditions are stressful EVERY day. We DO know that there are days when you would rather just pull the covers up over your head and stay there. Most of all please know that we CARE!!!![254]

---

252 In German, the term denotes someone who provides spiritual counseling and advice in critical life matters, which might include both religious and psychological realms. In military parlance, the German equivalent to a military chaplain would be a *Militärseelsorger*, which gives further symbolic weight to the institutionalizing role Hope assumes in her comment.

253 Leta, in Webbs, "As I Sit."

254 Leta, in Webbs. It cannot be verified at this stage but it seems that Leta is a regular follower on a number of milblogs. A person named Leta has been an avid respondent on Traversa's blog, whose tour ended in April 2007, when Phillips begins blogging

In this longer paragraph, the commenter repeats her earlier assertion of caring and her struggle with words. Typing "DO" in capitalized letters, again, emphasizes the avowal and aims at dispelling Webbs's anxiety about abandonment. The repetitive listing of assertions and the identical sentence openings further increase this effect and establish cadence. A similarly stylized and repetitive response by another reader begins "You are appreciated, all of you, regardless of our agreement with any particular president," while the last sentence, once more, resembles a chant because of its "when you—we" sequencing and poetry-style cadence: "Please do not forget that when you are on a plane, we clap for you; when you are gone, we cry for you; when you get hurt, we take it personally. We love you, all of you."[255] The final phrase "all of you" loops the comment back to its opening both in style and ritual content. In both examples, there is a response on a personal level: a self-introduction and reflections on the cognitive gap in the first, and a response to the "tool" analogy and political criticism in the second. They both add a reply on the symbolic, representative level enhanced by repetitive, stylized language. Leta emphasizes both "we," i.e., civil society, and the fact that the group thus constituted indeed does care. The second commenter symbolically elevates his or her statement by reproducing an exchange that signifies the social contract with "you," i.e., the soldiers, who are on the plane, are gone, get hurt, and "we," i.e., civil society, who clap and cry for "you," and take "your" suffering personally, enhanced by the looping emphasis on "all of you" at the beginning and end. Both commenters, thus, explicitly perform their roles as reassuring representatives of civil society in response to Webbs's equally explicit performance as a doubtful representative of the military.

Finally, two of Phillips's posts illustrate the milblogs' role in helping returning soldiers reflect on their experience and to negotiate challenges during reintegration. These observations also provide a transition to the following chapter, highlighting that self-reflection on the blogs serves veterans to come to terms

---

regularly. Leta's first comment to Phillips's blog is posted in September 2007. Wahine, "In Memory." In both Phillips's and Traversa's blogs, comments signed "Leta" discuss civic engagement for deployed soldiers, e.g. through groups such as Soldiers' Angels. They also consistently follow a distinct voice, especially regarding such expressions of empathy and the cognitive gap between civilian and military experience, highlighting that civilians support deployed soldiers "more than any words or actions can show you," as she states in the quote above. It is possible that Leta, thus, is the personified form of organized, institutionalized, and ritualized bearing witness to twenty-first-century soldiers' war narratives.

255 Anonymous (1 October 2007), in Webbs, "As I Sit."

with their own experience, and it might help other readers faced with similar challenges. Phillips returns home from his tour in April 2008. After that, he posts only a few entries in the following months in which he shares thoughts on homecoming, media news on his old camps in Afghanistan, and relevant news about the war. A few months after his return, he posts an entry titled "I Belong on the Front Line!" in which he refers to interviews with British Prince Harry who stated that he missed his fellow soldiers and the excitement and immediacy of deployment, and that he would like to return to Afghanistan.[256] Phillips also relates similar thoughts from a meeting with a fellow American veteran. He does not go into further detail, but the reference to missing the experience of deployment foreshadows the theme of his following posts and suggests a struggle with reintegration.

The blog then lies dormant for four months until, in January 2009, Phillips goes back online. Titled "Back in the Saddle Again," the entry suggests that the author has undergone a troubling period. He opens stating he would like to redeploy to Afghanistan, confirming similar remarks from the post before, and then directly launches into an explanation of his situation:

> I know it's been a long time since I posted, but I've been dealing with bouts of depression since my return and it's hard to post when everything looks black. I've been doing some reading and it seems that depression is not uncommon among veterans. I know that may not surprise some of you, and I've heard the same thing many times, but I was surprised when it happened to me. I've got everything in the world going for me; I'm not supposed to get depressed. But here I am.[257]

It can only be speculated why Phillips was surprised and what he expected when hearing about other veterans' depressions. His following explanation suggests that, thinking about reintegration troubles, he had partially subscribed to the popular image of the "mentally unstable Vietnam veteran," although its stereotypical depiction in the movie *Rambo: First Blood* had always seemed unrealistic and "overly dramatic" to him. If veterans are known in public memory to become unemployed, even homeless, and to have troubles maintaining their relationships, it must come as a surprise to him to face depression when he had "everything in the world going for [him]," that is, he had returned to a stable life and family. However, as he adds, he now understood the character of John Rambo's confession in the film's central scene because he could relate to "missing the excitement and camaradarie of the deployment [sic]," despite knowing about the costs of war.

256 Phillips, "I Belong."
257 Phillips, "Back in the Saddle."

"[W]hile I am glad to be home with my wife and children and my friends, I miss the sense of meaning and purpose that you find in combat. It's tough to explain how much you miss a place where you have little free time or privacy, where you are in constant danger. But many of us do miss it."[258] With his reference to *Rambo*, a popular narrative about a veteran whose war memories and whose longing for the excitement of battle have him wreak havoc back home, and because of the common understanding that fighting a war is a dangerous "job" that requires dire sacrifices and that should therefore not be liked, enjoyed, or longed for, this is an astonishingly open confession. It uses Phillips's own experience as an example to refute the popular notion of traumatized and inherently pathological veterans and to portray his situation, his longing for the sense of purpose and meaning as a normal, if troubling aftereffect of deployment. In addition, Phillips's reflections on the movie also demonstrate how thoroughly the cultural imagination and representation of earlier wars influences our—even the soldiers' who do the fighting—notions of what war and war experience are supposed to be like.

At this point, the therapeutic role of Phillips's blog comes into focus both on the private and representative levels. Phillips had originally planned to keep blogging about military issues to tell "the real story about Soldiers, how they feel about the war, the country, and life in general." He had made self-reflective remarks earlier, stating that writing about both "the good and the bad" helped him vent and order his feelings.[259] Friends had suggested that he should continue writing after his return for the same reason, but, as stated above, "it's hard to post when everything looks black." Having overcome a period of struggling, he now deliberately shares his reflections on depression among veterans with his audience, along with advice for self-help and references to institutionalized support, such as the VA's website on mental health. His generalizations draw on his own experience. "I did not intend for this to be a pity party for me, but it's easier for me to talk about these issues in terms of my first hand experiences, not what I've heard or read but what I know [sic]."[260] He thus confirms the general story of veterans suffering from similar problems by revealing his own emotional stakes as much as he helps himself order his own thoughts and make sense of his story. This technique resembles both the ceremonial war talk of Native American healing and cleansing rituals and techniques of narrative therapy developed by

258 This statement is bolstered by his story about a veteran friend who told Phillips before he went on his first deployment that he still missed flying combat missions in Vietnam, a longing Phillips could only relate to after he himself had returned from deployment.

259 Phillips, "Week 16."

260 Phillips, "Back in the Saddle."

'Western' psychologists discussed in the previous chapter. It is at once an act of self-therapy and performing a role as a representative of the military who confronts civil society with the inconvenient knowledge about the possible effects deployment to a war zone can have.

Consequently, the readers' comments explicitly bear witness to his story and make an attempt to share the burden both in private, one-on-one conversations and in self-consciously performing their roles as representatives of civil society. One reader congratulates him for "recognizing the symptoms" and for taking steps to address the problem. She also suggests that he should "consider blogging your experiences in the process, not only for your own well being, but for others who are dealing with the same things [sic]."[261] Earlier in the post, he had told readers that his support to help an Iraqi family gain immigrant status in the US under the regulations for foreign military interpreters had worked to ameliorate some of his emotional troubles. The commenter stresses a similar mechanism for him, i.e., that by helping others understand and learn from his situation, he would help himself. This notion is confirmed in his next post, where he offers explanations for post-deployment stress[262] and details the military's and the VA's efforts to provide mental health care. A reader thanks and encourages him: "Please contine to share your thoughts. They are becoming a great and valuable resource to me [sic]."[263] A regular commenter who, like Phillips, has a military background, supports his observations and reassures the author and the blog's community about changes in military culture regarding stress: "Soldiers are finally being told that the 'manly' thing to do is to seek help, not fight through the stress by yourself."[264] The blogs' audience thus further reassures Phillips in his efforts and encourages him, as well as other veterans who are similarly struggling, to continue addressing them. Discussing the emotional and mental difficulties in coming to terms with war experience serves as part of the remedy.

From a perspective of milblogs as civic rituals of reintegration, then, these commenters perform their roles as witnesses in response to the bloggers'

261 Ky Woman, in Phillips, "Back in the Saddle."

262 He states that dreams of a happy reunion with their families help soldiers withstand the stress of deployment, but "these dreams that give us strength to go on every day, sow the seeds of disappointment once we are reunited. No dream can survive the light of day." Phillips, "Stress." This explicates for civilian readers how soldiers build up idealized, longed-for versions of 'normal' everyday life back home that are shattered when confronted with mundane civilian life after the soldiers return.

263 Anonymous, 09 Feb 2009, in Phillips, "Stress."

264 Mikentexas, in Phillips, "Stress."

performance of their role as informants, storytellers, and messengers about military matters. Both sides self-consciously enact the social contract between the military and civil society, and they use the bloggers' individual concerns as a hook to generalize and symbolize. Bloggers such as Rex Temple and Richard Phillips share their experience, thoughts, and doubts, and commenters seek to provide the "three gifts" of appreciation, understanding, and support. While the medium of the blog entails limits as to the extent such support can go (e.g., supportive comments do not resolve veteran unemployment, and they alone could not 'cure' PTSD); it, nevertheless, provides a platform that facilitates symbolic support and enables further practical 'hands-on' support. It nurtures personal exchange, advice, thanks, and reassurance, but, as the observations of narractive mourning have illustrated, it can also emerge into a hub for civic engagement. The exchanges on the blogs create patterns in terms of content and language, and they manifest symbolic communication. They are civic rituals through which war experience is negotiated, its meaning is constructed, and, as a result, community is reconstituted. Older, traditional and distinct war narratives predating milblogs engaged in such negotiations before, but milblogs' mediality, their interactivity, immediacy, publicity, and their interrelatedness of private and public, direct and symbolic conversation nurture the negotiation of war experience in a new, hybrid form, on individual and representative levels of exchange.

The readings and contextualizations above have established the ritual function and content of milblogs. They have elucidated their cultural work, the construction of meaning through the negotiation and dissemination of knowledge and values. The perspective of Native American war-related ceremonies placed milblogs in a similar discursive context which allowed us to relate the different cultural and medial contexts of Indigenous war rituals and soldiers' and veterans' private use of social media. Understanding notions of sacrifice, derived from civil religion, as a form of identity-constructing 'cosmology' with which non-Native US soldiers and their audience negotiate their civic roles in their nation's war, further carved out the significance of ritual in this shared discursive context. This context also informs the discussion of milblogs and of homecoming scenarios in the following chapters. The reading examples in this chapter focused on war-related deaths and mental distress. As the next chapter will observe, however, milblogs do not solely ritualize suffering, and they do not portray war experience as negative and painful per se. They also have the potential to nurture a sense of coming to terms, of acceptance, of learning, and of growth, and they facilitate ritualized conversation as much as practical civic engagement based on soldiers' individual war experience.

4. Beyond the Call of Duty: War Experience, Relationship-Building, and Community Service

> *I feel filled with a terrible resolve to make [my blog] a part of the fight, as well as a means to improving the situation here. I know, big dreams and an overblown sense of my importance. But without dreams, what are we?*[1]

The previous chapter explored cultural practices of community-building in milblogs and how, when they are perceived as narrative rituals, their cultural work and their role in the negotiation of the social contract becomes evident. It highlighted that, while deployment places soldiers and their relatives in a considerable stress situation, their frequent reference to the social contract in milblog conversations helps bridge the gap between civilian and military life both on a personal and a collective level. Exchanges between milbloggers and their audience negotiate the often conflicting realities of life as a civilian and as a deployed soldier in a war zone as they help both sides interpret their experience and make sense of the war. These exchanges are, thus, cultural artifacts that generate, negotiate, and circulate knowledge and values. This circulation affects people beyond those who are actively engaged in the milblogosphere; it helps shape cultural practices and identity. The production and circulation of knowledge and values in the blogs, as we have seen, often follows particular scripts that engender corresponding self-conscious and ritualistic performances. The mutual awareness, acknowledgment, and appreciation expressed in these scripts symbolically reaffirm and enact the social contract between civil society and the military. Blogger-audience interaction, thus, marks an ongoing process of maintaining relationships while the soldiers are physically, socially, as well as mentally separated from civil society.

This chapter builds on this perspective of ritualized discourse to explore particular interrelated aspects of milblogging. It draws on the outline of interrelated analytic foci in Chapter Two which discussed how Native American practices

1 Traversa, "Terrible."

shape the impact of war experience on a warrior's personality and on the respective community relationships, and how civic activism seeks to operationalize similar effects for non-Native veteran reintegration. The following observations approach milblogs from the same angle. They explore how bloggers and their audience negotiate values and knowledge in their self-reflective discussion of the bloggers' experience during deployment, as well as their assertions of relationships and mutual responsibilities in these exchanges.

The chapter considers selective discursive contexts within the script of negotiating war experience to illustrate the embeddedness of milblogs in a heterogeneous corpus of war-related texts and scenarios and to emphasize that these diverse discursive contexts conduct similar cultural work. Since all discourse on war is politically charged,[2] this selection pinpoints the diversity of contexts and perspectives in which war experience and the relationships between US soldiers and their communities are discussed, and it takes the political agendas thus conveyed into consideration. The motto above exemplifies a blogger's commitment to utilizing his blog not only to share his experience and opinions, but also as a conduit to help influence opinions and relationships, that is, to contribute to the goals of the community and its current war effort. As in the previous chapter, the analysis reads both primary and secondary texts in these sections against the background of their political agenda to discuss war in their respective discursive contexts.

Based on this contextualization, the chapter outlines the narrative and ritualistic patterns through which bloggers negotiate the process of gaining experience, its results, and the conclusions drawn from it, before analyzing the cultural knowledge that they create. In addition to reflecting the soldiers' experience and their often painful learning process, this analysis of the interaction among blog participants reveals the bloggers' personal development and their dedication to perceive extreme experience not only as a burden, but also as an asset worth sharing for the benefit of others. War experience, as the diverse discursive contexts discussed here emphasize, is understood as a conduit to build and maintain relationships within a community. Extending beyond the 'call of duty' that separated deployed soldiers from their home communities in the first place, sharing their experience marks a personal commitment to community that, since community relationships have previously been identified as important features of reintegration and mental health for soldiers and veterans, serves as an additional tie between soldiers and their communities. The exchanges on

2 Cf. Hüppauf, *Was ist Krieg?*

war experience among bloggers and their audience assert the social contract and promote both the communal negotiation of meaning and individual soldiers' overall well-being.

For a better understanding of the interrelations between experience, (re) integration, and mental health, this chapter avoids the typical chronology of individual war experience (i.e., training, deployment, combat, and homecoming). It investigates approaches to war experience and psychological injury in psychology and therapy, contextualizing them with cultural practices and activist discourse on homecoming and readjustment in US civil society, before returning to the cultural work of sharing and working through experience in deployed soldiers' milblogs. These observations on psychology draw on Indigenous examples elaborated in Chapter Two to explain how war experience is understood and discussed in different cultural environments, what the typical processes of coping are, and how (meta-)ritual scripts negotiate meaning and values in the respective cultural contexts. It is important to address discourses on homecoming and readjustment to elucidate the prevalent mutual notions and expectations of veterans and civilians and how they influence civil-military interaction. Ultimately, the discussion pinpoints how these discourses contribute to the cultural imagination of war and its effects. My observations of how activist discourse on war experience and civil-military relationships seeks to portray experience as a gift, rather than primarily as a burden, illustrates these activists' drive toward veteran reintegration. This chapter's focus on soldiers' dedication to share their experience, often with altruistic motivations, for the benefit of a community, thus, highlights the role of these discourses for relationship-building and the constitution of community, and it reveals that efforts to maintain and nurture these relationships are already undertaken during deployment through conversation in milblogs.

The following sections apply the analytic lens of Indigenous practices to explore how war-related discourses in non-Native twenty-first-century US society employ notions of self-perception and community relationships. They further carve out functional equivalencies among these discourses. That is, activist discourse as well as many milblog conversations follow similar scripts and use similar arguments in their specific contexts, even where they do not explicitly refer to Native military traditions. Reading them through the lens of Native cultural practices, however, reveals the transmission and circulation of their respective, culturally specific meanings and values, their focus on notions inherent in the social contract, and their ritualistic outline.

A literature review complements the theoretical discussion on cultural transfer in military psychology and veterans' mental health care from Chapter

Two. It provides an exposition on the role of community and ceremonialism in PTSD research and therapy, investigating concepts such as 'posttraumatic growth' as well as the recent military doctrine of 'resilience.' In addition, these academic debates are contextualized with a brief discussion of activist discourse on veterans' civic engagement projects to pinpoint how non-Native mainstream society promotes a narrative of perpetual community service by referring to traditional American markers of group identity regarding citizenship, communality, and the social contract. This overview also foreshadows the discussion of activist homecoming scenarios in the following chapter.

A close reading of select blogs explores how milblog conversations convey the transformation of war experience and personality growth into a sense of personal responsibility for a community, and a resulting sense of community service even during deployment. The sample readings highlight how the respective bloggers present and justify their emerging sense of a calling to serve as mentors to younger soldiers, to future replacements, or to military relatives on the home front. They seek to educate both American readers and Afghan locals about each other's cultures and thus assume a role as culture brokers. Some authors transform their blogs into platforms for operating charity missions for Afghan children. In all these examples, the reading highlights the narrative processes, media-specific text formats, and symbolic gestures through which bloggers negotiate the meaning of their experience with their audience. It shows how audiences use equally symbolic response mechanisms to acknowledge the sharing and how they perform gestures of reintegration that, in their complex interactivity, ceremonially constitute community.

Veteran Readjustment in US Military Psychology and Civic Engagement

> *Wars require that we change the identity of the men we send to fight them.*[3]

Psychological debates and therapeutic practice on war stress and trauma since the 1980s drew on two interconnected developments. First, the definition of PTSD in the *DSM III* in 1980, facilitated through lobbying by activist scholars and therapists, marked a relatively concrete description of symptoms and initiated a surge of heterogeneous therapeutic approaches and corresponding clinical studies.[4] Second, the cultural legacy of Vietnam, manifest in images of collective

3 Laufer, "Serial Self," 39.

4 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 53–58.

memory such as the scenes of returning veterans being insulted at airports, and the popular image of the disgruntled Vietnam veteran personified in the movie character John Rambo, caused the American public to reflect on society's relationship with the military.[5] Some approaches to PTSD and war trauma emphasized this civil-military relationship more than others, in part because their proponents desired a public, collective, and critical debate about Vietnam,[6] and quite a few have sought to explain the rising numbers of afflicted soldiers and to suggest solutions regarding social support by way of cultural and historical comparison. As a result, several therapeutic approaches directly address the importance of social support and community reintegration for veterans' mental health. These professional mental-health services are accompanied by a great variety of initiatives in civic engagement that promote civil society's interaction with veterans to support readjustment.

Some of these social and community-based approaches to readjustment and therapy utilize cultural comparison with Native American warrior traditions, often by invoking the idea of universality in war experience as Chapter Two explored. Like these activist projects, the alternative methods of reintegration and therapy in US society discussed below emphasize the impact of war experience on personality development and civil-military relationships. In documenting current developments in military psychology and civic engagement in veterans' affairs, I argue that social support and community relationships are relevant factors not only for Native warrior preparation, reintegration and non-Native veterans' affairs, but they are also significant factors for mental health and civil-military relationships during deployment. The following discussion of community-based therapy and reintegration projects thus provides a context for an analysis of how milblogging facilitates relationship-building and social support during deployment.

Experience and Personality

As in Native American discursive contexts where rituals generate cultural knowledge about age acceleration and social absorption, non-Native society has addressed the impact of war experience on a soldier's personality development in various cultural practices. Most obviously, US literature has provided a specific context to discuss war as a rite of passage and droves of war novels, such

5 Cf., among others, Hagopian, 49–78; Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*; Eyman, review of *The Spitting Image* by Jerry Lembcke.

6 Cf. Hagopian, *Vietnam War*.

as Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, lent themselves to interpretations of an initiation to manhood by way of war. Similar to the Native practice of bestowing trust in responsible leadership in a veteran owing to his war record, non-Native cultural expressions have portrayed war experience as a prerequisite to active citizenship, that is, the eligibility for public office. Some works of fiction, most prominently Robert Heinlein's novel *Starship Troopers* and its 1997 movie adaptation, promote a strict understanding of the social contract, especially of an individual's responsibilities toward the community (i.e., the state). Only their personal sacrifice to the state earns veterans the right to enjoy the privileges of citizenship and the power of public office.[7] Several nonfiction texts about US veterans and civil-military relationships raise this issue, as well.[8] However, in the tribal traditions referred to above, the community's trust in veterans does not derive primarily from their sacrifice for the community in war, but from their commitment to employ their hard-earned wisdom and experience in perpetual community service.

(Military) psychology addressed 'Western' cultural perceptions of war's impact on soldiers' personalities at length. Yet, as Chapter Two has elaborated, a number of scholars draw on Native American traditions to sensitize psychology for the potential of transcultural comparison and of identifying universal elements in culturally specific therapies. They also explicitly address cross-cultural observations on how war experience affects personality. As Silver and Wilson observe, "[t]his is a recognition of the acceleration of development that

7 Dolman, "Military, Democracy, and the State in Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers."

8 Among others, Bacevich criticizes the transformation of the US military into an all-volunteer force because it allows the majority of the population to deny responsibility for both the political decisions on war and for the fighting as such: "A civil-military relationship founded on the principle that a few fight while the rest watch turned out to be a lose-lose proposition—bad for the country and worse yet for the military itself." Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 13. He even goes as far as interpreting the popular demonstrations of "support-the-troops" and "thank-you-for-your-service" as "[m]aintaining a pretense of caring about soldiers" through which "state and society actually collaborate in betraying them." Bacevich proposes that, instead, "defending the country once more become a collective responsibility, inherent in citizenship." Bacevich, 14. This, along with the literary examples, illustrates the culturally specific, 'Western' cultural context in which soldiering is understood as sacrifice of individual freedom (and, ultimately, one's life) for the greater good of society in the sense of the social contract. It thus also highlights the culturally specific underlying political philosophy on war.

often accompanies exposure to massive trauma. Survivors typically have to deal with issues of life and death most people do not have to consider un[til] later in life. There is a wisdom in survivorship worth salvaging."[9] If Native cultures follow ritual scripts to help their veterans cope with traumatic experience, to accept the corresponding changes in personality, and even to utilize these changes for beneficial civic activity, as Silver and Wilson argue, non-Native society should seek ways to develop comparable scripts and practices for veteran reintegration in its own cultural contexts.

In a similar vein, Tick evokes the warrior hero archetype, drawing comparisons from traditional cultures to discuss war as a rite of passage. From his universalist perspective, he posits that all societies throughout history have developed a "warrior class," shedding individuals of their civilian identities and preparing them for killing. War, as he argues, is the universal initiatory rite because societies have understood it as representing all aspects of life in a condensed and radicalized form.[10] While Holm speaks of age acceleration, Tick discusses war experience as "shock therapy" because "[t]he shock propels us suddenly and immediately, in a survive-or-die manner, out of innocence and into the biting realities of experience."[11] In describing the fundamental personality adaptations that the preparation for war requires of US soldiers, Michael Sledge quotes famed World-War-II correspondent Ernie Pyle: "Our men can't make this change from normal civilians into warriors and remain the same people."[12] In the same vein, Samuel Hynes observes that war experience apparently weighed particularly heavy on US soldiers during phases of selective service because of the cultural paradigm of the citizen army: "For the assumption implicit in the idea of an army composed of temporary civilian soldiers is that when the war to which they were called is over, they will revert to being the civilians they were before."[13] Consequently, as he argues, ethical issues and emotional distress as they were discussed in countless Vietnam War narratives become even more prevalent because temporary soldiers are confronted with the disparate codes of conduct, notions of

9 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 345.

10 In his claims to universality, Tick does not portray war as the only archetypal 'school of life' a society could adopt, but that, since all societies have experienced war, they all developed culturally specific practices and scripts for negotiating the types of knowledge and values derived from war, especially regarding the "shock" of violent experience.

11 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 49.

12 Qtd. in Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 246.

13 Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 219.

normalcy, and accepted behaviors of war and peace more directly when they make the transition between their soldierly and civilian roles. Hoge's self-help book for veterans similarly addresses training and aftereffects of war on soldiers' personalities. While he assures his readers that most war veterans do not develop PTSD, he cautions: "But they are also not the same person after deployment as they were before, and this is part of what it means to be a warrior."[14]

Modern (military) psychology sought to understand these experience-driven and forced changes on the self after Vietnam and offered various explanations and responses, of which many are discussed in the 1988 collection *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress.*[15] Several theories on the impact of war stress present blanket models, such as notions of stress evaporation (i.e., 'time will heal wounds'), residual stress perspectives (discussing social support or the lack thereof), or economic factors for a soldier's vulnerability to war stress, but many of these approaches do not consider individual "psychogenic predispositions" and the significance of personality change through war experience.[16] Two contributions from this book merit discussing at length as they illustrate how developmental psychology helps understand individual veterans' predicaments in readjustment and, at the same time, provides a context for the growth of community-based social support among both health care professionals and civil society in recent decades.

Robert Laufer explores these aspects with notions of the "serial self," describing an individual's civilian, soldierly, and veteran experience as participating in different social systems that cause sequential, radical breaks in the individual's self-system and result in a fractured self struggling to adapt to a series of discontinuities. He emphasizes the typically young age of soldiers for an understanding of war trauma.[17] Agreeing with other scholars in the field, he marks war as a disruption of personality development at a critical age because "we would argue that a plausible interpretation of self and post-traumatic stress theories is that it is the exposure of the self-system to a hostile environment that fundamentally undermines the ability of the maturing organism to unfold its potentialities, which shatters the self-system."[18] A soldier tries to adapt to the new self-system and new social norms during war and, upon return, realizes he has

14 Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, xiii.
15 Wilson, Harel, and Kahana, *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress.*
16 Elder and Clipp, "Combat Experience," 136–37.
17 Laufer, "Serial Self," 34.
18 Laufer, 38.

been severed from the norms and self-system in which he grew up. Once more, he is confronted with a fundamentally different "social matrix."[19] The shock, as Laufer argues, is all the more radical since modern 'Western' societies have a much higher life expectancy and a young soldier is thus forced to face death and mortality at a much more unlikely age.[20]

Laufer describes the veteran's self as "truncated" because an individual's "war self"[21] has to take over from the old civilian self. As a result, it is developed in a short biographical time span, and it might suddenly become a burden when the returning veteran attempts to retake his old civilian self, hoping to resume civilian life from the moment when he left home to become a soldier. In this reading, neither the old civilian self nor the war self are allowed to continue growing, yet war memory continually imposes itself upon the veteran; it resurfaces whenever the new adaptive self faces threats; and it attempts to dominate the new sense of self, employing its threat responses learned during war. The new adaptive self of the veteran thus appears "serially vulnerable to the war self."[22] The major conclusion from Laufer's study on the treatment of veterans in the late 1980s addresses tendencies toward a "civil mindset"[23] that makes the rupture in personality development from civilian to soldier to veteran all the more susceptible to traumatization.

Erwin Randolph Parson argues in a similar vein. His work derives from the development of the psychological concept of adaptation during the 1930s, which describes the self's continuous attempt to maintain equilibrium with its changing environment. His approach employs Heinz Kohut's theory of the "cohesive self," one of several competing theories of the 1970s and 1980s, arguing that the cohesive self is the ideal developmental state in which the self is the organizing center

---

19 Laufer, 38.

20 Laufer, 40. This impression becomes more intense if we take the "absence" of death in modern societies into account. People no longer die at home but in hospitals and nursing homes; stillbirth and the death of birthing mothers, if occurring at all, usually take place in hospitals; and industrialized agriculture has transferred the slaughtering of domestic animals from family farms to anonymous industrial facilities of which consumers are rarely aware. Grossman, *On Killing*, xxiii–xxviii.

21 Laufer, "Serial Self," 48.

22 Laufer, 49.

23 Laufer, 48. While this explanation seems plausible for the context of US 'mainstream' society, the underlying perspective, as discussed above, is inherently ethnocentric because it denies traditional Indigenous societies a similarly "civil" mindset, falsely arguing that these societies breed violence through an alleged prevalence of male superiority in warrior culture.

of all personality. Describing empathy and guidance (from parents, mentors, and peers) for mirroring as the major elements of self-development in a child as much as an adult, Parson argues that war veterans always need familial and societal guidance and appreciation—that is, empathetic mirroring—for full postwar readjustment.[24]

Parson's contribution is of particular interest as it combines its emphasis on developmental psychology with a call to action, i.e., to raise awareness about the necessity for social support in veteran readjustment. Focusing on self-development, he introduces the term "*posttraumatic self disorders* (PtsfD) […] to describe the utter pervasiveness of disturbances in the organization of the self in response to *psychological traumatization*."[25] In contrast to other approaches, however, he dialogs this focus with classic neurosis theories and points to society's failure to provide mirroring (empathy, appreciation) for Vietnam veterans. He thus postulates a "dual traumatic matrix," an interrelation between combat traumatization acquired in the war zone and what he describes as "sanctuarial traumatic stress,"[26] that is, the presumed failure of US civil society to support the returning veterans in regaining their civilian selves. In this sense, he argues that the moral covenant between society and the veterans was "unilaterally broken."[27] US society here fails to serve as "parents" for its soldiers and veterans because it denies them the necessary reflection and confirmation (empathy and appreciation) critical for the learning and development process, thus effectively denying them "a place to heal."[28]

This approach can be read against the script of Native communities helping returning warriors reintegrate and reflect on their experience, particularly through

24 Parson, "Post-Traumatic Self Disorders," 249.

25 Parson, 250. Similarly, Becknell and Tick emphasize that PTSD should be understood more as an identity disorder, a rupture in self-development, rather than as primarily related to stress and anxiety. Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 58; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 106.

26 Parson, 250.

27 Parson, 253.

28 Parson, 253. It would go beyond the scope of this study to explicate in detail here, but I should point out that Parson's generalization of American society as a unified bloc, regardless of his own political stance, reveals how politically charged the debate on the relationship between the military and civil society was and still is in the context of the Vietnam War, and that even academic texts not only discuss, but in themselves carry, political implications and the cultural imagination of that particular war.

their intricate relationships based on reciprocal economic and social support. Because of the close-knit social structure and symbolic kinship relations in Native communities, the notion that civil society acts as 'parents' who provide guidance and appreciation in this process of meaning-making and reflection becomes more explicit. The following discussion highlights a few exemplary psychological and social approaches aimed at helping veterans address their experience and personality changes in more positive ways.

As Chapter Two introduced above, a number of activist psychologists and therapists proposed since the 1980s that veterans' mental health care should adopt elements of Indigenous warrior traditions for therapy and social work. Their approaches address ways to support individuals' transformations between civilian, soldier, and veteran identities,[29] as well as general philosophical perspectives designed to avoid a blanket pathologizing of war experience and to explore more positive aspects, such as the application of war experience for civilian life.[30] Even when they are not explicitly referring to Indigenous or ancient 'Western' warrior traditions, military training and psychology have similarly adopted notions of beneficial war experience, particularly in the traumatological concept of "posttraumatic growth" and the recent US military's resilience paradigm. Clinical research on PTSD that emerged soon after the first definition of the term in the *DSM III* in 1980 noticed elements of coping and growth and discussed how war experience, while painful, also taught veterans to embrace responsibility and dependability in later life.[31] Some of the most prominent scholars on posttraumatic growth, Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, state in a 2004 article that positive outcomes of traumatic experience have been discussed in both ancient Christian, Hebrew, and Islamic traditions, while the term "posttraumatic growth" and its clinical parameters evolved only in the 1990s.[32]

Utilizing the analogy of an earthquake, Tedeschi and Calhoun describe trauma as a "psychologically seismic event" that might "shake" or even shatter an individual's ability to make sense of the world and of his or her own place in it.[33] Recovery from such an event requires "cognitive rebuilding," that is,

29 Silver and Wilson, "Native American," 347.
30 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 50–61.
31 Elder and Clipp, "Combat Experience," 137–38, 143.
32 Tedeschi and Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth," 2.
33 Tedeschi and Calhoun, 5.

acknowledging these changes in life and identity and incorporating both the traumatic experience and possible similar future events.[34] If this incorporation results in a higher resistance to future shattering of the individual's "schematic structure" for readjustment, some degree of posttraumatic growth is achieved.[35] Based on their therapeutic experience and clinical tests, the authors describe this phenomenon as "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises. It is manifested in […] an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life."[36] Many of these manifestations can be found in the ritual script of Native American war-related ceremonies (the higher status of veterans based on, e.g., personal strength and matured priorities), as well as in non-Native veteran projects that regard veterans as "bearers of gifts,"[37] in the discursive context of war memoirs and, as the close readings in this chapter elucidate, also in deployed soldiers' milblogs. This means that, even if the experience is not per se traumatic but 'merely' a "highly challenging life cris[is]," a deployed soldier might immediately draw strength from addressing these challenges and learning from them, and he or she might use a communication platform such as a blog to involve family and representatives of civil society in the process of working through the experience and generating meaning.

Military psychology and training adopted doctrines and programs to engender such growth through "combat and operational stress control measures" (COSC), and some of these programs' goals and concepts are reflected in veteran projects as well as blogs. COSC units are dispatched to war zones as "first responders" and provide an "initial level of intervention," primarily to preserve the fighting strength of combat units by addressing stress in its early stages before it impedes the combat efficiency of soldiers and their unit's cohesion.[38] They work toward avoiding the stigma of psychological illness among military personnel by creating a supportive atmosphere, treating afflicted individuals as soldiers rather than as patients or victims, and facilitating group support from the soldier's unit.[39] Their tasks and available interventions include Traumatic

34 Tedeschi and Calhoun, 5.
35 Tedeschi and Calhoun, 5.
36 Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1.
37 Cf. Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War."
38 Hallman and Pischke, "US Army Combat," 245–46. The US borrowed this idea from the Israeli Defense Forces who developed COSC units after the 1948 War of Independence.
39 Hallman and Pischke, 245–46.

Event Management (TEM), different types of psychological debriefings, grief processing, and measures within the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program.[40] These tasks and interventions are also supposed to nurture posttraumatic growth. Since they are conducted mostly within, or at least in close proximity to soldiers' parent units within the war zone, they take away the stigma of psychological victimization. They engender learning from experience, working through, and integrating memory. Generally, they fall under recent notions of professionalism in soldiering that entail "mental fitness" as a crucial part of the entire process of preparing and maintaining the soldiers' ability to fight and, thus, as a job requirement.[41]

While many scholars and practitioners doubt that the specifics of the 2011 CSF program will have a discernible positive effect and criticize its blanket enactment as a military policy without detailed previous tests,[42] the general idea of improving resilience and engendering posttraumatic growth has taken hold in military training, psychology, and veterans' affairs. Enhancing resilience skills has become an important aspect within programs for both recently returned veterans and their families because they "promote emotional well-being with a personalized, strength-based approach and serve to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health services during the reintegration process."[43] These programs support veterans not only in coping with the memory of hardship but also in facilitating self-efficacy on both the individual, family, and the community level. Reyes lists among the various individual self-efficacy skills the ability to discover

40 Hallman and Pischke, 245.

41 In her plenary lecture for the 2013 conference "Aftershock. Posttraumatic Cultures since the Great War" in Copenhagen, Mette Bertelsen explained that the Danish military accompanied its preventive measures against psychological stress for its ISAF contingent in Afghanistan with comparisons between soldiering and professional sports to overcome the stigma: Once soldiers were reminded that professional athletes must pay as much attention to their mental abilities as to their physical fitness in order to excel in pro sports, they were more likely to take military psychological exams and training measures seriously. Bertelsen, "Trajectories of PTSD: Danish Soldiers of the War in Afghanistan." Canadian special forces even hired a sports psychologist who had served on the Canadian Olympic team for the same purpose. King, *The Combat Soldier*, 331.

42 Collura and Lende, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Neuroanthropology," 134–35; McNally, "Are We Winning the War against Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?," 10.

43 Reyes, "Enhancing Resiliency Through Creative Outdoor/Adventure and Community-Based Programs," 268.

a new sense and purpose in life, developing realistic self-appraisal and problem-solving skills, and the maintenance of positive social relationships.[44] These skills are also acknowledged and nurtured in traditional Native ceremonies and social structures, and they are exercised in soldiers' self-reflections in milblogs, as well.

However, suggesting an understanding of soldiering as merely a particularly risk-laden profession, resilience and CSF, especially in their allusion to athletics, tend to overlook the importance of relationships between soldiers and civil society. While many veterans do not see their military experience as 'just a job' but as an emotionally charged commitment and are aware that it is "learning and unlearning to kill" which distinguishes soldiering from "any other job,"[45] warning voices, such as Bacevich's invocation of civil-military relationships and mutual responsibilities as part of the social contract, need to be considered. It is, thus, necessary to take a closer look at the psychological perspective on relationships—keeping in mind the above distinction of 'warriors' and 'soldiers' regarding the relationship between a war participant and his or her community—to better understand the commitment, the experience of having killed, and the challenges of "unlearning" it. Perhaps most importantly, these observations contextualize the discourse on sacrifice and relationships addressed in the previous chapter and further explain the social activist drive in many of the milblog conversations and homecoming scenarios above and in the following readings.

Military-Civil Relationships in Psychology

Military psychologists have stressed the importance of the homecoming experience for the development of a soldier's identity and sense of self. Parson posits that many Vietnam veterans' homecoming experience triggered "sanctuarial stress," echoing in his argument the prevalent cultural memory that civil society blamed the soldiers for the war's ills. Parson's perspective on personality development and civil-military relationships, regardless of the political reasons for the unwelcoming stance in parts of civil society, observes a feeling among many veterans that society broke the social and moral contract and denied them a "place to heal," that is, it failed to fulfill its wider mirroring functions as the soldiers' "parents."[46] Whereas Parson's text only briefly extends its developmental-psychology focus

44 Reyes, 269.
45 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 7.
46 Parson, "Post-Traumatic Self Disorders," 253.

to social observations to illustrate the similarity of relationship functions among families with society at large, some activist psychologists have highlighted the importance of interlocking relationships on different social levels since the 1980s. Psychologists, social scientists, as well as historians are still engaged in arguments if this societal breach in military-civilian relationships must be considered the "lesson of Vietnam" or, if not, what exactly that lesson is, and it is beyond this study's scope to provide a definite answer.[47] However, it is obvious that, since Vietnam, an increasing number of psychological and social theories, therapies, and civic projects focus on these relationships in terms of veteran readjustment, and that, as discussed before, some of them invoke Native American traditions as role models for American mainstream society. As Chapter Two has explicated, many of these cultural comparisons in activist psychology also adopt notions of warriorhood as a community relationship into their philosophy. At this point, it is necessary to return to these perspectives on relationships to contextualize social-therapeutic approaches in traumatology and veterans' mental health care and reintegration.

One of the recent publications representing the diversity of approaches to PTSD, Scurfield and Platoni's 2013 collection *Healing War Trauma*, takes Parson's allegory of civil society as the soldiers' parents further by analyzing relationships on various social levels. In addition to sharing experiences with veterans of other eras and theaters of war for mentoring, they argue, veterans should be supported in rebuilding relationships with nonveterans on the level of family and friends, but also in their relationships with the government and with civil society in general.

47 For discussions on often contrasting notions of these lessons, see Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*, 6; Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 408–09; Gardner and Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn from the Past*; Eder, *Leading the Narrative. The Case for Strategic Communication*, 123–24; Scurfield and Platoni, *War Trauma and Its Wake*, 8; Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*. Please note that many of these references explicitly use Vietnam veterans' experience and the collective memory of Vietnam (veterans) for their arguments on PTSD treatment. Regarding veteran care as a lesson of Vietnam, Michael Zacchea extends the issue into a *longue-durée* perspective. He describes veterans' affairs as a historical tradition of government promises, bemoaning the contemporary discrepancy between public praise for the veterans' services and little actual societal and government support for veterans. He adds that this tradition goes back to the War of Independence: "Not only has our nation not resolved the problem of veterans returning from war, it continues to repeat the very same mistakes." Zacchea, "Veteran's Advocacy: Social Justice and Healing through Activism," 31.

The authors posit that the experience of empty promises and the sense that the "sacred covenant" has been broken

> is a central issue of betrayal for many veterans and families. Hence, a crucial and valid therapeutic element is for clinicians to address veterans' relationship with their country, and part of the solution is for veterans to experience caring persons and organizations that are sincere and go beyond empty promises and walking the walk.[48]

Veteran readjustment is thus increasingly reinterpreted and reoriented towards relationship-building for both its individual psychological and its social therapeutic benefits. Becknell brings both together in his literature review. He stresses Judith Herman's notion that "traumatic events call into question basic human relationships" and that, therefore, traumatized war veterans often experience a loss of trust, both in formerly trusted companions (such as family members and friends) and in their personal abilities to build trust with strangers.[49] Herman concludes that "[r]ecovery can take place only within the context of relationships, it cannot occur in isolation."[50] In his analysis of civilian audiences of war narratives, Becknell adds to these observations by holding civil society accountable to take a more active role in helping veterans rebuild trust and relationships. Among other scholars, he refers to Paula Caplan who "called for more civilian and community involvement in veteran suffering and suggested that caring friends and compassionate strangers may be more helpful than trained therapists in dealing with the consequences of war" because "the moment they were asked to tell their story was the moment they began to reconnect with the listener and began, in the words of some, 'to feel like a person again.'"[51] Both Becknell and Caplan, thus, link civilians' responsibility for veterans to building relationships and trust through sharing and active listening to war narratives. Similarly, projects in social activism and social work emphasize the role of volunteering and community service for relationship-building and reintegration.

---

48 Scurfield and Platoni, "Innovative Approaches," 6.

49 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 51–52; Herman, Judith L., *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 53; cf. Shay, *Odysseus*, 174–75.

50 Herman, Judith L., *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

51 Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 54; Caplan, *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How all of Us Can Help Veterans*, xviii.

Continued Community Service and Social Support in Veteran Readjustment Projects

In recent years, both government services and civil society promoted community-based approaches to veteran readjustment in which the veterans' personal commitment—one might say, their personal sense of mission—to continue serving their community and to employ their war-related skills are critical aspects. This section addresses activist discourse about veteran volunteer projects to explore the interrelation between community service, readjustment, and (mental) health and to pinpoint the cultural-comparative perspective on warriorhood as a community service relationship. It is significant to emphasize the social-therapeutic focus in public discussions of such projects as they help veterans establish and display personal relationships and commitment to their communities. This discussion on community service provides a backdrop for the reading of personal missions in milblogs that extend beyond typical institutional soldierly duties, and it foreshadows the analysis of veterans' reintegration and healing projects in the final chapter, where community relationships once more are critical components.

In June 2013, a *Time* magazine report presented a number of veteran projects focusing on community service and civic engagement. Both its title "Can Service Save Us?" and its approach mirror the conclusions activist military psychologists draw from the study of Native American and ancient 'Western' military traditions of veteran readjustment.[52] The author has since extended his research and published a related book, *Charlie Mike*, using the military shorthand for "Continue the Mission."[53] The idea of extending one's service to society beyond deployment is prominent in the phrasing of these texts' and other project's titles and approaches, and it explains why social activists find the Indigenous philosophy of warriorhood as a perpetual community service relationship with mutual obligations to protection and tending so appealing. The projects featured in Klein's text address the veterans' challenge to readjust to civilian life, they promote their interaction with civilian communities through continued community service, and they seek to reintegrate veterans by employing their war-related skills and experience. These tasks facilitate personal growth and an interest in continued civic engagement and social responsibilities; and they strengthen relationships both within the veterans' families and between veterans and their

52 Klein, "Can Service."
53 Klein, *Charlie Mike*.

communities. Klein cites Barbara van Dahlen, a Maryland mental-health counselor for veterans, on veterans' challenging transition from being immersed in the highly organized and purposeful military activities in the war zone to what many perceive as an individualistic 'me-culture':

> When they leave the service, veterans are catapulted from an intense brother-and-sisterhood where the most serious issues imaginable are confronted every day, and plopped down into a society where they no longer have the comfort and purpose of being part of something larger than themselves. In a perverse way, their reaction to civilian life can be seen as a form of sanity: too many of the rest of us have slouched from active citizenship to passive couch-potato-hood. Many returning veterans find that passivity and isolation intolerable.[54]

Note that Klein and van Dahlen, as so many commenters on milblogs, implicitly echo the literature on civil religion in soldiering by interpreting military service as transcending the individual, committing soldiers to "something larger than themselves." Similar to Bacevich and others, Klein praises military service (and veterans' dedication to continued service) as "active citizenship," i.e., submitting the self to the interest and benefit of the collective, that the majority of Americans has presumably abandoned.[55] In portraying US civil society as primarily a 'me-culture,' Klein and van Dahlen demonstrate the cultural pessimism that is so typical of activist discourse on war experience and veteran reintegration. Their criticism of individualism and self-interest in US society opens activists toward cross-cultural role modeling and explains their pronounced interest in the warrior traditions of Native Americans as they seek to establish community-oriented forms of veteran reintegration and mental health care.

A nationwide 2009 study on volunteerism and veteran readjustment reflects on veterans' desires to engage with their communities. This report with the playful title *All Volunteer Force* presents 92 percent of veterans as regarding community service important and finds that veterans' civic engagement is well above the national average.[56] Because more than one million veterans not involved in community service at the time of the study expressed their willingness to volunteer if given the opportunity, the report calls for initiatives on the national, state, and community levels to tap into this resource—not least because the study's data suggest that volunteering is linked to a more successful transition and thus, better overall well-being of veterans.[57]

---

54 Qtd. in Klein, "Can Service."

55 Cf. Usbeck, "Don't Forget," 102–03; Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

56 Yonkman and Bridgeland, "All Volunteer Force," 9.

57 Yonkman and Bridgeland, 10–11, 25.

In recent years, a number of veteran volunteer projects have gained public attention and praise for their integration of voluntary community service and social and mental support for veterans' readjustment. One project founded in 2007, The Mission Continues, propagates the idea of continued service after deployment in its title already. The group's fellowship program integrates veterans in a community project of their choice for a six-month period, provides a stipend, and accompanies their work with a "leadership development curriculum," offering vocational guidance and opportunities for developing new skills and networks for the participants' future careers.[58] This approach efficiently combines social and readjustment support for veterans with volunteering and reintegration. Another such project is Team Rubicon. Founded in 2010, the nonprofit organization Team Rubicon provides worldwide disaster relief and first response. It combines volunteerism with veteran transition guidance by providing opportunities for continued service and repurposing veterans' skills and experiences,[59] arguing that combat veterans are uniquely trained to work in danger zones, work under pressure, and interact with civilians in shock. In addition, Team Rubicon argues that their relief for civilian communities helps veterans find purpose in life and realize that helping others helps themselves. The group, thus, seeks to address the high numbers of veteran suicides in organizing veterans beyond disaster volunteer work. In both projects, experience gained in the war is employed for altruistic, ethically unambiguous civilian tasks and shared with civilians in continued community service. At the same time, protagonists perform the ritual of narrating war experience in exchange for community reintegration on both a direct and a meta-performative level in not only discussing experience, challenges, and expectations but also in ceremonially enacting and conventionalizing them.

Similar motivation, cultural practices, and social interaction can be observed in the diverse creative writing projects for veterans organized at US universities,[60] but also among the virtual communities of the blogosphere where they occur in less institutionalized form. A number of post-deployment blogs explicitly discuss PTSD issues. I argue that, by writing about both their war experience and their experience with trauma and its effects, these bloggers perform a working-through of their own trauma, once more, both directly and on the meta-level. In addition, they often develop a sense of purpose and mission through writing. Scott Lee, founder of the blog *PTSD: A Soldier's Perspective*, states that he initially started blogging in order to "vent," hoping the blog would help him connect with those

58 "The Mission Continues"; Klein, "Can Service."

59 "Our Mission."

60 Cf. "Fallout"; "Warrior Writers"; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*.

"who understand," and to raise awareness for PTSD among the American public. Receiving his first comment on the blog, Lee was elated that "someone had heard and connected with me."[61] Over time, his growing audience inquired about his experience and problems, allowing him to give advice to both fellow veterans and caregivers to avoid mistakes that he felt he had made in trying to confront his own trauma: "The insights drawn from my experience of two messy divorces offers help to others in navigating obstacle courses that derailed my life." He adds that "offering the understanding I lack in my life" gives him hope for himself.[62]

Although Lee cannot maintain direct physical contact with most of his audience, their response in e-mails, blog comments, and on Facebook provides invaluable feedback on various levels. They reassure him that he is not left alone as he builds an online community of like-minded people who engage in an exchange about shared experience. In addition, he receives confirmation that his activities help others which, in turn, provides gratification and solace for himself. Having originated out of the frustration of feeling helpless, the blog has turned into a "mission," as a commenter pointed out to Lee: "It hit me, I'm doing what I have been prepared for my whole life. It gave meaning to my trauma and enabled further acceptance of my warrior parts. I have a mission: educate, support and engage veterans and caregivers."[63] The exchange between veterans and caregivers on this blog thus fosters a similar communalization as the veteran projects described above, enabling community-building and self-help through a sense of mission, that is, of continued community service.

However, regardless of their different formats, all these projects share veterans' interaction with their communities *after* their return from the war zone. The following close reading of milblog posts pursues similar questions and activities during deployment, exploring how life in the war zone affects the bloggers' sense of 'mission' in exchanges with their audience. It illustrates how the negotiation of war experience in these exchanges generates a 'calling' to help

61 Lee, *PTSD, a Soldier's Perspective*; Lee, e-mail message to author, 24 January, 2013.

62 Lee.

63 Lee. To provide a brief transatlantic context, the increasing public awareness of PTSD in Germany is related to a growing number of German Afghanistan veterans willing to speak out about their experience with trauma. One example is Daniel Lücking's blog *Aufräumen Kamerad!* which uses a similar format as *PTSD: A Soldier's Perspective*. Lücking provides detailed descriptions of therapy, of the impact of trauma on everyday life, and on navigating military bureaucracy in order to receive benefits. However, Lücking seems to be more critical of the military than American milbloggers tend to be, as the strong emphasis on whistle-blowing and a more general criticism of military politics on his blog suggests. Lücking, "Aufräumen."

and educate others that affects individual soldiers' well-being, and nurtures community-building. These deliberations also discuss the cultural work of these exchanges by exploring how they provide a platform for members of the military and civil society to engage in a public discourse on war experience, to negotiate their mutual relationship, and, consequently, collectively to give meaning to their experience and contribute to how it is remembered.

The Personal Sense of 'Mission' in Milblogs

As the previous discussions of diverse cultural traditions have highlighted, war experience is not always regarded primarily as a burden, but also as a responsibility, a gift, and a resource, in both Native American and non-Native cultures. Milblogs written by deployed soldiers tend to address all these aspects of war experience, with varying degrees of emphasis. They create discursive contexts that, while enacting different practices and being embedded in the confines and intricacies of deployment to the war zone, negotiate meaning and values and produce cultural knowledge in similar ways as Native war-related ceremonies or non-Native veterans' civic engagement initiatives.

By turning their blogs into public platforms for meaning-making, community-building, and relationship maintenance, deployed soldiers often engage in missions that go beyond their required duties within the military machine. They maintain, and often actively develop their sense of citizenship through voluntary activities in the service of various communities. Their self-perception as volunteer community servants nurtures relationships with those whom they serve, reflecting the sense of warriorhood as perpetual community service that activist discourse seeks to emulate from Native American practice. These voluntary civic engagements may or may not be directly related to the war effort, and might be targeting the civilian home front, fellow soldiers, veterans, trainees, or local populations in Afghanistan. In general, however, these activities, and the reports about them on the blogs, serve to maintain contact between deployed soldiers and a generally civilian audience at home, constantly facilitating both a sense of civilian 'normalcy,' of perpetual and direct service to, and of being integrated in a community, among the soldiers.

The following sections explore patterns in select milblogs to analyze a number of individual soldierly activities that go beyond the soldiers' specified tasks. Some of these activities even develop into long-term civic projects involving many participants and requiring a great organizational effort. The first section discusses how deployed bloggers engage in the military tradition of using their accumulated war experience to mentor other soldiers, be they future replacements in the deployment roster or young 'rookies.' These mentoring tasks do not constitute

a service to a civilian community per se, but they might include mentoring for civilian relatives of other military personnel, such as spouses or parents. While some of the posts discussed here were written out of a sense of military professionalism, trying to improve procedures and institutions, they also serve the individual bloggers' well-being and sense of community integration when regarded as an opportunity to help oneself by helping others, as the above subchapter on veteran projects elaborated.

A second section discusses soldiers' efforts at cultural brokering and education. Many blog entries describe the everyday life of the locals in the war zone, their customs and traditions. Bloggers often directly address their audience when they discuss their topics; they contextualize their observations with their own sociocultural backgrounds to help their American audience grasp local conditions. In many cases, bloggers explicitly state their goal to "educate" Americans about Afghanistan, both to help civilians gain an understanding of the hardships of the Afghans' everyday lives at war and to raise awareness, in contrast, for the bubble of affluence and security in which many Americans can afford to live. In other posts, American soldiers describe their efforts to explain American culture, customs, traditions, and the political system to Afghans. In this way, they turn into culture brokers and even into cultural diplomats of their own volition.

The final section takes up the issue of cultural diplomacy in investigating how milbloggers engage on a personal mission to help 'win hearts and minds' and, thus, to extend their soldierly war contributions beyond their specified military duties. While my interest focuses on the sense of personal gratification gained from these activities, this section also critically discusses the fleeting borders between personal opinions expressed in a public war narrative and these opinions become instrumentalized for the military's 'grand narrative.'

"Old Sarge" and the Rookies: Milblog Mentoring for Fellow Soldiers and Relatives

> *We have always conducted critical incident debriefings. We did them every night around the campfire, and the 'Old Sarge' always led them. There was always an old sarge, an old captain, or an old chief who was the survivor of past battles.*[64]

Observers of social and cultural change in the US military have tied, among others, problems of war stress to the military's changing demographics. As

64 Grossman and Christensen, *On Combat*, 307.

Grossman and Christensen point out in the above quote, older soldiers have always helped younger, less experienced ones understand and learn from recent battle events, and, thus, guided their initiation to killing. The authors see this informal system of intramilitary guidance and training as critical to understand and learn to manage combat-related stress. However, the high levels of education among soldiers, needed to operate ever more sophisticated weapons systems, along with the transition to an all-volunteer force in the late 1970s, have resulted in the current age-graded system of military demographics. Soldiers in the lower ranks tend to be of a very young age, and they have relatively good chances of rising through the ranks. Tick bemoans that "now the only elders on the battlefield are more experienced peers, often only a few ranks or years older than the initiate" who cannot serve as "ritual elders overseeing [the] transformational process" of being initiated into killing.[65] Marlantes makes a similar observation about his own experience in Vietnam: "There are no more old peasant soldiers with pipes dispensing hard-won wisdom."[66] He adds that, since Vietnam, older and higher-ranking officers had to "actively get down into the ranks to be more involved with younger military people's personal development."[67] It is, thus, hard to find older soldiers who could serve as mentors without encountering a gap in rank that would complicate the informal mentoring process at peer level. These gaps also lead to an often idealized and romanticized image in discussions of soldiering and soldier mentoring of bygone days.

Many works on military psychology and PTSD posit an archaic tradition of mentoring through recapitulating battle events among soldiers, stating that this system is currently being reestablished and institutionalized, mostly by formal Critical Incident Debriefing (CID) sessions, both within the units and as part of complementary military-psychological procedures, as with the stress control (COSC) units discussed above. 'Storytelling,' that is, narrating the event and providing guidance by experienced military 'elders' plays a major role in these settings.[68] In addition, the emergence of the Internet has triggered a number of independent soldier mentoring initiatives to further reintegrate mentoring into contemporary military processes. Many of these initiatives consider themselves

65 Tick, *War and the Soul*, 59.
66 Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 211.
67 Marlantes, 244.
68 Grossman and Christensen, *On Combat*, 302–39; Tick, *War and the Soul*, 210–23; Hallman and Pischke, "US Army Combat."

professional discussion forums on best practice.[69] On a less formal and less explicit level, milblogs serve similar functions. Mentoring in milblogs occurs either as the bloggers' advice to their military audience, embedded in the narration of recent experiences, or by enabling and inviting advice and guidance from more experienced commenters.

One of the most vivid and explicit examples of mentoring in milblogs can be found in the series of posts and comments following Buzzell's "Men in Black." This post's graphic and detailed narration of a firefight resembles the after-battle storytelling sessions discussed by Grossman and Marlantes and comes close enough—in form and function—to actual debriefings, as well as to formalized accounts of combat experience in Native warrior ceremonies. "Men in Black" details how Buzzell's unit of armored vehicles is ambushed in Mosul on 4 August 2004. Operating as a machine gunner in one of the vehicles, he takes fire from an assailant and reports: "I heard and felt the bullets whiz literally inches from my head, hitting all around my hatch and 50 cal mount making a 'Ping' 'Ping' 'Ping' sound."[70] Buzzell launches into an almost stream-of-consciousness mode of writing as he describes how events unfold, along with his own emotions and thoughts, and the chaos of battle translates into the obvious pace of writing and the lack of editing grammar and punctuation before he posts:

> 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. The vehicle in front of us got hit 3 times by RPG's. I kind of lost it and I was yelling and screaming all sorts of things. (mostly cuss words) I fired the .50 cal over the place, shooting everything. My driver was helping me out and pointing out targets to me over the radio. He helped me a lot that day. They were all over shooting at us.[71]

The post describes the attack and Buzzell's unit's response in great detail. It ends with their return to base. Buzzell illustrates his physical and emotional fatigue, stating "I went back to my room, thanked god, and passed out on my bed." Less than half an hour after his post goes online, readers begin to post comments, mounting to more than one hundred until the blog is taken offline a few weeks

69 The websites PlatoonLeader.org and CompanyCommander.com, organized by Captains Nate Allen and Antony Burgess in the late 1990s to enable mutual advice, mentoring, and guidance among junior officers, may serve as examples of such initiatives. Cf. Rid, "War 2.0"; Brænder, *Justifying*, 112.

70 Buzzell, "Men In Black."

71 Buzzell.

later.[72] Many commenters state that they are glad that he survived the battle and they thank him for the realistic description. Some comments by veterans offer congratulations and confirmation: "In two deployments to SWA, nothing I've seen holds a candle to what you just described. Sounds like you guys gave them hell, though. Be proud of how you and your comrades handled yourselves, no one could have done it better."[73] A fellow soldier who is stationed in Afghanistan at the time states that, in the nine months of his deployment, he had not "been shot at nor fired a shot. I just hope that if I have to, I perform as well as you did."[74] These statements already indicate elements of debriefing and mutual support through mentoring. In the first, an older veteran contextualizes Buzzell's recent experience with his own and confirms that Buzzell performed well under pressure. In the second, a less experienced active soldier similarly acknowledges Buzzell's performance and accepts him as a role model.

The post, its reception, and its impact on censorship have been discussed in detail before;[75] for this discussion on mentoring, it is critical to consider the subsequent entries. Two days after "Men in Black," Buzzell posts an entry titled "'Green' Gunner" in which he cites an e-mail received from a nonfiction author about Green Beret special forces in Vietnam. In the e-mail, a Green Beret veteran praises Buzzell's depiction of this firefight as a realistic representation of the chaos and confusion of battle, highlighting that the narrative avoids an omniscient first-person perspective: "The way this guy described it (with all the warts—not sure what he is hitting most of the time, shooting too close to his own men, etc.)—that is indeed how it is in a situation like that."[76] Again, a seasoned veteran of an earlier war comments on the blogging soldier's recent experience and acknowledges his performance both in battle and in narrating it. The elder confirms that battle is chaotic and that these situations entail a loss of control.

This e-mail to Buzzell, in a new technological and medial format, resembles the discursive context and fulfills similar functions as the battle debriefings in which an "Old Sarge," as Grossman has it, offers guidance and acknowledgment after combat. In this twenty-first-century version, the computer replaces the campfire as the locale that signifies winding down from the adrenaline rush of

72 The original posts and comments can still be accessed through mirrored sites at the Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine" at <http://web.archive.org/web/20041130083756/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_cbftw_archive.html>.

73 Cat Herder, at 8:53 p.m., in Buzzell.

74 RTO Trainer, at 7:25 p.m., in Buzzell.

75 Roering, *Krieg Bloggen*, 204–15; Brænder, *Justifying*, 217.

76 Buzzell, "'Green' Gunner."

battle and allows participants to reflect on the day's events. However, the specifics of the medium instigate yet another change: They turn the personal conversation among soldiers—that is, initiated insiders to warfare—into a public conversation on battle which includes the civilian audience on the home front. This particular conversation thus offers more similarities to the discursive context of Native warrior ceremonies in which civilian communities negotiate their relationships with their warriors by bearing witness to their stories and by acknowledging their experience and hardships.[77]

OPSEC requirements prohibit detailed descriptions of firefights and weaponry. Controlled by (self-)censorship and regulation efforts after 2004 (even after more permissive rules were issued in 2010), deployed soldiers' blogs generally no longer produce stories like Buzzell's "Men in Black." However, discussions on combat and tactics still occur, as in Rex Temple's depiction of a training mission in mock villages before deployment. After two engagements with 'enemy' fighters, Temple reflects on the event and, as if in a debriefing, self-critically recapitulates whether or not his actions were helpful for the completion of the mission. He even questions whether they were morally justified:

> While driving back I had another chance to rehearse the scenarios in my head. When the bad guys were running through the field, I opted not to pull the trigger because they didn't pose a threat and I figured we could round them up before they got away. The nearest village was several miles away. But is this how I would really react in combat? It's not an easy question to answer. Would I have been filled with rage because they just attacked our vehicle and my partner was injured? Could I use this as a justification for ending their life? I pray I never have to make that decision.[78]

At the time of this writing, this post had not attracted any comments. However, it illustrates a number of intertwined functions in milblogs. Because he "rehearse[s] the scenarios" not merely in his head but, in effect, publicly, by relating these thoughts to his audience in the post, Temple engages in mentoring, regardless whether intended or not. He details the events and provides his own analysis and criticism both for himself and for others to learn. This sequence of report and critical reflection might have been part of an actual Critical Incident

77 If we regard computers and the Internet as a new 'space' that represents both the bivouac campfire where soldiers reflect on past battles, as well as the fire place at home around which families and friends gather to listen to veterans' war stories, however, the frequent unreliability of access to computers in the war zone (depending on one's duty station) elucidates the emotional strain that accompanies the soldiers' dependency on these devices.

78 Temple, "Another Training Day."

Debriefing.[79] It even includes a public reflection on the dilemma that the soldier faced in having to decide between shooting down or trying to apprehend the enemy, and possibly endangering his own team or other civilians by making the wrong decision. By performing this self-debriefing in public, Temple invites readers to draw their own conclusions and learn from his experience. This public representation of military activity, then, is as much debriefing, performed (if not explicitly ceremonial) storytelling for civilians, as well as mentoring and invitation to discuss best practice among military professionals.

However, while OPSEC regulations render this form of post-battle mentoring generally inaccessible for the more recent blogs, different forms prevailed. Bloggers often address their own amazement, culture shock, or frustration about a variety of aspects of everyday life in a military camp, life in the host country, and interaction with its inhabitants. Describing their impressions, activities, failures, and moments of success, but also embedding the conclusions drawn from these experiences, they share their learning process with their audience and invite readers to discuss the knowledge thus gained. A deployed soldier's milblog can teach trainees and future replacements what to expect in the war zone and how to prepare by complementing the deployment training provided by the military.

In one of Rex Temple's posts, a commenter introduces himself as a corporal in a National Guard unit preparing for his first deployment to Afghanistan. He states that he found Temple's blog through a Google search and that it helped him to learn more about the country as well as about an embedded trainer's (ETT) tasks: "I would like to thank you for the insight, and enlightenment your blog has given me involving mobilization training, Afghanistan, and the function of the ETT."[80] Another post describes Temple's visit to a different base camp, located near a number of Afghan historic sites, such as the Darulaman (King's Palace). Four out of five comments respond to his depiction of Camp Dubs.

79 It remains unclear whether this detailed description of tactics and the open discussion of possible mistakes would, in fact, fall under OPSEC regulations and thus be subject to (self-)censorship—OPSEC measures are geared to denying the enemy information on weapons and tactics but, if Temple implicitly invites his readers to deliberate on the efficiency of his performance during this training session, the Taliban, known for monitoring American military personnel's online presentations, might learn from his experience, as well.

80 James Porter, 25 July 2009, in Temple, "Video Report." Readers Joe Herring (22 July 2009) and OI Doc G (12 Dec. 2009) voice similar notions in comments on the blog's "about" page. Temple, "The Writer."

Among them, a Turkish soldier remarks that he will be stationed at this camp in the coming months and that he will "need good luck there too."[81] Richard Phillips's blog received responses from a civilian medical student, commenting on his work in a camp hospital. In one post in April 2007, Maverick, a "lab tech student," expresses her admiration for Phillips's ability to work in adverse conditions at a temporary aid station (the station is housed in a tent in extreme weather).[82] The same commenter responds to a post a few months later: "I read your blogs every time a new one comes up. I check back every few days and every time i read I am amazed by the humanity you give to your patients. God Bless you…I watch with much admiration and my deepest gratitude [sic.]."[83] These expressions show that, regardless whether the commenters are younger soldiers or civilian medical students, they are learning from the bloggers' narrated experience and they acknowledge the bloggers' effort to share these experiences even in difficult circumstances.

This exchange with the audience and the intent of sharing one's learning process with potential replacements and younger soldiers is most explicitly expressed in Traversa's blog's title *Afghanistan Without a Clue*. Traversa states on several occasions that his account might be of help for those who follow him as embedded trainers, and that he would have liked to receive better preparation himself.[84] Asked about the role of the blog for mentoring in an e-mail interview, he explains:

> I felt we were poorly prepared for our deployment. We had no idea what to expect when we got there. I wanted the group coming after us to have more info. Many were avid readers of my blog, and told me later how helpful it was. I also prepared an extensive continuity book for the people coming to CMA.[85] I have always felt it was my responsibility to prepare anyone replacing me anywhere as best I can. Mentoring is very important to me, and I never really got to do it face to face.[86]

Through his blog, Traversa thus went beyond his designated tasks as an embedded trainer in order to support his replacements with his mentoring efforts. These off-duty activities obviously gained him much gratification and, apart from passing time and staying in touch with his family and friends, mentoring the specialized

81 Bulent Toksoz, 19 Oct 2009, in Temple, "Darulaman Mission-Part 3."
82 Phillips, "Week 13."
83 Maverick, 11 Aug 2007, in Phillips, "Week 27."
84 Traversa, "From Cats."
85 The Central Movement Agency is the Afghan National Army's logistics branch where Traversa worked as embedded trainer.
86 Traversa, e-mail message to author, 25 Oct 2012.

community of military peers through the blog nurtured his and his coauthors' relationships with that community beyond institutional ties and served their sense of purpose and general well-being.

The mentoring function in blogs is not restricted to informal services among military and military-related professionals, however. Even among the very first milblogs, civilian readers responded to bloggers' descriptions of military and local everyday life to inform the authors that these narratives provided frames of reference for spouses, parents, and siblings of other currently or soon-to-be deployed soldiers. Milblogs evolve into representative insights into military life to which large numbers of civilians at home relate personally. One commenter to the post by Rex Temple above refers to "a loved one" who is currently stationed at Camp Dubs: "[H]e will be all over Alfghanistan and I wondered what Camp Dubs looked like [sic]."[87] Even almost one year after this post, commenter John Strange seeks to learn from Temple about the environment his son will soon be deployed to: "My son is going to Camp Dubs in June 2011. He's AF do you have any pictures, or know of a web site that has pictures of the base."[88] Similarly, Shannon replies to one of Traversa's posts thanking him for writing the blog because it "helps me to understand a little better the country and the people there. My husband is deployed there in Kandahar."[89]

The blog exchange as a personal mission, as a way to (possibly inadvertently) help oneself through altruism functions in the same way when commenters and bloggers work together to coordinate civilian support for deployed soldiers. Activist groups such as the Soldiers Angels routinely scan through a variety of blogs as well as other social media services used by deployed troops to network and to seek and offer help. Richard Phillips's blog receives a comment on his depiction of living conditions in Khowst province which states that the reader had "adopted" a soldier in his area and that Phillips's blog "help[s] me to know what to send/write" in order to support the soldier.[90] Rex Temple is asked by a number of readers how they can send him care packages.[91] He and his wife then post a list of charitable support groups on their blog.[92] Temple diverts much of this interest directed at himself because he is located at a large central

87 Caroline, 17 July 2010, in Temple, "Darulaman Mission-Part 3."
88 John Strange, 2 May 2011, in Temple.
89 Shannon, 28 Jan. 2007, in Traversa, "Pirates."
90 Anon., 15 April 2007, at 01:29, in Phillips, "Week 12."
91 For OPSEC reasons, he sometimes cannot disclose his exact location and thus cannot provide a mailing address. Temple and Temple, "About Care Packages."
92 Temple and Temple.

base with many facilities providing everyday items, so he does not need many care packages. Instead, he suggests that readers send care packages to remote Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) whose troops have little opportunity to acquire such items. He then offers to provide a list of individual soldiers in need of care packages to these organizations.[93] Temple thus combines his popularity as a blogger with his duties which frequently take him to distant military sites to coordinate civilian support for others. These charitable activities, I argue, are in part efforts to mentor civilian supporters, employing the bloggers' unique position as experienced insiders. In the same post, Temple also discusses a charity drive for Afghan school children that is investigated in more detail below.

As in archaic, informal post-battle debriefings, in ceremonial narrations of warriors' experiences among Native peoples, in the early online military discussion forums on best practice, or in post-deployment blogs such as Scott Lee's PTSD self-help network, deployed soldiers' blogs serve altruistic functions by sharing war experience. They are not simply an occasion to blow off steam or send a message into the void but actively engage their audience in discourse on their specialized knowledge and values. Many bloggers understand this exchange as their personal mission to employ their experience to educate others. This experience is, thus, perceived by the audience as a 'gift,' a contribution to a community (rather, to diverse, often overlapping communities) which the commenters, as representatives of the audience, gratefully receive and acknowledge. Since comments and expressions of gratitude are made not only directly in private e-mails, but in the public forum of the blog, the effect of public acknowledgment for the soldiers' services contributes to the sense of community among all participants in this co-constructed narrative.

During the course of their deployment, some bloggers begin to use their popularity for political debates on the relationship between the military and civil society, especially on the soldiers' relationship with the media and, to a lesser extent, with politicians. One blog merits a closer look because a contextualization with Native American traditions of warriorhood as well as recent public debates on the value of continued service elucidates its discursive function. During his final month before returning home, Traversa posts a number of such reflections. In "Sgt. David Stephens," a memorial post for a soldier from his home town who was killed in Afghanistan, he muses on his adolescent reading of Napoleonic Baron Antoine-Henry de Jomini's (1779–1869) classic *The Art of War*, who suggested that political leaders should have military experience. Traversa

93 Temple, "Charity."

contextualizes his own experience of war in Afghanistan and agrees: "We'll never see this put into our constitution, but wouldn't it be wonderful if every one of our leaders, from the President down to Senators and Congress people, had served in the military, and even better, been in harm's way (so they really understand what it's like)."[94] He emphasizes that deployed military personnel feel insecure because they are subject to erratic policy changes due to political partisan bickering, making the soldiers feel like 'pawns.' He bemoans the fact that the populace in Iraq and Afghanistan similarly suffers from such unpredictable policy-making. Traversa's readers eagerly engage in this debate. Teri Centner, a regular commenter, refers to Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel *Starship Troopers*, which envisions military service as a prerequisite for full citizenship and voting rights.[95] Such a suggestion has evoked fears of a militarized society, even of fascism in the disguise of democracy since the publication of Heinlein's novel.[96] In this particular context, however, Traversa discusses military service as a prerequisite for citizenship because he, as a deployed soldier, is affected by political decisions made by civilians who seem detached from the personal consequences these decisions have, both for the soldiers whom they command and for the local population in the war zone whose interests they claim to protect.

In another April 2007 post, Traversa responds to hate mail that he received over his publicly expressed support for the service of homosexuals and women in the military. Traversa employs his military experience gained during deployment to deflate his opponent's arguments, stating that deployment to a war zone and immersion in a completely different culture open up entirely new perspectives to approach the diversity of opinions and customs:

> Sitting over here learning how to accept and befriend people completely different from me has been a very good experience. I have learned better to look at each person as simply a person. It's very liberating. Set your hate and bias aside, and get to know people. Have reasoned dialog. If they still insist on killing you, as the Taliban do, then we do what we must.[97]

This invocation of wisdom gained through extraordinary experience is addressed in Native American notions of age acceleration featured so strongly in tribal warrior traditions, as well as in the concept of the archetypal warrior hero whose

94 Traversa, "Sgt. David Stephens."
95 Teri Center, 24 Apr 2007, in Traversa.
96 Dolman, "Military, Democracy, and the State in Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers."
97 Traversa, "Angry Bear."

quest earns him unique wisdom. Once more, Traversa engages in mentoring, explaining to his audience that his war experience uniquely taught him about the fragility of life and about cultural diversity.

Traversa also posts a "Letter to the Editor" that the blogger team had begun to solicit from their readers a few weeks before, written by a friend from his hometown who similarly comments on the value of the soldiers' experience and of their learning processes for civil society, as well as for an understanding of mutual responsibility in citizenship:

> I'd like to […] make a plea to all of the great military people who will be coming home. As you think about what you will do in the future, I ask you to consider running for political office. I have learned so much through your eyes reading AWAC and other milblogs. As I pass this on to others I have seen their attitudes change from the enlightenment. I believe you are making a difference in a way that you may not have intended, and indeed I have seen you express this sentiment. Your experiences and attitudes are so valuable to our country. I know I have a lot of nerve to suggest that those who have served so well continue to serve. But I can't resist asking since you all have so gained much knowledge [sic]. If any of you would ever decide to run, I will be there to support you.[98]

In these exchanges, the blogger is obviously aware of the value of his experience; he explicitly states how important the learning process is to him; he voices his conviction that civil society can (and should) learn from these experiences and from the soldiers' acquired knowledge. Members of the audience chime in and acknowledge both the hard-earned experience and its sharing.[99] It is interesting to note here that commenter George Bailey not only addresses Traversa's experience, but also the effect his blog has in educating his audience. Regardless whether Traversa intended to use the blog as a vehicle to share experience and, thus, to educate civil society, Bailey acknowledges both the experience and the service of sharing it. His response exemplifies the public civilian acknowledgment of soldiers' narratives called for by activist scholars and therapists such as Shay, Tick, and Becknell.

---

98 George Bailey, in Traversa, "Angry Bear."

99 We do not know if the sender of the hate mail replied to Traversa's public reproving. In addition, it should be mentioned that the breadth of topics discussed and the open and critical debate encountered among Traversa, his fellow bloggers, and their audience are probably not representative of milblogs in general. Many blogs sampled for this study seem to engage in a limited range of topics and prefer an atmosphere of community-building like-mindedness, rather than public, critical, and rational debate in a more Habermasian sense.

"It Is not Like that in America." Cultural Brokering in Milblogs

> *I have only two months left to write first-hand about life here, can our simple conversations have an impact in the bigger scheme of things?*[100]

Soldiers traveling through war zones that were not part of their own country have, apart from applying a 'natural' military lens to place (e.g., terrain, obstacles, potential ambush sites) and people (e.g., adversaries, informants, noncombatants) always approached these strange places and people from a perspective of exoticism, especially since the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when armies were comprised to a large extent of soldiers from the middle classes in an era of emerging mass tourism.[101] It is, thus, not surprising that many American milbloggers view Afghanistan with somewhat of a tourist's gaze, posting photos of themselves at bazaars, in front of majestic mountain silhouettes, or wearing Afghan clothing. They frequently discuss these activities, such as purchasing Afghan carpets as souvenirs with which to decorate their American homes, or commenting on the strange procedures of local traffic, on bad roads, landscape features, and weather conditions. This is particularly not surprising if one considers the recruiting campaigns among contemporary 'Western' all-volunteer forces that lure potential recruits with promises of exotic places to see and interesting people to meet.

However, the tourist's gaze comes naturally because, after all, deployed soldiers are —specialized—travelers. Beyond that, many milbloggers develop a keen interest in intercultural exchange, that is, they begin to portray Afghanistan's history, cultural practices, local customs, and social organization for their readers in texts and photographs because their position as long-term visitors gives them insight into the host country that often not even the media will gain.[102]

---

100 Traversa, "Terrible."

101 Even in the Philippine War, American soldiers posed for photos in front of exotic buildings and landscapes. Niedermeier, "Imperial Narratives." In World War II, many Allied soldiers in Italy and France carried Baedekers to explore historic sites during their off-duty hours. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 159.

102 The 2012 conference "Krieg, Militär und Mobilität von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart" in Osnabrück, Germany, scrutinized historical interrelations of soldiering and mobility. Several contributions to the resulting print collection explore in how far these other perspectives that soldiers can assume during deployment or occupation duty would allow to understand them as a specialized type of "migrants," thus integrating migration and mobility-studies concepts with new military history. Cf. Rass, *Krieg, Militär und Mobilität*.

Deployed soldiers can, thus, report on the country and share insider knowledge that few others would have access to. Many milbloggers use this position to educate American readers, not only to share information about Afghanistan, but also to contextualize particular events and Allied activities with the local and regional background, and to contrast the harsh Afghan living conditions that they observe with the affluence they knew back home, inviting a debate about both reasons and explanations for the ongoing conflict, as well as criticism of American self-centeredness. Furthermore, some bloggers also report on their interaction with Afghans and their—often comical and sometimes frustrating—attempts to explain American culture and society and, thus, to seek common ground and gain mutual understanding on an individual level. In these attempts, they go beyond their duties as soldiers and begin to transform into culture brokers. Their blogs serve as hubs for intercultural exchange, which often engages both American and international audiences, as well as Afghan locals.

In "My First Afghan Meal," Rex Temple shares his experience of typical culture shock: Invited to a meal with the ANA unit his team is to train, he realizes that he forgot to bring his extra spoon (implying the typical fears of food poisoning among many 'Western' visitors to Asia). Temple describes the dishes in detail and observes his hosts in order to learn how to eat with his hands properly.[103] This experience of initial culture shock and adjustment to local customs can be observed in many milblogs' early entries. A similar entry a few weeks later details his problems eating unhomogenized yogurt and complains about the taste of Pakistani mangoes. However, he describes this meal at the ANA dining facility as the "best Afghan meal I have eaten since arriving here."[104] Several readers respond to his depiction of food culture, as in the following example: "Thank you

103 Temple, "My First." The post is fascinating on other levels, as well. Temple learns about Afghan history under Soviet occupation and that, in this earlier war, infighting among Afghans occurred as well because the Soviets recruited Afghans to help fight the US-backed Mujahideen. Temple decides to research this topic further and, for now, contextualizes the situation (both for himself and for his readers) by comparing it to the American Civil War. On a meta-textual level, Temple states during this first meeting with his ANA partners his sense of personal mission. Introduced to his liaison in the Afghan chain of command who "seemed impressed with the few sentences of Dari I was able to mutter," Temple outlines the motivation for writing his blog to his future training partner: "Using the translator I explained that I was a writer and I wanted the American public to read and hear stories about Afghan life." Temple, "My First."

104 Temple, "Quiet Sunday."

for sharing the details and helping us understand a culture that is literally and figuratively a half-a-world away from the USA. Your efforts, insights and photos are greatly appreciated."[105] This commenter acknowledges the cultural divide but also lauds Temple for his effort to explain and bridge these cultural differences.

Many of the discussions between bloggers and Afghans revolve around everyday life, customs, and traditions. Since representatives of both 'Western' culture and Afghans (regardless whether Taliban or not) often consider one another's perspectives on gender relations, marriage, family life, and sex as very strange, even as abhorrent, it is no surprise that many bloggers touch upon these topics. Temple, reaching out to his ANA partners and Afghan interpreters early during his tour, describes in his blog what he learned from these conversations about engagement periods, arranged marriages, and regulations for divorce in Islam.[106] In a similar vein, Traversa shares his frequent conversations with his unit's interpreters Hamid, Wali, and Han. Because he is obviously striving to portray the complexity of Afghan culture, history, and of the contact and conflicts between his own and many Afghans' beliefs, he relates many of these exchanges almost verbatim and goes beyond many other blogs' depictions of the local culture analyzed for this study. In an exemplary debate, they discuss the cultural implications of a childless marriage in Afghanistan and, eventually, reach their respective limits of understanding:

> The cultural gulf exploded in my face. The utter casualness with which he said this was as shocking as when Wali told me gays and apostates should be executed.
> "I married my wife because I love HER. Why in the world would I leave her if she couldn't have children? I want to be with her."
> Hamid seemed as baffled as I was. "But a marriage is nothing without children."
> "Why?" I demanded.
> "Who will take care of you when you are older? Who will pray for you when you die?" he explained.[107]

The "cultural gulf" Traversa mentions here looms over many such conversations. It is noteworthy how the author struggles to maintain a culturally relativist stance, that is, he carefully deliberates judgments of whose culture and customs are 'right' or 'wrong' or 'should' change their ways. He makes sure to include contextual information for American readers (if his Afghan partner did not already do so in the exchange). In the above conversation, he explains the sociocultural

105 Joey Niebrugge, 7 June 2009, in Temple.
106 Temple, "Slow Day"; Temple, "Mentoring."
107 Traversa, "Children"; cf. Traversa, "Marriage"; Traversa, "Anything."

obligation to intergenerational support within Afghan families, especially regarding care for the elderly in a society with brittle, if at all any, state-sponsored social infrastructure. However, he openly shares his opinion and his own cultural perspective on these matters in a tone that suggests a serious, but honest and respectful argument among friends:

> I turned off my glare, sat back in my chair, and pulled my hair back with my hands as I tend to do when faced with a dilemma. "We really do come from different worlds. I can't understand why you treat women so badly. To me, marriage is a partnership and a friendship. I cannot imagine deliberately hurting my wife, as your men do."
> "It is our culture."
> "Well, I can't change your culture, but I hope what I say can change you. I am concerned about you. I don't want you to be like that. When you get married, I hope you will treat your wife better than that."[108]

As much as Traversa and his Afghan colleagues reach the limits of mutual understanding, it is intriguing to observe Traversa's investment in highlighting commonalities and mutual interests after he depicted the 'otherness' of the local culture. These frequent references to common denominators make his blog an engaging public forum for culture brokering. Major Apple, one of his fellow soldiers who joined the team of *AWAC* bloggers, exemplifies this by sharing his childhood learning with the audience and contextualizing it with the learning process of cultural contact in Afghanistan:

> You're probably asking yourself, "What does any of this have to do with Afghanistan?" I'll tell you. Everything I've learned in life is applicable to an Afghan. They understand and respond to: Hard work, Loyalty, Family, Truthfulness, Integrity, Fun, Consistency, and everything else I've talked about. If you can forget about what makes us different, and concentrate on what makes us the same, the sky is the limit here.[109]

Traversa and one of his interpreters also set out to discuss Afghan history in detail in a short series of posts in which the author explicitly states his intent to educate readers. Yet, as he explains, he is being educated himself since it is the interpreter Han who uses both Traversa's personal curiosity and his blog's popularity to reach out to Americans: "Han is passionate about getting the truth out about Afghanistan, and I've told him I will be happy to relate his story to all of you. Han is certain that most Americans only know about the Taliban, and don't understand everything else that went before. So the two of us will do our part

108 Traversa, "Children."
109 Major Apple, in Traversa, "Terrible."

to educate as many as possible."[110] Traversa, thus, makes clear that he is merely relaying the information gained from Han, and that it is "Han's story. Remember, this is history as related to me by Han. It is his view. I make no other claim than that."[111] These posts contain a number of brutal episodes and graphic photos of the infighting among the warlords during the 1990s, as well as the Taliban terror regime prior to ISAF's invasion in 2001. Reinforcing Han's position as the storyteller (and thus, the educator) and emphatically focusing on Han's interest in sharing this story with Americans, Traversa performs his role as a messenger by expertly understating his own part in sharing Han's insight with all his readers: "I am moved by what he must have gone through, and he is seemingly desperate to finally be able to tell his story in such detail to an American. It is urgent that I understand what has happened."[112] His readers use their own knowledge of American history to contextualize and make sense of Han's story. Leta, a regular, reminds readers that American nation-building took several decades and included mistakes and infighting, as well. She concedes that religious fanaticism on a scale comparable to Afghanistan was absent from American history and that Afghans' nation-building process is, thus, understandably more painful and riddled with setbacks. Commenting on the narratives provided by Han and Traversa, she concludes: "So, I look forward to more history lessons from Han. Hopefully HIS information will assist those who read this (including me) to understand the reality of the entire situation there and not just what the media would have us know."[113] This final potshot at American mainstream media emphasizes many readers' concern about a sense of 'liberal bias' in the media, but it also reveals the blog's role as a source of (seemingly) independent insider information and, thus, it acknowledges and elevates Traversa as the provider of such information.

Being 'Western' visitors who, initially, might be as uninformed about Afghanistan as their audience, milbloggers become insiders over the course of their deployment. They witness or partake in many events, and their cooperation with the ANA and civilian local contract interpreters gives them immediate access to informants. They are, indeed, in a unique position to acquire and distribute information about life in the war zone that traditional media do not have. Regardless whether traditional media's war reports differ because, as conservative

110 Traversa, "History 1."
111 Traversa, "History 2."
112 Traversa.
113 Leta, 9 Mar 2007, in Traversa, "History 2."

blog readers presume, their 'liberal bias' is interested in diminishing the Bush administration's (or even the military's) reputation, or whether their dependency on reader and viewer ratings requires them to select the tragic and the spectacular over the everyday and the small steps toward nation-building, bloggers have access to mundane everyday life and are rewarded by their audience for depicting it in detail.[114]

Rex Temple features many such stories of small steps towards progress and individual joy. In "Rose Garden," he introduces an ANA sergeant who spends his off-duty hours gardening for the beautification of the military base. Temple particularly highlights this soldier's efforts to grow roses. He posts a number of beautiful pictures of this garden: "The roses are very difficult to grow and he compares this to the future of his country. He believes with hard work and determination Afghanistan will survive and be prosperous. The same goes for his rose garden."[115] Temple adds that he asked his wife to send some fertilizer and "Miracle-Gro" as a surprise for his fellow ANA sergeant. In this way, he invests in helping with these small steps. He becomes an active participant in the nation-building process but also engages on a meta-level by portraying his own efforts towards that goal. His readers appreciate the analogy of rebuilding and gardening as well as the photographs and share their own gardening expertise.[116] In a post on the Afghan tradition of kite flying, Temple portrays these cultural practices even more as acts of resistance against the Taliban, explaining that kite flying had been banned under their rule and that now, during holidays, American soldiers observed as many as one hundred kites in the air together. Invited to join and learn how to handle a kite and to engage in competition with other fliers, Temple explicitly conveys the political aspect of this activity and, thus, the political message behind reporting it: "But for the 10 seconds I held on to the line, I was feeling triumphant and defiant against the Taliban. It was truly a symbolic victory."[117]

---

114 Because they are participants in a war, however, their writing, too, is politically charged, and many readers reward bloggers' divergence from the mainstream media's positions and for matching readers' expectations. In these instances, community is constituted through an expression of like-mindedness. Cf. Kaye and Tremayne, "Blog Use Motivations."

115 Temple, "Rose Garden."

116 Vickie, 11 June 2009; juliannah, 11 June 2009, in Temple, "Rose Garden."

117 Temple, "Flying." Cf. also Doug "Rat" Templeton's entry on kite flying and Teri Centner's comment (17 Apr 2007) in Traversa, "Giant."

When they describe the living conditions of local Afghans, many bloggers put them in a perspective relative to the material wealth and affluence in American society back home, and readers frequently contextualize these differences in their own comments. During my research of milblogs, I did not encounter specific discussions of economic and social stratification, poverty, and crime in US society. It seems that American bloggers and their followers emphasize the overall affluence and security of US society in contrast to the poverty and instability of war-torn Afghanistan. Richard Phillips describes unpaved roads and the erratic water and electricity supply for most homes in Khowst province:

> We take a lot for granted; power, water, safety and security to name a few. In Khowst City they get 4 to 8 hour a day of power, usually in the evening […] Of course, running water requires electricity so most homes and business use water tanks on the roof to provide gravity-fed water for drinking and cleaning. Safety and security? Well, in a place where suicide bombings and automatic rifle fire are common, safety and security are not taken for granted.[118]

One commenter acknowledges the challenges to rebuilding and peace-keeping in Afghanistan, and hopes that "some good" will result from American involvement. He envisions two distinct outcomes, comparing them with other historical American engagements: "The question is: will our tenure there have results more like our efforts in Japan after WW2 or will it be more like our efforts in Lebanon during the Reagan administration? That remains to be seen."[119]

Providing a small series of reports on a mission to Kabul and its vicinity, Temple posts photographs about local sights, such as the Darulaman (King's Palace), and describes in vivid detail traffic, housing, and public life in the capital. He mentions the diversity of vehicles on the streets, ranging from SUVs to wheelbarrows, and adds that Kabul's position as the capital city and center of administration, commerce, and rebuilding efforts attracts a vast number of migrants who seek ways to support their families. One comment exemplifies many similar responses throughout Temple's and other soldier's blogs: "Thank you for enlightening us to what the people in Afghanistan experience on a daily basis. We are so blessed. If we ever think life isn't fair…we just need to look at the pictures above and your description and realize our life is so good."[120] These realizations of the cross-cultural wealth gap from both bloggers and their audience usually result in one of two conclusions. On many occasions, the exchanges

118 Phillips, "Week 12."
119 Anonymous (Dave), 9 Apr 2007, in Phillips.
120 Mary Lu Saylor, 9 Sep. 2009, in Temple, "Darulaman Mission-Part One."

between bloggers and their audience serve to justify the war effort, implicitly or explicitly, because all participants agree that American (and Allied) presence in Afghanistan works to overcome these harsh conditions. Sometimes, this notion is taken further, e.g., when soldiers use the culture shock about poverty in Afghanistan to launch charity drives among their audience, as the next subchapter describes. Before turning to these specific missions of social engagement, however, a few observations on exchanges in which US soldiers discuss American culture with their Afghan partners further illustrate milbloggers' efforts at culture brokering.

In their exchanges with ANA soldiers and interpreters, bloggers such as Traversa frequently encounter curiosity, based on vague ideas about American society and culture, but also about Christianity in general, among Afghans. Explaining 'America,' particularly the diversity and complexity of American society and cultural expressions to their Afghan counterparts, they once more assume the tasks of culture brokers and cultural diplomats. At the same time, they engage in individual missions of 'winning hearts and minds,' and they portray their activities as a complementary layer to the peace-keeping and nation-building mission of the US military. Traversa relates his personal mission in culture brokering to his interpreter Hamid when, once again, they face the cultural divide between them and must figure out how to explain and accept each other's opinions and world views: "True, it is not like that in America, but the point of my blog is to educate Americans on our cultural differences."[121] Traversa highlights the benefit of learning from one another in this exchange and depicts both Hamid and himself as open-minded representatives of each other's nations and cultures: "You see, when I write, you represent Afghanistan, and I represent America. Our worlds are very different, and when we talk, we both learn so much about each other, and thus about our countries. But always, no matter what we talk about, we part friends. Perhaps the same will be true of our countries."[122] Referring to these representative roles allows Traversa to understand their publicized private conversations as individual contributions to the overall war effort; he implicitly asks American readers to acknowledge their efforts at culture brokering.

During one of these conversations, Hamid confronts Traversa with sudden praise (they had discussed morality and individual ethical principles throughout the previous weeks, but also aspects of Traversa's family life, and

121 Traversa, "Terrible."
122 Traversa, "Life."

his teetotalism): "I wish you were a Muslim. You would be a great example of how a Muslim should live."[123] In the following, they launch into another discussion of religious differences, which is plainly painful for both and leads both to exclamations about the incompatibility of the other's beliefs and faith-based cultural practices. However, Traversa adds his own conclusions from these fierce and yet friendly exchanges, inviting his audience to consider his and Hamid's eventual acceptance of these differences:

> To all my readers, be they Christians, Muslims, atheists, or anything else, my goal is not to convert Hamid to any way of thinking. We talk because we are friends trying to understand each other's world. I am not mocking his beliefs, nor would I mock yours. Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Thought, Freedom from Coercion, these are the foundations of our great country. If I don't believe the way you do, hopefully that doesn't upset you. As long as your faith doesn't want to deny me my freedoms, I don't care what you believe or don't believe. Hamid and I are exact opposites on many issues, yet we are good friends. There may be a lesson in there somewhere.[124]

Commenters recognize Traversa's quest in these exchanges as the civil-religious drive inherent in Americans' wartime self-image throughout the twentieth century. Traversa purports to assert typical American ideals in this statement, in part adapting Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' to suit his current circumstances, and he presents them as role models in his exchanges with Hamid.

A few days later, the debate on faith resumes as Hamid inquires about the Bible and resurrection, baffled by reports on religious diversity in the US and even more baffled when confronted with the fact that many Christians, in fact, question elements of scripture.[125] Realizing Hamid's struggle to comprehend a critical perspective on faith, Traversa likens apostle Paul's story and the Bible's assertion that one thousand people witnessed resurrection to making the mocking claim that he saw a giant purple lizard fly around the military base and that one thousand people witnessed the same event but somehow could not be questioned about it. Explicating that nobody could logically prove either story, Traversa argues that taking a story on faith can be a carefully considered decision by referring to the Qur'an's creation story:

---

123 Traversa. "Life."

124 Traversa, "Life."

125 Other bloggers face similar notions about religiosity in the US. Rex Temple is told by an Afghan youngster that he hates Americans because they are "non-believer[s]." Temple takes great pains to 'create dialog' and enable a change in perspective, following the cultural advice of an ANA mullah: "I am not a non-believer, I just have a different book than you do." Temple, in "VMO Part 2."

> I always hated it in church when [citing one thousand anonymous witnesses] was used as a proof of the resurrection, because logically it isn't. But it's not the sort of question you would ask in church. The same is true with your view of the Qur'an. You believe the Qur'an wrote itself. This may be true. But you have no evidence of this. You must believe it based on faith. Do you understand what I'm saying? Just because I say 1,000 people saw a giant purple, rock-eating, flying lizard doesn't make it true, does it?"[126]

Readers seem to enjoy these debates immensely, and they frequently post encouraging comments or ask that specific topics be discussed. Many draw political conclusions from the conversations to acknowledge Traversa's performance as a culture broker and cultural diplomat. Seguin connects traditional American ideals discussed in "Life, the Universe, and Everything" with what he interprets as the maturation of Christianity after the Enlightenment. This commenter understands the conversations between the American soldier and his Afghan interpreter as seeds for a potential future Islamic Enlightenment which would serve the American mission of nation-building in Afghanistan. Seguin explicitly posits that Traversa's critical questions tackling Hamid's expressions of (blind) faith "are an integral part of the war on Wahhabi Theocracy […] If you continue asking these questions, and so does Hamid, I believe an Enlightenment can come to the Middle East and the Muslim world at large. Thank you, for all you are doing, this included."[127] Regular visitor Leta lauds Traversa for posing challenging questions but never telling his conversation partners "what to think." She adds "MAJOR KUDOS to you for the way you choose to allow one to think for themself as opposed to attempting to force and opinion or idea on the[m]. I'm kinda liking the idea of Bear for Ambassador to Afghanistan [sic]."[128] Another regular, Teri Centner, appreciates the diplomatic effort but also highlights the entertainment factor many readers apparently experience when following these exchanges. Readers frequently relate the debates to other sources in American (popular) culture: "Your lesson on faith was certainly a good try, Bear. I wonder if you should tell Hamid about the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster."[129]

---

126 Traversa, "Giant."

127 Seguin, 11 Apr 2007, in Traversa, "Life."

128 Leta, 17 Apr 2007, in Traversa, "Giant." Commenters refer to Traversa as "Bear" because he and his fellow writer Doug Templeton share the same given name and initial in their last names, leading to their distinction by nicknames as "Bear" and "Rat."

129 Teri Centner, 17 Apr 2007, in "Giant." The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster is a satirical organization who invented their own religion in response to the culture wars over the roles of church and state in the US, especially regarding the debate over Creationism versus Evolution in school curricula. Cf. "Church."

These examples represent one side of a wide spectrum of milblogs' depictions of deployed soldiers' lives in Afghanistan. Many bloggers show little interest in local cultures, and many who are interested portray them from a superior, ethnocentric perspective. However, given OPSEC restrictions on sensitive information, bloggers' choice of topics is limited, and many soldiers, if they do not talk about pop culture, as Doug Traversa frequently does as well, see the host country's culture as a point of interest that might draw the attention of readers back home. Regardless of the motivation of the majority of milbloggers, the examples explored here offer an insight into how authors use their blogs as vehicles to both express their opinions and curiosity, and actively seek to nurture dialog among themselves, their (generally American) civilian readership, and their Afghan teammates. In these instances, bloggers not only write to satisfy their sense of a personal mission beyond prescribed military duties, their writing also metanarratively discusses the value of these platforms for enabling, and supporting, intercultural exchange. As the final subchapter emphasizes, some authors use their blogs in yet more activist functions—they go beyond sharing their experience and conversations and employ their blog as an organizational space and as infrastructure for their individual campaigns in civic engagement to contribute to the war effort.

"Winning this War with Education." Milbloggers' Charity Missions as Part of the War Effort

> *[W]e all felt a sense of accomplishment. The smiles on the children's faces and those of the local villagers were evidence that at least for a day we had won the hearts and minds of the people. The true litmus test will be with what happens in the future and whether our troops will be continually subject to attacks or hidden IEDs.*[130]

A discussion of political aspects in milblogs keeps returning to the question of exploitation and instrumentalization, as this study has pointed out before. One of the reasons why initial, frantic attempts to shut down the private use of Internet services, particularly of social media, among deployed soldiers gave way to an attitude of permissive channeling is that military planners realized how profitable soldiers' narratives could be for military public relations. Pentagon officials realized the impact of social media not only on troop morale but also on the

130 Temple, "Tagab."

visibility and reputation of the military in public debate, and the milblogosphere actively promoted its contribution to winning 'hearts and minds' in internal military debates over social media use. Both military leaders and many of the soldiers themselves were thus convinced that, by narrating their war experience to the public, individual soldiers made valuable contributions to the war effort as much as to military public relations. This final section explores how milbloggers carry a sense of mission beyond duty into their blogging and civic engagement, and it discusses the ambiguities of private expression, military duties, and public relations that arise when private political and social activism intermingle with active deployment.

While it cannot be said that all milbloggers support the US government's military policies and strategies, or that they, thus, deliberately intend to serve as "third-party validators" and "force multipliers"[131] for the military's message, their embeddedness in the war situation must be taken into account. All writing about war is politically charged and, since soldiers are the ones who wage it, they are most immediately invested in and affected by the planning, conduct, and effects of war. Their writing, therefore, will be heavily influenced by their experiences, their own actions, and by the military culture surrounding them, i.e., by regulations, norms, and values. The assumption that blogging soldiers can truly represent an independent "third party" perspective in the depiction of military affairs must, thus, be taken with a grain of salt.

Given these underlying considerations, many blog posts leave open different and often conflicting interpretations on intent and effect regarding the venting of emotions in a post as they invite sympathetic audience responses, individual positive self-portrayal, personal commitment to the war effort beyond the call of duty, and positive portrayals of the American war effort in Afghanistan by highlighting individual soldiers' altruistic activities. The readings below therefore focus on select posts, primarily by Rex Temple, because they highlight how these diverse interpretations and meanings often blend into each other and because, in some cases, the bloggers explicitly offer their own interpretations of the meaning of depicted events. They reveal their awareness of this blending of personal and institutional interests and missions, particularly as they revolve around the phrase about "winning the hearts and minds" of Afghans.

In frequent intervals, milbloggers mention that they and other soldiers handed out candy, chocolate, soccer balls, or everyday items, such as ballpoint pens or toys, to children. This often occurs as part of so-called Humanitarian Assistance

131 Collings and Rohozinski, "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter," 4.

(HA) or Village Medical Operation (VMO)[132] missions during which troops convoy out to remote areas to make contact and establish friendly relationships with the locals. In these interactions, soldiers seek to bond with locals on a close, personal level, and the blogs offer opportunities to display the resulting emotions. Posting about one such mission, Rex Temple launches into his entry stating that its purpose was to "deliver school supplies, toys, clothing, hygiene items, and bring some happiness to the parentless children."[133] The post describes the variety of items as well as the living conditions in the orphanage visited that day, it addresses the problem of corruption, and ends noting that "[t]he smiles on the children's faces were priceless and watching them clutch their notebooks, pens, and new toys was unforgettable." During another mission, he spends a day pumping up soccer balls: "On several occasions I would hand the soccer balls to the young boys just to see the expressions on their faces. They were too young to differentiate between a Muslim and an infidel. In their eyes, all they saw was a generous man handing them a soccer ball."[134] In these and many other similar expressions, the soldiers' joy of "bring[ing] some happiness" to children is paramount. One might speculate that this aspect of these missions is particularly enjoyable for soldiers because these activities can be perceived as unambiguous and without moral complications regarding the often conflicting tasks soldiers have to perform in asymmetric wars such as the Afghanistan campaign.[135]

In many depictions of charitable soldiers, bloggers comment on the political context of the mission of which the giving of gifts is a part. That is, bloggers reflect on the implications of gift-giving, they are aware that the humanitarian and medical missions have the purpose of winning over previously disloyal or hostile civilians and maintaining the loyalty and support of others. Many blog posts thus immediately place these forms of interaction into the perspective of the larger war effort. In one post, Temple describes his unit's exercise at a shooting range. He observes that local children approach the scene to salvage spent cartridge casings to sell as scrap metal and to ask for food; one group of these visitors is from a "friendly" and another from an "unfriendly" village. "Even though a handful of the children came from the 'unfriendly village' to our west, we still gave them bottled water and some food to eat. Perhaps this small gesture

132 Some sources use the term Village Medical Outreach.

133 Temple, "Orphanage."

134 Temple, "VMO Day 4."

135 However, Temple's reference to corruption at the orphanage illustrates that war's ambiguities continue to loom over many of these seemingly innocent encounters.

of kindness will win over the hearts and minds of these young boys."[136] Kindness toward children in an extremely poor country blends in with the soldier's awareness that his behavior as a cultural diplomat and representative of what the adults at the "unfriendly village" would regard as an occupying enemy force might benefit future interactions with these villagers.

Richard Phillips reports similar scenes from his hospital, posting a picture of two girls who received some handouts: "And still, the patients continue to come. These two little girls represent the future of Afghanistan. Hopefully they will be like Germans and Japanese children from 50 years ago who remember kind American Soldiers who took care of them and gave them candy. We can't win this war unless we love the Afghan people, and there's no better place to start than with the children."[137] The frequent focus on children vividly marks the contrast between military and civil life. Children are not only the future generation of the country at war, they are also ideal representatives of civilian life because they are considered least responsible for and most affected by war. With this focus, then, a soldiers' war narrative reveals and channels many conflicts between military and civilian realities both on individual psychological as well as political and cultural levels of the narrative. Soldiers such as Temple and Phillips thus internalize the overall mission to win over the local populace in order to dry out Taliban resources, influence, and refuge. Through small, individual gestures, they not only improve their own morale by helping others, they contribute to the war effort and, perhaps most importantly, they inform their followers that winning the war (better, winning peace) requires time, vast numbers of such small, individual steps and, thus, patience. Referring to historical examples such as rebuilding Germany and Japan after World War II serves as proof that these steps, although they might seem insignificant to some at this time, have been part of a successful strategy before.

Rex Temple's blog reveals some intriguing insights into soldiers' sense of mission to win hearts and minds. An example of a particularly self-reflective post will serve to identify diverse layers of involvement. The entry "Winning this War with Education" introduces his audience to his off-duty reading on counterinsurgency strategies and explains that Temple hopes to learn from the manuals to improve his problem-solving skills. One lesson from a manual especially catches his interest: "If you do not understand relationships, people, cultural economics, human terrain, and all those related issues, you will only see the symptoms rather

136 Temple, "Air Force."
137 Phillips, "Week 12."

than diagnosing the problem…killing the enemy is easy, but finding him is often nearly impossible unless you have the cooperation of the villagers and the citizens," he concludes.[138]

He then relates his conversation with an eight-year-old boy who tells him that most of the people in his village support the Taliban out of fear and that handing out medical supplies and toys will not keep the boy safe once the American convoy leaves and the Taliban return to retake control of the village. Haunted by his own helplessness in giving hope to the boy, Temple explains to his audience that the Taliban apparently bomb schools and place bounties on teachers (especially women) because "they do not want the people to be educated," and that they hold sway over people's minds through the local mullahs who are often the only literate person in a village. "So perhaps one of the answers to winning this war is to educate the people, especially the young children, because they are the future of Afghanistan. I know this is a long process, but I think this is one of the essential keys in winning this war and finding a permanent solution."[139]

This seems to be one of the central moments in Temple's entire blog. It illustrates a period of change, as well as two interrelated levels apparent in Temple's writing. He blends private opinion and official statements in the posts with the evolution of his personal quest to contribute to "winning this war with education" by starting a donations drive for school supplies among his audience. Posted on 9 July 2009, the entry "Winning" is surrounded by casual remarks in posts during June and July that he volunteered as a "P[ublic] A[ffairs] representative"[140] on a particular VMO mission and as a "temporary Public Affairs Official"[141] for his unit. Assuming the tasks of a Public Affairs Officer in all but name, Temple begins to include more historical and political content contextualization in his posts after June and July 2009, focusing on the reasons behind particular military activities and on the possible implications of events.[142] This

138 Temple, "Winning."
139 Temple, "Winning."
140 Temple, "Day 1."
141 Temple, "My Day Off."
142 It seems that the terms "representative" and "official" were chosen because Temple, as a Senior Master Sergeant, is a noncommissioned officer (NCO), while PAO positions are assigned to officers. In addition, the unit already has a PAO with whom Temple cooperates frequently. The blog does not make clear why Temple is offered this position but it could be speculated that, in the spirit of the Pentagon considerations on social media discussed above, this PAO sought to employ the popularity of Temple's blog for official military PR. For more details on the tasks of PAOs, see Eder, *Leading*

makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish Temple's private from his official, professional persona on the blog. In the sense of Dennis Murphy's observations on private social media use among soldiers, these changes elucidate that it is impossible for any soldier-narrator to function as a 'true' "third party validator"[143] because it is unclear whether particular statements after June/July 2009 were made to express a private opinion or were published in his role as a Public Affairs Official, and it reveals Temple's embeddedness and engagement as an immediate participant in waging the war.[144]

The change of the blog's visual appearance during summer 2009 is another aspect of these interrelated levels of interest. While backtracking through the Internet archive to captures on other websites from the inception of the blog show the blog's header as a simple gray background against which the title "Afghanistan My Last Tour" is set in a white font up to 23 July 2009, captures after 26 August show a photograph of a sandbagged bunker flying a US flag against the background of a mountain silhouette, as well as the complementary new subtitle "Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Afghan People."[145] It is obvious that Rex Temple has adopted the official public diplomacy mission of ISAF forces in the Afghan campaign as his own personal mission, although it is less clear whether the changes in his blog's appearance and content result from his new function as Public Affairs Official or from his personal interest to contribute to the war effort.

From the standpoint of military public affairs, depicting soldiers in charitable functions helps counteract negative imagery. Hence, military officials would have had reasons to support Temple's private initiative. Mari K. Eder, in her how-to manual on military PR, states that these images are needed to prevent

---

the Narrative, especially 19–28, and for a contextualization of PAOs regarding Web 2.0 and social media, cf. also Usbeck, "Power."

143 Murphy, "New Media and the Warfighter," 3.

144 It is significant to note that, in the 'About' page of his blog, Temple explicitly states "[t]he opinions expressed within are mine alone and not endorsed by the DoD or the US Air Force." Temple, "The Writer." While it cannot be doubted that the opinions expressed in the blog are his, the blending of private Internet use and official public-affairs tasks in the text reveals the ambivalence of the notions of 'private' and 'endorsing,' with respect both to individual citizens serving as career soldiers in a modern all-volunteer army, and to the overall relationship between the military and the public in a modern communication age.

145 For the 23 July capture, see http://web.archive.org/web/20090723070709/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/. For the capture of 26 August, see http://web.archive.org/web/20090826052423/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/.

scandalous imagery, such as the torture photographs from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, from dominating the "narrative":

> With a definite emphasis on outreach, engagement, listening, and involvement, the images of the events at Abu Ghraib have been, if not replaced, then supplanted by the sheer volume of photos of soldiers shown building schools, reaching out to Iraqi leaders, posing with smiling children, and providing medical care, clothing, soccer balls, and the symbolic hand stretched out in friendship.[146]

Note the similarity in imagery between Eder's and Temple's stories, both including schools, medical care, and soccer balls. However, I make the point that, although these changes toward a more official stance in the blog pinpoint the problems around "third party" narration, Temple's engagement, nevertheless, expresses a personal sense of mission beyond the call of duty from which, as his many remarks on helping children illustrate, he draws personal gratification and a sense of meaning.

The most visible marker for this personal interest and the emotional gratification that it provides is the series of posts discussing a donation drive for school supplies that Temple and his wife initiate during summer 2009. Showing the cooperation among the Temples and their respective civilian and military support networks, the blog entries on their school supply project illustrate how civic engagement nurtures the relationship between civil society and the military. It seems to prove those wrong who believe that American society has abandoned the soldiers once again—i.e., having forgotten the 'lessons of Vietnam'—by giving up on Afghanistan and rendering the soldiers' work meaningless. His individual commitment to these social activities offers Rex Temple emotional rewards, in relation both to the Afghan children thus supported, to those back home who contribute donations, and to a sense of personal contribution to the overall war effort.

In a post on 1 June 2009, Temple announces his plan to start the donation drive for school supplies. He lists items needed and immediately contextualizes the plan with his recent personal realization that the war effort requires more engagement to sway local populations in favor of ISAF troops: "This is the mission that is near and dear to my heart. Our Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations define this platform as 'Winning the hearts and minds of the people'. Our PAO […] has some great ideas and together we want to work on this project."[147] Over the course of his deployment, Temple and his wife manage an increasingly large

146 Eder, *Leading the Narrative*, 6–7.
147 Temple, "Charity."

operation in which donations are collected stateside, shipped to Afghanistan, and then distributed to villages as part of the troops' Humanitarian Assistance missions. The blog regularly reports on the progress and solicits new donations. The project is featured in two extra pages on the blog header, and forty-nine posts are tagged as pertinent to the project between August 2009 and April 2010.[148] Temple's regular features with WUSF radio in Tampa, Florida and interviews with other media contribute to the project's expansion. Eventually, several hundred care packages are sent to Afghanistan and distributed, American schools and colleges participate in the project, and celebrities such as Miss America (1999) and Vice President Joe Biden's wife Jill become involved.[149]

Temple frequently updates readers on the progress and details of the project, combining remarks that put this individual project into the perspective of the overall war effort with amazed comments about "the outpouring of generosity that US citizens have displayed to support this project. It helps to reinforce our mission here and my belief that we can still win this war, especially by educating the children."[150] A post from September 2009 serves as another good example for this combination. Temple describes how his reassignment to a new base has affected the project. He mentions that, in this new facility, he encountered an Air Force Major who had plans for a similar project, leading both toward joint efforts. By now, care packages are coming in on a regular basis. The sheer number of items requires teams of more than twenty soldiers who volunteer to unpack, sort out, and prepare the items for distribution. Photos show soldiers carrying large stacks of boxes and sorting through supplies. Temple adds news that the Taliban have recently bombed a girls' school in Pakistan and killed over one hundred female students in an Afghan province. Reference to these news articles works to emphasize the importance of the project. Temple concludes that they "reinforced my determination to supply the students with these supplies and defy the Taliban and their warped ideology. It also supports my newly coined motto: 'Every pen and pencil donated to the kids in Afghanistan is like a sword in the Taliban's heart.' "[151] In addition, Temple states his appreciation for the American donors because they prove that "Americans still care about the destitute children in Afghanistan."[152] Implicitly, this remark also acknowledges and appreciates that

148 Temple, "Afghanistan My Last Tour."
149 Temple and Temple, "Miss America"; Temple, "234th Marine"; Temple and Temple, "Germany."
150 Temple, "234th Marine."
151 Temple, "Mountain."
152 Temple.

Americans care about the US soldiers who protect and support these children, which strengthens the function of this project as Temple's personal mission.

This entry illuminates the 'mission' aspect even more in a further section. Temple relates that "a Canadian anthropologist has labeled us as missionaries," but he believes this to be "misleading" as their work is primarily secular.[153] It is speculative to muse about this anthropologist's meaning without knowing his text, but Temple's interpretation might be based on a misunderstanding. It is quite possible that the anthropologist did not allude to an effort at religious conversion per se, but that he referred to the traditional practice of gift-giving, used by missionaries in encounters with Native peoples to gain their trust.[154] Temple describes exactly this practice as a successful tactic in counterinsurgency strategy, i.e., gift-giving to deny the Taliban a loyal populace to hide among. Temple could be described as a missionary in yet another sense, however. From the perspective of this chapter's main thrust, Temple's experience of the war and the military's peace-keeping and nation-building mission in Afghanistan lead him to deliberate on his personal involvement in the war's progress. He invests in feeling responsible for both the Afghan community, for the military, and for his home community. He develops a sense of, and embarks on a 'mission,' or a quest, that extends beyond his prescribed duties as a deployed soldier in Afghanistan—the resulting ambivalent blends between his private and official persona in his blog notwithstanding. In this way, he employs the public forum of his blog to establish a discursive context that allows him to engage his readers in negotiating meanings and values to draw from his personal war experience.

Conclusion

Rex Temple's school supply project and Doug Traversa's reports on cross-cultural debates with Afghans serve as examples of how war narratives by deployed soldiers depict their missions of civic engagement in various forms, be they variants of individual cultural diplomacy, such as charity drives and cultural brokering, or mentoring for both military personnel and their relatives. Regardless of their forms, these individual missions use the discursive context of a milblog to portray bloggers' altruism and commitment to social relationships. They

153 Temple.

154 The fact that, in many cases throughout history, the trust thus gained was soon breached, and that the gifts also served to generate and eventually maintain the Natives' dependency on the missionaries' material culture illustrates the ambivalence of 'gift'-giving in the context of religious missions.

reveal the potential benefits of bloggers' war-related experience, skills, and access to technology and information (such as a blog) for others. This sharing process and the corresponding collective construction of meaning generate and nurture relationships with a community that might be the soldiers' civilian home community, the military community of fellow soldiers, veterans, and their friends and relatives, or the national community that is reimagined and reconstituted through such a negotiation of meaning on the blogs. In this way, milbloggers' personal missions of sharing experience conduct cultural work in a functional equivalency with both the work of community-based veterans projects such as The Mission Continues, as well as Native American cultural practices within their tribal military traditions, although they all establish their distinct cultural and discursive contexts. In all these culturally specific forms of ceremonial pledges to community relationships, individual warriors, soldiers, or veterans employ war-related skills and experiences for the benefit of a community who reciprocates by acknowledging both the sharing and the often painful process of gaining such experience and skills. In all instances, both civilians and representatives of the military pledge mutual responsibilities and, through this pledge, acknowledge one another's affiliation with the community. As a result of this exchange, warriors, soldiers, veterans, and their civilian audiences (re)build relationships with one another and, thus, (re)constitute their communities through the joint construction and negotiation of meaning and values.

5. Singing their "Song": Veterans, Civilians, and the Trials of Homecoming

Each and every one of us veterans must have a song to sing about our war before we can walk back into the community without everyone […] quaking behind the walls. […] Those who are afraid or uneasy must hear it. They must see the art. They must lose their fear. When the child asks, "What is it like to go to war?" to remain silent keeps you from coming home.[1]

What is "home" anyway?[2]

Introduction

In countless war narratives across genres, cultural traditions, and history, the story's arc ends with the soldier's homecoming. The battle is won, the war is over, and the hero returns to his loved ones. Many such narratives adhere to and even explicitly invoke what Joseph Campbell has described as the archetypal "hero's journey": The hero goes forth to meet and withstand a challenge and, eventually, returns home victorious and matured.[3] In US literature and culture, this pattern can be observed in personal war narratives such as memoirs, fiction, war movies, nonfiction books, and in academic analyses of war experience. Milblogs often follow a similar narrative arc. Many blogs end with the soldiers' report of a happy reunion with their families; photos of soldiers hugging wives or enjoying the peace and amenities of home are typical features of such posts.[4] In a way, this type of narrative ending resembles the final kiss in a love story—regardless whether the boy gets the girl[5] or the soldier comes home, both stories suggest

1 Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 207.

2 Shay, *Odysseus*, 4.

3 Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; cf. Becknell, "Listening to Narratives of War," 17–19.

4 Temple, "Coming Home"; Odie's contribution in Traversa, "Sgt. David Stephens." Among other aspects, this chapter also breaks up the earlier chapters' patterns of gendering: while most bloggers discussed so far were males and milblog conversation thus neatly reproduced traditional patterns of male soldiers experiencing war and encountering large numbers of female commenters in a nurturing role, the homecoming scenarios discussed here also portray female soldiers and veterans in protagonist roles.

5 Cf. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 5.

closure: They mark the successful conclusion of a challenge, but, at the same time, they omit the beginning of a new challenge, i.e., the trials of everyday married life for the lovers, and the trials of readjusting to civilian life for the veteran.

This final chapter addresses how such homecoming trials are discussed in US society and, specifically, how civic activists seek to raise public awareness about them. It acknowledges that, for many soldiers, the physical act of returning home from deployment does not automatically translate into 'homecoming.' Combat veterans often need to "dial down" reflexes acquired as life-saving skills in battle.[6] Traumatized veterans sometimes take decades to understand the symptoms of stress, seek help, and come to terms with their trauma. Most veterans face challenges when returning to civilian life; the cognitive gap between the discipline, hierarchy, and essential sense of mutual dependability in the military on the one hand, and the emphasis on individualism, self-interest, and competition in US civil society on the other hand are frequently experienced as a culture shock.[7] In a deployment system of individual and unit rotations, returning veterans are aware that the war is still raging overseas and that fellow soldiers and friends are still in harm's way. Among veterans, this knowledge frequently evokes guilt and a sense of having abandoned their buddies while, at the same time, they face a society that is often ignorant about the hardships of war and whose members frequently do not seem to care about the war at all. In all these responses to their return from deployment, veterans take time to sort their memories and experience and try to fit in to civil society so that an individual sense of 'homecoming' is often quite disparate and delayed from their physical return.[8]

Jonathan Shay states in the motto above that veterans must first sort out what 'home' means for them, and for their families and communities. This process needs to be verbalized within the veterans' communities. As Vietnam veteran writer Karl Marlantes expresses above, they must find a "song," a narrative, to do the sorting, and they must find active and empathetic civilian listeners with whom to share their experiences and to support the sorting process, in order to achieve complete reintegration. This chapter, therefore, focuses on civic projects designed to help veterans find and sing their songs. This understanding

6 Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, x, 51–85.

7 Cf. Hoge; Junger, *Tribe*.

8 In this somewhat generalizing overview, complex issues, such as the prospect of (multiple) redeployments for career soldiers with its corresponding stress situations, cannot be discussed in detail.

echoes observations from Indigenous traditions, such as war-related practices on the Northern Plains, which hold that 'homecoming' means a Native veteran's ability to live with his or her memories, and not be overcome and controlled by them: "[T]here is a widespread conviction that what is needed for veterans to 'come home' is for them to be able to 'forget' the war; and the way veterans are to 'forget' the war, somewhat paradoxically, is to 'talk about it.' "[9] The civic activist projects discussed in this chapter all share this philosophy and emphasize the role of ceremonial storytelling among veterans and civilians as critical for homecoming, i.e., for reintegration and mental health.

Milblogs, as the previous chapters have shown, reflect attempts to exchange information and emotions about war experience and to bridge the cognitive and social gaps between soldiers and civilians. They also address the prospect of homecoming and discuss, in more or less detail, anticipation, but also anxieties about homecoming.[10] However, many milblogs are terminated upon return from deployment or simply peter out shortly thereafter; they do not capture and discuss particular post-deployment issues in detail. Rex Temple, in his last radio interview en route to the US, says that he looks forward to everyday life without the restraints of the military, but expects to need some time to "get my bearings" in the civilian world.[11] Douglas Traversa posts a few entries detailing his culture shock about some civilians' ignorance of US soldiers' and Afghan civilians' struggles in the war zone, and then moves on to discuss personal-interest issues unrelated to the military (e.g., dog rescue) until the blog is discontinued.[12] Richard Phillips remains silent for a while after his return, and then proceeds to reveal and discuss his problems with depression and related readjustment issues, before redeploying back to Afghanistan.[13] Although he did not write many entries during deployment on his Afghanistan experiences, Don Gomez wraps up his deployment with a reflective post titled "Afghanistan Post-Mortem" before going back to writing more generally on issues of military culture on his blog *Carrying the Gun*.[14]

To cover the experience of sorting out memories and the often lengthy process of readjusting to civil life, this final chapter has to move beyond the realm of milblogging and rely on a corpus of primary sources best described

9 O'Neill, "Coming Home," 446.
10 Phillips, "Week 23."
11 Temple in O'Brien, 4-15-Mlt-Rex-Heads-Home.Mp3.
12 Traversa, "Loose Ends"; "Clowns"; "Scum."
13 Phillips, "Back in the Saddle"; "Back to Afghanistan!"
14 Gomez, "Afghanistan Post-Mortem."

as 'homecoming scenarios' that, nevertheless, shares a discursive context with milblogs. As a complex medium of ritualized narrative practices whose cultural work lies in their self-conscious negotiation of war experience with civil society, milblogs can only be fully understood in conjunction with such cultural practices that concern themselves with veterans' homecoming, readjustment, and reintegration. 'Homecoming scenarios' are a growing corpus of diverse and widely discussed texts and practices of civic engagement; they are medially and modally heterogeneous scripts of homecoming rituals negotiated in documentary films, on websites, in theaters, as well as in creative writing and education projects. The phenomenon cannot adequately be described with the concept of 'text' alone, even in its broadly framed cultural-studies sense because its functionality is determined by the interaction and complementary implementation of diverse practices in a variety of media and modes, and it often involves elements of ritualized performance and physical presence.

This chapter, thus, employs the term 'scenario' which was derived from performance studies and serves to complement text-centered notions of cultural practice.[15] While a scenario might comprise individual texts, such as documentary films or websites, it also often involves embodied acts, such as town hall meetings or group therapy sessions, which then are often discussed, described, amended, and published in text form. The scenario is formed by the sum and the synergistic cultural work of all individual elements. Diana Taylor's understanding of 'scenarios' seems all the more relevant as her work also contrasts "archive" with "repertoire." She argues that the use of 'repertoire' explains performance and ritual in Indigenous societies as it

> enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically 'a treasury, an inventory,' also allows for individual agency, referring to 'the finder, the discoverer,' and meaning 'to find out.' The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being part of a transmission.[16]

In this sense, the lens of war-related ceremonies among Native North Americans focalizes the cultural work of homecoming scenarios. It helps understand them as 'repertoire,' as cultural practices requiring embodied presence and expressions beyond mere textual narration, as practices bringing together both veterans and civilians for the communal performance of rituals that are not simply theatrical

15 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.
16 Taylor, 20.

events staged for a passive audience. They require active participation by all involved parties to negotiate the meaning of war experience for both veterans and for civil society, that is, to 'find' and 'discover' this meaning in a concerted effort.[17] Hence, while most examples in this chapter's readings refer to texts and discuss how their 'textuality' helps determine their cultural work, it is critical to keep in mind that this adaptation of Taylor's concept reads 'scenarios' as superordinate, ritualized narrative structures which are usually iterated in embodied performances and accompanied by the supporting texts discussed in the readings (e.g., websites, online forums, films, oral history collections).

Taylor's reference to the primarily nonliterate practices of Indigenous peoples emphasizes cultural translation and allows an inclusive approach to the diversity of cultural expressions discussed in this study. Taylor describes scenarios as "formulaic structures"[18] and "portable frameworks."[19] A scenario, she adds, "includes features well theorized in literary analysis, such as narrative and plot, but demands that we also pay attention to milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language."[20] Scenario, in this sense, means both the performance—i.e., the embodied, spatially determined, and presence-oriented acts executed during a ritual—and the overarching narrative structure, the ritual pattern, whose manifestation and dissemination can be determined by various media and modes, such as dance, milblogs, or communal welcome ceremonies, as well as the supporting para-texts circulated to educate civil society about veterans' issues and to promote homecoming scenarios as a social remedy. Taylor's concept of scenario encompasses both the "setup" of performative practices and their "action," i.e., enactment.[21] She emphasizes that "the transmission of a scenario reflects the multifaceted systems at work in the scenario itself: […] writing, telling, reenactment, mime, *gestus*, dance, singing."[22]

---

17 This understanding also goes hand in glove with Ronald Grimes's distinction of performances in ritual and theater, i.e., theater is performed for a passive audience of consumers while rituals are performed by participants who reinforce their sense of community through that performance. Grimes, *Craft*, 297. In this context, it is striking that the *Theater of War*'s website, although using the term "audience," declares that 60,000 people have not only "attended" but also "participated" in the group's events. Their documentation, thus, similarly emphasizes the active and community-building component of their performance/ritual. "Theater of War: Overview."

18 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 31.

19 Taylor, 28.

20 Taylor, 28.

21 Taylor, 28, 31.

22 Taylor, 31.

Thus, her concept grasps not only the multidimensionality of performance and meta-performance underlying this study, but also the generic and medial diversity of its corpus. Taylor's emphasis on milieu in her outline of scenarios as an analytic tool allows this study to sharpen its focus on civic engagement and on the social activist intent behind homecoming scenarios. With the concept of 'homecoming scenarios,' then, this chapter examines the cultural practices' setup, their action and embodiment, and their transmission in textual representations.

While homecoming scenarios utilize different media and address different stages in a soldier's or veteran's 'career,' they are, nevertheless, situated in the same discursive context as milblogs. This is not only because they are both cultural artifacts representing war experience and civil-military relationships with a strong emphasis on the role of community, but also because they both rely on related textual, performative and cultural dynamics, i.e., on forms of ceremonial storytelling driven by social-therapeutic motivations. Like milblogs, homecoming scenarios regard communal, ritualized war narratives as an opportunity to mark the transition between civil and military life in a socially responsible manner. They both assume that practices of narrating war experience, guided by specific cultural conventions, help soldiers and veterans to come to terms with their experiences. For this process, they both rely on—and often explicitly require—an audience that bears witness to this narration and that, in their symbolic statements of empathy and support, sets an example for civil society in general. Both practices, thus, integrate an otherwise passive audience and transform it not only into actors of civic engagement, but also into co-narrators as their response is a critical component of the entire ritualized exchange. Both practices self-consciously emphasize the civic awareness and significance of such narrative exchange. While milblogs seek to inform civil society about the reality of war through firsthand observation, homecoming scenarios propose that veterans' war experience, through a culturally ritualized institutionalization in narrative and performance, can represent the complexity of war experience for civil society and integrate it into civic practices of cultural commemoration.

As such, homecoming scenarios can best be grasped by the two-pronged approach of a) inquiring about the cultural work of the practices to explain relationships and to illuminate how knowledge and values are iterated and disseminated, and b) by examining the negotiation of individual experiences (and suffering) among diverse groups of social and cultural agents. Like the discussions of milblogs in the previous two chapters, this chapter thus looks into the functionality of the sources while also discussing their social-therapeutic intent as critical factors in illuminating their cultural work and social relevance. Integrating its analysis of homecoming scenarios with the previous observations

on milblogs, this chapter thus answers the following major research question: How do homecoming scenarios, which cover a different phase of soldierly careers than milblogs, negotiate civil-military relationships, how do they foster interaction between veterans and civilians, and how do these dynamics reflect those of milblogs?

In the following, I further elaborate on the civic-engagement thrust of homecoming scenarios to situate them within the tradition of American war narratives and to discuss the notions of social therapy inspiring these practices, thus marking them as current cultural practices of negotiating war among soldiers and civilians, before introducing the readings of selected homecoming scenarios. Homecoming scenarios emerged within the tradition of cultural representations of war and are embedded in the activist discourse on war experience analyzed throughout the previous chapters. War memoirs and veterans' fiction and nonfiction writing, for example, have been prominent genres in US literary history, and their academic discussion has produced broad swaths of scholarly literature.[23] However, homecoming scenarios are a relatively recent phenomenon—in terms of reach, popularity, and civic engagement as well as in terms of formal diversity—and as such, they have not yet been outlined as a distinct cultural practice. The phenomenon originated in veterans' projects which—from diverse perspectives and in diverse modes—address the narration of war experience performed as a core element of the social and mental reintegration of returning veterans. In doing so, they delineate and repeatedly call for the social institution of specific rituals of veteran transition and reintegration as a civic practice. This recurring script is being conserved, transported, and reiterated in diverse cultural formats (both textual and performative). The corpus of such practices reflects an explicit ambition to effect social impact—it is promoted by forms of civic engagement and activism that claim social relevance, call for social change, and attempt to spread their ideas by employing established, in themselves 'ritualized,' cultural conventions (e.g., the formal and textual conventions of film).

The corpus of homecoming scenarios is manifest in another unifying feature. Cathartic, ceremonial storytelling, understood as a catalyst for veteran

23 Cf., among others, Limon, *Writing After War*; Jason, *Fourteen Landing Zones*; Anderson, *Aftermath*; Morgan and Michalson, *For Our Beloved Country*; Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*. Some of this chapter's sources extensively show milblogs' embeddedness in this tradition. Both Colby Buzzell's blog *My War* and Michael Strobl's post "Taking Chance Home" are featured in the anthology *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*, as well as in the accompanying eponymous CBS documentary. Andrew Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*; *Operation Homecoming*.

transition, is described, promoted as a ritual, and self-consciously performed as a paradigm of social change. It is, thus, a formally heterogeneous corpus of 'texts' and activities that outline the dramatic script of a ceremonial storytelling practice and enact this very practice at the same time. The phenomenon not only seeks to support the reintegration of veterans and help them navigate their experience, it also strives to value this war-related experience by making it productive for the civilian world. Homecoming scenarios are, thus, unique projects of civic engagement driven by a strong meta-performative impulse: They promote rituals of ceremonial, war-related storytelling as a viable and necessary form of community-oriented veterans' reintegration and social therapy while enacting these rituals through their explicit engagement of both veterans and civilians in these practices.

The civic activist drive of homecoming scenarios is strengthened by their institutional contexts, which becomes apparent when they are compared to depictions of homecoming that have recently become a popular theme in both news media and social media, and are typically manifest in the images of happy reunions at airports, homes, or military bases.[24] However, a 2015 study by John Howard and Laura Prividera argues that, while these video clips provide an "easy to access script for citizens to understand soldiering and what it means," they overemphasize joy, strength, resilience, and the completion of a task while avoiding topics such as veterans' reintegration struggles, social and economic challenges, and (mental) health issues.[25] These depictions usually resort to archetypal characters, such as the triumphantly returning "warrior hero," or the tragic "fallen hero."[26] As Howard and Prividera conclude, "[t]he glorification of service and war does a disservice to those military personnel who would benefit much more from understanding than nationalistic pride and praise."[27] The corpus of what this chapter understands as 'homecoming scenarios' is distinct from these overtly positive portrayals because it engages the challenges that other formats avoid and seeks to do justice to the complexity of war experience, as the following brief example elucidates.

In recent years, the production and currency of homecoming scenarios was extensively promoted and institutionalized. One important factor in this

24 A YouTube search for the phrase "Soldier Homecoming Compilation" will provide a general idea of the structure, content, and popularity of this format.

25 Howard and Prividera, "Nationalism and Soldiers' Health: Media Framing of Soldiers' Returns from Deployments," 217–18.

26 Howard and Prividera, 222.

27 Howard and Prividera, 231.

development is the emergence of mentoring and counseling, creative writing, theater, fine arts, and film courses and workshops for veterans offered by both educational institutions and activist groups. In many cases, English departments, humanities centers, and veterans' centers at universities play a leading role in providing ideas, resources, infrastructure, and focal points for outreach and civic engagement in and beyond the classroom.[28] Andrew Carroll's book and the accompanying CBS film *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience* emerged on this current wave of academic interest. Since the Vietnam War, psychologists and psychiatrists such as Jonathan Shay and Ed Tick have engaged not only in clinical therapy, but also in the promotion of community-oriented veteran self-help and social activist groups, and helped spawn the recent surge in homecoming scenarios. Their books and ideas feature prominently in the homecoming scenarios described in this chapter; the authors are frequently hosted as guest speakers and advisers.[29] Among droves of psychological works discussing clinical PTSD therapy and veterans' mental health, a few recent works explore civic activist projects of homecoming in conjunction with alternative and social therapy.[30] In addition, there are extensive

28 Cf., e.g., "Fallout"; Leche, *Outside the Wire*; Dalton, "From Combat to Composition: Meeting the Needs of Military Veterans through Postsecondary Writing Pedagogy"; Simon, "Veterans Learn"; Broder and Tanenbaum, "Soldiers Project"; "Warrior Writers"; Martin et al., *The Journal of Military Experience*; Doe and Langstraat, *Generation Vet*. Academic engagement within the humanities in this regard is probably driven by a number of intertwined factors. Humanities departments have the institutional knowledge and academic expertise for these types of courses and projects. The humanities are traditionally comprised of large numbers of faculty who see themselves as activist-scholars and engage in social issues. In addition, projects focusing on veterans at a university open doors to otherwise scarce sources of external funding for humanities institutions at a time when most such departments and centers struggle in competition with STEM disciplines. I am indebted to Lawrence Acker of Lindenwood University for his insights in these developments regarding veterans' affairs within higher education.

29 Among other scholars' works, Shay's *Achilles* and *Odysseus* are seen as classics. They are cited in much of the academic-activist literature and serve as references on the projects' websites. Tick's books and his healing and reconciliation retreat project Soldier's Heart are frequently cited as role models for spiritual, community-oriented approaches to veteran reintegration and therapy for moral injury. Tick, *War and the Soul*; *Warrior's Return*.

30 Cf., e.g., Scurfield and Platoni, *Healing War Trauma*; Scurfield and Platoni, *War Trauma and Its Wake*.

interrelations and mutual influence between protagonists of homecoming scenarios, as well as authors and audiences of books about veteran self-help, and about psychological mentoring on veterans' readjustment, mental health, and community-oriented reintegration.[31] The trials of homecoming are addressed in visual arts,[32] in the works of engaged journalists,[33] and even in several official reports on veterans' mental health and social therapy.[34] In this context, homecoming scenarios have directed public attention to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to raise awareness about the challenges of veteran readjustment. They have gradually built up institutional support and infrastructures for their social-therapy agenda.

As with the examples of ceremonial storytelling in deployed milblogs, the motivation behind homecoming scenarios is driven by dissatisfaction with the state of civil-military relationships and by concerns about the social contract among many veterans and civilians. It involves both the veterans' anxieties about abandonment and isolation, and activist civilians' empathy for veterans' issues, their sense of civic responsibility, and their recourse to cultural memories of an alleged general rejection of returning veterans after Vietnam. This activist urge most likely focuses on veterans more than on deployed troops because of the widespread assumption that public attention to veterans is much weaker than to active troops in the field, where bumper stickers, yellow ribbon campaigns,

---

31 Cf., e.g., Hoge, *Once a Warrior*; Marlantes, *What It Is Like*; Holyfield, *Veterans' Journeys Home*; Meagher, *Moving a Nation to Care*.

32 Cf., e.g., Mitchell, "100 Faces of War Experience"; *5000 Feet is the Best*.

33 Cf., e.g., Finkel, *Good*; Finkel, *Thank You*; Junger, *Tribe*; Updike, "Will They"; Klein, "Can Service"; Klein, *Charlie Mike*.

34 Tanielian and Jaycox, "Invisible Wounds of War"; Yonkman and Bridgeland, "All Volunteer Force." To provide a brief transatlantic contextualization, the German *Bundeswehr* has much less prominence in the public, owing to critical perspectives on the role of the military in World War II and the Holocaust. Public memory about these historical events still generates wary public discussions on the relationship between the military and civil society. However, German participation in the Afghanistan campaign has raised public awareness of veterans' mental health and corresponding problems of PTSD and readjustment. A growing number of German veterans and journalists address these issues. Lücking, "Aufräumen"; Sussebach, "Veteranen: Krieg im Frieden"; Würich and Scheffer, *Operation Heimkehr*. In addition, the parliamentary ombudspersons for the *Bundeswehr* regularly warn about growing official numbers as well as estimates of unreported cases of PTSD in their annual reports. Deutscher Bundestag, "Jahresbericht 2009"; "Jahresbericht 2010"; "Jahresbericht 2011."

and applause for military personnel in uniform at airports offer easy gestures for civilians to express support. As indicated above, the public imagery of happy family reunions suggests a task completed which allows the public to ignore potential psychological, social, and economic struggles in the wake of medialized homecomings.

In this context, the lens of Native American war-related ceremonies applied throughout this study helps understand the cultural work and social relevance of activist homecoming scenarios even better, and mainly for two reasons: First, unlike ceremonial storytelling in milblogs, the spatial and temporal gaps are removed, i.e., the practices discussed here do not have to take into account further combat and combat-related stress, nor look at reunion with one's home community as a distant and somewhat abstract idea. Like participants in the Navajo Enemy Way ceremony or Plains dancers counting coup, the veterans involved in homecoming scenarios have returned from the war zone and are surrounded by their families and home communities. Second, as a result of the eventual removal of the temporal gap and the veterans' physical contact with their community, veterans' problems with readjustment and mental health are perceived as frictions, cause social stress, and make healing and communal reintegration more urgent. It is, thus, significant that many Native American war-related ceremonies not only honor returning warriors but also cleanse them of the taint of violence and mend lingering psychological injuries. It is critical to note that Native civilians actively participate in these ceremonies, and that this joint participation in the ceremonial effort symbolizes the mutual responsibilities to which warriors and civilians commit themselves. By enacting a supportive, empathetic, and healthy community, the participants create, or reconstitute that community and, thus, work to 'heal' both veterans and civilians. It is this notion of mutual aid and communal responsibility to which homecoming scenarios in US mainstream society increasingly subscribe.

Many homecoming scenarios refer to texts about veterans' reintegration and social therapy which explicitly portray Native American war-related ceremonies as role models for community-oriented work with veterans, as Chapter Two discussed. They reflect a growing concern about isolation and the negative effects of overt individualism in US society. Consequently, they seek to learn from, borrow, or constitute and create diverse communal cultural practices to address these grievances. Protagonists frequently cite the positive effects of unit cohesion among deployed troops to explain the culture shock veterans experience upon returning to civil society. In numerous texts, journalists, scholars, and veteran writers explain that the proximity of death in the war zone necessarily

facilitates bonding among soldiers, fostering a sense of trust, reliability, protection, and familiarity. As Sebastian Junger posits, the experience of such virtues and loyalty "can be utterly intoxicating to the people who experience them."[35] The loss of these social relations upon return, and the veterans' immersion into a civil society built on self-reliance and competition, contribute to the culture shock many experience. They might help alienate veterans as they realize they are but a small minority within US demographics who made the transitions between the worlds of war and peace, and experienced the resulting psychological consequences firsthand.[36] As a World War II veteran told oral historian Studs Terkel, he perceived life with the fifteen men in his artillery gun crew as a "tribal sort of situation where we could help each other without fear."[37] Junger integrates these observations with the military traditions and war-related cultural practices of the Iroquois and concludes regarding non-Native veterans' reintegration struggles, comparing unit cohesion in wartime with studies on mutual aid in communities beset by natural disasters: "What people miss presumably isn't danger or loss but the unity that these things often engender. There are obvious stresses on a person in a group, but there may be even greater stresses on a person in isolation, so during disasters there is a net-gain in well-being."[38] Like the examples in the previous chapter, Junger (as well as many of the protagonists cited below) speaks of a "tribal" sense of community and refers to "egalitarian societies" as role models because, as he emphasizes, they do not merely "valorize," but "value" veterans. This notion perceives veterans' experience as a necessary contribution to society, but also cautions against pathologizing and further isolating veterans in creating a "victim class."[39]

Similarly, the protagonists of homecoming scenarios seek to reinstate such a sense of cooperation in their efforts to involve civilian communities in veterans' affairs, to build trust, and to encourage mutual aid and responsibilities. Among many other scholars, Shay emphasizes that a major feature of complex war-related PTSD is not only the "persistence into civilian life of adaptions necessary to survive battle," but also the "destruction of the capacity for social

35 Junger, *Tribe*, 77.
36 Junger, *Tribe*, 77–78.
37 Qtd. in Junger, 92.
38 Junger, 92–93.
39 Junger, 100–01. Junger specifically attacks the VA system of lifelong disability benefits for PTSD, arguing they signify that society no longer expects anything productive from these veterans.

trust."[40] Homecoming scenarios, then, work toward (re)establishing that trust since they argue with Shay (and frequently in reference to traditional societies' practices) that "recovery happens only in community."[41] Regardless whether activists explicitly cite Native American military traditions or, as the examples of theater projects in this chapter highlight, the veteran traditions of classical Greek drama, these cultural practices subscribe to the sense of crisis in the discourse on war experience that is keenly aware of veterans' reintegration struggles. They propose to overcome this crisis by way of diverse ceremonial, communal, and therapeutic scripts of storytelling and bearing witness. Homecoming scenarios, then, conduct cultural work in similar ways as many Native war-related ceremonies, and in similar discursive contexts. Although they are embedded in their own cultural context and often invoke their own cultural traditions (such as the citizen soldier), they frequently cite the Native American practices (as well as other traditions) as role models and seek to implement elements from these different cultures to motivate, justify, and help structure their own activities.

The following readings discuss five homecoming scenarios to illustrate select aspects of how these projects use various cultural expressions to promote their social agenda. Notwithstanding their diversity in scale, institutional support, or choice of media, the homecoming scenarios within this selection could be described as projects of institutionalized narrative practices. That is, they conceptualize encounters between veterans and civilians as cathartic, ceremonial narrative practices and institutionalize them through their promotion and prescriptive representation as models for civil-military relationships. These scenarios are usually realized through institutionalized activities, such as workshops, theatrical performances, town hall meetings, and social-therapy retreats, and are supported by various text formats. Many of the supporting para-texts are conceptual works by activist military psychologists (e.g., Jonathan Shay, Edward Tick), as well as documentary materials, such as websites and blogs, which often open up additional space for convergence and interaction between veterans and civil society.

The medial diversity in this corpus demonstrates how embodied, performed, and memorialized practices collaborate with texts serving as prescriptive models. That is, to relate back to Diana Taylor's concepts, they form a parallel and mutually reinforcing structure of 'repertoire' and 'archive.' In addition, these projects

40 Shay, *Odysseus*, 4.
41 Shay, 4.

frequently not only refer to Indigenous and ancient Greek war-related narrative practices as role models, their setup often emulates (explicitly or by chance) the embodiment and spatiality of these practices, thus once more revealing the significance of traditional knowledge and practice for the entire corpus of war narration in this study. It should also be noted that most practices of narractivity as they could be observed in the milblogs, i.e., the ways how blog readers directly contribute to blog posts and influence the overall narrative, are not visible in the media discussed here. Most projects have relegated direct interaction with their audiences to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. To keep the scope of this study and the diversity of media to explore manageable, these social media services could not be included in this discussion.

However, the representations of embodiment in films and film clips on websites, as well as the explicit and prominent calls to contribute to a project, illustrate how these scenarios engender direct interaction between veterans and civilians, and how they represent such interaction. While not showing narractivity in action, more often than not, they reveal its foundations and its results. Milblogs use the Internet as their ritual space and the physical interaction between participants and technology (e.g., keyboards, tablets) as an embodiment of the ritual process. Both this spatial setup and the physical interaction with technology provide the sense of presence among participants that enhances ritualization. For these homecoming scenarios, the Internet serves two spatial functions: It is a storage space to collect representations of individual ritual processes in various media. Films show embodied ritualized interaction at a defined space (e.g., the compound of a retreat, or a theater auditorium), and website texts instigate, prepare, and report such events of ritualized interaction. Comparable to the function of tributes and memorial blog posts, the scenarios' supporting websites also serve as convergence spaces, helping to construct the overall scenario by collecting and directing its individual elements, such as hyperlinks to social media where the direct communication with users then takes place, and information on the projects' mission, sponsors, and supporters. The websites also store information on the projects' activities, and on the individual scenario elements in which rituals are presented to the public (e.g., film and audio clips, essays). These convergence spaces thus provide frames for the overall scenarios; they, too, become the ritual space within which the cultural practice unfolds, and they help instill a sense of presence for its participants.

The readings below begin with analyses of the documentary films *Operation Homecoming* (2007) and *The Welcome* (2011), as well as their supporting

para-texts. These films develop prescriptive and exemplary practices of ceremonial storytelling by veterans and, through their circulation as films, promote and rehearse these practices. The supporting websites enhance their civic-engagement thrust as they offer discussion guides and questions, and invite viewers to host screenings or similar events as represented in the films. The interweaving of different media within the homecoming scenario becomes apparent because the medium 'film' depicts embodied and participatory ceremonial storytelling and promotes it as a necessary cultural practice to ameliorate the diagnosed social crisis in veterans' affairs. At the same time, interviews with veterans in the films and para-texts reflect on deployed soldiers' anticipation of homecoming and contrast these memories with their experience of their actual return, and with the corresponding social frictions and emotional challenges. The selection illustrates the broad range of these projects in terms of scale: *Operation Homecoming* could benefit from the institutional and financial engagement of the National Endowment of the Arts, while the Welcome Home Project and its major medium of circulation, the film *The Welcome*, represent the activities of local activists dependent on crowd funding.

Similarly, the third scenario, the Veterans Education Project (VEP), operates on a regional level in New England. It emerged from community-oriented veteran activism since the Vietnam War and will be featured here to examine how public debate on the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has shaped local social activism in veterans' affairs. It illustrates how activists use education to generate interaction between veterans and civilians and to foster opportunities for veterans to make their war experience productive for their communities. This reading focuses on VEP's website, and on an accompanying academic study on social work and narrative therapy. Like the following reading on theater projects, it, thus, does not so much analyze the veterans' stories themselves, but inquires how the activists promote the stories and how the scenario implements their telling.

Finally, the chapter discusses how two projects integrate modern interpretations and theatrical performances of ancient Greek drama with representations of recent war experience. These concrete homecoming scenarios combine theater and town hall meetings to bring together veterans, health care professionals, and local communities. They use websites and oral history video clips to disseminate their ideas of community-oriented veteran reintegration. The discussion focuses on how their website para-texts contextualize the historic reference to Greek drama and promote the projects' social activist thrust.

Operation Homecoming

This is the first time anyone's asked us to write about what we think of all that's going on.[42]

This first scenario is centered on a project of soldiers' creative writing based on their experiences in post-9/11 wars. It culminates in the film *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience* (2007), following the titular print anthology edited by Andrew Carroll in 2006. Both the film and the book feature a selection of short stories, letters, e-mails, poems, and blog posts published as part of a nationwide effort to engage military personnel and their families in firsthand war narratives. The project was initiated at a gathering of state poet laureates who eventually involved the National Endowment of the Arts, organizing creative writing workshops at military bases and ships in the US and in the war zones, taught by distinguished (and primarily veteran) writers.[43] Following the NEA's call, some six thousand participants attended the fifty workshops, and of the c. two thousand submissions, five percent were selected for inclusion in the anthology.[44] The film features a few of these book contributions. It is part of the eleven-episode PBS series *America at a Crossroads* which explores challenges to foreign and domestic politics, as well as social issues, facing US society since 9/11.[45] The following reading discusses the overall project's activist motivation before launching into a closer reading of the film to explore in how far its contributions address 'homecoming' and how they inform the project's agenda. Finally, brief sample readings of book contributions and para-texts on project-related websites illustrate how the different elements of this multimedia project complement each other and inform its activist stance.

The NEA representative for the project states that, never having worked with the military before, the institution wanted to bring writers and members of the military into personal contact with each other as it recognized the social and cultural importance of creating an environment of mutual learning.[46] In addition, the project was supposed to give voice to witnesses of war "who would not normally be heard,"[47] i.e., lower-echelon personnel and their families back home,

42 Participant during a writing workshop at Ft. Bragg, in Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*, xxvii.
43 Gioia, preface to *Operation Homecoming*, xi–xii.
44 Gioia, xiv.
45 "America at a Crossroads. Operation Homecoming."
46 Gioia, preface to *Operation Homecoming*, xii.
47 Gioia, xiii.

and provide them with a means of reflection on their war experiences.[48] While such voices have, in fact, shaped the tradition of US war narratives throughout history, it is significant to note that, for the post-9/11 wars, widespread civic engagement has fostered the collection, publication, and public debate on first-hand accounts even as the wars were still under way, and thus given firsthand narratives more impetus and more immediacy than in earlier wars.[49] This recent interest in personal narratives of war is apparent in the selection of the editor for the print collection. Andrew Carroll has been engaged in several projects documenting war correspondence and personal narratives since the turn of the century.[50] Project organizers state that they were surprised by the overwhelming response from soldiers and families. Among the range of reasons to contribute to the project, Carroll emphasizes the statement made by a noncommissioned officer in the Special Forces from the above motto—his surprised realization that civil society indeed seemed interested in hearing these voices. Thus, both the institution organizing writers and artists, and military personnel and families involved in the project, undertook efforts to learn from each other and to publicize this learning and exchange. For them to encourage and document such exchanges on veteran reintegration signifies how this project negotiates civil-military relationships at large.[51]

---

48 Gioia, xii.

49 In addition to the writing workshops and the solicitation of e-mails and letters, the NEA handed out audio books featuring classic war narratives to c. 25,000 soldiers. Gioia, xiv. The project thus places itself within the tradition of US war narratives. It also illustrates how soldiers' narratives are influenced by their cultural imagination of war, or "war-in-the-head," i.e., soldiers measure their own experience against their preconceived and culturally determined imaginations of war. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, 29–30.

50 Cf. Carroll, Andrew, *Operation Homecoming*; *Grace under Fire*; *War Letters*; *Behind the Lines*. Carroll's own Legacy Project, launched in 1998, seeks to preserve and publicize the communication between soldiers and their families, asking the public to contribute historical and recent letters and e-mails "that describe[…] an incredible story or articulate[…] thoughtfully the nature of war and its profound effect on those involved." Carroll, Andrew, "Legacy." This collection of personal communication has, by now, resulted in a number of print anthologies, films such as PBS's *War Letters* and History Channel's *The Great War: Dear Home*, as well as a number of museum exhibitions, such as the Smithsonian Institution's *War Letters, Lost and Found*.

51 It is striking to see the current, great public interest in collecting and documenting all kinds of historical war narratives. People collect old narratives, but they also encourage active soldiers to publish their own narratives as the wars still take place, and, from the start, determine the value of these contemporary narratives not only in terms of

The book and the film follow slightly divergent narrative arcs. The print collection traces the chronology of a typical soldier's deployment, starting with a chapter titled "And Now It Begins" and ending with "Home. Returning to the United States." The film, however, opens up with series host Robert MacNeil who contextualizes contemporary war narratives, explains the (then) new medium of milblogs, and discusses the magnified publicity of today's Internet-age war narratives, before he resumes introducing viewers to the NEA project. He then leaves the stage to soldier-authors reflecting on their role as writers, as in the first statement by one participant: "I may not be a very good soldier, but I may be a very good witness." In this way, the film emphasizes the soldier's role as a witness to a historical event; it even prioritizes this role over the speaker's primary function as a soldier. The film's selection of homecoming stories is also more homogeneous than the book's. The only film contribution explicitly describing a return from the war zone is Michael Strobl's account on his voluntary escort service to accompany the remains of deceased Pfc. Chance Phelps to his home town.[52] The book features homecoming "alive, wounded, or dead"[53] in more detail, and the stories related there are much more diverse and drastic. The film implies homecoming in John McCrary's depiction of portraits and tributes to deceased soldiers, and in Ed Hrivnak's reports on treating wounded soldiers during *medevac*[54] flights, but it does not address the social and emotional challenges of veteran reintegration explicitly. At first glance, this seems to be a discrepancy between the different elements of the whole project and a waste of the film medium, particularly given the project's title.

As Jeffrey Geiger posits in his texts on the history of (war) documentaries, the appeal of documentary films rests in 'Western' intellectual traditions that,

---

how they negotiate the relationship between civilians and the military, but, especially in Carroll's project, also regarding their function as historical sources. Cf. Carroll, Andrew, "Legacy Project."

52 This account first appeared as a guest entry at the milblog *Blackfive.* Burden, "Taking Chance Home." It was then featured in a print collection on milblogs, and eventually served as the screen writing blueprint for an HBO feature film. Cf. Burden, *The Blog of War*; *Taking Chance*. For discussions on the mediality of this story and its role as a communal narrative mourning ritual over death in war, see Usbeck, "Don't Forget"; Usbeck, "'Taking Chance Home.'"

53 Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*, xxiv.

54 Medical evacuation. This is usually done by helicopter to reach the nearest aid station, and by transport plane to transfer wounded soldiers back to large hospitals and rehabilitation facilities, e.g., in Germany, or back to the US. Carroll, Andrew, 291.

ever since the Enlightenment, have equated the visual mode with truth and accuracy. Since the earliest days of the film industry, showing images of soldiers and the results of violence in war "used to harness powerful public sentiments via their impressions of historical veracity and bodily immediacy."[55] The effect of harnessing sentiment through bodily immediacy is very drastic, indeed, in *The Welcome* discussed below. In *Operation Homecoming*, however, the choice of visual representations of written text is determined by a temporal obstacle. Unlike popular, recent war documentaries such as *Restrepo*, the filmmakers were not present during the events narrated here. The visuals must help reenact the events, they cannot capture them. The images accompanying Colby Buzzell's battle depiction in the chapter "Men in Black," for instance, are animations; their distortion of forms, abstraction of people, military equipment, and events (e.g., cross hairs symbolizing the narrator's fear as he receives incoming fire) reduce the documentary's potential to create a sense of veracity among the audience.[56] However, these effects enhance immediacy in employing documentary's performative potential, using visual elements such as cross hairs and sound (e.g., gun shots, wailing, Arabic music complementing the reading voice-over) to focus the viewers' attention on particular aspects of the narration, such as the narrator's sense of anxiety, the chaos of battle, and being surrounded by strangers in a strange place.

These visual and audio effects also echo the constant struggle between realism and abstraction in depictions of war in the arts. Academic observers of representations of war have argued that both a 'realistic' reenactment of battle scenes (e.g., the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*) and artistic, abstract representations (e.g., in postmodern novels such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* or Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*) can serve to show the brutal reality of war but both must also face the "internal constitutive difficulty in addressing the violent, the cruel, and the ugly without transforming it into beauty, without endowing it with aesthetic effects, without arousing pleasure, without bringing to redemption what should be irredeemable."[57] The film,

55 Geiger, "Taking Aim," 158.

56 Like Strobl's text, the inclusion of Buzzell's narrative in the project once more shows the transmediality and vibrancy of recent firsthand war narratives as his story, too, originated as a milblog post, was then remediated in Buzzell's print memoir, and, eventually, in this film.

57 Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century*, 20. One might also speculate that the realistic mode, e.g., for Buzzell's battle depiction, would have faced financial obstacles as it might have been too expensive to reenact a major firefight, whereas the scene in Jack Lewis's piece "Road Work" in which the narrator encounters an Iraqi father mourning

then, must walk the line between conveying to the viewer the sense of fear, confusion, anger, and boredom the contributors depicted in their writing, and using the available technical and financial means for such visual interpretation without distorting their narrative.

However, the abstraction in many visuals, as well as the omission of book material for the film, create the impression that the film was somewhat 'toned down.' It is possible that the educational thrust of the PBS series ruled out the depiction of violence in order to protect children and adolescent audiences. The film also does not address some of the more problematic aspects of homecoming: Unlike the book, it does not go into detail on some veterans' descriptions of substance abuse, PTSD symptoms such as flashes of rage and battle reflexes carried into civil life where they disturb, and possibly harm both veterans and civilians, nor the struggles of physically injured veterans and their families during rehabilitation. It is subject to speculation why these more conflict-laden examples were not included, but the impression remains that the film version seeks to appeal to a wider audience as it avoids many of the more graphic moments and obvious conflicts, and so it neglects some of the book's more critical questions.

The film project, as it cannot capture war experience as it unfolds, further supports its reading sections with short introductory clips. Occasionally, contributors contextualize their stories or provide further details. In "Road Work," Jack Lewis explains how the sight of an Iraqi father violently grieving over his son, imploring Americans in a passing convoy to kill him, compelled Lewis to write about this encounter. As in the opening sequence where a soldier-author muses on his value as a witness to war, these statements often operate on a metanarrative level. The scenario is about soldiers' war experience, but it also explicitly presents itself as an opportunity to share this experience with the civilian public, and the film goes to great lengths to characterize how the authors reflect on both their war and their narrating experience.

Operation Homecoming enhances this metanarrative mode by interspersing statements by senior veteran writers from earlier wars who served as instructors for the project's workshops in between the soldier-authors' clips. This patchwork pattern resembles the multimediality of the whole scenario, where workshops, print collection, film, and para-texts on the website complement each other. In some instances, the senior voices in the film emerge as quotes from their classic war narratives: Tim O'Brien's remarks in *The Things They Carried* that, apart

his dead son by the roadside, could easily be staged for the film. However, even this scene is depicted mostly in film stills, symbolizing the narrator's flashes of memory.

from climactic battle events, war appears to be "aggressively boring"[58] introduce Parker Gyokeres's piece "Camp Muckamungus" which depicts the boredom, sports, and the silly games that he and his fellow soldiers had at their camp to pass the time in Iraq. In other examples, senior veterans present their views in short oral-history statements. Anthony Swofford, author of the 1991 Gulf War memoir *Jarhead*, brings viewers' attention to soldiers' internal conflicts. While soldiers' values may be humane, he cautions, "the actions they're called upon aren't," which "permanently puts you at war with yourself, too." His foreboding statement serves as the prologue for Ed Hrivnak's "Medevac Missions." This contribution presents excerpts from Hrivnak's journal about his missions as a critical care air transport (CCAT) team captain. In one particular incident, Hrivnak struggles with himself and, eventually, lies to a wounded soldier who is not yet aware that his infected wound will require amputation of a limb. Hrivnak does not want to further agitate the man at that moment, but he also admits that the lie is borne from his own anxiety about confronting that soldier with the ugly truth and dealing with his reaction. Swofford's statement here helps set the stage to introduce viewers to Hrivnak's predicament.

To cite a final example in this context, Sangjoon Han's semi-fictional contribution is preceded by the adaptation of a Hemingway quote stating that war, "no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is always a crime." Although it is not paired with Han's but with Jack Lewis's contribution, Vietnam veteran writer Tobias Wolff's clip serves a similar contextualizing role: Wolff states that fear is a major reason why soldiers develop hatred for the enemy. Han's story describes how an Iraqi civilian watches as an IED explosion hits Han's convoy. As the Americans begin to shoot in all directions to protect the stricken vehicle, the man, who might have been only an innocent bystander, turns and flees. Although told to stop repeatedly, the Iraqi continues to run until Han shoots him. The narrative repeatedly switches between Han's and the man's points of view, vividly illustrating both sides' fear of one another. It highlights that Han's fear prevented him from rationally calculating the risk and the corresponding necessity to escalate his response (i.e., judging whether the man was actually a hostile insurgent or not), but was also determined by his irrational anger over the man's noncompliance with his command to stop.[59] Thus, fear-induced hatred of

58 O'Brien, *Things*, 33.

59 Susan Derwin of UC Santa Barbara explained in a podium discussion during the 2013 conference "Fallout. Narrative-Making in the Aftermath of War" that switching the point of view is an important didactic device in her own and many other creative

the 'other' resulted in an escalation that, eventually, fueled Han's self-doubts over the morality of his conduct.[60] Although the soldiers' directive in such situations is often 'better safe than sorry,' both Wolff's and Hemingway's remarks embed and reinforce Han's story in preparing the audience for the moral dilemma over his decision and his eventual agony over being both safe and sorry.

In these examples, the senior voices serve several functions at once. They place the post-9/11 narratives in the tradition of earlier American war writing by setting them next to excerpts from these classics. Yet, they also assume a mentoring role, helping both the young veteran authors and the civilian audience understand this particular aspect of war experience. By their own example, these 'elders' demonstrate that the new veterans are not alone with their memories and emotions and, in relating to the young writers, they already step forward as role models. These statements, then, are not only metanarrative but, as the examples in Chapter Three have illustrated, they are meta-rituals in their efforts to contextualize and help the new veterans come to terms with their experiences. In turn, this mentoring signifies a role model of reintegration to the audience because the senior voices bear witness to the young veterans' narratives and implicitly call on the audience to do likewise. Finally, these expert voices also serve a media-specific role: In the book, the task of contextualizing the narratives falls to the editor. In the film, however, these expert voices can profit from the popularity and trust attributed to firsthand oral history narratives. As established above, oral history, the direct representation of firsthand memory by a protagonist-witness, makes the representation of events and experience appear more vivid, but also more valid. While this documentary cannot represent war experience in a fly-on-the-wall mode as *Restrepo* does, it establishes its truth claim by empowering its protagonists to tell their own stories. It supports these stories through validation by the senior veteran-writers. Their contextualizations are not only third-party expert voices to this particular war, but their own firsthand experience

---

writing workshops for veteran students, as it helps veterans to assume the perspective of their adversaries and, thus, to rehumanize the 'other.' Focusing on his narrator's perspective, Han similarly explains that these POV switches served to "humanize the decisions of the soldier and convey just how hard it is to make those decisions and sometimes we get it wrong, and sometimes we get it right and [don't] know it."

60 Recall that Rex Temple reported on a similar ethical conundrum, weighing the necessity versus the potential immorality of escalation during a training mission in Chapter Four. As Temple ponders on his blog whether letting the fleeing mock attackers escape was the right thing to do, Han's story here might serve as a reminder that the decision to shoot and kill can result in even more self-doubt.

related in a similar mode helps validate the new veterans' narratives and places them in the tradition of the genre. As in the case of milblogs, the presence of firsthand witness narrators, however narrow and limited their perspective may be, lends an immediacy and credibility to the narrative that a documentary film or history book based entirely on the perspective of nonparticipant observers—i.e., 'outsiders' such as academics or journalists—could not gain. Like milblogs, these voices promise to represent an unfiltered, unembellished, and bottom-up perspective of war experience.

Given these roles of older veteran voices in the film, recourse to its apparent lack of actual 'homecoming stories' seems in order. The film does not explicitly address the physical return from the war zone to any great extent, the narrating time of some contributions actually predates the return from deployment, and, in some cases, the narrative was created long after deployment. Still, both the film and the book symbolize and portray the soldiers' reflections on various aspects of their war experiences as a definitive element of homecoming and of negotiating experience.[61] In this sense, all texts in the film are, indeed, about homecoming. This sense of reflection becomes particularly vivid when these contributions are related to Karl Marlantes's reference to Native traditions above: If we read the narratives in *Operation Homecoming* as veterans' efforts to find their own song and as the NEA's and civil society's engagement to help them sing it and to bear witness to this performance, then the project's cultural work clearly operates within the same discursive context as *waktoglaka*, the ceremonial narration of war experience in Northern Plains warrior traditions discussed in Chapter Two: Both forms of cultural expression work toward catharsis, a cleansing of the individual through verbalization of critical life experience in the 'Western' sense. In their respective cultural contexts, they also renegotiate the individual's relationship with his or her society in that they reconstitute the social contract between warriors or soldiers and civil society and negotiate the narrators' status as veterans.[62] Hence, the mere process of writing about war experience among US soldiers and veterans, seen through this lens of Indigenous practice, must be understood here as a critical part of coming home. It harks back to Marlantes's

61 In cases where texts for the project were written during deployment, they would be subject to the same temporal obstacle of anticipated return and the prospect of further danger in future missions as milblogs. Many of the contributions to this scenario resemble the cultural work but also the temporal (during deployment) and spatial (created and set in the war zone) perspective as milblogs, but are narrated in a different medium. Some, like Buzzell's text, are, in fact, remediated milblog posts.

62 O'Neill, "Coming Home," 458.

above observations on how singing 'songs' to their communities helps veterans to 'come home,' not only physically, but also socially and mentally.

In the following, I extend the discussion of the *Operation Homecoming* scenario beyond the film to include a few sample readings from the book and from website texts related to the project. The book contributions offer productive insight into ceremonial storytelling in the scenario that, eventually, can be tied back to similar processes in milblogs. The examples are taken from the final chapter titled "Home" where, unlike the film, various scenarios of returning home are discussed. They range from the regular end of deployment to the evacuation of wounded and the repatriation of deceased soldiers, to readjustment to life back home, be it trying to find a job, learning to live with a war-related disability, or facing symptoms of posttraumatic stress and the resulting social struggles. In all examples, authors reflect on how their war experience influenced their perspective of their current circumstances and how it affects their emotions and sense of self. While neither film nor book offer a medium of direct exchange with the civilian audience over these narrations in the way that milblogs and other social media do, the website texts, especially the discussion questions, highlight the project's motivation to engage audiences with these narratives and to create dialog.

In "Sea Voyage," written as an e-mail to his family and friends, Guy W. Ravey describes his trip from deployment in Afghanistan to Hawaii by ship in May 2003. This is a somewhat unusual homecoming because, since Vietnam, deployed troops have tended to return by air transport. Ravey's voyage, then, gives him several weeks' time to wind down and to reflect on his own and his ancestors' war experience.[63] His connection to his family's military tradition becomes particularly significant as his ship passes an island in Indonesia where his great uncle, also a fighter pilot, had been shot down, captured, and executed by the Japanese in 1944. The connection with this relative helps him reflect on his own loss of a fellow pilot and friend. This place makes him feel "the closest I've been to family in seven months. It felt warm and soothing" because "[i]n a way, I feel as though I'm bringing a part of Will's spirit home with me."[64] Telling his relatives about his research on the great uncle's fate and about his satellite

63 This example is especially remarkable because observers of war stress and military psychologists have pointed out that the long voyage from overseas theaters of war up until the mid-twentieth century offered US soldiers a critical "cooldown period" where they could reflect on past events in the secluded company of fellow initiates before reentering civilian life. Air transportation since the Vietnam War has removed this opportunity, forcing psychologists and military planners to look for substitutes for such "cooldown" phases. Grossman, *On Killing*, 293; Marlantes, *What It Is Like*, 182.

64 In Carroll, Andrew, *Operation Homecoming*, 320.

phone call to his grandfather to inform him he is currently close to the long-departed relative's place of death, Ravey not only reaches closure on his loss but helps his family reach closure on their earlier loss from World War II, as well. He constructs another 'homecoming' within his own, in conjunction with placing his own experience in the military tradition of both his immediate relatives and of the national family, and in sharing his reflections both with his blood relatives, and the national family.

In a similar way, Michael Thomas puts his return from Iraq in 2004 into a historical perspective. Eager to reach home, he is "desperate" about the delay of his flight to Bangor, Maine.[65] When they finally land in the US, he encounters a group of elderly veterans at the airport, lined up to welcome his group home. He learns that these veterans patiently waited for the delayed flight and describes his emotions as he begins to compare his own experience of a one-year tour of duty with these veterans, of whom many were deployed for the duration of their war, often under far worse conditions. Thomas speculates that some of these veterans would have served in Vietnam, musing about their own welcome, "how they were treated when they came back to the U.S., and yet here they were to support us."[66] This image of feeling proud, but also humbled by Vietnam veterans who extend a welcome to him that they did not receive themselves, recurs throughout homecoming stories in the post-9/11 era. It contextualizes the recent wars' veterans' experience within US military tradition, but it particularly focuses on the significance of civil-military relationships when these stories invoke and further cement the narrative of how civil society summarily rejected—i.e., betrayed—the Vietnam returnees, unfairly blaming them for an unpopular war.

In the final example (and the final contribution that closes the collection), Parker Gyokeres's last letter to family and friends after returning home from Iraq presents the audience with his struggle with everyday civilian life. It bears the title "The Hardest Letter to Write."[67] Gyokeres explains why he misses his unit:

> The main issue for me has been adjusting to a life without the dear friends I served with and whom I grew to love—and, without whom, I felt lost, alone, and unable to relate to others. I am told this is normal. That did not, however, make it easier. And I know I'm doing better than many for whom I care deeply. They hide it well, but they are struggling.[68]

65 In Carroll, 321.

66 In Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*, 321. The earlier reference to longer tours would concern veterans from World War II and Korea. Vietnam veterans, like veterans of later wars, usually served tours of up to one year, depending on their branch of service, as well. Muehlbauer and Ulbrich, *Ways of War*, 461–62.

67 In Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*, 369.

68 In Carroll, 369.

Mirroring the sense of loyalty and familiarity in hardship that Junger's book describes as "tribal," Gyokeres highlights that this bonding results from the "[t]raumatic, life-changing, or profoundly spiritual events"[69] that he shared with them. Since he did not share such moments with his family, his relatives struggle to understand and to accept his relationships with his buddies. He explains how such traumatic events also caused soldiers to withdraw and isolate themselves if they could not find a way to express and confront their memories. It becomes clear that, as the introduction to his story points out, his writing is metanarrative with cathartic intent, that he is also "writing for himself"[70] when corresponding with his family because "[m]y writing gave me an outlet while I was over there and it continues to help me now."[71] He credits his wife for recognizing his predicament: "[S]he knew when to listen and when to let me work through my emotions. This is perhaps the most important thing any loved one or friend can do."[72] It is one of the key revelations in his readjustment process, and it signifies the purpose of the entire scenario because "it's helpful knowing that there are people who care about us and are at least making an effort to understand. Your support has made this journey an incredible one for me, and I couldn't have gone through it alone. Thanks for joining me—and thanks, above all, for listening."[73] This letter and final firsthand voice in the book, then, boils down the cultural work and social-activist motivation of homecoming scenarios represented in the many works that take their cues from Indigenous military traditions. In all these cultural practices, veteran readjustment and reintegration requires a civilian community's encouragement to share one's war experience, as well as the civilians' willingness to listen, that is, not only to help veterans find and create their 'song,' but also to bear public witness when they sing it.

The para-texts accompanying the scenario's different media representations further emphasize dialog and civic engagement. The website for the PBS series *America at a Crossroads*, of which *Operation Homecoming* is one out of eleven film episodes, offers a detailed discussion guide and a page for educators. It applies a Habermasian perspective on informed, rational debate in the public sphere as it invites the audience to "join the national dialogue" not only at home, but also in libraries, church groups, at Internet cafes, and at the workplace.[74] In

69 In Carroll, 370.

70 In Carroll, 369.

71 In Carroll, 373. This statement echoes many similar metanarrative remarks in milblogs, such as Traversa's. Traversa, "AFROTC"; "From Cats"; "The Daily Commute."

72 In Carroll, *Operation Homecoming*, 374.

73 In Carroll, 374.

74 "America at a Crossroads. Discussion Guide."

the segment "The Experience of American Troops," the films *Warriors* (2007) and *Operation Homecoming* provide discussion prompts engaging the audience to reflect on the diverse dilemmas that US soldiers face in post-9/11 wars, such as group pressure to withstand fear, exhaustion, and to uphold prescribed ideals of masculine strength, or finding the balance between personal safety and paying respect to social and religious customs in their interaction with local civilians.[75] Among these questions, one refers to Sangjoon Han's story "Aftermath" discussed above. The discussion guide asks viewers to identify the dilemma in Han's narrative about shooting a fleeing Iraqi civilian after an ambush, and inquires how this experience "blur[s] the lines between right and wrong."[76] It picks up Han's agony over not knowing whether he made the right decision, and asks under what circumstances his decision to shoot might be considered immoral.

While the film and the book emphasize the individual perspective of the soldiers, the entire set of discussions for the PBS series contextualize the soldiers' experience with the larger picture of US society and with the country's international relations after 9/11.[77] In the sense that *Operation Homecoming,* as part of both the NEA project and of the PBS series, seeks to engage the public in dialogue about the role of the military in the recent wars, about the experience of its soldiers, and about the relationship between soldiers and society, it illustrates the function of the documentary genre in national cinema. Documentaries, as Jeffrey Geiger posits, "potently contribute[…] to shifting conceptions of US national consciousness and belonging" and "to both the nation's making and its unmaking."[78] That is, documentaries permanently reflect negotiations of group identity in US society. *Operation Homecoming*, in conjunction with the discussion questions, continues to raise these questions by addressing problems of the

75 The film *Warriors* was not included in this reading as it is not part of the NEA project. Although it discusses personal war experience during deployment in great detail, it does not address homecoming and readjustment.

76 "America at a Crossroads. Discussion Guide."

77 Interestingly, the educators' page in the discussion guide, focusing on film screenings at high schools, does not offer any direct questions regarding US soldiers' experience. Rather, it selects a set of questions from the troop experience segment that employs the switch in point of view once more. Viewers are encouraged to imagine themselves as Iraqi civilians and to discuss how they would perceive US military occupation and what they would like the US to do to improve their situation. "America at a Crossroads. Operation Homecoming."

78 Geiger, *American Documentary Film*, 4.

personal security of the troops, of winning 'hearts and minds' in an increasingly dirty war, and by reflecting on issues of loyalty, sacrifice, and moral injury.

Contextualized with Andrew Carroll's introduction to the book, it can be said that the overall scenario *Operation Homecoming* avoids gestures of blatant patriotism and war support. Giving voice to the lower-echelon troops, it seeks to work against a military culture that "ultimately values silent forbearance—not individual self-expression—in the face of adversity."[79] It fosters civic activism to empower soldiers to share their views and experiences, and to engage civilians to bear witness to these narratives. Contributors "did not hold back in reporting the full damage of combat to body and soul"[80]—although, as we have seen, the film producers might have—thus offering alternative perspectives on the war that move beyond a glossy advertising of heroism, manly prowess, and military culture. Rather, they focalize the negative consequences of war for those who wage it. However, as Chapter Three has elaborated regarding milblogs, this scenario's soldierly expressions intend to show that the "sacrifices made by their brothers and sisters in arms are never forgotten, and they know that words like courage and honor are hollow without an understanding of the horrific conditions in which they are forged."[81] *Operation Homecoming*, then, is a patriotic project in so far as it addresses sacrifice in the context of civil religion and ritually invokes the reconstitution of the social contract by pairing veteran narratives with a call to civilian acknowledgment, empathy, and support.

The Welcome Home Project

> *What we're gonna do here is make a temporary community, and it's a community based on welcome, based on the attempt to return.*[82]

The Welcome Home Project (WHP) is a local initiative for community-oriented veteran reintegration focused on social therapy. Its website postulates the state of civil-military relationships as a social ill responsible for the continued emotional suffering of veterans when it proposes to "bridge the historic and often painful divide between veterans and civilians in their communities by hosting creative, healing gatherings that feature our powerful documentary film *The Welcome*.

79 Carroll, O*peration Homecoming*, xix.
80 Carroll, xxiii.
81 Carroll, *Operation Homeing*, xxiii.
82 Michael Meade in *The Welcome*.

These gatherings serve as a vehicle for dialogue, education and mutual understanding."[83] The film *The Welcome*, an independent production released in 2011, features a 2008 healing retreat held by the project's co-organizer, mythologist and psychologist Michael Meade, in Ashland, Oregon.[84] This five-day retreat invited twenty-four veterans from US wars since Vietnam, along with their families, to rounds of talk therapy sessions and creative writing, culminating in a town hall performance in Ashland on Memorial Day 2008, where the veteran participants and their relatives shared poems, songs, and short stories related to their war experience with the local community.[85] Organized locally and dependent on donations for editing and film distribution, this project operates on a much smaller scale than the NEA and PBS-funded projects around *Operation Homecoming,* facing challenges for its infrastructure, reach, and visibility. It is an example of the commitment of some civic activists engaged in community-oriented veteran work. It also reveals how many protagonists within this social movement emphasize spirituality as a cornerstone of social therapy and how their projects are frequently inspired by spiritual and therapeutic practices in diverse cultural and ethnic contexts. *The Welcome* offers striking insight into these activist efforts because it illustrates the potential, but also highlights the underlying conflicts imminent in such practices of cultural transfer.

While *Operation Homecoming* discussed war experience and homecoming in general and outlined PTSD as one possible effect of deployment among many, *The Welcome* offers a deep and very intimate insight into the retreat's veteran participants' and their relatives' struggles with PTSD. All participants have been back from their wars for a while at the time of the filming (some have been back for decades). The psychological injuries they brought home sometimes manifest themselves in severe symptoms and affect the veterans' emotional and social

83 "Welcome Home Project."

84 Meade's own NGO, the Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, is engaged in a variety of projects in civic education and social therapy, focusing on "valuable traditional methods of cultural healing and individual mentoring" working with "at-risk youth, refugees, combat veterans, and communities in need." Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, "Michael Meade – Mosaic Voices." Their work features frequent reference to traditional, community-oriented healing methods from around the world, situating itself within the discursive social phenomenon described in this study, i.e., the growing interest in US mainstream society in alternative, often explicitly spiritual, community-centered civic engagement.

85 Since its release in 2011, the film has won awards and recognition at several independent international festivals. "The Welcome."

lives.[86] The film documents the five days of retreat, its group discussions, and its writing sessions and rehearsals. It features individual life stories, group reactions, and crises at length, before closing with the final town hall performance. The documentary employs a range of genre specifics in terms of audiovisual effects to facilitate the viewers' empathy with the participants. All in all, the retreat is presented as a success; it reenacts the 'universal hero's journey' that is a recurring topic during the retreat's therapy sessions, including ordeals (i.e., crises) and returns. It is, therefore, a meta-ritual itself, as the following discussion argues. Finally, the film's reliance on references to culturally specific therapy methods, customs, and religious beliefs holds therapeutic potential, but also poses risks to the group. The below reading explores how Meade, the retreat's 'ceremonial leader' and therapist, draws on these traditions to nurture a sense of community among the participants, how some Native American participants raise concerns about cultural appropriation and intercultural ignorance, and how the group seeks to find common ground to overcome this crisis. In this way, the film demonstrates its quest for cooperation as a prerequisite for social healing and reintegration.

Like *Operation Homecoming*, *The Welcome* starts *in medias res*, taking the viewer to the town hall meeting on the retreat's final day. The camera focuses on veteran Laura Carpenter, who introduces herself as an Afghanistan veteran preparing to redeploy to Iraq. As she reads her poem "On the Death of a Young Suicide Bomber," the camera fades into shots of a desert taken from inside a moving military vehicle, panning over a desert town and military installations, to shots of clouds in the sky as Carpenter describes in gory detail the dead body of a suicide bomber she saw in Afghanistan and muses about her little son's body back home. The wide shots of Middle Eastern desert and sky are eventually replaced by lush Oregon forests as the camera documents the group's arrival at

86 The veterans featured here include a few male Vietnam veterans while the majority are veterans of post-9/11 wars. Among the latter, at least one of the female veterans suffers from military sexual trauma (MST), an issue of growing public concern addressed in the film. One veteran, Rory Dunn, suffered physical injuries during deployment; he and his parents discuss depression related to disability and caretaking, as well as rehabilitation challenges. The group also includes two female Native American veterans, Debbie Guerrero and Eli Painted Crow. Their cultural background becomes important throughout the film as they challenge some of group leader Michael Meade's assumptions on borrowing cultural traditions, as well as insist that the group consider the experience of everyday racism as a culturally specific factor in minority veterans' PTSD.

the retreat while subtitles provide a brief introductory context for the story. In its chronological discontinuity, this beginning presents the entire scenario in a nutshell. It addresses the war and what painful memories of the past the veterans brought home; it foreshadows the future conclusion of the project by showing a veteran at the end of the retreat perform her story—visibly and audibly shaken; and it portrays her endeavor, exemplary for the whole group and the scenario as such, as a success, because she overcomes emotional distress and shares her memories with an engaged, sympathetic, and responsive audience at the town hall. Having thus set the stage, the film proceeds to tell the story of the retreat in chronological order.

The film is shot through in what Alex Danchev, in his discussion of *Restrepo*, calls a "fly-on-the-wall […] documentary."[87] Like *Restrepo*, the camera, for the most part, remains "glued"[88] to the protagonists' faces, "even when they fall silent. Indeed, it is the silent film that is often the most eloquent, as the muscles work, wordlessly, and the memories go off like depth charges under the skin."[89] *The Welcome*, too, employs this technique to its full effect. Apart from a few subtitles at the beginning and end, the viewers do not receive any form of extra contextualization. They are confronted with steady close-up shots of veterans struggling during discussions, rehearsal, and recital. Protagonists sigh, pause, stare at the floor in embarrassment, nervously knead handkerchiefs, break out in violent sobs, grind their teeth, shoot angry glares at one another or gently comfort each other, while the camera is literally 'in their faces' to capture these emotions. No voice-overs disturb these sequences, which immerses viewers into the situation and its emotional impact on the participants. Music intensifies these scenes, but, often enough, the absence of music, the creaking of floorboards, the rustle of fabric, the shuffle of feet, and other ambient sounds enhance the emotionality and conflicts displayed. While viewers do not learn which moments and crises were edited out, and what criteria might have been used (e.g., what degree of protecting participants' privacy was considered and how it was negotiated), it becomes obvious that the film emphasizes these struggles and emotional outbursts by refusing to comment and to contextualize them. As Danchev has observed regarding *Restrepo*, such long moments of silence make the message of *The Welcome*, the collective quest for common ground and mutual support during an emotional crisis, even stronger.

87 Danchev, "Infidels and Miscreants," 442.
88 Danchev, 443.
89 Danchev, 443.

Contrasting these focalizations, wide angles and full body shots intermittently show participants relaxing, talking, sharing jokes, exploring the compound during recess and in the evenings. They present the participants as a group and show its interaction and relationships, usually during less intense moments, and often in connection with natural features or at the backdrop of the scenic landscape. Supported by soft music, these scenes serve as sequencing devices, to compartmentalize the more heartbreaking and conflict-laden scenes, but also to indicate the passing of the days during the retreat.

The film frequently refers to rituals, to diverse cultural traditions of veteran reintegration, and, most explicitly, to the idea of the universal hero's journey. Although he does not discuss Joseph Campbell's works and their influence on many authors and activists in veteran's affairs, Michael Meade explicitly formulates a universal notion of warriors and of return from war at the beginning of the retreat and throughout. His introduction of the idea merits citing at length:

> What we're gonna do here is make a temporary community, and it's a community based on welcome, based on the attempt to return. And particularly in this culture there has been a kind of lapse of memory about the fact that people need to be welcomed back and assisted to return and find a place back in the community. The warriors are supposed to get home and not remain in the war. Not left over there, and not left out here. That's the tradition of all cultures: the honoring of the warrior, the welcoming them back and the return of the warriors into culture as meaningful and valuable citizens who know something about life, who know something about death, and therefore they have wisdom.

Like Jonathan Shay, Ed Tick, and many other activists in the field previously discussed, Meade here assumes a cycle in which a male hero leaves home to face challenges (usually at war), overcomes them, and returns as a victorious survivor whose experience has fundamentally changed him, requiring the support of the hero's community to work out a new sense of self and to employ his experience in service to the community. Meade introduces the elements of "initiation," "ordeal," and "return" to his group during the first day. He states that US society has apparently lost its traditional knowledge about community support for reintegration and suggests that these cultural practices, necessary to complete the cycle, can be borrowed and relearned from other—primarily Indigenous—cultures that still use them. In his explanation, the physical return from war alone does not constitute a homecoming; reintegration into the community requires a community's active support, i.e., veterans should not be "left out here." He emphasizes that the retreat is supposed to help the veterans complete their own journeys with a return, because this final stage is supposed to give meaning to the previous two stages, adding that, during return, "you are received by people who understand

the damage that you suffered for the benefit of others and understand that you have knowledge that other people who haven't been through it won't have." He thus situates his philosophy within the range of community-oriented approaches to veteran work discussed throughout this book.[90]

Yet the Welcome Home Project does not simply add a final step to a 'journey' that the participants have begun and lived through elsewhere. In its approach and in the setup of the retreat, the scenario seeks to recreate and reenact the entire symbolic journey: On the one hand, all veteran participants have been deployed to a war zone, survived, struggled with their memories, and now hope to complete the 'journey' through a successful therapy, i.e., a homecoming. On the other hand, the veterans and their relatives have known and suffered from the symptoms of PTSD for a while. Their journey, then, is the path toward healing, starting with the realization that their life situation needs to change for them to recover. Participating in the retreat marks their setting out, their initiation. It sounds odd to call suffering from PTSD a 'comfort zone' but the project encourages the participants to set out to try a new approach and face the challenges of going beyond the typical and conventional 'Western' medical solutions, which is symbolized in particular by Jake Jacobs's previous therapies' reliance on heavy medication, and by the project's overall fascination with non-'Western' and, for most participants, unfamiliar cultural traditions. Accordingly, the 'heroes' face ordeals during this journey, mustering the courage to tell their stories, and the group, symbolizing the overall community, seeks to help them return in supporting their efforts.

A major individual ordeal that may serve as an example is Vietnam veteran Bob Eaton's story. He is accompanied on the retreat by his wife and, through his wife's poems and stories during the first three days, viewers learn how war trauma affects a veteran's relatives and how his psychological injury has complicated his social life since his return in 1970. On the fourth day of the retreat, he summons the courage to tell his central story, describing the event that determined his Vietnam War experience and his postwar trauma. At this point, he has been inducted into the therapy group and its rules, 'customs,' and relationships (e.g., frequent singing to engender bonding, techniques of storytelling, public

90 Meade's approach in this retreat, as well as his philosophy discussed on his NGO's website, mirror many similar such groups. "Michael Meade – Mosaic Voices." The same arguments and imagery recur in the discussions on theater projects below, but also in recent projects on veteran storytelling in which a notion of universal warrior narratives play a role. Cf. "Aquila Theatre—YouStories"; Morie, Haynes, and Chance, "Warriors' Journey."

speaking, and creative writing). He has experienced a few other individual and collective crises during which, as a member of the group, he has actively worked to hold the community together and to aid its members.

Eaton's story marks a climax in the film's narrative arc, symbolizing his individual ordeal during the retreat as exemplary for the other members. He begins by announcing that his story is about "something that happened to me, and may be the reason [for] the way I am. I think my wife knows part of it but I haven't told her the story." At these words, the camera zooms in on his wife who watches him apprehensively, arms folded and eyes wide open. He relates how, early during his deployment to Vietnam in 1969, he experiences an attack on his camp at night. He carries extra ammunition to an artillery piece, not realizing in the chaos that its crew had been killed by a direct hit the moment after his last drop. Because of the imminent danger to the camp, commanders decide to fire antipersonnel artillery rounds, so-called "beehives" which cause horrendous wounds, at the Vietnamese. On the morning after the attack, Eaton is ordered to place the remains of the killed gun crew and of the enemy attackers in burlap sacks ("gunny sacks"). The extent of the carnage becomes clear as he says about the gun crew "I put six guys in three gunny sacks" and, talking about the Vietnamese attackers' remains, explains that he had to scratch body parts from trees with his entrenching tool and hack some into smaller pieces to fit all remains into the few available sacks. Afterwards, superiors tell him to take stock of the remaining ammunition and to forget about this recovery detail, but "I still had eight months left in country. And I thought every fucking night that this was gonna happen again." Forcing his narrative to its conclusion through tears and sobs, he ends: "I left in February '70 and never had a scratch on me … Go figure."

This story intensely reveals some veterans' inability to 'return' as Eaton explains his distress over the deaths of the gun crew. Because he never learned their names, he could not visit them at the Vietnam Wall where he had traveled three times since its dedication to find solace.[91] Telling Eaton to "forget" about the events of that night might have sprung from the military necessity to keep operations at the camp in order after the attack, but it denied him an opportunity to reflect on the event.[92] The cathartic effect of finally being able to share this story comes to

91 This episode once more illustrates the significance of the Wall as a cathartic monument for individual veterans.

92 While today's Critical Incident Debriefings could not have diminished the horror of what Eaton saw, he might have learned the names of the gun crew and reflected on the circumstances of their deaths, providing at least the potential for closure on that aspect of his experience.

the fore when he returns to his seat and breaks down as the group applauds him for facing the challenge of speaking up and returning 'home' from the podium, into the circle of the group (i.e., the 'community'). They gather around him and comfort him.[93] Meade, as the ceremonial leader and therapist, lets Eaton symbolically release these memories into a nearby stream in a following scene.[94] Yet, if we read the retreat as a group journey, where community support and mutual aid are paramount concepts, it seems significant that the other participants go out of their way to express their empathy and understanding for Eaton in this situation, such as Eli Painted Crow and Debbie Guerrero, who perform a Cherokee mourning song for him with a hand drum. As Meade had stated on the first day, the participants here utilize the "language" of poetry, stories, and song to help one of their own face his injury through that same language, or, in Marlantes's words, find and sing his song to come home.

Since *The Welcome* thus reenacts the whole cycle, it reveals that the full journey as such, and not simply the successful homecoming, is the hero's reward. Although the film ultimately presents only brief snippets of some of the participants' final performances at the town hall gathering, this does not appear to be a gap because, overall, the film has addressed all stages of the participants' journey during the retreat. It does not require full-length clips of the veterans' performances to make its case. Meade's backstage pep talk reminds the veterans that their performance is "a gift. It's our way of giving on this Memorial Day." The footage of the town hall event serves to symbolize how the community receives the gift, and how the veterans 'return,' i.e., how they merge with the larger community, as the camera pans over the sold-out auditorium, shows the audience's applause at the end of the performance, and follows as participants and members of the audience then mingle and embrace each other. This notion of return, of community reunion, is further symbolized by the embodiment of *e pluribus unum*, by the diversity of the group that 'survived' the retreat's ordeals. War supporters and war protesters among the Vietnam generation, war participants and civilian spouses, men and women, Native and non-Native American, as well

93 Viewers do not learn how much was cut from the scene immediately after the storytelling, but it is remarkable that the group of supporters gathering around and comforting Eaton is comprised entirely of women, while a wide shot of the room shows male veterans, such as Ken Kraft, alone in their chairs, obviously affected by the story, but lost in their own thoughts.

94 It does not become clear whether the substance Eaton uses to rub his hands and face to symbolize his cleansing from these memories is pollen or ashes. The former would signify another reference to Native American traditions in the retreat.

as immigrant veterans all contributed their unique experience to the group. They all made an effort to protect each other and to support the group. In this way, the retreat and final performance also symbolize the reconstitution of the national community which the activists hope to achieve through their engagement in veteran affairs.

While all these aspects, as the previous chapters have highlighted, can already be understood as the outline of a civic ritual, the ceremonial character of the retreat is further enhanced by the explicit ritualizing elements included: At the beginning, participants enter the communal room and are greeted with a smudging, while Meade performs a song with a hand drum.[95] Similarly, the release of Bob Eaton's memories into the creek, possibly with pollen, suggests a Native American ceremonial influence. The group also adopts a western African "Earth Song" for bonding. They sing it at the beginning and end of the retreat's gathering, or during crises (such as described below). Such elements of sequencing foster the retreat's ceremonial character and are also used in other PTSD group therapy settings, where they are explicitly called "rituals."[96] In the sense of Victor Turner's and Arnold van Gennep's discussions of stages in rites of passage, one might also understand the participants' liminal status, their initiation, their seclusion from the community (hence the term "retreat") and their eventual reunification with the wider community in a formal ceremony, as ritualizing elements.[97]

However, the intercultural ceremonial aspects discussed so far, as much as they help therapists like Meade connect their generally white veteran clients with the notion of universal stages and elements of war experience and introduce them to community-oriented traditions of reintegration, pose the risk of cultural misunderstanding and appropriation. *The Welcome* offers a significant example because, unlike many other projects in this field, viewers experience a clash between the use of Native American cultural practices by non-Natives and some Native participants' reactions to such use during the retreat. I briefly

95 Smudging is a pan-tribal Native American tradition with a huge variety of specific tribal elements and customs. Generally, dried herbs (e.g., sage) are burned, and the smoke is fanned across a person's body for the purpose of cleansing.

96 Johnson et al., "The Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." Similarly to Eaton's ritual, therapists in the setting described by Johnson et al. conduct "rituals" where, e.g., veterans and their families symbolically release their "burdens," verbalized on a piece of paper, into a bonfire. Johnson et al., 283.

97 van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

discuss this conflict for two reasons: First, it exemplifies the risk of cultural appropriation in the context of alternative therapy methods and civic activism. Second, the conflict as such signifies an 'ordeal' in the journey for the whole group. Some members of the group voice reservations against the outline of the ritual, accusing the ritual leader and other members of cultural insensitivity, and it is a challenge for the group to resolve this crisis and to find common ground in order to prevent a breakup and to complete the 'journey.'

After the initial welcome ceremony with smudging, drumbeats, song, and the first round of introductions, Meade outlines his understanding of the universal journey, emphasizing that "all cultures" developed practices to welcome veterans home. It is noteworthy that he positions himself within "a tradition that mixes traditions, borrows, steals…" and announces that, during the retreat, the group will "borrow from different traditions." He proceeds to explain the cultural background and significance of the smudging to the group, adding that it is "a tradition of this land here." During this speech, the camera focuses on Debbie Guerrero (Alaskan Tlingit), who scowls at the reference to borrowing and stealing. When Meade invites the group to comment—possibly in response to sensing her tension—she admits that she has a hard time "trying to control myself." Reflecting on the notion of "borrowing traditions," she complains that, if traditions were to be honored, the retreat's organizers should have "a traditional person" present to explain and perform them.[98] Demanding that Native traditional healers conduct Native ceremonies signifies that Native voices be heard, rather than used, that Native people retain control over how culturally sensitive knowledge is shared with uninitiated persons, and thus, that their culture is truly respected and honored.[99]

Meade signals his acknowledgment and acceptance of the criticism, but he adds: "If the old traditions can't be used to heal the new wounds then we're stuck with what's happening in modern culture, and that seems to be wounding everybody," indicating the whole group. Eli Painted Crow (Yaqui/Mexica) chimes

98 This is a central problem in issues of cultural appropriation. The viewers do not learn whether Meade has the training and whether he received permission to use Native American cultural artifacts (such as an eagle feather fan) and practices.

99 To give an example of intercultural veteran therapy in the manner called for by Guerrero, the Yakama nation of Washington state previously offered workshops in traditional, community-oriented healing for non-Native caregivers, as well as healing retreat options for veteran PTSD clients. These events were conducted by tribal elders and traditional healers. Flores, *Camp Chaparral Native Americans Show VA Caregivers How to Deal with PTSD*; "Camp Chaparral Welcome Home."

in that she would have needed a preparation, a respectful introduction into which ceremonial elements would be employed and why. She explains that the tradition of "stealing" and "borrowing" to which Meade referred caused pain because, as she repeatedly maintains throughout the retreat, her war and veteran experiences are inseparably tied to her experiences of everyday racism as a Native person in US society: "To me, it's not just what happened to me in Iraq, it's what happened to me my whole life." This shift in focus makes many white members of the group visibly uncomfortable. As Painted Crow cries, a veteran's spouse remarks that "this is getting a little deep for me," and one participant adds that he was not prepared for this conflict because "I didn't come here for a lesson on racism or anybody else's political agenda, I came here to get myself back in some way, shape, or form to who I was before I left [for the war]." Painted Crow then details how officers in Iraq used to call enemy territory "Indian Country," an experience Native soldiers seem to have made throughout the twentieth century.[100] She bursts out: "You're standing there in that goddamn uniform listening to that shit. I'm still the fucking enemy?… Racism matters!" With these emotional exchanges, open conflict has broken out because most of the non-Native respondents do not seem to acknowledge Painted Crow's concerns as immediately relevant to the group's purpose.

Meade then thanks everybody for speaking out honestly and for their mutual respect, opening the floor for other participants' introductory stories. The conflict around cultural appropriation and racism cannot be resolved on this first day, it seems as if a number of conflicts between individual interests (e.g., political controversies over Vietnam) are brought to the table during this initial round of 'rants,' racism being only one topic among many. However, the group also catches a glimpse of the solution because Bob Eaton looks for common ground to unify the participants. As veterans, he points out, "we are our own tribe, we just bring in our own tradition as it is." This statement does not resolve the issues of racism and cultural appropriation, but invoking the shared veteran experience allows the group to establish trust as a prerequisite to go forward. Eaton applies the same premise as Junger who describes soldiers' unit bonding as a form of 'tribalism,' a commitment to mutual aid and to the well-being of the group beyond self-interest in the face of crisis and danger. It is also remarkable that Eaton takes on the role of an elder leader and mentor both because, as a Vietnam veteran, he has more life experience than most participants, but

100 Cf. Carroll, *Medicine Bags*, 177; Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 129; Silliman, "The 'Old West' in the Middle East."

also because his long experience with PTSD symptoms, such as bouts of rage, taught him how to calm down during such moments. His mentoring of younger fellow veterans is thus an aspect of this role as a 'tribal' elder (e.g., mediation, counseling, leadership).

On the third day, the conflict over racism reaches a climax as Eli Painted Crow sees her initial reservations confirmed because the retreat's "teachings […] felt really white to me." She refers to some participants' earlier signs of discomfort with this issue and indicates that she feels "uncomfortable every day." Meade inquires: "What would it take for you to feel accepted here, now, today?" and Painted Crow states she would like the group "to just listen, and not question why I'm the way I am, or why I do the things I do […] or why I'm not over it right now." As she spirals into increasing emotional distress, the participants discuss ways to help her; they seek to understand her, but their analytic probing leads Painted Crow to point out in frustration that, what she senses as a "white" way of conversation, i.e., listening "with your head" instead of "your heart," constantly forces her to defend and justify her feelings and positions. The group visibly struggles to assure her of their support, but they also ask her—and each other—more probing questions about her perspective so that, finally, Painted Crow bursts out "…but no, I become the conversation. Either I'm a gift or a pain in the ass or whatever. All I asked for was a listening, and I didn't get it," before storming out of the room. As the group sits in baffled and embarrassed silence, the camera captures Painted Crow in the background, alone on the meadow behind the house, smoking and crying.

Obviously, the conflict escalated due to cultural misunderstandings, as the non-Native group members failed to recognize that their conflict resolution strategies, asking questions and discussing among each other how to help, further aggravated the situation for Painted Crow. Meade invokes the symbolic purpose of the retreat and the overall scenario, stating that "the village is now looking into darkness" and that the community is unsure how to bring everybody, coming with their individual concerns, anxieties, and frustrations, back "into the center." The situation is neatly visualized as the camera still shows Painted Crow through the open door to the patio, struggling with herself on the 'periphery.' In this moment of crisis, it is once again Bob Eaton who reassures the group of their common ground. Jokingly, he quips: "You've got twenty-four veterans with PTSD in here, I think we're doing pretty damn good. We're not killing each other!" Painted Crow had voiced the same idea earlier, signaling that, even in her anger, she recognized the bonds holding this community together, emphasizing that she does not feel left out by the group: "So that's why I'm sitting here [with you], because I don't want to live like this. Not trusting. And this is closer

than anything I've ever been because you're all vets. So it's allowed me to do this. So you're having a more open door than anybody else." Eventually, on the next day, Painted Crow, in traditional tribal regalia, thanks the group for their patience and performs a song about relationships. She visibly returns to "the center," this time bringing her unique cultural knowledge, her experience with tribal communal structure, cosmology, and customs, into the group. Her performance ends with a commitment to the purpose of the community of veterans as she announces, "you are my other me." With this realization, Painted Crow, and the whole group, have 'survived' their ordeal and reconstituted the community.

The film does not show whether the group resolves the issue of everyday racism for Native veterans, nor does it seem to resolve the "borrowing" and "stealing" of traditions during the retreat. Yet, Painted Crow performs a meta-ritual in her return to the group. She symbolically brings her cultural knowledge into the group, and she retains control over how she wants to do it. She, thus, prescribes this cultural exchange by role modeling what she had called for on the first day, i.e., that traditional tribal people should determine how, with whom, and under what circumstances, to conduct traditional ceremonies. In another sense, the group survives its ordeal in symbolizing community reintegration, as the smaller circle of veterans must first establish trust and bonds among themselves before they can go out into the wider civilian community and trust them to help with the reintegration.[101] In this small circle, older veterans such as Bob Eaton serve as mentors for younger ones, signifying the role of tribal veteran elders described in many Native American warrior traditions.[102]

The film ends with a successful performance at the town's auditorium. As the participants hugged each other after 'surviving' their ordeals during the retreat, they now mingle with the civilian audience in their symbolic return into civilian society. The participants have learned to understand their experiences and memories, however painful, as "gifts" to share with others. As such, the film's chronology only informs viewers how the veterans have attended the retreat and staged their performances; it cannot go into detail how the integration with civil

101 However, a number of local healers (e.g., physical therapists, acupuncture specialists) offer free treatments for the participants on the evening of the third day. The local community thus symbolically breaks the isolation and signals the civilians' readiness to receive the veterans even before the final townhall performance.

102 The younger veterans acknowledge this role as Melissa Steinmann shares a story in which she describes the continuous emergence of new generations of US veterans as an ongoing uphill march in which Vietnam veterans descend back down the hill, clearing the brush to build a path for those who follow after them.

society proceeded beyond the joyful scenes in the auditorium. Despite the symbolism, the film cannot portray the civilians in the auditorium other than as an audience because it does not include further interactions between veterans and the community.[103]

It is, thus, significant to explore how the film and its accompanying websites construct the project as a civic ritual scenario. Despite its limited options to portray participants' lives after the retreat, the film uses subtitles to further inform viewers, a feature that the website extends.[104] The subtitles and the online page featuring the veterans' bio blurbs emphasize how participants further pursued personal interests about which viewers learned during the film, but they also focus on the veterans' civic engagement in their respective communities.[105] These success stories culminate in an invitation to the wider public to become engaged in veterans affairs: The film's final subtitle, stark white on black, simply states: "There are 23 million veterans living in the United States today." Albeit implicit, this is obviously a call to action. Similarly, the websites promote *The Welcome* as a full scenario, i.e., they invite users to host screenings of the film, followed by town hall discussions. The project website repeatedly emphasizes the role it attributes to local communities and to dialog between civilians and veterans. While organizers call on the VA to take more responsibility for veterans, their community activist stance becomes clear: "[W]ithout this direct involvement of the civilian public many veterans will continue to carry the burdens of their war alone and all of our communities miss out on the depth and wisdom brought home by our returning warriors."[106]

The activist impulse is very prominent in the film website's screening advice and discussion guide. This page advises screening hosts to issue trigger

103 Cf. Grimes, *Craft*, 297.

104 "The Welcome."

105 Viewers and site visitors learn that Eli Painted Crow cofounded an NGO to support Native American women, that Ken Kraft breeds service dogs to donate to wounded veterans, while others work with local youth, or for the Veterans Administration.

106 "Welcome Home Project." It should be noted that all participants in this retreat suffered from some form of war-related psychological injury. By invoking all "23 million veterans" at the end of the film and emphasizing the "burdens" of war, the scenario's protagonists run the risk of overstretching their impulse to help by pathologizing all veterans, although they make clear that their philosophy and references to Indigenous warrior traditions merely acknowledge war experience as a critical life experience that requires community support, and not automatically as the harbinger of psychological injury.

warnings and age requirements for viewers. It also seeks to moderate the discussion to control the expected emotional reactions among veteran viewers and it cautions that people might respond strongly to political views and veterans' experiences as expressed in the film. Drawing on their own experience of previous screenings, the organizers suggest that hosts employ discussion facilitators, preferably mental health specialists, and institute rules to control the expected emotions and to ensure civility and mutual respect during the discussion. The questions in the guide are directed either to veterans or to civilians and aim at mutual understanding, using the film as a device to help viewers reflect on their before-and-after-screening perception of the respective other group.[107] The toolkit proposes that veterans and their family members are invited to screenings and panel discussions. As the film illustrates, the project attributes to veterans' relatives a central role as "translator[s] for civilians, living as they do between the veteran's experience and that of civilians."[108] In providing these questions, the project pursues its goal to encourage dialog between veterans and civilians.

On the websites accompanying the film, the scenario situates itself within the larger movement of community-oriented civic activism in veterans' affairs. The film alone expresses the scenario's agenda of creating dialog, but the websites' advice on town hall discussions among veterans, their families, mental health specialists, and local communities more actively foster such exchange. In focusing on town hall meetings as vehicles for dialog, The Welcome Home Project joins similar suggestions from other projects and activists. Sebastian Junger calls on US society to "develop ways to publicly confront the emotional consequences of war,"[109] suggesting that communities hold town hall meetings with veterans each Memorial Day. Such events, he argues, will "finally return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought. The bland phrase 'I support the troops,' would then mean showing up at the town hall once a year to hear these people out."[110] Lawrence Gross's website VeteranCeremonies.org suggests interfaith services at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. on Veterans Day, focusing more on the ritual and spiritual aspects of reintegration.[111] The interconnections between The Welcome Home Project and other activist groups also become clear in their references on

107 "Screening Toolkit."
108 "Screening Toolkit."
109 Junger, *Tribe*, 122.
110 Junger, *Tribe*, 123.
111 Gross, "Native American."

the "Resources" page, linking to Tick's organization Soldiers Heart and to The Mission Continues, where one of the veterans featured in *The Welcome* earned a fellowship after her retreat in Ashland.[112] This particular homecoming scenario, thus, shares its methods of community activism with many other similar organizations, but it pursues its goals through the meta-ritualistic and prescriptive film *The Welcome* as the project's centerpiece.

The Veterans Education Project

> *I don't have a recipe, but there's one thing I do know and that's the power of the narrative. Put the story together. Understand the story. Ask questions of the story; make it answer you… You will find the answer. You keep building the narrative until the answer comes around.*[113]

Like the Welcome Home Project and other initiatives discussed above, the Veterans Education Project (VEP) stresses the need to create dialog between veterans and civilians through the public exchange about war experience. The motto above illustrates how the project highlights storytelling as a critical device in the homecoming scenario and how it resorts to metanarrative explanations of its approach in its self-representations. Comparing the outlines and the situatedness of the homecoming scenarios discussed in this chapter, it could be said that, first, *Operation Homecoming* addresses homecoming as an aspect of war experience, but it does not relate much to actual community reintegration in its various media segments. It invites the civilian public to the dialog, but civilians need to engage in the project in order to notice and 'consume' the media products that are part of the scenario. The dialog itself is not depicted here. Second, the Welcome Home Project focuses entirely on veterans who suffer from PTSD and their reintegration struggles; that is, it explores solutions for a delayed homecoming. It is a prescriptive meta-ritual directly aimed at the civilian public. However, the veterans depicted in the film are on a 'retreat'; they are isolated from civil society throughout most of the narrated time and break this isolation in force only at the end of the film with only scant additional information on how they fared after the 'curtain' falls. This scenario presents itself as a role model,

112 "Resources."

113 Excerpt from VEP contributor T. E. Boudreau's 2008 memoir *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*, 148, qtd. in Wilson et al., "Military Veterans Sharing First-Person Stories of War and Homecoming," 393.

calling on the public to conduct similar town hall meetings. Yet, the film, being the scenario's major medium of representation, is primarily concerned with preparing the veterans for such a meeting and not so much with the civilian community and the veterans' interaction with it. Third, VEP places veterans into a civilian setting, and both the website and the academic study used as sources below are metanarratives about how veteran storytellers interact with civilian communities. Education is this scenario's major conduit to promote ceremonial storytelling as a cultural practice of homecoming along with a unique perspective on the veterans' experience of violence that other scenarios do not voice in such clarity.[114]

VEP was founded by Vietnam War veterans in 1982. Based in Amherst, Massachusetts, the group centers its operations around western New England. It organizes public events at schools, town hall meetings, and in churches, where veteran volunteers tell stories about their experience of war and homecoming. As the name suggests, their approach employs education as a central element to foster dialog: "By sharing their experiences, our veteran speakers gain an authentic connection with our community, provide a bridge between civilian and military worlds, and help us to heal the emotional wounds of war."[115] Establishing a public platform to let veterans talk about their experience and to have civilian audiences bear witness to these narratives is, as the previous examples have delineated, a common approach in community-oriented civic activism. Like many others, VEP postulates a divide between civilian and veteran "worlds." It proposes to nurture relationships and to support reintegration through public narrative performances in a ceremonial, formal setting.

Yet, it is remarkable that VEP stresses questions about violence as part of its educational approach. The mission statement on the group's website posits that "[v]eterans shar[e] personal stories that illustrate the realities of violence and deglorify war, in order to promote critical thinking, dialogue and healing in our schools and communities."[116] Repeatedly throughout the website's pages, authors come back to this notion of "deglorify[ing] war" and "critical thinking." Unlike other initiatives, VEP does not only call for acceptance and empathy for veterans

114 The final section below discusses scenarios using a similar setting within civilian communities. They focus on drama as the major vehicle. Both settings are comparable to the work of The Mission Continues mentioned in the previous chapters, who use a mix of arts, education, social work, and local community volunteerism to bring veterans in contact with the civilian world.

115 "Veterans Education Project."

116 "Veterans Education Project."

as a means to make them feel welcome in civil society, regardless of what they saw and did during deployment. If civilians are to learn from veterans' stories, it seems that this initiative forces its community audiences to acknowledge that war means killing, that violence is embedded in social and political contexts, and that these contexts have implications for the behavior, sense of self, memories, and mental well-being of a service member during and after deployment. With such an emphasis on the complications of war in mind, it is not surprising that VEP evolved from the 'rap groups' of the early 1970s, in which activist psychiatrists such as Robert J. Lifton and Chaim Shatan encouraged veterans to confront moral predicaments and their sense of guilt over their contributions and activities during the Vietnam War.[117]

This is not to say that VEP appears to be an outspoken antiwar project with a political—i.e., liberal—agenda that would voice particular criticism of the military. On the contrary, the website makes clear in their documentation of volunteer training that speakers should personalize their stories but refrain from "lecturing or advocating political or other positions" as well as from "recruitment or counter-recruitment-oriented presentations."[118] In this sense, it might be questioned, as Patrick Hagopian does regarding the "healing" qualities of the Vietnam Wall,[119] how much communal healing can be achieved if the project is so careful to discourage critical analyses of the political contexts around Vietnam that, inevitably, would have to address the domestic strife over the war.[120] However, the scenario's approach stands out because it seeks to promote ways for civilian listeners to use the veterans' personal stories to draw conclusions about violence in society and war. The personal stories are supposed to illustrate the "realities of war, […] de-glorify violence, and […] encourage individuals to make more informed and responsible opinions and decisions regarding the use of force."[121]

This critical perspective on violence and cathartic storytelling becomes clear in a longer quote from a Vietnam veteran volunteering for the project. He describes how he killed a civilian during a house search and thereafter struggled with guilt because he could not determine for himself whether the situation

117 Wilson et al., "Military Veterans," 396.

118 "Veterans Education Project."

119 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 402–05.

120 The website states that volunteer veterans are encouraged to state their political opinions in the debates but to keep personal experience as the foundation of the narrated event. "Veterans Education Project."

121 "Veterans Education Project."

posed sufficient danger and risks to his personal safety to justify such use of force. He explains how volunteering as a storyteller helped him confront this moral predicament:

> The forum of storytelling is the most positive completion of the healing process, and sharing in my community is the humanizing of an inhumane experience. I think that coming to speak from my heart about the issues of war experience has been essential to connecting to others; to be honest and not try to construct a heroic narrative but say a more personal experience of fear, horror, shame, humor, and the forms of bonding that do occur in hardship.[122]

In a sense, this story is similar to Sangjoon Han's agony over shooting a fleeing Iraqi civilian in *Operation Homecoming*, or Rex Temple's ruminations over the use of force after a training session in Chapter Four. In the case mentioned here, the veteran not only tells his story and relates his insecurity and guilt over his decision to kill, he also directly opens up to a civilian audience in his deliberations. He knowingly faces the social equivalents of the man whom he shot; talking to civilians helps him see his victim as a fellow human being. His storytelling has a cathartic effect because he receives supportive feedback on his efforts to humanize the supposed 'enemy': He expresses his guilt and the probability of being responsible for the death of a nonhostile civilian whose personal environment, that is, whose expression of humanity, he encountered in that house. Yet the audience also acknowledges his efforts to humanize himself and to enable civilians to imagine themselves in his situation (i.e., expressing his fear of being ambushed and having to make a momentous decision on the spot). He is relieved to be able to connect through honest storytelling and, thus, illustrates that he managed to establish trust. This accomplishment appears even more significant as he refers to the bond in hardship that civilians usually cannot share, nor understand, as so many veterans' and therapists' reports suggest. His storytelling, then, enabled him, like the participants in *The Welcome*, to build on trust within the 'tribal' circle of fellow veterans and extend that trust to civilians. He reconstructs his own sense of self as a member of that community.

The project's self-representation is metanarrative as it outlines the therapeutic potential of storytelling. In a joint paper with the Smith College School of Social Work in 2009, project organizers explore the role of storytelling for veterans' mental health services, proposing public events such as VEP's as valuable complementary measures in addition to working with professional mental

122 Wilson et al., "Military Veterans," 409.

health specialists.[123] The paper identifies four potential benefits of public storytelling: First, sharing stories helps communalize experience and promotes mutual understanding, self-reflection, and validation. Communalization, as VEP and the projects above have elucidated, provides a degree of 'normalization,' a sense of connection and approval, and spares the veterans from being treated as 'patients.' Second, the setting fosters posttraumatic growth, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Talking about one's memories in a safe environment helps sort through their complex challenges and develop a sense of control. The project's educational thrust allows veterans to help others and to take on a nurturing role as an 'elder' with unique expert knowledge, thus helping themselves find new perspectives and a new sense of self. Third, the study observed moments of social vindication through social engagement in that the veterans' experience is validated as the community acknowledges their memories and "complex ethical dilemmas"[124] portrayed in the stories. Fourth, the study emphasizes the learning experience for the veteran storytellers, for their audience, as well as for the accompanying therapists and social workers, especially in the group's workshops for professionals working with veterans.[125]

The veterans cite a range of reasons for contributing to the project. The following quote mirrors their motivations as discussed in previous chapters: "[T]he most important thing is that I can do something constructive when I tell my story. [When I speak in schools,] I can offer a history lesson about Vietnam, and I can even offer some life lessons that can help kids not to make mistakes and to do better. I can see it in their faces that they are listening and learning."[126] The exchange of sharing experience and bearing witness among veteran storytellers and civilian listeners creates a sense of productivity in this veteran. It gives him an opportunity to transform himself from the role of a victim into a nurturing and mentoring role, which, in turn, enhances his self-esteem and his own mental well-being.

As the discussion guides did for the Welcome Home Project, VEP institutes a system of guidelines for 'safe' storytelling to avoid triggers and to foster healing.

---

123 The authors of the study stress the complementary character of therapeutic storytelling. They decidedly do not depict publicly performed narratives as a one-for-all cure for PTSD, and specifically caution against problematic aspects in these public settings, such as trigger situations and moments of 'intercultural' misunderstanding and alienation between veterans and civilians. Wilson et al., 395, 402–09.

124 Wilson et al., 420.

125 Wilson et al., 418–20.

126 Wilson et al., 395.

Trainers instruct veterans to forgo competitive storytelling such as "pissing contests," critical analysis, disagreements, or glorification of events, and they help veterans during training sessions to construct stories in a safe way that still "capture[s] the terrible realities and consequences of war."[127] Audiences receive a primer, being asked for "respectful, supportive, and non-judgmental" listening to forge a "hospitable environment."[128] The group asks event planners to consider their audience, and to frame and outline question-and-answer sessions beforehand. These precautions, especially the framing of audience response in a controlled environment, are designed to embed these events in therapeutic settings. As has been shown, many of these therapeutic effects occur in exchanges on milblogs and social media services, as well, where a controlled environment cannot be established if comment functions are enabled, and where therapy is not even the primary motivation to write.

The personalization of experience as an anchor in the scenario's scripts serves both its two major target groups. In its educational approach, school audiences value the veterans' stories because "[i]t's like having people step out of the pages of history books and into the classroom."[129] In another quote on the projects' website, a student explains that five of his relatives fought in Vietnam. One was killed, one is reported missing, while the others never discussed their experience in the family. For that student, hearing the volunteer's story offered a first reference point for his relatives' experience.[130] To hark back to Pierre Nora once more, it took the liveliness of the veterans' 'memory' in their oral history presentation in class to provide this student with an understanding of and relation to the past that the fixed language of 'history' in a textbook could not offer, and it connected him with the personal history of his family.[131] In addition, the personal stories of PTSD, along with the recurrent emphasis on the effects of violence and the use of force become significant when the group's engagement for at-risk youth in schools and prisons is considered. Sharing stories about long struggles with symptoms, especially substance abuse, anger, and loss of control, veterans connect with students and provide them with "role models who have experienced hard times as a result of violence and/or drugs, and who have overcome significant challenges."[132] The veterans' frequently painful experience is portrayed

127 Wilson et al., 421.
128 Wilson et al., 421.
129 "Veterans Education Project."
130 "Veterans Education Project."
131 Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 100–02; Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*.
132 "Veterans Education Project."

as a 'gift' to the community, as VEP's approach seeks to utilize this perspective both to foster appreciation and support for veterans among civilians and to help rebuild afflicted veterans' self-esteem.

Finally, a few words on the ritualistic outline of the project's events are in order. The authors of the 2009 study state that VEP's storytelling events are not "intended to reenact ancient rituals of 'purification.' Yet, storytelling, as the veterans with the VEP perform it, carries characteristics of nonreligious, nonsectarian 'practice' and 'ritual' […] We suggest this kind of storytelling is, in fact, a small-scale local 'practice' or 'ritual' that can help Veterans heal the emotional wounds of war."[133] From the perspective of ritual outlined throughout the previous chapters, and of the homecoming scenarios in this chapter in particular, one must agree. Even if the events are not supposed to reenact ancient rituals, that is, to borrow—or outright "steal," to go back to Michael Meade's term—from other cultures, the motivation, setting, and context mark VEP's storytelling events as civic rituals. They are scripts in a homecoming scenario in the sense that they enact a cultural practice around civic engagement with and for veterans that the organizers deem productive to address a social ill. They postulate a gap between civilian and veteran 'worlds' that their activities are supposed to formalize, problematize and remedy. Their online presence and texts such as the Smith College study provide data and signal the support of academic experts in the field, and the depiction of these events marks them as exemplary models for further civic activism. In this way, like the flanking para-texts of the projects above, the VEP website is meta-ritualistic and meta-performative.

Despite the disclaimer above, the VEP also situates itself in the context of ritual. Its organizers refer to Native American and ancient Greek rituals of warriors' return to motivate their own approach to ceremonial, cathartic storytelling.[134] Most of all, they place themselves within the discourse on war experience and within the network of civic activists and activist scholars who promote social therapy and community-oriented veteran reintegration through frequent references to Native American, ancient Greek, and other traditional practices. Many of the early notions about the communalization of trauma since the 1970s were pioneered by scholars and therapists such as Chaim Shatan, Robert J. Lifton, and John P. Wilson. Jonathan Shay's works on psychological injury and homecoming in relation to the Greek classics have become classics in the field themselves and are frequently cited in the VEP study and on the website. Edward

133 Wilson et al., "Military Veterans," 424.
134 Wilson et al., 423.

Tick's ideas on civic healing rituals, based on the rituals of Indigenous traditions, and his work with the NGO Soldier's Heart are referenced in the study and he has frequently appeared as a panelist at VEP events at Smith College. VEP has also co-organized events with the Theater of War whose theatrical approach to social therapy will be discussed below. These nodes and connections illustrate that, while the organizers might not regard their activities as rituals per se, their philosophy is embedded in a network that seeks to learn from, promote, and construct, cultural practices of ceremonial storytelling in order to further their idea of community-oriented veteran reintegration. Their activities might not reenact ancient rituals, but they certainly construct civic rituals in their own homecoming scenarios.

Theater of War and Aquila Theatre

> *Can these ancient texts tell us anything about the psychological effects of enduring combat?*[135]

This final subsection explores the work of two theater projects, the Theater of War and Aquila Theatre, and their extensive use of ancient Greek drama in negotiating issues of war and homecoming experience. Both rely on reenactments and readings of Classical Greek tragedy which are often performed by veterans for mixed veteran and civilian audiences. They both also use their online platforms to engage users in reflections and deliberations on the relevance of these classics for contemporary veterans' experience and to document discussions held to complement the performances. Like the activities of the VEP discussed above, both initiatives situate their public debate of veteran issues in the 'civilian world,' that is, the performances and roundtables portray veterans in a civilian context, and they do not have to break through the isolation between both worlds that other scenarios emphasize much more.

The interest in Greek tragedy regarding issues of veterans' mental health goes back to Jonathan Shay's work in clinical combat trauma therapy at the Veterans Administration during the late 1980s. In a 2009 lecture on the development of his pioneering approach, Shay states that he realized while working with veteran clients "that I was hearing fragments of the story of Achilles all over again, sometimes even the whole narrative sequence that Homer gives us in the Iliad."[136] Based on this comparison, Shay published two books, *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994)

135 "Heracles: The Idea of the Hero" in Aquila Theatre, YouStories.
136 Shay, "Trials," 287.

and *Odysseus in America* (2002), whose integration of trauma theory, psychiatric expertise, and literary analysis have become classics in the field of veteran trauma therapy, particularly regarding community-oriented approaches. Drawing from his experience with Vietnam veterans in these works, Shay stresses the role of ritual as a form of cultural therapy grounded in his exploration of Athenian tragedy and of Aristotle's concept of catharsis.[137] He interprets ancient Greek theater as a script for communal veteran reintegration and healing rituals, stating:

> The performances of the Athenian tragic theater—which was a theater of combat veterans, by combat veterans, and for combat veterans—offered cultural therapy, including purification. […] The ancient Athenians had a distinctive therapy of purification, healing, and reintegration of returning soldiers that was undertaken as a whole political community. Sacred theater was one of its primary means of reintegrating the returning veteran into the social sphere as 'citizen.'[138]

From his observations of the old literary texts, Shay finds that, regarding issues of PTSD and veteran reintegration in contemporary US society, "[r]eligious and cultural therapies are not only possible, but may well be superior to what mental health professionals conventionally offer."[139] His approach entails all major elements of ceremonial storytelling about war experience discussed throughout this study. It encompasses the notion that war experiences potentially endanger a warrior's or soldier's mental well-being; that sharing these experiences with civilians in a public, communal, and narrative and/or performative format helps negotiate both the individual memory and the veterans' relationship with civilians; that ceremonial storytelling, thus, supports reintegration and mental health; and finally, that humans in different cultural contexts and at different times have developed similar cultural practices within this discursive context to foster such negotiations. Shay tackles both major interests informing this study, i.e., the cultural work of such practices designed for the discursive context of war experience and narratives, and a particular society's urge to develop communal therapeutic remedies for individual suffering expressed through these narratives.

Shay's approach has since inspired further research and public debate about the relevance of ancient Greek texts for contemporary veteran issues. Like many activist works focused on community-oriented ritual therapy among Indigenous cultures, proponents of cultural comparisons with ancient Greek drama muse in how far Greek texts "reflect universal aspects of warfare and its psychological

137 Shay, *Odysseus*, 154.
138 Shay, *Odysseus*, 152–53.
139 Shay, 152.

after-effects," whether "ancient Greeks [were] aware of what is now called combat trauma," and whether there were "any particular responses to combat trauma in ancient Greek culture that address, mitigate or even prevent its devastating effects."[140] While scholars do not agree on all these questions, they all seem to suggest a certain degree of universality in war experience that would make the study of ancient Greek texts relevant to modern military psychology. Such research and public promotion of universality have since become popular devices to problematize war experience, PTSD, and challenges of homecoming and reintegration in contemporary US society. Both the Theater of War and Aquila Theatre can be located within this tradition.

Theater of War (ToW) is a production offered by a theater group called Outside the Wire. Founded in 2009, the group defines itself as a "social impact company that uses theater and a variety of other media to address pressing public health and social issues" including psychological injury, but also (domestic) violence, addiction, or incarceration.[141] ToW's website lists over three hundred performances in the US, Europe, and Japan, held at military sites, hospitals, schools, churches, as well as the Pentagon and Guantanamo Bay.[142] By referring to the communal and therapeutic effect of ancient Greek drama, they formulate their philosophy of public performances as follows: "Using Sophocles' plays to forge a common vocabulary for openly discussing the impact of war on individuals, families, and communities, these events will be aimed at generating compassion and understanding between diverse audiences."[143] Their reference to the classics seeks to draw out contemporary veterans' experiences and contextualize them with the ancient texts' symbolism and cultural significance. This general mission statement also implies a gap between civilian and veteran experience and postulates the need to close that gap by bringing "diverse" audiences together and creating "compassion" among them.

Based in London and New York, Aquila Theatre (AT) was founded in 1991. AT is institutionalized as a nonprofit NGO and organizes events and town hall meetings anchored on public performances of poems and plays by Homer, Sophocles, and Euripides. The group specifically promotes an online program called YouStories which seeks to help contemporary veterans make sense of

140 Steinbock, review of *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks. The New Antiquity* by Peter Meineck and David Konstan; cf. Meineck and Konstan, *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*.

141 Doerries, *The Theater of War*, 285; "Mission."

142 "Theater of War: Overview."

143 "Theater of War: Overview."

their own experience by way of contextualization with the Greek classics. The program, thus, "uses ancient stories about war to inspire new stories."[144] YouStories operates a support website with additional information about the cultural context of these plays, along with video clips where US veterans tell their own stories and relate them to the issues portrayed in the classics. These stories are solicited on the YouStories website, which provides video capture software to allow users to record and upload their own oral history clips to the site. As part of the nationwide public program Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives, YouStories is, among others, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and archives its stories at the Library of Congress, demonstrating the currently widespread academic and public interest in veteran experience, war narratives, and oral history.[145]

The YouStories website is complex in its efforts to contextualize ancient 'texts' (i.e., drama and artifacts) with modern veteran experience and narratives. It explores four major themes: the experience of "coming home," as represented in Homer's *Odyssey*, the "Idea of the Hero" in Euripides's *Heracles*, "Ethics at War" in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, and the "Dilemma of War" in Sophocles's *Ajax*. The website's subordinate page "Explore Stories" is rich with hypertext connecting diverse aspects of each theme. It starts off with a video clip in which a veteran explains his or her own interpretation of how the classic play relates to their personal war experience. The site then offers a photograph of a Greek artifact (e.g., a vase, or a plaque), a brief description and object biography, and it illuminates how this artifact visually represents the ancient story. In the Odysseus theme, the site presents a plaque depicting Odysseus's return to Penelope. The description informs visitors that both the returning war hero and his wife test each other before they can once again trust one another after years of separation. It interprets the story by drawing connections to modern war experience and confronts the site visitor with corresponding discussion questions, beginning with: "What happens when a person is trained to fight and kill in the name of his or her country, is exposed to often horrific scenes of destruction, has to deal with inhumane sights and sounds on a daily basis and then returns home to the civilian population?"[146] A brief essay authored by an academic expert on ancient

144 "Aquila Theatre—YouStories."

145 "Aquila Theatre—YouStories"; Steinbock, review of *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*.

146 "Odyssey – Coming Home."

classics then fleshes out each theme.[147] The themes' hypertext collection also includes a synopsis of the ancient play, links to transcripts of the full play, and to video clips of performances or readings of selected scenes by AT cast.

All text elements invoke the relevance of ancient texts to contemporary society in inviting site visitors to consider the same question from different angles, and in different stories, genres, and media. They ask how the ancient stories can help modern society interpret contemporary war experience.[148] This initial question, in both theater projects, serves as the prerequisite for implying more significant follow-up questions, such as whether the references to Greek tragedy can help modern US society (re)learn, (re)construct, and institutionalize methods and practices of veteran reintegration, whether interpretations of these ancient texts about war experience can help contemporary society solve contemporary problems of social psychology and community disintegration. As in the examples of Indigenous military and veteran traditions discussed throughout this book, the protagonists and the online contextualizations of both theater programs follow the activist thrust in Shay's tradition, arguing that war and veteran experience indeed contain universal aspects that can be gleaned from these texts and that, therefore, ancient Greek tragedy can teach modern US society about citizenship, civil-military relationships, and veterans' homecoming. It is through declarations of universality and relatability that AT and ToW promote their performative practices as homecoming scenarios, that is, they present their performances, programs, and websites as prescriptive communal rituals of veteran reintegration, as descendants of the ancient practices that were remediated and adjusted for modern purposes but retain the same core message and conduct the same cultural work.

Without citing Shay directly, ToW echoes his notions of recurring central issues in military psychology across time when the overview web page states: "It has been suggested that ancient Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy, and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans." The performers of the ancient plays were "most likely veterans or cadets" and "Sophocles himself was a general," as the site explains.[149] From the premise of war veterans writing autobiographical fiction on war that was then reenacted by

147 In the case of the essay on Odysseus, the author recommends both of Shay's books as further readings. Race, "The Therapy of Odysseus in Phaeacia."

148 In comparison, the various websites and pages of the ToW program provide much less detail about the historical and literary context of their reference texts, resorting to brief information about the theater's proceeds and mission.

149 "Theater of War: Overview."

veterans for civilian and veteran audiences, the site draws conclusions about the ritual quality of the plays and implies their relatability and universality:

> Seen through this lens, ancient Greek drama appears to have been an elaborate ritual aimed at helping combat veterans return to civilian life after deployments during a century that saw 80 years of war […] Given this context, it seemed natural that military audiences today might have something to teach us about the impulses behind these ancient stories. It also seemed like these ancient stories would have something important and relevant to say to military audiences today.[150]

Modern US society can, thus, observe how a different culture helped veterans find and sing their "songs" about war and how the performance of these songs both addressed the psychological effects of war on veterans and reconstituted the communities. Because they attribute to the plays the ability to "timelessly and universally depict the psychological and physical wounds" of war, their Sophocles program serves as an anchor to "de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, disseminate information regarding available resources, and foster greater family, community, and troop resilience."[151] It does not become clear from ToW's online presence what degree of classical education and background knowledge they expect to find among their audiences, but, obviously, their references to the ancient classics offer opportunities for both veterans and civilians to consider universal elements in war experience and, consequently, to regard the conflicts portrayed there as comparable and relatable to contemporary issues of veterans' reintegration and mental health.

The same notion is present in much more detail in the various hypertext elements of AT's YouStories. In his contextualization of his own experience with the Odysseus theme, veteran Brian Delate speaks about his emotions during Aquila readings at the White House as he realized how much the knowledge of Greek warriors' cathartic performance in theater "helped my own healing, my own recovery."[152] Even more telling, William H. Race points to the parallels in the duration of wars between the *Odyssey* and US post-9/11 military engagements in his contextual essay: "In modern times, with tens of thousands of veterans returning from our ten-year wars involving multiple deployments, we have reason to pay particular attention to the way in which Odysseus recuperates from his harrowing experiences in war and wandering."[153] The ordeals of Odysseus

150 "Theater of War: Overview."
151 "Theater of War: Overview."
152 "Homer's Odyssey."
153 Race, "The Therapy of Odysseus in Phaeacia."

become a particularly significant allegory since members of the military, scholars of military sociology, and the American public voiced increasing concern about multiple deployments and erratic new regulations extending the duration of deployment tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.[154]

In the discussion of Euripides's *Heracles*, YouStories presents the hero's return, his affliction with madness at the hands of the goddess Hera, leading Heracles to murder his own family in a fit of rage, only to be calmed down by the comradeship of his fellow veteran Theseus. The theme, as YouStories has it, "creates a vivid and extreme demonstration of combat trauma or post-traumatic stress, both upon warriors and the societies within which they live."[155] The project draws a broad connection between different historical interpretations of psychological injuries, ranging from belief in divine intervention as in Euripides's play, to notions of shell-shock and hysteria in World War I, and today's conflicting definitions of PTSD. Visitors are confronted with guiding discussion questions: "How can civilians better understand veterans who have to deal with some form of PTS? Can these ancient texts tell us anything about the psychological effects of enduring combat?"[156] Answers follow in the accompanying academic essay which suggests that *Heracles*, both for ancient and modern audiences, portrays significant effects of war because it illuminates "how the violence of war changes irrevocably both those who do the actual fighting and those who, having remained behind, may believe themselves—falsely and tragically—beyond its reach."[157] This perspective embeds the impact of PTSD on a veteran's close relatives and, thus, once more strengthens their position as mediators and translators between veterans and civil society, similar to the role Bob Eaton's wife played during the retreat in *The Welcome*. The deliberation of this theme, although it acknowledges the Greeks' belief in divine intervention as alien to the modern observer's eye, nevertheless emphasizes that the ancient Greeks understood how psychological injury affects both those who suffer from it and their immediate social relations, and that they remedied their particular experience with these injuries through community support, understanding, and mutual aid.

The issues of universality of experience and the relevance of ancient texts for contemporary US society gain political significance in direct, albeit rather

154 Cf. Hoge, *Once a Warrior*, xvii; Howard and Prividera, "Nationalism and Soldiers' Health," 225; Zacchea, "Veteran's Advocacy," 31; Phillips, "Stress."

155 "Heracles: The Idea of the Hero."

156 "Heracles: The Idea of the Hero."

157 Pache, "Heracles and the Idea of the Hero."

implicit, comparisons to current public concerns scattered throughout the website. In the overview section's discussion how Greek society experienced "80 years of war," and in William Race's reference to the current "ten-year wars involving multiple deployments" cited above, contemporary concerns shine through about a traditional American political paradigm, the belief that "a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years War."[158] This paradigm assumes that the populace of a democratic society would have limited patience with its leaders if they embroiled the country in a long war. The public would withdraw its support and, eventually, replace the government to regain peace. This notion inspired George C. Marshall to make the statement about "Seven Years War[s]" in the wake of World War II. Following this paradigm, the US usually pursued quick, decisive military campaigns throughout its history. Once wars turned into quagmires, such as Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, observers pointed out that public support in the US faded the longer these engagements dragged on.[159]

A similar reference is implied in the essay on *Ajax* and the universal "Dilemma of War." Since the ancient Greeks considered war "the father of all things," the author argues, the social challenges facing their democracy at war must also affect the United States:

> It is this universal experience of war that allows for dramas produced in democratic Athens to reach out and speak to audiences in another democratic society twenty-five hundred years later. No less important is the universal experience of the returning soldier, and how there realities he or she faces on returning to the "World" are little different over the millennia and across culture.[160]

Democracy serves as the direct link between ancient Greece and the modern United States. Tritle invokes the Greek and US traditions of the citizen soldier to address the problem of prolonged wars. This connection also bespeaks anxieties about the social impact that the current state of permanent, worldwide military engagements will have on a professional US military whose members increasingly comprise but a tiny fraction of the US population. Hence, Greek tragedy is supposed to teach American audiences not only about the psychological costs of war, but also how war affects civil-military relationships and notions of citizenship (i.e., privileges and obligations) in a democratic society.

Other text elements of the YouStories website more explicitly formulate political problems in their contextualization of ancient themes for modern US

158 Bacevich, "Endless War."
159 Bacevich, "Endless War"; *Breach of Trust*, 41.
160 Tritle, "Soldier's Home."

conflicts. In the discussion of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, ethics at war become the central issue. Aquila's website introduces this story of a wounded warrior in the following way. His army abandoned him on an island but, as they realize they need his unique archery skills to win the war against Troy, they attempt to trick the embittered old veteran into rejoining. The website's discussion question challenges the visitor asking: "Is one's personal integrity, beliefs and moral compass more important tha[n] the strategic aims of an army, or does one have a duty to sometimes set these aside for the common good?"[161] Aquila Theatre makes the issue more poignant for a contemporary audience by casting the marooned Philoctetes as a female. The play, thus, addresses contemporary questions of equal treatment for women in the military, as well as the widespread cases of abuse and corresponding military sexual trauma. The website specifically asks visitors whether the dilemma in the ancient text poses "similar reflections in American culture today."[162]

Vietnam veteran and classicist Paul Woodruff does not raise concrete ethical issues of US post-9/11 wars in his essay. However, he invokes the conflict between Philoctetes, the cunning military leader Odysseus, and the young warrior Neoptolemus who is ordered to commit the betrayal that would trick Philoctetes into rejoining the Athenian forces, to sensitize visitors for contemporary ethical problems:

> As a society we should ponder these questions as we continue to prepare for war, and especially before we enter a new war: Can we teach youngsters the arts of war, including subterfuge, without destroying their ethical character? Can we overcome the isolation of veterans who have been wounded in body and soul? Is victory important enough to warrant the whole cost of war?[163]

Particularly his ominous remarks about continuing "to prepare for war," his warnings about "enter[ing] a new war," and questioning the value of victory vis–à–vis the costs of war stand out. While most primary and secondary sources consulted for this study agree in their empathy for veterans' quandaries and on the psychological consequences of war, not many link ethical issues directly to war's political contexts. They either cling to what milblogger Douglas Traversa has described as his "Tool Time" lecture as discussed in Chapter Three, or they avoid political debates over war altogether in order to prevent domestic confrontations, as Patrick Hagopian observed regarding notions of 'healing' after

161 "Philoctetes: The Ethics of War."
162 "Philoctetes: The Ethics of War."
163 Woodruff, "Philoctetes, a Short Introduction."

Vietnam.[164] It is all the more remarkable, then, that Woodruff and Aquila here poignantly make the connection between ancient war stories and future political problems. Referring to preparations for war, Woodruff calls on his audience to read *Philoctetes* as a cautionary tale and reminds his readers that any future military engagement would confront US soldiers with new ethical dilemmas, cause unjustifiable suffering, and thus exacerbate problems within the growing veteran demographic. Although he does not talk about how falsified evidence helped justify military intervention, about atrocities, or how government bureaucracy neglects veterans' needs, he warns that wars are more easily started than concluded and, to emphasize this chapter's context of "homecoming," that they tend to have personal and often harmful effects on those who fight them, as much as on their social environments, even decades after the last shots are fired.

Finally, this discussion of theatrical homecoming scenarios returns to the notion of ritual reintegration with a few concluding observations on textuality. It is remarkable that, in their detailed analysis of the cultural work of Greek tragedy, ToW and AT acknowledge the ancient Greek homecoming scenarios as "an elaborate ritual"[165] but do not interpret or even promote their own performances explicitly as rituals. However, they attribute community-forging and social-therapeutic qualities to their own scenarios when, e.g., ToW states: "Theater of War believes in the power of storytelling to bring communities together and help others heal."[166] They reinforce their mission to negotiate knowledge, values, and identities, and, thus, constitute community when they emphasize that different events and media are part of the script. Their activities are supposed to "forge a common vocabulary for openly discussing the impact of war."[167] They seek to "engage communities in powerful town hall discussions" in addition to their readings and performances in order to "foster understanding and compassion, while mobilizing citizens and resources to help improve the lives of service members, veterans, and their families and communities."[168] All these aspects mark ToW's events as practices of ceremonial storytelling and, therefore, as civic rituals of veteran reintegration in this study's sense.

Jonathan Shay describes Athenian tragic theater as "sacred theater"[169] because the performance of plays conducted cultural work in several, intertwined ways. It

164 Hagopian, *Vietnam War*, 402–05.
165 "Theater of War: Overview."
166 "Soldiers and Citizens Tour."
167 "Theater of War: Overview."
168 "Theater of War: Soldiers and Citizens Tour."
169 Shay, *Odysseus*, 152–53.

reenacted narratives embedded in the prevalent cultural context and cosmology, interpreting war experience in reference to divine interaction with humans and, thus, contributed to the Greeks' world-making. Yet it also brought together veterans and civilians for these cultural events; the stories did not simply talk about homecoming, they enacted homecoming and reintegration by sharing and listening to war stories. These meta-performative qualities enhanced the practices' degree of ritualization. To return to Ronald Grimes's reservations, the ancient plays were not so much performances for a passive audience of consumers, but a gathering of people who understood themselves as "congregations, tribes, or communities"[170] and who acknowledged a common purpose far beyond the mere consumption of a particular cultural event. In fact, the event, i.e., performance and active participation both helped renew that common purpose. In this sense, ToW and AT indeed conduct ritual homecoming scenarios because they encourage audiences and performers to interpret, acknowledge, but also contribute to the cultural work conducted in these scenarios and, thus, to self-consciously perform their roles as community members who (re)negotiate the community's values and (re)constitute group identity.

The diversity of media used in these scenarios adds to their cultural work because it engages their participants. AT invites its audiences to contribute their own stories to the YouStories collection, and to contextualize them with ancient texts and artifacts, as well as with the veteran stories already found on the website. ToW similarly invites the public to add their own stories to the 'pool' through the program's Storyline platform.[171] Like the public call for contributions in *Operation Homecoming*, Andrew Carroll's letters project, and the website *Native American Veterans—Storytelling for Healing,*[172] both theater projects do not simply present their audience with a narrative for consumption, they invite the audience to contribute and to make the narrative their own. This form of narractivity is different from the joint storytelling observed in the previous chapters' milblog readings because, in the medium of the project websites, civilian visitors see a core narrative, along with the activists' call to contribute; they even see a number of solicited veteran contributions that added to the core narrative, but they cannot visibly bear witness or participate directly in

170 Grimes, *Craft*, 297.

171 "Soldiers and Citizens Tour." ToW's website on the "Soldiers and Citizens Tour" has gone offline since 2016. The site can be found via the Wayback Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20160308185130/http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/soldiers-citizens-tour>.

172 "Native American Veterans."

the narrative construction on the websites. They are presented with videos of ToW and AT performances, as well as interviews in which activists explain their agenda, but direct interaction and debate about the projects is directed away from the medium of the website and channeled through social media services such as Facebook and Twitter. The websites as such are limited to a one-way flow of information. Nevertheless, the entirety of each scenario, in its multitude of media, modes, and genres constitutes a form of narractivity that significantly contributes to its activist drive and, thus, to its ritualization.

Conclusion

This final chapter moved beyond the realm of milblogs to discuss civil-military relationships in situations where soldiers, returning home as veterans, and civilians come in direct physical contact with each other again. It showed that many medialized representations of homecoming tend to oversimplify the process, focusing on the happy reunion of families, while blotting out the emotional and social challenges of reintegration. Homecoming scenarios address these challenges and call for active civilian engagement in accordance with their philosophy of ceremonial storytelling and bearing witness as vehicles of community-oriented reintegration and social therapy. The scenarios explored here share these basic assumptions, but they employ a variety of media and genres to express and promote their philosophy and to establish rituals of homecoming. While the milblogs discussed in previous chapters could construct their communities only in the virtual space of the Internet and were inhibited by the soldiers' prospects of further danger in the combat zone, these post-deployment practices can engender direct physical contact and interaction between veterans and civilians. Still, the Internet serves as a complementary virtual convergence space to bundle together the different media used for distinct elements of a scenario, and to disseminate the scenario's message.

Regardless whether the act of ceremonial storytelling is conducted in the form of printed short stories, of films depicting a therapeutic retreat, or of theatrical performances and readings captured on video and stored online, all scenarios share the twofold interest observed in the previous author-audience interaction on milblogs. Their reflections on war experience convey knowledge, negotiate values, and, thus, conduct cultural work resulting in the constitution of group identity and community. In addition, these negotiations exert an increased concern for individual suffering and for the (mental) health of veterans, transformed into an urge toward civic engagement in veteran affairs across various media.

Homecoming scenarios refer to diverse military traditions to motivate their own activist drive. References to Native American and ancient Greek cultural practices are the most common among them. The underlying core assumption behind these transcultural references is the protagonists’ concern about civil-military relationships in contemporary US society, a general criticism that government bureaucracy in veterans’ affairs, overt individualism, and a general neglect among civilians for wars fought by a socially segregated professional military aggravate psychological injuries that the soldiers bring home from deployment. The scenarios’ extensive fascination with these transcultural models of veteran reintegration and social therapy thus demonstrates their activist drive towards community, mutual responsibility, and ultimately, an increased awareness of and commitment to active citizenship in US society.

6. Conclusion

In his comprehensive cultural history *Was ist Krieg* (2013), Bernd Hüppauf argues that discourse is a central element in distinguishing war from other forms of killing: "War requires collective representation and imagination. Human beings are determined by violence and represent violence in symbols."[1] Symbols and images, he adds, turn 'mere' murder and mayhem into war because they "construct an order that expresses much more than victory and defeat."[2] War, then, not only entails the use of force among societies, these societies must also negotiate the meaning of the killings in order for them to be regarded as a 'war.' Although Hüppauf applies a rather ethnocentric perspective in arguing that such discourse could only emerge in urban societies, that is, in states, which would deny Indigenous cultures the capability to make 'true' war,[3] his focus on discourse nurtures a cultural-history perspective on war and it focalizes negotiations of war experience. The order constructed by discourse on war helps a society to identify and mobilize its resources against an adversary. Eventually, the representation of war through discourse serves to justify and make sense of the violence. It deliberates that particular society's norms and values, and contextualizes them with the war. It creates and disseminates knowledge, and (re)constructs collective identity by negotiating the meaning of violence against the enemy. In the US, discourse on war has carried such negotiations since the War of Independence. It has been expressed in leaflets and broadsides, newspapers, memoirs, letters, poems, fiction, feature films, documentaries, and, since the turn of the twenty-first century, in the media and technology of Web 2.0. In these representations of war, US citizens have sought to understand their wars, to justify decisions and outcomes, to mourn their dead, to determine how war affected their relationships with their government and with other nations, and to integrate memories and effects of their wars into a coherent sense of self.

This study has followed a specific strand of such war-related discourse in the US over the last few decades, investigating how, since the Vietnam War, narratives discussed the effects of war experience on soldiers, as well as on civil-military relationships. Throughout these last several decades, a sense of social crisis has prevailed in public discourse on war experience, driven by an anxiety

1 Hüppauf, *Was ist Krieg?*, 28.
2 Hüppauf, 29.
3 Hüppauf, 29–30.

about ruptured relationships between US civil society and its military. Within this discursive context, combat-related stress, trauma, and veterans' reintegration struggles are recurring and dominant topics. Public debates and cultural representations have engaged in collective soul-searching, at times even expressing a sense of cultural pessimism about war experience, asking in how far civil society as a whole during and after Vietnam should be held responsible for the emotional toll this war took on soldiers. At the same time, media representations of war mostly center on the spectacular and the tragic: when the news cycle does not report on suicide bombings, it is easy for US civilians to forget about the wars abroad and about the hardships they bring to both locals and deployed troops in the war zone. News media also tend to highlight specific aspects of war and war experience while neglecting others, and the language prevalent in medialized discourse underscores these limited perspectives—footage of happy homecomings suggests closure and standard phrases and bumper sticker slogans such as "thank you for your service" and "I support the troops" offer civil society easy, symbolic gestures of support. For many of the troops and veterans thus thanked, these gestures do not carry real significance as they do not affect their reintegration into society. In addition, charged language that valorizes the troops as "heroes" and "warriors" also nurtures a traditional military culture of hypermasculine strength and stoic forbearance, and discourages open and critical deliberation of war's emotional costs among veterans and civilians.

As a result, activist discourse on war in the media, in popular culture, as well as in academia has pinpointed, scrutinized, and questioned the state of civil-military relationships since the 1970s. It has facilitated the development and dissemination of social perspectives in psychology and psychiatry, and boosted social work and community-oriented projects in civic activism among veterans. Driven by a culturally pessimistic outlook on individualism and alienation in modern US society, and anxious about the growing social segregation between civil society and an all-volunteer military, protagonists have looked for cross-cultural role models not only to reform health care services for soldiers and veterans, but also to place the negotiation of war experience within public discourse on a more communal footing. Contemporary activist discourse on war experience promotes and facilitates the exchange between civilians and veterans. These cultural practices often ritualize such exchanges in order to symbolize the reconstitution of the social contract between civil society and the military. Over the last few years, these cultural practices harnessed new technologies, such as blogs and social media services, and integrated them with traditional practices, media, and modes of discussing war. In a somewhat ironic twist, this crisis-centered discourse reveals the perpetual rivalry between individualism and

collectivism in American self-perception. It celebrates as role models (and sometimes appropriates) the same Indigenous cultural concepts that, according to the national founding myth, were doomed to give way to progress and 'civilization.'

In its analysis of activist texts in academia, in the media, and in civic engagement, this study has investigated how culturally pessimistic self-reflections drive cross-cultural perspectives and role-models within this discourse. Activists frequently refer to Native North American warrior traditions not only to foster social-therapeutic approaches in veterans' mental health care, but also to promote civic perspectives on the social contract. Taking their cue from Indigenous warrior traditions that are based on a closely knit web of community relations and services, activists seek to construct community-oriented therapies and cultural practices in US 'mainstream society.' They invoke Indigenous role models to propose that the public acknowledge mutual responsibilities and social obligations for protection and tending among civilians and veterans as prerequisites for strong civil-military relationships in US society. In their cultural comparisons and models for cultural transfer, two ideas play central roles, i.e., war narratives and rituals are considered critical concepts both to help society make sense of war and to reconstitute community through a symbolic reintegration of the veterans, but also to help veterans work through their individual memories of war and tend to psychological injuries as they return into the civilian world.

Hence, activists' practices of veterans' mental health care, social work, and civic engagement seek to implement what this study has described as 'ceremonial storytelling': they observe Indigenous practices in which returning warriors symbolically share their experience with their community who, in turn, symbolically acknowledges this experience and pledges to tend to physical and emotional wounds in order to help the warriors reenter the realm of peace. Non-Native activists develop rituals with similar symbolic and discursive functions, seeking to integrate them either into conventional therapy methods or to construct civic welcoming, cleansing, and honoring rituals with a social-therapeutic thrust. These non-Native rituals usually entail an exchange between veterans and civilians, that is, a sequence of narrating and acknowledging war experiences among military 'storytellers' and civilian audiences. In these ritualized sessions of narrating war and bearing witness, expressed in diverse media and modes, veterans and civilians jointly negotiate and interpret war experiences and work to restore order and social equilibrium. Their practices help construct meaning, memory, and identity for individual veterans, but they also engage in collective meaning-making, that is, they symbolize the veterans' reintegration into civil society because the participants act as representatives of their respective group.

However, the concept of ceremonial storytelling not only helps explain the cultural functions of activist discourse and civic engagement regarding war experience but it provided this study with a cultural-comparative lens for the readings of contemporary war narratives. Seen from the perspective of Indigenous war rituals, non-Native milblogs and homecoming scenarios can be interpreted as forms of ceremonial storytelling as well, as narrative rituals in which soldiers and veterans share experience and, in turn, receive symbolic acknowledgment, appreciation, and pledges to support from their mostly civilian audiences. In fact, this perspective makes apparent that civilians, in contributing to the exchange, are not mere audiences but, rather, active participants to such civic rituals. Milblogs manifest such ritualized exchanges in their practices of mourning for deceased soldiers, in their discussions of war stress, or in their commitment to community service in mentoring and culture brokering. The blogs' distinct textuality helps disseminate and popularize these practices. Moreover, it provides a virtual ritual ground, that is, a convergence space for the participants to meet and network, to share information, and to engage in expressions and symbolic exchanges of empathy.

Homecoming scenarios, like Indigenous rituals, bring veterans and civilians together for ceremonial reflections on war experience, often in a shared physical space where embodied practices take place. Yet, they also employ a variety of media, such as print, film, or new media, to disseminate their message, to store information, or to serve as virtual convergence spaces. While many of the conversations in milblogs and homecoming scenarios do not refer to Indigenous warrior traditions, nor self-consciously enact and frame their practices as 'rituals,' they can best be interpreted as forms of ceremonial storytelling because this perspective unveils the complexity of their cultural work. Interweaving the study of war narratives with the notion of ritual, the concept of ceremonial storytelling shows how the exchanges between soldiers, veterans, and civilians in milblogs and homecoming scenarios symbolically negotiate values and norms, construct and circulate knowledge, and constitute community and collective identity. It illustrates how deeply milblogs and homecoming scenarios are embedded in the ongoing activist discourse on war experience and, thus, how they take up and further develop the recurrent debates on stress, trauma, and civil-military relationships since Vietnam.

7. Works Cited

5000 Feet is the Best, directed by Omer Fast. Short Film, Drama. 30 min, 2011.

"About Women in the Military." CaptainMolly.com – Women in the Military, November 3, 2012. http://web.archive.org/web/20121103185347/http://womeninthemilitary.military.com/about-captain-molly/.

Acton, Carol. *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse*. New York: Palgrave, 2007.

Adsit, Chris. *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual: Christ-Centered Solutions for Combat Trauma*. Newport News: Military Ministry, 2007.

Alber, Jan, and Monika Fludernik. introduction to *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, edited by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, 1–31. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010.

Altena, Marga M.A., Catrien D. Notermans, and Thomas Widlok. "Place, Action, and Community in Internet Rituals." In *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*, edited by Ronald L. Grimes, Eric Venbrux, and Udo Simon, 133–63. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

"America at a Crossroads. Discussion Guide." PBS America at a Crossroads, April 2007. http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/discussionguide/.

"America at a Crossroads. Operation Homecoming." PBS America at a Crossroads. Accessed March 18, 2015. http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/show_operation_homecoming.html.

Anderson, Ben. "Modulating the Excess of Affect. Morale in a State of 'Total War.'" In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 161–85. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Anderson, Benedict R.O. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006.

Anderson, Donald. *Aftermath: An Anthology of Post-Vietnam Fiction*. New York: Holt, 1995.

Anthony, Kate, DeeAnna Merz Nagel, and Stephen Goss, eds. *The Use of Technology in Mental Health: Applications, Ethics and Practice*. 1st ed. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 2010.

"Aquila Theatre—YouStories." Aquila Theatre YouStories, accessed March 17, 2015. http://youstories.com/stories/index/all-themes.

Ashbaugh, Andrea R., and Alain Brunet. Review of *Memory, War and Trauma*, by Nigel C. Hunt. *Canadian Psychology* 53, no. 3 (2011): 236–37.

Ashplant, T. G., Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*. New York: Psychology Press, 2000.

Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33.

Autenrieth, Ulla Patricia. "Gemeinschaft." In *Freundschaft und Gemeinschaft im Social Web. Bilder-Handeln und Peergroup-Kommunikation auf Facebook und Co*, edited by Ulla Patricia Autenrieth and Klaus Neumann-Braun, 14–17. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011.

Bacevich, Andrew J. *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*. New York: Metropolitan, 2013.

———. "Endless War, a Recipe for Four-Star Arrogance." *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2010, sec. Opinions. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/25/AR2010062502160.html.

———. *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Barak, Azy, and Meyran Boniel-Nissim. "Using Forums to Enhance Client Peer Support." In *The Use of Technology in Mental Health: Applications, Ethics and Practice*, edited by Kate Anthony, DeeAnna Merz Nagel, and Stephen Goss, 47–55. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 2010.

Barschow, Boris. "Bundeswehr und Social Media." *Afghanistan-Blog*, June 27, 2010. http://www.afghanistan-blog.de/bundeswehr-und-social-media/.

Bassett, Deborah, Dedra Buchwald, and Spero Manson. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Symptoms among American Indians and Alaska Natives: A Review of the Literature." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 49, no. 3 (March 2014): 417–33.

Basso, Keith H. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Baym, Nancy K. *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000.

Becknell, John M. "Listening to Narratives of War." (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2013).

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 40–55, (Vol. 96, No. 1, Religion in America, Winter, 1967: 1–21).

Bellavia, David. *House to House: A Soldier's Memoir*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

Bennett, Brian. "5 Riveting Soldier Blogs." *Time*, September 18, 2005. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1106331,00.html.

Bertelsen, Mette. "Trajectories of PTSD: Danish Soldiers of the War in Afghanistan." (Keynote speech presented at the conference Aftershock. Post-Traumatic Cultures since the Great War. Copenhagen, May 23, 2013).

Beyrau, Dietrich, Michael Hochgeschwender, and Dieter Langewiesche. "Einführung: Zur Klassifikation von Kriegen." In *Formen des Krieges. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Dietrich Beyrau, Michael Hochgeschwender, and Dieter Langewiesche, 9–15. Krieg in der Geschichte, (KRiG) 37. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007.

Bierce, Ambrose. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge and Other Stories*. Mineola, N.Y: Dover, 2008.

Bighorse, Tiana. *Bighorse the Warrior*. Edited by Noël Bennett. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994.

Bolton, Gillie, Stephanie Howlett, Colin Lago, Ian McMillan, and Jeannie K. Wright. *Writing Cures: An Introductory Handbook of Writing in Counselling and Therapy*. London: Brunner-Routledge, 2004.

Bonenberger, Adrian, and Brian Castner. *The Road Ahead: Fiction from the Forever War*. Pegasus, 2017.

Booth, Paul. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Lang, 2010.

Brænder, Morten. *Justifying the Ultimate Sacrifice: Civil and Military Religion in Frontline Blogs*. Aarhus: Politica, 2009.

Braungart, Wolfgang. *Ritual und Literatur*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996.

Broder, Judith, and Carol Tanenbaum. "The Soldiers Project. Healing the Hidden Wounds of War." The Soldiers Project, 2017. http://www.thesoldiersproject.org/.

Brooks, Elizabeth, Douglas K. Novins, Tim Noe, Byron Bair, Nancy Dailey, Jeff Lowe, W. J. Buck Richardson, Kara Hawthorne, and Jay H. Shore. "Reaching Rural Communities with Culturally Appropriate Care: A Model for Adapting Remote Monitoring to American Indian Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Telemedicine Journal and E-Health: The Official Journal of the American Telemedicine Association* 19, no. 4 (April 2013): 272–77.

Bruner, Jerome. "Self-Making and World-Making." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 1 (1991): 67–78.

Burden, Matthew C. "Taking Chance Home." *Blackfive.Net* (blog), April 27, 2004. http://www.blackfive.net/main/2004/04/taking_chance.html.

———. *The Blog of War: Front-Line Dispatches from Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

Burnell, Karen, Nigel C. Hunt, and Peter Coleman. "Developing a Model of Narrative Analysis to Investigate the Role of Social Support in Coping with Traumatic War Memories." *Narrative Inquiry* 19, no. 1 (2009): 91–105.

Burnell, Karen, Nigel C. Hunt, and Peter Coleman. "Using Narrative Analysis to Investigate the Role of Social Support in the Reconciliation of Traumatic War Memories." *Health Psychology Update* 15, no. 3 (2007): 37–39.

Buzzell, Colby. "'Green' Gunner." *My War. Killing Time in Iraq* (blog), August 7, 2004. http://web.archive.org/web/20041130083756/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_cbftw_archive.html

———. "I'm Soo Fucked." *My War. Killing Time in Iraq* (blog), August 10, 2004. http://web.archive.org/web/20041130083756/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_cbftw_archive.html.

———. "Men In Black." *My War. Killing Time in Iraq* (blog), August 5, 2004. http://web.archive.org/web/20041130083756/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_cbftw_archive.html.

———. *My War. Killing Time in Iraq*. London: Corgi, 2006.

———. "Sniper Fire (?)." *My War. Killing Time in Iraq* (blog), August 12, 2004. http://web.archive.org/web/20061018225209/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004/08/sniper-fire.html#comments.

———. "Stay Tuned." *My War. Killing Time in Iraq* (blog), August 19, 2004. http://web.archive.org/web/20050107085742/http://cbftw.blogspot.com/2004/08/stay-tuned.html#comments.

Cadwalladr, Carole. "Google, Democracy and the Truth about Internet Search." *Guardian*, December 4, 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/04/google-democracy-truth-internet-search-facebook.

Camoroda, Susan. "Social Media - DoD's Greatest Information Sharing Tool or Weakest Security Link?" Civilian Research Paper. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, April 15, 2010. http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA544321.

"Camp Chaparral Welcome Home." Accessed March 9, 2015. http://www.waterplanet.ws/cc/Home.html, (site discontinued).

Campbell, Heidi, ed. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. Bollingen Series, XVII. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor, 1991.

"Cancer Blog Directory - Navigating Cancer." Navigating Care, Inc. Patient Engagement Portal, 2017. https://www.navigatingcancer.com/cancer_blogs.

Caplan, Paula J. *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

Carlson, Bronwyn. "The 'New Frontier': Emergent Indigenous Identities and Social Media." In *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, edited by Martin N. Nakata, Bronwyn Carlson, and M. Harris, 147–68. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney E-Press, 2013.

Carlson, Bronwyn, and Ryan Frazer. "'It's Like Going to a Cemetery and Lighting a Candle.' Aboriginal Australians, Sorry Business, and Social Media." *AlterNative. An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 11, no. 3 (2015): 211–24.

Carocci, Max. *Warriors of the Plains: The Arts of Plains Indian Warfare*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.

Carroll, Al. *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags American Indian Veterans from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

Carroll, Andrew. *Behind the Lines: Revealing and Uncensored Letters from Our War-Torn World*. New York: Random, 2013.

———. *Grace under Fire: Letters of Faith in Times of War*. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

———. ed. *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*. New York: Random, 2006.

———. *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

———. "Native Americans." Healing Combat Trauma, n.d., Accessed January 24, 2017 http://www.healingcombattrauma.com//native-americans/.

———. "Healing War Trauma. The Website, the Vision, the Impact." In *Healing War Trauma. A Handbook of Creative Approaches*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 223–37. Psychosocial Stress Series 44. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Chouliaraki, Lilie. "From War Memoirs to Milblogs: Language Change in the Witnessing of War, 1914–2014." *Discourse and Society* 25, no. 5 (September 1, 2014): 600–18.

"Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster." Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, 2017. http://www.venganza.org/.

Clevenger, Steven. *America's First Warriors: Native Americans and Iraq*. Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

Coleman, Phill. "What Is a Veteran?" The American War Library, 2008. http://www.americanwarlibrary.com/whatvet.htm.

"Collateral." Collateral, 2017. http://collateraljournal.com/.

Collier, John. *From Every Zenith: A Memoir; and Some Essays on Life and Thought*. Denver: Sage Publications, 1963.

Collings, Deirdre, and Rafal Rohozinski. "Bullets and Blogs. New Media and the Warfighter." Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army War College, 2008. http://www.worldcat.org/title/bullets-and-blogs-new-media-and-the-warfighter-an-analytical-synthesis-and-workshop-report/oclc/474800344?title=&detail=&page=frame&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.csl.army.mil%2Fusacsl%2Fpublications%2FBullets_Blogs_new_Media_warfighterWeb_20_Oct_09.pdf%26checksum%3D34e55206c8a56e780309a5a494f62ad9&linktype=digitalObject.

Collura, Gino L., and Daniel H. Lende. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Neuroanthropology: Stopping PTSD Before It Begins." *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 36, no. 1 (May 1, 2012): 131–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2153-9588.2012.01096.x.

Crawford, Matthew B. "Sebastian Junger's 'Tribe." *New York Times*, May 27, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/books/review/sebastian-jungers-tribe.html.

Dalton, Kelly Singleton. "From Combat to Composition: Meeting the Needs of Military Veterans through Postsecondary Writing Pedagogy." (MA Thesis, Georgetown University, 2010).

Danchev, Alex. "Infidels and Miscreants: Love and War in Afghanistan." *International Affairs* 87, no. 2 (March 2011): 435–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.00981.x.

Dare, Byron. "The Internet as Healer: Reinventing Memory and Brotherhood among Vietnam Veterans in Cyberspace." *Doshisha American Studies* 43, no. 03 (2007): 67–89.

DeLear, Byron. "Flag Experts Explore Symbols, Their History and Role as 'Civil Religion.'" Examiner.com, October 19, 2014. http://www.examiner.com/article/flag-experts-explore-symbols-their-history-and-role-as-civil-religion.

Denton-Borhaug, Kelly. Review of *War and the American Difference*, by Stanley Hauerwas." Library of Social Science, 2015. http://libraryofsocialscience.com/reviews/Hauerwas.html.

———. *U.S. War-Culture, Sacrifice and Salvation*. Oakville: Routledge, 2014.

Deutscher Bundestag. "Drucksache 17/900. Unterrichtung durch den Wehrbeauftragten. Jahresbericht 2009 (51. Bericht)." Deutscher Bundestag, March 16, 2010. http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/009/1700900.pdf.

———. "Drucksache 17/4400 Unterrichtung durch den Wehrbeauftragten," January 25, 2011. http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/044/1704400.pdf.

———. "Drucksache 17/8400. Unterrichtung durch den Wehrbeauftragten," January 24, 2012. http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/084/1708400.pdf.

Dillard, Denise, Clemma Jacobsen, Scott Ramsey, and Spero Manson. "Conduct Disorder, War Zone Stress, and War-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in American Indian Vietnam Veterans." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 20, no. 1 (February 2007): 53–62. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20200.

Doe, Sue, and Lisa Langstraat, eds. *Generation Vet: Composition, Student Veterans, and the Post-9/11 University*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2014.

———. eds. introduction to *Generation Vet: Composition, Student Veterans, and the Post-9/11 University*, 1–27. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2014.

Doering-Manteuffel, Anselm. "Die Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges und neue Herausforderungen. Thesen zur Verschränkung von Zeitgeschehen und Historischer Problemwahrnehmung." In *Kriegserfahrungen. Krieg und Gesellschaft in der Neuzeit*, edited by Georg Schild, Anton Schindling, and Alkmar von Alvensieben, 273–88. Krieg in der Geschichte 55 (KRiG). Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009.

Doerries, Bryan. *The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today*. New York: Knopf, 2015.

Dolman, Everett Carl. "Military, Democracy, and the State in Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers." In *Political Science Fiction*, edited by Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox, 196–213. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

Doss, Erika. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Dugal, Michael W. "Affirming the Soldier's Spirit Through Intentional Dialogue." Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, March 1, 2009. Accessed March 14, 2012. http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA498529 (site discontinued).

Dyer, Gwynne. *War*. London: The Bodley Head, 1985.

Eder, Mari K. *Leading the Narrative. The Case for Strategic Communication*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011.

Egendorf, Arthur. *Legacies of Vietnam: Comparative Adjustment of Veterans and Their Peers: A Study*. Edited by Center for Policy Research. Washington: GPO, 1981.

Elder, Glen H. Jr., and Elizabeth C. Clipp. "Combat Experience, Comradeship, and Psychological Health." In *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by John P. Wilson, Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana, 131–56. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Ellis, Clyde. "'We Don't Want Your Rations, We Want This Dance': The Changing Use of Song and Dance on the Southern Plains." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1999): 133–54. https://doi.org/10.2307/970489.

Emery, John. "Emery on Silvestri, 'Friended at the Front: Social Media in the American War Zone.'" H-War, November 2016. https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/reviews/152690/emery-silvestri-friended-front-social-media-american-war-zone.

Enloe, Cynthia H. *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980.

Estes, Brian. "Writing the War: Military Institutions, Military Blogs, and Social Networks in the Iraq War." (M.A. thesis, George Mason University, 2008).

Eyman, David. review of *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, by Jerry Lembcke. H-Net, H-Pol, December 1998. http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2546.

"Fallout: In the Aftermath of War." Interdisciplinary Humanities Center UC Santa Barbara, 2012. http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/series/fallout/.

FancyShawlDancr. "Pfc. Lori Ann Piestewa *Tribute*." YouTube, December 19, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qnn3pm7SZQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War." *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1, 1990): 1200–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/2936595.

———. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Knopf, 2008.

Finkel, David. *Thank You for Your Service*. Melbourne: Scribe, 2013.

———. *The Good Soldiers*. New York: Picador, 2009.

Flores, Ray. "Camp Chaparral Native Americans Show VA Caregivers How to Deal with PTSD." YouTube, November 27, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH1tNLJCBis&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Forgotten War. Military Encounters in Afghanistan, directed by Paul Johnson. Documentary Film, 39 min. CreateSpace, 2011.

Fricke, Stefanie. "Erzählstimmen aus dem Terror. Warblogs Amerikanischer Soldaten." In *Amerikanisches Erzählen nach 2000: Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, edited by Sebastian Domsch, 174–96. Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2008.

Fromm, Peter D. "Warriors, the Army Ethos, and the Sacred Trust of Soldiers." *Military Review. The Army Ethic* (2010): 19–26.

Gallagher, Matt, and Roy Scranton, eds. *Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2013.

Gardner, Lloyd C., and Marilyn Blatt Young, eds. *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, or, How Not to Learn from the Past*. New York: New Press, 2007.

Gebert, Katrin. *"Carina unvergessen": Erinnerungskultur im Internetzeitalter*. Marburg: Tectum, 2009.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Geiger, Jeffrey. *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

———. "Taking Aim: New Documentary and War." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 56, no. 2 (2008): 153–73.

Gessner, Ingrid. *Kollektive Erinnerung als Katharsis? Das "Vietnam Veterans Memorial" in der öffentlichen Kontroverse*. Mainzer Studien zur Amerikanistik 44. Frankfurt: Lang, 2000.

Gioia, Dana, preface to *Operation Homecoming. Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*, edited by Andrew Carroll, Updated Edition., xi–xv. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Girard, René, and Patrick Gregory. *Violence and the Sacred*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Goldberg, Amos. "Trauma, Narrative, and Two Forms of Death." *Literature and Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2006): 122–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2006.0019.

Gomez, Don. "Afghanistan Post-Mortem: The End of War." *Carrying the Gun* (blog), March 24, 2015. http://carryingthegun.com/2015/03/24/afghanistan-post-mortem-the-end-of-war/.

———. "The Ethics of the Marine Corps Urination Case." *Carrying the Gun* (blog), October 5, 2013. http://carryingthegun.com/2013/10/05/the-ethics-of-the-marine-corps-urination-case/.

Good, Jennifer, Paul Lowe, Brigitte Lardinois, and Val Williams, eds. *Mythologizing the Vietnam War: Visual Culture and Mediated Memory*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014.

Graybeal, Anna, Janel D. Sexton, and James W. Pennebaker. "The Role of Story-Making in Disclosure Writing: The Psychometrics of Narrative." *Psychology and Health* 17, no. 5 (2002): 571–81.

Greyhawk. "A Brief History of Milblogs." *Mudville Gazette* (blog), November 11, 2005. http://web.archive.org/web/20130512063830/http://www.mudvillegazette.com/archives/003805.html.

Grimes, Ronald L. *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. "Ritual, Media, and Conflict: An Introduction." In *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*, edited by Ronald L. Grimes, Ute Hüsken, Udo Simon, and Eric Venbrux, 1–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. *The Craft of Ritual Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Grohol, John M. "Using Websites, Blogs, and Wikis Within Mental Health." In *The Use of Technology in Mental Health: Applications, Ethics and Practice*, edited by Kate Anthony, DeeAnna Merz Nagel, and Stephen Goss, 68–75. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 2010.

Gross, Lawrence W. *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

———. "Assisting American Indian Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Cope with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Lessons from Vietnam Veterans and the Writings of Jim Northrup." *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 373–409.

———. "Native American and American Military Veterans Resources and Discussion." Veteran Ceremonies. Accessed January 25, 2017. http://www.veteranceremonies.org/.

Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. Boston: Back Bay, 1996.

Grossman, Dave, and Loren W. Christensen. *On Combat, The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace*. 2nd ed., n.p.: PPCT Research Publications, 2007.

Grossman, Lev. "Meet Joe Blog." *Time*, June 13, 2004. http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,650732-2,00.html?iid=sr-link6.

Günther, Lena-Simone. *War Experience and Trauma in American Literature. A Study of American Military Memoirs of Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Frankfurt: Lang, 2016.

Gurak, Laura, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratcliff, and Jessica Reyman, eds. *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20070316152420/http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/.

Gurley, Diana, Douglas K. Novins, Monica C. Jones, Janette Beals, James H. Shore, and Spero M. Manson. "Comparative Use of Biomedical Services

and Traditional Healing Options by American Indian Veterans." *Psychiatric Services* 52, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 68–74. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.52.1.68.

Haberski, Raymond J. *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Hagopian, Patrick. "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation; Gathered at the Wall: America and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; Touching Memories: A Photographic Essay on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial." *Journal of American History* 82, no. 1 (1995): 158–64.

———. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011.

Haigh, Michael M., and Michael Pfau. "Examining the Content of Milblogs and Their Influence on Public Support for War." In *A Communication Perspective on the Military. Interactions, Messages, and Discourses*, edited by Erin Sahlstein Parcell and Lynne M. Webb, 255–74. New York: Lang, 2015.

Haldén, Peter, and Peter Jackson. *Transforming Warriors: The Ritual Organization of Military Force*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Hallman, Christian, and Patrick Pischke. "US Army Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC): From Battlemind to Resiliency, Debriefings, and Traumatic Event Management." In *War Trauma and Its Wake. Expanding the Circle of Healing*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 245–66. Psychosocial Stress Series 44. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Hamilton, Anita. "Best of the War Blogs." *Time*, March 30, 2003. http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,438877,00.html?iid=sr-link2.

Hammer, Stefanie. "How to Commemorate a Fallen Soldier: Ritual and Narrative in the Bundeswehr." In *Ritual and Narrative. Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, 237–65. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

Hanifen, Tim. "Three Gifts You Can Give Returning Veterans That Will Last Them a Lifetime." MarineParents, 2003. http://www.marineparents.com/postmc/3gifts.asp.

Hass, Kristin Ann. *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

———. *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

Hawley, Thomas M. "Bodies and Border Practices: The Search for American MIAs in Vietnam." *Body and Society* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 49–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X02008003003.

Hedges, Chris. *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. New York: Anchor, 2002.

Helbling, Jürg. *Tribale Kriege: Konflikte in Gesellschaften Ohne Zentralgewalt*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2006.

Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*. New York: Dell, 1968.

Hellman, Maria. "Milblogs and Soldier Representations of the Afghanistan War: The Case of Sweden." *Media, War and Conflict* (November 3, 2015): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635215611701.

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner Classics, 1997.

"Heracles: The Idea of the Hero." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed September 29, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/heracles-the-idea-of-the-hero-descr-2.

Herman, David. "Introduction: Narratologies." In *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, edited by David Herman, 1–30. Theory and Interpretation of Narrative. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999.

———. "Toward a Socionarratology: New Ways of Analyzing Natural-Language Narratives." In *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, edited by David Herman, 218–46. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999.

Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery. The Aftermath of Violence From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic, 1992.

Herrmann, Sebastian M. "'To Tell a Story to the American People': Reading the Surge of 'Narrative' in Contemporary Discussions of US Elections as 'Popular Narratology.'" In *Electoral Cultures: American Democracy and Choice*, edited by Georgiana Banita and Sascha Pöhlmann, 323–39. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015.

Herwig, Jana. "Die 140-Zeichen-Frage: Microblogging, Twitter und die liminoide Verhandlung des Sozialen im Web 2.0." In *Freundschaft und Gemeinschaft im Social Web. Bilder-Handeln und Peergroup-Kommunikation auf Facebook und Co*, edited by Klaus Neumann-Braun and Ulla Patricia Autenrieth, 195–211. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011.

Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Hobbs, Lorrie. "VA and IHS: Further Action Needed To Collaborate on Providing Health Care to Native American Veterans." Washington, DC: GAO, April 1, 2013. PDF.

Hobsbawm, Eric J., and Terence O. Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hoge, Charles W. *Once a Warrior – Always a Warrior: Navigating the Transition from Combat to Home – Including Combat Stress, PTSD, and MTBI*. Guilford: Lyons Press, 2010.

Holm, Tom. "American Indian Warfare. The Cycles of Conflict and the Militarization of Native North America." In *A Companion to American Indian History*, edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury, 154–72. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004.

———. "Culture, Ceremonialism, and Stress: American Indian Veterans and the Vietnam War." *Armed Forces and Society* 12, no. Winter 02 (January 1, 1986): 237–51.

———. "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment." *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 2 (1995): 83–86.

———. "Strong Hearts: Native Service in the U.S. Armed Forces." In *Aboriginal Peoples and Military Participation: Canadian and International Perspectives*, edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer, R. Scott Sheffield, and Craig Leslie Mantle, 127–52. Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy, 2007.

———. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls. Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

Holyfield, Lori. *Veterans' Journeys Home: Life after Afghanistan and Iraq*. London: Routledge, 2016.

"Homer's Odyssey." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed August 4, 2017. http://youstories.com/stories/detail/homers-odyssey.

Howard, John W., and Laura C. Prividera. "Nationalism and Soldiers' Health: Media Framing of Soldiers' Returns from Deployments." In *A Communication Perspective on the Military. Interactions, Messages, and Discourses*, edited by Erin Sahlstein Parcell and Lynne M. Webb, 217–36. New York: Lang, 2015.

Howard, Robert Glenn. "Enacting a Virtual 'Ekklesia': Online Christian Fundamentalism as Vernacular Religion.'" *New Media and Society* 12, no. 5 (November 24, 2009): 729–44.

Hunt, Nigel C. *Memory, War and Trauma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hüppauf, Bernd. *Was ist Krieg? Zur Grundlegung einer Kulturgeschichte des Kriegs*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

Huxley, Julian. "A Discussion on Ritualization of Behaviour in Animals and Man." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B* 251, no. 772 (1966): 249–71.

Hynes, Samuel. *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to a Modern War*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues. The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.

Jason, Philip K. *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Jessee, Erin. Review of *Memory, War, and Trauma* by Nigel C. Hunt. *Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 393–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohr074.

Jobs, Sebastian. *Welcome Home, Boys! Military Victory Parades in New York City 1899–1946*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2012.

Johnson, David Read, Sus C. Feldman, Hadar Lubin, and Steven M. Southwick. "The Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8, no. 2 (1995): 283–98.

Johnson, Thomas J., and B. K Kaye. "Wag the Blog: How Reliance on Traditional Media and the Internet Influence Credibility Perceptions of Weblogs among Blog Users." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 81 (2004): 622–42.

Jones, Ann. "The Forgotten War: 12 Years in Afghanistan down the Memory Hole". Al Jazeera, October 09, 2013. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/10/forgotten-war-12-years-afghanistan-down-memory-hole-201310212555335 0535.html

Junger, Sebastian. *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*. New York: Grand Central, 2016.

Kapferer, Bruce. "Beyond Ritual as Performance. Towards Ritual as Dynamics and Virtuality." *Paragrana* 19, no. 2 (January 2010): 231–49. https://doi.org/10.1524/para.2010.0036.

Kaplan, Andreas M., and Michael Haenlein. "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media." *Business Horizons*, no. 53 (2010): 59–68.

Kaufmann, L. Jeanne, W. J. "Buck" Richardson, James Floyd, and Jay Shore. "Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR) Training Program: The Effect of Community Outreach Workers on American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans Access to and Utilization of the Veterans Health Administration."

Journal of Community Health 39, no. 5 (October 2014): 990–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-014-9846-6.

Kaye, Barbara K. "It's a Blog, Blog, Blog World: Users and Uses of Weblogs." *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 13, no. 2 (2005): 73–95.

Kaye, Barbara K., and Mark Tremayne. "Blog Use Motivations: An Exploratory Study." In *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*, edited by Mark Tremayne, 127–48. London: Routledge, 2007.

Keeley, Lawrence H. *War Before Civilization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Keren, Michael. *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena*. Lanham: Lexington, 2006.

Kethcart, Randy. "Dedications." 5th Infantry Regiment Association. Accessed February 9, 2016. http://bobcat.ws/dedications.html.

Keyes, Paul R. "Live From the Front: Operational Ramifications of Military Web Logs in Combat Zones." Newport, RI: Joint Military Operations Dept. Naval War College, May 10, 2007.

Kieran, David. *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014.

King, Anthony. *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Kinniburgh, James B., and Dorothy E. Denning. *Blogs and Military Information Strategy*. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2006.

Kitch, Carolyn. "'Mourning in America': Ritual, Redemption, and Recovery in News Narrative after September 11." *Journalism Studies* 4, no. 2 (2003): 213–24.

Klein, Joe. "Can Service Save Us?" *Time*, June 20, 2013. http://nation.time.com/2013/06/20/can-service-save-us/.

———. *Charlie Mike: A True Story of Heroes Who Brought Their Mission Home*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

Klemm, Michael. "Doing Being a Fan im Web 2.0. Selbstdarstellung, soziale Stile und Aneignungspraktiken in Fanforen." *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Linguistik* 56, no. 1 (January 2012): 3–32. https://doi.org/10.1515/zfal-2012-0002.

Koenigsberg, Richard. "Aztec Warriors/Western Soldiers. The Body Politic Feeds upon Human Bodies." Library of Social Science. Accessed December 5, 2015. https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/newsletter/posts/2016/2016-06-08-RAK-azw.html.

Kramer, B. Josea, Stella Jouldjian, Mingming Wang, Jeff Dang, Michael N. Mitchell, Bruce Finke, and Debra Saliba. "Do Correlates of Dual Use by American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans Operate Uniformly Across the Veterans Health Administration and the Indian Health Service?" *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 26, no. Suppl 2 (November 2011): 662–68. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-011-1834-2.

Kuehn, John. "Thank You for Your Service? No, Thank You." H-Net, H-War (forum), November 14, 2014. https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/discussions/52070/thank-you-your-service-no-thank-you.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Lambek, Michael. "Religion and Morality." In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, edited by Didier Fassin, 341–58. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Lampa, Graham. "Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing." In *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, edited by Gurak et al., n. pag., 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20070317114955/http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/imagining_the_blogosphere.html.

Laubin, Reginald, and Gladys Laubin. *Indian Dances of North America: Their Importance to Indian Life*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.

Laufer, Robert S. "The Serial Self: War Trauma, Identity, and Adult Development." In *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by John P. Wilson, Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana, 33–54. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Lawson, Sean. "Loosing The Blogs Of War. The Advent of 'Milblogging' in the post-9/11 U.S. Military." LinkedIn SlideShare. August 15, 2007. http://www.slideshare.net/transtracker/lawson-loosing-the-blogs-of-war.

LeBlanc, Steven A. *Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003.

Leche, Christine Dumaine. *Outside the Wire: American Soldiers' Voices from Afghanistan*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.

Lee, Scott A. *PTSD. A Soldier's Perspective* (blog). 2016 http://ptsdasoldiersperspective.blogspot.de/

Leikauf, Roland. "*Welcome to My Bunker.*" *Vietnamkriegserfahrung im Internet*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015.

Lewis, Bradley. "Taking a Narrative Turn in Psychiatry." *The Lancet* 383, no. 9911 (January 2014): 22–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62722-1.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans*. repr. and updated ed. New York: Other Press, 2005.

Limon, John. *Writing After War: American War Fiction from Realism to Postmodernism: American War Fiction from Realism to Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Lücking, Daniel. "Aufräumen, Kamerad! Raus aus der Dunkelziffer!" *Aufräumen, Kamerad!* (blog), 2015. https://web.archive.org/web/20141219205807/http://ptbsblog.daniel-luecking.de/ (site discontinued).

Mahan, Jeffrey H. Review of *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality* by Rachel Wagner. *Religious Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (June 2012): 86.

Mallamo, Jenny Lu. "Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide With Stories." *Time*, April 11, 2015. http://time.com/3818170/military-stories/.

Mark, Gloria, Mossaab Bagdouri, Leysia Palen, James Martin, Ban Al-Ani, and Kenneth Anderson. "Blogs as a Collective War Diary." In *Proceedings of the ACM 2012 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 37–46. New York: ACM, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1145/2145204.2145215.

Marlantes, Karl. *What It Is Like to Go to War*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011.

Marlowe, Ann. "Sebastian Junger's Fascinatingly Wrong-Headed 'Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging.'" Tablet Magazine, July 7, 2016. http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/207079/members-of-a-tribe.

Martin, Travis L., Brian Mockenhaupt, Wanda Fries, Ami Blue, Jenny Bell, and Lisa Day, eds. *The Journal of Military Experience*. Vol. 2. Eastern Kentucky University, 2012. http://militaryexperience.org/the-journal-of-military-experience-vol-2/.

Marvin, Carolyn, and David W. Ingle. "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Revisiting Civil Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 767–80.

Masur, Louis P. *"…The Real War Will Never Get in the Books": Selections from Writers During the Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

McKegney, Sam. *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014.

McNally, Richard J. "Are We Winning the War against Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?" *Science* 336, no. 6083 (2012): 872–74.

McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. The Oxford History of the United States 6. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Meadows, William C. *Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche Military Societies. Enduring Veterans, 1800 to the Present*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

———. *Kiowa Military Societies: Ethnohistory and Ritual*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010.

Meagher, Ilona. *Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*. Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2007.

Medicine Crow, Joseph, and Herman J. Viola. *Counting Coup: Becoming a Crow Chief on the Reservation and Beyond*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006.

Meineck, Peter, and David Konstan, eds. *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

"Michael Meade – Mosaic Voices." Michael Meade – Mosaic Voices. Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, 2016. http://www.mosaicvoices.org/.

"Milblogging.Com: The World's Largest Index of Military Blogs (Milblogs)." Milblogging.com, December 16, 2013. http://web.archive.org/web/20131216020549/http://milblogging.com/.

"Military Experience and the Arts." Military Experience and the Arts, 2018. http://militaryexperience.org/

Mitchell, Matt. "100 Faces of War Experience. Portraits and Words of Americans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan." 100 Faces Exhibition, 2014. http://100facesofwarexperience.org/.

"Mission. Theater of War." Outside The Wire, 2018. http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/about/mission.

Moe, Todd A, Major. "Social Media and the U.S. Army: Maintaining a Balance." SAMS Monograph Series. Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, April 28, 2011.

Mohatt, Gerald, and Joseph Eagle Elk. *The Price of a Gift: A Lakota Healer's Story*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

Molin, Peter. "The Post-9/11 Condition: The Best ETT of Us All." *15-Month Adventure* (blog), September 7, 2011. https://petermolin.wordpress.com/2011/09/07/the-best-ett-of-them-all/.

Monnet, Agnieszka Soltysik. "War and National Renewal: Civil Religion and Blood Sacrifice in American Culture." *European Journal of American Studies*, special issue Wars and New Beginnings in American History (April 4, 2012). https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.9672.

Moodley, Roy, and William West. *Integrating Traditional Healing Practices Into Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005.

Moon, John Ellis van Courtland. *Confines of Concept: American Strategy in World War II*. New York: Garland, 1988.

Morgan, Speer, and Greg Michalson, eds. *For Our Beloved Country: American War Diaries from the Revolution to the Persian Gulf*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994.

Morie, Jacquelyn F., Edward Haynes, and Eric Chance. "Warriors' Journey: A Path to Healing Through Narrative Exploration." *International Journal on Disability and Human Development* 10, no. 1 (2011): 17–23. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijdhd.2011.014.

Morris, Glen. *The Babylon Blog: One Man's Journey to the War and Back*. Mustang, OK: Tate, 2008.

Moskos, Charles C. "The All-Volunteer Military: Calling, Profession, or Occupation." *Parameters* 7, no. 1 (1977): 2–9.

Muehlbauer, Matthew S., and David J. Ulbrich. *Ways of War: American Military History from the Colonial Era to the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Nagel, DeeAnna Merz, and K. Anthony. "Writing Therapy Using New Technologies—the Art of Blogging." *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 22, no. 1 (2009): 41–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/08893670802708001.

Nagel, DeeAnna Merz, and Gregory Palumbo. "The Role of Blogging in Mental Health." In *The Use of Technology in Mental Health: Applications, Ethics and Practice*, edited by Kate Anthony, DeeAnna Merz Nagel, and Stephen Goss, 76–84. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 2010.

Nardi, Bonnie A., Diane J. Schiano, and Michelle Gumbrecht. "Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?" In *Proceedings of the 2004 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 222–31. New York: ACM, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1145/1031607.1031643.

"Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing." Administration for Native Americans, February, 15, 2018. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/resource/native-american-veterans-storytelling-for-healing-0.

Neimeyer, Robert. "Re-Storying Loss. Fostering Growth in the Post-Traumatic Narrative." In *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice*, edited by Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi, 68–80. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. Later Printing edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Niedermeier, Silvan. "Imperial Narratives: Reading US Soldiers' Photo Albums of the Philippine–American War." *Rethinking History* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2014.873581.

Noe, Timothy D., Carol E. Kaufman, L. Jeanne Kaufmann, Elizabeth Brooks, and Jay H. Shore. "Providing Culturally Competent Services for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans to Reduce Health Care Disparities." *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. S4 (August 2014): 548–54.

Nora, Pierre. *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*. Translated by Wolfgang Kaiser. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998.

Norris, Margot. *Writing War in the Twentieth Century*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000.

Nünning, Ansgar. "Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term." In *What Is Narratology?: Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, edited by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, 239–75. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003.

Nünning, Ansgar, and Vera Nünning. "On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and Their Potential for Ritual Studies." In *Ritual and Narrative. Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, edited by Vera Nünning, Gregor Ahn, and Jan Rupp, 51–76. Cultural and Media Studies. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

Nünning, Vera, and Jan Rupp. "Ritual and Narrative, an Introduction." In *Ritual and Narrative. Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, edited by Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp, and Gregor Ahn, 1–24. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

O'Brien, Bobbie. "4–15-Mlt-Rex-Heads-Home.Mp3." Podcast MP3 Audio. Accessed January 21, 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20160523175013/https://afghanistanmylasttour.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/4-15-mlt-rex-heads-home.mp3.

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried: A Work of Fiction*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009.

"Odyssey – Coming Home." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed October 12, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/odyssey--coming-home-descr-2.

O'Neill, Theresa D. "'Coming Home' among Northern Plains Vietnam Veterans: Psychological Transformations in Pragmatic Perspective." *Ethos* 27, no. 4 (1999): 441–65.

Ontario Institute of Studies in Education. "Indigenizing Psychology Symposium. Indigenous Education Network (IEN)." Accessed April 15, 2016. http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ien/2016_Indigenizing_Psychology_Symposium/index.html.

Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience, directed by Richard Robbins. Documentary, 81 min, 2007. DVD.

"Our Mission." Team Rubicon, 2017. https://teamrubiconusa.org/our-mission/.

Owen, Gary. "Why General Campbell's Right About Airstrikes." *Sunny in Kabul* (blog), May 21, 2015. https://web.archive.org/web/20150708062012/http://sunnyinkabul.com/2015/05/21/why-general-campbells-right-about-airstrikes/.

Pache, Corinne. "Heracles and the Idea of the Hero." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed October 5, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/essay--heracles-and-the-idea-of-the-hero.

Parson, Erwin Randolph. "Post-Traumatic Self Disorders (PTsfD): Theoretical and Practical Considerations in Psychotherapy of Vietnam Veterans." In *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by John P. Wilson, Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana, 245–83. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Pawlyk, Oriana. "Seeking Ways to Bridge 'Civilian-Military Gap.'" *USA Today*, March 23, 2015. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/03/23/bridging-civilian-military-gap/70326160/.

Pennebaker, James W. "Writing About Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process." *Psychological Science* 8, no. 3 (May 1, 1997): 162–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x.

Pennebaker, James W., and Janel D. Seagal. "Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 55, no. 10 (1999): 1243–54.

Phillips, Richard. "Back in the Saddle Again." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), January 12, 2009. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2009_01_01_archive.html.

———. "Back to Afghanistan!" *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), November 16, 2009. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.com/2009/11/back-to-afghanistan.html.

———. "Crazy Mud and Good Advice." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), February 21, 2008. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2008/02/crazy-mud-and-good-advice.html.

———. "I Belong on the Front Line!" *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), September 4, 2008. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2008/09/i-belong-on-front-line.html.

———. *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog). Accessed March 4, 2018. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/.

———. "Stress in the Army Today." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), February 7, 2009. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2009/02/stress-in-army-today.html.

———. "The Bloggers Among Us." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), February 17, 2008. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2008/02/bloggers-among-us.html.

———. "Week 12: Khowst Province." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), April 9, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/04/week-12-khowst-province.html.

———. "Week 13: The Beginning of a Long, Hot Summer." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), April 17, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/04/week-13-beginning-of-long-hot-summer.html.

———. "Week 15: A Week to Forget." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), April 30, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/04/week-15-week-to-forget.html.

———. "Week 16: The Sun Comes Out Again." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), May 6, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/05/week-16-sun-comes-out-again.html.

———. "Week 21: Winning the War." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), June 17, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/06/week-21-winning-war.html.

———. "Week 23: Soldier On." *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), July 3, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.com/2007/07/week-23-soldier-on.html.

———. "Week 27: Busy, Busy, Busy…" *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), August 10, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/08/week-27-busy-busy-busy.html.

"Philoctetes: The Ethics of War." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed April 3, 2018. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/philoctetes-the-ethics-of-war-descr.

pptsapper. "Stop Calling Us Warriors." *The Angry Staff Officer* (blog), December 14, 2016. https://angrystaffofficer.com/2016/12/14/stop-calling-us-warriors/.

Prucha, Francis Paul. Foreword to *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954*, by Kenneth R. Philp. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Race, William H. "The Therapy of Odysseus in Phaeacia." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed October 5, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/essay--the-therapy-of-odysseus.

Rappaport, Roy A. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Rass, Christoph, ed. *Krieg, Militär und Mobilität*. Studien zur Historischen Migrationsforschung 30. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015.

Reifel, Nancy, Ruth Bayhylle, Nancy Harada, and Valentine Villa. "American Indian Veterans' Views about Their Choices in Health Care: VA, IHS,

and Medicare." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 33, no. 3 (September 2009): 23–33.

"Resources." The Welcome Home Project. Accessed October 10, 2016. http://www.thewelcomehomeproject.org/your-resources/.

Rettberg, Jill Walker. *Blogging*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008.

Reyes, Valvincent. "Enhancing Resiliency Through Creative Outdoor/Adventure and Community-Based Programs." In *War Trauma and Its Wake. Expanding the Circle of Healing*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 267–82. Psychosocial Stress Series 44. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Richtel, Matt. "Please Don't Thank Me for My Service." *New York Times*, February 21, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/sunday-review/please-dont-thank-me-for-my-service.html.

Rid, Thomas. "War 2.0." Hoover Institution – Policy Review, February 21, 2007. https://www.hoover.org/research/war-20.

Robb, Alice. "How Capital Letters Became Internet Code for Shouting." The New Statesman, April 17, 2014. http://www.newstatesman.com/sci-tech/2014/04/how-capital-letters-became-internet-code-shouting.

Robbins, E. L. "Muddy Boots 10: The Rise of Soldier Blogs." *Military Review* 87, no. 5 (2007): 109.

Roberts, Pamela. "The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery." *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (August 1, 2004): 57–76. https://doi.org/10.2190/D41T-YFNN-109K-WR4C.

Roering, Johanna. *Krieg Bloggen: Soldatische Kriegsberichterstattung in Digitalen Medien*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012.

Romanoff, Bronna D, and Barbara E. Thompson. "Meaning Construction in Palliative Care: The Use of Narrative, Ritual, and the Expressive Arts." *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine* 23, no. 4 (August 1, 2006): 309–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049909106290246.

Ronfeldt, David, and John Arquilla. "What Next for Networks and Netwars?" In *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, edited by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, 311–61. Santa Monica: RAND, 2001.

Rosenberg, Scott. *Say Everything: How Blogging Began, What It's Becoming, and Why It Matters*. New York: Crown Publishing, 2009.

Ross, Jeffrey Ian. *American Indians at Risk*. 2 vols. Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2013.

Rossetto, Kelly R., Pamela J. Lannutti, and Elena C. Strauman. "Death on Facebook. Examining the Roles of Social Media Communication for

the Bereaved." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 32, no. 7 (2014): 974–94.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. Introduction to *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, 1–40. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

———. "Ritual Studies and Narratology: What They Can Do for Each Other." In *Ritual and Narrative. Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, edited by Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp, and Gregor Ahn, 27–50. Cultural and Media Studies. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

———. "Will New Media Produce New Narratives?" In *Narratives across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, 337–60. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

Samet, Elizabeth D. "Leaving No Warriors Behind: The Ancient Roots of a Modern Sensibility." *Armed Forces and Society* 31, no. 4 (July 1, 2005): 623–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0503100409.

Savage, Kirk. *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Schild, Georg. Introduction to *The American Experience of War*, edited by Georg Schild, 9–18. Krieg in der Geschichte, (KRiG). Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010.

Schilling, Vincent. "Memorial Day Tribute: American Indian Warriors Who Made the Ultimate Sacrifice in War." *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, May 24, 2014. http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/05/24/memorial-day-tribute-american-indian-warriors-who-made-ultimate-sacrifice-war-155014.

Schmidt, Robert. "Indians in the Military." *Bluecorn Comics*, April 5, 2002. http://www.bluecorncomics.com/military.htm.

Schmidt-Lux, Thomas. "Fans und Religion." In *Fans. Soziologische Perspektiven*, edited by Jochen Roose, Mike S. Schäfer, and Thomas Schmidt-Lux, 281–308. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010.

Schrader, Claire. *Ritual Theatre: The Power of Dramatic Ritual in Personal Development Groups and Clinical Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011.

Schwär, Simone. *Storyfying War: Writing Lives and Combat in Contemporary American War Memoirs*. Trier: WVT, 2014.

"Screening Toolkit." The Welcome. A Healing Journey for War Veterans and their Families. Accessed September 22, 2016. http://www.thewelcomethemovie.com/hostascreeningtoolkit/.

Scurfield, Raymond M. "Healing the Warrior. Admission of Two American Indian War-Veteran Cohort Groups to a Specialized Inpatient PTSD Unit." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 6, no. 3 (1995): 1–22.

———. "Innovative Approaches to Healing War Trauma." In *Healing War Trauma. A Handbook of Creative Approaches*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 1–8. Psychosocial Stress Series. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Scurfield, Raymond M., and Katherine Theresa Platoni, eds. *Healing War Trauma: A Handbook of Creative Approaches*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

———. "Myths and Realities about War, Its Impact, and Healing." In *War Trauma and Its Wake. Expanding the Circle of Healing*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 16–27. Psychosocial Stress Series. New York: Routledge, 2013.

———. *War Trauma and Its Wake: Expanding the Circle of Healing*. Psychosocial Stress Series. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Shachtman, Noah. "Army Squeezes Soldier Blogs, Maybe to Death." Wired, May 2, 2007. http://www.wired.com/politics/onlinerights/news/2007/05/army_bloggers.

Shapiro, Seth, and Lee Humphreys. "Exploring Old and New Media: Comparing Military Blogs to Civil War Letters." *New Media and Society* 15, no. 7 (December 10, 2012): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812466718.

Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

———. *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

———. "The Trials of Homecoming: Odysseus Returns from Iraq/Afghanistan." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 79, no. 3–4 (December 2009): 286–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377310903130332.

Sherrard, Darren. "Veterans Day- Who Is a Veteran?" *VA Careers. Work and Life at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs* (blog), November 9, 2011. Accessed March 12, 2017. http://www.blogs.va.gov/vacareers/363/veterans-day-who-is-a-veteran/.

Shore, Jay, L. Jeanne Kaufmann, Elizabeth Brooks, Byron Bair, Nancy Dailey, W.J. "Buck" Richardson, James Floyd, et al. "Review of American Indian Veteran Telemental Health." *Telemedicine and E-Health* 18, no. 2 (March 2012): 87–94. https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2011.0057.

Silliman, Stephen W. "The 'Old West' in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country." *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 2 (2008): 237–47.

Silver, Steven M., and John P. Wilson. "Native American Healing and Purification Rituals for War Stress." In *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*, edited by John P. Wilson, Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana, 337–355. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Silvestri, Lisa Ellen. *Friended at the Front: Social Media in the American War Zone*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015.

Simon, Cecilia Capuzzi. "Veterans Learn to Write, and Heal." *New York Times*, February 1, 2013, sec. Education/Education Life. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/education/edlife/veterans-learn-to-write-and-heal.html.

Skelton, William B. "Officers and Politicians. The Origins of Army Politics in the United States before the Civil War." In *The Military in America. From the Colonial Era to the Present*, edited by Peter Karsten, 89–110. New York: Free Press, 1980.

Sledge, Michael. *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Smith, Craig A. "The World Wide Web of War." Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, March 15, 2006. http://www.worldcat.org/title/world-wide-web-of-war/oclc/227890362?title=&detail=&page=frame&url=http%3A%2F%2Fhandle.dtic.mil%2F100.2%2FADA449402%26checksum%3D5142f663e768659d769f38f4e5577113&linktype=digitalObject. PDF

Smith, David Paul. "The Sweat Lodge as Psychotherapy. Congruence between Traditional and Modern Healing." In *Integrating Traditional Healing Practices Into Counseling and Psychotherapy*, edited by Roy Moodley and William West, 196–209. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005.

Smith, Philip. "Codes and Conflict: Toward a Theory of War as Ritual." *Theory and Society* 20, no. 1 (1991): 103–38.

Snow, Donald M., and Dennis M. Drew. *From Lexington to Desert Storm and Beyond: War and Politics in the American Experience*. Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2000.

"Soldiers and Citizens Tour." Outside The Wire, 2011. https://web.archive.org/web/20160308185130/http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/soldiers-citizens-tour.

"Soldier's Creed—Army Values." Army.Mil, n.d. http://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html.

Sollors, Werner. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Spragins, Christina. "For My Brother." *Operation Home* (blog), November 22, 2013. http://operationhome.wordpress.com/2013/11/22/for-my-brother/.

———. "Thankfulness(Squared)." *Operation Home* (blog), November 27, 2013. http://operationhome.wordpress.com/2013/11/27/thankfulnesssquared/.

Spychala, Mareike. "Military Femininities and Soldierly Identity in the Iraq War Autobiographies by Female U.S. Veterans." *Tijdschrift Voor Genderstudies* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 321–36. https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2016.3.SPYC.

Stausberg, Michael. "Reflexive Ritualisationen." *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 56, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 54–61. https://doi.org/10.1163/157007304772697230.

Steffen, Tilman. "Internet und Krieg: Wenn Social Networks zum Schützengraben werden." Zeit Online, May 19, 2013, sec. Internet. http://www.zeit.de/digital/internet/2013-05/soldaten-krieg-facebook-twitter.

Steinbock, Bernd. Review of *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks. The New Antiquity* by Peter Meineck and David Konstan. Bryn Mawr Classical Review, August 9, 2015. http://www.bmcreview.org/2015/08/20150815.html.

Fr. Stephen. "A New Tribe, Babylon Diaries Reader." *Babylon Diaries* (blog), August 3, 2016. https://wordpress.com/read/feeds/6067306/posts/1108299834.

Stoltenow, Sascha, and Thomas Wiegold. "Die Digital Natives ziehen in den Krieg." Vimeo.com, May 8, 2013. Video recording. http://vimeo.com/65905002.

Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

"Suicide Wall. Honoring Veterans of Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan." Accessed February 9, 2016. http://www.suicidewall.com/.

Sussebach, Henning. "Veteranen: Krieg im Frieden." Zeit Online, March 29, 2014. http://www.zeit.de/2014/13/bundeswehr-veteranen-afghanistan/komplettansicht.

Taking Chance, directed by Ross Katz. Drama. HBO, 2009. DVD.

Tambiah, Stanley J. "A Performative Approach to Ritual." In *Culture, Thought, and Social Action. An Anthropological Perspective*, 113–69. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Tan, Leon. "Psychotherapy 2.0: MySpace® Blogging as Self-Therapy." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 62, no. 2 (2008): 143–63.

Tanielian, Terri, and Lisa H. Jaycox. "Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery." Rand, 2008. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG720.html.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Tedeschi, Richard G., and Lawrence G. Calhoun. "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence." *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 1–18.

Temple, Liisa. "Back Safely from Another Mission but No Internet." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), July 6, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130629060643/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/07/06/back-safely-from-another-mission-but-no-internet/.

———. "Tributes to Captain Matthew Freeman." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 13, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20090827090030/http://www.afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/08/13/tributes-to-captain-matthew-freeman/.

———. "Update about SPC Chris 'Kit' Lowe's Recovery." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 16, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130704231158/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/09/16/update-about-scp-chris-kit-lowes-recovery/.

Temple, Rex. "3 US Soldiers Killed." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), May 26, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20090531194749/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/05/26/3-us-soldiers-killed/.

———. "234th Marine Birthday and Sorting School Supplies." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), November 11, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130705035234/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/11/11/234th-marine-birthday-and-sorting-school-supplies/.

———. "A Mountain of Pens." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 24, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130731203320/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/09/24/a-mountain-of-pens/.

———. "A Quiet Sunday and Lamb Kabobs." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), June 7, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130720095356/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/07/a-quiet-sunday-and-lamb-kabobs/.

———. "A Soldier's Final Journey Home – Link to Photo Slide Show at the Bottom." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), July 17, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20100623034103/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/07/17/a-soldiers-final-journey-home-link-to-photo-slide-show-at-the-bottom/.

———. "Afghanistan My Last Tour." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), https://web.archive.org/web/20160110085059/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/.

———. "Air Force Crew Serve Weapon Certified." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), October 9, 2009. https://web.archive.org/

web/20130720140841/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/10/09/air-force-crew-serve-weapon-certified/.

———. "Another Training Day Fighting the Bad Guys." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), April 9, 2009. Accessed February 5, 2015. http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/04/09/another-training-day/.

———. "Camp Memorial Service for Capt. Matthew Freeman." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 15, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20161214094016/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/15/camp-memorial-service-for-capt-matthew-freeman/.

———. "Captain Freeman's Annapolis Service." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 26, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130705001129/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/26/captain-freemans-annapolis-memorial-service/.

———. "CBS News Sunday Morning: A Day to Remember." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 7, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130720102845/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/07/cbs-news-sunday-morning-a-day-to-remember/.

———. "Charity Drive, Mentoring and New Dog." *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), June 1, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160407033920/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/01/charity-drive-mentoring-and-new-dog/.

———. "Combat Heroes SPC Lowe and Captain Freeman." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 11, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20141010184711/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/11/combat-hero/.

———. "Coming Home." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), April 23, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20161016100110/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2010/04/23/coming-home/.

———. "Darulaman Mission-Part 3." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 10, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160625015504/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/09/10/darulaman-mission-part-3/.

———. "Darulaman Mission-Part One." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 9, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20150110063941/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/09/09/darulaman-mission-part-one/.

———. "Day 1 - Medical Mission to Uzbin Valley." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), June 18, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160729100009/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/18/day-1-medical-mission-to-uzbin-valley/.

———. "Flying High against the Taliban." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 25, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160318160530/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/09/25/flying-high-against-the-taliban/.

———. “Honoring Capt Freeman, SPC Lowe + Other Camp Business.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 9, 2008. https://web.archive.org/web/20130623072941/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/09/honoring-capt-freeman-spc-lowe-other-camp-business/.

———. “Honoring MAJ Rocco M. Barnes.” *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), June 9, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20161212151839/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/09/honoring-maj-rocco-m-barnes/.

———. “In Memory of the Fallen.” *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), June 6, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130705001937/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/06/in-memory-of-the-fallen/.

———.“Memorial Service for Fallen Hero—SGT Raymundo Morales.” *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), July 26, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130720100541/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/07/26/memorial-service-for-fallen-hero%E2%80%94sgt-raymundo-morales/.

———. “Mentoring My ANA SGM.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), July 11, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20090719140915/http://www.afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/07/11/trying-to-interview-my-ana-sgm/.

———. “My Day Off!!!!” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), July 10, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20090722060154/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/07/10/my-day-off/.

———. “My First Afghan Meal.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), May 14, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20141022161312/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/05/14/my-first-afghan-meal/.

———. “Orphanage Visit.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), September 29, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20140907150322/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/09/29/orphanage-visit/.

———. “Rose Garden.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), June 11, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160729092150/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/11/rose-garden/.

———. “Saying Goodbye to Capt. Freeman.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), August 15, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160805182107/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/08/15/saying-goodbye-to-capt-freeman/.

———. “Slow Day and Playing Scrabble.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), June 10, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160624193625/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/10/slow-day-playing-scrabble/.

———. “Somber News - Lost Another 4 US Troops.” *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), June 2, 2009. https://web.archive.org/

web/20130720102857/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/06/02/somber-news-lost-another-4-us-troops/.

———. "Tagab Valley VMO – Part 3/Conclusion." *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), July 24, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20100729013523/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/07/24/tagab-valley-vmo-part-3conclusion/.

———. "The Writer." *Afghanistan My Last Tour*, n.d. https://web.archive.org/web/20161212221847/https://afghanistanmylasttour.com/the-writer/.

———. "Update on SPC Lowe and Memorial for Capt. Freeman." *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), August 14, 2009. http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/?s=Update+on+SPC+Lowe+and+memorial+for+Capt.+Freeman. Accessed March 21, 2016.

———. "Video Report: DOWNRANGE by Pentagon Channel." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), July 25, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130731205106/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/07/25/video-report-downrange-by-pentagon-channel/.

———. "VMO Day 4 - Taliban Determined." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), November 24, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20141009104249/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/11/24/vmo-day-4-taliban-determined/.

———. "VMO Part 2 - Insurgents Attack." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), November 22, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20160210045651/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/11/22/vmo-part-2-insurgents-attack/.

———. "Winning This War with Education." *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), July 9, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130623095617/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/07/09/education-is-a-vital-component-in-winning-this-war/.

———. "Wounded Soldier SPC Lowe Speaks Out." *Afghanistan: My Last Tour* (blog), August 13, 2009. https://afghanistanmylasttour.wordpress.com/2009/08/13/savannah-hero-soldier-spc-lowe-speaks-out/. Accessed March 21, 2016.

Temple, Rex, and Liisa Temple. "About Care Packages - UPDATED." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), May 31, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130720103105/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/05/31/about-care-packages/.

———. "Germany Is Calling + School Supplies Drive Update." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), December 5, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20130704230004/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com/2009/12/05/germany-is-calling-school-supplies-drive-update/.

———. "Miss America Joins School Supplies Drive." *Afghanistan My Last Tour* (blog), October 31, 2009. https://web.archive.org/web/20131219063834/http://afghanistanmylasttour.com:80/2009/10/31/miss-america-joins-school-supplies-drive/.

"The Legacy Project: Letters on Display." The Legacy Project, 2008. http://www.warletters.com/.

"The Mission Continues." The Mission Continues, 2018. http://missioncontinues.org/

The Welcome. A Healing Journey for War Veterans and their Families, directed by Kim Shelton, produced by Bill McMillan. Documentary, 2011. DVD.

"The Welcome: A Healing Journey for Veterans and Their Families." The Welcome. A Healing Journey for War Veterans and their Families. Accessed September 20, 2017. http://www.thewelcomethemovie.com/.

"The Welcome Home Project. Bridging the Divide between Veterans and Civilians." The Welcome Home Project. Accessed April 3, 2018. http://www.thewelcomehomeproject.org/.

"Theater of War: Overview." Outside The Wire, 2011. http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview.

"Theater of War: Soldiers and Citizens Tour." National Council for Behavioral Health, 2017. https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/theater-of-war/.

Thompson, Mark. "The Other 1 %." *Time*, November 21, 2011. Sec. Nation, 34–39.

Tick, Edward. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Wheaton: Quest, 2005.

———. *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War*. Boulder: Sounds True, 2014.

———. "What Is a Warrior." soldiersheart.net, n.d. Accessed April 17, 2014. http://soldiersheart.net/resources/pdf_articles/What_is_a_Warrior.pdf. PDF.

Traversa, Doug. "18 Years." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), January 30, 2007. https://web.archive.org/web/20100511122045/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/01/30_jan_07_well_.html.

———. "AFROTC Detachment." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), October 28, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20100511123059/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2006/10/afrotc_detachme.html

———. "Angry Bear." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), April 12, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508114656/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/04/angry_bear.html.

———. “Anything Is Possible.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), March 25, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100511115729/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/03/anything_is_pos.html.

———. “Children.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), February 21, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100511121030/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/02/21_feb_2007_yay.html.

———. “Clowns.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), May 22, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508113100/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/05/clowns.html.

———. “From Cats to Afghanistan.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), November 6, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20100511122514/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2006/11/from_cats_to_af.html.

———. “Giant Purple Lizards.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), April 16, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508115413/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/04/16_apr_07_liste.html.

———. “History Lesson Part 1.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), March 7, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508122353/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/03/history_lesson_.html.

———. “History Lesson Part 2.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), March 8, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508122446/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/03/history_lesson__1.html.

———. “Introduction: How I Ended up in Afghanistan.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), August 15, 2006. http://web.archive.org/web/20120204033852/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2006/08/you_dont_know_m.html.

———. “Life, the Universe, and Everything.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), April 10, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508114440/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/04/10_april_double.html.

———. “Loose Ends.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), May 20, 2007. http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/05/loose_ends.html.

———. “Marriage.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), February 22, 2007. http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/02/marriage.html.

———. “Pirates of the Taylorbean.” *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), January 28, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100511122008/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/01/28_jan_07_ive_m.html.

———. "Scum and Villainy." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), May 26, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508113152/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/05/scum_and_villai.html.

———. "Sgt David Stephens." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), April 23, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508120409/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/04/sgt_david_steph.html.

———. "Terrible Resolve." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), March 15, 2007. http://web.archive.org/web/20100508080021/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2007/03/index.html.

———. "The Daily Commute." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), October 18, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20100511122958/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2006/10/the_daily_commu.html.

———. "Tool Time." *Afghanistan Without a Clue* (blog), December 27, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20100511122406/http://traversa.typepad.com/afghanistan_without_a_clu/2006/12/tool_time.html.

Tremayne, Mark, ed. *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Tritle, Lawrence. "Soldier's Home." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed October 6, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/essay--soldiers-home.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. *Frontier and Section*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961.

Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

Turney-High, Harry Holbert. *Primitive War. Its Practices and Concepts*. 2nd ed. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.

United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service. "Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity. A Supplement to Mental Health. A Report of the Surgeon General." United States. Dept. of Health and Human Services. U.S. Public Health Service, 2001.

———. Deputy Secretary of Defense. "Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 09–026 - Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-Based Capabilities." United States Deputy Secretary of Defense, February 25, 2010.

———. Veterans Administration. "American Indian and Alaska Native Servicemembers and Veterans." U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, 2012. http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/docs/AIAN_Report_FINAL_v2_7.pdf.

Updike, Nancy. "Will They Know Me Back Home?" Radio Podcast. *This American Life*. NPR, March 11, 2011.

U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Online and Social Media Division. "The United States Army Social Media Handbook 2013." LinkedIn SlideShare, 2016. https://www.slideshare.net/ArtilleryMarketing/the-united-states-army-social-media-handbook-16556225.

Usbeck, Frank. ""Don't Forget about Us, Because We Can't Forget You": A Narrative Approach to the Concept of 'Community' in American Soldier Blogs." In *Participating Audiences, Imagined Public Spheres. The Cultural Work of Contemporary American(Ized) Narratives*, edited by Sebastian M. Herrmann, Carolin A. Hofmann, Katja Kanzler, and Frank Usbeck, 91–114. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2012.

———. "Fighting Like Indians. The 'Indian Scout Syndrome' in American and German War Reports of World War II." In *Visual Representations of Native Americans: Transnational Contexts and Perspectives*, edited by Karsten Fitz, 125–43. Heidelberg: Winter, 2012.

———. "'Keep That Fan Mail Coming.' Ceremonial Storytelling and Audience Interaction in a US Soldier's Milblog." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik/Amerikanistik* 62, no. 2 (2014): 149–63.

———. "'My Blog Is My Therapy': The Sense of Community and Ritual in American Military Blogs." *Journal of Military Experience* 2, (July 2012): 271–86.

———. "Selling the 'Natural-Born Warrior': Representations of Nativeness in the US Military and in Law Enforcement." In *Selling Ethnicity and Race. Consumerism and Representation in Twenty-First-Century America*, edited by Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, Frank Usbeck, Anne Grob, and Maria Lippold, 175–93. Trier: WVT, 2015.

———. "'Taking Chance Home'. Die Rückführung eines Gefallenen und das Verhältnis von Militär und Zivilgesellschaft in US-Soldatenblogs." In *Krieg, Militär und Mobilität*, edited by Christoph Rass, 341–56. Studien zur historischen Migrationsforschung 30. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015.

———. "'The Power of the Story': 'Popular Narratology' in Pentagon Reports on Private Social Media Use in the US Military." In *The Poetics of Politics. Textuality and Social Relevance in Contemporary American Literature and Culture*, edited by Sebastian M. Herrmann, Carolin A. Hofmann, Katja Kanzler, Stefan Schubert, and Frank Usbeck, 313–33. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015.

van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Repr. ed. London: Routledge, 2004.

"Veterans Education Project." Veterans Education Project, n.d. Accessed April 4, 2018. http://vetsed.org/.

"Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall - The Virtual Wall (TM)." March 21, 2018. http://www.virtualwall.org/.

The Vietnam War. Directed by Kan Burns and Lynn Novick. Documentary Series, Florentine Films, PBS, 2017.

Viola, Herman J. *Warriors in Uniform: The Legacy of American Indian Heroism*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008.

Wagner, Rachel. *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality*. Media, Religion and Culture. London: Routledge, 2012.

Wahine, Haole. "In Memory…" *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), September 14, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/09/in-memory.html.

"Warrior Writers." Warrior Writers, 2015. http://www.warriorwriters.org/.

Webbs, Christina. "As I Sit Here in Afghanistan, I Wonder How Many People Truly Appreciate…" *Richard's Deployment to Afghanistan* (blog), October 1, 2007. http://deploymenttoafghanistan.blogspot.de/2007/10/as-i-sit-here-in-afghanistan-i-wonder.html.

Westwell, Guy. *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.

Wiegold, Thomas. "'Wenn möglich auch mit Humor': Die Social Media Guidelines der Bundeswehr." *Augen Geradeaus!* (blog), May 16, 2012. http://augengeradeaus.net/2012/05/wenn-moglich-auch-mit-humor-die-social-media-guidelines-der-bundeswehr/.

Wille, Dennis G. "Every Soldier a Messenger: Using Social Media in the Contemporary Operating Environment." Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, May 11, 2012. PDF.

Wilson, Edmund. *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Wilson, John P. "Culture-Specific Pathways to Healing and Transformation for War Veterans Suffering PTSD." In *Healing War Trauma. A Handbook of Creative Approaches*, edited by Raymond Monsour Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 47–67. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Wilson, John P., Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana, eds. *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*. Plenum Series on Stress and Coping 4. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Wilson, John P., and Catherine So-kum Tang. *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*. New York: Springer, 2007. http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=371627.

Wilson, Robert M., Susan Leary, Matthew Mitchell, and Daniel Ritchie. "Military Veterans Sharing First-Person Stories of War and Homecoming: A Pathway to Social Engagement, Personal Healing, and Public Understanding

of Veterans' Issues." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 79, no. 3–4 (December 2009): 392–432. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377310903130373.

Wood, John A. *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016.

Woodruff, Paul. "Philoctetes, a Short Introduction." Aquila Theatre YouStories. Accessed October 5, 2016. http://youstories.com/resources/detail/essay--philoctetes-a-short-introduction-by-paul-woodruff.

Würich, Sabine, and Ulrike Scheffer. *Operation Heimkehr: Bundeswehrsoldaten über ihr Leben nach dem Auslandseinsatz*. Berlin: Links Christoph Verlag, 2014.

Yonkman, Mary McNaught, and John Marshall Bridgeland. "All Volunteer Force. From Military to Civilian Service." n.p.: Civic Enterprises, November 11, 2009.

Young, Allan. *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Zacchea, Michael. "Veteran's Advocacy: Social Justice and Healing through Activism." In *Healing War Trauma. A Handbook of Creative Approaches*, edited by Raymond M. Scurfield and Katherine Theresa Platoni, 30–44. Psychosocial Stress Series 44. New York: Routledge, 2013.