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Weaponized Women in Contemporary Visual Culture: Representing Military Women in the 'War on Terror'

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Orientadores: Professora Doutora Susana Isabel Arsénio Nunes Costa Araújo
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Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas

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Trabalho financiado por fundos nacionais através da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, no âmbito de uma Bolsa Individual de Doutoramento (PD/BD/128073/2016)

2021

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of military women in contemporary Western visual culture during the 'War on Terror' (2001-present). Through the comparison of cultural productions that center on military women (e.g. films, TV series, etc.), I assess the current perpetuation of representational patterns established by a long tradition of the military/war genre. Moreover, I attempt to identify new patterns and tropes, and also categorize any divergences to pre-established patterns. With this study I intend to explore the hypothesis that military women are subjected to systematic stereotyping when featured in fictional narratives as protagonists, which I understand to be a signal of a larger problem, concerning the instrumentalization of military women by military/political forces. Drawing from the works of Cynthia Enloe, Barbara Ehrenreich, Yvonne Tasker, among other critics who theorized on this subject, I attempt to expand on what was already written, adding original material relating exclusively to the period of the 'War on Terror'.

Through the comparison and analysis of intermedia artworks from the US and European countries (UK, and France), I offer a wide cultural study on the fictionalization of military women. By focusing on US and European cultural representations of servicewomen I aim to verify the existence of similarities which may suggest a transatlantic cohesion in regard to not only representational tropes, but also military/political interests.

The thesis is divided into three parts, each corresponding to an important stage in military life. Therefore, chronologically, the first part is dedicated to 'Boot Camp', the second to 'Deployment', and the last to 'Discharge'. This structure is intended to compartmentalize stages that introduce different sets of challenges to women in the military. Through this approach, I am able to direct my focus towards each segment as a whole, exploring correspondent cultural products that encompass dominant representations in each stage of military life.

The final objective of this research is to acknowledge how fictional depictions of military women can help us achieve a clearer image of a collective Western understanding of what it means to be a female and a soldier. Additionally, I aim to identify how those depictions are used to convey specific ideological messages pertaining to (trans)national interests during the 'War on Terror'. Furthermore, through this cultural analysis I intend to contribute to an expanding field concerned with gender equality in Western armed forces.

Keywords: Military Women; Visual Culture; Military/War Genre; Representation; 'War on Terror'; Western Culture; Gender Equality.

Resumo

Esta tese analisa representações da mulher militar na cultura visual Ocidental contemporânea durante o período da 'Guerra ao Terror' (2001-presente). Através da comparação de produtos culturais centrados na mulher militar (e.g. filmes, séries de TV, etc.), examino a perpetuação actual de padrões de representação estabelecidos por uma longa tradição do género militar/guerra. Para além deste trabalho de comparação, identifico novos padrões e estereótipos, ao mesmo tempo categorizando divergências dos padrões previamente estabelecidos. Com este estudo, pretendo explorar a hipótese de que as mulheres militares estão sujeitas a estereótipos sistemáticos aquando protagonizam narrativas ficcionais, o que problematizo enquanto instrumentalização da mulher militar por forças militares/políticas. Apoiando-me nos trabalhos de Cynthia Enlow, Barbara Ehrenreich, Yvonne Tasker, entre outra/os crítica/os que teorizaram acerca deste tópico, pretendo expandir o trabalho que já existe, acrescentando material original relacionado exclusivamente com o período da 'Guerra ao Terror'.

Através da comparação e análise de vários tipos de obras artísticas visuais provindas dos Estados Unidos e de países Europeus (Reino Unido e França), dedico-me a um alargado estudo cultural focado na ficcionalização da mulher militar. Ao focar-me em representações culturais estadunidenses e europeias pretendo verificar a existência de semelhanças que possam sugerir uma coesão transatlântica no que diz respeito não só a estereótipos representacionais, mas também a interesses militares/políticos.

Esta tese está dividida em três partes, cada uma correspondendo a uma fase importante da vida militar. Desta forma, cronologicamente, a primeira parte intitula-se 'Boot Camp' (campo de treino militar), a segunda 'Deployment' (projecção das forças militares no terreno), e a última 'Discharge' (dispensa militar). Esta estrutura visa compartimentar períodos que apresentam conjuntos de dificuldades diferentes para a mulher militar. Através desta abordagem, direcciono o meu foco de atenção para cada

segmento como um todo, explorando produções culturais correspondentes que demonstram as representações dominantes em cada fase da vida militar.

O objectivo final deste trabalho de investigação é identificar o que dizem as representações ficcionais da mulher militar acerca de um entendimento Ocidental colectivo do que significa ser mulher e soldado. Adicionalmente, pretendo também reconhecer como essas representações são utilizadas para transmitir mensagens ideológicas específicas, relativas a interesses (trans)nacionais durante a 'Guerra ao Terror'. Através desta análise cultural pretendo ainda contribuir para os estudos que apoiam a igualdade de género nas forças armadas Ocidentais.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres Militares; Cultura Visual; Género Militar/Guerra; Representação; 'Guerra ao Terror'; Cultura Ocidental; Igualdade de Género.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people who, in one way or another, made their contributions indispensable to the completion of this PhD thesis.

Firstly, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Susana Araújo, not only for her unwavering dedication to her supervisees, but also for her guidance, support, and friendship. My co-supervisors, Professor Hilary Neroni, who has improved my research with her suggestions, and Professor Luísa Soares, who has always been a supporter of my academic work. Also, Professor Donata Meneghelli, who supervised my stay in Bologna, and assisted me with shaping the structure of the thesis. A special thanks to Bernard Flowers, who has kindly provided several materials related to his artworks, allowing me to better study them.

I would like to thank the Centre for Comparative Studies (School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon), and the International FCT PhD Programme in Comparative Studies (PhD COMP), for their institutional and financial support. Also, I thank FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia for the four-year scholarship which permitted me to be a researcher full-time.

My mother Cila, sister Tânia, father Joaquim, and brother-in-law Ricardo who support me unconditionally, and have helped me through this process by creating a loving and safe environment for me. Not forgetting my two amazing nephews, Vasco and Lucas, who always put a smile on my face.

My amazing friends: Elena Cordero Hoyo, for her contagious joy, and for sharing with me the ups and downs of a PhD. Eva Dinis, for her valuable encouragement during harsh times. Sandra Camacho, for her companionship and precious help throughout this whole process. Inês (Fina) Costa, for being such a good friend for more than fifteen years. Joana Fernandes, for her loving friendship, which I treasure greatly. A special thanks to my dear friend Igor Furão, who has accompanied me in this journey, and has not only given me assistance with research and with the writing process, but has also been a friend for all occasions.

Most of all, my husband Hugo Cerqueira, for always believing in me, and for motivating me to continue my journey in whichever direction I choose to take.

To the strongest woman I have ever met and ever will,
my sister, Lieutenant Tânia Alexandra Romão Alves Duque,
of the Portuguese Air Force.

Introduction

The drive for this project was a long-brewing one. It started in 1998, I was eleven when my sister joined the Portuguese Air Force at the age of eighteen. This was only a few years after the 1992 wider integration of women into the armed forces in Portugal, so her path, along with the path of other women enlisting in those days, was still exploratory. I remember my sister telling us about the struggles she encountered, especially during those early years, how she was accosted because of her body, and how she struggled to find her footing in a changing environment. However, what I remember most, was when she completely shaved her head, a decision not entirely rare for female soldiers, but still a big surprise for me, as I was still in my early teens. As I got older and my studies progressed, I became increasingly interested in the fields of gender studies and visual culture, and I found that it was only natural that I would apply my interests to a military context. This interest developed even further after researching the role of Lynndie England (along with other US military women) in the 2004 Abu Ghraib torture scandal, which lead to my MA thesis, entitled 'Experimenting with Torture: Abu Ghraib Through the Lens of Paul Scheuring's *The Experiment*' (FLUL, 2014). I then decided to dedicate my PhD research to examining representations of military women in contemporary visual culture, a topic inspired by my incredibly courageous sister Tânia, who has been a part of the Portuguese Air Force for over twenty years now.

Warfare has historically been a popular topic for cultural productions such as photography, music, and even accompanying the beginning of filmmaking. Even though this is mainly due to propagandist strategies, war stories have also been used as a setting against which characters could manifest moral fiber and valor, making the war genre a popular one amongst the general population. The protagonists of these cultural productions are usually soldiers, whose actions and behavior have the power to inform

the public about the war itself. Iconic photographs and films, among other cultural productions, are intrinsically connected with the public's idea of a particular war, and thus the types of soldiers' representations are important contributors to the characterization of wars. Warfare thus became a part of popular entertainment. As women began to be integrated into the armed forces in Western countries, at different rates, they too began to be featured into multiple cultural productions.

One of the military women who testified for the documentary *Invisible War* confesses: "I used to see movies of the military and I knew that was me, it was what I wanted to be"[1]. Films can inspire us to change our behavior, strive to look a certain way, and even to dedicate our lives to a certain career. Civilian's only contact with warzones are often solely made through digital screens or cinema theaters. In her TED Talk, as veteran Zoe Bedell addresses an audience of civilians to explain the concept of "direct combat units" (i.e. military units that engage in close combat), she tells them: "Think about any military movie you probably ever seen"[2]. Bedell understands that, by saying this, it will be much easier for her to explain that particular military concept, as 'direct ground combat units' are widely well represented in visual culture, and thus, a concept familiar to civilians. This example illustrates the massive influence of representativity and visibility within popular culture, contributing to the reasons that validate the need for my research.

This thesis is the result of an extensive study on the representation of military women in visual culture, which aims to understand in what ways servicewomen are used as a tool to portray a specific message, oftentimes supporting a preconceived stereotype about military women. In this thesis I refer to this type of exploitation as '*weaponization'*, the use of fictional military women as a 'weapon' in an ideological war.

Even though I address a multitude of art forms in the thesis, including photography, novels, music, among others, I mainly focus on films and TV series, as they are one of the prime sources of entertainment, and directly influence a large part of the population. The films/TV series I focus on are mainly within the wide scope of the *military/war genre*. I chose to combine 'military' and 'war' under the same genre because, in my understanding, fictional narratives set against the backdrop of either a military base

[1] *Invisible War*, 2012, dir. Kirby Dick.
[2] TEDx Talks, "Women in Combat: Zoe Bedell at TEDxHarvardLawSchool", YouTube video, 15:45 minutes, May 2, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsyJl98XGqk (accessed November 2019).

or an armed conflict, share a common set of ground rules, subordinating narratives centered on soldiers to the same genre. Furthermore, I have decided to confine my research to the period of the 'War on Terror' (also known as 'Global War on Terrorism'), the ongoing military campaign launched by the US in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 which led to several armed conflicts. I acknowledge that the term 'War on Terror' – as well as the policies it denotes – is not without its controversy, as it accompanies the political rhetoric specific to the government of former US president George W. Bush. This 'war' exists outside common conflict frameworks of time and space, as it only has a starting date but no end in sight. However, in order to circumscribe my research, I refer to the period of the 'War on Terror' to signal the time period of interest to my research. Furthermore, I will mainly be addressing two of the major armed conflicts during this period, the wars in Afghanistan (2001-present) and Iraq (2003-2011). This choice is primarily due to the fact that most of the fictional representations I have chosen as case studies take place during one of those wars.

I have confined my research to the geographical scope of Western societies, as I am interested in exposing common patterns of stereotyped representations of military women, and in identifying any shifts in the paradigm of representing servicewomen in Western visual culture. Exploring how depictions of servicewomen might be echoed across countries would establish a cohesive cultural basis of representation, further revealing a consistency in the Western collective imagery of what it means to be a woman in the military. In order to further define the geographical scope of the thesis, I primarily focus my research on the socio-political and cultural context of the United States of America. This choice is related to the fact that this country was the main one triggering the 'War on Terror'[3], and also considering that the US is the main purveyor of military/war genre entertainment. Regarding European countries, I opted to include cultural productions from the United Kingdom (UK) and France, as their armies not only had an active part in the 'War on Terror' armed conflicts[4], but they are also of comparable military structure; generally share an experience with mass, industrial warfare; and

[3] It is also important to acknowledge the importance of European political figures that propelled the war, like the former UK Prime-Minister Tony Blair, the former Spanish Prime-Minister José María Aznar, and the former Portuguese Prime-Minister Durão Barroso. This union is perhaps best demonstrated by mentioning the Azores Summit (March 16, 2003) where US President George W. Bush, and European leaders decided that the best course of action was to begin an armed conflict with Iraq. This fact is revealing of a Western cohesion (political/cultural) I am interested in analyzing.

[4] I acknowledge France´s later incursion in the 'War on Terror', however, I chose this country mainly for its extensive military/war cultural productions.

produce fictional narratives in the military/war genre with common traits. All in all, I believe that the case studies drawn from these countries can provide a representative portion of the Western production of popular culture during the 'War on Terror'.

The research in this thesis directly contributes to the intersection of the fields of Visual Culture, Gender Studies, and Military Studies (from a cultural standpoint). With my research in visual culture, I aim to contribute to an expanding field concerned with gender equality in the military field, which is still predominantly a "masculine-centered" institution. Furthermore, I believe that the analysis of military women's representation in the military/war genre in this thesis can be perceived as a microcosm of a larger struggle for gender equality. The methodological design of this thesis is mainly grounded in the analysis and comparison of a relevant sample of case studies through cultural criticism. The objective is to generate a grounded theory of the representation of military women in popular Western visual culture. I chose case studies based on their general popularity and/or critical appraisal, since I am mainly interested in fictional narratives that have impacted the largest amount of population. Then, I applied a preliminary stage of comparison where I sought to identify characteristics that seem to exist as a necessary condition for the representation of the military woman in fictional narratives, in regard to norms, values, visual depictions, and gendered expectations. I have included in this thesis a table with the core representative sample of films/TV series that feature military women in central roles (see Appendix). In this document, I reference the release year of the narrative, its name, the director(s), the country of production, the war it portrays, the stage of military life they mostly focus on, and if it includes a plot or sub-plot featuring romance or mental/physical disabilities. In order to establish comparisons and reflect on the role of female characters in a traditional masculine genre, I make use of several other visual narratives to expose pre-established patterns withing the genre, using them to question the roles women occupy. I believe that this variety of materials provides a flexibility to the analysis, allowing for the emergence of substantiated arguments regarding the representation of military women in Western visual culture during the 'War on Terror'.

Through the contextual analysis, and comparison, of a limited number of fictional works, I expect to be able to discern representational patterns that will inform my arguments regarding the way military women are being represented in Western visual culture during the 'War on Terror'. In my understanding, the identification of these patterns is particularly important, since patterns that are well-received by audiences in a particular genre (e.g. military/war genre), are often incorporated, and replicated into the

conventions of that genre. From a comparative standpoint, I intend to use the identified patterns to develop reflections about the representation of military women in Western visual culture at large. This qualitative method permits a wider scope of source materials since the flexibility of case studies facilitates an interdisciplinary approach towards this wider analysis of Western visual culture. I aim to examine what kind of discourses and images conveyed by media and political rhetoric are omitted or passively conveyed by such artworks. I not only draw on the case studies themselves, but necessarily rely on intertexts (articles, imageries, etc.) to convey my points of view.

To develop my study, I have supported my research on seminal works in the fields of visual culture, gender studies and military studies, as well as on several secondary works. I do this with the goal of facilitating an interdisciplinary approach, which I consider to be of utmost importance when addressing popular culture, a medium overflowing with a multitude of products and interpretations. My analysis is grounded on the works by W.J.T. Mitchel on post-9/11 visual culture, which I consider crucial in understanding how to critically approach the field. In the field of gender studies, the thesis draws on numerous authors that provided important contributions to the field. For instance, I support my research on the works of Cynthia Enloe, whose feminist work towards gender inclusivity in the military forces has propelled countless other scholars to focus on this issue. Another author whose research shaped this thesis is the philosopher Kelly Oliver, who published on the media's representation of military women. Furthermore, the field work by Helen Benedict was important for me to have a grasp on the experiences of real women who fought during the 'War on Terror'.

Regarding the sources for the analysis of fictional works, I apply Laura Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze' to the representations of military women in visual depictions, as well as Julia Kristeva's understanding of the connection between women and horror. Another author who exerted an impact on my research is Yvonne Tasker, whose work on the representation of military women in World War I and II films helped shape my analysis. Throughout the following chapters I draw on Tasker's findings to provide historical contextualization for the case studies I examine. This allows me to develop a critical model, since it demonstrates how fictional depictions of female soldiers have been intrinsically connected with socio-political phenomenon. Through the incorporation of seminal gender studies works in my analysis, I engage in the re-thinking of representation

of women in visual culture, as I apply the theory to a military context, in order to achieve what I believe to be an original study.

The thesis aims to cover a multitude of different representations of military women in Western visual culture, in order to identify relevant patterns in the military/war genre. However, I wish to maintain a cohesion, which I expect to achieve through the overall theme of the parts that compose this work. I have divided the thesis into three parts, named after the three main stages of military life: 'Boot Camp, 'Deployment' and 'Discharge'. I chose this segmentation, as I understand that each stage presents a specific set of challenges for military women, and while some difficulties are sustained in one way or another throughout military service, I believe that each stage does entail unique characteristics, which translate into distinct challenges for military women. My goal in each chapter is thus to pinpoint how fictional narratives have been depicting these challenges, and if they provide portrayals based on recurring stereotypes grounded on a Western collective imaginary of military women. I furthermore provide reflections on how these representations might influence not only how Western society perceives military women, but also how these women see themselves as 'soldiers', a previously all-male category. I believe this work is fundamental, since negative portrayals of military women can have a multitude of adverse effects, for instance, they can potentially discourage young women from enlisting in any branch of the armed forces, which could then lead to a blockage of positions of power for women. Furthermore, I consider this research to be essential to the identification of wider cultural tendencies, which expose social problems which are, in this case, related to issues of gender discrimination.

Part I of the thesis, entitled **BOOT CAMP**: **Transformation Narratives and the Female Body**, pertains to the stage of basic military training, commonly known as 'boot camp', where recruits begin to comprehend what does military service, and 'being a soldier', intakes. Each part of the thesis is composed of three chapters, and for this part, the chapters question traditional portrayals of boot camp in visual culture, comparing them to more recent ones, where military women appear more prominently. Throughout the thesis, (but with more emphasis on Part I), I examine the first season of the British TV series *Our Girl* (2014, created by Tony Grounds, BBC One), as one of few examples of a military-themed series centered on a military woman. This examination will be made through a contextualization of the larger cultural frame during the 'War on Terror', as

well as by making some relevant comparisons with fictional narratives from previous wars. This methodology is replicated throughout the entire thesis, as working from a comparative standpoint provides the opportunity to uncover patterns of representation that will allow me to determine the existing types of representation of military women in visual culture as they have evolved over time, and what they mean from a gender studies point of view. Part I of the thesis furthermore explores how sexual assault and rape are depicted in military narratives, seeking to understand patterns of military male sexual dominance over the female body. I additionally provide an examination the rape-revenge scenario in military narratives, where rape/sexual assault is offered as justification for female violence.

The first chapter of Part I, entitled '1.1 WHEN BOYS BECOME MEN: Fictional Depictions of Boot Camp Narratives in Pre- and Post- 9/11 Visual Culture', discusses boot camp narratives as a traditionally hypermasculine space, and how the inclusion of women has been negotiated through a collection of stereotyped notions. I address how women have often been made to assume a set of pre-determined and 'acceptable' roles in these narratives, contrasting with the general roles granted to male characters. Overall, in this chapter I discuss boot camp narratives focusing on the representations of femininity and violence that disrupt the pre-established hypermasculine format of boot camp narratives in Western visual culture.

The second chapter, '1.2 THE DESIRABLE UNWELCOMED: The Female Body in Military Narratives' is focused on the analysis of representations of the female body in fictional military narratives as provocative, disturbing, and unmilitary. In the chapter I introduce Julia Kristeva's concept of the 'abject' to refer to the representation of the female body onscreen, with focus on the representation of menstruation. The chapter discusses how the military/war genre conveys visual markers of gender identity, such as hair. The representation of hair in fictional narratives is thus examined as a way to visually show women abandoning their femininity in search of acceptance in military masculinity. I hence discuss theoretical conceptualizations of the visual representation of the female body, the most prominent being Laura Mulvey's theories on the 'male gaze'. I articulate Mulvey's theories with those of other authors like Rikke Schubart, and Yvonne Tasker. I furthermore expand on these theories with Kelly Oliver's idea of the 'pornographic way of looking', a concept directly derived from Mulvey, but applied to the 'War on Terror' context.

Moreover, in this chapter I examine the trope of 'military women looking at themselves in the mirror' drawing on Mulvey's recognition of self-awareness in cinema, centering on the reflected self-image of the military woman. I believe it is important to examine such tropes, since these types of fictional wartime imagery perpetuate cultural anxieties about women in the military.

The last topic explored in this first part, in a chapter entitled '1.3 THE WAR RAGES ON: Fictional Military Women and the Inescapable Romance', will be the portrayal of romance in fictional boot camp narratives, which aims to address how this recurrent trope attempts to mediate women's aggression and femininity. I question the persistence of romantic relationships in female-led military fiction through the examination of stereotypes such as 'the love triangle', with the intention of exposing the consistent association of women with specific genres (i.e. romance, melodrama, etc.). I am interested in exploring how fictional representations of romance with a (male) soldier are constructions of an idealized romantic objective that compels audiences to desire it. I will address this 'romanticization' of the armed forces drawing on the works of authors like Tom Digby, and Yvonne Tasker, drawing on her concept of 'war-romance hybrid' as a subcategory of military/war fiction. In order to develop this topic I discuss some of the debates concerning the integration of women in previously all-male units, primarily those concerning their impact on 'military group cohesion'. I then expand these conclusions to focus on the topic of romance and sexual relationships between fictional soldiers. The chapter includes an analysis of popular tropes, such as the one where women only enlist because of men. To achieve this study I examine case studies (e.g. films, TV series, music videos) that I have considered to be impactful in the social construction of military women. In the chapter I argue that the wide reach and influence of the selected case studies likely encourage the reproduction of patterns regarding the fictional representation of military women.

Part II of the thesis, entitled **DEPLOYMENT: Military Women and Gender-Related Controversy**, is concerned with representations of military women during the period after military basic training, when soldiers go to war abroad. I consider this second part to be of particular importance to this thesis, as it demonstrates how the narratives of real military women have significantly impacted media, and political rhetoric. The first chapter, entitled '2.1 CONTROVERSIAL WOMEN: Military Women in the Media', examines the manner in which military women's stories are usually covered by Western

news media. As contrasting case studies, I examine the cases of two real military women who were, for different reasons, under heavy scrutiny by the news media during the 'War on Terror': Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch. These case studies are only two amongst a large number of problematic fabrications within US global security narratives. Acknowledging that the bodies of military men are also a site of standardized obedience, in this chapter I demonstrate how military women continue to be either portrayed as villains or as heroines. Aside from the core theoretical framework, I draw on the works of media critics like Martin Barker, whose work focus on films taking place during the 'War on Terror'. The analysis provided in this chapter will show how mainstream media continues to privilege stereotypical narratives that see women as essentially *non-military*, either for their depravity (e.g. England), or for their vulnerability (e.g. Lynch). Chapter '2.2 THE 'TORTURE CHICKS: Female Body as a Tool for Torture' further explores the circumstances that brought Lynndie England to notoriety, widening the analysis to include other instances where military women have participated in gender-specific forms of military interrogation and torture. I question torture practices that took place during the 'War on Terror', examining the role military women have played in interrogations, and exploring if and how these women were instrumentalized by the military in these instances, as I have set out to confirm with this thesis. To achieve this goal I examine the works of experts on this subject (e.g. Darius Rejali), and the official US Department of Defense reports about torture incidents. In the chapter I also provide a connection with cultural representations of female torturers in the military, as to establish the relevance of art's critical perspective on this subject. Moreover, I discuss as a case study the book by Coco Fusco *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (2008), as well as Fusco's related performances. With this examination, I intend to demonstrate the relevance of art's critical perspective regarding the military use of the female body as a tool for military interrogation.

In the last chapter of Part II, '2.3 VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS: Military Women During Deployment', I firstly examine how military women have been represented in deployment narratives, providing a historical contextualization that will allow me to verify if patters have emerged over time. I then examine case studies of female-centered deployment narratives and male-centered deployment narratives. This comparative method is expected to be revealing of any gendered approaches to deployment narratives. Furthermore, I verify if, and how, the experiences of controversial military women have served as inspiration for fictional characters. Through the analysis

of pertinent case studies such as *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003, dir. Peter Markle), and *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler), I discuss how fictional mainstream productions have digested military controversies, and in what format they choose to present these narratives to the audience.

In the third and last part of this thesis, entitled **DISCHARGE: What Future(s) for the Military Woman**, I move on to the last stage of military life, discharge, not only by analyzing discharge narratives, but also by considering possible futures for military women. In the first chapter, '3.1 GENDERED HOMECOMINGS: Life After Discharge', I examine if and how military discharges undergo different depictions depending on the gender of the protagonist. The chapter includes analysis of narratives like *Home of the Brave* (2006, Irwin Winkler), *The Lucky Ones* (2008, dir. Neil Burger), and *Grace is Gone* (2007, dir. James C. Strouse), examined with a pertinent theoretical background (e.g. the works of Tatiana Prorokova). With the aid of these case studies I develop my analysis on the representation of military women in deployment narratives. Additionally, a part of this chapter is devoted to depictions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, given its prevalence amongst veterans, and also considering that it is often depicted in discharge narratives. I moreover address gendered depictions of physical injuries, a study much informed by my previous analysis of the stereotyped representations of the female body in the military/war genre.

The second chapter, '3.2 VIRTUAL BATTLEGROUNGDS: Computer-Generated Scenarios of Warfare', explores representations of military women in video games, considering the connections between the gaming industry and the military-industrial complex. I consider how the gaming industry is impacted by, and impacts, military technologies, operations, and trainings. This chapter also contains a study on the issue of the gaming industry's adaptability to the crescent numbers of female soldiers. I discuss the inclusion of women in gaming, a traditionally male-dominated industry, drawing comparisons with the progressive integration of women in military spaces. Throughout this chapter I expand on topics already addressed in this thesis, such as gender stereotypes in the development of female characters. Moreover, the chapter contains a comparison between the military-themed video game franchises *Call of Duty* (2003 – 2019, Activision) and *America's Army* (2002 – 2015, US Army). These two popular games will contribute to an intermedia approach regarding my overall aim to analyze the

representation of military women in contemporary visual culture. Overall, this chapter offers an important insight on the future of visual depictions of military women in an increasingly popular medium. Finally, the concluding chapter of Part III is ’3.3 THE POSTHUMAN SOLDIER: Futuristic Creations of Female Soldiers’. Drawing on the seminal work of authors like Michel Foucault, and Donna Haraway, in this chapter I present a reading of futuristic representations of military women as cyborgs. I consider the future of the female body in the armed forces, as military technology increasingly effaces the ‘human’ side of warfare. In this analysis, and informed by the existing visual representations of futuristic military women, I intend to question what roles could the female body play in a military institution composed of virtual and technological bodies. This analysis examines the film *Voir du Pays* (2016, dir. Muriel Coulin, Delphine Coulin), which depicts military women using digital technology which creates avatars for them with the purpose of performing therapy. Additionally, the chapter includes an analysis of the digital collage series *Liberation!* (2007), by Bernard Flowers, which center on the visual combination of female, soldier, and machine.

The chapters described above offer a vast and original corpus, which, to my knowledge, have not yet been examined with a critical focus on the representation of military women in contemporary visual culture. The variety of intermedia texts selected for analysis, coupled with the appropriate theoretical framework, offer innovative possibilities to discuss the representation of fictional servicewomen. Moreover, the comparative methodology (with an emphasis on visual, and interdisciplinary studies) that I employ throughout the thesis is a feature that permits a more fluid articulation of the case studies, leading to original analysis. Overall, I believe this work contributes to the existing state of the art, regarding critical examination of cultural depictions in the military/war genre.

Part I

BOOT CAMP:
Transformation Narratives and the Female Body

Chapter 1.1

WHEN BOYS BECOME MEN
Fictional Depictions of Boot Camp Narratives in Pre- and Post-9/11 Visual Culture

The Manly Rituals of Boot Camp

Depicting warfare has been a staple of mainstream cinema ever since its early stages. Through the portrayal of intense battles and courageous soldiers an important message of patriotism was repetitively conveyed[5] by early mainstream motion pictures in Western visual culture. While the particularities of the messages have necessarily changed over the years, the cultural production of fictional narratives featuring military practices, or warfare, as a backdrop have not diminished. Acknowledging the myriad of sub-genres, and even genre crossovers, that have resulted from expanding on the possibilities of the military/war genre, I will, for the purpose of this chapter, direct my focus to the sub-genre of boot camp.

Boot camp narratives show the progress of recruits, in any branch of the military, as they go through basic training. These narratives have a specific message, that of *transformation*, offering soldiers the privilege of becoming 'better', which denounces an insidious military propaganda. Boot camp fiction shows the struggles that occur from two types of transformations: when civilians turn into soldiers, and/or when soldiers turn into elite soldiers (through specialized military training). These transformations tend to focus on male protagonists. As Yvonne Tasker explains in *Soldier's Stories*, an important work on fictional depictions of military women, "[b]oot camp movies stage rites of passage as

[5] Including those found in 'militaintment', which describes military entertainment aimed at celebrating the current US government. See Roger Stahl, *Militaintment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

narratives of masculinization: boys become men, civilians become soldiers"[6]. Tasker categorizes boot camp narratives as 'rites of passage', assimilating them to ritualistic practices of male members of tribal cultures, and effectively implying that military procedures have not evolved to convey a progressive and inclusive institution. Other authors, among them Suzanne Frayser, Cynthia Enloe, and also Ralph Donald and Karen McDonald have made similar claims, as this comparison is not recent within the field of anthropology. Frayser equates recruits to 'neophytes', passively obeying the orders of their elders[7], while Enloe, accounts for a mother's reluctance in offering her son to this sanctioned cultural ritual, quoting the mother: "I as a mother didn't want to *sacrifice*[8] my son to the military"[9]. The sacrificial facet of enlistment presented in this example exposes a deep-seated connection with ritual ceremonies in a collective understanding of the military. In their turn, Donald and McDonald clarify the many ways in which boot camp is like tribal rituals, as they list, for instance, the removal from a familiar space, shaving heads, substituting clothes, tattooing symbols, etc.

Another aspect aptly conveyed by Donald and McDonald regarding the common approach to boot camp as a space of rituals of masculinity, is the fictional depiction of stereotypes of manliness within the genre. As Rikke Schubart explains in *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, "[…] the 'heroic' nature of the protagonist in male film genres is mythologically, psychologically, and culturally designed to function as a role model of masculinity"[10]. Drawing from Schubart, I ascertain that the main source for exemplary behavior that young boys look for, can be found in fictional, often unrealistic and exacerbated, depictions of male behavior. This observation is also expressed by Donald and McDonald, when they state that "[s]adly, American boys often spend more time exposed to fictional media models of manliness on the screen and television than they spend with their fathers"[11]. Considering the importance of fictional role models of manliness in the lives of young boys, Donald and McDonald turn to cinematic depictions of basic military training to support their argument of the presence of "[…] this ancient

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[6] Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 237.
[7] See Suzanne G. Frayser, *Varieties of Sexual Experience: An Anthropological Perspective on Human Sexuality* (New Haven, CT: HRAF Press, 1985).
[8] My emphasis.
[9] Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd, 2000), 115.
[10] Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 14.
[11] Ralph Donald and Karen McDonald, *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 2011), v.

ritual of becoming a man/warrior in […] films featuring U.S. armed forces basic training"[12], and actually pinpoint films that, they argue, exemplify the close association of boot camp with ritualistic behaviors, such as *Full Metal Jacket* (1987, dir. Stanley Kubrick) and *Jarhead* (2005, dir. Sam Mendes)[13]. These films fictionalize initiation rites as common practice of military transformation from 'boy' to 'man'. They are also examples of films that attest to the motif's existence prior to the 'War on Terror' (depicting, respectively, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War), revealing that not much has changed in the depiction of boot camp as a ritualistic space of transformation of boys/recruits into men/soldiers.

The pigeonholed fictional image of the male soldier is particularly problematic when 'symbols of manliness' are imbued with harmful stereotypes that are picked up by young boys and carried into adulthood. In *Reel Men at War*, Donald and McDonald list a detailed typology of stereotypes pertaining to the war genre, analyzing the impact they have in the development and socialization of young men. Some of these stereotypes include: "the mama's boy"; "the rebellious son"; "the virgin"; "the woman hater", "the sissy", "the hero", etc.[14]. They represent what the authors sarcastically call the "[…] archetypes of appropriate masculine behavior […]"[15], meant to be admired and emulated. Even though the stereotypes differ in their descriptions, they are nonetheless constructed around the premise that it is wrong for men to identify/associate with women, be it their mothers (as is the case of "the mama's boy"); or through the portrayal of 'effeminate' characteristics (such is the case of "the sissy"). The only permissible contact male soldiers should have with women is a sexual one, as conveyed by "the lothario", as sexual contact with women is seen as a staple of manliness, albeit a predatory one, as "the wolf" demonstrates.

A particular aspect of differentiation with women that is repetitively featured in military/war narratives is the importance of repressing male emotions. As emotions are perceived to be exclusively 'female', recruits are strongly encouraged not to emote, which is actively considered a sign of weakness. In many cases, the male soldier is only permitted to cry on-screen when a team member is killed, either for dramatic effect, or to propel the story. The death of another soldier is a recurrent plot-point that offers

[12] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 5.
[13] Even though both films approach the idea of 'transformation' via boot camp in a different way, they serve to demonstrate how impactful military training is for male soldiers.
[14] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 41-112.
[15] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 42.

motivation to pursue revenge, while at the same time, offering him an opportunity to be emotionally complex without appearing 'feminine'. This detachment with women and 'women-like behavior' is perceived to make men better soldiers, which consequently typifies women (and all 'female-like' behavior) as *anti-soldier*. As Donald and McDonald explain, recruits are constantly shown "[…] examples of the so-called inferior, flawed, incomplete variety of human being they must avoid becoming at all costs: a female"[16]. Being called a 'girl', a 'lady', a 'dame', among other names meant to symbolize women, is therefore a shame and a dishonor to the male soldier. Coupled with 'female behavior', regarding rejected behavior for the male soldier, is 'homosexual behavior', considering that military masculinity has long been close-knit with heterosexism. Common military language reveals the deep-seated contempt for both women and homosexuals, as the terms 'girl', 'pussy', lady', 'dyke', 'faggot', 'bitch', 'fairy', 'queer', among many of the kind, have been documented[17] as continuously, and interchangeably, used to refer to male recruits, primarily in a US military context. This type of language has been largely reproduced in fictional representations of military life and boot camp life.

On the topic of the military use of terms derogatory towards women, Helen Benedict wrote that: "This misogynist language is so deeply engrained in military culture as to be reflexive"[18]. The reflexive conduct Benedict pinpoints is aligned with the general military mentality of blindly following orders, as soldiers are formatted to unconsciously respond in a pre-established way to recurring stimuli. Misogynistic language is thus a part of their set of reflexive behaviors, working as a stimulus to a desired response. Military jargon, aside from derogatory, can work to validate masculinity while effectively shunning women. One of the most famed examples of military cadence (military call-and-response songs) can be found in the film *Full Metal Jacket*. When recruits are encouraged to sing along to: "This is my rifle, this is my gun/This is for fighting, this is for fun", while grabbing their firearm and penis in unison to the beckoning of 'rifle' and 'gun', they are reassured that the symbol of their masculinities is a weapon by itself. Military Cadence (or Cadence Call) addresses numerous topics, such as the struggles of military life, or being homesick. Additionally, it often incites the soldiers to kill[19],

[16] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 8.
[17] See Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).
[18] Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 51.
[19] "Bomb the village, kill the people/Throw some Napalm in the square/Do it on a Sunday morning/Do it on their way to prayer". Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 37.

however, as Iraq war veteran Jennifer Spranger recalls, "It wasn't the songs that made people ready to kill, […], it was the bond between soldiers"[20]. Spranger suggests that the repetitive chants to kill the enemy were not the ignition to respond with a deadly assault on the battlefield, it was the threat on a fellow soldier's life that provokes that reaction. This would mean that the bonds between soldiers had to be strong, with soldiers seeing the squad members as equally capable of defending each other. However, considering the language that permeates military structures, I can determine that women are not included in the default category of 'soldier', and the misogynistic language "[…] serves as a constant reminder to women that, even as they are winning honors and advancing in numbers and positions in the military, when it comes to the group, they are alone"[21]. This loneliness, and all the possible dangers that stem from it, are at the core of Helen Benedict's work, *The Lonely Soldier*, which tells the stories of five military women that served in the Iraq War in the aftermath of 9/11.

Considering the ever-growing presence of women in Western military forces since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, which sparked the 'War on Terror', it is important to consider the complex part women play in this pre-established model of masculinized hierarchy. By integrating different branches of the forces, and occupying positions previously only available to men[22], women actively disrupted the conventional norms of the military, causing cultural representations to adjust, forcing a shift on the representation of the 'soldier', traditionally seen as male. In order to elaborate on this issue, I will first unpack the patterns found in boot camp narratives: When considering both the narrative plot and character arc of the protagonist, the following pattern tends to emerge: (1.) the recruit joins a particular unit; (2.) the recruit encounters animosity from one (or more) of their fellow recruits; (3.) the recruit endures strenuous training and the harshness of a Drill Instructor; (4.) the recruit proves themselves as an outstanding soldier; (5.) the recruit (re)gains the trust and admiration of the unit; (6.) the recruit ultimately gains the respect of the Drill Instructor.

This pattern can be observed (either partially or fully) in films featuring male protagonists from *The D.I.* (1957, dir. Jack Webb), to *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982, dir. Taylor Hackford), *Tigerland* (2000, dir. Joel Schumacher), *Jarhead*, among others.

[20] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 58.
[21] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 51.
[22] The access to these positions was gradual. According to the website Council on Foreign Relations: "In 2016, the Defense Department lifted all restrictions on the roles women can perform in the military". See: https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military (accessed July 2019).

The fact that the pattern spans over several decades shows that the boot camp narrative continues to be a staple of the military/war genre. In fact, boot camp scenes are often even featured in films of other genres that briefly include military scenes[23], indicating the relevance of that transformative and ritualized period in soldiers' lives. Narratives that depict their male protagonist going through boot camp typically have their character arc be a positive one, where they go from an inexperienced, sometimes unruly, 'grunt' to a full-fledged soldier, worthy of admiration for his arduous passage from a boy to a man.

Since the boot camp process is so intrinsically connected with the idea of 'becoming a man', it is important to examine if a re-formulation of this process takes place, considering the growing presence of enlisted women, or if it maintains its 'soldier mold', forcing both male and female recruits to take its form. An examination of military/war narratives featuring female protagonists going through boot camp exposes the negotiation of the figure of servicewomen between reality and fiction. This negotiation is a complex one, which is mainly focused on the delicate balance of two aspects: their appearance (masculine/feminine); and their behavior (masculine/feminine). Therefore, while only men are permitted (and expected) to present a masculine appearance accompanied with a masculine behavior, women struggle with presenting themselves as either too feminine (thus, 'not military'), or too masculine (thus 'not a woman'). As explained by Rikke Schubart in her critical study on the female hero in popular culture, "[e]very move up the scale of masculinity also means a move down the scale of femininity"[24]. This dichotomy is not just an issue in visual representations, it is also a factual concern, described by countless female soldiers. For instance, in *The Lonely Soldier*, Mickiela Montoya informs that "[t]here are only three things the guys let you be if you're a girl in the military – a bitch, a ho, or a dyke"[25]. Montoya, an Iraqi War veteran, thus classifies how women are perceived according to their behavior and appearance, which is associated with presumptions about their sexuality.

The struggle with femininity faced by military women can be categorized by Schubart's concept of the 'in-between'[26]. On discussing female protagonists, Schubart rejects the term 'heroine', preferring to employ the designation 'female hero', as she is interested on observing how fictional women have thrived in typically male-driven

[23] e.g. *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis).
[24] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 311.
[25] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 5.
[26] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 9.

narratives (across the genres: action; martial arts; war, etc.). She characterizes the 'female hero' as an 'in-between', as she perceives the 'female hero' to be in a place between two opposite poles, between male and female, aggressive and passive, etc. Schubart defines the 'female hero' as someone who "[…] is recognizable as feminine, yet her cross-dressing and cross-behavior represent degrees of in-betweenness"[27].

The same dilemmas concerning the compromise of femininity are perceivable in fictional depictions of military women. Schubart's concept of the "in-between" can be carried into the analysis of military women, as they are instructed to behave in a sanctioned manner that was first developed with only men in mind, and wear uniforms that were, just like the military, made for men, and only later adjusted for women. The 'cross-dressing' and 'cross-behavior' that Schubart discusses, can explain the poster for the British TV series *Our Girl* (2014, created by Tony Grounds, BBC One).

Figure 1 - Promotional poster for the stand-alone episode of Our Girl (2013). (open access image).

I interpret Figure 1 as an encapsulation of the 'in-betweenness' discussed above, as the protagonist of *Our Girl* (Molly Dawes) negotiates her femininity in order to (as advertised in the poster) 'be the best'[28], as the British Army promises. The mirrored image

[27] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 14.
[28] *Our Girl* is a British television military drama series, produced by the BBC since 2014. The first season follows Molly Dawes, a young English woman who joins the British Army.

of Dawes being a post-boot camp 'improvement' on her former self. The promotional image shows the 'military version' of Dawes looking sideways at her 'lesser version', who looks disgruntled, with a slouching pose. By having the 'military Dawes' as a reflection of the 'civilian Dawes' (the dominant figure in the image), the poster for *Our Girl* seems to be implying that a 'better' someone was inside her all along, and was ultimately brought out through military training.

The perception of boot camp as it appears on popular culture is so deeply ingrained into a collective understanding of the military, that fictional productions insidiously influence other fictional productions. An example can be seen in *Our Girl*, when Dawes apologizes for laughing while in formation by saying: "I just felt I was in a film for a minute, sorry". This self-referentiality evokes Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, where references come with no referents, as we are immersed in a hyperreality. Baudrillard's theory also helps us understand how the image of military women, through constant fictional representation under a set of contained markers, now encompasses those stereotypes in the collective imaginary of Western society. This fictional and stereotyped image obscures some realities women face while in the military, for, as Baudrillard writes, when the simulation is "[m]ore real than the real, that is how the real is abolished"[29]. The complication these simulations present to the ability to rightfully represent 'real' military women is the main drive of this thesis, and its analysis, my main contribution to the corpus of critical analysis on the representation of military women in contemporary visual culture.

Depicting the Violent Military Woman

The setting of boot camp can be found in female-driven visual narratives both before and during the 'War on Terror', such as: *Private Benjamin* (1980, dir. Howard Zieff); *G.I. Jane* (1997, dir. Ridley Scott); *Our Girl* (2014); *Volontaire* (2018, dir. Hélène Fillières), among others. According to Tasker, having this background in military plots centered on a female protagonist works to avoid the struggles of having to represent a woman actually engaged in violence and unfriendly fire[30]. Therefore, the setting of boot

[29] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 56.
[30] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 237.

camp allows the narrative to engage with a female character in a military frame that contains the action inside a controlled environment without having to put her in any real threat of death, neither does it force her into a situation where she has to kill or be killed. Nonetheless, completing basic military training is a validation that she is prepared to kill. As Helen Benedict writes: "[…] boot camp is many things to many people. […] But however it's experienced, […], the bottom line is that boot camp is about training people to kill"[31]. The tendency to portray the act of killing in war as a gendered activity, an action permissible only to men, pushes the fictional representation of military women into non-combatant settings, as is the case of the boot camp. Narratives that feature boot camp scenes in their first half, and place women in the battle zone as the plot develops, often circumscribe their agency in a way that prevents them to be shown being violent. For instance, in the 2017 film *Megan Leavey* (dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite), the titular Megan completes boot camp and goes to Iraq as a K9 handler[32]. In another example, in *Our Girl*, Dawes goes to Afghanistan as a medic, which follows on the long-established tradition of portraying military women as nurses, medics, or overall caregivers[33]. Be it a K9 handler or a medic, these characters, protagonists of their respective narratives, play auxiliary roles in the military. These choices are a product of their categorization, as they are seen as *not male*, therefore, *not a soldier*. Placing military women in these auxiliary roles crystallizes the woman as "[…] a figure of agency and modernity simultaneously framed by traditional, patriarchal cultural assumptions"[34], and effectively removes the pressure of representing her as violent, while at the same time offering her as a token of progress.

Scholar of Film and Television Studies, Hilary Neroni comments on a tactic used by movies like *G.I. Jane* (1997) or *Courage Under Fire* (1996, dir. Edward Zwick) to address the image of the 'violent woman' in cinema. They separate the 'violent' side and 'feminine' side of the military woman, as the two seemingly cannot co-exist[35]. However, this detachment is oftentimes forced, and seems to be appeasing to those who might find odd to see a military woman on screen with no references to a domestic or personal/romantic life. In *G.I. Jane*, we are shown moments of the main character's

[31] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 49.
[32] A K9 handler trains, and works with, military dogs.
[33] For an extensive approach on the trope of military women as healthcare professionals, see the chapter "Invisible Soldiers: Representing Military Nursing", in *Soldiers' Stories*, by Yvonne Tasker (2011).
[34] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 23.
[35] See Chapter 6: Femininity on the Front Line: Portrayals of Violent Women in Recent Military Films. Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 133-148.

domestic life and romance, to counterpose the scenes where she is seen in full military masculinity, or 'musculinity' to use Tasker's term[36]. In *Courage Under Fire*, Karen Walden's personal life is presented, as she is portrayed as a loving daughter and mother, opposing the strenuous moments of battle shown previously. These examples of opposing scenes are a response to what Neroni sees as the problem of the violent woman on screen. By "[…] split[ing] the female soldier's violence from her femininity" the creators of these narratives hope to convey the idea that while professionally competent, the military woman never stopped belonging to a domestic sphere. Neroni adds that this approach is employed in order to create "[…] a palatable version of the violent woman"[37], thus placating the viewers/critics who might think the protagonists were not 'female' enough. This filmic artifact mirrors, nonetheless, how servicewomen feel when having to negotiate their femininity, as evidenced, for instance, in *The Lonely Soldier*, when Specialist Abbie Pickett describes how she felt "[…] divided from herself as a female"[38].

Narratives like *Courage Under Fire* and *Basic* (2003, dir. John McTiernan) use a different tactic. They do not feature boot camp scenes, yet they also showcase military women in non-combatant roles, who are inadvertently pushed into conflicts. The deliberate choice of engaging women in an isolated conflict instead of generalized warfare reveals the prioritization of gender roles over the depiction of war. Although the details of the specific conflicts may vary, they tend to be caused by the strangeness of having a woman in a position deemed 'unwomanly'. In both these two examples of pre- and post-9/11 films, two military women play a non-combatant role (a Medevac pilot and a Military Police Investigator, respectively), and both face hostility based on their gender.[39] In *Courage Under Fire*, Captain Karen Walden's orders are underplayed, and she is eventually shot. In *Basic*, Captain Julia Osbourn is disregarded as a competent investigator, and not trusted to handle the investigation alone, as her superior states that "[…], this is way out of her league". Capt. Osbourn (often called Julie-bird) is repeatedly pushed aside, lied to, tricked, disregarded, and overall treated like an annoying child. The

[36] In *Spectacular Bodies*, Tasker's work on gendered representations in visual culture, she defines 'musculinity' as "[…] the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation". See Yvonne Tasker. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. (London: Routledge, 1993) 3. I will further develop this concept in the next chapter (Chapter 1.2).
[37] Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press. 2005), 142.
[38] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier,* 141.
[39] According to Taker in *Soldier's Stories*, the servicewomen's "[…] ability to achieve extraordinary things despite male hostility represents another sort of test, a process which she must prove herself capable and worthy" (249).

infantilization of military personnel is, nonetheless, not exclusive to women, as it assures the obedience and malleability desired of all soldiers, with the intend of having them follow orders. A fictional example that encapsulates this preference for child-like recruits can be found in a scene from *Forest Gump* (1994). When Gump joins the Army he is highly praised by his Drill Sergeant for his obedient demeanor:

> "Drill Sergeant: GUUUMP! WHAT'S YOUR SOLE PURPOSE IN THIS ARMY?
> Gump: To do whatever you tell me, Drill Sergeant?
> Drill Sergeant: GODDAMMIT, GUMP! YOU'RE A GODDAMN GENIUS! THAT'S THE BEST OUTSTANDING ANSWER I'VE EVER HEARD! YOU MUST HAVE A GODDAMN I.Q. OF 160! YOU ARE GODDAMNED GIFTED, PRIVATE GUMP!"[40]

The fact that Gump's child-like obedience was not a product of an unabated patriotism, but a trait of his character, is irrelevant. Soldiers are told when to wake up, when to eat, how to look and behave, in a distortion of a child-parent relationship. Nonetheless, however similar the infantilization of female and male recruits may appear during boot camp, the important difference remains that, while male recruits may aspire to become full-fledged soldiers and take a higher place in the military hierarchy once basic training is over, servicewomen will for the most part continue to be infantilized and patronized throughout their military careers. This is attested in *The Lonely Soldier*, where Helen Benedict accounts for the tribulations lived by real women during boot camp. Benedict details, for instance, how Mickiela Montoya suffered sleep deprivation, was humiliated, punished on a whim, yelled at, and kept from any newscasts in order to keep her 'ignorant' and 'malleable'. As Benedict puts it: "She was treated like a child to give the drill sergeant the authority of a parent"[41]. Montoya also recalls how, at the base camp she was stationed during her deployment to Kuwait (Camp Arifjan), the female soldiers "[…] were told never to go anywhere at night without a battle buddy for protection"[42]. Enforcing a 'buddy system' for women's protection[43] establishes military women as

[40] *Forrest Gump*, DVD.
[41] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 50.
[42] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*. 167.
[43] Mostly protection from sexual assault/rape. A topic I will address in a later chapter.

helpless, and thinking about them as 'little sisters'[44] (among other examples of condescending assumptions) perpetuates the infantilization of the female soldier, a practice that also transpires to military women's fictional representations, adopting more or less critical tones. One of the most famed examples is the 1980's comedy *Private Benjamin*.

As Yvonne Tasker explains, in the 70's and 80's, military women were mainly represented in 'service comedies', both in TV and cinema[45]. One of the first and most successful female-driven boot camp film was the 1980 film *Private Benjamin*. As a 'fish out of water' comedy, it is filled with meant to be laugh-inducing tropes, namely, the hyper-feminine woman that mistakenly goes to a hyper-masculine place, as the comedy is intended to originate from Benjamin's inaptitude and over-the-top femininity. The film leaves no room for interpretation when it comes to the source of humor in this comedy, which is attested by its tagline: "The Army was no laughing matter, until Judy Benjamin joined it"[46]. *Private Benjamin* otherwise follows the general construction of the boot camp narrative listed above: Judy Benjamin joins the US Army; upsets her fellow recruits who are punished for her lack of discipline; undergoes harsh training; struggles with the austerity of the Drill Instructor; proves herself as an intelligent soldier at the simulated 'combat games'; regains the trust and admiration of her fellow recruits; and ultimately gains the respect of the Drill Instructor. Aside from the plot, the characters also speak to a conventional pattern of typecasted military figures. The Drill Instructor is a caricature of 'the tough Black sergeant', replayed in such films like *An Officer and A Gentleman*, *Aliens* (1986, dir. James Cameron), *Tigerland*, etc.

Another trope *Private Benjamin* promotes is 'the angry Latina' (Private Gianelli). A recurrent image, featured in many films such as *Basic*, *Aliens*, *Avatar* (2009, dir. James Cameron), etc. Gianelli is referred to as 'a 308', the code number for recruits who joined the force in order to avoid incarceration. She is first presented casually chewing bubble gum, while displaying a red brassiere under her unbuttoned Army fatigues and wearing too much make up. This introduction presents Gianneli as a dangerous and sexualized character, falling in line with Western cinema's long tradition of characterizing women in sexual terms. This trope is often utilized for women of Latin American descent, in what

[44] Montoya recalls male soldiers commenting: "It's because you're like our little sister. We don't want anything to happen to you". See Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 174.
[45] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 173.
[46] *Private Benjamin*, DVD.

Mary Beltrán calls the "*más macha* action hero"[47], a sexualized woman with a physical purpose, while "[…] ultimately subservient to the white lead character's storylines". Gianelli embodies the description offered by Beltrán, as this film's '*más macha*', she is "[…] both an of-the-moment cinematic role model symbolizing Latina and national progress on a number of fronts, and a smokescreen in relation to inequities that continue to prevent many Latinas from gaining power in real life"[48]. The trope of the 'angry latina' or '*más macha'* reiterates the intersectional aspect of female representation in military/war films.

Yet another character that fits in recurrent tropes of the crossing between the comedy genre and boot camp narratives is the film's main antagonist, Captain Lewis, labeled by Tasker as a "caricature of misplaced female authority", and a "monstrous military woman"[49], Lewis is the overtly (and inappropriately) sexual female in charge. Her romance with another Captain reveals, however, that there was a necessity to diminish this authoritative character, in another example of infantilization of military women, as she blushes and giggles when she is around the man she desires.

In his analysis of war cinema, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (2002), Lawrence H. Suid criticized *Private Benjamin*, however, not for its poor depictions of military personnel, but for their inaccurate portrayals of technical details, and overall representation of the army. Suid complains that, in *Private Benjamin*, "[…] the cinematic Army merely served as the instrument for turning a spoiled Jewish princess into an independent person, […]"[50]. In fact, Suid refers to Benjamin as a 'princess' multiple times[51], and labels Captain Lewis as "abrasive", "sarcastic", "sexually frustrated" and a "lesbian"[52]. The use of these polarizing terms by a scholar of the military/war genre exemplifies how typecasted women are when in military narratives, and how scholars and critics are used to address them.

Films like *Private Benjamin* perpetuate stereotypes regarding military women that have existed since the very appearance of military women in popular visual culture, and no character embodies that more than the protagonist, Judy Benjamin. According to

[47] Mary Beltrán, "Más Macha: The New Latina Action Hero", in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (London: Routledge, 2004), 186-200.
[48] Beltrán, "Más Macha", 198.
[49] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 188.
[50] Lawrence Suid**,** *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 427.
[51] Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 427, 428, 430.
[52] Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 428.

Tasker, the film adopts a filmic device that follows in the tradition of *Keep Your Powder Dry* (1945, dir. Edward Buzzell) and *Never Wave at a WAC* (1953, dir. Norman Z. McLeod), regarding how military training shapes the character of wealthy women. In fact, Benjamin personifies two major stereotypes regarding military women in fictional depictions that started in the 50's and 60's: she is both a "compelling sign of strength and independence", and an infantilized "sexy nuisance"[53]. The same is true for Major Margaret O'Houlihan in the 1970's film MASH (dir. Robert Altman), who, as a head nurse, was a figure of independence and modernity, but was also nicknamed 'Hot Lips".

Benjamin's narrative of transformation begins when she joined the Army (by mistake) as a recent widow. Completing boot camp, she manages to be the first woman assigned to a special air force, the Thornbirds. Here, Benjamin goes through a second boot camp, where her petit figure and delicate behavior is even more exacerbated for comedic purposes, since her unit is entirely composed of tall, athletic men. The visual contrast between the body of female and male recruits continues to be utilized to this day, if not for comedic purposes, to highlight that women simply do not match their male counterparts when it comes to physical attributes, as seen recently, for example, in the French film *Volontaire* (2018).

Figure 2 (left) - Screenshot of Private Benjamin *(1980). Benjamin as a 'Thornbird'.*

Figure 3 (right) - Screenshot of Volontaire *(2018). Baer in formation.*

By embracing the challenges of being in a special unit, Benjamin took upon her the values of military masculinity, following the Thornbirds' cadence: "[…] Glory, glory, I'll be falling from the sky/Glory, glory, I am not afraid to die/Glory, glory, I'm as proud

[53] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 173.

as I can be/Col. Thornbush made a man out of me"[54]. However, when came the time to jump out of an airplane, she was hesitant and afraid, and ultimately says "I tried to be macho, but those guys are better at being men than I am"[55]. With this vent she validates the idea that to perform valiantly as a soldier one needs to be a man. As if refusing to be a 'man' allowed Benjamin to be 'treated like a woman', Col. Thornbush presents an alternative way for her 'to serve', more suited for a woman, and attempts to rape her. Benjamin's attempted rape is presented in a way meant to be perceived as comedic[56] as were Benjamin's blunders during boot camp, as the film follows the conventions of Service Comedy.

In his analysis of the scene where Benjamin is driven away of the base by the man who attempted to rape her, Suid writes that "[…] Private Benjamin uses the incident to garner a dream assignment at Supreme Headquarters Allied Europe (SHAPE) in Brussels"[57]. Here, Suid reinforces stereotypes of women using sexual assault (or even fabricating it) to manipulate men. In his mission to defend his pre-conceived image of the military, Suid reveals his lack of concern for how military women are represented, as he only discards them as caricatures staining what should have been an immaculate setting for the plot, as he insists on "authentic military ambience"[58].

Benjamin's character ends her first boot camp successfully integrating the female group of recruits, while failing to feel like a part of this the special unit. Benjamin's aspirations to military masculinity convey the message that it is simply not possible for a woman to achieve the standards of men in the military, which ultimately translates to *women cannot become soldiers*. Overall, *Private Benjamin* gives a tendentious portrayal of female soldiers, building on pre-existing stereotypes, and perpetuating them. Its analysis is nonetheless important, as it represents a mark in the representation of military women in fictional boot camp narratives. The character of Judy Benjamin opened the door to the stereotype of the fragile, innocent but sexy, female soldier. This stereotype has been recreated in subsequent films, and the themes of the film have even been rebooted for the 2008 film *Private Valentine, Blonde and Dangerous*, featuring Jessica Simpson in the titular role. Moreover, a remake of *Private Benjamin* is rumored to be in

[54] *Private Benjamin*, DVD.
[55] *Private Benjamin*, DVD.
[56] Since it makes use of exaggerated gestures and dialogue, to elicit a comedic response.
[57] Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 428.
[58] Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 604.

the works[59]. The continuous interest in these representations only reveal the strength of the aforementioned stereotypes, which continue to be produced and consumed by Western audiences.

If *Private Benjamin* is a staple of the *ingénue sexy soldier*, other visual representations have helped to disseminate the opposing stereotype, that of the *butch soldier*. Labeling a woman as 'butch' implies that she is physically strong and overtly 'masculine', especially in her appearance. In visual media centering on military/war the 'butch' is frequently a punchline for comedic purposes. This is not the case, however, when the military/war genre is crossed with the science fiction genre. On such crossovers, narratives feature strong and muscular women, who occupy positions of power, and not only have leeway to be violent, but are also praised for it. Women like Ellen Ripley (of the *Alien* saga) and Sarah Connor (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) are referenced countless times as the apex of female physical strength in cinema. While the physical dominance of both these characters is undeniable, it is important to state that they are not the focus of the film. Just like the respective titles of films suggest, their spotlight is on the alien and the terminator. Even in more recent sci-fi films featuring military women, they are not the focus of the story, they only exist to react to whatever strange entity the narrative conjures, as evidenced by *Avatar*; *Battleship* (2012, dir. Peter Berg); *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014, dir. Doug Liman); and more recently, *Annihilation* (2018, dir. Alex Garland). All of these examples feature physically strong, smart, and capable military women who fight aliens, and none of them are depicted as 'impaired' by their gender, nor they partake into a romantic relationship with another soldier[60].

The penchant for empowering military women in fantastic or otherwise otherworldly conditions suggests that this empowerment is better suited for a science fiction narrative, and therefore unachievable in real world. As Ralph Donald and Karen McDonald argue, "[a]lthough science fiction often manages to equally place women in harm's way and even promotes them to positions of command, it is in a future that has yet to arrive"[61]. This is substantial, as sci-fi's *carte blanche* to place women in positions of violence and power ends up further highlighting their actual lack of agency in the real world. In this manner, the science fiction genre clashes with the military/war genre, since

[59] See Dave McNary "Rebel Wilson Marches to 'Private Benjamin' Update". *Varity* (May 7, 2014), https://variety.com/2014/film/news/rebel-wilson-private-benjamin-remake-1201174382/ (accessed July 2019).
[60] A topic I will discuss in length in later chapters.
[61] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 4.

the latter's intent is usually to portray the military institution, and/or a war/conflict, in the most truthful way possible, as the iconography tends to convey a valued respect for the depicted forces, and event. The pursuit of realism in cinematic portrayals of military/war only further challenges the representations of military women, as their representations tend to lose authenticity when fictionalized.

The Untransformed Military Women

Having considered the structure of the boot camp sub-genre and having established that boot camp narratives are transformative at their core, it is important to acknowledge that that transformation is usually tested by the end of the narrative. Boot camp narratives usually culminate in a trial that tests the protagonist's skills, teamwork, and integrity. The main character, having completed their transformation via boot camp is typically confronted with a challenge that forever changes them. This challenge often solidifies their integration into their particular unit. Yet, the types of trials and tribulations men have faced in boot camp narratives have traditionally differed from those faced by women. As Schubart puts it, "[…] war irrevocably changes men. They can win their 'red badge of courage', […] and they can lose their limbs, their sanity, their lives. But war does *not* change women"[62]. In fact, this tendency has been subsiding, as more and more fictional narratives are depicting female soldiers in positions never presented before. In order to exemplify, while simultaneously responding to Schubart's statement, I present as instances where female characters are portrayed losing limbs, the 2013 film *World War Z* (2013, dir. Marc Forster), where a female soldier loses her arm[63]; as an example of loss of sanity, the 2016 film *Voir du Pays* (2016, dir. Muriel Coulin, Delphine Coulin), where military women are depicted as struggling with their sanity over PTSD; and finally, as an example of a narrative featuring the loss of a female soldier's life, there is the 2007 film *Grace is Gone* (2007, dir. James C. Strouse), where the titular Grace is killed during the Iraq War. These three are examples of fictional productions that subvert the traditional manner of representing women as soldiers, successfully portraying them as relatable and

[62] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 302.
[63] The (uncommon) disruption of the conventionally attractive body of the female soldier is a topic I will address in Part I – Chapter 1.2.

vulnerable people. Even though these depictions continue to be largely outnumbered against portrayals of the stereotyped 'sexy soldier' or the 'butch soldier', it is nonetheless important to weigh in their contribution to a possible shift in the paradigm of representing military women in Western visual culture.

Comparing the scope of harm feasible to happen to fictional military men to that which may happen to fictional military women, it is clear that men are more commonly portrayed as both victims of armed violence, and as survivors of the excruciating woes of battle. Regarding a wide sample of visual narratives[64], soldiers have been shown losing limbs, like Lieutenant Dan in *Forrest Gump*, or Master Chief Petty Officer Carl Brashear in *Men of Honor* (2000, dir. George Tillman Jr.). Even documentaries, like *Body of War* (2007, dir. Phil Donahue, Ellen Spiro) centering on veteran Tomas Young, who was wounded and paralyzed during Iraq War, show the extent to which war can maim a soldier. Military men have also traditionally been depicted as insane or struggling with mental issues[65], as depicted in *Jacob's Ladder* (1990, dir. Adrian Lyne), or by the memorable Private Gomer Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket*. Also, there are more examples in popular visual culture of male soldiers either dying, as happens in *American Sniper* (2014, dir. Clint Eastwood), or being rumored to have died, as shown at the end of *Tigerland* (2000) than examples of female soldiers dying[66].

Regarding the ending of boot camp narratives, the climax of the plot is the aforementioned final exercise, when the protagonist's arc is finally unfolded, according to the way she/he responds to it. Considering *Tigerland* as an example of a boot camp film with a male lead (Bozz), we can see how significant the final exercise can be. In *Tigerland*, at the basic training final exercise – a Mexican-based simulation of the Vietnam War (a.k.a. the titular tigerland) –, Bozz faces death, as a rival soldier decides to use live ammunition, rather than the obligatory blank cartridges, with the intent to kill him. Bozz is changed by this experience, and while not wounded, he decided to purposely injure a friend, just so to keep him from having to go to Vietnam. The threat of real danger, and hard decision-making, is what raises the stakes in these types of films, and ultimately re-introduces the protagonist as a *transformed* soldier, reinforcing the ideological pro-war propaganda.

[64] Presented in this thesis' Appendix.
[65] This trope spans across multiple wars, but it found a strong expression during the Vietnam War, a conflict that changed the way US citizens though about their soldiers, and inspired many fictional accounts of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
[66] I will discuss the subject of physical and psychological injuries at length in a later chapter.

On the other hand, female-led boot camp narratives tend to feature less than dangerous situations, and after basic training is complete, the narratives somehow annul the servicewoman's presence in the military. The 1997 film *G.I. Jane* is an example of a boot camp narrative that annuls the transformative impact of military training on a female protagonist. *G.I. Jane* is one of the most significant fictional depictions on the controversy regarding women's access to higher/specialized positions within U.S. military[67]. In this film, the central character, Jordan O'Neil, faces the exact same difficulty in the start, and at the close, of the plot. At the beginning of *G.I. Jane*, Lieutenant O'Neil is a topographic analyst who successfully saves a group of soldiers by accurately pinpointing their location for extraction. By the end of the film, and after the gruesome boot camp she endures, O'Neil's final challenge is to find the location of Master Chief Urgayle, which she does, saving his life. The ending of *G.I. Jane* made Schubart write that the "[…] SEAL training has made no difference, she was a winner from the beginning"[68]. This repetition of obstacle-response implies that boot camp did not change her significantly, since she just used the same skillset she had at the beginning of the film to resolve a similar situation.

Also, in *Our Girl* (season 1) we can find an example of the suggestion that women do not change significantly despite boot camp. The protagonist, Molly Dawes might have changed when it comes to certain technical skills, but regarding moral/ethical values, she remained the same. This is evident in two scenes, the first, at the beginning of boot camp, when recruit Katy falls during a race and Dawes stops to help her up, disregarding the direct orders of her superiors telling her to keep running. This scene establishes from the very beginning that Dawes is someone who will disregard direct orders to intervene and help a fellow soldier. She does it again in a scene close to the end of the series when she disregards direct orders not to cross a mine-riddled field alone to retrieve a wounded soldier.

As discussed above, male-centered military narratives encourage men to be brave and strong, while those with a female lead quickly abandon these pursuits to remind women either that they have come as far as they can go in the military, or that their obligations to domesticity are more important. This hearkens back to how women have

[67] *G.I. Jane* is an example of narratives concerned with testing to see if female soldiers are capable of keeping up with male soldiers. Which is supported by Schubart's comment that "war movies are embedded in contemporary social and political debates and discourses. In the case of female war films, these are about gender and domestic politics rather than the economics of war or questions of foreign politics". Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 301.
[68] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 302.

been incorporated in war efforts in the US since the Civil War, as laundresses or 'camp followers'[69], and in both World Wars in auxiliary roles, and were subsequently discarded after the end of the conflicts. Narratives that revert military women to domesticity deny the reform of gender roles in the US military.

Not only do female-led boot camp narratives undermine their protagonist's transformation, as they often revert them to some level of domesticity, as is the case of the aforementioned *Private Benjamin*, who by the end of the film abandons the army to get married. Character arcs as these diminish the capabilities and relevance of servicewomen, pegging them as disposable, and ultimately incapable of the type of transformation that male soldiers achieve in other narratives. By not presenting a harder challenge at the completion of the plot, such narratives deflate the transformative appeal of the boot camp sub-genre, and deprive women from asserting their positions as capable soldiers.

These unachieved transformations in female-led boot camp narratives (in comparison to male-led narratives) thus suggest that women are culturally seen as uncapable of climbing up the military chain of command, and their changes are circumscribed to the gaining of characteristics that might facilitate their reinstatement in a domestic sphere. While the sample of fictional narratives analyzed for this thesis do not hint at a conscious critique of the limitations the military institution sets for women, a case can be made that those limitations nonetheless transpire a pervasive blockage for female growth in military institutions. Moreover, as I see the military as a micro-cosmos of society, it also speaks to the circumscribed access women face in institutions outside the military.

As I have explained, and will continue to explore, boot camp narratives are a uniquely representative portion of military/war fiction, as they portray how women are 'permitted' to enter the military institution, how they must regulate their femininity by balancing what is expected of a 'woman' and of a 'soldier', and what they must compromise in order to establish their place as soldiers in a masculine environment. As the thesis progresses I will develop on fictional boot camp conventions, as this sub-genre of the war film provides a controlled setting for the close examination of fictional military women. In the following chapters I will explore how fictional servicewomen step in and

[69] For a comprehensive approach on this subject see Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

out of the boot camp sub-genre, allowing for further analysis regarding the 'hybridity'[70] of military women as a fictional character. It is this 'hybridity' that characterizes military women in cinematic genres, mirroring their duplicity as both a symbol of transgression and conformity.

[70] As explained by Yvonne Tasker, the military woman "[…] is consistently associated with generic hybridity, whether in the war-romance hybrids […], the comedies […], the boot camp conventions […], or the thrillers and investigative fictions […]". Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 60.

Chapter 1.2

THE DESIRABLE UNWELCOMED
The Female Body in Military Narratives

"Women who are inducted into masculinist hierarchies are exported tissue, in constant danger of provoking an inflammatory response and summary rejection"
Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (1999)

Overcoming Boot Camp

Having established the groundworks for Western military's ideologies concerning gender and the integration of women in the armed forces, I now move onto the analysis of what is the biggest argument against integration used by its opposers, women's bodies perceived as essentially non-military. In this chapter, I consider how the body of the military woman (in relation to the body of the military man) has been represented in fictional narratives pertaining the military/war genre, particularly in the boot-camp sub-genre, in conformity to Part I of this thesis. In this first section, I will analyze how specific bodily traits are depicted, and to what end. I will start by providing contextualization through examples of pre-9/11 visual culture products that have established the basis for subsequent representations. I will also discuss the importance of gender identity markers (such as hair), in military/war narratives. As I build on the work of influential authors, such as Yvonne Tasker's work on gender and the spectacle of the body in Hollywood[71], and Cynthia Enloe's influential work on gender and militarism[72], I aim to contribute to

[71] One of her most important contributions being: Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[72] With important publications such as: Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkley: University of California Press, Ltd, 2000).

the discussion on the problematic of representing military women in contemporary Western visual culture.

Concerning post 9/11 recruitment, Helen Benedict writes on *The Lonely Soldier* that "[t]he Pentagon is too desperate for bodies"[73]. While the heavy enlistment following the attacks on the World Trade Center proved this affirmation to be correct, a question emerges: Whose bodies? As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a deep-seated correlation between military and masculinity, which leads to the conclusion that the 'bodies' that interest the Pentagon are, by default, male ones (those considered "strong" and identifying as "heterosexual"). Nonetheless, in the years following 9/11 women have enlisted in the US military in unprecedented numbers, mainly due to the US's high rate of unemployment; a growing demand for soldiers; and the absence of a draft. In fact, the latest demographics (pertaining to 2018) show that women represent 16% of the enlisted forces, and 18% of the officer corps in the US[74], a percentage that highly surpasses those of previous conflicts.

While the official recruitment website for enlisting in one of the five branches of the US military does not state preferences in terms of gender, the website does clarify, under 'Requirements for Joining the Military', that "[m]en and women meet different fitness standards"[75]. This announcement testifies to the fact that, from the very start of their military life, men and women are expected to meet different standards, especially when it comes to how their bodies perform. This distinction is often the basis for opposition to the integration of women in all facets of the armed forces[76].

In *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (1993) Yvonne Tasker explains the importance of the rise of the muscular hero to action cinema starting in the 1980's[77]. Tasker recognizes the overwhelming success of actors with an unusually strong body, like Stallone or Schwarzenegger, as a retaliation to the feminism of the 1970's, embodying the glorification of the (white) male body in an unprecedented

[73] Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 44.
[74] According to the *Council of Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military (accessed November 2019).
[75] www.usa.gov (accessed September 2019).
[76] See Carol Cohn, "How Can She Claim Equal Rights When She Doesn't Have to Do as Many Push-Ups as I do?: The Framing of Men's Opposition of Women's Equality in the Military", *Men and Masculinities*, 3, (2000), 131- 151.
[77] Another author who also explored this topic in the 1980's was Susan Jeffords, analyzing its connection with the political sphere of that time, in the following publication: Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

cinematic demonstration of masculinity[78]. Correspondingly, while male actors were praised for their powerful bodies in action narratives, there were also female actors who gained notoriety for their physical condition during this period, disrupting traditional "codes of femininity"[79]. For instance, Linda Hamilton played the muscular, and driven, Sarah Connor, against Schwarzenegger's nearly indestructible cyborg, and the moldable T-1000, in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991, dir. James Cameron). That portrayal achieved cult status, and established Connor as a "muscular female heroine"[80]. Hamilton's portrayal of Sarah Connor had such a long-standing impact on popular culture that the actor resumed her iconic role as Sarah Connor in *Terminator: Dark Fate* (2019, dir. Tim Miller), without any changes to the character's tough demeanor or visual depiction.

As referenced in the previous chapter (Chapter 1.1), in her analysis of the representations of muscular heroines, Tasker coins the term 'musculinity', to indicate "[…] the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation"[81]. According to Tasker, featuring a physically strong woman in an action film is not an attempt to diversify female characters, but it is chiefly a way to reinscribe the female body in a discourse of masculinity. Therefore, Sarah Connor is allowed to be muscular and brave in *Terminator 2*, as long as there is a clear separation between her, a worried mother (emphasizing her womanhood), and the male protagonist (Schwarzenegger), stronger, braver, and the center of the narrative. Tasker finds similar problems with the character of Ellen Ripley (*Alien* films: 1979 – 1997, dir.s Ridley Scott, James Cameron, David Fincher, Jean-Pierre Jeunet). Placing Ripley as the hero of the saga raises, according to Tasker, questions of "symbolic transgression" and "[…] problems for the genre at the level of connotation"[82]. However, in my understanding, Tasker fails to recognize in her analysis the legitimacy of the Alien as the 'male' central figure of the films, which relegates Ripley to a supporting role. Additionally, Ripley shares with Sarah Connor a connection to motherhood[83],

[78] See Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 1.
[79] Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 132.
[80] Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 3.
[81] Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 3.
[82] Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 15.
[83] Even though Connor's connection to motherhood is evident, as throughout the film she goes to great lengths to protect her son John, Ripley's connection to motherhood is somewhat more complex, as she acts as a mother-figure for a little girl in *Aliens* (1986), and actually gives birth to a xenomorph in *Alien Resurrection* (1996).

counterbalancing their overt masculinity, and reinstating them as acceptably females inside what is essentially a male space (action/sci-fi genre).

Much has changed regarding the portrayal of physically strong women in science fiction during these past few decades, as women became fierce knights in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011 – 2019, created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss), full-fledged Jedi in *Star Wars: Episode IX - The Rise of Skywalker* (2019, dir. J. J. Abrams). Also, DC Entertainment and Marvel Studios delivered successful films centering on powerful women, such is the case of Diana Prince in *Wonder Woman* (2017, dir. Patty Jenkins) and Carol Danvers in *Captain Marvel* (2019, dir. Anna Boden, and Ryan Fleck). In fact, the superhero subgenre has been delivering a long-awaited variety of muscular female characters that draw from pre-existing images/lore. As such, the Dora Milaje, seen in the popular film *Black Panther* (2018, dir. Ryan Coogler), evoke tribal traditions of female warriors, and the Amazon women fighting in the 2017 *Wonder Woman* are based upon recognizable Greek mythological characters. These characters, muscular as they may be, do not follow the pattern of 'musculinity', as they are not the 'female equivalent' of a male action hero in their own narratives. While it can be argued that these characters were brought to the big screen as counterpoints for male characters, they ultimately derive from legends and/or history that always identified them as female, and they do not exist only in relation to a male character in their narratives.

If we consider one of the most emblematic figures successfully re-emerging in sci-fi lately, Wonder Woman, we can trace her origins back to standing as a representation of unabashed feminism during WWII. As Munford and Waters put it, in their work on feminism and popular culture, Wonder Woman "[…] embodied a mode of female empowerment and independence opened up by the wartime economy and exemplified by the Rosie the Riveter campaign"[84]. The representation of Wonder Woman as a strong fighter persuaded young women to get involved in the war efforts, as the comics depicted Wonder Woman fighting Axis military forces. By "[…] placing this model of emergent female power in a national and patriotic context"[85], young women were led to believe that they too could be 'wonderful', and make a difference, which they did.

Post-war Wonder Woman, on the other hand, was no longer required to be a warrior, and ultimately was drawn into domesticity, helplessness, and romance narratives,

[84] Rebecca Munford, Melanie Waters, *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystic* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 3.
[85] Munford, Waters, *Feminism and Popular Culture*, 3.

in an effort to sway women to again follow her lead. Munford and Waters denounce how "[…] her body might offer itself up once again for cooption by the mainstream"[86]. The idea of 'offering' the body of a highly recognizable and representative character in Western culture to the mainstream implies the deliberate manipulation of the perception of the general public. The influence that the changes to the body[87], and narrative, of Wonder Woman had on a section of the population is illustrative of the importance fictional representations hold in societies that consume great amounts of entertainment. Nonetheless, as I addressed before in this thesis, it appears that only the sci-fi genre is permitted to play with the blurring of categories of masculinity and femininity, where fantasy rules. The same blurring comes with more challenges in the military/war genre, where the fictional female warriors are constricted by a set of pre-established conventions that were already in place before their emergence as soldiers.

In Chapter 1.1 I discussed how, in military training narratives, the character arc of servicewomen did not match the intensity of the boot camp transformation of servicemen, and in this chapter I demonstrate how the depiction of their bodies falls short in comparison as well. While Linda Ruth Williams claims that women are "[…] the sex most open to physical transformation"[88], the materials analyzed for this thesis show that not many fictional servicewomen have had their bodies 'transformed' in post-9/11 boot camp narratives. One character that evidences this current absence of physically strong females in boot camp is a pre-9/11 one, Lieutenant Jordan O'Neil in *G.I. Jane* (1997, dir. Ridley Scott)[89].

Nowadays, the military female body is no longer a fictitious or mythological entity, as women are now a part of military forces in its full capacity. Women can now apply to join special forces in the US, which became law only in 2016. *G.I. Jane* takes place at a time when women were not yet integrated in US Navy Special Forces. Therefore, the character of Jordan O'Neil was not burdened with the responsibility of representing real soldiers, and was thus free to be an 'exceptional woman' in a *quasi*-fantasy narrative, depicting what was then not a reality. Tasker uses the term 'exceptional

[86] Munford, Waters, *Feminism and Popular Culture*, 7.
[87] Wonder Woman's body measurements and costumes have changed throughout the years. See Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopft, 2014).
[88] Linda Ruth Williams, "Ready for Action: G.I. Jane, Demi Moore's body and the female combatant movie". *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker, (London: Routledge, 2004), 174.
[89] *G.I. Jane* tells the fictional story of the first woman joining the US Navy SEALs.

woman' to refer to characters that are presented in the narratives as clear exceptions to the norm[90]. The 'exception' embodied by O'Neil allows her to be depicted as uncommonly muscular. In this film, the concept of 'musculinity' still applies, as she reflects on the staple of the tough woman in an all-male team. O'Neil's body then becomes both a site of transgressive femininity and of imprinted masculinity at the same time. As I have been discussing, the setting of boot camp invites transformation, and *G.I. Jane* delivers what is perhaps one of the most striking physical transformations from a fictional military woman. We see O'Neil shaving off her hair, doing one hand push-ups, her body dripping in sweat, her muscles bulging and glistening. These were not images associated with women in the military/war genre, and have since dissipated over time, in favor of more 'controlled' visual interpretations that preserve a 'softer' look.

In her attempts to become a Navy SEAL, is O'Neil also becoming a man? While Hilary Neroni argues that "[s]he [O'Neil] does not try to become male, nor does she give up her femininity entirely", instead "[…] erasing certain aspects of femininity […] in order to be accepted"[91], on the contrary, Helen Benedict argues that, to integrate the Navy SEALS, "[…] the Moore character [played by Demi Moore] must turn herself into a man"[92]. Even if this appears to be a diverging subject, the fact remains that O'Neil does seek out to meet the same physical standards as the men in her unit, the standards that today's US military recruitment centers have pre-determined to be different according to gender[93]. Neroni furthermore states that O'Neil is placating fragile masculinities with her transformation, by arguing that "[t]his elision of difference allows the men to see her accomplishments without being upset by her femininity invading their all-male environment"[94]. While her erasure of markers of gender identity may work towards the group recognizing O'Neil as an apt soldier, it compulsively also signals a visual recognition of O'Neil as a 'male', supporting the idea that military culture associates being a soldier with being a man.

In a scene where O'Neil is showering alone in the dark, Master Chief Urgayle approaches, stares at her naked body for a moment, unnoticed, then says: "The Israelis tried it. Women in combat. Seems the men couldn't get used to the sight of women blown

[90] See Tasker. *Spectacular Bodies*, 251.
[91] Neroni, *The Violent Woman*, 144.
[92] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 141.
[93] As shown in the US Government website, under 'Requirements for Joining the Military', as explained earlier in the chapter.
[94] Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 144.

open"[95]. Urgayle conveys to the audience what is and is not permissible for women to show men. He does this by staring at a naked O'Neil while proclaiming that the *sight* of dead women is not only unappealing, but also a liability in a war zone. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey addresses cinema's particular ability to categorize women as sex objects, not just through dialogue, but also by visually exposing them for the male characters (and by extension, for male audiences). In this scene, the audience is not only permitted to spy on O'Neil alongside Urgayle, but is also validated by his comments on how she does not belong in the US Navy. As Mulvey explains: "Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself"[96]. This shower scene in *G.I. Jane* establishes the status quo on how O'Neil should be looked at, as a vulnerable body under borrowed physical markers of military masculinity.

Even though O'Neil tries her best to distance herself from being a distracting and provocative element among the trainees, she is nonetheless marked by difference, a difference she appears desperate to dilute through her relentless attempts in embracing military masculinity. By embracing it, this character born out of 'exception' ends up achieving a symbolic level of masculinity by the end of the narrative, as she yells at Master Chief Urgayle: "Suck my dick!", what Benedict calls "[…] a male statement if there ever was one"[97]. Ultimately, O'Neil manages to disrupt established gender norms within the military, even if only those contained inside her boot camp experience.

When analyzing more recent representations of military women, it is important to consider how they engage with cultural expectations of gender roles in the military, which will lead us to an understanding of the weight those representations have in contributing to the perpetuation, or reformulation, of stereotypes. Jordan O'Neil continues to be an influential character, and *G.I. Jane* an influential movie, in a post-9/11 scenario. Attesting to this, upon the news of the upcoming ban lift regarding women in the Navy SEALS, an article in *Navy Times* warns: "Don't expect G.I. Janes right away"[98], given the modifications planned for the units before actual integration could take place. The immediate throwback to a dated reference testifies to the establishment of that character

[95] *G.I. Jane*. DVD.
[96] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 843.
[97] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 141.
[98] Meghann Myers, "Pentagon OKs plan allowing women to join Navy SEALs". *Navy Times*, (December 3, 2015). https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2015/12/03/pentagon-oks-plan-allowing-women-to-join-navy-seals/ (accessed November 2019).

as a staple of representation of military women, affecting future depictions, either directly or implicitly.

In her seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), the aforementioned Laura Mulvey denounces the social structures and codes that are embedded in cinematic productions, through the use of psychoanalysis. According to Mulvey, western mainstream cinema is a reflection of a patriarchic society shaping its characters and plots according to it. Mulvey argues that Hollywood works of fiction (she lists, for instance, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, 1958) use the body and sexuality of female characters only to visually please men. Criticizing the sexist structure of mainstream cinema, she writes that "[f]ilm reflects, reveals, even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle"[99]. These 'ways of looking', as Mulvey sees them, place the woman as a passive object of deliberate male gaze, while it offers men the omnipotent power of looking[100], or, as she simply puts it: "Woman as image, man as bearer of the look"[101]. Mulvey draws from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in her analysis of cinema as the construction of a male 'unconscious'. By evoking Freud's concept of scopophilia (the pleasure derived from looking at the body of another), Mulvey considers that cinema facilitates scopophilia at the expenses of the female body, while at the same time appeasing to spectators' ego, by offering an avatar for them to transpose into/identify with.

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was meant to be a provocative political piece, as Mulvey admits to her intentions with the text, by stating that: "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article"[102]. By disclosing her agenda, Mulvey actively calls for an attack on the ego of film history[103], positioning herself as an agent of feminist change. Mulvey's work received some criticism, among other things, for recognizing only a heterosexual relation of viewing and pleasure, for focusing only on the representations of white women, and for assuming that

[99] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 833.
[100] O'Neil's body is many times framed in a way as to exacerbate her shape, her nipples shown through the tank top.
[101] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 837.
[102] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 835.
[103] By stating that: "The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego, that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked". Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 835.

all spectators share the same levels of identification with a fictional character[104]. Even though the text received backlash, scholars continue to address the themes Mulvey introduced. Through the re-working of her original ideas, and/or by expanding on her concepts, those works attest to the enduring importance of Mulvey's theories[105].

Some of the later criticism arises from self-proclaimed post-feminist Rikke Schubart, who criticizes the tardiness in film theory to notice (what she dubs) 'female heroes'[106]. One of the 'distractions' she pinpoints is precisely Mulvey's theories on the 'male gaze', which Schubart sees as "one-sided and highly subjective"[107]. While Schubart admits that "Mulvey set the agenda of feminist film theory for the next decades", and that "[s]he was not wrong to point out that women are objects of male desire"[108], she disagrees with the generalization that fictional women are passive, and men are in control, which she refers to as the 'Mulvian binary'. Schubart lists male actors who famously displayed their bodies in what she considers to be an "erotization of the male […] body"[109], such as Jean-Claude Van Damme, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Bruce Lee. What Schubart fails to see, is that the characters these men adopted onscreen where not primarily intended for a female audience. When their bodies were on display, their strength and power was the main focus of the exhibition. By stating that "[…] these actors earned their claim to fame by exposing flesh"[110], Schubart suggests that their sex-appeal was the main factor of their mark in the action/martial arts genres, and that they were only filmed shirtless to please a 'female gaze'. None of the characters these men portrayed lacked narrative agency, nor were they relegated to serve only as sexual spectacle or erotic objects, as women traditionally have been. In my understanding, Schubart's attempts to disrupt the hierarchy established by Mulvey falls short on its premise, as she makes use

[104] Mulvey herself addressed some of these issues in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'" inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' first presented as a paper at the conference *Cinema and Psychoanalysis* in 1981.
[105] Examples of the permeability of her work can be found, for example, in Hu Ying, "Beyond the Glow of the Red Lantern, or, What Does it Mean to Talk About Women's Cinema in China?" In *Redirecting the Gaze: Third World Women Filmmakers*. Diana Robin and Ira Jaffe (eds.). (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 257-82. Here, Ying uses Mulvey's theories on the gaze and applies them to Chinese cinema. Another example can be found in Karen Schwartzman. "The Scene of the Crime". In *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World*, ed. D. Robin & I. Jaffe, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 205-255. Here, Schwartzman utilizes Mulvey's theories to examine Venezuelan cinema.
[106] A topic explored on chapter 1.1. See Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 8.
[107] Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 20.
[108] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 20.
[109] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 20.
[110] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 20.

of post-feminist concepts pertaining the denial of binarism and the belief that absolute gender equality is a reality, and is expressed by the full access to agency by both men and women. I consider that Schubart's vision of gender equality to be limited, failing to go beyond the amount of visual display of flesh and into the reasons behind each type of exposure, and their implications on popular culture as representations of male and female heroes[111].

Regarding the debate on the agency of muscular male action figures, Yvonne Tasker offers a more nuanced perspective. While the 'Mulvian binary' is not lost on Tasker, she approaches the issue understanding the difference in roles allowed to male and female action heroes in recent visual culture. Tasker points to how, in Mulvey's analysis of classic Hollywood, male characters pushed the narrative, while female characters were 'spectacle', and argues that "[…] the male figure in the contemporary action picture often functions in both capacities. He controls the action at the same time as he is offered up as a sexual spectacle"[112]. I argue that, even if Taker's perspective is more informed than Schubart's interpretation, it does not take into consideration how the 'sexual spectacle' might vary according to the body being offered as the object of gaze. Mulvey implies that the object of gaze is passive, and this is not the case when considering male action figures, while they might be sexualized, they are never in a passive position, they hold the power in the narrative, in terms of agency *and* physically. Women presented as sexual objects for the 'male gaze' are frequently diminished and physically overpowered. On the other hand, the exposed bodies of Stallone, Van Damme, Schwarzenegger, or any other male action star, will not be overpowered. This should be taken into consideration when discussing the disparity in gender representations, informed by the ramifications of Mulvey's theory, present in recent analysis of visual culture.

Mulvey's article also sustains one of the main arguments of this thesis, that fictional military women are given a narrative arc that most of the times culminates in driving them away from climbing the hierarchical ladder. As Mulvey explains: "The presence of woman is an indispensible [sic] element of spectacle in normative narrative

[111] For reference on how male action stars influenced US American masculinity, see Cohan, Steven, and Ina Rae Hark, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 1993); Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993); Timothy Shary, *Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).
[112] Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 16.

film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line"[113]. Mulvey suggests that, as passive and disrupting objects, women actively represent an obstruction to the plot. This argument can thus explain the recurrent characterization of military women as a distraction for male soldiers, which frequently leads to their removal from the warzone/unit/base.

For the problem of challenging the unbalanced relationship between power and pleasure onscreen, Mulvey offers a solution: "[…] It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged"[114]. Unfortunately, even though more than four decades have passed since Mulvey's groundbreaking text, multiple works of fiction continue to be produced and released containing the unabashed objectification of female characters, catering to the 'male gaze' in the same 'voyeuristic-scopophilic' manner, and many of them pertaining to the military/war genre.

Having discussed Mulvey's theory, I am interested in understanding how/if it can be applied to films featuring military women. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Mulvey mainly addressed scenes where women would be on display, and sometimes performing (singing/dancing) for men. Since that (typically) does not happen in post-WWII military/war films, we can verify in these more recent films that "[t]he determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly"[115]. Feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver draws from Mulvey's influential work, applying it to representations centered on the Iraq War. Instead of discussing 'the male gaze', she discusses the 'pornographic way of looking', which concerns the female body at the intersection of sex and violence. This is something Oliver sees as "[…] normalized through popular media". Mulvey's influence in Oliver's arguments are clear when she expresses that "[t]he pornographic way of looking reinforces the power and agency of the looker while erasing or debasing the power and agency of the looked-at"[116]. This 'pornographic way of looking' is manifested in fictional visual productions that depict military women as overtly sexualized in a violent setting. As Caroline Heldman explains in the documentary *Miss Representation* (2011, dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom, and Kimberlee Acquaro):

[113] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 837.
[114] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 843.
[115] Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 837.
[116] Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 2.

> We also see a new incarnation of this [objectification of women in visual culture], where women appear to be empowered, they are carrying the story, they are the action hero, but again when you peel back a layer or two, you discover that it is really not about their agency. I call this archetype the Fighting Fuck Toy, because even though she is doing things supposedly on her own terms, she very much is objectified, and exists for the male viewer. [117]

The 'Fighting Fuck Toy' archetype, while usually presented with some degree of satire, pervades representations of fictional female soldiers. Examining the focus some visual narratives place on the physicality of a soldier, I see a need to circle back to Mulvey's original theory on the representation of women as spectacle. Even though military women are not always presented as a sexual spectacle, they often display a visual contrast between their male counterparts, which aims to provide spectacle in the perceived abnormality of the situation. One recent example of this can be found in the 2018 French production *Volontaire* (dir. Hélène Fillières), which features a woman going through boot camp. When interviewed about her choice regarding the actor for the main character (Laure Baer), director Fillières told reporters that she wanted "[…] a graceful, very feminine young woman who embellishes the story, accentuating her beauty to better emphasize the femininity of this brave and strong character"[118]. By admitting that she deliberately searched for a 'graceful' and 'very feminine' actor to 'embellish' her narrative, Fillières contributed to the status quo of portraying military women as fragile and feminine. The director added that "[t]he contrast between the grace of her face and the power of her determination touches me a lot, […]"[119]. Fillières thus conveys the idea that a graceful face is not expected to co-exist with determination, presenting a contrast. The actor chosen for the part ended up being Diane Rouxel, who, with her blue eyes, small frame, and blond hair, echoes the casting of Goldie Hawn as Private Benjamin. Similarly to Hawn, we see Rouxel's petit body struggle to complete the physical challenges imposed by boot camp, especially when it comes to one of the main staples of demonstration of female inadequacy in boot camp films, the *obstacle course scenes*.

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[117] *Miss Representation*, DVD.
[118] Allocinè. "Volontaire", http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-255544/secrets-tournage/ (accessed November 2019).
[119] Allocinè. "Volontaire", http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-255544/secrets-tournage/ (accessed November 2019).

Obstacle course scenes are commonly featured in military/war visual narratives, as they can establish the protagonists' drive, while at the same time showing their bodies (i.e. male bodies) change as a consequence of training. Based on the sample of military/war films I have examined for the purpose of this thesis, I can conclude that obstacle course scenes in films centering on a female protagonist have a tendency to work in one of three ways: As a source of *comedy*, as a *metaphor*, or as an *omen*.

Traditionally, the visual physicality of women has been played for comedy in obstacle course scenes. That trend has permeated time, as it appears in films such as *Private Benjamin* (1980, dir. Howard Zieff), and later *Private Valentine* (2008, dir. Steve Miner). The awkward body of the fragile female failing to overcome the obstacles is offered in a comedic way, usually accompanied by the soldier's incessant complaining. The message is that their overt femininity incapacitates the women in a functional manner, and as the movie progresses, and they embrace their 'military masculinity', the women become able to overcome the obstacles they could not in the previous scene(s). Therefore, it is common to have at least two obstacle scenes, one at the beginning and one near the close of the narrative, to show this 'progress'.

Volontaire is a prime example of the use of *obstacle course as a metaphor*. In this film, overcoming the hardships of the course is meant to be seen as a parallel for Baer's difficult path in conquering the heart of the severe Commanding Officer Riviere. One of the obstacles is bluntly offered as the core symbolic representation of the Commanding Officer, the climbing wall. Baer is shown looking at the high wall in front of her, a metaphor for the tall Riviere, whom Baer wishes to conquer romantically. Fillières purposely frames the height difference between Baer and Riviere to insist on the idea of Baer's physical inferiority, and how it is appealing to an overpowering Commanding Officer.

Figure 4 (left) - Screenshot of Volontaire (2018*). Baer and Riviere.*

Figure 5 (right) - Screenshot of Volontaire (2018*). Baer during an obstacle course.*

As an example of the *obstacle course as an omen* we can consider *Our Girl*. In the first stand-alone episode of *Our Girl*, upon presenting the recruits to the obstacle course, Corporal Geddings states that he wants to "separate the shit from the clay"[120]. This analogy, while crude, reveals a desire to dispose of those recruits considered to be waste, and those able to be molded by the Army. Protagonist Molly Dawes struggles while going through the obstacle course. Seeing Dawes' difficulties, Corporal Geddings screams at her: "I have yet to see a gallant bullet that carefully avoids members of the female sex and targets only men"[121]. Under the guise of motivation, the Corporal was actually implying a deliberate lack of effort from Dawes (and by extension all women), as if she naively believed that she could not be harmed during conflict because of her gender. During the obstacle course, Dawes helps a fellow recruit who was choking on ropes laid for an obstacle, disregarding her own progress in the obstacle run. This scene is echoed in later episodes where Dawes saves soldiers with disregard for her safety or interests.

The examples of obstacle scenes above prove that obstacle course scenes[122] are useful to relay information about the protagonist to the audience. However, it is the particularities of that message, when the protagonist is a woman, that are cause for concern.

In the previous chapter (Chapter 1.1) I explained how Rikke Schubart analyzed fictional women who infiltrate previously all-male worlds and play the hero in what are perceived to be 'male' genres. I equally discussed Schubert's stance against referring to them as 'heroines', preferring 'female heroes'. With this category, Schubart offers a variation of Tasker's notion of 'musculinity', in the sense that, even though the term 'female hero' does not refer exclusively to physical capabilities, it still addresses the representation of women as an extension of a default male character. As Schubart explains, "[a]rchetyping the hero both absorbs and adjusts to social change, allowing her agency as well as limiting her action"[123]. Accordingly, archetyping the default military

[120] *Our Girl*, DVD.
[121] *Our Girl*, DVD.
[122] There is a difference between scenes centering on obstacle course and drill scenes, whereas the former typically aim at portraying an attitude adjustment, the latter intend to convey precision and order. As the obstacle course is seen as a learning step, a way to adjust behavior, the drill is a proud moment for the soldier, a manifestation of an achievement. This is evident in *G.I. Jane*, *Our Girl*, among other narratives.
[123] *Our Girl*, DVD.

hero to become a 'female hero' becomes a surrender to military masculinity, as the woman is constricted to previously established patterns of male heroism.

During her considerations on fictional female heroism, Schubart accuses feminists of being utopic. She implies that feminists see men as the enemy[124], an argument that has been largely disproven by the later wave(s) of feminism. While defending her post-feminist view of the 'female hero', Schubart recognizes that that it is a category open for interpretation, due to its complexity as a "[…] contested site, a paradoxical and ambivalent creature"[125]. Even though debates among feminists problematize, among other issues, women's role in modern warfare, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of the issues at hand, which can never be trivialized by blaming 'men'. This negotiation of the female body in typically male cinematic genres can be particularly problematic when addressing military spaces. Regarding visual representations of servicewomen, the challenge lies in the choices of erasure of gender identity markers, one of the most evident examples being the cutting or shaving of hair.

From the mythologies of Medusa, to Samson, hair has a long history within cultural imagination[126]. Hair is often considered a source of strength. In mythology, female hair was offered to the Gods as sacrifice (Seleucid Queen Berenice II), took the form of terrifying snakes (Medusa), was used as a tower's stairwell (Rapunzel), etc. However, the mythology is inverted in depictions of the military. While Samson loses his power after Delilah cuts his hair, in the military, losing one's hair is a sign of strength.

As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, when addressing the ritualized aspects of boot camp, Donald and McDonald listed cutting hair as one of the signs of military ritualistic behavior, explaining that "[…] recruits are deprived of their former hairstyles and given the standard G.I. butch haircut, the military equivalent of primitive head-shaving"[127]. The cleansing that comes with head-shaving allows one to be ready for a new stage in life, which is akin to the military mentality. Nevertheless, since only men are required to cut their hair in the US military, women are able to choose if they want to shave it, cut it, or simply tie it neatly. In *The Lonely Soldier*, Benedict details how servicewomen keep their hair in conformity to military regulations, which includes

[124] When she suggests that "It might turn out that men are not the enemy, but merely an opponent". Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 14.
[125] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 14.
[126] For an in-depth approach on this subject see Victoria Sherrow, *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006).
[127] Ralph Donald and Karen McDonald, *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, inc., 2011), 5.

regulation hair clips and hair bands. Women are obliged to keep their hair intact, often using hair gel and spray. These procedures are so time consuming that several women decide to cut it short. Some even do it while on deployment due to extreme heat.[128]

Being able to choose what to do with their hair allows women to have a certain (if limited) amount of agency in defining their visual identity. As they can decide to shave their hair and be associated with men (and therefore seen as a 'soldier'), or keep it longer and maintain a look more traditionally linked with femininity. In *The Lonely Soldier*, Benedict describes how Mickiela Montoya decided to cut her long hair in preparation for boot camp, writing that "[…] as the tendrils dropped around her feet she felt liberated, as if with her hair she were shedding the wild girl who now only embarrassed her"[129]. There is thus an important connection between hair and femininity, and through Montoya's experience we can observe how real women self-regulate the amount of femininity they deem appropriate for military life.

Fictional representations of military women have been shown to struggle with this particular mark of gender identity as well. Examples date back to silent films, as observed in *The House with Closed Shutters* (1910, dir. D. W. Griffith), where a woman cuts her hair to join the Civil War in the place of her coward brother (Figure 6). In this early example of military/war film, the removal of hair is also symbolic of the literal body replacement of a man by a woman.

Figure 6 – Screenshot of The House with Closed Shutters *(1910). 'The mother' helps 'the sister' cutting her hair.*

[128] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 40.
[129] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 37.

If, as Schubart defends, "[l]ong hair is a sign of abominable femininity and weakness in the war film" [130], this can explain military narratives' insistence in depicting barbershop scenes. These scenes are a staple of the military/war genre, and according to Schubart, they suggest that shaving male recruits' heads implies mandatory uniformization, while the voluntary cutting/shaving women's hair is 'liberating'[131]. Although making a bold and arguable assumption regarding the potentials of female 'liberation', Schubart still makes a pertinent point by suggesting that some military women purposely choose to shave their heads with the intent to 'belong'.

To this day there has not been a fictional servicewoman who has made shaving her hair in boot camp more visually impactful than Jordan O'Neil in *G.I. Jane*. By erasing a marker of gender identity, this fictional character transposes to the screen a similar sentiment by Montoya in *The Lonely Soldier* quoted above, as O'Neil is also 'shedding' the girl that embarrassed her. Demi Moore famously shaved her own head in front of the cameras for *G.I. Jane*, as her character strived to eliminate handicaps (as the hair was constantly in her face), but above all, to prove that her gender is not an impediment for her progression within the Navy SEALS. As Linda Ruth Williams wrote, by shaving her hair, Lieutenant O'Neil "[…] was taking control of her career by taking control of her body"[132]. *G.I. Jane* depicts fictional military women struggling with their hair as a problematic element in their insertion in the military, but there are other fictional soldiers who struggle with it in different ways, and conveying different messages.

She's in the Army Now (1981, dir. Hy Averback) is a TV film that depicts a unit of women going through Army boot camp. One of the recruits, Marshall, struggles with military life, and her struggles are signified by her long hair, which constantly blocks her sight. Marshall is thus told by the Drill Instructor "keep it up, or cut it off". When all the recruits are punished for Marshall's inadequacies, they forcefully shave her hair, as a collective symbolic message of the refusal of her weakness, which is connected to her hair. She later tries to re-gain 'femininity' by overusing makeup, in what Tasker refers to as "a clownish parody of femininity"[133]. This example attests to the idea that femininity is incompatible with military life.

[130] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 303.
[131] See Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 304.
[132] Williams, 'Ready for Action', 181.
[133] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 240.

In *Our Girl*, Molly Dawes does not cut her hair, which is never depicted as an impediment of any sorts. She does, however, change its color. When we first meet Dawes, she is a 'party girl' with bleached blond hair, and as begins to embrace the military ideals, she decides to color it. When asked by a fellow soldier: "Is that your natural hair color, brown?", Dawes responds affirmatively, adding 'dark chestnut'"[134]. As hair can be perceived as an integral part of a person's identity, it is even more evident in the military where your hair might be the only thing that stands out as a marker of your gender. By coloring her hair brown, Dawes returned to her 'natural' state, abandoning what the bleached blond represented, a 'frivolous' life being cast aside for the sake of a 'righteous' life in the Army. By coloring Dawes' hair, the series conveys the message that changing appearances allows women to better embrace Army life, and 'be the best', as their slogan states. This short scene in *Our Girl* is noteworthy for the subliminal message it conveys to its audience, reinforcing the pro-military propaganda the series holds up.

Even though there is symbolism in cutting or changing the hair, is it important to make clear that many servicewomen in real life cut/shave their hair only for practical reasons, adapting to their environments, and opting for the practicality of a shorter hairstyle. Fictional characters that strongly associate their hair with their femininity, as seen in representations like *She's in the Army Now* or *Our Girl*, ultimately contribute to the stagnation of women's progression as fully realized characters in military-driven entertainment.

The Abject Body of the Military Woman

Considering the importance of acknowledging the layers of identification between viewer and fictional subject, I now address not only how we see the body of the fictional servicewoman, but also how she 'perceives' her own body.

On the topic of identification, I again draw from Laura Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Centering on a dominant male figure with which the viewer identifies with, Mulvey's identification analysis draws from Lacan's *mirror stage*

[134] In *Our Girl*, DVD.

(itself a critical interpretation of the work of Sigmund Freud)[135], which describes the moment when children recognize themselves in the mirror as a whole, pinpointed by Lacan as the cornerstone for the construction of the ego. Lacan establishes that "[t]he function of the mirror stage turns out […] to be […] to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality"[136]. This relationship is not always linear, as Lacan explains, "[r]ecognition is thus overlaid with mis-recognition: the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, […]"[137]. Mulvey offers Lacan's theory as "[…] the birth of the long love affair/despair between image and self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience"[138]. Drawing from Mulvey's recognition of self-awareness in cinema, centering on the reflected self-image, I apply Mulvey's theory to the analysis of fictional military women looking at their reflections.

Fictional characters serve as mirrors for whom they are meant to represent, many times warped by harmful stereotypes. Cinematic realism aids in this mirror-like identification which reinforces the ego. However, when the characters themselves gaze into a mirror and contemplate their reflections, I find that such instances often offer useful insights on the issue of identification. Tasker argues that "[m]ilitary women are frequently depicted viewing their reflection in the mirror, an image that suggests female narcissism and a process of transformation in equal measure"[139]. Drawing on Tasker's suggestion of narcissism, I find appropriate to consider the myth of Narcissus (according to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), who gazes at his own reflection unaware that the face he sees reflected is his own. This lack of self-recognition, which inspires passionate love, can be applied to the mirror device used in female-led military fiction. The soldier who gazes at her reflection, not recognizing herself, is filled with passion and pride over the uniformed figure. Following Tasker's reading of fictional servicewomen, I now move beyond Mulvey's reworking of Lacan's mirror stage: The woman is capable of recognizing herself in the mirror, but by adding the uniform, the narcissistic aspect arises, disrupting

[135] For a more recent interpretation of Lacan's theories on the mirror stage and the gaze, see Todd McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes", *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003), 27-47.
[136] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function: As Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 78.
[137] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 836.
[138] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", 836.
[139] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 53.

self-recognition. Furthermore, when the servicewoman contemplates her reflection, it reinforces associations with women obsessing over appearances. The mirror device in female-led military/war narratives spans over decades of visual representations of the military woman. The perpetuation of these scenes suggest that the fictional wartime imagery continues to depend on the same approaches to manage cultural anxieties about women in the military.

In *Volontaire,* Baer looks at her reflection while in uniform, exhibiting pride in what she sees in the mirror. Using the mirror device, the film tells us that she is proud not only of the way she looks, but also of her actions as a soldier, for "[…] the uniformed woman posed before a mirror offers a potent evocation of duty coupled with pleasure"[140]. In most instances, visual pleasure can be found in the contemplation of beauty, which *G.I. Jane* refutes in one scene. O'Neil, badly bruised from boot camp, stands in a public bathroom looking at her reflection in the mirror. Another (presumably non-military) woman approaches her, saying "ain't really none of my business, but I'll say leave the bastard"[141]. O'Neil does not reply, but smiles satisfied at her maimed reflection. She appears pleased with the fact that her bruises are, as Schubart explains "[n]ot the martyr-wife's, but the hero-soldier's"[142]. She wears the marks as a badge of honor, an accomplishment within a violent environment. Schubart continues, stating that "[…] the bruises are not from the violence men inflict on women, but from the violence men inflict on men"[143]. These signs of male-on-male violence symbolize O'Neil's breakthrough into military masculinity.

In the previous chapter I have discussed the mirrored image in the poster for the series *Our Girl*, how the image in the mirror represents Dawes' 'best self' according to the show's propaganda. During the episodes, we can observe how the mirror device is used to convey to the audience how the character sees herself. In a scene where Dawes looks at the mirror and sees herself in military uniform, (even though she is on leave), we are led to believe that the military is now such a big part of her life that the mirror shows her 'true reflection' (Figure 7). By seeing her mirrored image complete with military fatigues Dawes is drawn to re-deployment, as if reminded of a higher calling.

[140] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 53.
[141] *G.I. Jane*, DVD.
[142] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 311.
[143] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 311.

Figure 7 - Screenshot of Our Girl *(2014). Dawes looks at 'herself' in the mirror.*

The presence of the female body in a traditionally masculine space, invites possible strangeness regarding not only visual differences, but also regarding bodily functions exclusive to the female body. Servicewomen have been reported to adapt their bodies to live up to the (male) standards of military, "[…] by taking newer forms of birth control to make their periods less frequent or to eliminate them altogether"[144]. Early representations of the fictional military woman did not show, for instance, the intricacies of menstruating while in boot camp, choosing to focus instead on more superficial concerns, such as the preoccupation with appearance.

Post-WWII visual narratives have attempted to convey the realities of the military female body, shedding light on some of the issues that further differentiate and alienate women in the military. When represented in its earnest entirety, the female body is seen with repulsion, and its visual representations mirror that sentiment, usually by regulating what can be shown and what must not be seen. As Tasker explained, "[r]epresentations of military women exemplify the policing of a hierarchical concept of gender, in which both femininity and female bodies are associated with disgust"[145]. In her seminal work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva defends that 'abject' is what is disgusting, dirty, and improper, however, "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite"[146]. I thus use Kristeva's

[144] Kelly Oliver, "Women as Weapons of War?: Women, Violence, and Agency in Terrorism". *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2013), 85.
[145] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 280.
[146] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

notion of abjection to analyze the representation of the female body in military/war narratives.

One of the most singular aspects of differentiation between female and male bodies is menstruation, which is seldom acknowledged in visual representations of servicewomen. However, when it does feature in the narrative (for the purpose of this chapter, a boot camp narrative), it always has a negative connotation, either directly or indirectly. In *G.I. Jane*, Slovnik, a male trainee, is very disturbed about having a woman in the barracks, even more so after seeing that she packed tampons. He waves the box so the rest of the group can see it and join him in ridiculing her. Tampons are here not only a symbol of unabashed femininity, but also a reminder of penetration, for as Schubert states: "Like bullets and penises, tampons penetrate the female body, they are the body reminders of physical disorder, of the breakdown between bodies and genders"[147]. Thus, feminine hygiene products are to be kept away, as taboo as their purpose. Another, more recent, example of menstruation portrayed negatively in a boot camp narrative is seen in *Volontaire*. Early in the film we see Baer struggling to find a tampon, which causes her to be late for formation. The message conveyed here is that menstruation hinders military readiness (here depicted in the form of punctuality), ultimately rendering women as unprofessional.

Seeing menstruation as a cyclical 'plague' hearkens back to the ritualistic aspects of the military I have discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 1.1). According to Kristeva, "[r]itually impure and contaminating, menstrual defilement wields with them in addition, a cataclysmic power such that one is led to speak, under the circumstances, not only of *ritual impurity* but also of the *power-of pollution*"[148]. This 'pollution', while seen with repulsion by the military, is paradoxically used as a tool of warfare, a 'weaponization' of the female body, as not only the concept of menstruation is appropriated, but also fake menstrual blood has been used to coerce detainees[149].

The presence of menstruation also alerts to the fact that a body is fertile, and thus able to be pregnant, which is often considered unmilitary. On the section entitled 'Contraception and Deployment' in the US Army's website, the first sentence is: "Menstrual cycle and fertility control are two important issues facing reproductive age

[147] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 306.
[148] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 77.
[149] I will discuss this topic in length in Part II – Chapter 2.2.

women that impact unit readiness and deployment experience"[150]. Having this correlation at the beginning of the text is insightful as to the Army's perception of the female reproductive cycle: that it is essentially negatively impactful to the units[151]. In *The Lonely Soldier* Benedict provides evidence that the pregnant, or able to be pregnant, body has been treated by the US military without much care to its necessities. Iraq War veteran PaintedCrow details her clash with the US military's deficient response to women's health issues. Suffering from endometriosis she was told she was required to deploy anyway, and her pains were dismissed as an excuse to avoid the war. Riddled with pain she was given the follow advice by a female sergeant: "The Army does not care about you and your uterus. You're going home on leave. And when you get home, get a hysterectomy"[152]. PaintedCrow ended up undergoing a hysterectomy at great personal cost, since, as a Native American, her uterus holds cultural significance. As she puts it: [t]here's a lot of things that were taken behind my uterus. It wasn't just some part that didn't work anymore"[153].

Vaccinations against Anthrax were mandatory in deployment post-9/11, which were reported to increase miscarriages and birth defects[154]. While Federal Law prohibited the military from offering either the 'morning after pill' (Plan B One-Step) or performing abortions[155], female recruits had to take the Depo-Provera birth control injection (which is optional today). While these vaccinations caused diverse problems for servicewomen, complains were typically met with animosity, as pregnancy is still considered to be used as an excuse to leave the military[156].

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[150] Col. Michelle Munroe, "Contraception and Deployment", *U.S. Army* (May 22, 2015). https://www.army.mil/article/149032/contraception_and_deployment (accessed November 2019).
[151] According to a 2020 *Military.com* article, the US Pentagon is conducting its first survey in more than 30 years specifically focused on the reproductive health of female service members. This effort indicates a positive shift in acknowledging the needs of military women when it comes to their physical (and psychological) wellbeing. Bing Xiao, "DoD to Assess Female Troops' Reproductive Health for First Time in Decades", Military.com, August 8, 2020, military.com/daily-news/2020/08/08/dod-assess-female-troops-reproductive-health-first-time-decades.html (accessed September 2020).
[152] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 160.
[153] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 160.
[154] "Studies found a whopping 39 percent rise in birth defects for pregnant women who take the vaccine within the first trimester; a side effect that even the military acknowledges, as well as a rise in the likelihood of miscarriage". Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 62.
[155] At the time this thesis was written, while emergency contraception (Plan B One-Step) is available to US soldiers at any military pharmacy, abortions will only be performed in military facilities in case of rape, incest, or in case of danger to the pregnant woman.
[156] Benedict offers an example that attests to this in *The Lonely Soldier*. After a miscarriage (thought to be caused by the Anthrax shot), Mickiela Montoya was ordered to deploy within one month. Feeling the time was not enough, she asked for a therapist, and in response, her unit's Commander "[…] made it clear that he thought she had gotten pregnant on purpose to get out of going to war and was now only trying a new way of malingering by claiming she'd had a miscarriage". Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 163.

The pregnant body of infamous US soldier Lynndie England made news when she appeared on her court-martial bearing the child of Charles Graner, equally on trial for the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Her pregnancy was covered by the media, her expected motherhood clashing with the vilified persona the media had established[157]. England's pregnancy was not well received by the US military as well, which has a tradition of dealing with pregnancies in a secretive fashion, as an article *The Washington Times* exposes, for "[a]s in the case of Pfc. England, pregnancies can be embarrassing to the military"[158]. More than just inciting embarrassment, the article continues, "[p]regnancies can hamper readiness by creating hard-to-fill vacancies"[159], which leads to the dissimulation of the actual number of pregnancies by the US military. If the pregnant body is considered detrimental in a military context, motherhood follows the same patterns of exclusion. As has been noted by many and reported by the journalist Lizette Alvarez in a *The New York Times* article[160], combining motherhood with being a soldier is presented as a conflicting pairing.

Much attention is given to how women conjugate their military career with raising their children, while the same is seldom asked of men[161]. As Victoria Sherrow explains in *Women in the Military*, concerning the Gulf War, "[…] even though more servicemen than servicewomen had children at that time", "[…] soon the war was nicknamed the 'Mommy War'"[162]. In 1990, *People Weekly* published an issue that featured a military mother holding a child, the title reading "Mom Goes to War", raising awareness of the large percentage of mothers that participated in the Gulf War. On the cover you can read: "One 10-year-old's question: Mommy, what if you die?"[163]. What has always been a part of military father's lives (leaving their children to fight in an armed conflict) is seen as problematic, and treated by the media as sensationalist, when the soldier in question is a woman. Nowadays, the maternity policy in the US has changed, and women have gained more rights under the Military Parental Leave Program (MPLP). Nonetheless, while it is important to acknowledge these changes in military regulations as progressive, they do

[157] See Susana Araújo, "Images of Terror, Narratives of Captivity: The Visual Spectacle of 9/11 and its Transatlantic Projections", *Symbiosis,* Volume 11.2, (October 2007), 27-46.
[158] The Washington Times. "Pregnant Troops Leave the War; Central Command not Counting". *The Washington Times* (June 15, 2004). https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/jun/15/20040615-115647-8125r/ (accessed October 2019).
[159] The Washington Times. "Pregnant troops leave the war*"*.
[160] See *The New York Times*. "Wartime Soldier, Conflicted Mom" (September 26, 2009). https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/us/27mothers.html (accessed October 2019)
[161] A microcosm of the treatment of motherhood in Western society.
[162] Victoria Sherrow, *Women in the Military* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 85.
[163] People Weekly, "Mom goes to War", (September Issue, 1990).

not erase the social connotations regarding military motherhood (or military pregnancy), which is still considered a hindrance for military effectiveness. Fictional military mothers are usually portrayed in visual culture with a specific set of representational guides. Motherhood is frequently used in narratives to reinforce the femininity of a certain character, at the same time atoning for their military masculinity[164].

Nevertheless, not only pregnant bodies or the bodies of mothers are targets of differentiation. Intersectional analyses of the female body in the military reveals that a multitude of bodies are subjected to different types of discrimination, and their cultural representations mirror this reality. As Enloe defended: "[s]cratch a military, and one is likely to find an ethnic or racial hierarchy"[165]. Black and Latin women are usually depicted as supporting characters (as I clarified in Chapter 1.1); female protagonists are seldom conventionally unattractive; and female bodies are rarely represented as physically wounded. In *Our Girl*, when Dawes' love interests ('Smurf' and Captain James) are shot by enemies, Dawes rhetorically asks a superior "why was I not shot?". *Our Girl* is an example of a visual narrative where women's bodies are not subjected to external wounds like the bodies of men are. It implies that men suffer from the physical pain of being shot, while women suffer from survivor's guilt and emotional pain.

Female bodies are likewise rarely represented as beaten, or disabled[166]. The harshness of training and the gruesomeness of warfare are usually not imprinted on the bodies of women in military/war narratives. On the other hand, men have long been depicted bearing the marks of war (e.g. *Coming Home* (1978, dir. Hal Ashby); *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989, dir. Oliver Stone); *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis); *Men of Honor* (2000, dir. George Tillman Jr.); *Bennett's War* (2019, dir. Alex Ranarivelo). Notable exceptions can be found in recent portrayals like *World War Z* (2013, dir. Marc Forster), where a female soldier loses her arm, and *Voir du Pays* (2016, dir. Delphine and Muriel Coulin), which shows the bruised body of a servicewoman. These uncommon representations disrupt the conventionally attractive body of the female soldier. They are, however, exceptions to the norm. Still, depicting the female body as able to be seriously harmed and still continue to fight, sends a powerful message regarding the resilience and legitimacy of women in the military.

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[164] An early example is *Courage Under Fire* (1996, dir. Edward Zwick), where Captain Karen Walden is depicted as a brave soldier, which is balanced against her civilian life, where much effort goes into characterizing her as an invested mother.
[165] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 183.
[166] A topic I will develop in Part III - Chapter 3.1.

Military Rape Narratives

Having established that the female body, considered abject in a military context, invokes fear and disgust, I now turn my attention to other violent responses to the presence of women in the armed forces. In Chapter 1.1 I discussed how boot camp was a ritualized environment that turned 'boys' into 'men'. Part of that training includes using sexual aggression as a weapon of war. Sexual abuse has been perceived as a part of warfare from its very beginning, "[…] an indistinguishable part of a poisonous wartime stew called 'lootpillageandrape'"[167]. The rape of local women by invading military groups is considered a strategy to exert power over the population, making rape a weapon of war. The moral conflicts in sexually abusing captured women has shown to be a concern in popular culture, most notably in the film *Casualties of War* (1989, dir. Brian De Palma)[168], in which the abduction, rape and murder of a Vietnamese woman by US soldiers is contested by one of their own. Commenting on *Casualties of War*, cinema scholar John Belton wrote that "[…] the rape victim serves as a means of sexual exchange among men – a bond that they all share and that solidifies their ties to one another"[169]. Seeing rape as a common socialization event for military men might seem aggressive in its dehumanization of the victims, however, it does seem to reflect the epidemic of rape by soldiers during deployment.

In 2000 the United Nations Security Council unanimously decided to adopt *Resolution 1325* (UNSCR 1325)[170], which came as a response to the acknowledgment of the negative effects of war on women and girls (the rape and forced prostitution of women and children heavily weighing in), calling for the adoption of a gender perspective that would (among other aims) protect women and girls from gender-based violence and/or sexual aggressions during conflicts.

Not disregarding the complex issue that is the sexual abuse of women from war-torn countries by military men, for the sake of concision I will focus on the sexual abuse

[167] Enloe. *Maneuvers*, 108.
[168] Brian De Palma, later directed *Redacted* (2007) which explored similar themes.
[169] John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 200.
[170] UNSCR 1325 is available at: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325 (accessed November 2019).

of military women by fellow soldiers. Sexual assault scandals involving different military branches, like 'Tailhook' in 1991 (US Navy), 'Aberdeen' in 1996 (US Army), and the 'Air Force Academy' in 2003, were paramount in exposing the recurrence of sexual assault, the difficulties in reporting it, and in having the perpetrator(s) convicted. The scandals also exemplified the backlash and pressure the victims encountered. Speaking on the repercussions of her public denouncement of the 'Tailhook' scandal, Paula Coughlin reveals: "I had to walk into a room full of Naval Aviators that felt like I had betrayed their tribe. I had to listen to a live talk show about how I had ruined the Navy and what a slut I was."[171]. Coughlin's statement reinforces my previous argument on the military culture as ritualistic, by referring to the Navy Aviators as a 'tribe'.

In the award-winning documentary *Invisible War* (2012, dir. Kirby Dick)[172], we hear servicewomen detail their stories of sexual abuse within the US military. The documentary also accounts for their struggles to reduce the prevalence of rape among soldiers, demanding accountability from the military, in the form of a lawsuit (*Cioca v. Rumsfeld*). *Invisible War* does not feature exclusively abused military women, it also includes servicemen recounting their stories of abuse. However, even though all soldiers comprehend the risk of possibly being trespassed by bullets, for "[p]enetration is the risk a soldier takes"[173], women are significantly more at risk of forceful sexual penetration. The Pentagon reported that "[…] about 20.500 service members across the military branches – about 13.000 women and 7.500 men – were sexually assaulted in the 2018 fiscal year", and that "[…] the majority — about 70 percent — still do not officially report such incidents"[174]. This reality is often misrepresented in the military/war genre.

The representation of sexual abuse between soldiers in Western visual culture is a controlled one, as narratives often depict friendly teasing and flirting by servicemen towards military women without much consequence. The narratives that do approach this topic, in lesser or greater depth, are important in order to assert the level of transparency/understanding of this problem. One of the first Western female-centered visual narratives featuring the attempted rape of the protagonist is *Private Benjamin*.

[171] Michael Winerip, "Revisiting the Military's Tailhook Scandal", *New York Times*, (May 13, 2013). https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/13/booming/revisiting-the-militarys-tailhook-scandal-video.html (accessed November 2019).
[172] *Invisible War*, DVD.
[173] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 308.
[174] Jen Kirby, "Pentagon report shows sharp rise in military sexual assaults" *Vox* (May 3, 2019), https://www.vox.com/world/2019/5/3/18528148/pentagon-military-sexual-assault-report-shanahan (accessed November 2019).

Benjamin's ingression in the (previously) all-male unit Thunderbirds was the confirmation of her status as an 'exceptional woman'. Helen Benedict argued that sexual hostility towards women in a military context can be a way to penalize women for their deemed inappropriate integration in the armed forces, as stereotypes of women's inferiority continue to persist. Servicemen "[…] resent women for usurping the masculine role of warrior"[175], therefore, by sexually harassing and even raping women, military men seek to establish their superiority over them. Also, Yvonne Tasker has likewise defended that female excellence is considered provocative by military men, as they often use rape to 'discipline' servicewomen[176]. In *Private Benjamin*, the eponymous Private is nearly raped during bootcamp by the very Colonel that integrated her in the unit, escaping by jumping out of an airplane. *Private Benjamin* is groundbreaking in showing how high patented military members can (and do) prey on subordinates.

By the end of the 21st century, films like *Opposing Force* (1986, dir. Eric Karson) and *Inflammable* (1995, dir. Peter Werner) addressed (respectively) the simulation of rape in a Prisoner-of-War (PoW) simulation and the rape and murder of a Navy woman aboard a military vessel. Also, the 1995 *She Stood Alone: The Tailhook Scandal*, offered a made-for-TV dramatization of the sexual harassment of Paula Coughlin, as well as of her struggle in reporting the attack and attempting to get a conviction for the men who harmed her (which never happened). In 1997, *G.I. Jane* featured the attempted rape of the female protagonist during bootcamp. Akin to *Opposing Force*, this took place during a simulation of a PoW Camp and it symbolizes the assertion of power over the only female cadet. According to artist Coco Fusco, simulating sexual assault is an accepted convention of military culture, and "'[m]ock rapes' may occur as part of training for survival as a prisoner of war, while simulated and real acts of sodomy are accepted as part of informal initiation rites"[177]. Fusco's argument further supports the argument that military behavior follows consistent ritualistic patterns. This 'mock rape' furthermore accentuates the military belief that rape is a natural and expected type of wartime violence.

Notably, in *G.I. Jane*, Jordan O'Neil regains her military masculinity by physically overpowering her Master Chief when he attempts to rape her, stating: "Suck my dick". As Tasker reminds us, "[…] in military rape narratives women are raped (or

[175] Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 5.
[176] See Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 258.
[177] Coco Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 53.

threatened with rape) when they are too successful"[178]. This is certainly the case of O'Neil, being the first woman to go through boot camp to join the Navy SEALS. By being subjected to the threat of rape, O'Neil gains both sympathy from her unit, and from the audience. The moment she fights back is therefore perceived as admissible retaliation. Fighting off rape is what allows her to be finally seen as one of the team, as her previous fights against the sexist limitations of the Navy did not.

At the corner of the new millennium, the film *The General's Daughter* (1999, dir. Simon West) focused on the investigation of the murder of Captain Campbell, who was found strangled, naked, and pinned to the ground, in a reenactment of her rape when she was a trainee, during bootcamp at West Point[179]. The film critiques military masculinity, portraying Army men as irrational and misogynistic, having one of them confessing that: "[…] they [the male recruits] hated her. They hated her so much. They hated that she was smarter than them, they hated to be out there with someone who had to squat to piss"[180]. Nonetheless, the film also patronizes its female characters, especially in the portrayal of Campbell, as a woman in dire need of her father's support (as the very title of the film emphasizes), since he denied the rape ever happen for the sake of his career and reputation. In a desperate attempt to get him to admit the rape, she reenacts the circumstances in which she had been found, naked, staked to the ground, and with a pair of underwear wrapped around her neck. Campbell hopes that once confronted with the horror of what has been done to her body, her father will stop covering for her abusers, and stop stifling her from reporting them. *The General's Daughter* is unique in its blunt screening of an episode of rape during bootcamp, and even more so for its depiction of a performance of rape. With the display of Campbell's naked and abused body, the film not only confronts the General with the abuse, but the audience as well, as we are forced witnesses to Campbell's enduring trauma through her performance. In *Watching Rape*, postfeminist scholar Sarah Projanski wrote that "[a]ntirape activists […] often replace the term 'rape victim' with 'rape survivor' to emphasize women's agency in response to their victimization and to address the complexity of women's post-rape experiences"[181]. Through her subsequent professional achievements, one would think Campbell was a

[178] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 257.
[179] The film is an adaptation of the homonymous book published in 1992 by Nelson DeMille, inspired by the Tailhook scandal.
[180] *The General's Daughter, DVD.*
[181] Sara Projanski, *Watching Rape, Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 9.

'rape survivor', when in fact, she fell victim of her rape multiple times in different ways. That one single traumatic event severely affected her, shaping her life in relation to it, up to her death, as she was murdered following the performance of her rape.

The General's Daughter's depiction of rape trauma contributes to the debate on the long-term effects of sexual harassment and/or rape during military basic training in the lives of military women. Furthermore, the film accurately conveys the real frustration of rape victims in not being recognized as such by the military, a phenomenon attested not only by Paula Coughlin at the time of 'Tailhook' scandal, but also by countless soldiers[182]. These soldiers describe how they were discredited, how their complaints were disregarded, and ultimately how perpetrators were seldom convicted. The depiction of this particular reality also appears in *Private Benjamin*, as the Colonel that assaulted Benjamin is never penalized. Also, in *G.I. Jane* we are not given any indication that the Master Chief was demoted, discharged, or even reprimanded for his attempted rape. A more recent example of military rape carrying no consequences for the rapists is seen in *Voir du Pays*.

The US military's perception and stance on sexual harassment and/or rape has caused feminists to pinpoint the prevalence of 'rape culture'[183], categorizing the term as a normalized and accepted phenomenon within the military institution. Adding to the issues relating to the military's approach to rape I have already addressed (discrediting, failure/unwillingness to penalize, etc.), I also include 'victim-blaming' as a significant problem pertaining women in the military. Recognizing that this is a problem found inside the military as well as outside[184], I must reiterate that the military, as a microcosm of society, amplifies some of its features, such is the case of victim-blaming.

Sexual harassment and/or rape is often seen as an expected consequence of combining women and men in military units. These views are even supported by the 45th President of the US, Donald Trump, who, in 2013 wrote the following tweet: "26.000 unreported sexual assaults in the military-only 238 convictions. What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together?"[185]. This approach sees the military environment as a primitive space, where primal sexual instincts are indulged regardless

[182] See *The Lonely Soldier*, *The Invisible War*.
[183] See *Transforming a Rape Culture*, edited by Emilie Buchwald, et al. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1993), and *Watching Rape*, by Sarah Projanski.
[184] All occurrences related to sexual harassment and/or rape are not at all exclusive to the military, since, for instance, civilian women reporting rape are frequently questioned about their own habits or choice in clothing.
[185] Trump, Donald, Twitter Post. May 7, 2013, 11:04 PM.

of morals. Western fictional representations of military victim-blaming are peppered throughout the military/war genre in more or less subtle ways. Instances of banter between soldiers reveal not only their resistance to women's presence, but also their blamelessness. One example of a straightforward scene revealing the dogma about women being a sexually disruptive presence can be found in the French film *Les Combattants* (2014, dir. Thomas Cailley), winner of several Cannes and César awards. At the beginning of Army boot camp, upon calling forth the 'filles' (girls), Lieutenant Schliefer tells the three recruits who came forward: "I want no problems with sex because of you. Is that clear?"[186], to which they acquiesce. With this warning, the Lieutenant clarifies how women are perceived from the very beginning of boot camp. The similarities in terms of approach in a French film and US productions, shows how generic the Western military/war genre can be.

In popular culture narratives, women are oftentimes raped, and/or tortured, and/or murdered to provide complexity and motivation to a male character. This trope has spanned across mediums, highly featured in superheroes narratives, for upon discovering that their loved ones have been harmed, they become motivated to fight the villain. Comic book writer Gail Simone dubbed the trope 'Women in Refrigerators' (after the imagery of Green Lantern's girlfriend dead in his refrigerator)[187].

Another type of narratives that sees sexual abuse and/or murder as the catalyst for a character's growth is the rape-revenge subgenre. However, unlike the previous example, narratives of rape-revenge do not discard women for the benefit of a male character's story arc, these plots accompany the downfall and triumph of women. The rape-revenge plot in military narratives represents a genre cross-over that infuses the military/war genre with the rape-revenge themes made popular in the 70's with exploitation films like *Rape Squad* (1974, dir. Bob Kelljan), or *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978, dir. Meir Zarchi). This sub-genre, itself a "loosely-defined cannon"[188], as characterized by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas in *Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical History*, has mutated throughout the following decades, crossing paths with different genres, such as drama (*Irreversible*,

[186] Translation via subtitles. *Les Combattants*, DVD.
[187] See Simone's site on the representation of superhero women: *Women in Refrigerators*. https://www.lby3.com/wir/ (accessed November 2019).
[188] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical History*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 60.

2002, dir. Gaspar Noé), horror (*Revenge*, 2017, dir. Coralie Fargeat), action (*Kill Bill, Vol. 1/Vol. 2*, 2003/2004, dir. Quentin Tarantino), among others[189].

This subgenre finds expression in the military/war genre for its validation of violence. In other words, if military violence is perceived as exclusively male, avenging a rape is a territory where women are allowed to legitimately enact violence. By staging the plot on a military background (and for the purposes of this chapter, during bootcamp), women get to exert violence without it being seen as unfeminine. Even if the plots do not adhere exactly to the aforementioned pattern for rape-avenge narratives, the narrative still presents the rape (or attempted rape) as a gateway to acceptable (and even encouraged) female violence. An example of this is O'Neil's violent retaliation after her attempted rape in *G.I. Jane*, which, as explained above, makes her gain the support of her unit.

As Kelly Oliver argued, "[w]e are encouraged to feel violent, to want violence, without thinking about our own investments in that violence or about its consequences"[190]. This sentiment can be explained through an analysis of the overall media approach to the "War on Terror" and its conflicts. An example can be found in one of the photographs of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, where on the body of a naked and bound detainee the US soldiers wrote 'I'm a rapeist' [sic]. Claiming this detainee had committed sexual crimes condoned the soldiers, who thus felt legitimized in the torture.

[189] Rape-revenge narratives usually present the following pattern in three steps: A woman is raped; she survives and gathers her strength; she exacts revenge on her attacker(s), usually killing them.
[190] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 7.

Chapter 1.3

THE WAR RAGES ON
Fictional Military Women and the Inescapable Romance

"If the Corps wanted you to have a wife they would have issued you one"
– *Jarhead* (2005, dir. Sam Mendes)

Loving in the Armed Forces

Throughout the examination of representation patterns of military women in contemporary visual culture I have encountered a large number of cultural productions (e.g. films, series, etc.) that combine the military/war genre with romance. During this chapter I will unpack the cultural and social-political significance of this intersection, focusing on the roles of servicewomen in these narratives. I will do so by firstly providing key-points regarding love and romance in the military. This information will aid in understanding the recurrent themes in the fictional narratives I present throughout the thesis.

To understand the topic of love and romance in the military from a historical perspective, I must consider the period before women were integrated into the armed forces. Before integration, the military personnel's relationships have been commonly described as sexual, rather than romantic. Military prostitution has been a part of war theaters from the beginning of organized armed conflicts, and has even been deemed necessary to help the troops' morale[191]. Prostitutes traditionally played the part of 'comfort women', as Cynthia Enloe explains in her influential work on the militarization

[191] For an extensive approach on the topic of military prostitution in early wars, see Barton Hacker and Margaret Vining, *A Companion to Women's Military History* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

of women's lives, *Maneuvers*, "[p]rostitution can seem comforting to some. They imagine it to be 'the oldest profession'. Around a military camp prostitutes connote tradition, not rupture; leisure, not horror; ordinariness, not mayhem"[192]. To Enloe, who theorized on issues pertaining to military prostitution (including child prostitution), organized prostitution has been considered a solution to prevent soldiers from raping. However, prostitutes have also been strategically 'weaponized' (i.e. used as a form of attack) by military institutions during war efforts to collect intelligence, and were often valuable spies. The Dutch exotic dancer Mata Hari became uncommonly famous (as a spy for Germany during WWI), while countless anonymous women provided aid to armies as sex workers, and, even though "[p]rostitutes were involved in the struggle in various ways" as Tabitha Kanogo explains, "[…] their contribution was nearly always denigrated by being portrayed in the context of their sexual flexibility rather than their political commitment" [193]. In her text, Kanogo denounces the way History has poorly depicted military prostitutes, disregarding their political contributions to war efforts.

On the other hand, civilian women's involvement with military men has traditionally been depicted in a different fashion. As Rosemary McKechnie explains: "Women's traditional roles in the old order of things were necessarily limited: the 'camp-follower' or prostitute was liminally attached to fighting units while the wives of officers waited for their men to visit"[194]. Being the dutiful wife/girlfriend of a soldier on duty overseas has been a staple of the military/war genre, a topic I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

In *Love and War,* a work on the making and manipulation of gender in militaristic societies, Tom Digby explains how demarcated gender categories are encouraged in this institution. He also describes how these categories have affected civilian societies, 'militarizing' gender constructions that establish men as strong, violent, and invulnerable; and women as passive and compassioned, since "[w]ar-reliant cultures are masculine cultures, meaning that the values of warrior masculinity are culturally pervasive"[195]. In his conclusion, Digby states that a gendered military and militarized genders are inversely

[192] Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 108.
[193] Tabitha Kanogo, "Kikuyu Women and the Politics of Protest: Mao Mao", *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Sharon MacDonald et al., (London: McMillan Education, 1987), 81.
[194] Rosemary McKechnie, "Living with images of a fighting elite: women and the Foreign Legion", *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives,* edited by Sharon MacDonald, (London: McMillan Education, 1987), 123.
[195] Tom Digby, *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Love and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 118.

proportional. Thus, he believes that de-gendering the military (e.g. through the lifting of restrictions of women in combat roles, their growing numbers in high rank positions, etc.) works to aid in the de-militarizing of genders (e.g. archetyping hyper-manliness as military).

This 'cultural programming' of boys and girls towards a militarized construction of gender is impactful on their romantic pursuits as adults. The cultural appeal in being romantically engaged with a (male) soldier is so prevalent that it has been used to commit online frauds. According to the website for the *US Army Criminal Investigation Command*, they receive "[…] hundreds of allegations a month from victims who state they got involved in an online relationship with someone […] who claims to be a U.S. Soldier"[196]. These scammers then ask for money, providing elaborate motives, usually related to some fabricated problem within the military[197]. These military romance frauds indicate that a large number of civilian individuals idealize having a romantic relationship with a soldier, thus establishing grounds for targeted fraud. This interest is informed by popular culture representations of relationships with (male) military personnel, which glamorize not only the men, but also these types of relationships. These representations are an example of what Tom Digby refers to as "cultural puppet strings"[198], cultural constructions of an idealized romantic objective that compels people to strive for them. In *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Love and Romance*, Digby exposes how militaristic societies manipulate gender, warping romantic relationships through the manipulation of gender categories. Through Digby's approach I thus theorize that the online frauds play with how "[…] culture programs into us the beliefs, preferences, and desires from which our experiences of love and sexuality flow"[199], establishing the military men as romantically (and sexually) desirable to civilians[200]. Digby's research is revealing regarding romantic connections between military personnel and civilians, I will now consider romantic relationships among servicemembers.

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[196] US Army, "Online Romance Scam Information", *US Army Criminal Investigation Command*. https://www.cid.army.mil/romancescam.html (accessed December 2019).
[197] For a US Army collection of examples of fake documents used by scammers, access https://www.cid.army.mil/romance-scam-examples.html (accessed December 2019).
[198] Digby, *Love and War*, 12.
[199] Digby, *Love and War*, 12.
[200] The reality show *Army Wives* (Lifetime, 2006 – 2014) is a prime example of the diffusion of this message. See Mary Elizabeth Haralovich, "Those at Home Also Serve: Women's Television and Embedded Military Realism in Army Wives (Lifetime, 2006 – 2014)", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham, John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 289 – 304.

Socialization against the backdrop of strenuous military training or warfare can be difficult. Socialization with a group deemed as 'inferior' by the majority can be even harder. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the integration of women in the armed forced has been, from its very beginning, met with animosity. Anthony King, a scholar of War Studies whose research centers on small group cohesion, defends that an effective integration is only possible through a process of "feminine effacement", which he describes in 'Women in Close Combat Roles' as women's voluntary erasing of their gender from their relationships. King explains that in order to achieve the status of "honorary men"[201] and be accepted as equals by male soldiers, servicewomen must avoid sexual contact with their male counterparts. King even goes beyond the advice of rejection of sexual contact, as he determines that "[…] sexual abstinence has to be extended even to the point of rejecting friendships"[202]. I ascertain from King's argument that he believes women should only have professional exchanges with male soldiers, which would eventually place them in a position of equal before them. He does not, however, anticipate the same type of behavior from military men, even professing how they are expected to be sexually promiscuous[203]. I understand this scholar's perspective[204] to be sexist and constrictive. In his text, King advocates for unity cohesion through socialization, as he endorses the exclusion of women from their respective military units, should they not follow his behavioral thesis. Even if different scholars in the field of Military/War Studies[205] have made strong cases against the correlation between social cohesion and military effectiveness, scholars like Anthony King perpetuate stereotypes of the superiority of the male, white and heterosexual soldier.

In the interest of maintaining the military as a patriarchal institution, not just women have been constantly marginalized, other minorities have been too. To reinforce the institution's heteronormativity, sexual minorities have encountered particular challenges in the US military, including prohibition. In 1994, President Clinton's Administration instated the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy (DADT) in the US, which barred LGBTQ+ soldiers from disclosing their sexual preferences, while at the same time

[201] In his text, King assumes the status of "honorary man" is something military women must aspire to.
[202] Anthony King, "Gender and Close Combat Roles", *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, edited by Rachel Woodward, Claire Duncanson (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 313.
[203] As King explains: "[…] male soldiers do not know how to interact with females in any other way than by solicitation". In King, "Gender and Close Combat Roles", 312.
[204] Anthony King has over twenty years of research experience, and is currently the Chair of War Studies at the University of Warwick.
[205] e.g. Robert Egnell, "Gender Perspectives and Fighting". *Parameters*, 43, 2, (2013), 33 – 41.

prohibiting discrimination and harassment against individuals based on suppositions of their sexualities.

The main concerns against the integration of sexual minorities – coming from the US military and congressional allies – resided in the belief that integration would affect group cohesion in a negative way, hindering military effectiveness and performance, an argument reused every time the military faced changes through way of integration of minorities. However, as Elizabeth Kier exposed in her article "Homosexuals in the Military: Open Integration and Combat Effectiveness" [206], perceiving group cohesion as a unifying positive aspect of military life can be a misguided standpoint. Kier illustrates negative sides of group cohesion when explaining how it can also "[…] encourage an active drug subculture, antiwar activities, and collective acts of indiscipline", a major one being "large-scale desertion"[207]. Kier's article, based on previous studies on this topic, concludes that "[…] the relationship between cohesion and performance is the result of a commitment to the goals of the group, not interpersonal attraction"[208]. In other words, while 'social cohesion' does not guarantee military effectiveness, 'task cohesion', or the group's commitment to a task, does. Therefore, according to Kier's research, if the soldier's social (and sexual) life is not a contributing factor to military performance, then the soldier's sexual orientation would not affect the military's goals.

During the time when it was in effect (1994 – 2011), the DADT policy "[…] acted as a self-perpetuating mechanism that safeguarded a heteronormative gender order by creating the problem it promised to solve"[209]. One year after the repeal of DADT a study was published that provided an assessment of the first year of openly integrated LGBTQ+ personnel. This study, based on extensive on-field research and media analysis, aimed to verify if the predictions of the negative impact a DADT policy repeal would have on the US military were correct. The authors' conclusion was that "[…] DADT repeal has had no overall negative impact on military readiness or its component dimensions, including cohesion, recruitment, retention, assaults, harassment, or morale", the authors added that "[i]f anything, DADT repeal appears to have enhanced the military's ability to pursue its

[206] Elizabeth Kier, who specializes in International Relations with an emphasis on international security and civil-military relations, contributes with this article to the debates concerning the DADT policy, and addresses the topic of full integration of homosexuals in the military.
[207] Elizabeth Kier, "Homosexuals in the Military: Open Integration and Combat Effectiveness", *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), 16.
[208] Kier, "Homosexuals in the Military", 17.
[209] Sarah Bulmer, "Sexualities in State Militaries", *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, edited by Woodward, R., Duncanson, C. (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 169.

mission"[210]. This study is important not only for its findings and considerations on the full integration of open LGBTQ+ servicemembers, but it also serves to shed a light on the weight of interpersonal relationships during military service, a topic which I address (with focus on its visual representations) in this chapter.

The Legacy of the 'War-Romance Hybrid'

As I have been discussing in the first two chapters of the thesis, the fictional presence, and body, of military women, have been depicted as transgressive. I will now offer analysis of one method of 'explaining' servicewomen in a military/war narrative: As the romantic interest of a male soldier[211].

It should be noted that a large number of male-centered military/war narratives include a romantic sub-plot, often involving a woman (girlfriend or wife) outside the military base[212]. However, a highly significative difference emerges: In male-centered military films the woman is peripheral to the main plot and functions only as a trait to provide the main character's arc with a more complex personality or motivations; in female-centered military narratives, the romantic interest is often on-base and is an essential part of the main plot. Military/war narratives with male protagonists tend to focus on their professional achievements and personal growth. On the other hand, narratives with female protagonists usually center their plots on the romantic connections of the protagonist. In their analysis of masculinity in cinematic depictions, Donald and MacDonald explained that "[i]n the majority of American war films, the purpose of including women in screenplays has historically been to provide men with love interests and add a little sex appeal to the film"[213]. This has been in fact women's primary space of participation in early military narratives, as they were mostly there to emphasize the masculinity of the male protagonist, while consigned to the periphery of the plot. In the interest of the analysis of visual narratives centering on military women, I propose an

[210] Aaron Belkin, et. al., "Readiness and DADT Repeal: Has the New Policy of Open Service Undermined the Military?", *Armed Forces & Society*, 39, 4, (October 2013), 2.
[211] My examination will not only focus on male-centered narratives, but will also provide case studies of female-centered narratives, both from earlier conflicts, as well as from wars taking place during the 'War of Terror', the main timeframe of the thesis.
[212] e.g. *Men of Honor* (2000, dir. George Tillman Jr.); *American Sniper* (2014, dir. Clint Eastwood), etc.
[213] Donald, MacDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 4.

examination of fictional productions where women have leading roles, with the purpose of conveying propagandist pro-war messages, ultimately with the aim of inciting female audience members to reproduce on-screen behaviors, in an expression of norms, values, and expectations.

Keeping in mind Tom Digby's aforementioned concept of "cultural puppet strings"[214], I now focus on how romance has been traditionally represented in the military/war genre, with the intent of examining the origin of patterns, and their relevance in the construction of the contemporary fictional military woman. To provide contextualization for this analysis, I begin by addressing representations of love and romance in early cultural productions (mainly motion pictures) of the genre.

Even though there were cinematic productions that featured romantic connections during the first World War (WWI)[215], it was during the second World War (WWII) that these themes found a larger cinematic expression. Along with the insurgence of romance during wartime came the reformulation of women's roles in visual narratives. One of such reformulations saw the transformation of the 'sex symbol' into a Pin-Up Girl[216]. Even though Pin-Ups were not 'invented' during WWII, they were certainly 're-invented'. Pin-Up Girls served to raise moral during WWII[217], showing civilian women that sexual behavior was a way to serve their country, akin to the way men served in the battleground[218]. Film historian Jeanine Basinger, in her article about women in wartime cinema, qualified Pin-Up Girls as "[…] the soldier[s] of love"[219]. The attire reinforced Pin-Ups' condition as 'soldiers of love', as they were usually portrayed wearing tiny versions of military uniforms, and exposing a lot of their bodies. According to Jeanine Basinger, images of Pin-Ups' 'uniforms', often posing with – or on – weaponry, conferred "[…] an 'I-am-in-the-military-alongside-you' quality to the pin-up photo"[220]. Through their symbolic presence, Pin-Ups became part of the imaginary of warfare, seen 'pinned

[214] Digby, *Love and War*, 12.
[215] e.g. *Wings* (1922, dir. William A Wellman), *The Big Parade* (1925, dir. King Vidor), *The Dawn Patrol* (1938, dir. Edmundo Goulding).
[216] A Pin-Up Girl is a model, or illustration of a woman, that poses in often revealing attires. Batty Grable being one of the most famous.
[217] The 'Vargas Girls' (drawn by Alberto Vargas) being perhaps the most popular example of Pin-Ups for wartime moral.
[218] For instance, the film *Pin-Up Girl* (1944, dir. Bruce Humberstone) explores this theme.
[219] Jeanine Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film: Home-Front Soldier", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham, John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 89-105.
[220] Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 93.

up' in barracks and military bases. The Pin-Up Girls are ultimately an example of how women's images have been manipulated and exploited towards conveying messages that align with military interests. Having recognized how Pin-Ups embodied the static image of the 'women for troop morale', I now discuss the array of possible military roles for women in the motion pictures of that period.

Created in 1942, the US government agency responsible for mediating the propaganda concerning WWII, the 'Office of War Information' (OWI), included a branch reserved for the 'Motion Picture Bureau of the Office of War Information'. This office provided guidelines and demands to the movie industry, and their instructions about roles for women echoed the needs of the time. A major one was women fulfilling the jobs left by enlisting men. Resulting from this, as Jeanine Basinger explains, "[t]he woman's film moved front and center at the box office to play an important role in wartime entertainment about the home front"[221]. For the OWI it was important to show women working in plants, tending to machinery[222] and ultimately embracing the propagandist message of the famed Rosie the Riveter: "We Can Do It!". Motion pictures such as *Rosie the Riveter* (1944, dir. Joseph Santley), and *The Girl in Overalls* (1943, dir. Norman Z. McLeod) delivered the message to civilian women that their contribution in auxiliary jobs was indispensable to the war efforts.

Women were therefore being incited into assuming many jobs left vacant by enlisted men, however, this was but one of the ways in which they were expected to give their contributions to the war efforts. Another, crucial one, was assuming auxiliary positions inside the Armed Forces as well. Films like *Never Wave at a WAC* (1953, dir. Norman Z. McLeod), and *Here Come the WAVES* (1944, dir. Mark Sandrich), represented this need[223]. Nevertheless, their emotional, romantic, and sexual assistance was also required. This is noticeable, for example in *I Love a Soldier* (1944, dir. Mark Sandrich), which depicts a woman, who, while working as a welder of battle ships, falls in love with a soldier. Glamorizing relationships with male soldiers (addressed earlier in this chapter) became a staple of military/war films during the WWII. Furthermore, women were encouraged to offer military men their love and companionship, whether they were

[221] Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 91.
[222] This type of propaganda films was also present in British cinema, seen in films like *Millions Like Us* (1943, dir. Sidney Gilliat), which focused on a woman working in a factory making aircraft parts during WWII.
[223] These two films addressed the auxiliary units: WAC (Women's Army Corps) and WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).

interested in them or not. As an example of this trope, I present an excerpt of the song 'You Can't Say No to a Sailor' from the 1942 film *Iceland* (dir. H. Bruce Humberstone):

> "[…] So if you're patriotically inclined
> Heed the call to arm and keep this thought in mind
> You can't say no to a soldier, a sailor or a handsome marine
> No, you can't say no if he wants to dance
> If he's gonna fight he's got a right to romance […]"[224]

This song was performed by a woman (Joan Merrill), but it was written by two men (Mack Gordon and Harry Warren), which is reflected in the perspective of the song. These themes of female submission to male 'needs' contributed to the establishment of hypermasculine military institutions, and for a biased cultural understanding of gender in those institutions. These themes, as presented in 'You Can't Say No to a Soldier', also encouraged the propagation and banalization of sexual harassment, dissuading women from denouncing it.

As established, women's new contribution to the war workforce was important, however, their role as a housewife continued to be the most required. This was reinforced by the films of that time, which, according to Basinger, submitted the 'home' "[…] refitted for wartime conditions"[225]. This 'refitting' of the home was characterized by celibacy, writing letters to husbands overseas, and overall *sacrificing*, an idea closely related to 'femininity'[226]. The home-front thus became women's theater of war. Home is therefore perceived as an extension of battlefield, as 'stay-at-home' women became extensions of their military husbands[227], embodying what Basinger calls "the female Home-Front Soldier"[228]. US films like *Since You Went Away* (1944, dir. John Cromwell), or *The War Against Mrs. Hadley* (1942, dir. Harold S. Bucquet) depicted women as troopers for a war transposed to their homes, shifting the military/war genre "[…] from

[224] Joan Merrill. "You Can't Say No To a Soldier". Recorded July 1942. Written by Mack Gordon, Harry Warren. From the film *Iceland* (1942, dir. H. Bruce Humberstone).
[225] Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 97.
[226] In early examples of military/war narratives (WWI, WWII) the woman was regularly depicted as 'the one who waits', a motivation for the soldier to come back home, embodying the 'home' herself. This harkens back to Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey*, who, despite of her Spartan descent, is known a symbol of marital fidelity, waiting 20 years for Odysseus to return from the Trojan War.
[227] A British example of women's fight in the home-front during the WWII is *Mrs. Miniver* (1942, dir. William Wyler). *Mrs. Miniver* is considered an important film of the epoch, having received six Academy Awards and other high accolades.
[228] Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 97.

male tragedy to female drama"[229]. Basinger also argues that these types of visual narratives show the women going through their own kind of boot camp, their own form of military training, consisting of grieving their husbands absence; adapting to a 'simpler life'; accepting their newfound role in society; etc.[230]. In the same way men go from 'men' to soldier boot camp, in these narratives we find that there is "[…] a conversion from 'woman' to Home-Front Soldier"[231], in a newfound militarized 'home'.

The patriotic undertone of how these women's stories are presented is, again, an affirmation regarding the expected behavior of civilian women watching these films. These narratives support Cynthia Enloe's argument that "[m]arriage, femininity, military function, and romance, all these factors have been routinely woven together in the fabric of militarized women's lives"[232]. All of these factors in early military/war narratives convey the weight of the romance plot in the construction of today's fictional military women.

On her study about military women in WWII films, Yvonne Tasker identified the prevalence of romantic plots to support the presence, and protagonism, of women. Tasker examined the merging of the war and romance genres, to find that it combined a dedication to conventional patters of femininity, and a commitment to the servicewomen's independence as a modern woman. Tasker labeled this subgenre as '*war-romance hybrids*', serving the purpose of bringing military women into a masculine space, while retaining a familiar structure for female characters[233]. Placing the military woman in a romance allows the narrative to cast her in a familiar role for Western audiences, easing the possible strangeness that can derive from seeing a female combatant. Romance narratives signal the military woman's continuing commitment to conventional patterns of femininity, in an effort to counterbalance the implied masculinity of the military. 'War-romance hybrids', nonetheless, hinder the chances of effacing gender differences, since romance narratives are centered on 'femininity', thus counting on a strong demarcation between man and woman.

[229] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 299.
[230] For a list of the ten steps of 'female enlistment' identified by Basinger see Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 98.
[231] Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman on Film", 101.
[232] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 220.
[233] See Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 57.

Tasker has dedicated part of her research to military nurses, as she sees them as representative of a comfortable space to depict military women[234]. Depicting military nurses in a romantic setting with a military man was a way for film producers to portray love affairs without dealing with the provocative matter of having women as soldiers, since nurses, while a part of the armed forces, are not considered fighters. This reality lead feminist Connie L. Reeves to address them as "invisible soldiers"[235]. Following Cynthia Enloe's perspective, that "[…] the military saw that the nurse-soldier romance […] could bolster wartime male morale and feminine orthodoxy"[236], Tasker argues that the military woman is a narrative counterbalance to the military man. Hence, as military men are expected to kill, military women are expected to heal. This duality reinforces the centrality of men in military/war narratives, while pushing women to the periphery of the action. The trope of the nurse-soldier romance continued to resound in cultural productions. It featured in MASH (TV series 1972 – 1983, created by Larry Gelbart); *The English Patient* (1996, dir. Anthony Minghella); *Pearl Harbor* (2001, dir. Michael Bay)[237]; up to *Our Girl*[238]. One of the reasons for the perpetuity of this trope is that nurses are allowed to be depicted in proximity to the male body, without it being considered inappropriate. From these moments, supposedly portraying the work of a medical professional, instances of comedy, sexual innuendo, or even romance, usually arise.

From this analysis I acknowledge that the presence of women in early military/war genres was always marked by the contrast between them and the male soldier. In the different reiterations of women's roles (e.g. factory workers, housewives, nurses, etc.) two things have remained the same, their auxiliary status, and their proclivity for romance. A large portion of military visual narratives featuring female soldiers depict their motivations for enlisting as being of an emotional/romantic nature, one of the most common being the desire to enlist because of a failed relationship. Hence, I believe it is

[234] Examples of US productions focusing on the US military nurse are: *Proudly We Hail* (1943, dir. Mark Sandrich), *Cry Havoc* (1943, dir. Richard Thorpe), and *They Were Expendable* (1945, dir. John Ford), *Women in War* (1940, dir. John H. Auer).
[235] See Connie L. Reeves, "Invisible Soldiers: Military Nurses", *Gender Camouflage: Women and the US Military*, edited by Francine D'Amico and Laurie Weinstein (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
[236] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 220.
[237] Both *Pearl Harbor* and *The English Patient* are period pieces, set against the backdrop of WWII. According to John Garofolo, Hollywood continues to produce films of that conflict because "World War II remains a safe bet to reinforce a comfort-based ideology resting on the known outcome of that war". John Garofolo, "War Films in an Age of War and Cinema", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham, John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 42.
[238] Even though Dawes is a medic, not a nurse, her character is still seen as caretaker, and moments of treatment provide opportunities for romantic scenes (as I will demonstrate in this chapter).

relevant to examine another early trope regarding women in military narratives: What Tasker calls 'enlisting because of men'. I will start by pinpointing the first appearances of this trope while explaining its relevance, and durability, up to 'War on Terror' visual narratives. Since I have been discussing the particular way in which WWII narratives dealt with 'femininity' in the military/war genre, I now examine WWII narratives as the birthplace of the 'enlisting because of men' trope. A prime example is *Skirt's Ahoy!* (1952, dir. Sidney Lanfield), as the trailer for the film suggests, "they all joined the Navy and became three girls with one idea: men"[239]. Tasker writes that, in *Skirt's Ahoy!* military service is presented as filled with romance opportunities, and also as an alternative to a married life[240]. Even though the women in *Skirt's Ahoy!* were joining the WAVES to meet men[241], others are shown enlisting to escape them. Tasker explained how women's motivations for enlisting in WWII fiction were "[…] either to *get* a man or to *forget* a man"[242]. Throughout the decades following WWII, other military/war narratives have ensued the 'enlisting because of men' trope, where men are the motivation for women's enlistment.

In *Private Benjamin,* Judy Benjamin shares with her fellow recruits how her husband died of a heart attack on their wedding night. One of the recruits responds "Jesus Benjamin. I don't get it, what do you do after a thing like that?", to which Benjamin answers bluntly: "Join the Army"[243]. This narrative, set in the 1980's, presents Army life as liberating for women, and pushes the idea that enlisting in the Army is a marker of independence, as opposing to marriage, which is depicted as oppressing. According to Enloe, "[i]n the long history of the militarization of women, the newest maneuver has been to camouflage women's service to the military as women's liberation"[244]. Enloe's argument aligns with my own, in the sense that the 'maneuvers' Enloe speaks of, are a way of *weaponizing* representations of military women to achieve military interests. *Private Valentine* (2008, dir. Steve Miner), a reworking of *Private Benjamin,* follows its predecessor's approach regarding 'camouflaging' military service as liberation. This can be verified in a scene featuring a conversation between two female soldiers. Private Jeter,

[239] Movieclips Classic Trailers, "Skirts Ahoy! (1952) Official Trailer - Esther Williams, Joan Evans Movie HD", YouTube video, 3:53, July 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owvrK5mO_d8.
[240] See Tasker, *Soldier's Stories*, 133.
[241] The song 'What Good is a Gal (Without a Guy)?' (*Skirts Ahoy!*, 1952, dir. Sidney Lanfield) is a good example of how *Skirts Ahoy!* explores this theme.
[242] Tasker, *Soldier's Stories*, 133.
[243] *Private Benjamin*, DVD.
[244] Cynthia Enloe. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd, 2000), 45.

when asked about her return to the US Army explains: "Proudly served as sergeant at Fort Benning. Traded my stripes in for marriage. That fell through. Came back for the love of my country, First Sergeant!". To this, First Sergeant Morley replies: "A woman scorned is a good soldier. Welcome back Private Jeter" [245]. The exchange between these two women attests to the trope 'enlisting because of men' into military/war narratives released during the 'War on Terror'. Also in *Our Girl* we can observe this trope, as Dawes joins the British Army following the discovery that her boyfriend was cheating on her.

In contemporary visual culture, not only films and TV series depict the trope of women enlisting to claim their liberation after losing a romantic (male) partner. This idea is also present in other visual means of transmitting entertainment, such as music videos. In a successful music video for pop star Katy Perry's song *Part of Me* (released March 21, 2012) we see Perry playing the role of a scorned woman who decides to join the US Marine Corps immediately after discovering her boyfriend is cheating on her (just like Dawes in *Our Girl*). When Perry leaves her cheating boyfriend, she stops at a gas station, where she is captivated by a Marine Corps advertisement that reads 'All women are created equal, then some become marines'[246]. The military stands as an escape from her heartbreak, and she immediately decides to enlist without pondering any implications. We next see Perry cutting her hair short[247] and going through boot camp at Camp Pendleton (California), with real female Marines.

The album that contains 'Part of Me', *Teenage Dream: The Complete Confection*, has sold over 1 million copies. When this chapter was written, the music video for 'Part of Me' had close to eight hundred million views on *YouTube* alone. Being a very influential artist, it is necessary to consider how Perry's thematic choices impact her large fanbase. Troubled by the type of message being conveyed in 'Part of Me', renowned feminist Naomi Wolf wrote an article for *The Guardian* in which she denounces the video as a piece of propaganda that glorifies violence through its use of military training and missions for backdrop to a pop song. In the article, Wolf questions a possible involvement of the US Military's Public Affairs in the development of the video. Wolf pleads for transparency, and suspects that "[…] the US military's PR [Publis Relations] arm is buying up chunks of pop culture real estate". Furthermore, Wolf categorizes the video as

[245] *Private Benjamin*, DVD.
[246] Katy Perry, "Part of Me". YouTube video, 4:11, March 21, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuwfgXD8qV8.
[247] Again, an example of a theme discussed before in this thesis, that of cutting hair to shed femininity.

a "[…] glossy, seductive 'war is fun when you can't get a date' pop video"[248], countering any claim of it being a serious portrayal of – or an homage to – women in the military (as Perry and her team claimed).

Narratives that offer military service as a path after heartbreak, as seen in *Our Girl*, *Private Benjamin*, *Private Valentine,* 'Part of Me', among many other examples, effectively engage in promoting the idea of *romancing the military itself*, as a substitute for the love of a man. By portraying women's motivation to enlist as a romance-driven impulse, these narratives ultimately contribute to the long-lasting arguments against the integration of women in military units, feeding into the stagnation of women's progression as fully realized characters in military-driven entertainment.

Romance has thus served as an explanatory device that justifies the presence of women in earlier military contexts. I will now consider female-centered narratives set during the 'War on Terror' focusing on the recurrent inclusion of romance. I defend that the patterns described by Tasker have permeated through time, persisting, in some form or another, until today. One of Tasker's claims, that wartime narratives "[…] centralize the military woman while insisting on her auxiliary status"[249], can still be verified in contemporary visual narratives such as *Our Girl*. While Dawes is the protagonist, and 'our girl', her role in the British Army is an auxiliary one, as she is a Combat Medical Technician[250].

As aforementioned, *Our Girl* follows the tradition of narratives featuring WWII military nurses, as described by Cynthia Enloe in *Maneuvers*, Dawes mirrors fictional military women that experience "[…] not warfare, the preserve of manly men, but romance, the natural arena of feminine women. In the life of the female military nurse, war thereby became adventure; care was converted into romantic love"[251]. In fact, romantic scenes arise from several instances of medical attention in *Our Girl*, from Dawes tending to Captain James' blistered feet, to her care of 'Smurf' after he was caught in an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) explosion. There is, however, a very evident and

[248] Naomi Wolf, "Katy Perry and the Military-Pop-Cultural Complex", *The Guardian*, April 16, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/16/katy-perry-military-pop-cultural-complex (accessed in December 2019).
[249] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 70.
[250] Fictional representations, such as Dawes, reflect the continued exclusion of military women from Ground Close Combat (GCC), a topic extensively discussed among scholars of Military/War Studies. For reference of the debates surrounding this issue, see Cooper Fitriani, R. Matthews, "Women in Ground Close Combat", *The RUSI Journal*, 161, 1, (2016), 14 – 24; or Robert Egnell, "Gender Perspectives and Fighting", *Parameters*, 43, 2, (2013), 33–41.
[251] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 220.

important distinction between Dawes and the women playing medical professionals in most visual narratives set during WWII: Dawes is not confined to base camp, she accompanies the units in their missions to secure medical care. This is what Tasker has referred to as "nursing under fire"[252]. Nevertheless, even though Dawes joins the men on the battlefield, she is still framed as a non-combatant. Attesting to this is one BBC advert for the first season of *Our Girl*, which features the tagline: "Their war, her battle, our girl"[253]. With this statement, BBC blatantly detaches Dawes from the war efforts in Iraq, where she is deployed to. Romance is really Dawes field of battle, where she defers blows and is hurt by male attacks. This approach is employed to secure the femininity of the military woman in a male-dominated genre.

Our Girl feeds into the assumption that military women will inevitably disrupt the normal functioning of the boot camp by being sexually promiscuous[254]. Dawes is very candid in expressing how she craves sex more while in boot camp. After having sex with a fellow recruit Dawes is confronted by her bunkmates, who assign her one point for her sexual encounter. The 'classification' goes as following: "One point for a recruit, five points for a corporal, ten points for a sergeant, and 50 for a major"[255]. This 'scoreboard' can be perceived at first glance to be aligning with a postfeminist stance[256], it is in fact revealing of an appropriation of behavior that what has come to be described in Tasker's term 'military masculinity'.

In 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance', bell hooks recalls overhearing a conversation between white college students, discussing the list of women (from different ethnicities) with whom they planned to have sex before graduation. hooks' analysis centered on the 'consumption' of the Other's perceived 'exoticness', "[…] where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other"[257]. I recognize a parallel between hooks' case study and the female recruits 'scoreboard' in *Our Girl*. Considering that in both instances the planned sexual encounters were an affirmation of power, I propose that, for both the

[252] Tasker, *Soldier Stories*, 78.
[253] See the poster in https://abrilveja.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/s1og-cartaz.jpg?quality=70&strip=all&strip=info (accessed December 2019).
[254] Another aforementioned example of this approach can be seen in *Les Combattants*.
[255] *Our Girl*, DVD.
[256] In the sense that postfeminism argues that gender equality has already been achieved, here represented by the freedom to choosing a sexual partner inside a military institution. On issues regarding postfeminism and military see Mary Douglas Vavrus, Postfeminist War: Women and the Media-Military-Industrial Complex (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019).
[257] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance", *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 367.

recruits in *Our Girl* and hooks' students, "[…] fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind […] "innocence" and enter the world of "experience"[258]. Since sexual autonomy is something usually associated with male soldiers, for women to consider an achievement to have sex with as many (and as high in the chain of command) military men as possible, can be interpreted as an attempt to correspond to the expected behavior of a (male) 'soldier', thus embodying 'military masculinity'. This is aligned with the series message that military women's promiscuity does in fact disrupt military social cohesion[259]. An example of this is the series' suggestion that the male recruit who had sex with Dawes was discharged over the jealousy of Corporal Geddings. *Our Girl* thus emerges as an example of a cultural production during the 'War on Terror' that, under the guise of offering the overlooked perspective of women in the military/war genre, permeates tired tropes of female promiscuity and male jealousy. *Our Girl* is a military drama leaning on the romantic potentials that come with the integration of female soldiers in military units. Furthermore, the soundtrack of the series sustains this argument.

Soundtracks are an important part of transmitting emotions to the viewers of visual narratives, and those within the military/war genre are no exception. Military cadence (songs accompanying the soldiers' march) is an intricate part of military life, so, songs about war and soldiers have become a natural part of their visual representations[260]. Soundtrack provides cues for emotional responses, and the theme song of a TV show can set the tone for the whole series. In the case of *Our Girl*, the theme song is 'The War Rages On', which by title alone might invoke ideas of the unrelentless pressure of warfare, but I consider it to be better suited to accompany a narrative about a couple facing hardships.

"The war rages on
You'll be at my side
Through it all
Through hardships unseen
We'll still survive, fortified
Please don't pass me by

[258] hooks, 'Eating the Other', 368.
[259] An argument supported by Anthony King, in the text we have discussed above.
[260] For a closer analysis of this topic, see Robert Eberwein, "'Hearing' the Music in War Films", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham, John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 6 – 19.

Can't you hear me calling out your name
Forgive the things I do
Don't turn your back when I need you
The war rages on […]"[261]

This theme song effectively inscribes the series in the military drama genre, as the preoccupation with romance is very prevalent. Also noteworthy is the lack of a specific recipient of the message the song is conveying. Keeping the romantic message as vague as possible allows Dawes to interact with multiple possible suitors and let the viewers speculate about the outcome.

In order to move beyond the primary anglo-saxon context of this thesis, I now consider a cultural production that features the topic of the military-romance 'hybrid' in boot camp narratives. Therefore, I compare *Our Girl* (a UK production) to a French production from the same year (2014), *Les Combattants* (dir. Thomas Cailley). This film debuted at that year's Cannes Film Festival. Categorized as a romantic comedy (popularly known as rom-com)[262], it tells the story of Arnaud and Madeleine. As Arnaud is working a summer job, he meets Madeleine, described in the film's IMBD page as "[…] beautiful as she is brusque, a concrete block of tensed muscles and doomsday prophecies"[263]. Madeleine enrolls in an Army bootcamp induction course, and Arnaud follows her lead, there they encounter new challenges to their limits. Having a man join the Army on account of a woman signifies a clear departure from previous military/war narratives. In fact, there are several aspects that suggest a gender role reversion in *Les Combattants*. Typically, the female character in a romantic comedy with a military setting would be expected to be the sensitive, and caring one, but in *Les Combattants* this role falls onto Arnaud. Madeleine is physically strong, dedicated to her military ambitions and direct in her approach, traits that are usually bestowed upon male characters. Arnaud is motivated by love, while Madeleine is motivated by achieving military goals and acquiring survival skills.

Movie critic Sheila O'Malley, suggests in the influential cinema critique website *rogerebert.com*, that "Madeleine (Adele Haenel) does not know that she is a character in

[261] Alex Clare, "*The War Rages On",* August 11, 2014, Track 9 on *Three Hearts*, Universal Island Records, 2014, CD.
[262] "*Les Combattants* (2014)", IMDB, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3204144/ (accessed December 2019).
[263] "*Les Combattants* (2014)", IMDB, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3204144/ (accessed December 2019).

a rom-com. She thinks she's in a war movie"[264]. Madeleine's fierce demeanor automatically displaces her, as the female protagonist of a romantic comedy is not expected to be more interested in combat that in gaining male attention. This confusion is likewise perceptible in the international distribution of the film[265]. *Les Combattants* was marketed in English-speaking countries with the title *Love at First Fight*. In Germany it was translated as *Liebe auf den Ersten Schlag* (Love at First Fight). In Portuguese-speaking countries it was likewise translated as *Amor à Primeira Briga* (Love at First Fight). Turning a title that literally means 'The Combatants' into 'Love at First Fight' re-directs the focus of the movie to a more 'rom-com friendly' premise to more acceptable social norms. The original name reflects the couple's fighting nature, as they rebel against family expectations (Arnaud) and society's expectations (Madeleine). The international re-titling cheapens their character arcs, limiting their personal achievements to youthful romance. 'Love at First Fight' also operates under the false pretense that the couple falls in love after their first 'fight', when in fact, on their first encounter they engage in a demonstration of self-defense tactics, which does not qualify as a 'fight'.

Madeleine's commitment to physically preparing for the French Ground Army's boot camp is met with strangeness and disgust, and as a potential source of comedy for the audience. Madeleine trains to increase her endurance underwater by jumping in her swimming pool with a weighted backpack on. Watching this, Arnaud's brother tells him: "She is really nuts", to what Arnaud retorts "Yeah, she is kind of weird", his brother, however, does not think 'weird' quite covers it, and adds "Totally off the hook is more like it"[266]. Despite Madeleine's 'weirdness', they both enlist, and during bootcamp, the pair suffers a disenchantment with the Army and go Missing in Action (MIA). It is at this point that their romance begins to blossom, and their couple dynamics begin to change, now aligned with what is expected of romantic comedies. Madeleine loses her resilience and determination, leaving Arnaud to assume the lead in their decisions. This betrayal to Madeleine's character, in what was at first leading to a determined military woman, reveals the film's lack of commitment – and even interest – in having these women represented.

[264] Sheila O'Malley, *Love at First Fight* (Review), *rogerebert.com*, May 22, 2015, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/love-at-first-fight-2015 (accessed December 2019).
[265] By the French production company *Appaloosa Distribution*.
[266] *Les Combattants*, DVD.

I will now consider visual narratives created with the only intention of telling the true story of a particular military woman. Biopics like *Serving in Silence: The Margarethe Cammermeyer Story* (1995, dir. Richard Heus), and *She Stood Alone: The Tailhook Scandal* (1995, dir. Larry Shaw) told stories of military women that impacted the US military, addressing such important issues as the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, and sexual assault within the military institution (respectively). Other biopics, like *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003, dir. Peter Markle), magnify the soldier's stories, oftentimes adding fabricated elements to the narrative[267]. These type of military/war biopics are a staple of the genre[268], and those focused on military women should be addressed within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I will now examine a biopic that will allow me to address the patterns of the 'war-romance hybrid' I have been discussing.

Megan Leavey is a 2017 US biographical drama directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite, based on the true story of a young female Marine named Megan Leavey and a Military Working Dog named Rex. It depicts how Leavey and Rex were wounded by a roadside bomb during the Iraq War in 2006, and it follows her struggles to adopt Rex after her discharge[269]. In his analysis of how *Megan Leavey* relates to 'War on Terror' popular culture, Paul Duncum indicates that the film is very much in line with the dominant visual narratives depicting the wars taking place during the 'War on Terror' in the sense that it is supportive of military intervention[270]. However, I would add to Duncum's argument, that *Megan Leavey* also conforms to traditional approaches on romantic narratives involving servicewomen, even if in a 'distorted' way, as I explain below.

Megan Leavey demonstrates that when a narrative has a military woman as protagonist, romance can even be *forced* upon the plot. Throughout the film we watch Megan interact with mostly male characters, piloting her actions as a result of these encounters. A romance sparks between her and a fellow Marine, however, the relationship does not contribute much to the plot, and is discarded, because, as Duncum explains

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[267] I will address this film in detail in Part II - chapter 2.3.

[268] Notably, male-centered biopics like *Patton* (1970, dir. Franklin J. Schaffner), *Valkyrie* (2008, dir. Bryan Singer), *Downfall* (2004, dir. Oliver Hirshbiegel), *American Sniper* (2015, dir. Clint Eastwood), etc.

[269] *Megan Leavey* also subscribes to the aforementioned trope of 'enlisting because of men'. In the film, the reason for her enlistment is emotional distress over the death of a close male friend, when in reality, Leavey enlisted because of the 9/11 attacks, which compelled her to join the military efforts in 2003, just like they did for a great number of soldiers at that time.

[270] See Paul Duncum, "Megan Leavey and the Popular Visual Culture of the War-on-Terror". *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War since 1914: The British Isles, the United States and Australasia*, edited by Martin Kerby, et al. (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2019), 45.

"Megan's […] real romance is with Rex"[271]. The relationship with her (male) dog follows patterns found in many narratives detailing romances: (1) the 'couple' meet in a problematic situation; (2) the woman must overcome the 'man's' limitations and lack of emotional availability; (3) she strives to connect with 'him'; (4) leading to a blossoming romance that will ultimately see them together at the close of the narrative[272]. This description is usually assumed to involve human participants, but in the case of *Megan Leavey* it is followed with a woman and a dog. Nonetheless, I argue that this narration approach still inscribes *Megan Leavey* into the military/war genre trend I am exposing. Leavey's troublesome boot camp story, and hardships deploying to Iraq, was probably perceived by the producers of the film to be insufficient for a compelling storyline, therefore, the female lead had to be involved in a romance.

Even though the film was written to be about Leavey and the bond she developed with Rex, the film portrays the dog as having a much more developed character arc than Leavey herself. He is untamable at first, what is commonly called a 'land shark', after meeting Leavey he begins to excel at his job as an Electro-Explosive Device (EED) dog, and grows into a loyal and competent Military Working Dog. Leavey's character, despite developing some degree of determination, does not achieve the level of narrative growth Rex does. Under the premise of telling the story of a female soldier, this film puts a lot more effort into Rex that it does into Leavey. Take for instance, two versions (US and UK) of the film's poster for theatrical release.

[271] Duncum, "Megan Leavey and the Popular Visual Culture of the War-on-Terror", 56.
[272] *Volontaire* (2018), discussed in the previous chapter, is an example of a female-led military narrative where this pattern can be observe, as Baer strives to overcome the 'wall' that is Commanding Officer Riviere, resulting in their romantic connection.

Figure 8 (left) - US poster Megan Leavey (2017). (open access image).

Figure 9 (right) - UK poster Megan Leavey (2017). (open access image).

Drawing a comparison between the poster for the US theatrical release (Figure 8) and the poster for the UK theatrical release (Figure 9), it is apparent that Rex has been given the spotlight in the UK poster, taking the title of the film. This change in marketing, akin to the one I addressed regarding *Les Combattants*, echoes concerns that a larger audience would gravitate towards the film if it appeared not to be centered on a military women. Note that both versions of the poster share the same tagline: 'A true story about a marine's best friend'. This tagline alone attests to the efforts in marginalizing Leavey as the protagonist of her narrative.

I consider important the contribution of the military biopic for this research, as it provides an opportunity to analyze a cultural production based on real facts performed by military women, instead of having a completely fabricated narrative. It is thus relevant to assess how much of this film's plot points are based on Leavey's actual experiences. The film begins with the standard phrase 'Based on a true story', however, considering that the entertainment industry is usually more concerned with telling a great story, than an honest one, cautious should be advised when considering the veracity of the events detailed. The military media company *Task & Purpose* distributed an article where they

detailed how several members of Leavey's unit have gone public with claims that call into question various key aspects of the film. They stated that, after reading the movie's script, "some […] Marines were appalled by what they read — so much so that four drafted impassioned letters to the filmmakers, alleging, in exhaustive detail, numerous discrepancies they argued amounted to "stolen valor" and requesting certain key plot points and character descriptions be either altered or removed"[273]. Other instances exist where people contest the accuracy of the film's narrative, including military consultants, soldiers who worked with Leavey, film crew members, and Megan herself, who, when asked about the real EED blast that earned her a Purple Heart, said: "Overall it was good, the bomb was buried too deep, I was very lucky"[274], while on screen it is played out as a near-fatal explosion, from which she and Rex should never have returned.

I believe the film should be acknowledged as groundbreaking for being one of few military movies having a female lead, and being written and directed by women. Nonetheless, it should likewise be criticized for its failure in portraying an accurate version of Leavey's story, and by its perpetuation of cinematic tropes concerning female soldiers in military-driven narratives[275]. *Megan Leavey* provides a non-conventional perspective on the military romance trope, since the 'romance' is between Leavey and a dog. Still, the pervasiveness of this trope reinforces the idea that the general public would never be interested in a military-driven narrative that solely told the story of a servicewoman without the appeal of a romantic sub-plot or an emotional connection with an animal.

The Military Love Triangle

Military/war narratives, as I have been discussing, routinely circle back to old themes in visual representations of military women. As I have clarified above, despite the different contexts/backgrounds, romance themes/tropes starting during the first world

[273] Adam Linehan "Megan Leavey is a Good Iraq War Film. But is it Stolen Valor'?", *Task & Purpose*, June 22, 2017. taskandpurpose.com/megan-leavey-is-a-good-iraq-war-film-but-is-it-stolen-valor (accessed February 2020).
[274] "Megan Leavey (2017)", History vs. Hollywood, http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/megan-leavey/ (accessed in February 2020).
[275] The major two tropes being 'enlisting because of a man', and the 'obligatory romance'.

wars have found their way into modern narratives of military conflicts. When analyzing different iterations of intergender interaction in 'war-romance hybrids' I have found that one type of plot device is often used to further create romantic possibilities around a military woman, the *love triangle*[276]. This plot device is an extension, and consequence, of the military-romance 'hybrid', and is not a recent trait of military/war narratives. According to film scholar John Belton in *American Cinema/American Culture*, "[…] the reappearance of this motif [love triangle] (…) testifies to its status as a timeworn genre convention"[277]. This 'motif' has actually reappeared countless times across decades, arguably being first featured in a military narrative in *Wings* (1927, dir. William A. Wellman), detailing the romantic triangle between two US Army Air Service pilots and a military ambulance driver. This plot is mirrored in *Pearl Harbor* (2001, dir. Michael Bay), where two pilots in the US Squadron for the Royal Air Force fall in love with a military nurse.

However similar the plots may appear, *Wings* is distinctive in the fact that the triangle does not converge on the female participant's corner, as there is a strong homosexual undertone to the plot[278], featuring the first on-camera kiss between two men. In fact, in his work on war cinema, Lawrence J. Quirk stated that "*Wings* is essentially a love story – between two men"[279]. The movie, the only silent film to win Best Picture at the very first Academy Awards (1929) was not met with controversy over the affection shown between the two male protagonists. As it seems, "[…] kissing in the trenches was remarkably common during World War I. According to British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Santanu Das, letters and accounts of the war are peppered with stories of soldiers kissing, embracing, and giving each other pet names like 'my Palestine Wife'"[280]. Even though the affection between the two soldiers was blatantly displayed in the motion picture, the female character's presence – even appearing during the men's kiss – assured audiences that conventional heteronormativity was being upheld.

[276] Generally perceived as two characters competing for the love of a third.
[277] John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 200.
[278] The topic of homosocial bonding in war films (of different times) have been identified and researched by many critics (academic or otherwise) of the genre. e.g. Robert Eberwein, *Armed Forces: Masculinities and Sexuality in the American War Film* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
[279] Lawrence J. Quirk, *Great War Films: From the Birth of a Nation to Today* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994), 42.
[280] Maggie Koerth-Baker, "Ten Important Kisses in History", *CNN*, https://edition.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/wayoflife/05/20/mf.ten.important.kisses/ (accessed February 2020).

Commenting on René Girard's schematization of erotic triangles in literature[281], Eve Sedgwick praises his analysis, which conveys that "[…] in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love', differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent"[282]. This feature of *Wings* is likewise inherited by *Pearl Harbor*, which, maintaining its romantic gestures directed towards the female's corner in the triangle, managed to depict the men's intense friendship and rivalry. I recognize that the several marks of homosociality present in the narrative attest to the strong bonds between the two male soldiers. In *Pearl Harbor* we watch the romantic involvement of two close friends (Rafe and Danny) with the same woman (Evelyn), even engaging in a physical fight over her. By the end of the narrative Danny dies, leaving Rafe in a relationship with Evelyn, raising Danny's child. According to John Belton, "[i]n enjoying sexual relations with the same woman, the men enjoy what psychoanalysts describe as a displaced homoerotic or homosocial relationship with one another in which their rivalry becomes a form not of sexual competition but of exchange"[283]. In this sense, *Pearl Harbor*'s plot exemplifies a visual narrative celebrating the relationship of Rafe and Danny, consumed through Evelyn's body, and later solidified in the shared paternity of her child[284]. Thus, I argue that in male-male-female love triangles, such as *Pearl Harbor* and *Wings*, the woman can act as a buffer for any suspicion of homoeroticism in male soldier's relationships. Through the use of military women to re-route male intimacy/desire for each other, the narrative device of the love triangle exalts the masculine qualities in male soldiers, while leaning on women to provide anchorage for male storylines. Anthropologist Gayle Rubin, a theorist of sex and gender politics, has also hypothesized about the idea of men 'exchanging' women[285]. Specifically, Rubin has defined patriarchal heterosexuality as a dissimulated way of trafficking women, in the sense that women are used as interchangeable property for the

[281] See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).
[282] Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 21.
[283] Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 200.
[284] Portraying this love triangle against the backdrop of a moment in history well known to Western audiences is not deprived of significance. Depicting relationships during the wars in 'War on Terror' comes with more sensitive issues to address, do WWII is a 'safe' way to screen warfare and project fictional romances. This is evidenced by the continuous narratives set during the WWI/WWII that continue to be released to this day.
[285] Rubin developed his theories from the works of Lévi-Strauss and Engels.

benefit of male interpersonal relations[286]. This reasoning further pushes women into the periphery, a passive object of male sexual experience, harkening back to bell hooks' argument in 'Eating the Other' that I have discussed above.

In her work on fictionalized representations of homosocial desire, Sedgwick repels Freud's theories on the erotic triangle[287], mainly his support of its symmetry. As Sedgwick elaborates, Freud defended that the structure of the triangle "[…] would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants"[288]. Sedgwick strongly disagrees with this view, accusing Freud of "historical blindness"[289], as she makes her case for an asymmetric love triangle, regarding the shifting power relations it can entail, supporting her analysis with contemporary feminist theories[290]. In my analysis of 'War on Terror' visual narratives I have also found several iterations of asymmetrical love triangles, where the triangular scheme usually is presented as male-male-female. Drawing on Sedgwick's argument, I understand that what makes these triangles asymmetrical is precisely their skewed distribution of power and status. By being prevalently centered on two men fighting over one woman, the plots can include displays of military masculinity in line with the conventions I have been discussing in this thesis. Harkening back to my previous examination of Donald and McDonald's work on the topic of military masculinity(ies), "[…] establishing sexual and interpersonal dominance over a female is part of the social construction of manliness"[291]. This 'social construction' is manifested in military love triangles through the asymmetrical distribution of power and status.

In his article detailing the geometry of gendered conflicts in popular films, Mark Hedley analyzed an extensive sample of films featuring love triangles (from various genres), and found "[…] the female characters to be represented consistently as advantaged relative to their male counterparts in terms of moral status and disadvantaged

[286] See Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes Toward a Political Economy of Sex", *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.
[287] Which Freud articulated whilst explaining the 'Oedipus Complex'. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dream* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913).
[288] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 23.
[289] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 23.
[290] Among other feminists, Sedgwick uses the work of: Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row—Colophon, 1976); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[291] Donald and McDonald, *Reel Men at War*, 45.

relative to their male counterparts in terms of social power"[292]. In the narratives I have considered for this chapter, I have found that Hedley's findings are still verifiable in more recent love triangles. Nevertheless, I should add a relevant aspect, overlooked by Hedley[293]: In military/war narratives where a military woman is at the center of a love triangle, the two male soldiers tend to belong to different hierarchical positions, which is the case of *Our Girl*.

In the military drama *Our Girl*[294], the main character, Molly Dawes is part of not one, but two love triangles. The first occurs during Dawes' boot camp, and it is between her, Corporal Geddings (her hierarchical superior), and recruit Chris Ingrams (her peer). This first triangle is introduced and set aside in the pilot for the season, while the second one develops during the five episodes that make up the first season. This love triangle is between her, Captain Charles James (her hierarchical superior), and Private Dylan 'Smurf' Smith (her peer). The replication (and extension) of the love triangle formula from pilot to series is revealing of a deliberate intention to portray the protagonist in a moral conflict marginal to the challenges of warfare. Love triangles are not a sub-plot to *Our Girl*, they are the main drive of the choices each main character makes, which allows for an observation of the gendered dynamics within military love triangles. In my assessment, *Our Girl* conforms to Hedley's analysis, when he writes that "[t]he representation of a morally superior male corner of a triangle invokes one of two possible stereotypes, that of the benevolent Prince Charming [James] and that of the Courageous Hero ['Smurf']"[295]. Analyzing films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987, dir. Adrian Lyne), Hedley writes that "[i]n such films, the triangle is the force that motivates the development of the plot; the resolution of the triangle represents the plot's climax"[296]. Adapting Hedley's theory to *Our Girl*, I can surmise that it falls under the same category as *Fatal Attraction,* in the sense that its love triangle is the drive for the main plot.

Dawes' love triangle is propelled by 'Smurf's' impulsive demeanor, which often leads to dangerous circumstances. This choice in plot falls into place with Rikke Schubart's argument that "[w]here war movies play out scenarios of national struggle and

[292] Mark Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film: 1986-2000", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 47, Nos 5/6, (September 2002). 207.
[293] This aspect was overlooked by Hedley most likely due to the fact that he was not centering his research on the military/war genre.
[294] As explained before, for the sake of concision, I will only address the pilot episode (2013) and Season 1 (2014), as the following series of the TV show are derivative of the original season.
[295] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 209.
[296] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 206.

control, female war movies play out scenarios of female struggle and male loss of control"[297]. John Belton, who acknowledges the proclivity for this male loss of control, defends that women are actually to blame for it. Belton argues that women in war films are detrimental to the military man, since they are the ones that cause him to be emotional and ultimately vulnerable, "[…] and this vulnerability will eventually destroy him"[298]. The Dawes/'Smurf'/James triangle attests to the perpetuity of the trope Belton pinpoints, as Dawes is represented as a disruptive figure in both men's lives, making them vulnerable, and is depicted as the cause for their outbursts and involvement in potentially life-threatening situations[299].

The end of *Our Girl*'s first season sees one of Dawes' love interests die. With the heroic death of 'Smurf' – which again attests to his embodiment of Hedley's 'Courageous Hero' stereotype – Dawes is freed from the responsibility of having to choose between the two men, ending up with 'Prince Charming' (James). Accompanying this conflict resolution, the narrative now has leeway to focus on her professional achievements. The reason for this, drawing on Hedley, is that "[m]ore important matters, apparently, cannot be dealt with sufficiently until the unstable triangle dissolves into a more natural monogamous dyad"[300]. In the final moments of the series last episode, shortly after 'Smurf' dies, we then see Dawes assuming a more autonomous role, going on another tour to Afghanistan. Furthermore, she is briefly shown having a major contribution in both saving an Afghan girl, and in training the next wave of British soldiers deployed there. This ending indicates that only after the love triangle was resolved Dawes could finally dedicate herself to her job. Moreover, it also confirms my aforementioned statement that the military – and the romantic possibilities depicted within it – have a transformative power over the military woman.

Acknowledging the magnitude of the number of romantic plots and subplots featured throughout visual narratives over the decades, it would be dismissive to not consider their significance to the representation of military women in visual culture.

[297] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 318.
[298] Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 200.
[299] e.g. A cadet who is sexually involved with Molly is expelled (*Our Girl*, pilot episode); 'Smurf' charges into a mined field to impress her, nearly losing his life in the process (*Our Girl*, season 1, episode 1); etc.
[300] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 206.

Depictions of romance between characters have the ability to convey specific messages to the viewers of popular films/TV series, condoning certain behavior while condemning others. I support Hedley's reasoning that "[…] popular films play a significant role in defining the applicable norms, values, and expectations. Although they do not determine these at the individual level, they do condition them at the population level"[301]. Ultimately, these narratives contribute to the (re-)shaping of values, norms and expectations that make the fabric of Western society. Romance narratives have even contributed to influence the public's collective memory of particular conflicts. As Clémentine Tholas-Disset wrote on her chapter on mythical Americanness, "[u]ndeniably, the romance, more than any other genre, permits to accentuate this personal approach by channeling the attention of the audience on the story of the characters […] rather than on History"[302]. This 'channeling through romance' was apparent, for instance, in the film *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982, dir. Taylor Hackford), where a handsome naval officer carrying a poor working girl swayed audiences to embrace US military after the Vietnam War[303]. Another famed example of a military narrative with a romance (and controversial nods to homoeroticism) sub-plot is *Top Gun* (1986, dir. Tony Scott), which contributed enormously to spike the US Navy Aviators enlistment numbers at the time of its release[304]. Following Tholas-Disset's claim that "[…] war romances underline evocative values such as jealousy, love, peace and happiness, thus giving a more universal dimension to the pictures"[305], I reiterate my argument that romance narratives – including those featuring love triangles – actively work to dissociate the plot from the real dangers of warfare, while establishing the military woman as a non-combater. *Our Girl* is a contemporary example of how recurrent this trope, and others, continue to be, denying the female protagonist the opportunity to head a narrative in which she becomes a heroin – or 'female hero', drawing from Schubart

[301] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 203.
[302] Clémentine Tholas-Disset, "Mary Pickford's WWI Patriotism: A Feminine Approach to Wartime Mythical Americanness", *Heroism and Gender in War Films*, edited by Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Jakub Kazecki (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 14.
[303] As Garofolo wrote about how *An Officer and a Gentleman* helped change the view of the military in a post-Vietnam America: "The romantic notion of a naval officer as a chivalrous knight, sweeping down in his white uniform, literally carrying the poor working girl off her feet". John Garofolo, "War Films in an Age of War and Cinema", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A Cunningham (New York: John Wiley & Sons. 2016), 46.
[304] For an approach on the US government involvement in military films (including *Top Gun*), see David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004).
[305] Tholas-Disset, "Mary Pickford's WWI Patriotism", 14.

– by excelling at her job and proving to be worthy of admiration, like many other male-centered narratives. In *Our Girl*, the woman exists only in relation to her male counterparts, and can only navigate in the narrative through the incentives or obstructions created in her path by men. As *Our Girl* demonstrated, once the conflict with the male characters was over, so was the narrative.

In *Between Men*, Sedgwick concludes that love triangles are a "[…] sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment"[306]. Although this is a dated example of a feminist stance – as it was published in the mid-eighties – Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* has contributed to the foundations of feminist scholarly analysis of fictional representations of female/male sexuality, homosociality, and gendered power dynamics. From her work I have obtained valuable analytical tools regarding power dynamics in love triangles in the case studies I have discussed.

In "*Generation Kill*: The Invasion of Iraq As Seen on HBO", film and television scholar Deborah L. Jaramillo draws a comparison between military/war narratives set during the WWII and the Iraq War, and concludes that, pertaining romantic (sub)plots, "[…] the Iraq War has no romantic cinematic tradition". Even though I agree that narratives played against the backdrop of the Iraq war – or any other war during the 'War on Terror', for that matter – do not have a distinctive romantic tradition, this does not mean that they are not inscribed in romantic traditions seen in military/war cultural productions. As I have identified in this chapter, romance narratives during the 'War on Terror' replicate patterns created during the two world wars, and while they may include particularities that position them in a 21st century cinematic space, for the most part they perpetuate outdated devices and tropes. Wartime narratives featuring romance reinforce the stereotype that "[…] men and women who work side by side are inevitably caught up in relationships"[307], reinforcing Anthony King's misinformed argument regarding real military personnel I have discussed above in this chapter. Although I recognize that love triangles in military/war narratives are not entirely fictional – as the case of Charles Graner, Lynndie England, and Megan Ambuhl can attest[308] – the recurrent way in which

[306] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 27.
[307] Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 88.
[308] These three soldiers were a part of the military torture scandal in Abu Ghraib, Iraq (2004). The two women were involved with Graner at different times, England had a child with him, and Ambuhl married him.

they are incorporated in narratives reveals a misrepresentation not only of the majority of military women's relationships, but also of their investment in military careers. I believe the cultural tropes I have been discussing in this chapter to be impactful in shaping military women's fictional representation. As Mark Hedley explains, concerning popular films:

> "They [popular films] communicate to their audience a set of ideas regarding what issues create conflict between women and men and how such conflict normatively transpires. They inform their audience how such conflict should be resolved. They reveal to their audience who is expected to be assertive and who is expected to be compliant, who is expected to overcome obstacles and who is expected to fold under pressure, who is expected to pursue their legitimate interests doggedly and who is expected to acquiesce to such pursuits sympathetically"[309].

Nevertheless, according to Hedley, these set of ideas should be perceived as 'system representations', as they are indicatives of "systemic stereotypes and hegemonic ideology", not to be assumed as "empirical reality"[310]. Even though I do not see fit to theorize on how visual narratives like *Megan Leavey*, *Les Combattants,* or *Our Girl*, are received by Western audiences, I follow the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School, which supports the idea that what popular culture portrays as 'reality' actually influences what society perceive to be real[311]. Therefore, I do propose that representations as the ones I have considered as case studies in this chapter are impactful in the social construction of military women. I contend that their wide reach and influence likely encourage the reproduction of these patterns of interaction in the social system.

[309] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 203.
[310] Hedley, "The Geometry of Gendered Conflict in Popular Film", 203.
[311] See Jürgen Habermas, "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society". In *Critical Theory and Society*, edited by S.E. Bonner & D. M. Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 292–312.

Part II

DEPLOYMENT:

Military Women and Gender-Related Controversy

Chapter 2.1

CONTROVERSIAL WOMEN
Military Women in the Media

The Mediated Image of Military Women

In this first chapter of Part II, I will undertake a rhetorical analysis of the media coverage centered on military women. I will start from a general approach to this subject, with considerations about the kind of coverage given to issues pertaining servicewomen. From there, I will explore how media discourses regarding military women focus on their gender, instead of objectively focusing on their military service. In the interest of a close analysis of the subject at hand, I will examine two highly popular case studies concerning military women during the 'War on Terror': The Abu Ghraib photographs (focusing on Lynndie England), and the rescue of Jessica Lynch. I chose these two servicewomen for their unique contributions to the debates of the participation of women in military combat, as I will explain further below. Through the analysis of the case studies I not only identify patterns of media representation of servicewomen, but I also establish how influential these patterns are, affecting the group of deployed soldiers these women are made to represent[312].

As the news media is the main source of public information[313] regarding the progression of wars taking place overseas – as well as of its ideological construct and propagation –, it is important to examine how they are framed the mainstream media. Given that media outlets have the power to sway large numbers of people to believe in a particular information, its impartialness is crucial for the fair representation of intervenients/events. Nonetheless, what has been generally observed by media theorists

[312] This last portion of the analysis will be further developed in the next two chapters.
[313] But not the only one, as I explain below.

like Belinda Morrissey, in her analysis of media narratives about women who kill, is that "[i]n contrast to the beliefs of media practitioners, media theorists have concluded that the media constructs the real rather than simply reflects it"[314] [315]. Morrissey's work follows Jean Baudrillard's seminal considerations on the implosion of meaning in the media, where he argued that the media causes information to "[…] exhaust[s] itself in the act of staging communication"[316]. Baudrillard's important work *Simulacra and Simulation*, which I have previously referred to in Chapter 1.1, introduced among other theories the notion that the media feeds false ideologies to the public, who then lose the ability to discern what is reality and what is fantasy, or what he called, the 'simulacra of reality', an accepted substitute for the real. Drawing of Baudrillard, my analyses in this chapter unfold on the belief that the selected media narratives have been 'staged'. I also follow Morrissey's argument on how mainstream media discourse relies on large volumes of pre-existing stories, from which it adapts in order to tap into a collective understanding of a particular issue. Consequently, I recognize that the media stories created around the two case studies are thus submitted to the cultural and socio-political context that surrounds them.

Having considered the prevalence of the 'simulated reality' in Western mainstream media, I now examine the significance of mass media representation in an increasing technological/digital era. In "Unsung Heroes", a paper on the differential treatment/recognition of military women and men in the media, Irene Fiala, writes that "[…] the media continues to be the primary, and oftentimes sole, source of information for the general public on the ongoing war"[317]. Although I do not deny the news media's weight when it comes to broadcasting military action to a wider civilian audience, I do note that Fiala has disregarded a different contribution to the dissemination of warfare information. I am referring to the materials that the soldiers themselves upload to different online platforms for public access. In past wars there have been photographs, letters, and other materials that revealed the everyday life of soldiers in the trenches, only in this

[314] Belinda Morrissey, *When Women Kill: Questions of Agency and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 14.
[315] As examples of said media theorists, Morrissey lists the works of, for instance, S. Cohen and J.Young (eds). *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973; and B. Naylor, "Media Images of Women Who Kill", *Legal Service Bulletin*, 15, (1990) 1: 4–8.
[316] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1994), 55.
[317] Irene Jung Fiala, "Unsung Heroes: Women's Contributions in the Military and Why Their Song Goes Unsung". In *Women in Military and Armed Conflict*, edited by Helena Carreiras, Gerhard Kümmel (VS Verlag Für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 51.

century have we been able to access information from the non-biased perspective of a soldier. As Susan Sontag puts it, "[w]here once photographing war was the province of photojournalists, now the soldiers themselves are all photographers – recording their war, their fun, their observations of what they find picturesque, their atrocities"[318]. However, professional wartime photographers choose their subjects in concomitance with a certain newspaper's guidelines, but on the other hand soldiers photograph whatever they deem interesting. Soldiers record/photograph their realities, not in concordance with the military's code of ethics, as one would expect, but with their own personal morals[319].

In Martin Barker's examination of a cinematic approach that he dubbed the "Iraq war aesthetics"[320], he explains the relevance of real US soldier's *YouTube* videos to the creation of said 'aesthetic'. Barker details how, making use of that new platform (*YouTube* was created in 2005), soldiers were able to upload videos of their daily lives during deployment. Filmed with cellphones or digital cameras, these videos were uploaded by soldiers without restrictions. As the platform developed, it began taking down videos that exhibited maltreatment of people and animals, among them, soldier's videos. Supporting Barker's stance that "[t]he Iraq occupation did indeed become a *YouTube* phenomenon"[321], there has been other academic works on soldiers' *YouTube* videos[322]. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these works seldom feature a gendered approach on the subject. In her analysis of soldier's *YouTube* videos, Kari Andén-Papadopoulos identifies four categories in which they can be distinguished: 'Combat Action', or the recording of military engagement; 'Operation Iraqi Boredom', or showing the tedious daily routine of soldiers; 'Tribute', or paying homage to fallen soldiers; and 'Interactions with Iraqis', or recorded exchanges between soldiers and Iraqi locals[323]. These types of videos carry an 'authenticity' that succeeds in showing what mainstream media cannot – or will not – show. The materials collected, and distributed, by soldiers

[318] Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", In *New York Times Magazine*. I-V, (May 23, 2004), 26.
[319] For an extensive approach on the topic of how a specific situation might impact the morals of a person, see the following work in the field of Psychology: Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London: Rider, 2007).
[320] Martin Barker, *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 34.
[321] Barker, *A 'Toxic Genre'*, 36.
[322] e.g. Christian Christiansen, "Uploading Dissonance: *YouTube* and the US Occupation of Iraq", *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 1, No.2, (2008), 155-75; Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, "US Soldiers Imagining the Iraq War on *YouTube*", *Popular Communication*, Vol. 7, Issue 1, (2009), 17-27.
[323] Andén-Papadopoulos, "US Soldiers Imagining the Iraq War on *YouTube*", 22.

can function as counter-narratives[324], or as advocators for national strategic narratives[325], depending on the approach not only of the video, but of the viewer.

Audiovisual materials captured by soldiers often carry the ability to show civilian viewers important, and unique, facets of war representation. Kelly Oliver, in her work on the appropriation and weaponization of women in the Iraq war, argues that the images/videos captured by soldiers during the occupation of Iraq are "[…] evidence of the of the latest form of colonialism and imperialism, in which racism and oppression are not only still present but enlivened by new technologies"[326]. In this sense, Oliver follows Susan Sontag, who wrote on how late 19th to early 20th century photographies of the lynching of African American people preceded the torture images taken at Abu Ghraib[327]. Nonetheless, Oliver adds to Sontag's arguments by conferring a particular significance to the technology used to convey recycled messages of imperialist power. Oliver thus defends that technological advances have been paramount to the development of new 'ways of looking', which despite its many positive effects, have also provided new standpoints for processes of colonization and imperialist occupation. A case in point is the scandal of the Abu Ghraib photographs, which exposed various accounts of abuse of Iraqi detainees by US troops. What the images showed collided with former US President George W. Bush's narrative of the US virtuous intentions of liberating the Iraqi people, and consequently damaged what Sontag exposed as "[…] America's claim to moral superiority"[328]. However, the Abu Ghraib photographs differ from the *YouTube* contents examined by Barker and Andén-Papadopoulos, in the sense that they were never meant to reach the public through mass media[329]. The pictures were taken to be circulated amongst soldiers, and to be used as leverage over detainees in interrogations. Nonetheless, I argue that the intent to keep the photographs private further contributes to their 'authenticity', according to Andén-Papadopoulos' definition of that concept.

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[324] See Mette Mortensen, "Counter-Images: Visual Censorship and the Challenges of Digital Media—The Snapshot of Fallen US Soldiers (2004) and the Bootleg Tape of Saddam Hussein's Hanging (2006)", *Journalism and Eyewitness Images: Digital Media, Participation, and Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 52-78.
[325] See Maria Hellman, "Milblogs and soldier representations of the Afghanistan War: The case of Sweden", *Media, War & Conflict*. 9 (1), (2016), 43–57.
[326] Kelly Oliver. *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 67.
[327] Which I will describe below.
[328] Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", 26.
[329] The images only reached the public thanks to Sergeant Joe Darby, who denounced the abuses to his superiors.

I recognize that beyond mainstream news media coverage lies a large number of other media outlets that can greatly contribute to Western societies understanding of military conflicts, which consequently affects the public's perception of real military women. Soldier-made videos, photographs, *milblogs* (military blogs), etc. could rival mainstream media regarding the creation of a singular war narrative. This perspective was articulated by journalism scholar Mette Mortensen, as she explains how images shared by the soldiers, whom she refers to as 'eyewitnesses'[330], "[…] undermine the tight regulations of images during conflict"[331]. According to Mortensen, when the Abu Ghraib images leaked to the public, it effectively challenged the official framings of conflicts, which was met with attempted censorship. Access to social media and other sites were blocked on military computers, and digital cameras were forbidden after the worldwide scandal. The US Defense Department justified the necessity for these restrictions claiming that "[…] soldier imagery threatened to reveal classified information, aggravate violent confrontations, or misrepresent American warfare"[332]. As Mortensen explains, these actions were ineffective in controlling the dissemination of soldier-made images/videos, leading the Department of Defense (DoD) to resign to the fact that, instead of attempting to block the flow of contents, they should instead give their own contributions to the bulk of images/videos[333]. However, Mortensen does not seem to recognize that the DoD's actions only served as a first barrier of stifling. Even if the materials continued to find their way into the world wide web, they not only reached a small percentage of the population due to several restrictions in the availability of these materials, but when they did, they were likely to be absorbed into a larger journalistic pieces. In the end, despite being relevant, I argue that what Mortensen calls 'eyewitness' materials (soldier's videos, images, and even stories) carry a light contribution to the countering of mainstream news media, often being incorporated into it, adapted to fit a particular angle, as I will explain below regarding the Abu Ghraib photographs.

Focusing my research angle to how Western mass media reports military women, I will first consider how media reports war itself. One important factor to analyze is the

[330] Mortensen is, nonetheless, careful to explain that the Abu Ghraib images do not count as 'citizen images', even if considered by her to be created by 'eyewitness', given the institutional affiliations of the amateur photographers (28).
[331] Mortensen, "Counter-Images", 52.
[332] Mortensen, "Counter-Images", 58.
[333] As Mortensen explains, "[…] the army is massively present on other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, SlideShare, just as it hosts numerous blogs" (58).

language used to convey different messages. Irene Jung Fiala alerts to the fact that the very language used to discuss war in media outlets is gendered. In "Unsung Heroes", Fiala explains, for instance, how common it is of news coverages to use sports/hunting analogies when reporting on warfare, which are considered 'masculine interests'[334]. Moreover, when it comes to reporting the contributions of soldiers to a particular conflict, Fiala clarifies that men's military performances are easily conveyed by the media, given how familiar those type of stories are to the general public. On the other hand, as Fiala explains, "[…] women's contributions are often 'lost' in academic debate and public-oriented driven media, unless those services support current gender roles"[335]. Here, Fiala implies that men and women receive different news media coverage when it comes to the reporting of similar military deeds. Following Fiala's argument that "[…] soldier contributions are viewed through the lens of gender"[336], I infer that mass media plays a large part in the compartmentalizing of socially constructed views of gender roles in the military. As a result, the media ends up influencing not only the way in which servicewomen are seen, but also the career opportunities allotted to them. In her text, Fiala concludes that, given the prevalence of news materials focusing on servicewomen controversies rather than achievements, "[…] the public remains largely unaware as to the sacrifices that women make in the context of combat or support operations"[337]. Fiala's "Unsung Heroes" thus introduces here an important consideration regarding military women and their news media representations, that of the recurrence of controversy based on gender.

News coverage often show a preoccupation with the integration of female bodies in a traditionally masculine space, an issue already discussed in this thesis. The abundant coverage of issues pertaining military women in scandalous, or otherwise polemic, contexts stems from the gradual changes to combat exclusion policies. One example of a gendered polemic prominently featured in past news articles is the participation of a large number of women in the Persian Gulf War. As I mentioned in Chapter 1.2, the media coverage of this war devoted many news articles to the topic of mothers going to war, leaning on traditional ideals of gender roles. The subliminal message in this type of

[334] For a comprehensive understanding of the parallels between war and 'masculine activities', see Chapter 2 ("Go, Team, Go!" Manliness and War/Sports Metaphors) of Ralph Donald and Karen McDonald, *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 15-40.
[335] Fiala, "Unsung Heroes", 50.
[336] Fiala, "Unsung Heroes", 50.
[337] Fiala, "Unsung Heroes", 52.

coverage is that women are expected to assume parenting responsibilities, since military men who fathered children are typically not subjected to this sort of scrutiny and criticism when they deploy. This assertion is revealing of a gendered approach on media's attention of issues pertaining to military personnel.

Villains: Lynndie England and the Abu Ghraib Photographs

War crimes – specially crimes concerning sexual sadism – were traditionally considered to be perpetrated by men. As Enloe reminds us, "[w]omen were not – according to the conventional presumption – supposed to be the wielders of violence, certainly not the perpetrators of torture"[338]. At the beginning of the 21st century, women's contribution during wartime was still perceived to be close to the position women performed in WWII, where they played the role of worried mothers/wives, waiting for the return of their loved ones, securing the 'home front'. If women fought, theirs was an auxiliary role, not directly involved with the more dangerous missions in warfare. As I have been discussing in this thesis, with the increase of women enlisting in all branches of the armed forces after 9/11, many women were deployed alongside men, still not able to participate in direct combat[339], but as part of support operations.

In April 2004, a year after the military invasion of Iraq by the US government[340], a series of alarming photographs of US soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners, known as the Abu Ghraib photographs, were made public on the US television newsmagazine *60 Minutes II* (CBS). Discussions concerning the torture, sexual abuse, and murder of Iraqi detainees permeated TV news programs and front pages of newspapers around the world. In the photographs, US soldiers – members of the US Military Police (MP) – were depicted intentionally humiliating and torturing Iraqi detainees, held for interrogation. The pictures were taken by the MPs themselves, at Abu Ghraib prison, an Iraqi facility under US control. President Bush and his government were quick to publicly reprehend these acts,

[338] Cynthia Enloe, "Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib: Making Feminist Sense of an American Military Scandal", *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 10:3, 89-102, (2004), 91.
[339] In the US, the ban on women serving in combat was be lifted in 2013, but only in 2016 were women granted access to all military occupations without restrictions, including special forces and ground units.
[340] The Iraq War, conducted by a United States-led coalition began on March 20, 2003, and ended on December 18, 2011.

considering them 'rogue' soldiers, 'a few bad apples' that did not represent the US military, and the overall aim of US missions in Iraq[341]. Furthermore, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's initial reaction was to define what happen at Abu Ghraib as 'abuse' or 'humiliation', carefully rejecting the term 'torture'. At a press conference Rumsfeld declared: "What has been charged so far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture. I'm not going to address the 'torture' word"[342]. Even though Rumsfeld swerved around the terminology, others were quick to recognize acts of torture – defined as "[t]he infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure"[343] – in the photographs. In "Regarding the Torture of Others", when considering the avoidance of the word 'torture' when the Abu Ghraib case began to be debated in media circles, Susan Sontag brought attention to how "[w]ords alter, words add, words subtract"[344]. Sontag clarified that images do not have the ability to manipulate a narrative like words do. However, even though images capture an exact moment, documenting it, they may still not disclose their full context, as Oliver reminds us, "[w]hat is at stake […] is what is visible and what remains invisible, what can be seen and what cannot be seen"[345]. What, then, could be invisible in photographs that show so much? This question could be answered in different ways, as several intersectional issues are hidden from frame. However, for the sake of consistency and concision, I will focus only on the military women in the images. Knowing how these photographs were taken to be circulated amongst soldiers, and to be shown to detainees as 'motivation to cooperate', it stands to reason that international media coverage was not on the soldier's minds at the time the pictures were taken. In their casual display of 'equal opportunity abuse', the images seem to convey the idea of indubitable equality between male and female soldiers. The servicewomen's smiles and 'thumbs up', while portraying what Kelly Oliver called "[…] a complex web of torture and tourism"[346], effectively dissimulate the subjugated place of female soldiers deployed to Iraq.

Returning to the question of 'what cannot be seen' in the photographs, I must consider the already established systems of vigilance that influenced how and why the soldiers

[341] See "Bush 'Sorry' for Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners", *CNN*, May 7, 2004. https://edition.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/05/07/bush.apology/index.html (accessed April 2020).
[342] Donald Rumsfeld in Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", 25.
[343] As defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/torture (accessed March 2020).
[344] Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", 72.
[345] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 72.
[346] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 71.

digitally recorded the abuses. Many authors theorized on the importance of digital technologies in a new age of surveillance and control, mainly drawing from Foucault's seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975)[347]. Foucault advocated that technologies meant to 'observe' were "[…] eyes that must see without being seen"[348], as a part of politics that establish what can or cannot be seen, according to its agenda. I thus apply this theory to the mainstream media's coverage of the women of Abu Ghraib. As the unsanctioned and unpredicted images leaked to the public, they severely damaged the US Government's desired public perspective for the 'War on Terror'.

If, as Oliver defends, "[d]igital technology feeds, if not produces, the compulsion to record life as a sort of proof that it has been lived"[349], photographs of daily abuses were, in a way, to be expected, given not only the technological development of cellphones and digital cameras in the beginning of the 21st century, but also the historical proclivity to document abuse. Aside from Sontag's aforementioned connection between the Abu Ghraib images with lynching photographs, other authors found similarities in other pictorial traditions, such as pornography; sadomasochism; 'trophy shots'; colonial depictions of 'inferior' people; etc.[350]. The photographs have even been analyzed against the compositions of both classical and modern artworks[351].

The images shocked for their blatant dehumanization of those detained, and mostly for the behavior of the soldiers, thought by the general public to uphold high values concerning the fair treatment of Prisoners of War (PoWs). In these photographs, US soldiers can be seen smiling happily, giving the camera a 'thumbs-up', at ease with their surrounding environment. Commenting on the positions the detainees were placed by the soldiers, philosopher Slavoj Žižek noted how they "[…] suggest a theatrical staging, a tableau vivant, which cannot but call to mind the 'theatre of cruelty', Robert

[347] e.g. Zahid Chaudhary, "Phantasmagoric Aesthetics: Colonial Violence and the Management of Perception", *Cultural Critique* 59 (winter, 2005): 63-119; E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
[348] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Random House, 1991), 171.
[349] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 73.
[350] See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Remote Control: Dispatches from the Image Wars", Artforum 62, no. 10 (2004): 61–64; Luc Sante, "Torturers and Terrorists", *New York Times*, May 11, 2004.
[351] In *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2007), Stephen F. Eisenman argues that "[t]he Abu Ghraib images have also prompted a parapraxis; the recall of a few exceptional, […], works of art" (43).

Mapplethorpe's photographs, scenes from David Lynch movies"[352]. Regarding the soldiers' demeanor in the photographs, Cynthia Enloe wrote that "[t]hey appeared to be taking enormous pleasure in humiliating their Iraqi charges"[353]. Beyond the idea of the 'pleasure' derived from photographing the torture of the detainees[354], the participation of female soldiers in the torture has also been the object of much discussion. Even though several male intervenients appear in the photographs, three women were the main focus of media attention, Sabrina Harman, Megan Ambuhl and above all, Lynndie England.

Private First Class Lynndie England (twenty-one years old at the time) served as an Army reservist with the US Military Police at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq throughout 2003. During her time as a clerk at the prison, England participated in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners, prominently appearing in the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs. Although Harman and Ambuhl also appear in many of the images, Lynndie England was singled out by the news media[355]. If, according to Sontag, "[…] to photograph is to confer importance"[356], a certain value is recognized in the photographed subject. Thus, I contend that due to England's recurrent and central position in the photographs, that she was considered 'valuable' to display and photograph. Despite her recurrent role in the images appearing to signify a position of superiority, the multiple photographs actually attest to how she was, similarly to the naked bodies of Iraqi detainees, merely another object for display, an inferior being in the military hierarchy. Her 'value' is only reflected in her inflammatory presence as a military woman, mocking naked Muslim men, an added insult to an already dehumanizing experience.

Overall, the mainstream news media neglected to acknowledge how England herself was objectified. England was 'placed' into positions for photos[357] (see Figure 10 and Figure 11), and used by her peers as added humiliation for naked Muslim men. In fact, Howard and Prividera argued that "[b]oth England and the detainees were transformed from agents to objects with England executing her sworn duty as a feminine object used

[352] Slavoj Žižek, "Between Two Deaths: The Culture of Torture". *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 11, (June 3, 2004), 19.
[353] Enloe, "Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib", 89.
[354] See Michael Flyn, Fabiola Fernadez Salek, *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
[355] This fixation is supported for instance, in S. Jeffreys, "Double jeopardy: Women, the US military and the war in Iraq", *Women's Studies International Forum*, (30, 16-25, 2007); and in Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2007).
[356] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971), 28.
[357] By Graner, England claimed, on *Dateline NBC*, October 2, 2005; and also on the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (dir. Errol Morris, 2008)

to shame the enemy"[358]. Kelly Oliver also supports this viewpoint in *Women as Weapons of War*, when she writes that women like England "[…] become the means to compound not only sexual and physical abuse but also abuse of religious and cultural beliefs"[359]. Howard and Prividera see the Abu Ghraib photographs as "[…] complex artifacts of real and symbolic violence against women and the detainees; they also are and were constructed, coordinated, and controlled by men serving to propagate gendered and violent militarism"[360]. Therefore, through this case study, I demonstrate how mainstream news media worked to attribute complete agency to England – given her look of superiority in the photographs – and then explored this agency.

Figure 10 (left) - England holding a detainee on a leash at Abu Ghraib prison. (open access photo).

Figure 11 (right) - England and Abu Ghraib detainees. (open access photo).

Although, as already determined, England was not alone in the incidents of sexual humiliation and torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison, she became a convenient culprit to place culpability. Throughout the public debates upon the dissemination of the photographs, England's media construction achieved such proportions that in certain instances it even took priority over the examination of the US government/US military actual involvement in/awareness of the events that transpired in Abu Ghraib. The mass media coverage of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal tended to neglected examinations of systemic prisoner abuse, favoring debates centering on England[361]. Ultimately, England

[358] John W. Howard III, Laura C. Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype: Media Representations of Lynndie England, Gender, and the (Ab)uses of U.S. Female Soldiers", *Women's Studies in Communication*, 31(3), (2008), 298.
[359] Oliver, Women as Weapons of War, 25.
[360] Howard III, Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 298.
[361] One activist that has extensively spoke on the insidious connections between the prison-industrial complex and the military-industrial complex, regarding their conduct, has been Angela Y. Davis. See Angela Y. Davis, Eduardo Mendieta, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005).

became symbolic for media discourses that advocate how women cause chaos in the armed forces, and are thus unsuited for military service.

As mentioned above, the dehumanizing acts of torture depicted in the photographs were attributed to 'a few bad apples' by George W. Bush's government. This was disputed by many politicians and other social commentators, who saw the links between these actions and its sanction in higher levels of the chain of command[362]. Many times, the three servicewomen were referred to as 'girls' by the news, a common trend when reporting on military women[363]. England, Harman and Ambuhl where found guilty of what Sjoberg and Gentry call '*triple transgression*', meaning, a simultaneous transgression of state law, of the "idealized image of militarized femininity"[364], and of the overall standards of femininity.

After the tumultuous process of the integration of women in the armed forces, the Western public was confronted with the idea that women could be agents of violence. In the foreword to *One of the Guys,* political activist Barbara Ehrenreich confesses her 'surprise' and even 'shock' upon first seeing the Abu Ghraib photographs, as she discloses how "[a] certain kind of feminism, or perhaps […] a certain kind of feminist naiveté, died in Abu Ghraib"[365]. This kind of 'upended assumptions' revealed that men are not the only ones capable of committing war crimes, of torturing and appear unfazed by it. As Ehrenreich explains, the images made clear that women have no claim to a moral superiority when it came to enact warfare, an idea implicit in some feminist approaches[366]. Concluding that "[…] a uterus is not a substitute for a conscience"[367], Ehrenreich states that gender equality is not enough in the pursuit of justice and peace, writing that "[t]he

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[362] Among them, notably, Former Vice President Al Gore. In a speech delivered at the New York University (on May 26, 2004), Gore not only called for the resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, but stated that the Abu Ghraib torture was not isolated as an action of 'a few bad apples', on the contrary, it was a direct consequent of Bush's 'incompetent' government.

[363] See David Jones, "'Why the Hell Should I Feel Sorry', Says Girl Soldier who Abused Iraqi Prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison" *The Daily Mail*, June 13, 2009. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1192701/Why-hell-I-feel-sorry-says-girl-soldier-abused-Iraqi-prisoners-Abu-Ghraib-prison.html (accessed March 2020); Philip Sherwell, "US Leash Girl Wins Plea Bargain Over Abu Ghraib Abuses", *The Telegraph*, May 1, 2005. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1489106/US-Leash-Girl-soldier-wins-plea-bargain-over-Abu-Ghraib-abuses.html (accessed March 2020).

[364] Laura Sjoberg, Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 59.

[365] Barbara Ehrenreich, "Foreword: Feminism's Assumptions Upended". In *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, edited by Tara McKelvey (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). 2.

[366] Quoting a columnist from the *St. Petersburg Times*, "Feminism taught me 30 years ago that not only had women gotten a raw deal from men, we were morally superior to them" (Mary Jo Malone, *St. Petersburg Times*, May 7, 2004). To this, Ehrenreich adds that "The strategy and vision [of feminism] rested on the assumption that women were morally superior to men" (3).

[367] Ehrenreich, "Foreword", 4.

struggles for peace and social justice and against imperialist and racist arrogance cannot, I am truly sorry to say, be folded into the struggle for gender equality"[368]. Although I agree that gender equality is not the ultimate solution for the countless socio-political issues in modern Western societies, I argue that Ehrenreich's vision of feminism is very limited, a by-product of second and third wave feminism. Ehrenreich does not recognize intersectional feminism as an alternative to a feminism blind to issues on the margins of strict gender equality.

Ehrenreich believes the images incapsulate the worst aspects of Western world, as seen by Islamic fundamentalists: "imperial arrogance, sexual depravity … and gender equality"[369]. The fact that gender equality was given a grim connotation alarmed those who fought for it, and helped to support the arguments of those who opposed it[370]. One of such oppositions came from Anna Simons, a Professor of Defense Analysis at a US Naval Postgraduate School. In an article posted on the Texas National Security Review website, she repels the idea of women serving in combat units, beckoning the readers to remember "[…] Charles Graner and Lynndie England, [and how] the dynamic between them helped fuel the sadism at Abu Ghraib"[371]. Simmons holds the integration of women in certain military services as accountable for the torture scandal. This perspective contributes to a popular discourse that neglects any other factors, focusing only on the fact that women were present at the site[372]. Kelly Oliver, on the other hand, provides an examination of facts in direct opposition to Simons. As Simons saw the sexual connections of the soldiers – Graner and England – as the catalyst for sadism and torture, Oliver suggests that the soldiers' sexual relationships were enticed by enacting sexual sadism on the detainees[373]. Thus, by stepping outside of the recurrent gendered molds of

[368] Ehrenreich, "Foreword", 4.
[369] Ehrenreich, "Foreword", 2.
[370] This opposition concerns mainly the propagation of US right-wing agendas aiming to provoke a backlash to the advances of gender equality in the military. See Peggy Noonan, "A Humiliation for America", *Opinion Journal*, May 6, 2004. In this article, Noonan establishes a comparison between post-integration military and the segregated military during WWII, concluding that the integration of women in military units is to blame for the involvement of servicewomen in torture. Ultimately, these types of arguments support the idea that feminist culture encourages female sexual sadism.
[371] Anna Simons, "Here's Why Women in Combat Units is a Bad Idea", *Texas National Security Review* (November 18, 2014). https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/heres-why-women-in-combat-units-is-a-bad-idea/ (accessed March 2020).
[372] Another author that explains this tendency is Lila Rajiva, "The Military Made Me Do It", *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, edited by Tara McKelvey (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). 217.
[373] In Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, Oliver provides examples of how soldiers "used sexualized abuse to enhance their sex lives as Abu Ghraib" (84), for instance, she writes of photographs of detainees forced to simulate sexual acts being offered as birthday presents to soldiers, etc.

attributing blame to women's integration in the armed forces, Oliver was able to provide a different approach to the subject, one that traces this "glorification of sadomasochism and sexual violence"[374] to a tradition within Western behaviors like fraternity hazing, self-injury, choking and hanging 'games', etc. Some commentators used the comparison between the actions seen in the Abu Ghraib photographs, and pledges in US frat houses as proof of how irrelevant and unharmful it all was[375], others, like Oliver, drew the comparison to highlight a deep-seated problem with US sociocultural behaviors. In his reaction article to the Abu Ghraib scandal, Slavoj Žižek claimed that not only the 'hazing-like' behavior exposed the "[…] obscene underside of US popular culture of US popular culture", but even that "[t]he prisoners were effectively being initiated into American culture"[376]. Both Oliver and Žižek alert to the forced propagation of a hegemonic culture by US soldiers, which has marked roots in longstanding systems of imperial dominance.

Part of Sjoberg and Gentry's concept of the '*triple transgression*', is, as stated above, the transgression of the standards of femininity, which England was also accused of by the media. One of the ways this accusation took place in mainstream media was by labeling England as a 'tomboy'[377], since the photographs in which she appeared showed a petit young woman with short hair and in 'manly' military fatigues. Scholars like Timothy Kaufman-Osborn exposed how news media worked to question her femininity by using gendered terminology. Considering Lynndie England to be "[t]he most convenient scapegoat for such 'gender trouble'"[378], Kaufman-Osborn attests to the "[…] stubborn persistence of conceptions of gender"[379], as he navigates thorough the prominent discourses on England in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib scandal. In his essay, Kaufman-Osborn uncovers what he believes to be the mainstream media's 'appropriation' of England's story and image for a conservative cause. It is precisely that conservative section of news coverage that also portrayed England as sexually promiscuous and deviant. Aside from her public condemnation for participating in the sexual abuse of Iraqi

[374] See Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 85.
[375] e.g. Right-wing radio personality Rush Limbaugh stated that "[t]his is not as serious as everybody is making it out to be", and that "[t]his is no different that what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation. […] I'm talking about people having a good time […] These were just boys and girls blowing off steam during a stressful situation". Dick Meyer. "Rush: MPs Just 'Blowing Off Steam'. In CBS News. May 6, 2004. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rush-mps-just-blowing-off-steam/ (accessed in March 2020).
[376] Žižek, "Between Two Deaths", 20.
[377] Seen for instance in news reports like: Evan Thomas, "How Did a Wispy Tomboy Behave Like a Monster in Abu Ghraib?", *Newsweek* (May 2004).
[378] Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, "Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?". In *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, edited by Tara McKelvey (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). 146.
[379] Kaufman-Osborn, "Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib, 149.

detainees, England was likewise criticized for having sex out of wedlock, and for conceiving a child with fellow soldier Charles Graner. Even though Graner was one of the key participants and instigators of the actions depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs, the news media, when reporting England's pregnancy, focused mainly on her. This lack of mention of Graner's contribution to the pregnancy is thus explained by Enloe: "He apparently was doing what men are expected to do in wartime: have sex and wield violence"[380]. Media attention was then focused on England, as her pregnant body disrupted the news media's established construction of her as a sexual sadist and monster[381].

In one of her most debated photographs, England appears holding a leash tied to an Iraqi prisoner (Figure 10). This image has brought about many comparisons with practices performed by the BDMS[382] community/sub-culture. One author who made such claims is Stephen F. Eisenman, who discussed in his influential work *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, how connections between the Abu Ghraib images and pornography/BDSM practices should be carefully considered, in order to avoid blaming these practices for "[…] the obscenity of government sanctioned torture"[383] [384]. Essentially, Eisenman calls attention to the major differences between pornography and the Abu Ghraib materials – not only the photographs, but also the videos distributed –, claiming these differences highly surpass the similarities[385]. Addressing the picture where England holds a leach attached to an Iraqi detainee, Eisenman explains how the leash does not hold the same bonding significance a collar holds in the BDSM community, on the other hand, it expresses a distancing between 'master' and 'slave'.

As I have mentioned above, war crimes concerning sexual sadism were traditionally seen as perpetrated by men. Thus, as verified in the case of Lynndie England, female perpetrators of sexual sadism are considered abnormal, following in the tradition of the polarization of female deviance into long existing categories of saint/sinner, Madonna/whore, or even, for the purpose of this chapter, of villains/heroines. On their

[380] Enloe, "Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib", 91.
[381] For a critical reading of Lynndie England's pregnancy see Susana Araújo, *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror: Images of Insecurity, Narratives of Captivity* (London: Bloomsbury), 58.
[382] BDSM stands for Bondage/Dominance/Sadism/Masochism. It comprises consensual erotic roleplays that include different interpersonal dynamics (e.g. bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, etc.).
[383] Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 32.
[384] Eisenman accuses Arthur Danto of nearly crossing that line (32). See Arthur Danto, "Art and Politics in American Self-Consciousness", *Artforum*, (July 2004).
[385] Eisenman argues the similarities fall under visual comparisons, while major differences lie in the consensual dimension of the practices, the objective, and target audience for the images, etc.

efforts to qualify the media coverage focused on Lynndie England's participation in the photographed torture of Iraqi detainees, John Howard III and Laura C. Prividera determined that England's "personal and professional behaviors" were framed by the news media "[…] via the fallen woman and warrior hero archetypes"[386]. Their assertion is partly based on Cynthia Enloe's *Maneuvers* (2000), where she explains how important 'feminized concepts' like 'the fallen woman'[387]; 'marital fidelity'; 'sexualized respectability'; etc. are to military life[388]. Furthermore, Howard and Prividera discuss these archetypes to establish that the story constructed around England obscures any military culpability for the events that took place at Abu Ghraib, whilst effectively preserving patriarchal militarism, and allowing for the persistence of the subordination of military women.

Since "[…] alternative explanations of behavior deemed deviant under the ruling hegemony are almost non-existent"[389], England's appalling behavior was thus categorized by news media within comfortable frames of gendered deviation and as 'non-military'. The events and decisions that led up to her behavior were disregarded for the sake of a simplistic story on how she was the 'rottenest' of the 'bad apples'. Beyond accentuating how Lynndie England became the epicenter of the Abu Ghraib scandal, Howard and Prividera actually claim that England 'became the story', justifying this affirmation by adding that "[…] the Abu Ghraib scandal was given perspective via a mythic narrative of a young woman morally adrift from her military and feminine moorings"[390]. By explicitly labeling England's narrative – comprised of media discourse and imagery – as 'mythological', the scholars disclose their understanding of Lynndie England's story as not quite grounded in reality, but as a fact spun into legend.

Heroines: Jessica Lynch and the Victimization of Military Women

[386] Howard III, Prividera. "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 287.
[387] The archetype of the 'Victorian Fallen Woman' is defined by a woman's failure in meeting the moral expectations of Victorian age (e.g. not abiding to the dress code, having sexual relationships out of wedlock, etc.). See N. Auerbach, "The Rise of the Fallen Woman", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 35 (I). 29-52.
[388] See Enloe, *Maneuvers*, xiii.
[389] Morrissey, *When Women Kill*, 15.
[390] Howard III, Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 288.

Lynndie England is not the only servicewoman who has seen her story manipulated into mythology. In fact, there is another military woman who is frequently connected with England, albeit on the far opposite side of the scale: Jessica Lynch. Both their cases are important to establish the pervasiveness of military propaganda in contemporary mainstream media.

Lynch became known to the public during the US military's 2003 invasion of Iraq. Lynch was a nineteen-year-old private first class (PFC), working as a supply clerk in the US Army. On March 23, 2003, Lynch's convoy of the 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company was ambushed by Iraqi forces during the Battle of Nasiriyah. Eleven of the thirty-three US soldiers were killed in the attack, and seven were captured, Lynch among them. Having suffered injuries in the blast, she was transported to Saddam Hussein Hospital (Baghdad). On April 1, US Army special operators executed a mission to rescue Lynch. This mission was recorded, and the short footage of her dramatic retrieval was released to media networks in the United States and broadcasted worldwide.

News media, notably *The Washington Post*, reported a heroic rescue and praised Lynch for resisting capture. The *Post* cited unnamed US officials in an article entitled "She Was Fighting to the Death": "Pfc. Jessica Lynch, rescued Tuesday from an Iraqi hospital, fought fiercely and shot several enemy soldiers after Iraqi forces ambushed the Army's 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company, firing her weapon until she ran out of ammunition"[391]. The first media reaction wave was mainly a ramification of this first article from *The Washington Post*, and all reported on Lynch's rescue, making her out to be a salvaged "[…] female Rambo who had shot her way out of an ambush"[392]. Amidst the media frenzy over Lynch, she received various accolades for exemplary courage under fire during combat operations to liberate Iraq[393].

This narrative was propagated for months, as Lynch was still in intensive care for the injuries sustained in the convoy attack. It was only after returning home that Lynch began publicly speaking out against the story that had been created for her by the US Department of Defense (i.e. the Pentagon) and spread by the mainstream media. Lynch was critical of the original story reported by *The Washington Post*, which was then replicated in

[391] Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb, "She Was Fighting to the Death", *The Washington Post*, April 3, 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/04/03/she-was-fighting-to-the-death/827181d6-bc41-4d13-b20c-ba95fedab997/ (accessed April, 2020).
[392] Frank Rich, "Saving Private England", *The New York Times*, (May 16, 2004). https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/16/arts/saving-private-england.html (accessed March 2020).
[393] Jessica Lynch was awarded a Bronze Star, a Prisoner of War Medal, and a Purple Heart.

numerous news outlets. Lynch exposed how the reported story of her attack and rescue was almost entirely fiction. Fabricated were the reports of the 'heroine' shooting the convoy attackers, the accounts of her being mistreated by her Iraqi captors, up to her exacerbated rescue. In truth, Lynch never fired her weapon, and the wounds she sustained from the convoy attack were treated by a friendly Iraqi medical staff at Saddam Hussein Hospital.

The *BBC News* article "Jessica Lynch condemns Pentagon" reports that Lynch "[…] has accused the military of using her for propaganda purposes"[394]. Furthermore, in an interview with journalist Diane Sawyer, Lynch was asked if it bothered her that she had been showcased by the military. Her answer was "Yeah, it does. It does that they used me as a way to symbolize all this stuff. Yeah, it's wrong"[395]. Lynch thus admitted to feeling 'used' as an unwilling symbol in the Iraq War. In April 2007 Lynch appeared before a Congressional hearing on military misinformation from the battlefield to "[…] reject the Pentagon's portrayal of her as 'Rambo from West Virginia', shot down in a blaze of glory"[396]. At the hearing, Lynch professed her confusion with how her story of warfare misfortune was turned into a 'hype', inflated into a heroic tale of battle and rescue[397].

I therefore now consider the interest in having this story fabricated about a PFC involved in a convoy attack. From the Pentagon's perspective, this story promoted the Iraq war, which was at the time highly unpopular among the US population. According to Kelly Oliver, "Lynch's story was wielded by the press and the Pentagon alike not only to shore up public support for the war but also to rally the troops on the ground"[398]. Referred to as a 'feel-good story'[399] by Yvonne Tasker, the tale of Lynch's rescue incited soldiers to want to kill the Iraqi enemy, thus serving an immediate purpose for the US military's agenda. In *Women as Weapons of War* Oliver explains how Lynch and her dramatic rescue were 'weapons' in the US 'propaganda war', effectively working to boost confidence in the military efforts in Iraq.

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[394] "Jessica Lynch Condemns Pentagon", *BBC News*, (November 7, 2003). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3251731.stm (accessed April, 2020.)
[395] See "Jessica Lynch Scared When Rescue Began", *abc News*. (January 6, 2006). https://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/story?id=132433&page=1 (accessed April 2020).
[396] Ewen MacAskill, "Rambo Image Was Based on Lie, Says US War Hero Jessica Lynch", *The Guardian*, (April 25, 2007). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/25/iraq.usa1 (accessed March 2020).
[397] See Mark Tran, "'Little Girl Rambo' decries US Propaganda", *The Guardian*, April 24, 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/24/usa.marktran (accessed April 2020).
[398] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 41.
[399] See Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 214.

The angle in which Lynch's story was conveyed was through victimhood. Her injuries, reported as gunshots/stab wounds, and also speculated sexual assault was repeatedly advertised by the media. At the same time, a sensationalization of Lynch's backstory ensued, her love for children and hopes of being a schoolteacher were publicized, gathering sympathy for the war hero. The media positioned Lynch as a victim, and as a civilian girl, not as a fallen soldier. This perspective effectively worked to encompass all servicewomen, forcing Lynch into a representative role, a "Rorschach test for our ideals of both femininity and girl-power"[400], as Oliver writes. Therefore, Lynch became a passive symbol onto which different standpoints were projected. For instance, Lynch's capture and rescue narrative was exploited by opponents to women in the military, who used her story to muscle their arguments that women were physically weaker, were unfit for combat duties and were in constant need of male support/rescue.

The fabricated narrative for Lynch undoubtedly carried a mixed message, she was a 'Rambo' who was also girly and weak, a fierce fighter who fired against enemies until her last bullet, but also weak and in need of rescue. Imprinted into both 'masculine' and 'feminine' types of narratives, I argue that Lynch became an *impossibility*. She became a beacon for both valiant soldiers who must fight for their country, and for delicate civilians who must be protected. As the incompatibility of her double identity began to provoke questions over some of the 'facts', the only factual evidence in the story was the video of Lynch's rescue, where we see her wounded body being wheeled out by US (male) soldiers. As a result, her 'true' identity is declared as being unmistakably 'feminine', requiring protection from the 'masculine military'.

Jessica Lynch's authorized biography advocates for her intrinsic femininity. In *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*, Rick Bragg (a former New York Times reporter) quotes different people addressing Lynch as 'princess', 'small', 'prissy', 'subdued', and 'tough' but 'meek'[401]. Overall, Bragg's portrayal of Lynch is that of a "[…] tiny, delicate girl who never scowled, never frowned and never raised her voice"[402]. In this biography, Lynch's upbringing is depicted as traditionally ultra-feminine, taking up a large portion of the book, the rest being reserved to her short military career and media controversy. Bragg extensively depicts Lynch as a someone without agency in battle, writing "[i]f war

[400] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 41.
[401] Rick Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 14, 24, 44.
[402] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 33.

was an elementary school play, she would play a tree"[403]. These sentences in her official biography further demonstrate the efforts in portraying Lynch not as a soldier who suffered a casualty of war, but as a victim who got caught in the middle of a conflict she was a bystander to.

Bragg, mostly centering on Lynch's civilian life, addresses the reaction of her parents to the whole situation. Bragg details how before ever seeing their daughter, Lynch's parents had heard on the news how "[…] Jessi had been injured in the crash of the Humvee but that she had crawled from it with her gun blazing, killing the enemy as they closed in around her until she was cut down by Iraqi fire"[404]. Bragg informs us how her parents felt 'proud' hearing their daughter's stories of combat. At the same time, Bragg overemphasizes the subdued and childish persona he established for Lynch, when we writes that "[t]he hero of Operation Iraqi Freedom went into surgery with a tiny teddy bear tucked beside her cheek"[405]. Bragg makes clear that her 'myth' was something Lynch had no control over, as he writes "[t]he myth was made while she was sleeping"[406]. This 'myth' saw Lynch as "Jessi, damsel in distress, [who] would be transformed into a kind of invincible action figure who absorbed bullets and just kept on fighting as the enemy closed in"[407]. While Bragg criticizes the 'myth' created around Lynch, he is inadvertently inscribing his biography in the same mythology, contributing to what he calls her 'long shadow'. In *Pop Culture Goes to War*, Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter criticize *I Am a Soldier, Too*. In their work – a book that focuses on the persistence of militarism in US popular culture during the 'War on Terror' – Martin and Steuter not only denounce the falsity in the media construction of Lynch's 'myth', but they also expose Bragg's work, claiming it to be overtly focused on the aspects that made Lynch *not* a soldier, even suggesting that Bragg planted the idea that Lynch had been raped to increase book sales[408]. In *I Am a Soldier, Too*, Bragg upholds the 'true' nature of Jessica Lynch, as a pretty and simple girl who had no business enlisting in the Army. By the end of the book, claiming how Lynch would never 'hide' behind a military uniform again[409], Bragg writes

[403] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 45.
[404] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 151.
[405] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 152.
[406] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 152.
[407] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 157.
[408] See Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter, *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the 'War on Terror'* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 136.
[409] The fact that Bragg considers the donning of military fatigues as 'hiding' is revealing of his stance regarding the ineptitude of Lynch to perform military duties.

that "[t]he next time she hides it will be behind a veil, as she begins that normal live"[410]. With this, Bragg effectively re-inscribes Lynch into domesticity and 'womanhood', through the prospective of marriage.

Oliver defends that Lynch "[…] is the ideal hero because she is a woman who suffers, the ideal of feminine self-sacrifice and suffering, akin to that of the Virgin Mary, who suffers for us"[411]. Her particular brand of suffering is also presented by the media in a familiar pattern, that of the 'captured woman'. As Rikke Schubart defends, in the end "[…] the Lynch story had served its purpose: Not to show the female soldier as a combative soldier, but as the all–American blond teenager with blue eyes and the innocent victim of savage capture"[412]. As Lynndie England's constructed narrative found expression in traditional stereotypes – like that of the 'fallen woman' – there is also a familiar pattern in the narrative the media created around Lynch. The 'myth' of the white woman who is 'taken' by enemies and must be rescued by white men calls into mind, according to Schubart, "[…] the classical seventeenth century myth that historian Richard Slotkin calls 'the captivity narrative'"[413]. Oliver even parabolizes Lynch's story as that of "[…] the story of beauty against the beast"[414]. Through the recognizable formula of the captivity narrative[415], news media offers the audience a familiar logic in war reporting, alluding to a clear division between us/them, good/evil, and using a female victim to symbolize this dichotomy. This approach perpetuates the harmful typecasting of military women as helpless victims. Likewise, Susan Faludi in *The Terror Dream* describes the importance the 'captivity narrative' assumed in the news media reports of Lynch's rescue. One example that attests to the news media insistence in this approach is the report of Lynch's rape. The claims that Lynch had been raped were contested by the Iraqi doctors who took care of Lynch after the convoy attack[416].

Like in the Lynndie England's case, the news media fixated on Lynch, even though other US servicemembers were involved in the attack. When covering the incident, the news media downplayed the death of the eleven other soldiers who perished during the

[410] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 201.
[411] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 41.
[412] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 314.
[413] Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, 314.
[414] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 63.
[415] For a comprehensive approach on captivity narratives and their ideological role throughout history, see *The Captivity Narrative: Enduring Shackles and Emancipating Language of Subjectivity*, edited by Benjamin Mark Allen and Dahia Messara (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).
[416] See "Jessica rape claim shocks Iraqi doctors", *AlJazeera.com*, (November 11, 2003). https://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2003/11/20084914116142862.html (accessed April 2020).

attack. Among them was Lynch's best friend, the Native American PFC Lori Piestewa[417], and the African American Specialist Shoshana Johnson. Kelly Oliver explains that the mainstream media focused on Lynch, "[…] because she is a seemingly innocent, young, pretty white girl, the girl next door; while Shoshana Johnson, an African American woman captured in the same skirmish and held for twenty-one days in various prisons and the victim of abuse, remains in the shadows"[418]. The disparity in media coverage can thus be attributed to the fact that Lynch better fits the racial pattern associated with the captivity narrative, while Piestewa and Johnson do not[419]. This monolithic portrayal of 'woman' deemed worthy of attention by the news media ultimately rejects an intersectional approach of gender, ethnicity, and class. Piestewa and Johnson's ethnicity and status made them unsuitable for the desired public representation. Therefore, neither of their stories was appropriately acknowledged by mainstream media.

This intense media focus surrounding the case of Jessica Lynch is particularly important to this thesis, in the sense that it demonstrates the extent in which a military woman can be 'weaponized' by Western governments. Lynch's case is paramount in the examination of how servicewomen's bodies and stories are manipulated, or to use Enloe's term, 'maneuvered' to better serve a military agenda. Furthermore, this case study is also revealing of how the US military-industrial complex has become intricately connected with the media system itself. During the period when she was in the limelight, Lynch was featured in books, cartoons, televised interviews, documentaries, newspapers, magazine articles, etc.[420]. This further attests to the existence of a strong interrelationship between media texts and institutions like the military-industrial complex.

Given the analysis of both case studies, I argue that the media coverage of issues centering on military women – often framed in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes –, reveals the immutability of the masculine military culture and continuously rekindles

[417] Specialist Piestewa was a member of the Hopi tribe, and was the first Native American woman in history to die in combat while serving in the US military. She was also the first US servicewoman to be killed in the Iraq War. Arizona's *Piestewa Peak* is named in her honor. See Rudi Williams, "Army Spc. Lori Piestewa: Honoring a Fallen Hero", *Defend America*, (June 24, 2003). https://web.archive.org/web/20070808195738/http://defendamerica.mil/profiles/june2003/pr060203b.html (accessed April 2020).

[418] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 41.

[419] For reference on statistics regarding the number of mentions that each servicewomen got in the news media, see Claire Turenne Sjolander, Kathryn Trevenen, "One of the Boys?", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 12:2, (2010), 158-176.

[420] I will elaborate on this in Part II - Chapter 2.3.

debates on the legitimacy of women participation in warfare/the military. The patterns observed insidiously contribute to limit women's access to command and leadership positions within the armed forces. This is significant, as I have been defending, in the sense that women are continually kept from accessing high status in a powerful structure, as is the military-industrial complex. Furthermore, as Howard and Prividera argue, media's recycling of stereotypical gendered narratives allows them to "[…] reappropriate the Victorian fallen woman archetype and cast England as iconic in the news coverage of Abu Ghraib"[421]. This 'reappropriation', and following update, attests to my introductory considerations in this chapter, which highlights, drawing on Belinda Morrissey, that mainstream media discourse continuously reuses pre-existing gendered materials and ideas, which are then adapted to fit into a collective understanding of a particular issue. In Lynndie England's case, the common thread that links the archetype of the Victorian 'fallen woman' and England, as identified by Howard and Prividera, is the focus on 'female morality'. In their article, the authors expose how England's media coverage was strongly gendered, how her femininity was objectified, and how the media managed to falsely attribute agency to her.

In this chapter, I also provide some input on the nature of the contribution of 'eyewitness' materials to military women narratives. The two case studies presented here testify to the fact that when soldiers provide the public with images captured by them, unfiltered and unedited, there is an access to a world where conventional mainstream news media could never reach. In the case of Lynndie England, the photographs taken by soldiers at Abu Ghraib inadvertently brought about international discussion concerning the ethical treatment of prisoners of war. In the case of Jessica Lynch, the video recordings of her rescue (due to a Special Forces raid) helped to foment the idea of a heroic rescue mission. Both the Abu Ghraib images, and the Lynch rescue video are still available online[422], which attests to the durability of these materials in the internet era. Nevertheless, I contend that these 'eyewitness' materials fall short in comparison to the overwhelming amount of information provided by mainstream news media outputs, which continue to form opinions on conflicts and its intervenients.

[421] Howard III, Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 296.
[422] Lynch's rescue video is available on YouTube, but the wider bulk of the Abu Ghraib images have become increasingly difficult to find online over the years, which could suggest a deliberate erasure of those images from public access.

Following in this thesis argument that military women are perceived, and represented, as ideologically inconsistent, I ascertain that Western mainstream media plays a large part in the dissemination of a stereotyped image of servicewomen. As Howards and Prividera argue, during the last two decades of news coverage concerning military women, "[…] the inconsistency has been resolved by focusing on their femininity, vulnerability, victimization, female bodies, and/or relational dimensions to the exclusion of their military identity"[423]. This statement has been verified in this chapter with the analysis of both case studies. In the news media, Lynndie England was criticized over her 'tomboy' – or non-feminine – look, her pregnant body scrutinized, and her sexual relationship with a fellow male soldier vilified. While Jessica Lynch had her femininity praised, her 'All-American Girl' good looks lauded and her vulnerable body victimized.

These two case studies confirm how news media use stereotypes in their narratives, typecasting military women for the assimilation of large audiences[424]. These stereotypes and consequent expectations for femininity – within society and in the military – can sustain arguments against women in the military, and particularly against women in combat. From the two case studies examined, I observed that mainstream media either considers women too disruptive and unruly to serve (i.e. Lynndie England), or consider them too vulnerable to serve (i.e. Jessica Lynch).

> "Two young working-class women from opposite ends of West Virginia go off to war. One is blond and has aspirations to be a schoolteacher. The other is dark, a smoker, divorced and now carrying an out-of-wedlock baby. One becomes the heroic poster child for Operation Iraqi Freedom, the subject of a hagiographic book and TV movie; the other becomes the hideous, leering face of American wartime criminality, Exhibit A in the indictment of our country's descent into the gulag. In the words of Time magazine, Pfc. Lynndie England is 'a Jessica Lynch gone wrong'[425].

In his article for *The New York Times*, Frank Rich puts both women in direct opposition on the spectrum of good and evil. He recognizes there was an active media "[…] creation of Jessica Lynch Superstar"[426] even claiming that England is Lynch's Abu Ghraib

[423] Howard III, Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 294.
[424] This gendered approach to news coverage is not only harmful to military women, further separating them – as the subordinate sex – from their male counterparts, but it also removes focus from underlying issues of great importance, that appear (if at all) buried in the news articles. These issues have to do with gender inequality, racial and class discrimination, etc.
[425] Rich, "Saving Private England".
[426] Rich, "Saving Private England".

'doppelgänger'. Rich concludes that the fabricated Lynch story attests to how well the Pentagon controlled the news media during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the Abu Ghraib images, on the other hand, symbolizes a loss of control. I challenge Rich's argument in the sense that while the leaking of the Abu Ghraib photographs does prove a loss of control in the containment of the images – they were in the Pentagon's possession after all – the effort in demonizing and penalizing only the group of MPs featured in the photographs while avoiding accountability, attests to the fact that the US Department of Defense was able to regain control of the situation in the long run.

Analyzing the media treatment of both military women (England and Lynch), I remit to Sontag's question on "Regarding the Torture of Others": "What makes some actions representative and others not?"[427]. Even with the Pentagon distancing itself from the very real behavior performed by England, and attempting to praise the actions said to be carried out by Lynch, both these women are representatives of the US Army in the eyes of the public. Therefore, it is important to consider how the demonization or celebration of specific servicewomen reflects back upon all military women. In "Embattled Agencies", Sine Nørholm Just explains how the mass media fabricated stories of both England and Lynch ended up affecting the group of female soldiers they were seen to be representing. Moreover, Just argues that their mass-mediated stories also contributed to the (re-)creating of the collective concept of 'military woman', privileging a "[…] conservative and restricted notion of the female soldier"[428]. Having the actions, and stories, of these two women mold the category of 'female soldier' actively circumscribes the agency expected of military women in general. Just's work in comparing England and Lynch's media stories reinforces the idea that the categories of 'female' and 'soldier' are continuously portrayed as clashing. The importance of media representations can thus be verified through the testaments of actual military woman, who feel the pressure of England and Lynch's media personas infiltrating their military careers. The documentary *Lioness* (2008, dir. Meg McLagan, Daria Sommers) offers an example of how servicewomen can be affected by such media external representations. *Lioness* was developed with the intention of giving visibility to Western military women deployed to fight in direct ground combat. The directors stated how they felt compelled to make this

[427] Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", 26.
[428] See Sine Nørholm Just, "Embattled Agencies: How Mass Mediated Comparisons of Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch Affect the Identity Positions Available to Female Soldiers in the US Army", *Centre for Communication Studies*, Scand. J. Mgmt, 22, 99-119. (2006), 116.

documentary to suppress a fault, the invisibility of a large group of military women. As directors McLagan and Sommers state in the documentary's website: "While the reality of the changing role of female soldiers was playing itself out on the ground in Iraq, here at home the image of the female soldier stagnated in the public imagination, polarized between Jessica Lynch at one extreme and Lynndie England at the other"[429]. Even though *Lioness* is a valid contribution to the discussion on military women's involvement in the 'War on Terror', it also works to provide important alternative standpoints for women that are not centered around the opposition between England and Lynch.

Upon an examination of the myths and archetypes created around military women by news media outlets, recurrent patterns begin to emerge. Through the perpetuation of gendered narratives and recycled stereotypes, news media have been important supporters of the military's hegemony structures. I second Howard and Prividera's argument that "[m]ilitaristic discourse and practice institutionalize (and normalize) the subordination of the feminine to the masculine"[430]. Therefore, I contend that the biased coverage of stories centered on military women perpetuate patriarchal militarism by insisting on approaches that favor the subordination of women. News media's persistence in delivering gendered narratives perpetuates the distinction between genders in the military, a division that continues to obstruct women's path to equality within the military-industrial complex. The cases of England and Lynch are perhaps still considered the most divisive. However, Western news media's gendered approach to stories centering of controversial military women goes beyond these two cases, traversing narratives of servicewomen torturing detainees in Guantanamo Bay during interrogations[431]. The two case studies examined in this chapter are two among a large number of problematic fabrications within US global security narratives. More than military men, whose body is also a site of standardized obedience, military women continue to be either portrayed as villains or as heroines. The analysis provided in this chapter demonstrates how the mainstream media continues to privilege stereotypical narratives that see women as essentially *non-military*, either for their depravity (e.g. England), or for their vulnerability (e.g. Lynch).

[429] Meg McLagan, Daria Sommers, "Director's Statement", *Lioness* (official website). http://lionessthefilm.com/about_the_film/ (accessed April 2020).
[430] Howard III, Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype", 290.
[431] A topic I will address in the next chapter (2.2).

Chapter 2.2

THE 'TORTURE CHICKS'
Female Body as a Tool for Torture

Interrogating Torture in the 'War on Terror'

As I have addressed in the previous chapter with the popular case of Lynndie England, when the Abu Ghraib Photographs became public, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke out against the surfacing of the term 'torture' to define the actions depicted in the images. In reality, the Abu Ghraib controversy – along with adjacent ones – catalyzed a number of debates about the legitimacy of the use of torture, and what it entails. In this chapter I question torture practices that took place during the 'War on Terror', examining the role military women have played in interrogations, and exploring if and how these women were instrumentalized by the military in these instances, as I have set out to confirm with this thesis. I also provide a connection with cultural representations of female torturers in the military, as to establish the relevance of art's critical perspective on this subject.

I begin by providing an overview of the issues surrounding torture and interrogation during the 'War on Terror', as I believe this outline is helpful in contextualizing the role military women have played, and how that role has been perceived. I will then proceed to the second section, where I examine specific cases in which women's bodies and sexuality have been used for the purpose of extracting information from detainees during interrogation. I do this by drawing on the important work of scholars like Kelly Oliver, to provide a theoretical basis for my analysis on the

relevance of the application of 'gender coercion' techniques[432]. In the last section of this chapter I turn to the artworks of Coco Fusco, namely the performance *A Room of One's Own* (2006) and the publication *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (2008). By analyzing Fusco's works against the theory explored in the preceding sections, I intend to demonstrate the relevance of cultural contributions to the debate at hand. I believe this connection is important to the scope of this thesis, as I set out to determine how military women have been represented in visual culture during the 'War on Terror'.

Aside from Donald Rumsfeld's aforementioned attempts at downplaying the word 'torture' when referring to the actions of the soldiers at Abu Ghraib, during the 'War on Terror' torture practices have also been referred to by the euphemisms 'enhanced interrogation techniques', 'moderate physical pressure', or even 'torture lite'[433]. The US government considered that value of expected 'intelligence'[434] hoped to be gathered from a particular detainee justified these acts. Although I do not dismiss the importance of the historical facts behind the US government's approval and regulation of torture practices[435], in this chapter I will focus on the practices themselves, as this approach will allow me to address the main objectives of my research. It is important to highlight that most of these acts of torture took place in 'black sites'[436]. For the sake of concision, I will focus on a few US controlled military bases in Afghanistan and Iraq. In my understanding, this restriction will allow for a more precise assessment of military women's contribution to military torture.

Since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq differed from the previous conflicts in terms of available technology, among other progressions, new interrogation strategies had to be developed to cater to the new 'War on Terror'. Largely based on the *Kubark*

[432] 'Gender coercion' techniques intend to cause stress on a detainee through provocations (either verbal or physical) from someone of the opposite gender. It is a method considered part of the 'Futility Interrogation Techniques', which sees the interrogator conveying the idea to the detainee that resistance is futile.
[433] See Ross Bellaby "The Ethics of Torture-Lite in Advance", *The International Journal of Applied Philosophy* (January 2016) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291373787_The_Ethics_of_Torture-Lite_in_advance (accessed April 2020).
[434] In this context, 'intelligence' is defined as: "Information, news; information concerning an enemy or possible enemy or an area" (See *Merriam-Webster*'s definition of 'intelligence' https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intelligence, accessed April 2020).
[435] For instance, the debates surrounding the US departure from the Geneva Convention treaties.
[436] In military terminology, a 'black site' is a US controlled facility where a secret military operation or project is conducted.

Counterintelligence Interrogation manual[437], written in 1963 by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), torture practices have made a strive to deviate from procedures developed centuries ago, such as whipping, branding or mutilation. Interrogation coercion is now characterized by the use of practices that leave the least amount of physical marks, known as 'clean coercive techniques'. These practices have grown in popularity due to leaving few marks on the body, thus enabling avoidance of backlash from human rights groups (e.g. Red Cross). The practices include electroshock, torture by water and ice, tying victims in agonizing postures, using sonic devices, and administrating drugs[438]. Also, psychological torture practices like sensory deprivation techniques – also known as 'white torture' – are employed to create a sense of extreme isolation in the detainee. Therefore, interrogators have been able to inflict high amounts of pain and stress without it being visible on the detainees' bodies.

The practice of waterboarding[439] became especially controversial back in 2006, when former US Vice-President Dick Cheney endorsed that form of torture, claiming that it was a reliable method of forcing the detainees to disclose valuable information[440]. Due to the large amount of media controversy surrounding the practice of waterboarding over the years, it has since become ingrained in popular culture. Scenes of waterboarding were critiqued in fictional representations of wartime interrogations. One of the most debated scenes appeared in the acclaimed 2012 film *Zero Dark Thirty* (dir. Kathryn Bigelow), which shows a detainee enduring waterboarding under the vigilance of the main character, a female CIA intelligence analyst. The film was criticized for its pro-torture stance, condemned for suggesting that only through the use of torture was Osama Bin Laden found[441]. More recently, the 2019 edition of the popular video game *Call of Duty: Modern*

[437] See Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation* (July 1963). https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB27/docs/doc01.pdf (accessed April 2020). It is important to acknowledge that, due to the time period this manual was conceived and published in, women were not yet participating in the process of interrogation, thus being excluded from this manual.

[438] For an interdisciplinary understanding of the physical and psychological effects of torture on the human body, consult Shane O'Mara's work on the neuroscience of interrogation, particularly the chapters dedicated to the assessment of the consequences of stress, pain, sleep deprivation, drowning, cooling, heating, and starving. See Shane O'Mara *Why Torture Doesn't Work. The Neuroscience of Interrogation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 105-203.

[439] Waterboarding is a form of torture consisting of pouring water over the face of a person, which is usually covered with a cloth while the person is lying down. This practice is meant to simulate the experience of drowning, causing great stress to the captive person, while giving the torturer control over the situation.

[440] See Mark Tran "Cheney endorses simulated drowning" *The Guardian* (October 27, 2006). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/oct/27/usa.guantanamo (accessed April 2020).

[441] For reference on some of the criticism on *Zero Dark Thirty*, see Naomi Wolf, "A Letter to Kathryn Bigelow on *Zero Dark Thirty*'s Apology for Torture", *The Guardian*. (January 4, 2013).

Warfare featured a playable waterboarding scene[442], showing the impact the 'War on Terror' has enacted on entertainment, a topic I will explore on Chapter 3.2. Techniques like waterboarding are thus considered 'stealth violence' in the modern approach to torture. It is perceived by experts that these techniques have found maximum expression in Abu Ghraib, gaining the term 'stress and duress' techniques[443]. These techniques were employed under a 'No Blood, No Foul' policy, meaning that as long as the detainees did not show marks of abuse on their bodies, the military would not be prosecuted. In the absence of visible marks, it would thus be inconclusive to an observer if a detainee was subjected to torture.

Besides Abu Ghraib, another US controlled military prison that attracted a lot of controversy for its abusive practices towards detainees, as well as for cases of indefinite detention, was the Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp, or GITMO[444]. Considered by Amnesty International to be the "gulag of our times"[445], the torture practices documented to have happened at this detention camp showed connections with techniques used in Abu Ghraib. These links were attributed to the sharing of information on methodology between the two facilities[446]. The fact that different facilities were performing similar methods of torture suggests awareness from superiors, thus rejecting the argument of instances of torture being the work of 'rogue' soldiers.

Inside the Wire[447], written by US Army Sergeant Erik Saar, in cooperation with journalist Viveca Novak, details Saar's six-month tour at Guantánamo Bay detention

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https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/04/letter-kathryn-bigelow-zero-dark-thirty (accessed April 2020); Slavoy Žižek, "*Zero Dark Thirty*: Hollywood's Gift to American Power", *The Guardian* (January 25, 2013) https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/25/zero-dark-thirty-normalises-torture-unjustifiable (accessed April 2020); and Jane Mayer, "Zero Conscience in *Zero Dark Thirty*", *The New Yorker* (December 14, 2012) https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/zero-conscience-in-zero-dark-thirty#ixzz2FEv7RPBo (accessed April 2020).

[442] See Alec Kubas-Meyer, "*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, With Its Waterboarding and Child Killers, is Controversial as Hell", *Daily Beast* (October 28, 2019) https://www.thedailybeast.com/call-of-duty-modern-warfare-with-its-waterboarding-and-child-killers-is-controversial-as-hell (accessed April 2020).

[443] Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007). 267, 294. Also, see Darius Rejali, "The Real Shame of Abu Ghraib", *Time Magazine* website (May 20, 2004).

[444] This detention camp is situated in Cuba, a problematic case of territorial control between the US and Cuba. For a detailed account of the legal status of the detention camp see Joseph Lazar "International Legal Status of Guantanamo Bay", The American Journal of International Law Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 1968), 730-740.

[445] Richard Norton-Taylor. "Guantánamo is Gulag of our Time, Says Amnesty". The Guardian, (May 26, 2005) theguardian.com/world/2005/may/26/usa.guantanamo (accessed April 2020).

[446] One of the key persons responsible for this link was Major General Geoffrey Miller, who commanded both detention facilities. See Andy Worthington, "The abusive reign of Geoffrey Miller", *The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of 759 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 191-193.

[447] Erik Saar and Viveca Novak, *Inside the Wire: A Military Intelligence Soldier's Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantánamo* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005).

camp, where he served as an Arabic translator. In this book, Saar attests to have witnessed abuses of detainees, listing sleep and food deprivation, mock interrogations, harassment with dogs (Military Working Dogs, known as MWDs), and sexual abuse, among other types. Saar also exposes the overall inexperience of the soldiers, and interrogators, stationed at Guantánamo. According to Saar, the interrogators' attempts to get detainees to 'confess' were governed by 'confusion' over the boundaries of acceptable methods of interrogation, given Donald Rumsfeld's statement about the Geneva Convention.

In *An Ethics of Interrogation*, which addresses the complexity of the act of interrogation in both domestic and international contexts, Michael Skerker explains that "[…] the literature suggests that the number of cases where security officials interrogate someone they know is culpable pales compared to the number of cases where the interrogatee is only suspected of involvement in terrorist activity"[448]. Numerous scholars from different fields – as well as military specialists –, have contributed to the debate regarding the actual efficacy of torture[449]. One of the most prominent works in the area is *Torture and Democracy*, a comprehensive study of modern torture and interrogation, written by Darius Rejali, a leading expert on the study of torture through the ages. Adding to an already extensive body of work on the topic of torture[450], in this particular publication Rejali unpacks the topic of the efficacy of torture. Rejali questions the scientific accuracy of torture, if it is possible to torture in a 'restrained manner', if technology can be helpful, how it impacts organizations, and how relevant is the intelligence gathered overall. Rejali's concludes:

> "Torture cannot be scientific. It is unlikely interrogators can torture in a restrained manner. Technology does not help them in this respect. Torture has strong corrosive effects on professional skills and institutions. Clean, selective, professional torture is an illusion. This is true regardless of whether one uses

[448] Michael Skerker, *An Ethics of Interrogation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 183.
[449] See John W. Schiemann, *Does Torture Work?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Lisa Hajjar, "Does Torture Work? A Sociolegal Assessment of the Practice in Historical and Global Perspective", *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, Vol. 5, (December 2009); Shane O'Mara, *Why Torture Doesn't Work. The Neuroscience of Interrogation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[450] See Darius Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Darius Rejali, "Torture and Public Opinion: The Partisan Dimension", *Examining Torture: Empirical Studies of State Repression*, edited by Tracy Lightcap and James P. Pfiffner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11-41; Darius Rejali, "Coerced Information as Truth and Memory", *Folter: Politik und Technik des Schmerzes*, edited by Wolf Burkhardt, Karin Harrasser and Thomas Macho (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Fall 2007).

> torture to intimidate, interrogate, or extract false confessions. […]. In short, organized torture yields poor information, sweeps up many innocents, degrades organizational capabilities, and destroys interrogators"[451].

Even though Rejali acknowledges that torture may produce some truthful – and even useful – information, he nonetheless categorizes it as 'the clumsiest method' to gather information, given that the possibilities for error are large, recurrent, and enduring.

Before *Torture and Democracy*, Rejali had written about issues of torture pertaining to the Abu Ghraib photographs[452] in a 2004 *Salon* article entitled "Does Torture Work?"[453]. In his reflection on this instance of torture, Rejali explained how torture is not a trustworthy method to produce decisive information, revealing that even the photographed acts of torture that took place in Abu Ghraib only offered 'actionable intelligence'[454] to the interrogators, and not concrete information that impacted the course of the Iraq War.

Even though Rejali's work on torture is quite extensive and detailed in its approach, during my research of his writings I have not found a single mention of military women torturing detainees, or an analysis on 'gender coercion' techniques of any kind. Given that *Torture and Democracy* was published in 2007, there were already high-profile cases circulating in the news media about female soldiers engaging in torture, the most famous being Lynndie England. Despite this, in *Torture and Democracy* England is only mentioned one single time, grouped with a few other soldiers who were court-martialed for their actions at Abu Ghraib. Rejali's mention of England is not to recognize her distinctive role in the torture debates that followed the Abu Ghraib photographs scandal, but to generally state how the lives of those soldiers were forever changed[455]. This absence could be due to Rejali's dismissal of England's importance in the Abu Ghraib case, or of the use of female bodies in the interrogation rooms, as I do not believe it stems from a lack of awareness of its existence. Even in his 2007 article "Torture Makes the Man", which explores the perception advocated by some torture apologists that

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[451] Rejali. *Torture and Democracy,* 478.
[452] Rejali also authored and the following article on the Abu Ghraib photographs: Darius Rejali, "The Real Shame of Abu Ghraib", *Time Magazine* website. (May 20, 2004). http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,640375,00.html (accessed in April 2020).
[453] See Darius Rejali, "Does Torture Work?", *Salon*. June 22, 2004. https://www.salon.com/2004/06/21/torture_algiers/ (accessed April 2020).
[454] 'Actionable intelligence' is information that leads to other sources and requires further investigation.
[455] "The lives and families of Lynndie England, Sabrina Harman, Chip Frederick, and other soldiers are probably ruined forever". Rejali, *Torture and Democracy,* 536.

torturing is the cure for weakness in soldiers, Rejali neglects to consider the role military women play in an environment that incites practices expected to generate stronger men.

Rejali has since revisited *Torture and Democracy* for a chapter in the 2020 publication *Interrogation and Torture: Integrating Efficacy with Law and Morality*. In that chapter, entitled "The Field of Torture Today: Ten Years on from *Torture and Democracy*", Rejali considers if and how the theoretical approaches towards torture and interrogation have changed since *Torture and Democracy* was published, in 2007. In this revision, again, there is not one single mention to the participation of military women in practices of torture during interrogation, as the chapter focus more on the evolution of torture techniques and technologies (e.g. waterboarding, electrical torture, etc.). By posing the question "How much has torture changed since the 'War on Terror' began?"[456] and then disregarding servicewomen's specific contribution to the development of torture practices during the 'War on Terror', Rejali's work undermines the importance of unbalanced gender dynamics in military hierarchies. It also contributes to the literature that effaces the military appropriation of women's bodies as problematic, or even real, potentially encouraging its perpetuation, even if unintentionally.

I suggest that behind Rejali's long-lasting lack of interest in addressing how military women have been participating in torture practices is that he considers that topic to be 'rumor' around 'real' torture issues. Writing on unnamed 'controversies' based on "[…] stories, rumors, myths, and unspoken agreements […]", Rejali thus comprises it all as: "[…] what I call 'torture-talk'— the chatter that had little to do with techniques and policies that I called 'torture'"[457]. From this statement, I understand that Rejali considers the military's use of 'gender coercion' to be 'torture-talk', an occasional controversy-filled buzz that does not contribute to the actual issues concerning the use of coercive interrogation techniques. I argue that the consistent neglect to address 'gender coercion' techniques, when extensively discussing 'clean coercive techniques' and "torture styles"[458], reveals an important flaw in Rejali's influential body of work. To counterpose Rejali's omission I explore in the section below the use of military women's bodies and sexuality as a well-documented, and sanctioned, technique for detainee interrogation.

[456] Darius Rejali, *Interrogation and Torture: Integrating Efficacy with Law and Morality*, edited by Steven J. Barela, et. al (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 79.
[457] Rejali, *Interrogation and Torture*, 88.
[458] Rejali, *Interrogation and Torture*, 80.

'Invasion of Space by Female': On 'Gender Coercion'

Having established a contextualization for interrogational torture I now turn my attention to how women have participated in it, and how these practices have been perceived not only by the military, but also by scholars and the mainstream media. Informed by my readings on the participation of military women in torture[459], I have divided my approach to the subject in two categories: (1.) The use of the *concept* of femininity as a tool for interrogation, and (2.) The use of physical *contact* with the female body as a tool for interrogation. It is important to recognize that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and are many times employed simultaneously. It is, however, necessary to identify them separately as they represent different aspects when approaching the topic of 'gender coercion' I discuss in this section. To elaborate on these categories:

(1.) The use of the *concept* of femininity as a tool for interrogation: It pertains to how anything associated with women is used as a weapon to exert a response from the detainee. For instance, many of the Abu Ghraib photographs revealed that women's underwear were placed on the heads of detainees[460]. Furthermore, practices referred to as 'cross-dressing behaviors' were reported in news media to have been "[…] imposed on one detainee shortly after his capture. On 06 Dec 02, the subject of the first Special Interrogation Plan was forced to wear a woman's bra and had a thong placed on his head during the course of interrogation"[461]. Through the use of women's underwear to oppress the detainees, US soldiers demonstrate the extent of their humiliation practices, also making a mockery out of femininity and, as a result, of servicewomen. In "The Fallen Woman Archetype", Howard and Prividera clarify how "[…] anything feminine that could violate the enemy was welcomed into the discursive and material space at Abu Ghraib. […]. They [the detainees] were also branded with feminine figures on their bodies

[459] Stemming from both official US military documents, and academic analysis by scholars in the field of military studies.
[460] One of the most famous images makes the cover for Stephen F. Eisenman's *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2007).
[461] Colin Freeze, "Combatants Use a New Weapon in Terrorism War: The Sex Bomb", *The Globe and Mail* (May 20, 2006). https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/combatants-use-a-new-weapon-in-terrorism-war-the-sex-bomb/article22504386/ (accessed April 2020).

and forced to imitate feminine sexual roles"[462]. The authors thus acknowledge the feminization of detainees to achieve emasculation as a manner of imposed inferiority.

Aside from objects connected to womanliness, even the stare of women has been utilized as a torture device. Several sources confirm that forcing detainees to stand naked in front of military women was a common practice. For instance, the *Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Torture*[463] reports how "Bashir Nasir Ali al-Marwalah, […] when he was first captured, 'had to stand up for five days straight and answer questions' and 'was also forced to strip naked and stand in front of a female interrogator' ([redacted] 14353 (231521Z APR 03))"[464]. Also, in *CIA Torture Unredacted*, an investigative work on the CIA torture program, there are accounts of how "[i]nterrogations occurred daily, sometimes twice, and often while al-Mehdi [a detainee] was naked in front of his female interrogators"[465]. The same publication provides other examples, like the case of "Al-Maghrebi [who] was […] interrogated repeatedly, including in the presence of a woman while he was completely naked"[466]. These examples contribute to the understanding of how interrogational torture was devised, from a Western standpoint, to explore the idea of femininity as displeasing to Muslim men. Thus, with this first categorization I begin to lay the foundations towards an understanding of the role of women in interrogation torture, as I have established how women have been utilized as gendered provocation, serving as bait, and meant to represent sexually charged stereotypes.

(2.) The use of physical or visual *contact* with the female body as a tool for interrogation: This requires actual participation of women in the interrogation booth. In *Sovereign Masculinity*, feminist philosopher Bonnie Mann describes a detainee's resistance to sexualized torture, concerning an explicit technique called "Invasion of Space by Female"[467]. The name of this practice illustrates its intent. However, while the

[462] John W. Howard III, Laura C. Prividera, "The Fallen Woman Archetype: Media Representations of Lynndie England, Gender, and the (Ab)uses of U.S. Female Soldiers", *Women's Studies in Communication*, 31(3), 2008, 298.
[463] The development of this investigative work was fictionalized in the film *The Report* (2019, dir. Scott Z. Burns).
[464] Senate Select Committee of Intelligence, *The Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Torture: Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014), 515.
[465] Sam Raphael, et al. *CIA Torture Unredacted*. (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2019), 250.
[466] Sam Raphael et al. *CIA Torture Unredacted*, 230.
[467] Bonnie Mann, *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 194.

technique's name intends to convey a direct – and presumably uncomfortable – interaction with a detainee, it can also be applied to women's disruptive presence in that military space. As an 'invader', women are seen as entering a space that does not belong to them. It is important to acknowledge that 'Invasion of Space by Female' is a technique authorized by the US government[468]. This sanctioned interrogation technique sees female interrogators unbuttoning their shirts, touching their breasts, and speaking in lewd terms[469]. It includes documentation of detainees who were "[…] sexually taunted by a woman interrogator, who fondled [their] genitals"[470], among other behaviors I will examine in this chapter.

The sexual nature of these practices has driven some authors to perceive military women's functions as only of sexual nature. This synecdoche can be seen in "The 'Sex Interrogators' of Guantánamo", where lawyer Kristine A. Huskey recounts her visits to the detention camp. Huskey writes what detainees have confessed to her, including how during some interrogations, "[…] there was more than one 'sex interrogator', two or three females would engage in similar tactics at the same time"[471]. Classifying these women as 'sex interrogators' exposes Huskey's views on their 'special functions'. Even though Huskey contests that, "[t]he use of women in coercion techniques […] not only insults our women in uniform, but vastly undermines the role women play in the military and armed conflict"[472], by labeling them as 'sex interrogators', when that term has not been used in any official document, causes Huskey to contribute to the very problem of 'undermining the role women play in the military and armed conflict', she intends to denounce.

In the aforementioned *Inside the Wire* there are many examples of 'gender coercion' practices intended to play on the detainees' perceived religious background. In one example, Saar recounts one of his assignments as a translator, this time working with

[468] "Finding #12c: On various occasions between October 2002 and January 2003, a female interrogator invaded the private space of a detainee to disrupt his concentration during interrogation; Technique: Authorized: FM 34-52". Randall Mark Schmidt, John T. Furlow, "Army Regulation 15–6: Final Report: Investigation into FBI Allegation of Detainee Abuse at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba Detention Facility" (April 1, 2005, amended June 9, 2005). https://www.thetorturedatabase.org/files/foia_subsite/pdfs/schmidt_furlow_report.pdf (accessed April 2020). 16.
[469] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wide*, 224.
[470] Worthington, *The Guantánamo Files*, 177.
[471] Kristine A. Huskey, "The 'Sex Interrogators' of Guantánamo", *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, edited by Tara McKelvey (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). 177.
[472] Huskey, "The 'Sex Interrogators' of Guantánamo", 178.

a female interrogator named Michelle, whom Saar previously described as "[…] an attractive girl in her late twenties, with long brown hair"[473]. In her interrogation of a Syrian detainee, Michelle wanted to know details about his religious upbringing and current connection with religion. Upon the detainee's denial to converse with a woman about religion, since "[d]evout men do not discuss religious views with women", the interviewer asked Saar to be the one to interview him, following her instructions on what to ask, namely, to "[f]ind out what makes him tick religiously"[474]. This is one of many entries describing how the female body and sexuality have been utilized against the religious beliefs of the detainees. In another example in *Inside the Wire,* Saar discovered a "[…] microscopic dress with a sheer top, along with some thong underwear hanging on the back of the door". Addressing it as if it were a work uniform, Saar informs the reader that the female interrogator's "[…] strategy was to be sexually provocative to try to make the detainee feel impure and unworthy of going before his God in prayer and thereby gaining strength". Saar adds that one of his colleague linguists had told him that he had once accompanied this interrogator on a questioning and saw her "[…] tak[ing] off her dress […] and was wearing just a bra and a thong"[475]. Saar's first-person account was very impactful on the torture debates circulating at the time, causing, for instance, *The New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd to call these women 'torture chicks'[476], based on Saar's allegations.

The cases depicted in *Inside the Wire* were, along many others, the object of a thorough investigation by two US senior officers[477], who examined a series of allegations that indicated that torture and abuse of detainees was taking place during interrogations. From this three-year investigation, covering more than 24,000 interrogations, the declassified Oversight Report/Investigative File *AR 15-6 Investigation into FBI Allegations of Detainee Abuse at Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility* surfaced. Also known as the 'Schmidt-Furlow Report' (after its authors), this document describes instances of alleged abuse; lists the investigators' findings; and concludes with a discussion of the organizational response providing further recommendations. The report responded to a number of allegations of abuse involving female military interrogators.

[473] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wide*, 167.
[474] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wide*, 183.
[475] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wide*, 193.
[476] See Maureen Dowd, "Torture Chicks Gone Wild", *The New York Times*, (January 30, 2005), https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/opinion/torture-chicks-gone-wild.html (accessed April 2020).
[477] Brigadier General John T. Furlow and Lieutenant General Randall M. Schmidt, appointed by General Bantz J. Craddock, Commander of United States Southern Command.

These concerned accusations of servicewomen performing 'lap dances' on detainees; observing their naked bodies; rubbing perfume on them; touching their bodies and hair; taking off their own clothes in front of detainees; straddling detainees while they were held down; massaging a detainee's back and shoulders; fondling a detainee's genitalia, making lewd sexual comments, noises, and gestures; and finally, using 'faux menstrual blood'[478], which I will analyze in further detail below. All of these procedures were not subjected to reprimand, for according to the report, they were either authorized procedures at the moment of enactment, or were authorized not long after.

In the study "Women Soldiers and Interrogational Abuses in the 'War on Terror'", Doctor Steven H. Miles pondered on the implications of giving an order to a lower-rank female soldier to suggestively touch a detainee. Miles determined that: "Such […] could constitute a form of sexual harassment in that the approaches were novel, unapproved, and improvised without the subordinate women interrogators being prepared to perform such acts"[479]. Although Miler was not completely accurate in his assessment of the unauthorized nature of the actions, he could be right in determining that these requests of sexual nature could have been, at least for the women, improvised and uncomfortable, thus supporting Miler's claim of sexual harassment. Miler continues his argument denouncing these actions performed by service women as the "[…] use of Islam as a way of life against the prisoners"[480]. It is important to state that nowhere during my research of official declassified documents have I found an entry documenting similar actions performed by male soldiers. Given that homosexuality is also not approved by Islam religion, it is pertinent to inquire why only women have been required to perform these types of practices. This can perhaps be explained drawing on Riva Khoshaba's arguments in "Women in the Interrogation Room", which explores the cultural significance of US women overpowering Muslim men through sexual abuse. According to Khoshaba, having women, and not men, engaging in sexually suggestive behavior with Muslim detainees, deeply disrupts the detainee's social construction of power distribution according to gender. Describing an unnamed detainee's account of his experiences with female interrogators in Abu Ghraib prison, Khoshaba writes how he claimed to be more traumatized by their interrogations, than by sleepless nights and stress positions.

[478] Schmidt and Furlow, "Army Regulation 15–6", 2, 7, 15, 20, 22.
[479] Steven H. Miles. "Women Soldiers and Interrogational Abuses in the 'War on Terror'". In *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*. Tara McKelvey (ed.). (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007). 94.
[480] Miles, "Women Soldiers and Interrogational Abuses in the 'War on Terror'", 94.

Khoshaba then argues that "[…] this man's trauma was the result of two inversions – that of the proper male and female roles and their relationship to one another"[481]. Considering Miler and Khoshaba's texts, I can then articulate both arguments to infer that the use of military women's bodies and sexuality in the interrogation room is thus a combination of Western ideals of sexual harassment, and of Western readings on Arabic notions of the virtuous and subdued woman. In *Sovereign Masculinity*, Bonnie Mann allows for this argument to go even further, as she comments on the blurring of the female interrogator's 'racial-national power' with the detainee's perspective of female subordination before men. As Mann explains, "[t]he racial power of the interrogator is sexualized in the process, so that the female torturer is infused with the manhood of the nation as she sexually degrades the prisoner"[482]. The woman is thus used in this context as a symbolic representation of Western power, which is manifested through the exploitation of her body and sexuality.

In the most revealing episode in *Inside the Wire*, Saar recalls accompanying a female interrogator named Brooke, as a translator for the interrogation of a 'high-priority' detainee. Then Saar describes her using a red marker's ink to simulate menstrual blood, drawing it from inside her pants in front of the restrained detainee and "[…] wiping what he believed was menstrual blood on his face"[483]. According to Saar's recounting, the detainee reacted in a severe way, screaming, and sobbing as Brooke opened her hand "[…] to show him her blood"[484]. Upon leaving, Brooke tells the detainee that the water in his cell would be shut off, to prevent him from cleaning himself. This episode was investigated by Schmidt and Furlow, and it is featured in their report. The report states that the female interrogator is no longer in military service and has declined to be interviewed. The Schmidt-Furlow report directly acknowledges *Inside the Wire*, claiming that "[…] former SGT [Sergeant] Erik Saar who has written a book into 'activities' at GTMO. Despite repeated requests he declined to be interviewed"[485]. The investigators then collected their information from other sources, determining that the situation was a single occurrence, and therefore "[n]o formal disciplinary action was taken", and that

[481] Riva Khoshaba, "Women in the Interrogation Room". In *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, edited by Tara McKelvey (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), 180.
[482] Mann. *Sovereign Masculinity*, 197.
[483] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wire*, 227.
[484] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wire*, 227.
[485] Schmidt and Furlow, "Army Regulation 15–6", 28.

"[t]here is no evidence that this happened again" [486]. Given that the official response to this action was not severe, I presume that this type of actions does not represent a problem for the US Army.

Saar explains that Brooke got the idea to use fake menstrual blood after asking another linguist how she could "break him [the detainee] from his resilience on God, his source of strength"[487]. Here we have another example of how religious faith was seen as a weakness, and a target for interrogators. In *Torture and Impunity*, a work about the use of torture by US intelligence services, military historian Alfred W. McCoy explains that during the Bush administration there was the pervasive notion that "[…] 'Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation'" [488]. This perception pinpointed by McCoy allowed for the construction of an offensive form of interrogation using women to sexually humiliate Muslim men. The recurrent mention of how these practices are a direct attack to Muslim culture and Islam religion represent for activist Angela Y. Davis a violence in itself. As Davis argues in *Abolition Democracy* – published in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib and commenting on systems of oppression –, declaring that these torture practices could only affect Muslim men reveals cultural subjugation. This Orientalist view of the 'Arab mind' causes Davis to state that, "[t]o explain the tortures within this pseudo-cultural framework is to define the people who are being tortured as already inferior"[489]. In an effort towards avoiding complicity in the inferiority of the detainees, Davis suggests that scholars and commentators should focus their analysis on the interrogation strategies, which reveal much more about those devising them, then about those being interrogated. I agree with Davis standpoint, in the sense that I consider the use of women's bodies and sexualities in interrogation contexts to be very revealing of how Western societies view women as a tool used for the purposes of gathering intelligence.

As I am analyzing the instrumentalization of women's bodies and sexuality by a Western institution, it is very substantial to address the use of menstrual blood – which is highly symbolic of womanhood – as a weapon of war. Even though it is traditionally regarded by patriarchal cultures as something unclean and repulsive, or, in Julia

[486] Schmidt and Furlow, "Army Regulation 15–6", 8.
[487] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wire*, 227.
[488] Alfred W. McCoy, *Torture and Impunity: The US Doctrine of Coercive Interrogation* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 160.
[489] Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press: 2005), 54.

Kristeva's terms, 'abject'[490], menstrual blood has nonetheless been used as a tool of warfare. The Western assumption that contact with menstrual blood is only repulsive to Muslim men reveals great hypocrisy and sense of superiority, since Western societies have traditionally considered it something foul, and it is still seen as somewhat of a taboo. As Kelly Oliver explains, "[t]he military's use of pretend menstrual blood in interrogation makes apparent the imagined threat of menstruation in patriarchal cultures, most particularly ours. The imagined threat is made explicit when menstrual blood becomes part of the arsenal of 'sex tactics' used by the military"[491]. Even Saar admits to feeling 'unclean' in their attempts to "[…] spit on Islam" by smearing fake menstrual blood on a detainee, as he stated that "[….] there was not enough water in all of Cuba to make me feel clean"[492]. This particular behavior during interrogation demonstrates a subversion of Western's perception of menstruation in favor of warfare, which is revealing of the extent of the appropriation of womanhood in the 'War on Terror'.

In my assessment of the use of women's bodies and sexuality, I found to be important to consider the effect these practices might have on the servicewomen. As Bonnie Mann explains in *Sovereign Masculinity*, there are testimonies of "[…] female interrogators who report having suffered as a result of the demand that they use their bodies and sexuality as explicit modes of torture"[493]. In *Inside the Wire*, Saar describes how immediately after the interrogation where red ink was used to pass for menstrual blood, Brooke, the female interrogator "[…] looked at me [Saar] and began to cry. She too was exhausted, but wholly frustrated as well. […]. I knew she hadn't enjoyed this"[494]. Not ignoring the obvious stress caused upon the detainee, it is nonetheless noteworthy to highlight how these instances of exposure can cause severe emotional drain on the female interrogators that expose their bodies and convert their sexuality into weapons of interrogation.

Participation of female interrogators during the 'War on Terror' is also recognized in a book written by Chris Mackey, a senior US Army interrogation supervisor, in which he reveals inside stories of detainee interrogation. When introducing his team of

[490] Kristeva suggests that Western cultures see menstrual blood as a way to invoke the maternal body as an uncanny border, and as a threat to individual (particularly male) autonomy. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[491] Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 28.
[492] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wire*, 229.
[493] Mann. *Sovereign Masculinity*, 195.
[494] Saar and Novak, *Inside the Wire*, 228.

interrogators Mackey writes about Sergeant Anne-Marie Walker, an interrogator described by Mackey as a "[…] young Michigan soldier [who] surprised prisoners by her youthful appearance and icy tone". Mackey also defined her unique interrogation methods by saying that "[…] she lured unsuspecting detainees into letting their guard down and pounced when the moment was right"[495]. Words like 'lured' and 'pounce' bestows upon Walker an animalesque and savage behavior. Describing how she lures then attacks, Mackey appears to liken this female interrogator to a fantasy being, like a siren, a Greek mythological creature that lured sailors to their death with their charming voice. For comparison, Mackey describes male interrogators in this manner: "[…] Talbot was an example of the precocious and affable composition of the interrogator ranks", or "[…] [Davis was] noted for his unnervingly careful delivery during questioning", or "[…] [Cavanaugh] used his imposing size – coupled with a booming voice – to great advantage"[496]. The attributes chosen to describe the members of the interrogator's team characterize men as either cheerful, cautious, or overpowering, while the only woman on the team (Walker) is predator-like. This suggests that the role of interrogator is considered to be 'unnatural' for servicewomen, aligning with the overall considerations about women in the armed forces observed during my research.

In another entry in *The Interrogator's War*, this one about a female civilian interrogator[497] named, Lilian arriving in Afghanistan to interrogate and analyze the intelligence gathered, Mackey refers to her as a 'soccer mom', 'elegant', 'fragile', with 'big brown eyes', and physically weak[498]. Opposing the descriptions of men's 'imposing size' and 'a booming voice', Lilian is described as having to "[…] put[ting] on a stern face and summon[ing] a hard edge to her voice"[499]. Observing her interrogating a detainee, Mackey confessed to being impressed with her ability to "[…] deliver such a performance, full of hostility, and veiled threats and menacing looks"[500]. From this senior interrogator's contribution it can be determined that men are better suited to perform interrogations, while women's professional conducts come as a 'surprise', with them having to put on a 'performance' of toughness. Having considered the idea of how women 'perform' in interrogation rooms, I now expand my analysis to verify how actual

[495] Chris Mackey and Greg Miller, *The Interrogator's War* (London: John Murray, 2004), xiii.
[496] Mackey and Miller, *The Interrogator's War*, viii, xii.
[497] From an OGA (Other Government Agencies) an acronym used to refer to civilian intelligence agencies in a warzone.
[498] Mackey and Miller, *The Interrogator's War*, 222.
[499] Mackey and Miller, *The Interrogator's War*, 223.
[500] Mackey and Miller, *The Interrogator's War*, 224.

performative practices might help in understanding women's role in interrogatory torture.

Performing Torture: Coco Fusco's A Room of One's Own (2006) *and* A Field Guide for Female Interrogators (2008)

Artists have always contributed to the way society thinks about, or remembers, a particular armed conflict. Either through paintings, photographs, films, or other mediums, cultural productions continue to play a large part in forming a collective memory of warfare. Moreover, political activism has also played a major part in alerting the public to specific injustices, many times contributing to practical changes and impacting the political climate. Considering the cross between art and activism, I now explore the notion of *artivism*.

In *Death of the Artist*, a study of modern art/artists that examines artistic practices as well as the significance of alternative identities, pseudonyms and collective identity in the art world, Nicola McCartney explains the concept of artivism by stating that: "The artivist (artist + activist) uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression – by any medium necessary"[501]. The blending of art and activism thus offers the opportunity for different kinds of protesting[502]. As McCarthy establishes artivism as a relatively new term, she also states how "[…] the practice of activism and art has a far longer history and may be more obviously recognizable in particular forms of creative resistance"[503]. Considering how 'creative resistance' might interlink with the topic I am exploring in this chapter – that of military women's involvement with interrogational torture –, I chose to analyze the *artivist* work of Coco Fusco, in order to further develop my argument on the representation servicewomen in visual culture.

Coco Fusco is a Cuban American artist[504], whose performances and installations,

[501] Nicola McCartney, *Death of the Artist: Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 42.
[502] As McCarthy exemplifies with the work of The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group that fuses a political tactic name with feminism, advocating for gender equality in the art world through activism.
[503] McCartney, *Death of the Artist*, 42.
[504] Fusco has received multiple awards. e.g. 2018 Rabkin Prize for Art Criticism, a 2016 Greenfield Prize, a 2014 Cintas Fellowship, a 2013 Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2013 Absolut Art Writing Award, a 2013 Fulbright Fellowship, a 2012 US Artists Fellowship and a 2003 Herb Alpert Award in the Arts. See https://www.cocofusco.com/bio (accessed May 2020). Furthermore, her provocative work has been displayed at the 56th Venice Biennale, the Sydney Biennale, The Johannesburg Biennial, The London

exploring themes like colonialism, power, race, and gender, have become influential[505]. As an interdisciplinary artist and academic, Fusco combines several mediums in the creation of her artworks, producing books, videos, and authoring academic papers on the issues explored in her artworks. Ever since she first learned about women's involvement in interrogational torture during the 'War on Terror', Fusco has created provocative artistic productions intended to question these practices, exposing them in unexpected spaces, and for unsuspecting audiences. Fusco often takes her art to the streets, non-conforming to the safe space of a museum. This was the case of *Bare Life Study #1*, a 2005 performance meant to expose the ritualized humiliation of detainees. For this performance Fusco took a large group of her female students to the streets of São Paulo (Brazil)[506]. These students were dressed in recognizable orange jumpsuits, what Fusco referred to as "detainee drag"[507], meaning attires (i.e. hoods, orange jumpsuits, etc.) that were already a part of a US cultural iconography of the 'War on Terror'. Fusco herself was dressed as a soldier, and ordered the 'detainees' to scrub the street with toothbrushes[508]. Interested in socially constructed roles, Fusco embodies the role of a harsh soldier, exposing the 'spectacle' of subjugation in practices taking place in military prisons, as well as introducing, through her own body, the problematic of women's role in these practices.

Also in 2005, Fusco underwent a course devised by former US military interrogators, and designed to teach its participants methods of extracting information. Fusco took a group of six women with her, and filmed the experience, which resulted in the video *Operation Atropos*. According to Fusco, the immersive training included a simulation of what prisoners of war go through. The group was 'captured', and locked up like real detainees intended to be interrogated. At the end of the experience, Fusco and the group of women were taught to replicate the procedures enforced on them. Fusco believes military interrogation to be 'political theater', she also considers it to be "[…] a form of intercultural theater imposed upon an unwilling audience of one"[509]. Fusco's assessment

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International Theatre Festival, Tate Liverpool, The Museum of Modern Art, among many other institutions.

[505] A noteworthy example is her performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1993), in collaboration with Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

[506] The performance took place in front of the American Consulate in São Paulo, as part of an invitation to perform at the *15th International Electronic Art Festival - Videobrasil* (2005).

[507] Coco Fusco. *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 22.

[508] See *Bare Life Study #1*. In Coco Fusco's official website. https://www.cocofusco.com/bare-life-study-1. (accessed April 2020).

[509] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 68.

finds expression in situations like the one exposed by Chris Mackey in *The Interrogator's War*, where he describes the 'performance' of military interrogation. Fusco's intention to base her artworks on real accounts, and learned tactics, infused her following works with an uncomfortable verisimilitude, an authenticity that aims to force audiences/readers to encounter a hidden reality, and consider their own role in it. In a later publication, Fusco explained how in the classroom portion of the course the all-female participants were instructed to put up a performance for the captive person, to 'excel at playing dumb', and to only attempt to 'play tough' if their physiques and voices could back up the tactic[510]. These instructions, given by former interrogators, indicates the US military's assumption of the limitations of servicewomen's abilities as interrogators. Fusco's work in *Operation Atropos* was important for her understanding of the military interrogation process, ultimately allowing her to develop her artworks with some knowledge of interrogational tactic.

In order to concisely analyze Fusco's artistic development on the idea of women performing in the interrogation room, I closely examine in this section two of Fusco's artworks, the 2006 performance *A Room of One's Own*: *Women and Power in the New America*, and the 2008 publication *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*.

In the field of the performing arts, in its simplest definition, a 'performance' is the deliberate behavior of a person (or more) for another person (or group of people). Although the very act of warfare has been read as performance[511], and the military has incorporated into their practices a lot of intentional spectacle[512], actual artistic performances have been developed that address the issues concerning this chapter[513]. Fusco's performance, *A Room of One's Own*: *Women and Power in the New America*, is one of them. The performance consisted of a 'military briefing' given by Fusco on the topic of the growing role of US women in the 'War on Terror'. The content of the lecture was highly satirical, as Fusco played the role of a military interrogator, glad to have earned her rightful space in the war efforts, being able to contribute in ways men never

[510] See Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 67.
[511] See Lindsey Mantoan. *War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
[512] See Anastasia Bakogianni (ed.), *War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
[513] e.g. the performance *Guantánamo, Honor Bound to Defend* debuted in 2004 at Tricycle Theater (London); the performance *Women at War* debuted in 2014 at the Rivendell Theatre (Chicago); the performance *The Lonely Soldier Monologues* by Helen Benedict debuted in 2015 at the Cockpit Theatre (London).

could[514]. The title of the performance is a direct reference to Virginia Woolf's 1929 *A Room of One's Own*, but by misreading Woolf's work as a call only for economic equality, Fusco turns the title into a commentary on the rhetoric of women's progress and agency in military spaces. This connection was clarified during the performance, when Fusco stated how she agreed with Woolf's argument that all women must have their own space where they can exhibit their strengths[515]. Fusco acknowledged how the 'War on Terror' has given servicewomen the unique opportunity to demonstrate their 'prowess'. Through the appropriation and perversion of Woolf's important feminist stance, Fusco effectively replicated the US military's response to the calls for gender equality in the military.

Throughout the performance of the 'military briefing', Fusco oftentimes stepped out to interrogate a 'detainee' kept in a small room. The audience could see those interactions on a projected close circuit video (Figure 12, and Figure 13). They could observe Fusco being abusive towards the sometimes hooded 'detainee', yelling insults at him, throwing water on him, forcing him to keep stress positions, etc.[516]. In these instances, Fusco delivered her take on military performativity, as she embodied the role of a strict servicewoman bound to extract the required intelligence out of a detainee by any means necessary. These means included the deliberate subjugation of the 'Muslin man', evidenced by the inclusion of a 'Islamic phrenology' slide shown during Fusco's speech. Displaying this slide, 'Private' Fusco explains the mind of Islamic fundamentalists, declaring it to be rooted in nihilism.

Figure 12 (left) - Screenshot of A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America (2006).

[514] "Up to now, the main obstacle to women playing a central role in the defense of our country has been the fact that we have been barred from joining our brothers on the field of battle". Script for *A Room of One's Own*. Coco Fusco, "A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1, War and Other Bad Shit (MIT Press, Spring, 2008), 152.
[515] Fusco, "A Room of One's Own", 142.
[516] Fusco, "A Room of One's Own", 142, 143, 148.

Private Fusco addresses the audience.

Figure 13 (right) - Screenshot of A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America (2006). Private Fusco interrogates a detainee.

During the performance, Fusco shows gladness that the 'War on Terror' has an enemy for whom female sexuality is a 'threat', offering women the opportunity to be uniquely valuable to the war efforts[517]. *A Room of One's Own* is an important contribution for a better understanding of how spaces like an interrogation room represent the US military's appropriation, and exploitation, of the feminist struggle. Fusco uses her performance to form a strong critique of how the US military has taken advantage of the sexual freedom women fought for during the twentieth century. The artist thus denounces how political and military strategists have "[…] capitalize[d] on female ambition while at the same time severing the attraction to power from the desire for change"[518]. Fusco comments on the manipulation of military women's circumstances by pinpointing military efforts to deliberately separate empowerment from transformation, as women have been conditioned to desire authority and power, but not to question its real implications[519]. Therefore, the power female interrogators exhibit in the interrogation room is nothing more than a performance, as Coco Fusco's work reminds us. The dominance female interrogators exert on the detainees ends once the interrogation is over, as their power to control the course of interrogation is a conditioned performance. However, I refute Fusco's stance that women perform, in military interrogations, for an 'audience of one', as cited above. I recognize that performances' audience as including not just the detainee, but also the other officers (or translators) that might be present, and even the interrogator herself.

Fusco concludes the performance by declaring: "The United States of America needs female intelligence to pierce through the terrorists' veils of secrecy. Finally, we too can be warriors"[520]. Fusco here alludes to the state of 'warrior' as only accessible to men, parodying that it finally became available to women given their ability to use femininity

[517] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 97.
[518] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 101.
[519] Cynthia Enloe's concept of 'maneuvering' can thus be applied in this context. "Out of their sense of need, those military officials and civilian state authorities responsible for preparing for and waging war have tried to maneuver different groups of women and the ideas about what constitutes 'femininity' so that each can serve military objectives. Sometimes these maneuvers have thoroughly succeeded. Women have so internalized the militarized sense of their duties, sources of pride, bases of anxiety that they have virtually no awareness that they have been maneuvered". Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 36.
[520] Fusco, "A Room of One's Own", 152.

as a tool of warfare. Fusco's *A Room of One's Own* draws attention to how women have been kept from positions of power in the military hierarchy, while also satirically performing the newfound 'space' for female agency within military structures.

The artistic (and activist) explorations of military women's involvement in interrogatory practices were drained into one book by Coco Fusco, the 2008 publication *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, a blend of academic and artistic activism (artivism), addressing the topic of torture from a feminist perspective, providing clarity through academic deliberations and criticism from satire. This book has the specific concern of exploring the degrees of involvement in torture by military women, and exposing how their sexuality has been used to gather intelligence. *A Field Guide* is composed of four parts: a critical essay; a document from the FBI; a re-writing of a performance script; and an illustrated guide. Each segment providing different contributions to a common goal, to denounce the institutionalization of the female body by the military, used as a weapon during the 'War on Terror'.

The opening essay is titled 'Invasion of Space by a Female', which refers to the military tactic addressed in the previous section of this chapter. It is not surprising that this particular method is featured in Fusco's work, given how she sees the term is a "[…] testimony in itself of the state's rationalization of its exploitation of femininity"[521]. As the role of women in military interrogation is condensed into a sanctioned military tactic, it effectively feigns legitimacy in its appropriation of female sexuality. In this essay, which takes the form of a letter to Virginia Woolf, the author of *Three Guineas*[522], in an impossible dialogue between two feminists concerned with the role women play during wartime. In the essay, Fusco admits to Woolf her guilt in dragging her work through the muds of modern conflicts, as she appropriated for her performances the title of one of her most famous work, *A Room of One's Own*. Accounting for her subversion of Woolf's ideals of empowerment, Fusco explains how "[y]our [Woolf's] atelier becomes my torture chamber"[523]. This subversion is in fact very revealing of the progression of feminist standpoints, signaling a shift in the ideals that brought Woolf to claim a literal

[521] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 41.
[522] In *Three Guineas* (1938) Virginia Woolf proceeds the work begun in *A Room of One's Own*, providing her views on war and women.
[523] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 8.

and figurative space for women in a male-dominated sphere, which in her case, was the literary world of the 20th century.

Even though the artifact of structuring the text as a letter to Woolf is compelling, and makes for an interesting approach to the subject, Fusco quickly trails off, writing for herself and for an intended 21st century reader, assuming the role of an academic lecturer. Fusco provides an approach to women's relationship with power in what she called the 'New America'. Fusco emphasizes the topic I discussed in the previous chapter, that servicewomen have come to be known as "[…] villains, heroines, and victims" [524]. Fusco elaborates on this, explaining that women's military deeds (whether positive or negative) are always accompanied by a reading of their gender in that particular situation. This standpoint falls in line with the reasoning I have been presenting in this thesis, that the 'War on Terror' has seen a gendered exploitation of their 'human resources'. To make sense of the shock in seeing women torturing, Fusco draws on the work of Angela Y. Davis to clarify that, understanding the social construction of gender must lead to the acknowledgment of women's potential participation in circuits of violence previously inhabited solely by men. Fusco even considers that the denial to implicate feminism in matters of misuse of power is a 'feminist blind spot'.

Passing for an official US manual for interrogators – featuring an 'official' stamp on the cover –, *A Field Guide* presents a re-writing of the script for the aforementioned performance (*A Room of One's Own*) in a segment entitled 'The feminist future'. The book also includes a genuine FBI memo, containing a description of an interrogation involving a female interrogator who made sexual advances as part of her approach. Using this unclassified official document, Fusco effectively blurs the lines between truth and fiction, exacerbating the idiosyncrasies of reality. This document also gives Fusco's argument a more serious tone. Following her thought-provoking essay, and preceding the satiric part of the book, the FBI memo successfully works to balance Fusco's entries, forcing the reader to keep in mind the reality before embarking into her satiric guide for coercive techniques.

At the very end of *A Field Guide*, there is an illustrated manual for female interrogators that questions the moral dilemma of torture in general, and the use of female sexuality in specific. This manual was created out of the accounts of interrogations conducted by women, that Fusco has collected during her research, and that I have

[524] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 9.

covered in this chapter. Even though the manual is satirical, the overall situations it describes were in fact reported by different sources and the titles correspond to actual interrogation techniques. The methods presented suggest female superiority and easiness with the given role. One of the techniques presented, entitled 'Exploiting Cultural Phobias #1' is accompanied by an image of a female soldier threatening a detainee with a dog (Figure 14). Even if the use of Military Working Dogs in abusing detainees was widely debated – mainly after the Abu Ghraib photographs emerged –, their possible connections with servicewomen was not sufficiently explored. In a film I have examined in Chapter 1.3, *Megan Leavey*, there is a scene where a male soldier informs Leavey on how Muslims see dogs, showing US assumptions about Muslim culture. This male soldier claims that Iraqis do not like dogs as a part of their religion, and it is even worst when they have a female handler (which is Leavey's position). This correlation between femininity and dogs was explored by Coco Fusco in *A Field Guide*. In it, Fusco informs military women wishing to 'exploit cultural phobias' that the "[a]ctive stimulation of detainee's fears increases anxiety, often leading to incontinence. The degree of humiliation increases exponentially and heightens regression if performed by a military policewoman in front of other detainees"[525]. This instruction is accompanied by the illustration below (Figure 14), that mocks the efforts in using both femininity and dogs as military weapons, suggesting through ridicule the similarities between dogs and women at the eyes of the US military. This illustration, despite clearly meant as satire, is portrayed as a fusion of US assumptions of Muslim weaknesses. However, as the figure of the blond servicewoman is unmistakably satisfied with the situation, showing a visible smirk, the figure of the detainee can be either cowering in terror, or hiding his face in secondhand embarrassment. Fusco leaves the interpretation of the detainee's response to the viewer, similarly to other illustrations.

[525] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 126.

Figure 14 - 'Exploiting Cultural Phobias #1'. A Field Guide for Female Interrogators (2008), page 126.

The construction of this 'technique' in particular, stresses the intersection between cultural assumptions of Muslim men, and the distortion of female agency in the US military. As the manual progresses, the techniques get gradually more invasive and sexualized, as we see female soldiers undressed and touching the detainee. The last technique, 'Fear Up Harsh', is accompanied by an illustration of an actual reported case, which I have discussed in this chapter: A female interrogator smearing fake menstrual blood on a detainee's face. This image concludes Fusco's book, and does it in such a provoking and shocking manner that it really forces the reader to consider Fusco's previous arguments.

A Field Guide for Female Interrogators is an interesting contribution to the efforts in building interdisciplinary bridges that address contemporary political issues. It is also a bold statement in the field of feminist critique of power and militarization. Fusco's performance and book work to expose the underlying dangers of a feminism that is only characterized in egalitarian terms. Allowing for the acknowledgment of how the 'War on Terror' ideology has appropriated feminist ideas of equality between genders, Fusco incorporates and subverts US military practices in her art. Through her artworks, Fusco was able to demonstrate "[…] the dark side of advancing women's rights through warfare"[526]. As both an artist and an academic, Coco Fusco has challenged the way that the art world and academia engage with contemporary politics.

[526] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 8.

Even though I argue that military women have been turned into tools of warfare in the context of the 'War on Terror', I nonetheless acknowledge their active participation in this process. Since, according to Fusco, "[i]f we refuse to address the ways that women embrace power then we deny ourselves the means of understanding how conservative forces exploit identity politics"[527]. Given that the first woman to ever hold the post of CIA Director, Gina Haspel, was implicated in torture and other criminal actions in 2018, including heading a 'black site' in Thailand known as 'Cat's Eye'[528], it is still pertinent, and necessary, to question the position of women in practices of torture from a feminist point of view, while at the same time offering cultural resistance to the militarization of women's bodies and sexuality.

In this chapter, I have set a framework for an analysis of military women's contribution to torture during interrogation by first establishing what has become of torture practices in the 21st century with the advent of the 'War on Terror', and by defining what are now considered 'clean coercive techniques'. Understanding that the preferred methods have been those that leave the least amount of permanent physical sings of abuse, the development of alternative means of torture thus became recurrent in the pursuit of intelligence in the aftermath of 9/11. It is in this context that Western female soldiers, growing in numbers, were called to contribute to the war efforts in interrogation rooms. Their contribution expected the use of their bodies and sexuality, in unpreceded conducts that appropriated femininity for the sake of gathering information. I consider that the cases explored in this chapter, satirized by artist Coco Fusco, demonstrate the extent of this appropriation.

[527] Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, 81.
[528] See David Smith, "Torture allegations dog Gina Haspel as she is poised to be first female CIA head", *The Guardian* (March 16, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/16/gina-haspel-cia-torture-allegations (accessed April 2020).

Chapter 2.3

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS
Military Women During Deployment

Gendered Representations of Deployment

In the first part of this thesis my focus was on boot camp-related issues, as I analyzed the specificities of this first stage of military life from a gendered point of view. Since I have demonstrated the inclinations of fictional military women in boot camp narratives, I now turn my attention to how women are represented in what I am calling *deployment narratives*, meaning narratives that mostly focus their plot against the backdrop of military service during the 'War on Terror'.

This final chapter of Part II, encompasses the information collected and examined in the previous two chapters (2.1- Controversial Women, and 2.2- Torture Chicks), which allowed an understanding of how actual military women have been portrayed by the US government and by the mainstream media, given their involvement in previously all-male military operations. In this chapter I therefore explore images of servicewomen during deployment. This assessment is important because, as I have stated before in this thesis, by finding meaning outside the case studies' entertainment value, we can see how the fictional image of female soldiers influences, not only how the general (i.e. civilian) population thinks about military, but also how those women see themselves. This ultimately affects enlistment rates, and has the ability to influence women's access to military structures of power, which continues to be mostly populated with men.

In order to contextualize my analysis, I have observed how in military/war narratives focused on military women in WWI and WWII, the women going overseas to contribute to military efforts were mainly nurses, since, as I have previously discussed, women

occupied primarily an auxiliary status in the first two world wars. Remarkably, there have been women occupying special positions like paratroopers, however these stories have not been displayed in cultural productions as much as the stories of military WACs (US Women's Army Corps) and WAVES (US Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) were[529]. Subsequent wars would have their own versions of fictional military women in auxiliary roles, still mainly occupying the position of nurses/health professionals[530]. The Gulf War offered more possibilities for fictional representations of military women during deployment. A noteworthy example is *Courage Under Fire* (1996, dir. Edward Zwick), where a male officer investigates the details surrounding the death of Captain Karen Walden, a female commander, and pilot, of a Medevac Huey helicopter. This film portrays its female character as a strong, brave, and competent soldier, and while she is still a part of a medical team, her position is not one typically associated with women. However progressive this premise might appear, its storyline is not just focused on the military life of Captain Walden. *Courage Under Fire* also explores the undertones of the relationship of this military mother and her child, or what is known as a 'military brat'[531]. Children often play an integral part in deployment narratives, oftentimes acting as an indicator of the disintegration of family life[532]. This aspect is more prominent when the plot focus on military women, since they are expected to fulfill the role of caretakers in their children's lives[533]. The film ultimately suggests that Captain Walden failed in her role as a mother, showing the daughter's pain over her death. This potentially transgressive narrative resorts to depicting a military woman that is simultaneously glorified as a soldier, and characterized as a failed mother[534]. Ultimately, the film depicts a non-conventional female soldier that is reclaimed into domesticity.

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[529] e.g. *Here Come the WAVES* (1944, dir. Mark Sandrich), *Never Wave at a WAC* (1953, dir. Norman Z. McLeod).

[530] e.g. The Korean War was the backdrop for the TV series *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983, created by Larry Gelbart), and the Vietnam War was the setting of TV series *China Beach* (1988-1991, created by John Sacret Young). Both TV series focus on medical staff, emphasizing the role of female nurses.

[531] The term 'military brat' refers to the child of a parent, or parents, serving in the United States Armed Forces.

[532] As they are often shown reacting negatively to the absence of a military parent. e.g. *Fort Bliss* (2014, dir. Claudia Myers).

[533] I further explore this topic, and its fictional representations in the chapter 3.1 – Gendered PTSD.

[534] For a comprehensive analysis of *Courage Under Fire* and its relevance regarding fictional depictions of women during the Gulf War, see Yvonne Tasker, "Soldier's Stories: Women and Military Masculinities in Courage Under Fire", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 19:3, 209-222; also, Susan E. Linville, "The 'Mother' of All Battles: Courage Under Fire and the Gender- Integrated Military", *Cinema Journal* 39, No. 2, Winter, 2000, 100-120.

The representation of female soldiers has changed throughout the decades, nevertheless, some elements have resisted these changes. One of them, is the way that deployment is portrayed as *escapism*, a way to leave behind problems with family, significant others, or even a way to explore a new identity. Grounded in real accounts of servicewomen[535] that have claimed to have joined the military "[…] to escape poverty, to leave rural America, to see the world, and to have a better life"[536], this trope is manifested in many fictional narratives featuring female soldiers. For instance, in *Private Benjamin* (1980, dir. Howard Zieff), when the Army recruiter tells Benjamin she could be eligible for a position in Europe she says: 'Europe? I do need to get away'[537]. In more recent depictions, in *Megan Leavey* (2017, dir. Dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite), the titular character is enticed by a Marine Cops advert that reads 'Get Away, See the World'.

In chapter 1.3 I have explored 'war-romance hybrids' in relation to boot camp narratives featuring female protagonists, analyzing how they commonly focus their plot around an on-base romance. Deployment narratives follow a similar pattern, only usually favoring romantic connections overseas. Showing a romantic connection between two fictional soldiers while they are serving abroad, alludes to military service as a way to find romance. On a military propaganda level, associating the excitement of a possible love connection with the situational danger of being in a foreign country as a part of a military operation, could increase the appeal for enlisting. I acknowledge how deployment narratives focusing on romance overseas effectively bring forth the expectations, and worst assumptions, of traditionalist opponents of women's military service, as these narratives stage intimacy between male and female soldiers[538] as a consequence of women's mobility.

As an example of how deployment romances are developed, I now focus on *Our Girl*. Molly Dawes, the protagonist, is first involved in a romantic triangle during boot camp, as I have explored in chapter 1.3. However, this pattern is repeated during her deployment to Afghanistan. In my interpretation, repeating the formula indicates the exhaustion of the creators' storylines for Dawes. This reduced approach to the character

[535] See Helen Benedict. *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).
[536] Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War* (New York: Columbia University Press. 2007), 147.
[537] *Private Benjamin* (1980, dir. Howard Zieff).
[538] I refer only to fictional heteronormative relationships, as these are the ones mostly addressed by critics. However, is it important to acknowledge the narratives dedicated to LGBTQ+ couples in the military. Examples of LGBTQ+ military narratives are: *A Marine Story* (2010, dir. Ned Farr), and *Burning Blue* (2013, dir. D. M. W. Greer).

of a military woman is, again, revealing of the diminutive fictional space women are allowed to inhabit within the military/war genre. Dawes is thus not offered the opportunity to have a storyline focused exclusively on her military career. In fictional depictions of romance during deployment, such as *Our Girl*, there is a positive conclusion, whereas in the high-profile cases of real military women such as the women involved in the Abu Ghraib photographic scandal, "[…] their military careers ended in the midst of 'amorous disasters' of pregnancy, betrayal, and separation by prison"[539]. In this quote, philosopher Kelly Oliver borrows a term used by Julia Kristeva in *Hatred and Forgiveness*, that of 'amorous disasters'. Kristeva originally associated that term with the lives of *shahidas* (female Islamic bombers), stating that the lives of these women are littered with "[…] amorous disasters — pregnancy outside of marriage, sterility, desire for phallic equality with man"[540]. In her analysis of *shahidas* as examples of female sacrificial violence, Kristeva recognizes them as women who did not accomplish their societies' cultural expectations, and religious beliefs, by having engaged in 'amorous disasters'. The cross-reference offered by Oliver is revealing of a similarity of status between Western and Middle Eastern women, which is generally considered to be quite different[541]. The 'amorous disasters' pinpointed by Oliver, mainly pertaining to Lynndie England's case, are usually not featured in popular culture depictions of military women during the 'War on Terror'. The absence in representing this reality aligns with my argument in chapter 1.3, that romance narratives engage in the dissociation of the plot from the real dangers of warfare, while establishing the military woman as a non-combatant. In the interest of offering a point of contrast from which to analyze the female-centered fictional narratives of deployment in the following sections, I provide some considerations on the patterns of male-centered fictional narratives of deployment.

Though deployment narratives with male protagonists might focus on particular missions, and on overcoming specific dangers, female-centered narratives taking place during deployment tend to divert from aspects of warfare by introducing domestic conflicts into the plot. Despite the frequent mention of how male soldiers long for home, and how their cycles of deployment tours might be affecting their family lives, military men are not as directly implied in the disruption of the family dynamic as women are,

[539] Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 147.
[540] Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2005), 431.
[541] See Kelly Oliver, "Meaning Against Death", *Psychoanalysis, Aesthetics, and Politics in the Work of Julia Kristeva*, edited by Kelly Oliver, S.K. Keltner (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009). 49-64.

since servicemen are depicted as simply honoring their duty. I offer as examples three films that attest to it: *The Hurt Locker* (2008, dir. Kathryn Bigelow); *American Sniper* (2014, dir. Clint Eastwood) and *Thank You for Your Service* (2017, dir. Jason Hall). In all three examples, the family life of the male protagonists has been disturbed by their repeated deployments[542], nonetheless, these soldiers are not blamed for it. The problems their families face is something that has happened *to* the male soldier, and not *because* of him. In these three films the rupture of family life is something he stoically deals with the best he can[543], with the support of his family. Whereas male-centered narratives focus on the toll war enacts on the soldier and his family, female-centered narratives focus on how the soldier's choices have affected their family lives. In films like *Fort Bliss* (2014, dir. Claudia Myers), female soldiers are penalized for forsaking their domestic roles, being rejected by their children, or shunned by their families as a consequence of their military profession[544]. Female-centered deployment narratives are thus hybridized when it comes to its genre, re-categorized as 'war dramas'. They provide the familiar emotional plot of family drama, against the backdrop of military operations. Even though I do not dismiss the potential relevance in portraying a 'human dimension' in fictional representations of warfare, I argue that the systematic confinement of women to domestic issues in deployment narratives, actively contributes to the hindering of military women's progression within military structures. Furthermore, I believe that this assessment is relevant to the wider understanding of representational structures at the intersection between gender and cultural studies.

Shadows of Lynch and England in Popular Visual Culture

Based on the framework for the analysis of narratives of deployment I have considered above, I now assess how fictional approaches of military deployment relate to the case studies I have examined in the previous chapter. Thus, in this section I look for

[542] Also, their lives become affected by subsequent issues with PTDS (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), an issue I will develop on chapter 3.1.
[543] In *Hurt Locker*, the protagonist enlists for re-deployment to Iraq, as he sees it as the fulfillment of his duty; in *American Sniper*, the protagonist joins a program to help veterans cope with PTSD; and in *Thank You For Your Service*, the protagonist volunteers into a rehabilitation center to seek help with his PTSD.
[544] I provide an analysis of *Fort Bliss* regarding this topic on chapter 3.1.

fictional representations of military women influenced by the real cases, and/or characteristics pertaining to the cases of Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England. As I look for these 'shadows' (i.e. influences), I consider how they are employed, and what purposes they serve, examining how 'military performativity' plays a part in the depictions of these military women. With this analysis I intend to determine how these two high-profile servicewomen impacted popular culture through fictional (or semi-fictional) portrayals.

The consumption of war as entertainment, a topic I explore in further detail on chapter 3.2, has accompanied the evolution of the conflicts that make the 'War on Terror'. Therefore, since Jessica Lynch's story of involvement in a convoy attack and subsequent rescue was already dramatized by the news media, the translation of that story to the screen seems almost natural. Despite the rebuttal of her heroic demeanor during the Iraq War, Lynch is still considered a positive example of female soldier, and therefore, a relevant subject for fictional adaptation by US production companies. As it was important to acknowledge that the media and political discourse about Lynch's capture and rescue influenced the public's perception of the role of women in combat, it is important to recognize the importance of Lynch's influence on fictional representations of military women in fictional culture.

On May 18, 2003, not long after Lynch's rescue, a documentary aimed at uncovering the 'true story' behind Lynch's capture and rescue aired on *BBC Two*[545]. In this documentary, one of the Iraqi doctors that treated Lynch (Dr. Anmar Uday) told the reporters how the rescue was 'staged'. Dr. Uday explained that at that time there were no Iraqi military at the hospital, still, he says, "[i]t was like a Hollywood film. They [US soldiers] cried 'go, go, go', […]. They made a show for the American attack on the hospital, [resembling] action movies like Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan"[546]. Dr. Uday's statement is revealing of how military operations are 'performed' for domestic audiences. The doctor's account, plus the released rescue footage[547], reinforce the theory

[545] The fact that a British network (*BBC Two*) was the one to initially shed some light on a story fabricated by US media, shows how close-knit the US news media are, recycling the same story without investigating facts. It could also indicate the degree of political influence on US news outlets.
[546] John Kampfner, "Saving Private Lynch Story 'Flawed'", *BBC News*. May 15, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/3028585.stm. (accessed May 2020).
[547] The rescue video continues available online. See TheFamousPictures, "Jessica Lynch Rescue Army", YouTube video, 4:49 minutes, June 25, 2010, videohttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYtmUx4nHco. (accessed May 2020).

of the US military's deliberate efforts to force a narrative through Jessica Lynch's experience, which converts any subsequent fictional adaptation into a metafictional product.

In 2003, a dramatization of Lynch's period of captivity in Iraq entitled *Saving Jessica Lynch* (dir. Peter Markle) premiered on the US network *NBC*. The fact that the film was not released to cinemas does not necessarily diminish its relevance when it comes to its potential reach and impact. In "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form", Stacy Takacs reminds us of "TV's importance as a site of ideological struggle in the post-9/11 context"[548]. Television has an imposing presence in the lives of Western populations, as it is, for instance, the preferred way to communicate political messages and provide important information to the general population. Even with the recent changes in TV consumption dynamics, largely attributed to the increasing popularity of subscription channels (e.g. *HBO*), and streaming services (e.g. *Netflix*), which are not subjected to the same regulations as open channels, films made for TV, or TV series, continue to exert an impact on a large percentage of viewers. In her essay, Takacs explains how made for TV content can not only enable political discussions at a domestic scale, but can also provide rearticulated fictionalized versions of societies' central beliefs in order to give viewers the opportunity to reconsider the validity of those doctrines and to engage in imagining alternatives to it[549]. Takacs perspective follows the work of Newcomb and Hirsch, who in "Television as a Cultural Forum" established a cultural basis for the analysis and criticism of televised content. These authors devised a bridge between understanding TV as a medium of communication, but also as an 'expressive medium', that through its chosen contents provides material to culturally examine society. With this seminal text, Newcomb and Hirsch affirmed their concern with "[…] 'dominant' messages embedded in the pleasant guise of fictional entertainment", and its often close association with "[…] a complex sort of political control"[550]. By conceiving audiences as empirical entities, researchers like Newcomb and Hirsch have been able to determine the cultural impact of televised content, as well as develop a field for Television Studies[551].

[548] Stacy Takacs, "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form: Bush, Saving Jessica Lynch, and Deadwood", *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the 'War on Terror'*, edited by Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, Karen Randell (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010). 153.
[549] See Takacs, "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form", 162.
[550] Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*. Summer 1983, 562.
[551] See Toby Miller, *Television Studies: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

The made-for-TV movie *Saving Jessica Lynch* is told form the perspective of Mohammad al-Rehaief, the Iraqi lawyer who signaled the US troops to Lynch's location. Takacs satirizes this premise by re-telling it as: "[…] with the aid of a loyal Indian scout, the cavalry locates the missing captive and swoops in to save the day"[552]. Takacs reasons that *Saving Jessica Lynch*, which received endorsement from the US Department of Defense, helped to reinforce the Bush administration's vision for the War in Iraq, and subsequently for the 'War on Terror'. This vision being a confrontation between civilization and savagery, with the character of Jessica Lynch acting as a pawn amidst this conflict. The fact that male soldiers were killed – or captured in the convoy attack, like Lynch – is overlooked, as the movie portrays male soldiers' weaknesses as either the consequence of individual errors, or as a failed attempt to save others. Laurie Piestewa and Shoshana Johnson, whose invisibility from the news media I have addressed in chapter 2.1, also make short appearances in the film. However, their storylines are quickly set aside – with the death of Piestewa, and the capture of Johnston – in favor of the preparation for Lynch's rescue. The inclusion of these two soldiers in the plot serves to symbolically identify Lynch as a representative for all military women, reinforcing the invisibility of non-white service women in fictional representations as well.

Even though *Saving Jessica Lynch* was advertised as depicting a true story, her capture and rescue did not occur as the public was first told, as I have explained in a previous chapter. Lynch herself denounced the movie's false portrayal of the events that took place in Iraq. Takacs argues that the film "[…] deployed Western imagery quite overtly to call up the cultural fantasy of regeneration-through-violence activated by the captivity narrative"[553]. As explained in chapter 2.1 of this thesis, as a white young woman, Lynch fitted the pattern of captivity narratives. The very title of the film, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, evokes *passivity*, signaling Lynch's lack of agency in her own story. From the first scenes in Iraq, the character of Lynch reacts to her surroundings in a frantic, inappropriate and non-military way. Lynch's performance as a soldier is interrupted with scenes of Lynch's past in the US, mostly reminding the viewer of her innate femininity. Through the contrast of domestic and military scenes, the movie suggests a friction between the two worlds, as if the injuries Lynch sustained were the only possible outcome for her participation in combat. Stacy Takacs defends that, in the film, Lynch was "aggressively

[552] Takacs, "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form", 156.
[553] Takacs, "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form", 154.

feminized"[554] for the sake of making the convoy attack seem more dangerous. As presented in the movie, Lynch's femininity incapacitated her from her performance of 'military masculinity' while under fire. During the convoy attack, Lynch is seen abandoning the implied 'performance of military masculinity', embracing an infantilized femininity which culminates in the comparison between Lynch and an Iraqi child, al-Rehaief's daughter. The comparison is rooted in al-Rehaief's pity for Lynch, as she reminds him of his daughter: ''She is just a girl. A child. When I look at that girl in the hospital bed, I think of our daughter"[555]. This comparison exerts influence on the way that the audience will read the character of Jessica Lynch. Not only does it infantilize Lynch, but also this cross-cultural connection makes a case for worldwide female fragility.

The film is overall more focused on how Lynch's rescue was planned and conducted, than on Lynch's experiences and life. This is not to say that it is essentially 'wrong' to fictionalize a story from the point of view of the rescuers. In fact, *Saving Private Ryan* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998), which inspired the title for *Saving Jessica Lynch* – despite Lynch not being attributed a rank in the title, which coincidentally is the same as Ryan's: Private –, is more focused on Ryan's rescue team, and not on Ryan *per se*[556]. Through the deliberate assimilation with Spielberg's acclaimed film, *Saving Jessica Lynch* intended to gain from the connection of Jessica's story with the heroic rescue of Private Ryan, at the same time reminding audiences of the 'supremacy' of US armed forces through a forced association between World War II and the Iraq War.

The movie's portrayal of the actual events lies somewhere between facts and fiction, since Lynch is (accurately) not seen firing back at the convoy attackers, but on the other hand she is (inaccurately) seen being interrogated by Iraqi militia, and even slapped while on a hospital bed, which reportedly never happened. *Saving Jessica Lynch* is thus a product of a myriad of statements, images, and collective assumptions, combined to create a character that, by the end, only slightly resembles the 'true' Jessica Lynch[557].

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[554] Takacs, "The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form", 156.
[555] In *Saving Jessica Lynch*, dir. Peter Markle, 2003.
[556] For critical comparisons of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Saving Jessica Lynch*, see Aaron B. O'Connell, "Saving Private Lynch: A Hyperreal Hero in an Age of Postmodern Warfare", *War, Literature and the Arts 17*, no. 1-2 (2005): 33-52; and Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 80.
[557] I make a cautionary use of 'true', as I follow Jacques Lacan's theory that there is not one 'simple', 'whole' or 'absolute' truth, but multiple. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

In *Docu-Fictions of War*, a 2019 work on how representational narratives have manipulated popular opinion in different conflicts, Tatiana Prorokova clarifies how war fiction works to offer factual documentation while at the same time capturing embedded cultural representations. In her analysis of cultural texts on war, Prorokova contends that they are not only fictional, but are 'docu-fictions', works that relay documented realities/subjects, while including fictionalized aspects that manage to expose the cultural views at the time of their production. Prorokova lists numerous examples of non-documentaries – which are not purely fictional either –, among them is *Saving Jessica Lynch*[558], which begins with the inscription 'based on a true story', having some aspects changed 'for dramatic purposes'. As Prorokova explains in *Docu-Fictions of War*, this approach can hinder the public's ability to differentiate between reality and fiction, which in Lynch's case is particularly troublesome, since her story was already partially fabricated to begin with. However, as military entertainment is aimed towards financial gain, it falls on the viewer to realize that what they are watching is not a reliable narrative. This would depend a great deal on the viewer's common sense, as Jacques Derrida puts it on his reading of Lacan's concept of the passage of truth through fiction: "[…] common sense will always have made the distinction between reality and fiction"[559]. However, as the lines between fact and fiction are intentionally blurry, it is difficult for the general civilian public to know if they should rely on a narrative of something they have never experienced, as is the case of warfare. Writing on visual narratives based on real wars, Prorokova determines that "[…] while they do attempt to transmit a historic reality, they succeed only in *re-creating* one, employing an artistic approach"[560]. Through the presentation of inaccessible war experiences to the general public, this *re-creation* contributes to an understanding of warfare history. This reasoning derives from Baudrillard's analysis of 'simulacra' and 'simulation', as it conceives that a re-creation of a war reality (i.e. 'simulation') thus becomes more 'real' than the actual warfare[561].

My final assessment of *Saving Jessica Lynch* is that, as the sole fictional adaptation of Lynch's highly mediated story, the film fails to center the plot on her. Lynch is denied a voice, and is shown as a passive object for retrieval, her fragile body rescued as an

[558] Others include *Redacted* (2007, dir. Brian De Palma); *The Kingdom* (2007, dir. Peter Berg); *Body of Lies* (2008, dir. Ridley Scott); etc.
[559] Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth", *Yale French Studies*. No.52, Graphesis: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy, 1975, 89.
[560] Tatiana Prorokova, *Docu-Fictions of War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 275.
[561] See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1994).

affirmation of the protective abilities of male soldiers, and of the abilities of the institution they stand for. The fictionalized version of Lynch thus acts as a signifier of female victimhood and dependency. The fictional depiction of Lynch's idealistic enlistment, consequent involvement in a life-threatening combat, and capture as a POW (Prisoner of War), constructs a narrative that suggests women are deluded when it comes to military deployment. The movie's presentation of Lynch's story in this manner, effectively encourages viewers to consider that women should not serve in combat, which I believe to be a disservice to the progression of gender equality in the armed forces.

Jessica Lynch's interview with Diane Sawyer (November 2003), where she addressed the misinformation regarding her story, and the film, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, coincided with the publication of Lynch's biography *I Am a Soldier, Too*, which I have examined in this thesis as well (chapter 2.1). This biography, while conveying factual information surrounding Lynch's military career, also works to develop a quasi-fictional character out of Lynch, mirroring the approach of *Saving Jessica Lynch*. According to Oliver in *Women as Weapons of War*, in Lynch's biography she is desexualized, infantilized, and overly feminized in what Oliver refers to as her 'prissification'[562]. At the end of *I Am a Soldier, Too*, after Lynch's story has been told, Bragg considers the artistic renderings of Lynch. As Bragg states, "[s]he [Lynch] has had songs written about her, and poems, and even interpretative dance pieces". He remarks how several artists painted portraits and sketches of her face, adding that "[…] they all used the same model: the picture of Jessi and her camouflage cap, the flag behind her. It is the likeness that they love"[563]. By emphasizing the appeal of her *likeness*, Bragg admits that it is not the real Jessica Lynch that is revered, but a fabricated idea of her. The mentioned photograph of Lynch (Figure 15) appeared not only on different magazine covers[564], but it was also featured on the cover of Bragg's biography, making him complicit in the propagation of this idealized version of Lynch[565].

[562] See Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War*, 62.
[563] Rick Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 201.
[564] e.g. *People Magazine* (April 21, 2003), *Daily News* (April 2, 2003).
[565] Lynch later capitalized on her notoriety, working as an actress she made her film debut playing a small role as Military Specialist Summer L. Gabriel in *Virtuous* (2015, dir. Bill Rahn). Lynch's role was loosely based on her own experiences in the Iraq War. Lynch also played non-military parts, evidenced by her role in the 2016 drama *One Church*, which depicts the relationships of two families with their church. (See Jessica Lynch's full filmography: *IMDB: Jessica Lynch*. https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0528342/?ref_=tt_cl_t2. accessed May 2020.)

Figure 15 - US Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch. (public access image).

Bragg discussed this photograph of Lynch (Figure 15) in the last chapter of the biography, pondering on Lynch's 'legacy', and affirming that this image casts a 'long shadow'. Comparing it to Lynch's 'real' persona, Bragg declares that it "[…] is larger, much larger, but it is only a trick of light"[566]. I argue that this 'trick of light' can be extended to Lynch's fictional representation, as it manifestly exhibits expected traits that corroborate the collective idea of Lynch's experience, and ultimately, women's performance during deployment.

In the same manner that Jessica Lynch was highly influential in the public perception of the role of women in combat, so was Lynndie England, for different reasons, as I have already discussed. As I have done above for Lynch, I will now consider the impact of Lynndie England's media representations in fictional representations of military women in popular visual culture.

The Abu Ghraib torture scandal sparked the development of documentary films that intended to both expose and provide explanations for the actions of the US soldiers. In 'Documenting the Documentaries on Abu Ghraib', Stjepan G. Mestrovic, a sociologist that participated in the Abu Ghraib trials as an expert witness [567], writes on the distortion

[566] Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, 203.
[567] See Stjepan Mestrovic, *The Trials of Abu Ghraib* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007).

of facts in Abu Ghraib documentaries. Mestrovic argues that the 'culture industry', much like the military, "[…] dehumanizes its subjects, which are used for news and entertainment, and it uses machinelike techniques to entertain and inform the masses"[568]. Mestrovic's appropriation of critical theorist Theodor Adorno's term 'culture industry'[569] changes the original association between popular culture and a factory – given the mass-production of standardized cultural goods –, now linking popular culture with the militarized process of 'manufacturing' standardized soldiers[570]. In his analysis of the culture industry's depiction of Abu Ghraib, Mestrovic focus on the documentaries *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007, dir. Rory Kennedy), and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008, dir. Errol Morris), contrasting their approach on the same subject, which Mestrovic sees as a competition to convey news and information for a profit. In his essay, Mestrovic explains how he accompanied the soldiers in the process of participating in the documentaries, and how that process was 'exploitative', 'uncomfortable', and 'deceitful'. Mestrovic concludes the essay by denouncing the cultural exploitation of what he calls the 'Abu Ghraib drama' signifying the '[…] triumph of systemic sadism"[571]. Even though I agree with Mestrovic's critique of the exploitative nature of the 'culture industry', which has financial gain as its main goal, I also believe in the importance of cultural products (both fictional and non-fictional) to the social processing of an important event like the Abu Ghraib torture case. I do not counter the assessment Mestrovic makes in his text, that the soldiers depicted in the photographs abusing Iraqi detainees were not 'born sadists', but were both incited by their military training, and engulfed in their deployment reality[572]. I do, however, disagree with Mestrovic's dismissal of the importance of the documentaries to the collective discussion and understanding of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal.

[568] Stjepan G. Mestrovic, "Documenting the Documentaries on Abu Ghraib: Facts Versus Distortion", *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination. Michael Flynn*, edited by Fabiola F. Salek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). 273.
[569] As introduced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a work published in 1947, and written by Frankfurt School philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno.
[570] For a critical analysis of the relationship between popular culture and military see Carl Boggs, Tom Pollard (eds.). *The Hollywood War Machine: US Militarism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[571] Mestrovic, "Documenting the Documentaries on Abu Ghraib", 290.
[572] This dynamic was perhaps best explained by psychologist Philip Zimbardo in *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London: Rider, 2007). Building on his famous 'Stanford Prison Experiment', Zimbardo establishes here how both psychological and social factors can result in immoral acts being committed by people who would otherwise never engage in such behavior.

Documentary films are often responsible for unearthing realities previously unknown to the general public[573]. For instance, *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007, dir. Alex Gibney) was instrumental in demonstrating how US military acts of torture were recognized and authorized by the military chain of command up to the White House[574]. Documentaries like this can promote anti-establishment views and perspectives, and are often attempts to oppose governmental monitoring and control of sensitive information[575]. *Standard Operating Procedure*, is an example of a documentary that, disregarding the story frame attributed to the soldiers by mainstream news media, attempts to deconstruct the Abu Ghraib photographs by questioning not only the people involved, but also by addressing the context they were inserted in. Morris' group of interview subjects for the documentary included Lynndie England, who, when questioned about her role in the scandal, begins by proclaiming that "[…] it's a man's world", and that every single woman in the military prison was there because of a man, "[d]ifferent reasons, yes, but it was because of a man"[576]. England then explains how Corporal Charles Graner was behind every photograph she appeared in, orchestrating her every pose. England speaks of her love for Graner, and how his personality was enticing to the point she would do anything for him.

In an interview with director Joshua Oppenheimer, Errol Morris defended his documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure*, explaining his intention to show how "[…] the real story of Abu Ghraib is in no way contained in those images"[577], and that documentaries like his can help to shed some light on the context of an event while giving a voice to the intervenients. Oppenheimer states that seeing Lynndie England speak for herself in the documentary is "[…] almost like an antidote to seeing [her] in all these photographs"[578]. Oppenheimer admits to a strangeness in seeing England speaking for the camera about the infamous photographs, which, indulging his 'antidote' metaphor, were 'poisonous'. He adds that England's close-ups "[…] make her human, almost mythically

[573] e.g. *Uncovered: The War on Iraq* (2004, dir. Robert Greenwald) brought to light issues of US government secrecy regarding war policies.
[574] *Taxi to the Dark Side* won the 2008 Academy Award for best feature documentary. For a critical analysis of this documentary, see Julia Lesage, "Torture Documentaries and *Taxi to the Dark Side* (Alex Gibney, 2007)", *Screening the Tortured Body: The Cinema as Scaffold*, edited by Mark de Valk (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 207-237.
[575] See Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder: Paradigm Press, 2005).
[576] *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008, dir. Errol Morris), DVD.
[577] Joshua Oppenheimer, "Misunderstanding Images: Standard Operating Procedure, Errol Morris", *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, edited by Joram Ten Brink, Joshua Oppenheimer (London: Wallflower Press, 2012), 399.
[578] Oppenheimer, "Misunderstanding Images", 413.

so"[579]. The subversion of the expected 'monster' depicted in 'poisonous' photographs is meant to counter the narrative built up by the mainstream media, offering England a platform to contribute to the discussion of her own mythology[580]. Nonetheless, I contend that this approach is likewise an entry in the mythological construction of Lynndie England, even if by opposition. As Oppenheimer stated, the documentary goes to great lengths to 'make her human', so much so, that it borders on the mythological. Even if I do not see this counter-narrative as having the same weight as the one constructed for England by the news media, I nonetheless consider it to be a *quasi-fictional* representation of her, important for the larger understanding of how her own voice is delivered and portrayed. While *Standard Operating Procedure* is presented as a documentary, it could be argued that it follows under the same categorization of 'docu-fiction' as *Saving Jessica Lynch*, according to Prorokova's work, which rejects that a documentary could offer an completely authentic account of facts and subjects[581]. Nevertheless, documentaries can provide an approach that fictional narratives are not able to convey, that of a closely personal nature. In the previous chapter I have shown how the public circulation of 'eyewitness' materials – meaning soldiers' photographs, videos, etc. through online platforms like *YouTube* – have impacted the perspective of civilians about warfare, and have influenced cultural representations of the 'War on Terror'. Therefore, I reason that documentaries like *Iraq in Fragments* (2006, dir. James Longley) and *The War Tapes* (dir. Deborah Scranton, 2006)[582] are uniquely able to open a window into a reality unknown to the majority of Western societies, oftentimes providing a counter-narrative to the current ideology transmitted through the news media[583].

In addition to critical documentaries focusing on the Iraq War, the visual narratives that fictionalized the conflict also play an important part in the engagement of the public in political dialogue. Although Lynndie England was featured in non-fictional

[579] Oppenheimer, "Misunderstanding Images", 413.
[580] I follow Roland Barthes theories regarding mythologies: That dominant ideologies repurpose popular culture by depriving subjects of its real meaning, creating 'myths', which carried new, and often quite different implications. Barthes further advocated that these 'myths' facilitated the dissemination and assimilation of particular worldviews. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972).
[581] See Prorokova, *Docu-Fictions of War*, 45.
[582] *Iraq in Fragments* provided a platform for Iraqi citizens to voice their thoughts about the war in their country. *The War Tapes* is comprised of footage collected from cameras given to US soldiers deployed in Iraq.
[583] For a comprehensive outline of documentaries about the Iraq War, see: Douglas Kellner, "The Cinematic Iraq War", *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 199-238.

documentary films, there are not that many films/TV series that purposely fictionalize her, supposedly because she is not a person that US audiences would like to see transposed onto the screen. Production companies must assess if audiences are willing to be entertained by certain politically charged events, like the Abu Ghraib torture scandal. The overall commercial failure of films depicting the Iraq War was analyzed by Martin Barker in *A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Films*. The unresponsiveness of the general public to films about the Iraq War testifies to a disillusionment with US policies throughout the 'War on Terror'. This is arguably the case with Abu Ghraib. *A Toxic Genre* was published in 2011, and time proved that other angles were possible in the fictionalization of commercially successful Iraq War films. For instance, *Zero Dark Thirty* and *American Sniper*, released in 2012 and 2014 respectively, were well received by both audiences and critics. This is most likely attributed to the fact that these films were released after US troops were withdrawn from Iraq (2011)[584], which allowed for a distanced, and therefore 'safer', cultural introspection about it.

Although Lynndie England was not deliberately fictionalized in a film in the same straightforward way that Jessica Lynch was, England was, nonetheless, insidiously influential upon the representations of torture, and torturers, in fictional narratives. Since the Abu Ghraib photographs controversy, England has become a well-known symbol for military torture, being referenced in a myriad of different cultural productions, including plastic artworks[585], plays[586], cartoons[587], even being appropriated into the conceptual presentation of a band[588], among other examples.

In 2014 a film focused on the Abu Ghraib military prison was released, entitled *Boys of Abu Ghraib* (dir. Luke Moran). For all the news media focus on the 'girls' of Abu Ghraib, it is significant that the only fictional film about the prison should focus

[584] Nonetheless, it is important to note that the US embassy and consulates still maintains a staff of more than 20,000 soldiers is Iraq, for the purpose of securing US assets, engaging in the suppression of terrorist cells (ISIL) and the training local troops. See James Denselow, "The US departure from Iraq is an illusion", *The Guardian*. 25 October 2011. London. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/oct/25/us-departure-iraq-illusion (accessed May 2020).

[585] e.g. Martha Rosler's photomontage *Election (Lynndie)*. From the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, 2004.

[586] e.g. Judith Thompson, *My Pyramids: How I Got Fired From the Dairy Queen and Ended Up in Abu Ghraib*. Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Edinburgh, 2005; and Peter Morris. *Guardians*. The Culture Project (New York, 2006).

[587] e.g. "Homeland Insecurity", *American Dad*. Season 1, episode 6; and "Saving Private Brian", *Family Guy*. Season 5, episode 4.

[588] The Australian band *Abu Ghraib* performs under the guise of torturers and tortured, with an album entitled 'Enhanced Torture Techniques' (2019), and songs titled 'Stress Position', and 'Hot Box'.

exclusively – to the point of highlighting that aspect in the title – on men. The plot revolves around a fictional male soldier, Military Police (MP) Jack Farmer, who is sent to Abu Ghraib during deployment. As he deals with the tedious routines and constant delays in his discharge, Farmer develops a friendly bond with a detainee, Ghazi Hammoud. Notably, only one military woman is featured in the film, with only a few seconds of screen time. The decision to produce a film about the 'boys' of Abu Ghraib when it was the involvement of women that caused the most controversy is questionable. I consider the complete omission of female torturers in the film by itself an indicator of their disruptive presence in the photographs, meaning that their possible fictionalization was considered to be generally unwanted by the public.

In this section I have demonstrated how potentially transgressive portrayals were reduced in agency, and remitted to a gendered approach on the intersection of the categories of 'soldier' and 'women'. Portrayals like *Saving Jessica Lynch* and *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, regardless of their differences, work towards a single goal, that of female *othering*, the deliberate exclusion of women from military spaces. These portrayals ultimately obfuscate the actual achievements of real military women who hold important positions in the military and perform their jobs efficiently.

Representing Torture and Camp X-Ray (2014)

As established, the military torture debates that have erupted after information leaked from US controlled prisons like Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo (GITMO) have been very influential on popular culture[589], spawning several documentaries and fictional adaptations. With the intent of continuing my analysis of how military women are represented in Western visual culture, in this last section of the chapter I examine how the issue of torture is treated in deployment narratives. To achieve this, I begin with some considerations of how government-sanctioned torture has been represented in popular culture (i.e. films, TV series, etc.), then moving on to particular fictional representations

[589] Torture has infiltrated into mainstream culture to the point of its *aestheticization*. Given some fashion designers drawing inspiration from torture practices to create high fashion pieces. For instance, John Galliano's 2008 Menswear fall fashion line, featuring male models walking with ropes around their necks, fake bruises and blood on their bodies, and hoods on their heads.

of torture featuring military women. In the interest of specificity, I examine *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler) as an example of how women's presence is negotiated in fictional representations of military spaces of abuse. I then articulate *Camp X-Ray* with cultural products with similar contexts, like the novel *Sand Queen* (2011, Helen Benedict), and the TV series *Our Girl*. Moreover, I also contrast *Camp X-Ray* with *Boys of Abu Ghraib* (2014, dir. Luke Moran), in the interest of establishing a gendered approach to how differently, or not, fictional military men and women are represented in semi-fictional spaces of torture. I likewise analyze how these two case studies portray the topic of engaging with the 'enemy', questioning the purpose of this method, and considering if/how a gendered approach affects the outcome of those interactions.

There is a large number of plastic/visual artworks bent on addressing issues of torture, many of which I have presented in this thesis[590]. A particularly influential example is what W. J. T. Mitchell called the 'Abu Ghraib Archive'[591] in *Cloning Terror*. The uncovered abuses at this detention center inspired a great number of artistic responses, notably, the paintings in Fernando Botero's *Abu Ghraib* series (2006). This collection of paintings explored the humiliation[592] and abuses captured in the infamous photographs, at the same time morally implicating the viewer[593]. Other artists, like Martha Rosler or Jonathan Hobin explored the uncanniness in the violence of the Abu Ghraib photographs, either through superimposing the images with domestic settings – as Rosler did in her collage, *Bringing the War Home* (2004) –, or by reenacting the images using children – as Hobin did in his photograph, *A Boo Grave* (2010). Although these are considered 'highbrow' creations, plastic artworks are not the sole, or even the most sought out, cultural productions that convey the socio-political and historical conditions of its time. Visual productions like films and TV series are also important cultural productions, as

[590] Relevant texts that examine these artworks are, for instance: W. J. T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images. 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2007).
[591] According to W. J. T. Mitchell, '[…] the 'Abu Ghraib archive' [is a] body of texts and images, recordings and remembrances that is centrally constituted by, but not limited to, the 279 photographs and nineteen video clips gathered by the Army's Criminal Investigation Command (CID)". In Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, 112.
[592] In some of the paintings in the Abu Ghraib collection, Botero depicts detainees dressed with feminine undergarments, emphasizing a topic I have explored in the previous chapter, how culturally impactful was the use of femininity as a weapon of torture.
[593] See Frank Möller, "The implicated Spectator: From Manet to Botero", *Terror and the Arts: Artistic, Literary, and Political Interpretations of Violence from Dostoyevsky to Abu Ghraib*, edited by Matti Hyvärinen, Lisa Muszynski (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 25-40; and Jack Rasmussen, "Botero: Abu Ghraib and the Economics of Censorship", *Exhibitionist*, Fall 2008, 16-20.

they too reflect on, challenge, or even subvert the dominant ideological currents of their times. As a medium that interweaves sound, dialogue, and image, it can uniquely bring forth a sense of reality that other artworks can only hint at. In *Screening Torture*, Flynn and Salek defend that films – and by extension TV series – possess an 'existential momentum' that draws the viewer into inhabiting it by force of its immediacy[594]. Drawing on Flynn and Salek's statement, I thus turn my attention to how torture has been fictionalized during the 'War on Terror', and if/how military women have been included in these depictions.

Having explored in the previous chapter how torture methods and their efficacy is seen by specialists in the area, I identified a general agreement that torture is not the most reliable practice to obtain information from detainees. Nonetheless, visual productions (e.g. films and TV series) have dismissed this understanding in favor of an entertaining and spectacular approach to torture. Flynn and Salek state in the introduction of *Screening Torture*, that "[…] in the post-September 11 era torture has been given magical qualities"[595]. Here, Flynn and Salek refer to how, in visual narratives, torture has been usually depicted in ending with a confession that 'magically' reveals all the needed information to resolve the issue that brought about the interrogation, leading the authors to declare that "[…] the accepted 'iconography' of torture is misleading"[596]. By relaying this message intertwined with entertainment, narratives that depict this formula ultimately reinforce the idea that torture is an infallible way to extract information. The US TV series *24* (2001-2010, created by Robert Cochran and Joel Surnow) is one of such narratives[597]. This series dedicated some of its plot to the justification of torture for the sake of stopping an imminent threat, what is commonly referred to by torture apologists as the 'ticking time bomb' situation[598]. Even though this situation has seldom (if ever) happened in reality, it has still been employed as a reason for torture[599]. In 'Movies of Modern Torture

[594] See Michael Flynn, Fabiola F. Salek, *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.
[595] Flynn & Salek, *Screening Torture*, 3.
[596] Flynn & Salek. *Screening Torture*, 5.
[597] Other TV shows depicting torture are: CBS's *Criminal Minds* (2005-2020), Showtime's *Dexter* (2006-2013), The CW's *Supernatural*, NBC's *Blindspot*, FX's *American Horror Story*, among others.
[598] See Alex Adams, "The Ticking Time Bomb and Beyond", *Political Torture in Popular Culture: The Role of Representations in the post-9/11 Torture Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 122-156.
[599] In *Torture and Democracy*, Rejali reveals that actual torturers "[…] did not really operate under the urgency of a ticking time bomb" (329). For his considerations on fictionalized interpretations of the 'ticking time-bomb' narrative device see Rejali's "Ticking Time-Bomb Stories", *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination*, edited by Michael Flynn and Fabiola F. Salek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 227.

as Convenient Truths' (2012), which explores the way Western visual productions (i.e. films and TV series) provide narrative devices that expiate the use of torture, Darius Rejali describes how producers of *24* or *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005 created by Steven Bochco, David Milch) "[…] frame torture and terrorism around the theme of manliness"[600]. These cultural productions are then echoes of patriarchal values, which encourage manly depictions of bravery. Rejali thus exposes a 'raw anxiety' in post-9/11 Western societies, the "[…] fear that we have become sissies and our enemies know it"[601]. One way to confront this feeling of anxiety and fear that Rejali speaks of, has been by processing them through explanatory narratives in popular culture.

Even though torture scenes have been featured in many visual narratives across different genres[602], they arguably found its niche in the horror genre, spawning a category that film critic David Edelstein called 'torture-porn'[603]. This profitable trend, considered nihilistic by Edelstein, encompassed films like *Saw* (2004, dir. James Wan), *Hostel* (2005, dir. Eli Roth), *Wolf Creek* (2005, dir. Greg McLean), among others. Characterized by their unabashed scenes of torture, this group of horror films received a lot of attention and criticism for their on-screen depictions of gore. However, it is important to highlight that within the horror genre, torture and sexual violence has proliferated in past decades under difference labels, such as 'splatter movies'. So, what we see in the so-called 'torture porn' trend is not an original creation, but a revival of a cyclical cinematic tendency. In *Post-9/11 Horror in America Cinema*, a work on how the horror genre has uniquely responded to the changes in a post-9/11 society, Kevin J. Wetmore considers the impact of 'torture porn' on the horror genre, arguing that it "[…] domesticates and controls these images [of real acts of torture] and provides a narrative which justifies them in context and in the world"[604]. Nonetheless, I argue that while generally seen as encapsulating the atmosphere of post-9/11 anxieties, the films labeled as 'torture porn' deserve more thoughtful criticism beyond that tagline, as they are a product of a time when discussions about torture already occupied news media outlets. By reducing a large group of films to a

[600] Darius Rejali, "Movies of Modern Torture as Convenient Truths", *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination*, edited by Michael Flynn and Fabiola F. Salek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 228.
[601] Rejali, "Movies of Modern Torture as Convenient Truths", 228.
[602] e.g. the biblical drama *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, dir. Mel Gibson), the spy film *Casino Royale* (2006, dir. Martin Campbell), the action film *Body of Lies* (2008, dir. Ridley Scott), the political thriller *Rendition* (2007, dir. Gavin Hood), etc.
[603] David Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn", *New York Magazine*. January 26, 2006. https://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/. (accessed May 2020).
[604] Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 98.

scandalous moniker, and inappropriately invoking pornography while doing it, Edelstein, and the scholars and critics of the genre that followed his premise[605], cut out any possibilities of engaging in constructive discussions with these cultural productions.

Seeing that the depiction of torture has adhered so well to other genres, I will now focus my attention on the military/war genre. Pertaining the field that triggered the torture debates in the first place, it is not surprising that torture techniques should appear in fictional depictions of warfare/life during deployment. However, even though many military/war films include scenes of torture, these might not be directly linked to a real place or situation. Other films, though, use as a setting real locations strongly associated with US military torture cases, such as the prisons of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay. It is important to consider here the extent of reality-based elements in the analyzed narratives. There is a significant difference between creating a space of military torture that, while grounded in documented reports, is still a fictional place, and setting a narrative in a well-known military facility. This is the case of *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler), situated on the homonymous camp, a temporary detention facility located at the Guantánamo Bay detention center. According to Prorokova, *Camp X-Ray* falls under the category of 'docu-fiction' or war. Even though there are actual documentaries that explore the so-called GITMO[606], there are also visual works of fiction that take place at Guantánamo[607], further blurring the 'docu-fiction' category. Even though *Camp X-Ray* was shot at an abandoned correctional facility, it brings us into that reality through visual references to actual photographs that circulated in the media (January 2002) depicting the abuse of detainees at Guantánamo Bay[608]. The images illustrate the sensory deprivation of detainees, turning the men into what Anne McClintock called in 'Paranoid Empire' "[…] unpeopled bodies, reduced to subhuman status, mere property of the state"[609]. In

[605] e.g. Steve Jones, *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); and Aaron Michael Kerner, *Torture Porn in the Wake of 9/11: Horror, Exploitation, and the Cinema of Sensation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).
[606] *The Road to Guantánamo* (2006, dir. Michael Winterbottom) is told from the perspective of the abused, unlike *Standard Operating Procedure*. Gitmo: The New Rules of War (2005, dir. Erik Gandini), directed by Swedish documentary filmmakers and Tarik Saleh, examines the Guantánamo Bay detention facility.
[607] e.g. *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantánamo Bay* (2008, dir. Jon Hurwitz).
[608] For an official account of the investigations of abuse at GITMO, see
"Army Regulation 15–6: Final Report: Investigation into FBI Allegation of Detainee Abuse at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba Detention Facility". (April 1, 2005, amended June 9, 2005), https://www.thetorturedatabase.org/files/foia_subsite/pdfs/schmidt_furlow_report.pdf (accessed May 2020).
[609] Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters form Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib", *Small Axe*, Number 28, (Volume 13, Number 1), March 2009, Duke University Press. 35.

this text, where McClintock analyses the possible intents in knowingly torture innocent people, she comments on how these photographs capture the "[…] *hyper-visibility* of the men as *bodies*", while at the same time accentuating their "[…] *invisibility* as *human beings*"[610]. Moreover, McClintock exposes the detention center for its "elaborate performance of legality", its "[…] attempt to theatrically display state violence as legitimate"[611]. Returning to Baudrillard's aforementioned theory, the behavior of the US military in Guantánamo Bay represents a 'simulacrum' of legality, in the sense that it created a facade of legitimacy to sustain illegal and inhuman acts[612]. A film that accurately explores this theatricality is *The Report* (2019 dir. Scott Z. Burns), a fictionalization of the investigations of the CIA Interrogation Project[613].

Camp X-Ray tells the story of a young soldier, Private First-Class Amy Cole, who is stationed at GITMO during her deployment. There she befriends a detainee, Ali Amar, whose perception of both of their positions ends up changing Cole's beliefs in the US military's mission. The films starts by being transgressive in its depiction of military women, as Cole tells her mother that not only is she planning on continuing a military career, she rejects her encouragements for romance, saying "Mom, stop. I'm not dating an Army guy, and I didn't join the military to find a husband"[614]. The plot becomes even more atypical when we see Cole volunteering to join an Initial Reaction Force (IRF) strike, a special unit meant to physically subdue prisoners, described by Corporal Ransdell as "a four man team called in when shit hits the fan on the walk"[615]. In reality, this unit has been reported as the source of brutal attacks on detainees at Guantánamo[616]. In her first intervention as a part of the IRF, Cole is struck by a detainee, leaving her with a bloody lip. Having Cole injured as a result of an IRF strike subtly justifies the unit's existence to the audience, validating it. At the same time, the scene emphasizes how Cole is unfit to belong to this unit.

After this incident we see that Cole's daily task is to deliver books to detainees, first identifying her as a holder of knowledge. However, there is an immediate culture clash

[610] McClintock, "Paranoid Empire", 65.
[611] McClintock, "Paranoid Empire", 67.
[612] For an extensive collection of detainees' accounts of their time in GITMO, see Andy Worthington, *The Guantánamo Bay Files: The Stories of 759 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
[613] Notably, in a scene an interrogator is told: "You have to make this [Enhance Interrogation Techniques] work. It's only legal of it works". *The Report* (2019 dir. Scott Z. Burns).
[614] *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler).
[615] *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler).
[616] See Worthington, *The Guantánamo Bay Files*, "The most extreme brutality came from a special unit […] a riot squad responsible for beating supposedly recalcitrant prisoners into submission" (133).

that might come as a surprise, a detainee (Amar) demands the last book in the *Harry Potter* series[617], and Cole has never read the novels. This exchange establishes to a Western viewer thar Amar is not like the 'others', he is educated, speaks English, lived in Germany, plays soccer, and is interested in Western culture. These factors sum up to this character being designed to be relatable, and likable to Western audiences. The focus on popular culture is crucial in defining the dynamic between soldier and detainee. As they bond over Cole's mistaking *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (book number three in the *Harry Potter* series) for an Arabic book, Amir explains how he has even read the bible, and likes all the 'magic parts'. Other instances of pop culture references include addressing Amir as 'Hannibal Lecter', given his insightful and relentless questioning of Cole, and also the code for psychiatrist being 'Alfred Hitchcock'. These references bring some familiarity to an inaccessible place, the film encourages the viewer to feel comfortable by alluding to recognizable icons. As Amir becomes more and more obsessed with reading the last *Harry Potter* book, he explains that since he cannot know how his story in Guantánamo will end, at least he could learn how Potter's does. He compares himself to Professor Snape (a *Harry Potter* character that Cole does not know), to say that even though he is thought to be evil, there is a chance he might be good after all (which is revealed in the final novel of the series). This metafictional reference forces the audience to compare Amir's situation to that of a fictional character in a young adult novel, imposing a simplistic good/bad dichotomy onto a much more complex situation. At the end of the film, Cole is able to send *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (the last book in the Harry Potter series) to GITMO, with the inscription: "To Ali, I don't know if Snape's a good guy, but I know you are. Love, Blondie[618]"[619]. This one-dimensional resolution seems to imply a restoration of values, as Amir is finally recognized by a US soldier as a 'good guy'. Nonetheless, the film ends with him still indefinitely detained, and possibly still subjected to torture.

Regarding the depiction of torture in *Camp X-Ray,* even though we are shown instances of detainee humiliation and forced submission, explicit torture acts are not shown in this film, we only see their outcome[620]. Torture is thus *invisible*, a lingering

[617] In *Making Camp X-Ray* (2015) the actor that plays Amir informs us that the *Harry Potter* series are the most read fictional books by detainees at Guantánamo Bay.
[618] Amir called Cole 'Blondie' since she was not authorized to divulge her name. This could be a reference to the band *Blondie*, another popular culture reference.
[619] *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler).
[620] e.g. during Amir's shower, several marks are shown on his back, also, when Cole looks in his file, there are pictures of Amir's severely bruised face.

presence that the viewer is aware of – given its grounding with reality –, but is not straightforwardly presented on screen. Cole does engage with physical abuse in the first half of the film, when she kicks a detainee for spitting on her, and then when she agrees with the sleep deprivation techniques enforced on Amir after he threw feces at her in protest. Corporal Ransdell explains to Cole that "these guys just don't like girls, it's an Arab thing". This oversimplification serves to further empower Amir, since he does befriend Cole, further detaching himself from the remainder of detainees in the eyes of a Western audience. Faced with the detainees' animosity, Cole develops her own performance of military masculinity. The beginning and end of this performance is bookmarked in the film by shots of Cole either fixing her hair in a bun, or letting it out, reinforcing a topic already addressed in this thesis that sees hair – a marker of femininity – as part of the convention of visual narratives centered on military women. In "Forbidden Bonding at the Time of the War on Terror", an examination of filmic depictions featuring connections between soldiers and detainees, Marek Paryż considers Cole's automated and emotionally detached demeanor, concluding that "[t]his is her way of assuring herself that her value as a soldier should not be perceived through the prism of her womanhood, as if she underwent a transformation every time she went on and off duty"[621]. The need for Cole's performance of masculinity is again confirmed in a scene where Cole is forced to watch over Amir while he takes a shower, which is done to humiliate him, while at the same time punishing her for befriending a detainee. In response to Cole's protest over this 'blatant violation of standard operating procedure', Corporal Ransdell asks her "are you a soldier, or are you a female soldier? Because I don't have this kind of problems with soldiers"[622]. The distinction between 'soldier' and 'female soldier' reinforces my argument of the existence of a *default male soldier*, to which women must adapt to, justifying their need for a performance of military masculinity.

Comparing *Camp X-Ray* to *Boys of Abu Ghraib* I was able to establish a gendered approach to how differently fictional military men, and women, are represented in well-known spaces of military torture like Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. In *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, much like *Camp X-Ray*, the audience is shown instances of humiliation and forced submission, but again, torture remains *invisible*. The detainees are taken out of

[621] Marek Paryż, "Forbidden Bonding at the Time of the War on Terror: The Enemy as Friend in *Camp X-Ray* and *Boys of Abu Ghraib"*, *The Enemy in Contemporary Film*, edited by Martin Löschnigg, Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 347.
[622] *Camp X-Ray* (2014, dir. Peter Sattler).

frame to be subjected to 'enhanced interrogation techniques' and are brough back to the compound visibly shaken. Viewers are thus left to imagine what could have happened during that time. Like *Camp X-Ray* was informed by the photographs of sensory deprived detainees during intake at GITMO, so was *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, to an even greater extent, informed by the Abu Ghraib photographs. The film re-creates some of these images in passage, as we are speedily shown a cell with a hooded man standing on a box, and others with chained detainees in stress positions. This however merely serves to introduce the protagonist, along with the audience, to the prison, and is not mentioned again throughout the film. Upon considering the portrayal of torture in *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, Paryż claimed that the film "[…] strikes the viewer through images of extreme forms of dehumanization"[623]. I disagree with Paryż's assessment, as I consider that the film only *suggests* dehumanization, but does not explicitly displays, or even deals, with the subject. For instance, in two different scenes we see soldiers blasting loud music[624], but we are never told, or shown, how this might be affecting the detainees, as they do not appear on camera during these moments. I do not advocate that torture acts must be necessarily shown on camera to achieve the correct filmic adaptation of the events that transpired in Abu Ghraib, however, I do argue that such a vague and detached representation does not inform the viewer about the significant impact of the sanctioned methods that US military enforced upon the detainees.

Both films avoid the subject of torture while fictionalizing places that became notorious for it. By focusing their plots on the bond between soldier and detainee, there appears to be a deliberate effort to re-create the narrative of both these detention sites in a redemptive way. They attempt to re-condition the audience to neglect the abuse of detainees in favor of a version where bad things remain out of sight and there is a possibility of developing a relationship between soldiers and (certain) detainees. If I was to consider McClintock's aforementioned argument of the detainees' 'invisibility as human beings', I would conclude that both *Camp X-Ray* and *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, in their attempt to make visible the 'humanity' of a detainee, necessarily had to make torture

[623] Paryż, "Forbidden Bonding at the Time of the War on Terror", 354.
[624] A documented technique, listed in the Schmidt Furlow Report as "FM 34-52 technique – Incentive and Futility – acts used as reward for cooperating or to create futility if not cooperating", The investigators reported that at the Guantánamo Bay detention center "[…] cultural music would be played as an incentive. Futility technique included the playing of Metallica, Britney Spears, and Rap music". Randall Mark Schmidt, John T. Furlow, "Army Regulation 15–6: Final Report: Investigation into FBI Allegation of Detainee Abuse at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba Detention Facility". (April 1, 2005, amended June 9, 2005). https://www.thetorturedatabase.org/files/foia_subsite/pdfs/schmidt_furlow_report.pdf (accessed April 2020), 9.

invisible. I reason that if the films showed scenes of torture upon the 'humanized' detainee, it would provoke audiences to further repudiate US military intervention. So, by keeping torture hidden, presented only as an ominous presence, they succeed in creating a safe space for the narrative to flow.

Having explored how *Camp X-Ray* and *Boys of Abu Ghraib* keep torture out of *sight*, I now focus how they similarly keep it out of *mind* as well, by focusing on a humanitarian angle. A common aspect of the two films is the bond developed between the main protagonist (soldier) and a detainee. However, there is a critical difference in these two relationships. In *Camp X-Ray*, Amir's reasons for imprisonment are never confirmed or denied, while in *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, Hammoud confesses to being responsible for a bombing that killed 18 civilians. Asked by Farmer if he had indeed killed innocent people like he admitted during interrogation, Hammoud replies that 'they were not innocent'. This confession provokes Farmer into an empathic disconnection with all detainees, triggering his appearance in one photograph broadcasted by the news media of him abusing a detainee. *Boys of Abu Ghraib* thus embodies an exoneration for the Abu Ghraib photographs, reinforcing the necessity of torture to obtain confessions and intelligence. Even though it might seem positive to 'humanize the enemy', I highlight that in both cases the bond is only with *one* single detainee, as all the others are amalgamated in a faceless group of 'hajjis'[625]. Regarding *Camp X-Ray*, Paryż comments on the group of ignored detainees, claiming that "[o]ne cannot say that the film denies their humanity; rather, it does not address such an issue, perhaps thus hinting that they should better stay where they are"[626]. Paryż sees films like *Camp X-Ray* and *Boys of Abu Ghraib* as examples of cultural productions that explore avenues of "[…] broadening the scope of cultural functions of feature films in the era of the War on Terror"[627]. For these two films, broadening that scope meant reinventing a narrative for GITMO and Abu Ghraib. As fictional representations of Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib still resonate with the way Western society deals with torture and war, these two adaptations lack depth in their approaches to those realities. Both films bypass the most important issues concerning the places they are fictionalizing, neglecting the broader political implications of US military intervention in Iraq for the sake of presenting a dramatic, even if unlikely, connection.

[625] 'Hajji' is an umbrella derogatory term used by US military that encompasses Iraqis, Arabs, Afghans, or West Asian, North African, and South Asian people in general.
[626] Paryż, "Forbidden Bonding at the Time of the War on Terror", 351.
[627] Paryż, "Forbidden Bonding at the Time of the War on Terror", 345.

I argue that the significant difference in leaving Amir's culpability as a mystery while revealing Hammoud's responsibility for a terrorist attack has a lot to do with the gender of the soldier they bond with. Amir's potential innocence allows Cole to be caring for him until the end of the narrative, while Hammoud's confessed guilt gives Farmer the legitimacy to distrust and mistreat all detainees, ultimately granting him a perverse moral superiority. These two different behaviors by the soldiers suit the military/war genre conventions that claim servicewomen as *compassionate and nurturing*, and servicemen as *appropriately hostile*. Other fictional representations that enforce this perspective in their sub-plots by showcasing connections between soldier and 'enemy' are *Megan Leavey*[628] and *Our Girl*[629]. In both cases, the protagonist female soldier, deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (respectively), interacts with a local child, emphasizing the maternal role women are given in warfare. Although in *Camp X-Ray* the protagonist bonds with a man instead of a child, she still assumes some sort of maternal role, as she cares for him in ways she is not intended to[630]. This does not happen in *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, as the attention Farmer was giving to Hammoud was deemed undeserved by the reveal of his culpability in a terrorist act. Not only visual narratives have adopted this storyline, literary fiction has also embraced it. For instance, the novel *Sand Queen* (New York: Soho Press, 2011) by Helen Benedict was inspired by her previous work, *The Lonely Soldier*, and tells the story of a US female soldier, who befriends an educated, English-speaking Iraqi woman. Benedict's approach to the subject is nonetheless different, since she makes use of a double narrative, dividing the story to fit both women's perspective[631]. By giving the two women a space of speech, and not limiting the narrative to one single Western voice, Benedict is able to more appropriately relay the struggles for both parties involved in the Iraq War, which denotes a recognition of the conflict's complexity by the author.

[628] In *Megan Leavey*, we see Leavey being reprimanded by a superior for interacting with a child and revealing her Military Working Dog's name. Her immediate trust in a child further denotes an effort in depicting military women as nurturing and caring.
[629] In *Our Girl*, throughout several episodes the relationship between protagonist Dawes and a young Afghan girl named Bashira is developed to portray Dawes compassion. This relationship becomes overbearing on Dawes mission, as she is constantly reprimanded for engaging with the girl, whose father was allegedly linked with a terrorist cell.
[630] i.e. Investigating Amir's past, procuring books for him, reporting a fellow officer for embarrassing him, etc.
[631] For a critical approach on *Sand Queen*, see Giogio Mariani, *Waging War on War: Peacefighting in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 216.

In this chapter I have critically interrogated fictional representations of military women during deployment, with the intent of assessing how female bodies are depicted, and legitimated in public discourse through popular culture. The case studies presented illustrate the ways in which fictional characters with the potential to be transgressive – portraying military women in combat situations during the 'War on Terror' – are pushed back into comfortable depictions of femininity. Their narratives are thus shelved into a gender binary scheme for the purpose of 'making sense' of those performances. Ultimately, these representations also reinforce the arguments of those who oppose the participation of women in combat, as they portray negative outcomes and consequences of incorporating female soldiers in deployment missions.

I have also demonstrated in this chapter that the focus on the 'enemy' is an important factor in 'War on Terror' deployment narratives, as the very term 'War on Terror' – revealing fantasies of worldwide omnipotence –, implies an abstract enemy, a faceless offender. By including a plot or sub-plot focused on the possibility of amicable relationships with Iraqi/Afghan locals, narratives like *Camp X-Ray*, *Our Girl* and *Sand Queen* prove how the aim of the conflicts can be confusing to all the intervenients. The fictional narratives primarily examined in this chapter, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, and *Camp X-Ray*, belong to an expanding archive on the documentation of government-sanctioned torture. They all contribute, albeit in different ways, to the idea that women are inept for military operations, at the same time reinforcing how military spaces in general, and combat in particular, are the expected domain of men.

In his analysis of meta-pictures of media, W. J. T. Mitchell offered 'ten theses on media', number five being "all media are mixed media"[632]. Here Mitchell explains how there is no 'pure' media, evidenced by the way a medium sometimes "[…] becomes self-referential and renounces its function as a means of communication or representation"[633]. Drawing on Mitchell, I have demonstrated in this chapter how the news coverage of notorious cases involving military women have bled into fictional narratives, into artworks, and into new forms of conveying representations all together, culminating in a mirror of society. Ultimately, this mirrored image echoes Susan Sontag sentiment that "[…] the photographs [of Abu Ghraib] are us"[634].

[632] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 215.
[633] Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?*, 215.
[634] Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", 26.

Part III

DISCHARGE:

What Future(s) for the Military Woman

Chapter 3.1

GENDERED HOMECOMINGS

Life After Discharge

"I am your walking wounded broken toy soldier"
In Evisceration*, by Sergeant Robynn Murray*

Gendering Discharge Narratives

The term 'military discharge' indicates that a soldier is released from her/his obligation to serve in a particular branch of the armed forces. Types of discharge may vary in different countries, nonetheless, 'discharge' is a term generally attributed to soldiers who have completed their service. Other types of discharge are enforced based on the soldier's conduct, or by force of medical conditions that prevent the soldier from continuing her/his military career. In this chapter, I address how discharge from conflicts considered part of the 'War on Terror'[635] have been represented in fictional narratives. In the interest of continuing to answer the main research question of this thesis, I chiefly focus on narratives that feature military women, providing relevant male-centered narratives for contrast. Similarly to the previous 'boot camp narratives' and 'deployment narratives', I understand 'discharge narratives' as narratives whose main plot focus on the discharge of one (or more) soldier(s). I also examine cultural productions that deal with homecomings that might not be a result of a discharge, but of a leave period leading up to re-deployment. I consider these narratives to also fall under the category 'discharge narratives', as they convey identical challenges of social reintegration, even if the soldier's homecoming is temporary.

[635] Mainly the US-led military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This chapter is segmented in three sections. The first section introduces discharge narratives, examining a sample of them with emphasis on the representation of gender. The second section explores discharge narratives that concern military Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Finally, the third section is devoted to the analysis of discharge narratives that include representations of physical injuries. In accordance with the main purpose of this thesis, with this chapter I intend to address how military women are represented in the last stage of military life, discharge. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that fictional representations of the challenges of discharge are not the only path for civilian audiences to be confronted with this reality, as there are multiple documentaries that discuss this issue. For instance, documentaries like *The Ground Truth: After the Killing Ends* (2006, dir. Patricia Foulkrod), and *Hell and Back Again* (2011, dir. Danfung Dennis), have been instrumental in informing civilian audiences about the daily challenges of many returning veterans[636]. They also play a significant part, as a source of factual information, in establishing a visual standpoint for potential fictional representations of discharge.

I begin by examining a film divided into four interlocking stories of discharge, *Home of the Brave* (2006, Irwin Winkler). This film focuses on the life of four US soldiers after their discharge from the Iraq War. Spanning different genders, ethnicities, and classes, it intends to show how similar, amongst soldiers of all types, are the difficulties in adjusting to civilian live after experiencing traumatic events in war. In her critical reading of *Home of the Brave*, Tatiana Prorokova writes that, for those soldiers, the US "[…] becomes a more foreign country to them than Iraq; their homeland turns into a more dangerous place for them than the land of their enemy"[637]. This idea can be challenging to audiences, who might consider that leaving war to return to a familiar place is exactly what soldiers need or desire. On the contrary, in *Home of the Brave* we find veterans with severe difficulties in re-entering that once familiar space, which has since become strange to them. It is in this portrayal of war veteran alienation that we find the character Vanessa Price.

One of the four soldiers highlighted in the film, Vanessa Price is the only military woman prominently featured. Price lost a hand due to an Improvised Explosive Device

[636] Only *The Ground Truth* features testimony from a female veteran. Nonetheless, both films are adamant in the portrayal of the crucial support of mothers, wives, and girlfriends upon the male soldier's return.

[637] Tatiana Prorokova, "'I Don't Belong Here Anymore': Homeland as an Uncomfortable Space for War Veterans in Irwin Winkler's *Home of the Brave*", *Conflict Veterans: Discourses and Living Contexts of an Emerging Social Group*, edited by Michael Daxner, et. al., 164-173 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 170.

(IED)[638] explosion during a convoy attack in Iraq, and returned to her previous job as a high school teacher of Physical Education[639]. As the only disabled veteran in the film, Price is the one to illustrate the difficulties of living with war injuries, representing a large number of soldiers with disabilities. This representation in quite unique, as fictional military women are usually not depicted having extensive/visible physical injuries, or going through amputations[640]. However, in this exception, one recurrent trope persists, the actress portraying Price (Jessica Biel) is conventionally attractive, counterbalancing the perceived 'unattractiveness' of amputation. Price is very ashamed of her disability, hiding it as much as she can. She especially avoids showing her amputated hand to her young son, creating a distance between them. While other soldiers have loving families that try their best to help them through their difficulties, Price shuts down her family, and rejects her previous relationship. This relationship appears to fail due to her inability to connect with her former boyfriend. She then falls in love with another man, and she is the only soldier in the film to have a romance sub-plot in the narrative. Price's storyline is yet another entry in my previous analysis (chapter 1.3) about the recurring enforcement of a romantic storyline for fictional military women during the 'War on Terror'. Other (male) characters are shown to need the support of their families to process war-related trauma, however, Price's subplot narrative suggests that she did not need the support of loved ones, she required a new romantic connection. Price's storyline therefore implies that, above all, she was interested in remaining attractive to men.

The character of Vanessa Price is representative of how military/war narratives frame servicewomen injured by 'Iraqi enemies', through the use of a melodramatic approach. In *Cinema Wars*, the critic Douglas Kellner expresses his disappointment with the film *Home of the Brave*, as he sees that it "[…] tries to redeem the terrible losses of the destructive invasion and occupation through the heroic struggle for recovery and redemption of the returning US soldiers"[641]. Kellner considers that the film embraces a simplistic approach by portraying US soldiers as inherently good and Iraqi insurgents as

[638] An IED is a bomb constructed out of different explosive materials, and is usually associated with terrorist actions.
[639] Even though Price was able to return to her previous job, many female veterans struggle with finding employment, as statistics reveal that female veteran suffer from higher unemployment rates compared to their male counterparts. See Tomika W. Greer, "Career Development for Women Veterans: Facilitating Successful Transitions from Military Service to Civilian Employment", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. Vol. 19, Issue 1. (January 2017). 54-65.
[640] A topic I explore further on in this chapter.
[641] Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 220.

essentially evil. Presenting this dichotomy in a straightforward way, without further implications or complex connotations, the film avoids to politically position itself, what Kellner considers 'political cowardice'. On the other hand, Tatiana Prorokova finds merit in the film, seeing it as a "[…] fine cinematic example that openly criticizes society and, consequently, homeland as a social construct"[642]. In my assessment of *Home of the Brave* I found it to be a straight-forward display – recurring to tropes of the genre – of the most common difficulties soldiers encounter after discharge. Even though I acknowledge the film's efforts in providing different protagonists (varying in gender, ethnicity, rank, age, and socio-economic status), those characters ultimately lack complexity, rendering banal the serious issues they attempt to showcase.

The Lucky Ones (2008, dir. Neil Burger) follows the overall structure of *Home of the Brave*, with arguably more complex military characters. It tells the story of three soldiers who return from Iraq: Staff Sergeant Fred Cheaver, Staff Sergeant T.K. Poole, and Private First Class Colee Dunn. These soldiers come from different contexts, and differ in gender, ethnicity, rank, age, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, they are all faced with different struggles[643]. However, this film does not separate the protagonists like *Home of the Brave*, on the contrary, throughout the film they help each other overcome the problems that military deployment brought into their lives. Dunn calls the trio 'the lucky ones', for their fortune in "getting out in one piece"[644]. All three protagonists have war-related injuries, but only Dunn's is visually perceivable, as she walks with a limp (consequence of a bullet wound). Similarly to *Home of the Brave*'s character, Price, Dunn is also played by a conventionally attractive actress (Rachel McAdams). This military woman is portrayed as being naive and overly trusting, described as 'living in a dream world'. Dunn's storyline is propelled by a romantic relationship she had with a fallen soldier, which is presented as the difficulty she must overcome. In *The Lucky Ones* we find echoes of *Home of the Brave*, not only in the pattern of having struggling Iraq veterans as protagonists, but more importantly for this study, in the sense that it features an attractive female soldier whose storyline is likewise driven by romance.

[642] Prorokova, "'I Don't Belong Here Anymore", 171.
[643] Cheaver's wife files for divorce, and he must raise money for his son's college; Poole struggles with an injury that may have left him sexually impotent; and Dunn is on a mission to deliver her deceased boyfriend's guitar to his parents.
[644] *The Lucky Ones*, DVD.

Both *Home of the Brave* and *The Lucky Ones* are discharge narratives where we are able to see the effects of war trauma not just on the returning veteran, but also on their families. I now examine a narrative where the soldier does not come home. I have decided to include this analysis in my examination of discharge narratives given that I consider critical the study of fictional renderings of the impact the death of soldiers has, not only on their families, but also in society at large. As I see it, this provides an opportunity to assess the representation of fallen soldiers through the lens of their cultural constructions. *Grace is Gone* (2007, dir. James C. Strouse) centers on a family adapting to life without a military family member. This film is unique in the sense that it centers on the death of a servicewoman, a subject that is seldom approached in military/war films. The film follows Stanley Phillips, whose wife, Sergeant Grace Phillips, dies serving in the Iraq War. The plot focuses on his difficulty in telling his two daughters of their mother's death, and the journey – both literal and metaphorical – the family undergoes.

At the very start of the narrative we see Phillips in a support group for military spouses, in which he is the only man present. Aside from reinforcing the discrepancy between the numbers of military men and women, this scene establishes Phillips' embarrassment over the 'gender role reversal' in his life, mainly due to the lasting guilt of having been dismissed from military service over his poor eyesight during boot camp, where he met Grace. Phillips admits to this guilt by recording a message on his own answering machine, his own way to 'talk' to Grace, since it is her voice on the voicemail message. In this impossible conversation, Phillips confesses: "I was ashamed that it was you who was going [to war] and not me. We would be better off if it was me. The girls would been better off"[645]. The acknowledgment of his shame reiterates the notion that men are the ones supposed to go to war, and that their two daughters would either be better taken care of, or not suffered as much, if it had been him dying in Iraq instead. Since we are never shown footage of Grace in Iraq, or any flashback of her life, our only interaction with her is by hearing her voice on that voicemail message. The disembodied voice of Grace Phillips, possibly meant to create a curiosity in the viewer, actually ends up provoking a disengagement between the audience and this soldier, whom we see being mourned, but feel nothing for[646].

[645] *Grace is Gone*, DVD.

[646] I argue that Grace Phillips was robbed of a voice, and turned into a passive subject in the narrative. For contrast, I offer the film *God Bless the Broken Road* (2018, dir. Harold Cronk), about a mother who loses her husband in the Afghanistan War, leaving her to care for her daughter alone. Even though it has a similar

The two Casualty Notification Officers who inform Phillips of the passing of his wife, add that "Sergeant Phillips is a brave soldier. She died serving the country she loved"[647]. As Phillips struggles to tell his daughters of this news, we see that the oldest child has already grown sceptic of the war efforts, failing to understand its worth or purpose, which Phillips strives to correct, due to his conservative beliefs. In his analysis of *Grace is Gone* as part of a larger examination of the 'Cinematic Iraq War', Kellner reads Phillips imprint of beliefs on his daughters as a "[…] display [of] the rigid conservatism that is unable to see its limitations and complicity in a failed war"[648]. Furthermore, Phillips is overly aggressive towards his anti-war brother, and silences his daughters when they wish to voice their opinions on the subject, as he answers for them. This behavior seems to be offered as justifiable, given his wife's death and his secret grief. As Martin Barker comments in *A 'Toxic Genre'* during his analysis of the film, "[s]uffering somehow becomes apolitical"[649]. Although I believe the film is not completely apolitical in its message of the impact of war on families[650], I agree with Barker in his assessment that Phillips's grief is portrayed as apolitical. Through the portrayal of Phillips' grief as detached from his political views – a Republican who voted for George W. Bush –, the film appears to suggest that grief over a fallen soldier is shared throughout political parties. This effectively instrumentalizes the death of soldiers, and banalizes grief.

Another way in which *Grace is Gone* subtly engages in political topics is through the theme of the heroic fallen soldier. According to Katharine Millar in 'Gendered Representations of Soldier Deaths', "[…] death has an incredible political salience; what is said (or unsaid) about a person upon their death reflects society's understanding of their identity, their social positioning, and, ultimately, their worth"[651]. Following Millar's

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premise to *Grace is Gone* (with a gender reversal of the main character), this film allows for the voice of the fallen soldier to be heard in two ways: By first showing how he died during a hostile attack at the beginning of the film; and also through the reading of his last letter to his family, at the end of the narrative. *God Bless the Broken Road* thus strives to bring the male fallen soldier to the forefront (even showing his military photograph), providing the audience a relational basis to understand the role of this person in his family, which does not happen in *Grace is Gone*. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that, while *Grace is Gone* followed a grieving father's journey to confess to his children of their mother's demise, in *God Bless the Broken Road* the main plot centers on the grieving mother finding love again.

[647] *Grace is Gone*, DVD.

[648] Kellner, *Cinema* Wars, 226.

[649] Martin Barker, *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 95.

[650] For a critical reading of the political message in *Grace is Gone* see Dan Hassoun, "A War for Everyone: Strategic Ambiguity in the Home-Front War Drama", *A Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham and John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 385.

[651] Katharine M. Millar, "Gendered Representations of Soldier Deaths", *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 543.

thoughts on the weight of representation upon death, I thus consider how Grace Phillips' gender influenced her fictional representation as a fallen soldier. It is undeniable that Sergeant Phillips demise had a tremendous impact upon her family. Nonetheless, the film does not indicate if her death was registered or grieved by society at large, legitimizing her efforts as a war hero on a national scale. Millar draws upon Judith Butler's concept of 'grievability' – the merit in receiving social recognition after death – to convey the national need for a "[…] public, communal veneration of the military dead"[652]. The demise of a soldier is therefore perceived as redeeming of any inappropriate conduct, effectively depoliticizing the war she/he died fighting. Millar argues that the death of a soldier converts death "[…] from a terrifying collective trauma to an admirable, purposeful, and individual act"[653], a death with *meaning* for, as Butler would say, a life that *matters*[654]. In *Frames of War*, Butler expands on the concept of 'grievability' introduced in her seminal work *Precarious Life*, which first considered the 'differential allocation of grievability'[655] in choosing which lives are worth grieving[656]. Maja Zehfuss explores this issue raised by Butler, questioning the 'hierarchy of grief' pertaining soldiers. In 'Hierarchies of Grief and the Possibility of War', Zehfuss provides a reading of how the 'grievability' of soldiers is publicly constructed. Zehfuss thus points out the chosen *terminology* in government military obituaries: 'deep regret' or 'great sadness', furthermore, the *naming* of a fallen soldier, followed by a short *biography*, and always accompanied by a *picture*[657]. As I have defended above, the construction of Grace's grievability is entirely focused on her family. Analyzing *Grace is Gone* under the light of Zehfuss' account of how the 'grievability' of soldiers is publicly constructed, reveals the film's underrepresentation of the titular character. Even though there is a military announcement of the US Army's 'regret' in informing Mr. Phillips of Sergeant Grace Phillips' death, there is no account of the reasons that made her pursue a military career (i.e. biography). Furthermore, the only photograph we see of Sergeant Phillips is one where she is hugging her husband in civilian clothes. Having this photograph be the only

[652] Millar, "Gendered Representations of Soldier Deaths", 546.
[653] Millar, "Gendered Representations of Soldier Deaths", 546.
[654] "Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear". Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 14.
[655] See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), XIV.
[656] For instance, Butler denounces a scheme that perceives Western lives as publicly grievable and non-Western lives as publicly ungrievable (see Butler, *Precarious Life*, 12). A patter which, for the most part, is replicated in the Western military/war genre.
[657] Maja Zehfuss, "Hierarchies of Grief and the Possibility of War: Remembering UK Fatalities in Iraq", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 38. No. 2. 425, 426.

time the audience gets to see Sergeant Phillips, the film enforces her identification as a 'wife/mother' and not as a 'soldier'.

All in all, I argue that Sergeant Grace Phillips is indeed 'grievable'. Yet, her grievability is portrayed on a small, domestic scale, as opposing, for instance, to the death of male soldiers in *Taking Chance* (2009, dir. Ross Katz), *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2016, dir. Ang Lee), and *Last Flag Flying* (2017, dir. Richard Linklater). In these films, fallen male soldiers are mourned, grieved, and honored nationwide, attesting to Butler's theories of the public differentiation of 'grievability'[658]. These examples also reinforce Millar's argument that "[w]omen, as soldiers, are ungrievable casualties"[659], as they show national commemorative practices aimed at honoring male soldiers lost in battle.

Intended to convey discourses of healing and forgiveness, *Grace is Gone* bypasses Grace Phillips' story all together, to the point of not even explaining the circumstances of her death, and focusing only on how her decision to pursue a military career has brought pain and confusion to the life of her husband and two daughters. *Grace is Gone* also provokes questions regarding the treatment of military motherhood in discharge narratives. In fact, it shares some aspects with *Courage Under Fire* (1996, Edward Zwick), as the military mothers in both films are denied presence, as posthumous characters[660]. Both women are made secondary in the films made to be about them, having their feats discussed by other characters. In most fictional narratives depicting military mothers, being a soldier is depicted as clashing with motherhood, negatively impacting the life of their children. This type of portrayal is more evident in discharge narratives.

Military parents returning from a deployment cycle often encounter challenges in reestablishing relationships with their children, which encompass adjustments and renegotiations of their authority as a parent, the return to daily routines, and overall resuming a normal domestic life. Moreover, some of these military parents might come home with physical injuries, or war-related stress, which could increase the difficulties in the reconnecting process. In a psychiatry essay based on the study of military mothers, the authors express that servicewomen often feel guilty for their absence – as many of them used to be the primary caregivers –, feeling frustrated and anxious about post-

[658] See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 34.
[659] Millar, "Gendered Representations of Soldier Deaths", 552.
[660] For a comprehensive analysis on the topic of motherhood in *Courage Under Fire*, see Susan E. Linville, "The 'Mother' of All Battles: *Courage Under Fire* and the Gender- Integrated Military", *Cinema Journal* 39, No. 2, (Winter, 2000). 100-120.

discharge changes[661]. This article determines that: "Because military moms may experience less social support and are less likely than military dads to have a spouse to rely upon during and after deployment, the transition home may be particularly stressful"[662]. The lack of 'social support', which I recognize as the collective understanding that mothers should not be going to war, permeates into fictional representations of military mothers.

In the sample of fictional representations of returning military parents I have analyzed for this thesis I have found a clear distinction in approach: in films where the protagonist is a female soldier returning from war, any estrangement from her child(ren) is attributed to their choice in career, as the case study below demonstrates; on the other hand, in films where the protagonist is a returning male soldier, any family alienation is treated as an added external pressure on the soldier, but not as a consequence of his career choices.

Fort Bliss is a 2014 film written and directed by US director Claudia Myers, who, informed by her previous experiences in documenting the lives of military women and veterans with disabilities[663], wrote a screenplay about a veteran mother's return to the US. The film's protagonist, Staff Sergeant Maggie Swann, is a decorated Army medic returning from an extended tour in Afghanistan which lasted 15 months. The core concern of the film lies in the difficulties Sergeant Swann has in readjusting to life back home, especially, in the difficulties she has in establishing an emotional connection with her young son (Paul). Swann's ex-husband tells her how Paul has been deeply affected with her deployment to Afghanistan, displaying behaviors like sleepwalking. The disaffection shown by Paul is portrayed as 'confused' over her absence, and is visually conveyed through the boy's screams and tantrums over his mother's attempts to connect with him.

As the protagonist of a military/war film, Swann follows some of the tropes reserved for military women, already identified in this thesis: She is played by a conventionally attractive actress (Michelle Monaghan), she belongs to a medical unit in the Army, and is involved in a romance with a new acquaintance, who aids her in

[661] See Tova B. Walsh and Bethsaida Nieves, "Military Moms: Deployment and Reintegration Challenges to Motherhood", *Motherhood in the Face of Trauma: Pathways Towards Healing and Growth*, edited by Maria Muzik, Katherine Lisa Rosenblum (New York: Springer, 2018), 218.
[662] Walsh and Nieves, "Military Moms", 219.
[663] Myers has written and directed the made-for-TV documentaries *The Long Road Back* (2009), and *Women at War* (2010).

addressing some traumatic events that took place in Afghanistan[664]. Furthermore, Swann's family life is shown to be disrupted – with her divorce and estranged child –, which is portrayed as being entirely her fault. Upon her return Swann expresses her desire to take care of Paul, to which her ex-husband replies: "If you wanted to take care of him, you wouldn't have stayed in the Army"[665].

The whole narrative is punitive of Swann's choices[666]. She does not even receive the typical 'welcome home' that popular visual representations of soldier's homecomings usually depict[667]. Even though Swann manages to reconnect with her son by the end of the narrative, she has still not 'earned' the right to be called 'mom', as Paul only addresses her by her first name. At the very end of the film, Swann is unexpectedly called back to Afghanistan for another tour. She again leaves her son with his father and his new wife. This decision was very contested by her ex-husband, who again blames her, saying: "You will fight for your country, but you won't fight for your son"[668]. Confronted with this accusation, Swann manifests her frustration in the fact that as a woman, and as a mother, she is subjected to much more criticism for re-enlisting than military men who are fathers. This sentiment is rooted in real accounts of military women, who recognize double standards in society's perception of parenthood in the military[669]. As Swann says "I love my son and I love my country, I don't think I have to choose between them"[670], she is demanding the same treatment military men receive, in that they are commended for their service independently of being fathers. Portrayals of military mothers like Swann, Grace Phillips, or Kelli in *Return* (2011, dir. Liza Johnson) reaffirm the social role of women as

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[664] Another instance of repetition of a trope identified with fictional military women in this thesis is the emphasis on her hair. As she says goodbye to her new boyfriend before leaving for Afghanistan, Swann is dressed in military fatigues, with her hair up according to Army regulations. The boyfriend asks her: "Take down your hair for me. […] This is how I'll remember you" (*Fort Bliss*, DVD). Again, we see an example of a fictional narrative that explores hair as an unmistakable mark of femininity, containing a servicewoman's 'true' (non-military) identity.

[665] *Fort Bliss*, DVD.

[666] The husband/father figure is also depicted as resenting to be left with the responsibilities of domestic/parental role in the place of the wife/mother. This happens not only in *Fort Bliss*, but also in other female-centered discharge narratives like *Return* (2011, dir. Liza Johnson). In this film, the returning servicewomen is confronted by her husband, who tells her: "I've been playing Mr. Mom here" (Return, DVD).

[667] I am referring here to the scenes where returning soldiers are awaited by their friends and families at the airport, many times carrying flowers, banners and balloons.

[668] *Fort Bliss*, DVD.

[669] See J. Agazio, et. al., "Mothers going to war: the role of nurse practitioners in the care of military mothers and families during deployment", *Journal of American Association of Nurse Practices*, 25(5):253–262. 2013; and T. Walsh, "Mothers and deployment: understanding the experiences and support needs of deploying mothers of children birth to five", *Journal of Family Social Work*, 20:84–105. 2017.

[670] *Fort Bliss*, DVD.

nurturers. On the other hand, military fathers, like Sergeant Cheaver in *The Lucky Ones*, are perceived first as providers for their children[671]. At the end of the narrative, Swann is seen re-deploying to Afghanistan against her will, again causing great distress to her family. However, by explicitly making the military responsible for Swann re-deployment, the film forces the audience to redirect their angst towards the unfairness of military deployment rotations, and not towards the individual soldier.

Fort Bliss was not a high grossing film, nonetheless, it was endorsed by the US Army, which allowed access to Army locations and expert advice during the production of the film, in the interest of 'authenticity'. Furthermore, the premiere of *Fort Bliss* was hosted by the organization 'Veterans in Media and Entertainment'[672]. This endorsement suggests that the Army and its veterans support this type of representation. *Fort Bliss* is a film that that touches upon some important struggles that military mothers face after discharge, however, it presents them in a formulaic manner. By recurring to stereotypical ways of portraying military women, the film ultimately dilutes an important portrait of the struggles of life after discharge for military women, by forcing a romantic sub-plot into the narrative. The choice of including a romance sub-plot effectively removes the audience's focus from the main character's disrupted family life, offering a familiar narrative arc for the female soldier.

Depictions of Combat-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Whilst keeping in mind that psychological and physical injuries are not mutually exclusive – on the contrary, are often simultaneously present – I nonetheless present them in this chapter as distinct categories. The main reason for this distinction is that my approach is subjected to a visual sphere. Thus, I identify a division of injuries, as their difference as invisible[673] (mind), and visible (body) requires different sets of visual

[671] In *The Lucky Ones* Sergeant Cheaver's goal is to secure the money to secure his son's place at Stanford University.
[672] 'Veterans in Media and Entertainment' is a non-profit organization has the mission to unite current and former members of the military working in the film and television industry.
[673] I cautiously use the word 'invisible' here, as I explicitly do not correlate mental health with invisibility in the sense that the word negates its existence. I use the word 'invisible' to address health issues that, when portrayed onscreen in visual cultural productions (e.g. films, TV series) by actors, are 'visually' perceptible to the audience, or not.

characterizations in fictional narratives. Therefore, in the last two sections I provide an analysis of visual narratives set during the 'War on Terror', examining how psychological and physical injuries are portrayed from a gendered perspective.

Beginning my analysis of war-related injuries with those pertaining to an invisible realm, I focus my analysis on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In its most simplistic definition, PTSD encompasses a variety of conditions that stem from intense trauma. Even though my work does not incorporate any evaluation of the types of mental disorders (and their symptoms) that pertain to PTSD, it is nonetheless important to have an overall awareness of the most common PTSD symptoms. This acknowledgement allows for a better analysis of the visual representations of PTSD in fictional narratives. There are three main groups of symptoms generally identified as pertaining to PTSD, these are: Intrusive symptoms (the 'intrusion' of memories, feelings, smells, etc. of the traumatic event into everyday life); avoidance symptoms (forgetting or avoiding situations/people who reminds them of the traumatic event); and arousal symptoms (perceiving threats and danger everywhere, and reacting with violent outbursts)[674]. These symptoms may vary in intensity, and sometimes accompany the person for the rest of her/his life. Since the battlefield is, by the nature of its violence, a causer of trauma, it is not surprising that soldiers are highly affected with combat-related PTSD.

The wide-range term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was only formally defined in its present form – and applied to combat-related cases –, in 1980[675]. Before the current diagnosis of PTSD, post-war physical or emotional disorders were known by different names. During the US Civil War they were called 'soldier's heart', during the WWI they were termed 'shell shock', during WWII they were known as 'war neurosis', during the Korean War they were named 'combat exhaustion', and in the Vietnam War they were diagnosed as 'battle fatigue'[676]. Nonetheless, despite the different terminology, the condition has repeated itself, afflicting a vast number of soldiers throughout the history of armed conflict.

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[674] For a complete assessment of PTSD see John P. Wilson, Terence M. Keane (eds.), *Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD* (London: The Guilford Press, 2004).

[675] In the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, (DSM- III). 1980.

[676] For a comprehensive approach on the history of PTSD, see Daryl S. Paulson, Stanley Krippner. "History of the Diagnosis and Treatment of PTSD", *Haunted by Combat: Understanding PTSD in War Veterans Including Women, Reservists, and Those Coming Back from Iraq*, edited by Daryl S. Paulson and Stanley Krippner (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 31.

With the intent of examining depictions of combat-related PTSD in fictional narratives of the 'War on Terror', it is important to acknowledge how the condition has been previously represented. Beginning with fictional representations of the two world wars, I have already discussed how the films of these epochs contained mainly propagandist messages, which clashed with the idea of returning veterans with mental illnesses. Notably, the film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946, dir. William Wyler), featured three WWII male soldiers facing difficulties in readjusting to their civilian lives. Nonetheless, the film ends with a marriage, and on an optimistic note[677]. In fact, visual depictions of combat-related mental illness were so stifled by the US government at that time, that the 1946 documentary *Let There Be Light* (dir. John Huston), intended to inform audiences about 'casualties of a neuropsychiatric nature'[678], was not cleared for public release until 1980[679].

Depictions of PTSD in US films found their peak expression during the Vietnam War. Given that the US was not victorious in this conflict, the production of its fictional representations were not as well received as those depicting conflicts with a more satisfactory conclusion (like WWII). Therefore, most films that are set during the Vietnam War convey a dark and despondent reality, which oftentimes include characters with PTSD. Acclaimed films like *Apocalypse Now* (1979, dir. Francis Ford Coppola) and *Platoon* (1986, dir. Oliver Stone) are prime examples of this sentiment. The Vietnam War inspired fictional narratives that explored the impact of war trauma in complex ways. For instance, the film *Deer Hunter* (1978, dir. Michael Cimino) showed the toll that Vietnam War had on returning soldiers[680], and in *Jacknife* (1989, dir. David Jones) we see how soldiers sometimes turn to alcohol to deal with their mental issues[681].

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[677] For an analysis on *The Best Years of Our Lives'* portrayal of PTSD see David A. Gerber, "Heroes and Misfits: The Troubled Social Reintegration of Disabled Veterans in *The Best Years of Our Lives*", *Disabled Veterans in History*, edited by David A. Gerber (New York: The University of Michigan Press, 2012) 70-95; and Jeanine Basinger, "The Wartime American Woman in Film", *A Companion to War Film*, edited by Douglas A. Cunningham and John C. Nelson (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 95.

[678] The documentary showed interviews with several soldiers who were diagnoses with different 'neurosis'. The soldiers are seen stammering, with anxiety issues, amnesia, etc.

[679] Today the documentary is publicly available, for instance, on US National Archives. "Let There Be Light, 1946", YouTube, 57:53 minutes, January 22, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQPoYVKeQEs (accessed June 2020).

[680] It also introduced the game of Russian Roulette as a metaphor for the random probability of soldiers dying in war.

[681] Furthermore, one of the most prominent films to portray the agony of PTSD in the context of the Vietnam War was *Jacob's Ladder* (1990, dir. Adrian Lyne). The aesthetic of this film was influential in its original depictions of delusional behavior.

Depictions of PTSD during the 'War on Terror', while informed by previous narratives on the subject, evolved in unison with the ways of conducting warfare. I will now address two male-centered films taking place in the period of the 'War on Terror' that deal with PTSD in different ways: *In the Valley of Elah* (2007, Paul Haggis), and *Thank You for Your Service* (2017, dir. Jason Hall). By comparing these two films I will establish a pattern of representation for male soldiers, which I will then use to inform my analysis of female-centered narratives about military PTSD.

Based on a real story[682], *In the Valley of Elah* (2007, Paul Haggis) centers on a US Military Police veteran, Hank Deerfield, searching for his son Mike, a soldier who disappeared after his return from Iraq[683]. The search eventually turns into an investigation to find the culprits of his murder. At the end of the narrative, it is revealed that Mike was brutally killed by three of his fellow soldiers, over a simple quarrel. During the investigation, Deerfield is aided by a female police officer, Detective Emily Sanders, whom he deems unknowledgeable of the bonds of military brotherhood, given her initial suspicion that Mike's fellow soldiers could be the murder culprits. Deerfield rejects Sanders' suspicions, telling her: "You have not been to war so you're not gonna understand this. You do not fight beside a man and then do that to him"[684]. In his analysis of the film, Guy Westwell states that the character of Sanders exists to "[…] reinforce […] a point of view external to the world of masculine militarism"[685]. Westwell suggests that this character's sole purpose in the narrative is just to provide an 'outsider perspective', which I consider an indication to the fact that she is a woman in a military (i.e. masculine) world. I disagree with Westwell's assessment of Sanders, since not only is she instrumental in exposing the truth, but also, as the daughter of a veteran herself, she has a unique understanding of the strain war puts on soldiers and their families.

As Sanders was ultimately proven right in her accusations, and Deerfield learns that his son actually seemed to enjoy torturing detained Iraqis during deployment, Deerfield re-thinks his blatant belief in the military. These moral questions culminate in his utter shock upon hearing the apathic and unemotional way that one of the soldiers describes stabbing his son and dismembering him. This scene effectively highlights the

[682] *In the Valley of Elah* is based on the story of Richard Davis, which was first published in *Playboy* article, written by Mark Boal, and entitled "Death and Dishonor" (May 2004). This correlation with a real story makes *In the Valley of Elah* a docu-fiction, according to Prorokova's work.
[683] In military terms, AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave).
[684] *In the Valley of Elah*, DVD.
[685] Guy Westwell, *Parallel Lines: Post-9/11 American Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2014), 178.

extent of psychological damage some soldiers are subjected to during warfare. Indeed, Westwell writes that this scene "[…] shows how the war has reduced young men to sociopaths unable to feel empathy or even recognize the loss of their ethical bearings".[686] *In the Valley of Elah* exploits how PTSD may trigger overtly violent episodes, and how the perpetrators can be so affected by the condition to the point of being emotionally unresponsive to it. It showcases how PTSD is a possible consequence of permitting young soldiers to engage in sanctioned violence towards the 'enemy', but not allowing them to manifest fear, regret, or hesitation regarding their role. This is evident in a flashback scene where Deerfield's son calls him from Iraq in a desperate cry for help, wanting to leave after being ordered to run over a child with a Humvee. However, the cold, disproving, and disappointed response from his father put him on a different path, that ultimately lead to his murder[687]. Thus, by the end, Deerfield not only shows disenchantment with the US Army, but also considers his own role in the demise of his son.

The film calls into question not only how the Army value system can be corrupted[688], but also – perhaps most importantly – it exposes social structures that generate men who would harm and kill without hesitation, a "sider societal militarism"[689], in Westwell's terms. Westwell defends that the narrative exposes how a "[…] military ethos produces the kind of destructive violence unleashed in Iraq and felt by families of soldiers killed or physically and psychologically damaged by the war"[690]. As Deerfield faces the results of his enforcement of a projected image of military manhood upon his son, he abandons his reverence for the Army. At the very end of the film we see a disenchanted Deerfield, who recognizes that the psychological damage inflicted upon soldiers in the 'War on Terror' has caused the country to be in crisis, its own kind of PTSD, symbolized by Deerfield raising a US flag upside down, an international sign of distress[691]. This complex film manages to interweave two generations of soldiers in the stark acknowledgement of the extent of combat-related PTSD.

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[686] Westwell, *Parallel Lines*, 176.
[687] This is another example of a military father who, forsaking his role as a caregiver, is nonetheless never faulted by the narrative for his son's demise.
[688] Which consists of: Loyalty; Duty; Respect; Selfless Service; Honor; Integrity; and Personal Courage (for which the acronym LDRSHIP is used). See "Army Values", *US Army*. https://www.army.mil/values/. (accessed May 2020).
[689] Westwell, *Parallel Lines*, 179.
[690] Westwell, *Parallel Lines*, 178.
[691] For analysis about the relationship of *In the Valley of Elah* and US global political positioning, see Gregory A. Burris, "Imperial symptoms: *In the Valley of Elah* and the cinematic response to the 'war on terror'", *CineAction*, no. 81, (2010); and Joan Mellen. "Spiraling Downward: America in Days of Heaven, In the Valley of Elah and No Country for Old Men", *Film Quarterly*, 61, 3, (2008).

In *Thank You for Your Service* we find a different facet of PTSD, as we follow the readjustment of the male protagonist, Sergeant Adam Schumann, to civilian life after being discharged from Iraq. The film shows not only how the main character copes with PTSD, but also how his fellow discharged soldiers deal with their own versions of it. Moreover, the film offers a conventional approach to the role of the supporting wife, which is replicated by several women in this narrative. This film differs from *In the Valley of Elah* for its depiction of male soldiers actively acknowledging, and seeking help, with their PTSD. Both Schumann and Specialist Solo Aieti seek the Veterans Affairs (VA) to apply for mental health care. While waiting to be called, they come across Colonel Plymouth, who revealed disappointment in Schuman's apply for VA benefits. The Colonel expressed his disappointment by saying: "Shoe, you were my hammer out there. Don't let these guys see you fold like this. It's bad for morale. It's bad for big Army"[692]. This scene is important to convey how the US Army, here represented by a high ranked soldier, is dissatisfied with soldiers showing 'weakness' over an 'invisible' (and therefore 'non-existent') problem.

Specialist Aieti presents a particularly interesting case in the portrayal of PTSD. Aieti exhibits all three major clusters of PTSD symptoms, he has visions of a fallen soldier during his everyday life (intrusion symptoms); he has serious memory loss (avoidance symptoms); and finally, he has violent outbursts that cause him to be aggressive (arousal symptoms). One of his aggressive outbursts is triggered by a videogame he was playing, *Call of Duty*[693], during this outburst Aieti lashes out against his pregnant wife, who despite being very scared, nonetheless forgives his behavior and supports him. In 'Danger on the Home Front', Sonya Michel criticized films like *Born on the Fourth of July*, featuring veterans that depended on the 'sexual/maternal' for recovery[694], phrased as "female sacrifice to achieve male recuperation"[695]. *Thank You For Your Service* continues this tradition, showing the compromise and efforts of the wives of male soldiers, who are seen being physically and verbally threatened or mistreated.

Thank You for Your Service, named after the hollow appreciation soldiers' get by civilians, displays the difficulties in living with combat-related PTSD. The film shows

[692] *Thank You for Your Service*, DVD.
[693] I will further develop the connection between videogames and PTSD in the next chapter (3.2).
[694] Sonya Michel, "Danger on the Home Front: Motherhood, Sexuality, and Disabled Veterans in American Postwar Films", *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 273.
[695] Michel, "Danger on the Home Front", 274.

different ramifications of soldiers' PTSD, including portrayals of suicidal ideation (i.e. suicidal thoughts), and including a soldier who actually commits suicide, representing a section of real soldiers who kill themselves[696]. However, all the psychological stress displayed by characters in this film stem from one singular event in Iraq, which saw one of their fellow soldiers die. Many times films directly correlate PTSD with a single traumatic episode, when in reality, PTSD may be caused by no particular isolated incident. Films like *Home of the Brave*, *In the Valley of Elah*, *Thank You for Your Service*, etc., are examples of narratives that use this plot device to neatly explain PTSD to the audience. On the other hand, in narratives like *Return*, the protagonist's (Kelli) trauma is not pinpointed onto a single incident, as it arose from the accumulation of all the unnamed experiences in her deployment. Furthermore, in *A Toxic Genre*, Barker sees the use of PTSD as a *narrative device* in films, as a way to explain away soldier's issues, 'depoliticizing' their relationship with warfare. Barker argues that "[… PTSD has become a convenient label for bundling together problems and behaviors in a manner which prevents their exploration"[697]. What Barker means, is that through the focus on a soldier's struggle with PTSD, the narrative allows for pro-war and anti-war advocates to find common ground, both sides united in agreement that the soldier should be cared for. When examining *Home of the Brave*, Barker finds that the four protagonists are "representative sufferers"[698], which also applies to the soldiers in *Thank You for Your Service*. However, in its variety of PTSD representation, *Thank You for Your Service* does not feature or mention any military women, who face many of the same challenges regarding PTSD.

An article on the VA's website states that "[w]omen are more than twice as likely to develop PTSD than men (10% for women and 4% for men)"[699]. The studies this article was based on, ground this statistic on the higher likelihood of women to experience sexual assault[700], among other combat-related factors. In 2007 the US Department of Defense

[696] The VA claims that an average of 17 veterans a day commit suicide. The numbers are so high that it is addressed as a phenomenon: US Military Veteran Suicide. See US Department of Veterans Affairs, *2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, 2019.
[697] Barker, *A Toxic Genre*, 86.
[698] Barker, *A Toxic Genre*, 90.
[699] Dawne Vogt. "How Common is PTSD in Women?". US Department of Veterans Affairs. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_women.asp (accessed June 2020).
[700] The issue of PTSD related to instances of sexual assault (Military Sexual Trauma) is explored in the documentary *The Invisible War* (2012, dir. Kirby Dick), among other studies. See Ben Wadham, Violence in the Military and Relations Among Men: Military Masculinities and 'Rape Prone Cultures', *The Palgrave International Handbook on Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 241-256.

(DoD) published a report based on several studies on soldiers' mental health. This report informs that, while military women are more likely to develop PTSD than their male counterparts, they are however less likely to be clinically diagnosed. The DoD attributes fault to "[…] cultural expectations that make it difficult for society and mental health providers to recognize women as combatants"[701]. Additionally, the report denounces a tendency to attribute military women's mental health problems to depression, anxiety, or personality disorders, instead of combat-related PTSD. The aforementioned film *Fort Bliss*, features a main character that has PTSD partly due to a sexual assault episode she experienced in Afghanistan. The symptomatology is visually presented in the film in the form of anxiety, panic attacks, and difficulty in engaging in sexual intercourse. This representation ultimately corresponds to a gendered representation of PTSD, that restricts women's range of symptoms in fictional portrayals.

Fictional depictions of PTSD contain different sets of behaviors for male and female veterans. Frequently, depictions of male soldiers with PTSD focus on violent outbursts of rage. This is evident in *In the Valley of Elah*, *Home of the Brave* and in *Thank You for Your Service*. On the contrary, depictions of female soldiers with PTSD tend to bypass outbursts of rage, and focus on the quiet internalization of trauma through manifestations of emotional detachment. This is seen in *Fort Bliss*, *Megan Leavey*, *Home of the Brave* and *Return*. This disparity indicates gendered perspectives on combat-related PTSD, as men correspond to ideals of aggressive masculinity, and women are limited to demure manifestations of combat-related stress. Furthermore, men often encounter difficulties in seeking professional help, since "[…] experiencing distress and mental illness can be framed as a failure to live up to heroic standards, and a failure of military and masculine competency"[702], according to Hilary Cornish in "Gender Mental Health and the Military". This reality transposes to the case studies provided in this section, as both *In the Valley of Elah*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Thank You for Your Service* display the prejudice surrounding servicemen seeking help with mental health issues. Yet, real life military women with PTSD display a wide array of behavior related to their conditions, which also may include outbursts of rage, as the documentary *Poster Girl* (2010, dir. Sara Nesson) demonstrates.

[701] U.S. Department of Defense, *An Achievable Vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health* (Falls Church, VA: Defense Health Board, 2007), 59.
[702] Hilary Cornish, "Gender Mental Health and the Military", *The Palgrave International Handbook on Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 276.

Poster Girl, which premiered in the U.S. at the Telluride Film Festival in 2010, is an Oscar and Emmy[703] nominated documentary that follows the discharge of Sergeant Robynn Murray (US Army veteran of the Iraq War), and her subsequent journey with PTSD. Sergeant Murray joined the US Army in 2003 (at 19 years of age) and was sent to Iraq. Murray describes her behavior as being exemplar, since she dutifully followed orders, and was able to "suck it up and take their [male US soldiers] sexual harassment"[704]. In the documentary we hear Murray explain how she and two fellow female soldiers were 'made' into poster women for females in combat by being featured on the cover of *Army Magazine* (Figure 16).

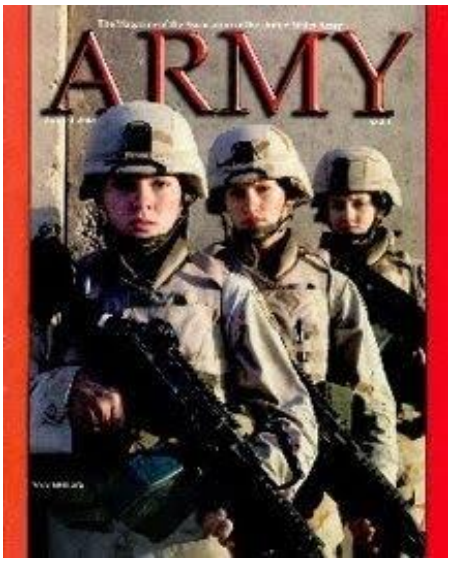

Figure 16 - Cover of Army Magazine *(August 2005). (open access image).*

Murray explicitly states that she never intended to assume that role. The appropriation of the ungranted image of these women by the US Army is an example of how servicewomen are used to advertise a military ideology they not always fully comprehend, due to their inexperience and young age. *Poster Girl* also documents Murray's frustration with the bureaucracy of the VA, shows her battle with alcoholism and large amounts of prescribed medication for both her hip injury, and her PTSD symptoms. We see Murray cry, punch walls, have fits of anger, among other displays of PTSD-related behavior. Thus validating the concept that women also have outbursts of

[703] Nominated in 2011 for an Academy Award for Best Short Documentary Film, and nominated in 2011 for an Emmy in the categories of Outstanding Individual Achievement in a Craft, and Outstanding Informational Programming. Also, the documentary was the winner of International Documentary Association award for Best Short in 2011.
[704] *Poster Girl*, DVD.

anger, something under-represented in female-centered military films about PTSD, as I have detailed above. One of the healthier coping mechanisms Murray found was The Combat Paper Project[705], created to help war veterans manage their experiences at war[706]. The Project provides a creative space for soldiers, where they can create art from their old uniforms, and engage in other activities that connects them with fellow veterans[707].

In the documentary we see Murray working on her artworks, as she explains the thought process behind them. Her artworks (Figure 17) were exhibited at Art Rage Gallery, from October 8, 2008 to November 1, 2008[708]. The first piece, 'Indoctrination' is composed of different US Army training manuals, which to Murray symbolize how the handbooks have 'molded' her into a soldier. The second piece, 'Baghdad' represents her body draped in an amalgamation of sand and blood in Iraq. The final piece, 'Healing' is made from Murray's Army uniform, which she perceives as the embodiment of making something therapeutic out of something negative. Even though the artworks were meant to expose her newfound vulnerability, I argue that they also function as a conscious armor against further 'attacks' from military ideology.

Figure 17 - 'Indoctrination', 'Baghdad', and 'Healing' by Robynn Murray (2008). (open access image).

[705] The director of *Poster Girl*, Sara Nesson, also directed another short documentary detailing the process of veterans involved in the Combat Paper Project, entitled *Iraq, Paper, Scissors* (2010).
[706] Access the website of The Combat Paper Project for more information. https://www.combatpaper.org/. (accessed June 2020).
[707] Such as Warrior Writers, which publishes books with veterans writings.
[708] For a description of the exhibition and access to the gallery see https://artragegallery.org/artrage-grand-opening/. (accessed June 2020).

All three pieces, made from molds of Murray's body, are representational of her healing process, in what she calls the "[…] deconstruction of this macho image I had of myself"[709]. Her choice of using a mold of her torso to symbolize the deconstruction of a 'macho image' reinforces the significance of breasts as a marker of femininity. When addressing the gallery crowd to present her work – which was displayed among the work of several other veterans – Murray jokingly says "I'm the only veteran in the room that could have made that mold"[710]. She is evidencing the fact that she is the only female veteran presenting at the gallery, which by itself indicates not only a lack of female representation, but also that her molded breasts were a focus point of femininity in a (still) masculine space of resistance.

The artistic outlets presented at that art show were not only important for the soldiers, for their therapeutic properties, but they were also important as a way to reach out to the public in non-conventional ways. Through artworks made by veterans, civilians have the opportunity to engage with their war experiences in a unique way, and perhaps gain a deeper understanding of the implications of warfare for Western soldiers. Furthermore, Murray's three art pieces mirror the triphasic structure of this thesis. Murray divided her military journey in three distinct moments, which correspond to boot camp, deployment and discharge. This division further enhances the importance of understanding the challenges each stage poses to military women, which I have strived to address in this thesis.

Depictions of War-Related Injuries

Oftentimes coupled with narratives about PTSD are depictions of war-related disabilities. Showing disabilities caused by war has the effect of dramatizing the conflict, frequently upholding the injured as heroes. The disabled veteran has been a recurrent character in war narratives, being featured in several fictional narratives throughout the decades. Films like *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946, dir. William Wyler), and *The Men* (1950, dir. Fred Zinnemann) showed WWII veterans with paralysis, and who have undergone amputations. These characters, not only inform audiences of the consequences

[709] *Poster Girl*, DVD.
[710] *Poster Girl*, DVD.

war enacts on soldiers, but also show that it is possible to overcome disabilities and resume a normal live. This incitement for recovery has warranted its own sub-genre according to Carol Cohn, as 'films of restoration'[711], which emerged not only from the US but also from Europe. This group of films was not particularly critic of the conflicts that caused the injuries, focusing more on the heroic sacrifice of the soldier, and his road to recovery[712]. These approaches were favored since the governments hoped to paint a lighter picture of war, one that would not deter young men from wanting to fight for their country.

One film that provides an insightful critique of this behavior is *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971, dir. Dalton Trumbo), based on the novel of the same name, authored by Trumbo in 1939. This film, an anti-war drama, tells the story of a young US soldier, Joe Bonham, who was hit by a projectile during WWI. As a consequence of this attack, he was left a quadruple amputee, also losing his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Although he still remains conscious and able to feel, he is nonetheless a prisoner inside his own body. Deemed 'decerebrated' by doctors, he was hidden away in a utility room of the hospital, an embarrassing secret for the US Army. Eventually, Bonham finds a way to communicate through Morse code. Tapping his head against the pillow he asks the Army to put him on display in a glass coffin, part of what were then popularly known as 'freak shows', so that people could see what the war had done to his body. This desire is most eloquently expressed in the novel by Trumbo:

> "He would make an exhibit of himself to show all the little guys what would happen to them and while he was doing it he would be self-supporting and free. He would do a favor to everybody including himself. He would show himself to the little guys and to their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and wives and sweethearts and grandmothers and grandfathers and he would have a sign over himself and the sign would say here is war and he would concentrate the whole war into such a small piece of meat and bone and hair that they would never forget it as long as they lived"[713].

[711] See Carol Cohn, "Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War", *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Miriam Cooke, Angela Woollacott (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 227-246.
[712] This trend has perdured, and can be seen in recent films like *Bennet's War* (2019, dir. Alex Ranarivelo).
[713] Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun* (New York: Bantam Books, 1939), 157.

His desire to be seen as a cautionary tale, a living warning of the costs of war, reflects not only his desire to spare future soldiers and to educate the population, but it also conveys his desire for some type of agency. When his appeal is denied, he then asks the Army to euthanize him, which is also refused, leaving him with the anticipation of a lonely and bleak future. *Johnny Got His Gun* is a candid portrait of the military's conscious denial and omission of the consequences of warfare, and their dismissal of soldiers' wounded bodies. Visually, the film is effective in conveying a bleak present, as opposed to a hopeful past. This is manifested through the use of black-and-white scenes for the present, and colored scenes for Bonham's recollections and visions. The visual portrayal of Bonham's body in the film is much more shrouded than the descriptions of Trumbo's novel intended. His body is concealed under a sheet, and his face is kept under a mask, so all we see is the outline of his deformed body. By denying the audience to see Bonham's body, the film ultimately engages in the same form of repression the military has enforced on him. I argue that this erasure should not be directly attributed to a deliberate avoidance to exploit a deformed body for sensationalistic purposes, as the pivotal message of Trumbo's narrative is encapsulated in Bonham's body. So, when the film denies the audience the sight of the consequences of war, Trumbo's anti-war message is likewise covered under a sheet, implied but never shown.

Johnny Got his Gun is nonetheless an important film to establish a frame for representations of disabled soldiers, contrasting it with narratives that paint disability as a form of heroic sacrifice. The 1971 film adaptation was released at a time when the US was experiencing backlash over the Vietnam War, and thus, the story of a soldier maimed as the consequence of a war, was a story well received at the time[714]. A narrative that was born out of WWI, and resonated through the following wars, continues to speak to other generations, who through Bonham's tale get a glimpse at the forbidden sign over him that reads 'this is war', as he intended[715].

Permanent war injuries on male soldiers also embody a strike at patriotism, on the system that subjected them to such disabilities. Such is the reason for the Army's insistence that Bonham remains hidden from the world. If the general public were to see what has become of his body, it would expose a political system incapable of protecting

[714] The film received various accolades in prestigious awards festivals (e.g. The Cannes Film Festival) between 1971 and 1974.

[715] *Johnny Got His Gun* continued to be relevant for upcoming audiences, achieving cult status when it was used for source material for Metallica's 1988 song 'One' (which used clips from the film in the music video). Furthermore, the story was also adapted for theater in 2008 (dir. Rowan Joseph).

its citizens, potentially diminishing their patriotism. Therefore, the need for honest depictions of war-related injuries is important for the sake of an informed and critical society. Currently, there are several documentaries exposing the physical injuries of soldiers involved in the conflicts that make up the 'War on Terror'[716]. For instance, the award-winning documentary *Body of War* (2007, dir. Phil Donahue, Ellen Spiro) shines a light on one particular US soldier, Tomas Young, to demonstrate how war can impact service members. Young was shot a few days after being deployed to Iraq, leaving him paraplegic. This political documentary shows Young's daily struggles with pain and rehabilitation, the support of his wife and mother, and how he became an anti-war activist with Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), giving public speeches and even being interviewed for *60 Minutes*[717]. In *Cinema Wars*, Kellner writes that "*Body of War* thus contrasts two bodies: that of a young man paralyzed by the war and the body of Congress that enabled the war"[718]. The documentary follows Young's ill-fated attempts to meet with formed president George W. Bush, as his mother affirms that the government is 'insulated', and does not want do acknowledge people like her son.

War-related disabilities can be portrayed with a wide range of symbolic meaning, adapted to the particularities of the depicted conflict. This is perhaps more evident in depictions of disabled veterans in the Vietnam War, who are often depicted as enraged, neglected, misunderstood, and addicted to alcohol or drugs[719]. As I have mentioned above, the Vietnam War spawned several fictional narratives dealing with PTSD, but also with war injuries, many of them carrying an anti-war message. One of them is *Coming Home* (1978, dir. Hal Ashby), an Oscar-winning film about a paraplegic soldier, Luke Martin, who became an anti-war activist. In this film we find characters that demonstrate the physical, emotional, and psychological pain of the war. However, despite having two soldiers commit suicide due to the burden of their mental and physical trauma, *Coming Home* could likewise be considered a 'film of recuperation', as Martin goes from being angry and frustrated, to finding love and being happy. One of the most provocative scenes in the film showed how Martin was able, through oral sex, to make his (married) partner,

[716] e.g. *Hell and Back Again* (2011, dir. Danfung Dennis), *Baghdad ER* (TV documentary, 2006, dir. Jon Alpert and Matehew O'Neill), *Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq* (2007, dir. Jon Alpert, Ellen Kent), *The Ground Truth: After the Killing Ends* (2006, dir. Patricia Foulkrod), *Fighting for Life* (2008, dir. Terry Sanders), among many others.
[717] "Healing The Wounds Of War". Aired on *CBS*. May 2006.
[718] Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 207.
[719] See Martin F. Norden, "Bitterness, Rage and Redemption: Hollywood Constructs the Disabled Vietnam Veteran", *Disabled Veterans in History*, edited by David A. Gerber (New York: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 96-116.

Sally Hyde, achieve an orgasm for the first time in her life. The issue of impotence related to war disabilities is approached from an optimistic angle in this film, as the ability to perform sexually is interconnected with the ideal of manliness. Even though some authors labeled his behavior as 'feminine'[720], *Coming Home* provides a progressive leap from previous depictions of war veterans with spinal cord injuries like *The Men*, which carried the message that, if men were impotent, no form of sex was possible.

Sally Hyde's role in *Coming Home* is that of a nurturer, and a vehicle for male sexual affirmation, which in turn would lead to his remasculinization[721]. When Martin asks her: "You aren't one of these women that gets turned on by gimps?"[722], this question is intended to ascertain her conventional sexual preferences, making her 'normal' in the eyes of the audience, and by extension, 'normalizing' their sexual connection. *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989, dir. Oliver Stone) somewhat replicates the premise of *Coming Home*, in the sense that both narratives focus on an anti-war paraplegic soldier that experiences sexual impotence[723]. In both visual texts, the protagonists must prove their manhood to the audience by engaging in sex. As Jeffrey Preston explains in *The Fantasy of Disability*, in both films "[…] the loss of bodily control is presented as a phallic crisis of castration"[724]. Therefore, befitting as 'films of recuperation', in order for the characters to conform to their disability, they must first address this problem, for as Stephen Safran states in his study "Movie Images of Disabilities and War", many soldiers identified "[…] altered sexuality as being even more important than problems walking"[725]. Nonetheless, studies show that it is quite common for soldiers who have been physically injured, or have PTSD, to deal with sexual dysfunction[726]. In *Body of War* we are given frank and detailed testimonies that attest to this reality in a more recent context, as Young manifests

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[720] See Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Indiana University Press, 1989), 146-147.
[721] Women's traditional role of nurturer to the returning disabled veteran is well documented. See Willard Waller, *The Veteran Comes Home* (New York: Dryden Press, Inc., 1944); and Susan Hartman "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans", *Women's Studies*, 5, no. 2 (1978), 233-239.
[722] *Coming Home*, DVD.
[723] For a reading on the depiction of sexual dysfunction in Vietnam films, see Tobey C. Herzog, *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost* (London, Routledge, 1992).
[724] Jeffrey Preston, *The Fantasy of Disability: Images of Loss in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 72
[725] Stephen P. Safran, "Movie Images of Disability and War: Framing History and Political Ideology", *Remedial and Special Education*, (July 2001), 229.
[726] See US Depart of Veterans Affairs, *Sexual Dysfunction A Common Problem in Veterans with PTSD*, (March 24, 2015). https://www.research.va.gov/currents/spring2015/spring2015-3.cfm (accessed June 2020); and Benjamin Breyer, et. al., "Sexual Dysfunction in Male Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans: Association with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Other Combat-Related Mental Health Disorders: A Population-Based Cohort Study", *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*. 11(1): 75-83, (January 2014).

his worry in not being able to have intercourse with his wife, and she confesses to feeling like a nurse or a roommate to him[727].

Nonetheless, in fictional representations of military conflicts in the 'War on Terror' this issue is still taboo. One film that attempts to tackle this issue is *The Lucky Ones*, where one of the male protagonists, Staff Sergeant T.K. Poole, was temporarily impotent due to a shrapnel injury. Poole's sole purpose in the film is to drive to a prostitute whom he heard specializes in this sort of 'problems'. Recurring to prostitution is a common thread in *Coming Home*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and *The Lucky Ones*[728]. The emotional detachment that comes with paying for sex allows the men to engage in sex with someone who is not their caretaker, and therefore not a maternal figure. As Preston advocates, some form of male sexual identity is reclaimed "[…] by purchasing sexual intimacy, by having access to the prostitute's time and body"[729]. Prostitution is thus presented as a necessity for the disabled soldier, a trope in the military/war genre.

In *American Cinema/American Culture*, John Belton addresses the fictional representation of the returning male soldier, affirming that "[s]uccessful reentry into society demands that they undergo a process of demasculinization"[730]. Belton argues that war has enforced hypermasculinity into men, rendering difficult a reentry into a non-military social order, especially when the veteran has some kind of physical disability[731]. Therefore, according to Belton, they male veteran must not resist 'feminization' in order to adapt to his new environment. To correlate 'demasculinization' with suffering from a disability is to equate vulnerability with femininity. This sentiment is commonly replicated in discharge narratives, in scenes where male soldiers seeking help are perceived as weak, which *Thank You for Your Service* is an example among others[732]. In this discharge narrative, the pressure of PTSD has become so heavy to Specialist Aieti that he wishes for his wounds to be external, visible, thus making him a war hero and not a soldier who cannot control his emotional state. During a car trip, Aieti says to Schumann: "Nobody knowns you fought unless you got your fucking arm blown off. I'd

[727] Aside from being portrayed in the documentary, the difficulties felt by the couple over Young's sexual dysfunction is also detailed in Mark Wilkerson, *Tomas Young's War* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 45, 79, 198.
[728] Also in other films, like *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis).
[729] Preston, *The Fantasy of Disability*, 71.
[730] John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009), 202.
[731] Belton offers as examples of this kind of representation: *First Blood* (1982, dir. Ted Kotcheff), *Born on the Fourth of July*, among others.
[732] e.g. In *Home of the Brave*, when a male veteran tells his father he is thinking about talking with 'someone', his father responds: "About what? Your feelings? You sound like your mother", accusing him of being a 'pussy'. (*Home of the Brave*, DVD).

take it. I'd rather be a hero with my ass blown off than this shit"[733]. The pair discuss what sort of injuries would be tolerable to gain admiration as a war hero. Aieti says he would trade his PTSD for an amputated leg, but not for the loss of an ear. This exchange emphasizes the importance of *looking* like a war hero, and what sort of wounds would be considered more 'manly'. By wishing he had a physical disability instead of mental illness issues, Aieti reinforces the idea that physical war wounds are 'manly', and the struggle with emotional control is not, and therefore, it is considered 'feminine'. This scene suggests that hypermasculinity has been so deeply indoctrinated into male soldiers that any correspondence to 'female' emotional vulnerability is shameful. Continuing their conversation, they make fun of a fellow soldier who lost his lips in an explosion, and laughingly call him 'pussy lips'. By engaging in an impossible negotiation of war-related injuries, the two veterans establish the difference between heroic war wounds (loss of limbs), and embarrassing deformities (loss of an ear or lips). The former being the mark of manliness, and the latter being characterized using 'female-related' terms. I argue that this categorization has been strongly informed by visual depictions of disabled soldiers from previous conflicts[734], turning this conversation about military disabilities, and their connection with heroic masculinity, into an argument for how fictional representations have influenced western societies' understanding of war-related disabilities.

Writing at a time when combat positions were not yet fully accessible to women (early 90's), Sonya Michel considered that "[i]njuries, scars and disabilities, once easily readable emblems of patriotic sacrifice, become signs of masculinity that indirectly evoke service to country by referring to a mode of sacrifice ostensibly available […] only to men"[735]. This reality emphasized by Michel suffered a change, as an increasing amount of military positions became accessible to women over time. With women fulfilling more and more positions in combat, or combat-adjacent areas, they too were subjected to several degrees of physical injuries. However, the fact that there is still a higher number of men in combat/combat-adjacent positions, translates into a high disparity in the numbers between female and male soldiers with disabilities. This is perhaps the main reason that causes the study of female military veterans with disabilities to be under-

[733] *Thank You for Your Service*, DVD.
[734] e.g. Lieutenant Dan from *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis) and Master Chief Carl Brashear from *Men of Honor* (2000, dir. George Tillman Jr.).
[735] Michel, "Danger on the Home Front, 260.

researched[736]. Another reason can be the 'double jeopardy' hypothesis[737], which finds military women with disabilities at an increased risk of stigmatization given their double status as a minority in the military, as both a woman, and as person with a disability. It is important to add that the 'double jeopardy' hypothesis does not offer a full intersectional perspective, as it does not imply the inclusion of other types of minorities which might increase the level of discrimination a soldier can be subjected to (ethnicity, sexual preferences, etc.)[738].

Since the topic of disabled military women is understudied in academia, it is relevant to observe how this lack of research/interest translates to the visual depictions of disabled servicewomen. Documentary films about military personnel fighting in the conflicts that make the 'War on Terror' show military women with a wide range of physical disabilities, from internal – and sometimes invisible – injuries (e.g. *Poster Girl*), to highly visible ones (e.g. *The Ground Truth*). Nonetheless, during my research for this chapter, I have only found two depictions of disabled military women in the military/war genre: *The Lucky Ones*, and *Home of the Brave*[739]. These representations portray different types of disabilities: a limp, and an amputated hand (respectively). I would argue that it is crucial to note that the two representations occur in films where the women are not the sole protagonists, each woman shares the narrative with other male soldiers, thus allowing, in my perspective, for a larger margin of representation. In other words, I believe that the visual recognition of female war-related disability is still a topic largely avoided by Western visual culture, thus resulting in either their stifling among other (imposing) male characters, or the cancelling of their representations altogether.

Regarding the depiction of an amputated hand in *Home of the Brave*, choosing to feature a female character with an amputated hand is indeed transgressive, breaking the mold for representations of female veterans. Still, the lack of visual portrayals of female

[736] See June A. Willenz, *Women Veterans: America's Forgotten Heroines* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); and Rachel Dekel and Miriam Goldberg, "Female Military Veterans with Disabilities", *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[737] See N.L. Chappell, B. Havens, "Old and female: Testing the double jeopardy Hypothesis", *The Sociological Quarterly*, 21, (1980), 157–171; and J.L. Berdahl, C. Moore, "Workplace Harassment: Double Jeopardy for Minority Women", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*. 91, (2006), 426–436. Notable exceptions include, for instance, Kate Hendricks, et. al. (eds.), *What Happens When Military Women Become Civilians Again* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2019).
[738] For a critical analysis on intersectionality in war studies, see Orna Sasson Levy, "Ethnicity and Gender in Militaries: An Intersectional Analysis", *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[739] I am not including the depictions of disabled military women in other genres: e.g. *World War Z* (2013. Dir. Marc Forster) in the Horror genre, or *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015, dir. George Miller), in the Science Fiction genre.

soldiers with leg amputations in popular culture should be questioned, since a vast number of servicewomen has been subjected to leg amputations, which are mainly due to bombings. This is evident in documentaries like *The Ground Truth*, or *Service: When Women Come Marching Home* (2012. Dir. Marcia Rock, Patricia Lee Stotter)[740]. Servicewomen with leg amputations are thus not a rare occurrence, and since these women are enforcing their visibility[741], it is important to question why popular visual culture has not accompanied this evolution.

In "Spiraling Downward", Joan Mellen offers her reading of a film I have already discussed, *In the Valley of Elah*. Mellen informs the reader of a scene that was cut from the final edit of the film. In this scene, Mike would go to the hospital to visit his girlfriend who lost both legs while stationed in Iraq. During the visit, he would comfort her by saying that the parts he was interested in still worked[742]. Even though Mellen does not say why the production of the film decided to cut this particular scene, in *Parallel Lines*, Westwell speculates that cutting this scene signifies a "[…] toning down of Mike's capacity from violence and casual misogyny to retain the possibility of redemption"[743]. Meaning that, avoiding to characterize Mike as a sexist on top of a sadist – established by his enjoyment in hurting detainees – makes it easier for audiences to support his redemption arc. I add to Westwell's supposition that, most likely, the sight of a female double amputee would have been too distracting from the main message of the film: that war desensitizes male soldiers, and would open up further (marginal) debate on the physical damage inflicted on female soldiers.

As mentioned, besides *Home of the Brave*, the other female soldier character with a disability is Colee Dunn in *The Lucky Ones*. Dunn's permanent limp – which resulted from being shot in Iraq – is constantly present onscreen, and she frequently manifests pain. Furthermore, we are shown her injury up-close, in a scene where Poole helps Dunn change the dressing on her wound, which is framed in a suggestive manner. As she takes off her pants to expose the bleeding bullet wound on her thigh there is an awkwardness

[740] Produced through the organization *Women Make Movies*, which supports a diverse and inclusive filmmaking landscape. See https://www.wmm.com/ (accessed June 2020).
[741] e.g. Kirstie Ennis, a female Marine with a prosthetic leg has posed nude for *ESPN Magazine*'s 2017 Body Issue. Commenting on this magazine cover, Navy Chief Nancy Bullock-Prevot (head of a foundation for homeless female veterans) said: "We are so used to seeing male veterans who are amputees being featured (in the media). I think the photo is getting so much attention because people are not used to seeing female veterans in that way".
https://eu.pnj.com/story/news/military/2017/07/14/female-amputees-changing-perceptions-combat-veterans/476629001/. (accessed June 2020).
[742] See Mellen, "Spiraling Downward", 8.
[743] Westwell, *Parallel Lines*, 181.

between the two characters that suggests romantic complicity. With this scene, the film seems to avoid the opportunity to deliver a serious account of a war injury that pains a soldier, opting to explore on the romantic/erotic possibilities of having Dunn remove her pants on camera. As this is the only scene in the film that is exclusively about Dunn's injury, I would say that *The Lucky Ones* partakes in the canon of fictional military women I have been exploring, as it attempts to give meaning to the existence of a female soldier through the inclusion of a romantic connection. In fact, both *The Lucky Ones* and *Home of the Brave* follow this path when presenting the storyline of a female soldier with a disability.

As the final part of this thesis concerns discharge narratives, this chapter has addressed the main issues faced by women (mental, emotional, and physical challenges) upon their return from combat, and their respective fictional representations. Through the presented case studies I have demonstrated how women are generally represented in discharge narratives: In need of external male validation trough romantic affairs (*Home of the Brave* and *The Lucky Ones*); as passive and voiceless subjects (*Grace is Gone*); or as mothers who neglected their expected role of nurturer (*Fort Bliss* and *Return*). For the argument I have been developing, this stereotyping of military women in this final phase of their military lives (discharge), falls in line with my previous readings of fictional narratives of boot camp and deployment. Women continue to be placed in the role of the nurturer, and when they return to the domestic space society has claimed they have forsaken, fictional representations tell us that they are not only dislodged, but must be punished for their abandonment of their maternal/domestic responsibilities. This limited scope of representation leaves out important expressions of what it is to be a woman in the armed forces, or a returning veteran. This further ostracizes them from what was already perceived as a 'males-only' institution. Including the examination of male-centered films like *In the Valley of Elah* and *Thank You for Your Service* has provided a contrast to the main points of analysis in this chapter. By comparing how male and female characters are depicted in similar premises to different outcomes, my research has shown that, permeating those fundamental differences, lies the continuous estrangement of the category of 'women as soldier'.

Documentaries depicting soldiers with PTSD and/or disabilities, while informative regarding the realities of the soldiers involved, are not as impactful on the general (civilian) public when it comes to a collective understanding of what war-related PTSD and disabilities are, what they represent, and how they manifest themselves. Fictional narratives depicting soldiers with PTSD and/or disabilities offer entertaining storylines that place mental and physical dysfunctions in contained spaces of representation. This encourages audiences to typecast veterans according to their conditions as they have seen it represented onscreen[744]. The analysis of the case studies presented will hopefully contribute to the underdeveloped research of female veterans with PTSD and/or other disabilities. I believe that the films examined in this chapter are representative of the general stereotypes concerning the returning female soldier. Thus, by discussing their idiosyncrasies and identifying representational patterns, this chapter ties in with the former two chapters, proving how military women continue to be misrepresented in the multiple facets of military life.

[744] Which in turn affect how people with disabilities are treated by family-members, neighbors, co-workers, etc. They furthermore influence strategies in Special Education. See Stephen P. Safran, "Movie Images of Disability and War: Framing History and Political Ideology", *Remedial and Special Education*. (July 2001), 223-232.

Chapter 3.2

VIRTUAL BATTLEGROUNDS
Women in Computer-Generated Scenarios of Warfare

Video Games and Warfare

Throughout this thesis, I have looked back at visual representations of soldiers from previous wars to inform my analysis of fictional depictions of female soldiers during the 'War on Terror'. This research work has provided crucial historical context to the case studies I have examined, and has allowed me to develop my arguments. In this last part of the thesis (Part III), I find of utmost importance to look into futuristic approaches to the 'soldier' as a concept, and to 'battlefields' as interactive arenas. As technological warfare evolves, so do the fictional depictions of the military, of soldiers, and of combat. It is thus my goal in these last two chapters of the thesis to address how military women are included in these futuristic representations/mediums.

In this chapter, I will examine how women are represented in military/war video games, acknowledging the ways in which the gaming industry interlinks with the military-industrial complex. I also intend to include analyses of the role of women in fictional depictions of increasingly technological warfare. Hence, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section considers how the gaming industry is impacted by, and impacts, military technologies, operations, and trainings. This section will lay down the foundations from which the rest of the analysis will be built on. The second section concerns the adaptability of the gaming industry to the crescent numbers of female soldiers. Here, I will expand on topics already addressed in this thesis, such as gender stereotypes in the development of female characters. Lastly, in the third section I will compare the military-themed video game franchises *Call of Duty* (2003 – 2019, Activision) and *America's Army* (2002 – 2015, US Army). From this comparison, I aim

to draw conclusions on the way female soldiers are incorporated into military entertainment platforms, falling in line with the main scope of this thesis.

Throughout my research I have introduced analysis on several examples of the Western military-entertainment complex[745]. I have mostly focused on the cooperation between the military, and production companies of films/TV series, but I have also tackled other fields of entertainment, such as music videos. All of these materials have allowed me to better understand the representation of military women in contemporary visual culture. This path of interdisciplinary visual diversity has led me to now introduce analysis in another field of entertainment: video games. I believe that the examination of video games as cultural texts will enrich my research, since several academic studies show that, through exposure to video games, players are subjected to the reinforcement of prevalent (gender) ideologies[746].

In *Playing War*, a study on military video games after 9/11, Matthew Thomas Payne engages in the critical reading of video games as texts, towards the analysis of what he calls 'ludic war', meaning pleasurable virtual combat experiences[747]. I intend to adopt a similar approach to my examination of the playable military woman character in this chapter, by adopting a critical reading of video game narratives and character construction, considering them cultural texts. With this analysis I hope to ascertain how military women are represented in war video games, as they are an influential part of visual culture, and, like films and TV series, contribute to the social construction of the default 'soldier'. Furthermore, even though the commercial collaboration between the military and the video game industry is not a recent event[748], in the interest of containing my analysis to the period of the 'War on Terror' I will only be addressing examples of games released after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

[745] Meaning the cooperation between the military and entertainment industries to their mutual benefit, seeing its results in the fields of cinema, multimedia, and virtual reality.
[746] See H. Bilandzic and R. Busselle, "A Narrative Perspective on Genre-Specific Cultivation", *Living with Television Now: Advances in Cultivation Theory & Research*, edited by M. Morgan, J. Shanahan, N. Signorielli (New York: Peter Lang. 2012); and M. Morgan, et. al., "Yesterday's New Cultivation, Tomorrow", *Mass Communication & Society*, 18, 674–699. (2015).
[747] Matthew Thomas Payne, *Playing War: Military Video Games After 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 6.
[748] e.g. Atari Inc., *BattleZone*, 1980, Arcade; SEGA. *Desert Tank*. 1994. Arcade; Origin Systems. *Apache: Longbow*. 1996. DOS. etc.

The military historian Samuel Marshall wrote in *Men Against Fire* (1947) that, in WWII, up to 75% of US soldiers did not fire their weapons with the intent to kill, a fact which Marshall considered a hinderance to 'combat effectiveness'[749]. The US Army strived to reduce this percentage by the Vietnam War, aiming to transform the act of killing into a conditioned reflex. This included the use of digital simulations, featuring realistic weapons, that facilitated the mechanic reaction of shooting a 'person' on sight. In the documentary *The Ground Truth: After the Killing Ends* (2006, dir. Patricia Foulkrod) US Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) David Grossman explains how the introduction of video games into the training process conditioned soldiers to pull the trigger on sight. Furthermore, in his book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. Grossman argues that these simulations allowed for 'mechanical distance', offering the "[…] unreality of killing through a TV screen, a thermal sight, a sniper sight, or some other kind of mechanical buffer that permits the killer to deny the humanity of his victim"[750]. Grossman, however, goes beyond the military scope, claiming that video games turn children into potential desensitized killers[751]. This perspective, while supported by authors like Grossman[752], has also received some counterarguments, for instance, from studies that defend the cognitive value in playing video games[753], and others that see it as a way to engage younger population with real news events[754]. Nonetheless, recent statistics show that the average age of a gamer (in the USA) is between eighteen and thirty-four years old[755], which demands a refocus into the real age group of video games' target audiences, and the ways they these gamers can be affected by playing[756].

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[749] In this context, combat effectiveness refers to a soldier's ability to perform a military task as expected.
[750] Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995), 218.
[751] See Grossman, *On Killing*, 362.
[752] For instance, Susan Sontag, who argued that "It is hard to measure the increasing acceptance of brutality in American life, but its evidence is everywhere, starting with the video games of killing that are a principal entertainment of boys". Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", *New York Times Magazine*. May 23rd. I-V, (2004), 28.
[753] For instance, through the work of cognitive scientist Daphne Bavelier, who advocates for how playing 'shooter' video games can improve focus, develop learning skills and aid with the ability to multitask. For an overall approach of her study, see TED Talk "Daphne Bavelier: Your Brain on Video Games", YouTube video, 17:57 minutes, November 19, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=448naPYDVpA (accessed September 2020).
[754] With games like Newsgaming, *September 12th, A Toy World*, 2003, Newsgaming; the art project *911 Survivor* (2003); and the art project *Waco Resurrection* (2003).
[755] According to Christina Gough, "Age of U.S. video game players in 2020", *Statista*. (Jul 24, 2020). https://www.statista.com/statistics/189582/age-of-us-video-game-players-since-2010/ (accessed September 2020).
[756] Furthermore, I should briefly address that I will not ingress in discussions concerning the problem of violence in video games. My analysis is based on the belief that video games are a highly demanded entertainment field, to which women should have the opportunity to participate in equal standing.

Video games have commonly been disregarded by popular culture critics as a subpar cultural product[757], nevertheless, the video game industry has in fact reached a high level of relevance as an entertainment medium, even rivaling film and television[758]. This means that it exerts a high impact on a massive segment of Western societies, demanding the attention of cultural studies scholars. Among the myriad of genres of video games (e.g. action, role-playing, sports, etc.) we can find military-themed video games[759]. These games are mostly presented in a First-Person Shooter (FPS) format, allowing the player to select a military character[760], and experience the game from its perspective. This means that throughout the gameplay, against the backdrop of armed conflict, the player sees a part of the weapon, and the character's hands holding it, as one would, if holding a weapon in real life[761].

Military-themed video games, which center on military-like battles, are among the most popular in the industry, contributing to what war scholar Roger Stahl called 'militainment'[762]. The term 'militainment', a fusion of 'military' and 'entertainment', refers to state violence repackaged as an object for entertainment. Stahl believes video games represent a "[…] nexus of the militarization of cultural space"[763], which turns real wars into interactive military-themed amusement park rides. The technological progression of armed conflicts coupled with the evolution of game technology has brought about the sequential development and release of multiple installments of military-themed video games. This has caused Stahl to emphasize how the progressive life cycle of military-themed games evidences the close connection between the military and the gaming industry, against the backdrop of current military conflicts[764]. Sthal unpacks these collaborations in the military-entertainment complex by providing an example of the

[757] see Roger Ebert, "Video Games Can Never Be Art", *Chicago Sun-Times*, (April 16, 2010), http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2010/04/video_games_can_never_be_art.html (accessed September 2020)
[758] See Daniel Muriel, Garry Crawford, *Video Games as Culture: Considering the Role and Importance of Video Games in Contemporary Society* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[759] For an approach on the history of war games see Sebastian Deterding, "Remediation, Boardgames, and the Early History of Video Wargaming", *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, edited by Nina B. Huntemann, Matthew Thomas Payne (London: Routledge. 2010), 39-59.
[760] A topic I will explore in further detail in the next section of this chapter.
[761] For a discussion on the topic of FPS gun viewpoint, see Scott A. Lukas, "Reading the Video Game Gun", *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, edited by Nina B. Huntemann, Matthew Thomas Payne (London: Routledge. 2010), 96-113.
[762] See Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[763] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 92.
[764] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 96.

cooperation between the US Department of Defense, and the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT):

> "Founded with a $45 million Defense Department grant, ICT amassed a motley collection of Hollywood talent, academics, toymakers, and game industry insiders to assist the military. Here, toy manufacturers help in generating ideas for futuristic weapons; Hollywood screenwriters brainstorm about potential terrorist plots; academics suggest strategies for urban combat and psychological operations; game makers devise new methods for soldier training; and set designers help build virtual environments"[765].

In this quote, Stahl makes apparent the collaboration between the fields of cinema, game making, and academia, to the benefit of the military apparatus. This thought process echoes Jean Baudrillard's view of military/war films in *Simulacra and Simulation* regarding military/war films: "The war became film, the film becomes war, the two are joined by their common hemorrhage into technology"[766]. This 'hemorrhage' became even stronger through the development of military-themed video games in the 21st century. If films/TV series are the primary sources of visual knowledge of war for the general population, video games are the "[…] primary interface governing the civic experience of war"[767], as stated by Stahl in *Militainment, Inc.* Furthermore, comparisons between televised news of real warfare and cinematic wars are as pervasive as comparisons between TV news of warfare and war-themed video games[768]. The intersection of these comparisons offers a unique path into the analysis of Western visual culture, which, as we can see, is deeply engrained within military conflicts.

It is important to state that, many military-themed games do not receive any support from government institutions, which is also the case for many military-themed films/TV series. Nonetheless, this does not mean that military institutions do not benefit from the popularization of these films, TV series, and video games. This unfinanced support of the military by video games like the franchise *Ghost Recon* (2001 – 2019, Ubisoft) and *Rainbow Six* (2015, Ubisoft) was described by David Annandale in

[765] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 97.
[766] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 41.
[767] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*, 18.
[768] These comparisons were also made by Sthal in the chapter 'War Games'. This chapter examines the merge of television news and video games, claiming that both share war-themed materials and storylines. Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 91.

Reframing 9/11 as 'cheerleading', coupling these games with those which actually receive financial support (along other kinds of support) from the US Department of Defense[769]. Many times, this 'cheerleading' described by Annandale translated into a higher percentage of recruitment, a phenomenon also observed with military/war films. As I explained in a previous chapter, films like *Top Gun* (1986, dir. Tony Scott) had a tremendous impact on the percentage of new US Navy recruits. This influence is replicated with video games, as they can encourage players to take their (virtual) fighting abilities onto real battlefields. However, even though video games play to the idealized fantasies of gamers about warfare – which have been much informed by cinematic depictions of war – films and video games differ in terms of their offer of engagement with warfare.

Movies have the ability to transpose the spectator to a fictional plane, even if for a short while. When watching a film like *Inglourious Basterds* [sic] (2009, dir. Quentin Tarantino), one can observe the brutal killing of Adolf Hitler by Jewish Americans, and be a spectator in this re-writing of History. War movies like *Inglourious Basterds* offer viewers a 'satisfactory' re-imagining of facts, displaying a version of History considered appealing, or desirable, to the target audiences. It is thus relevant to this research on visual culture to consider how a similar re-imagining of History would fare out in video games.

As Matthew Payne describes in *Playing War*, new media artist Douglas Edric Stanley created a game for the 2008 Leipzig Games Convention (Germany) that would allow players to defend the World Trade Center towers from attacks. Even though the game presented aliens attacking the twin towers, it clearly evoked memories of the September 11 attacks, which prompted harsh criticism that ultimately led to the end of the game[770]. It is thus pertinent to consider why would a film like *Inglourious Basterds*, which featured high amounts of violence and gore, be celebrated by audiences and critics[771], while a game mimicking the pixelated retro style of the arcade game *Space Invaders* (1978) would be criticized to the point of its abolishment. I argue that this is related to the specific war/event that the movie depicts, in the same way that certain war

[769] David Annandale, "Avatars of Destruction: Cheerleading and Deconstructing the "War on Terror" in Video Games", *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the 'War on Terror'*, edited by Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, Karen Randell (New York: Continuum Books, 2010), 98.
[770] For a report on the controversial game, which contains a video of its gameplay, see Chris Kohler "Controversial Space Invaders Remix Raises Square Enix's Ire", *Wired Magazine*, (August 22, 2008). https://www.wired.com/2008/08/controversial-s/ (accessed September 2020).
[771] *Inglourious Basterds* received multiple awards and nominations, including eight Academy Award nominations (among them Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Original Screenplay).

films' plots are revered while others are berated. Disregarding the subjective 'cinematic quality' of war films, the movies focusing on wars or conflicts that are popularly perceived as having a positive outcome for the US[772] are embraced despite of any depictions of violence. On the other hand, films that portray deep flaws in US military operations are usually rejected by the wider audience and critics[773]. I perceive this to be the main reason behind the support of *Inglourious Basterds*, and the shunning of Stanley's game. The other reason I find for this inconsistency, is that while films offer a purely passive experience, video games allow an active engagement in the visual narrative. Arguably, the possibility of re-imagining 9/11 as an alien attack packaged for entertainment was incompatible with a national desire to remember the event as untampered with, leading to the rejection of this politically charged game. Drawing on Payne's statement that "[a] nation's collective identity and its mythological destiny find powerful expression across media, old and new"[774]. The generalized aversion to wars or conflicts that expose an unfavorable side of US military thus seem to be in contradiction to the overall growth of military-themed video games post-9/11. However, this apparent contradiction is explained by Stahl in *Militainment, Inc*., when he explains that post-9/11 military-themed video games usually avoid incorporating game narratives that could interfere with the experience of battle[775]. This suggests a 'guilt-free' gaming experience which consciously neglects to include some features of war that could possibly hinder the entertainment aspect to the game by associating it with an unpopular war[776]. It is therefore important to highlight that game developers pick and choose which warfare characteristics they wish to include in their games, arguably creating games that attempt to mimic warfare in only a superficial, or stylistic, manner.

Matthew Payne does not draw a comparison between these two visual mediums of entertainment (cinema and video games) in *Playing War*, however, he does recognize their conjoint importance to a 'collective national memory', writing that "[p]hotographs,

[772] Here I refer to the US given that the vast majority of the films discussed are Hollywood products.
[773] Two films that provide examples of both embraced and rejected war films are: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998, dir. Steven Spielberg) and *Redacted* (2007, dir. Brian de Palma).
[774] Payne, *Playing War*, 7.
[775] See Stahl, *Militainment, Inc*., 98.
[776] For instance, the popular military-themed franchise *Call of Duty* is set to release the game *Call of Duty: Black Ops – Cold War* by October 2020 (for PlayStation 5). The fact that the franchise chose to develop a game about the Cold War, but never about the Iraq War, or the Afghanistan War, is very revealing of how these wars are unpopular. Further complicating this choice is the fact that several installments of *Call of Duty* actually make use of maps, technologies, etc. exclusive of these two wars (e.g. Activision, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, 2011, Activision; and Treyarch, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, 2012, Treyarch).

films, radio programs, comic books, web sites, and – yes – video games are the disparate forensic evidence and cultural building blocks for our collective national memory, unifying disparate cultural groups across vast distances and eras"[777]. In his study, Payne thus chooses to focus his analysis on the cultural and social factors that have contributed to Western societies' perception of 'military shooter'[778] video games as pleasurable experiences. About Douglas Stanley's video game, Payne writes that "[i]n lieu of offering escapist fun or experiencing some revisionist or alternative history, [it] critiques the mediated pleasures that commercial war games typically trade in"[779]. Payne's perspective supports my previous claim that Stanley's video game does not offer a 'culturally safe' battleground to play in, and therefore distances itself from war films that might provide access to an alternative reality.

In his study, Payne thus acknowledges the importance of video games as media through which people can be conditioned to understand, and accept, state-sponsored violence, indoctrinated through scenarios of warfare that offer the opportunity to safely experience sacrifice in defense of one's country. Furthermore, as Annandale also advocates, even though video games can mirror social fears regarding terrorism, they nonetheless "[…] are often paradoxically optimistic as they present a fantasy that is a corrective to the messy reality in Iraq and elsewhere"[780]. This leads up to Payne's affirmation that "[m]ilitary entertainments, or "militainments," are commodities that proselytize on behalf of a state mythology"[781]. The opportunity to engage with warfare from a 'safe' space, and the ability to control the virtual body of a soldier as oneself, opens up my research to an interactive realm that contributes to defining the representational sphere of military women. Payne deliberately uses Stahl's aforementioned concept: 'militainment', emphasizing the new terrains for research in the field of military entertainment. Furthermore, Payne builds upon the work of Stahl, among other authors[782], to develop his own theories (employed in *Playing War*) regarding the

[777] Payne, *Playing War*, 8.
[778] A 'military shooter' video game consists of a military-themed video game in which the player(s) assumes the avatar of a soldier who must complete a military mission. This is done while killing the characters which might offer opposition, these may be other players (in multiplayer games) or non-playable characters (NPCs). e.g. the *Call of Duty* franchise.
[779] Payne, *Playing War*, 1.
[780] Annandale, "Avatars of Destruction, 98.
[781] Payne, *Playing War*, 9.
[782] e.g. Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

importance of gameplay (game design) to cultural assessments of armed conflicts, and its implications to economic networks of power.

Military First-Person Shooters (FPS) in Visual Culture, and Military Women

An example of a video game franchise that materializes the US Defense Department's efforts in using the entertainment industry to increase enlistment numbers is the First-Person Shooter (FPS) *America's Army* (2002 – 2015, US Army). *America's Army* is a successful series of video games developed, and distributed (through free download), by the US Army[783]. Created with the intent to allow players to experience, and explore, US Army's operations, *America's Army* is therefore a platform for strategic recruitment[784]. In his analysis, David Annandale calls the *America's Army* franchise 'honest', for its blunt admission of being a tool for recruitment, not attempting to pass as a game for entertainment purposes only. *America's War* is not based on an entirely fictional virtual space, since it provides as much realism as possible to the gameplay, allowing the general population to interact with the wars transmitted on the news[785]. In *Militainment, Inc.*, Sthal calls *America's Army* a tool to implement a wide culture of 'virtual recruitment', subjected to the US Army brand[786]. According to Sthal, at a time when the news of warfare resembles video games, and video games recreate wartime news, "[t]he business of play works closely with the military to replicate the tools of state violence; the business of state violence in turn capitalizes on playtime for institutional ends"[787]. Sthal defends that video games, as cultural manifestations, are unique in their incitement of the 'virtual citizen-soldier', spawned from the interlocking of progressive technologies and military conflicts This category refers to a civilian player, who by virtue of virtual gameplay, becomes a 'soldier'. This makes video games an optimal tool from

[783] *America's Army* Official Website. http://www.americasarmy.com/ (accessed June 2020). America's Army was one of the top ten online games in the world from 2002 to 2008 (see Corey Mead. *War Play: Video Games and the Future of Armed*. Boston: Eamon Dolan Book, 2013. 113).
[784] For an analysis of how video games can be used for military recruitment, see David B. Nieborg, "Training Recruits and Conditioning Youth: The Soft Power of Military Games", *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, edited by Nina B. Huntemann, Matthew Thomas Payne (London: Routledge. 2010), 75-89.
[785] The very first installment of the game (*Operations*) was modeled after an actual raid that took place in Afghanistan.
[786] See Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*, 93.
[787] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*, 109.

which to analyze how Western societies understand war, and *America's Army* is arguably a prime example of a game that makes use of the popular appeal of the 'virtual citizen-soldier'[788].

Building on Stahl's idea of the 'virtual citizen-soldier', I apply it to fictional narratives that depict characters playing, or discussing, video games. It is thus noteworthy to examine what role does the representation of gamers play in the context of military/war fictional narratives. Drawing on the first season of the TV series *Our Girl*, a case study already addressed in this thesis, we can find examples of how gaming is considered, by popular culture, to be intrinsically interlocked with warfare, and with its fictional representations. In two separate occasions we can see the father of Molly Dawes (the series' protagonist) playing *Call of Duty*. These instances signal the constant intrusion of warfare into the home via the TV set. However, it is relevant to highlight that, while newscasts of war evoke in the family a general sense of dread and unhappiness, games of warfare – which are visually similar to the images shown of battle zones –, evoke joy and happiness in the fictional family depicted in *Our Girl*.

Moreover, in *Our Girl*, we can hear Corporal Geddings call the recruits the 'PlayStation Generation' during military training. This term, meant in a pejorative way, makes use of stereotypes that imply gamers are lazy. Also, when Captain James is warning Dawes of the dangers of warfare, he states: "This isn't *Call of Duty* on the PlayStation"[789]. However, in a later scene where the British troops are under intense shooting, Dawes says to her unit: "It was like *Call of Duty* for a minute there, boys!". Thus, while Captain James may be correct in his assertion that real conflict is not like a video game where you can respawn and keep playing after being fatally wounded, or simply pause/leave the battle, Dawes' comparison shows how military 'shooters' are deeply ingrained into a collective warfare imaginary.

Another topic of interest when analyzing fictional representations of military games is their relation to depictions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Throughout my research I have found that in some cases[790] military video games are used in discharge narratives as a device to trigger a PTSD episode. This happens in films like

[788] For an assessment of the relationship between *America's Army* and the video game industry, see Randy Nichols, "Target Acquired: *America's Army* and the Video Games Industry", *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, edited by Nina B. Huntemann, Matthew Thomas Payne (London: Routledge. 2010), 60-74.
[789] *Our Girl*, DVD. The reference of *Call of Duty* as the quintessential military 'shooter' conveys its importance as a cultural symbol.
[790] From the sample of films I examined. See Appendix.

Thank You for Your Service, where Specialist Solo Aieti has flashbacks of the death of a fellow soldier while playing a military 'shooter'. These flashbacks caused Aieti to have a violent outburst, putting his pregnant wife in danger. Even though it could cause doubt that a soldier would return from the war with either physical or psychological disabilities and want to play military-themed video games, this is actually factual. An example can be found in the documentary *Hell and Back Again* (2011, dir. Danfung Dennis) where a soldier with a severe disability plays *Call of Duty*.

Another example in this pattern is *Voir du Pays* (a.k.a. *The Stopover*, 2016, dir. Muriel Coulin and Delphine Coulin). In this film, there is a scene which superimposes a soldier training on a treadmill onto a videogame being played by soldiers next to him (Figure 18). This brief scene is ominous of what is to come, since the soldiers participate in a post-war decompression stage which requires them to relive their experiences through virtual reality therapy, seeing their real past experiences played out in a digital world[791]. This superimposition calls attention to the increasingly blurred boundaries between the soldier's biological body and the digital battlefield.

Figure 18 - Screenshot of Voir du Pays *(2016). Soldier running on a treadmill/ military videogame superimposition.*

In *Voir du Pays*, video games are presented as both a source of entertainment (soldiers playing arcade 'shooters'), and as a military tool (soldiers subjected to virtual therapy built from pre-existing game technology). *Voir du Pays* thus offers a complex approach on the topic of fictional depictions of military-themed video games, acknowledging both their ludic side, and their appropriation as a military tool. The movie

[791] I will further develop the topic of virtual therapy in *Voir du Pays* in the next chapter (3.3).

nonetheless follows the trend of having a video game (or in this case, an 'adapted' video game) triggering a PTSD-related episode on a soldier. In a particular scene, anxiety attacks are induced on a military woman by forcing her to re-live traumatic events through the digital body of an avatar[792].

The acknowledgement that Western life is progressively computer-mediated, leads to an understanding of how semi-realistic gameplay facilitates a familiarity with machines, allowing gamers to understand interfaces and grow familiar with simulated worlds, and with the narratives they create. Building on my research of the subject, I will now examine how the digital representations of military women have evolved along with the military-entertainment technology. Furthermore, understanding how video games help shape perceptions of gender roles, I will question how they have influenced the cultural construction of the category of the 'military woman', the main concern of this thesis. I will now discuss some issues concerning the 'realism' of video games from a gendered perspective. I will start by addressing the topic of gender diversity in the gaming community, which will then lead me to an analysis of the main issues regarding female characters in popular military video games.

In *Ready Player Two*, a study on gendered perspectives in game design, Shira Chess writes that: "Like all popular art, game design is affected by the culture and time in which it is constructed"[793]. Chess approaches game design to question the ways in which games are generally not developed with the prospect of having women playing them, which justifies the title of the book, identifying women as 'Player Two', and men as 'Player One'[794]. Based on her research, Chess claims that game developers make specific games for women, 'social games' (e.g. *Farmville*, or *Words with Friends*), while console games,

[792] An 'avatar', according to *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, is (among other definitions of the term): "an electronic image that represents and may be manipulated by a computer user (as in a game)". https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/avatar (accessed September 2020).
[793] Shira Chess, *Ready Player Two: Women Gamers and Designed Identity* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 37.
[794] Which is then reflected in how female characters are usually relegated to secondary characters. An issue addressed in T. Lynch, et. al., "Sexy, strong, and secondary: A content analysis of female characters in video games across 31 years", *Journal of Communication*, 66, (2016), 564–584.

considered 'hardcore games'[795] are targeted for men[796]. 'Hardcore games' exist in direct opposition to 'social', or 'casual' games, and are understood as being more intense, complex, and often more violent[797]. Military-themed games fall in this category of 'hardcore games', and therefore, have a tradition of excluding women from their target-audience, expanding their market with a multitude of games designed for straight white men[798].

In his own analysis of military-themed video games, Thomas Payne addresses the unbalanced gender diversity of high-level players in gaming competitions, expanding those considerations to a larger framework. Payne comments on his observations in the commercial gaming center LANopolis[799], as well as on the interviews he conducted at that site with what he calls the most 'avid' (or 'hardcore') players of military-themed video games. As Payne establishes a framework for the social practices that characterize this particular micro-community of what he calls 'ludic soldiers'[800], he finds it to be overtly dominated by men. Payne describes LANopolis as being a "[…] markedly homosocial space, [playing] host to explicit displays of machismo, sexism, racism, and homophobia"[801]. The scarcity of women playing games in LAN centers is punctuated by the stereotyping collected by Payne through interviews, that women only enjoy social games (likewise noted by Shira Chess), where they can engage in exchanges with other players. Another popular opinion collected by Payne was that the women that walk into LANopolis are either girlfriends or mothers of (male) gamers. Even though Payne makes this pertinent observation, he does not further explore the issue of both overt and tacit displays of sexism in the gaming culture, abandoning it in favor of other topics. Nonetheless, the brief considerations presented by Payne of this micro-cosmos of the gaming community can be enlarged to stand as representative of a wider community.

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[795] The designation 'hardcore games' extends to its players, a.k.a. 'hardcore players'. This designation alone confers a certain type of entitlement about their gamer identities, as the term is culturally related with either pornography or music. This topic was discussed by science fiction writer Erin Hoffman, in her 2012 blog post: "The problem with the lowest difficulty setting" Erin Hoffman Blog. http://www.erinhoffman.com/wp/?p=535 (accessed September 2020).
[796] Chess, *Ready Player Two*, 39.
[797] See B. Manero, et. al., "An Instrument to Build a Gamer Clustering Framework According to Gaming Preferences and Habits", *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, (2016), 353–363.
[798] This topic is the central discussion in Sheri Graner Ray, *Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market* (Boston: Charles River Media, 2004).
[799] This LAN (Local Area Network) center is located in Texas, USA.
[800] Payne, *Playing War*, 170.
[801] Payne, *Playing War*, 190.

One of the most poignant examples of sexism in the gaming community happened between 2014 and 2017, when a large online harassment campaign took place under the hashtag #GamerGate[802]. The proponents of this movement directed several threats of rape, death, even committing doxing[803], against several women in the gaming industry. Game developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu spoke publicly about their experiences, as did Anita Sarkeesian, a media critic heavily targeted by #GamerGate[804]. Sarkeesian was mainly targeted because of her campaign to raise money for a study on female representation and gender tropes, in a wide specter of video games. Despite the harassment she suffered, Sarkeesian was able to collect three times the sum she intended, and released the series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. This video series features entries such as: "Damsel in Distress"; "Ms. Male Character", or "The Lady Sidekick". Sarkeesian used her platform to address the topic of the online harassment of female and LGBTQ+ gamers[805], at the same time she discussed the underrepresentation (and misrepresentation) of women (and other minorities) in video games. I acknowledge the importance of studies about gender diversity in gaming communities (i.e. groups of people who share interest over a particular game or gaming genre)[806], and likewise recognize the importance of having women participating in the development of those considered 'hardcore games'[807]. Nonetheless, in the interest of concision I will focus my analysis on the representation of military women in video games.

The #GamerGate controversy revealed that video games represent a charged space for gendered discourse. Therefore, the cross between military ideology, and the overtly masculine community of gamers, opens up a field for critical analysis of gender stereotyping in the form of military-themed video games. Thus, it is crucial to make

[802] The #GamerGate controversy was populated with individuals from in different Western countries, but it had its epicenter in the US.
[803] Doxing consists of collecting personal information about someone (often through hacking) to then publish this information online. The goal being either to embarrass the target (e.g. by posting personal photographs), or to threaten their safety (e.g. by posting their address of phone number).
[804] See Caitlin Dewey, "The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read", *The Washington Post*. (November 14, 2014). http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-togamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/ (accessed September 2020); and Melissa McEwan, "This Is Misogynist Terrorism", *Shakesville*, (October 15, 2014). http://www.shakesville.com/2014/10/this-is-misogynist-terrorism.html (accessed September 2020).
[805] For a recent study on the topic of online harassment see Jennifer Golbeck, *Online Harassment* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2018).
[806] For a detailed recent study on this issue, see Sofie Van Bauwell, "Women Gamers", *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, edited by Karen Ross (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2020).
[807] See Jennifer Brandes Hepler (ed.), *Women in Game Development: Breaking the Glass Level-Cap* (Boca Raton: CRC Press. 2017).

distinctions between how *realistic* video games can be, regarding graphics and the accurate replication of real settings, and their *realism*, meaning the inclusion of real social, ethical, or moral issues in their narratives[808]. Since entertainment is the main priority of video games, as it is in the majority of films/TV series, certain elements of the representation of warfare, what Sthal designates by "unconsumable realities", are not featured in gameplay "[…] for the sake of conscience-free playing"[809]. Meaning that war is 'sanitized' for entertainment purposes. This approach provides gaming experiences exclusively focused on an aseptic version of the armed forces and war.

This fact was parodied by US comedian Amy Schumer in a humoristic sketch entitled "A Very Realistic Military Game"[810]. In the sketch, Schumer accepts her boyfriend's invitation to play a video game he describes as being like *Call of Duty*[811], only more realistic. Schumer is glad to see that this game offers the option to choose a female soldier as a playable character. However, at the beginning of the game, instead of the habitual fighting gameplay, Schumer's avatar is raped by a fellow soldier. The game then asks the player (Schumer) if she wishes to report the rape, but tries to persuade her not to (showing a picture of the rapist's family), and then makes her go through fastidious paperwork only to see her rapist reinstated into duty, and her character's military career destroyed. The sketch parodies how oblivious many people are to military sexual abuse, demonstrated by Schumer's boyfriend assuring her that that has never happened to his (male) character, and certainly it was her fault for not playing the 'game' right. His comment, while referring to the video game, is also applicable to the figurative 'game' military women 'play' to be successful in their military careers. Furthermore, in the sketch, Schumer also manages to satirize military bureaucracy and victim blaming, while shining a light on the notion that video game versions of warfare, however 'realistic' they might seem, are in fact very distant from actual soldiers' real-life experiences[812]. This satirical text is effective in critiquing two large spheres that have a tradition of alienating women: the armed forces, and the gaming industry.

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[808] See Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming", *Game Studies* 4, no. 1. (2004). http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/galloway/ (accessed July 2020).
[809] Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.* 28.
[810] Comedy Central, "Inside Amy Schumer - A Very Realistic Military Game", YouTube video, 3:08 minutes, August 26, 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXGJGuH59qw (accessed June 2020).
[811] An immensely popular First-Person Shooter (FPS) military-theme game, which I will discuss in this chapter.
[812] For a comprehensive approach on the topic of how female comedians are bringing sensitive subjects into the televised limelight, including an analysis of "A Very Realistic Military Game", see Joy Press, *Stealing the Show: How Women Are Revolutionizing Television* (New York: Atria Books, 2018).

As I have already discussed in chapter 1.2, Laura Mulvey's theory on the representation of women as spectacle is of major importance when critically examining depictions of women in entertainment platforms. In that chapter, I highlighted Mulvey's considerations on how fictional women are offered as a sexual spectacle for the 'male gaze'. I now expand these considerations to address video games as an example of another visual platform, taking particular notice of female characters in military-themed games.

However, it must be stated that the issue of 'gaze' is significantly different for films than it is for video games. This is partly due to the particularities of the game's camera. When watching a film, we only see the specific angles orchestrated by the director. On the other hand, when playing a video game, the player has control over the game camera, being able to choose the angle from which to see a character[813]. While this control in the angle of the gaze may disrupt Mulvey's original theory, the generally sexualized design of the female characters reinforces the intent of her main argument. Anita Sarkeesian's online video series *Tropes vs Women in Video Games* demonstrate how Mulvey's theories can be applied to this field. In the video "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games"[814]. Sarkeesian adds to the research[815] that reveals that games are more likely to have a wider diversity of male playable avatars than female ones, as she exposes the gaming industry for a lack of diversity of female characters' body types. Sarkeesian points out that male characters are designed to represent a large spectrum of body types, with each physical characteristic corresponding to a character's trait/ability, while the same does not occur with female characters. According to Sarkeesian, female characters' bodies are created to visually please male gamers, falling in line with Mulvey's theory, regardless of camera movement.

Overall, the 'realistic' female bodies[816] designed for the majority of video games are in fact limiting when it comes to body shapes, with the vast majority of female characters sporting slender frames, conventionally attractive facial features, and

[813] This topic is addressed by video games scholar Esther MacCallum-Stewart, in "'Take That, Bitches!' Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives", *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 14, (2014). http://gamestudies.org/1402/articles/maccallumstewart (accessed September 2020).
[814] Feminist Frequency, "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games", *YouTube* video, 7:24 minutes, September 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbqRtp5ZUGE (accessed September 2020).
[815] See K. Haninger, K. M. Thompson, "Content and Ratings of Teenrated Video Games", *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 291(7), 856–865, (2004); M. K. Miller and A. Summers, "Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines", *Sex Roles*, 57, 733–742, (2007).
[816] I am referring to female bodies of human characters, as opposed to animal, alien, or other types of fantasy characters.

clothing[817] that reveals their large cleavage and/or other body parts (e.g. Lara Croft)[818]. On the other hand, popular male video game characters like Mario (from the franchise *Super Mario*), or Master Chief (from the franchise *Halo,* 2000 – 2021, Xbox Game Studios) are always depicted fully clothed, and show distinct body shapes. This objectification of women in video games[819] is thus a complement to other platforms in visual culture (e.g. films, TV series, etc.), in the sense that all have a history of favoring depictions of conventional female attractiveness[820]. This is problematic because repetitive depictions of women as young, beautiful, and slender, manifest the notion that women's value is tied directly to their youth, beauty, and sexual appeal.

When Shira Chess wrote that that "[g]ames need bodies, and games control those bodies"[821], she reminds us that the overtly masculine history of the gaming industry determines that not only 'extra-gaming bodies' (gamers) should be male, but the 'in-game bodies' (avatars) should also be male by default[822]. As the armed forces have been traditionally considered a 'male space', so have been military-themed video games. All in all, it can be argued that the resistance to gender diversity in the gaming industry mirrors a similar type of resistance in military circles. This is further complicated when discussing military-themed video games, and the inclusion of female military playable characters, which is the topic of the next section.

Female Avatars in Call of Duty *and* America's Army

[817] See Berrin Beasley and Tracy Standley, "Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games", *Mass Communication & Society*. 3rd ed. Vol. 5 (London: Routledge, 2002), 279-93.
[818] This topic is extensively discussed in E. Downs and S. L. Smith, "Keeping abreast of hypersexuality: A
video game character content analysis", *Sex Roles*, 62, 721–733, (2010); it is also the topic of one of Anita Sarkeesian's videos: "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games".
[819] Which arguably finds its highest form of portrayal in the franchise *Grand Theft Auto* (1997-2013, Rockstar Games).
[820] Regarding the exclusion of specific identities/body types from digital worlds (from an intersectional perspective), see the section entitled: Bodies that (Don't) Matter: Flattening the Digital Body. In Chess, *Ready Player Two,* 164; and A. Shaw and E. Friesem, "Where is the Queerness in Games? Types of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content in Digital Games", *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 3877–3889, (2016).
[821] Chess, *Ready Player Two*, 152.
[822] Chess, *Ready Player Two*, 157.

I will now compare the franchises *Call of Duty* (2003-2020), and *America's Army*, in order to assess how these two case studies represent military women in their influential military FPS games. I will begin by examining the immensely popular[823] franchise *Call of Duty*. This franchise is composed of militaristic-style games based on real-world conflicts, where players can choose an avatar (called 'Operator') to navigate the gameplay in either campaign (i.e. following a pre-established storyline) or in multiplayer mode (i.e. battling other players). The first three installments of *Call of Duty* (released in 2003, 2005, and 2006) were set against the backdrop of World War II. Only in 2007, with *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, did the game branched out into a more modern type of conflict, placing the action (partially) in the Middle East. If the game developers' choice in not featuring playable military women in the first three installments was understandable given the historical context intended, it began to be a noticeable flaw starting with the 2007 game, especially since women were by then occupying a growing percentage in US military recruitment. As the number of female gamers also began to increase, *Call of Duty* developers were pressured by fans and critics to add women to their games, while possibly also feeling commercially pressured by rival military-themed FPS games like *Halo* or *Gears of War* (2006 – 2019, Epic Games), which already had female playable characters available. It took *Call of Duty* developers ten years before adding the first female playable character in multiplayer mode, introduced in *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (2013, Activision). This was advertised with live action promotional materials for the game featuring Megan Fox, a conventionally attractive actress. The choice in casting Fox to advertise the inclusion of women in the game seems to have been an attempt to entice the male players and justify the inclusion of female avatars.

Despite *Call of Duty*'s early dismissal of gender diversity, the franchise has improved the variety of gender representation, showing an increasing diverse group of characters, which culminated in the most recent installment (at the time of writing this chapter), *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (2019, Activision). This game includes women with different ethnicities, different nationalities, and an age range that would be compatible to real-life military personnel (Figure 19)[824]. Furthermore, these women occupy different roles, including high military ranks (e.g. the character of Lieutenant General Lyons).

[823] The 2019 installment surpassing one billion dollars in sales worldwide. See Jeff Grubb, "Modern Warfare is the most-played *Call of Duty* this generation", *Venture Beat*, (December 18, 2019). https://venturebeat.com/2019/12/18/call-of-duty-modern-warfare-most-played/ (accessed October 2020).
[824] See Monica Miller, and Alicia Summers, "Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Games", *Sex Roles*. Vol. 57, 733-42, (2007).

Figure 19 - Screenshots of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare *(2019). Female Operators (i.e. avatars).*

Regarding body proportions in *Call of Duty*, female and male avatars are roughly the same size. Though this gives a perception of both genders as equal forces, this design choice primarily serves gameplay fairness, as a larger character would signify a larger target, and smaller characters would have an unfair advantage[825]. Also, when it comes to attires, female characters come with their own assortment of unique options for attire and gear, which correspond to the ones available to male characters regarding coverage and combat efficiency. Regarding bodies with disabilities, a topic already covered in this thesis, the 2019 installment of *Call of Duty* features for the first time a character with a prosthetic leg (an 'Operator' called Alex). Even though this character is representative of a large portion of soldiers who lost a limb during warfare, he is the only one with this particularity, supporting my research findings (presented in the last chapter – 3.1) that female military characters in visual culture are usually not depicted as physically disabled[826]. Moreover, throughout my research of the military/war genre, I have highlighted the importance of the representation of hair, as a specific physical trait in the construction of the fictional female soldier. I have stated how visual narratives rely on hair to convey either a restrained woman (with tightly kept hair), or an ungoverned woman (with loose hair) and have demonstrated how the removal of hair is portrayed as a blow to femininity, as women continuously have their femininity associated with their

[825] This argument could also open a debate for the advantages of having a body type considered 'normal' in the military.

[826] For an analysis on video games characters with disabilities on a different game, see: Rachel Hutchinson, "Representing Race and Disability: Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas as a Whole Text", *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Video Games*, edited by Jennifer Malkowski, Treaandrea M. Russworm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2017), 164-178.

hair. It is thus important to see how *Call of Duty* delivers avatars of women with a myriad of hairstyles: short, long, afros, braided, and even shaven (Figure 19).

More importantly, the 2019 game of the franchise is the first with a playable female protagonist[827], the Middle Eastern Farah Karim[828], whose description reads: "An exceptional soldier who has known a lifetime of war". Karim[829] is the founder and commander of a liberation force (The Urzistan Liberation Force). According to the narrative director of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, Karim was based on the group of militia fighters YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin), who operate in Syria and Iraq. The narrative director states the game developers were inspired by these women's resilience and bravery, and felt it was 'overdue' to feature a female protagonist like Karim[830]. Even though Karim is not a Western military woman, having a female character play this important role represents a big step towards gender diversity in a traditionally male-dominated franchise. However, it should be noted that molding a character after the YPJ could suggest an appropriation of those women's struggles for the sake of entertainment, denoting a trait of US hegemony.

Even though research in the area shows that the sexualization of female characters in video games has been declining since its peak in the 1990's[831], a gender unbalance in character design can still be observed[832]. This important military-themed game has recently shown that 'hardcore games' can include different types of women – in different capacities –, in their narratives and remain highly lucrative. Given that a study conducted by a non-profit organization showed that only 5% of the games presented at the 2019 Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) had female protagonists[833], the *Call of Duty* franchise

[827] Aside from this lead female avatar, the game is also populated with female soldier NPCs (Non-playable Characters), these are characters which are not controlled by the player, but contribute to the gameplay.
[828] Karim is a digital rendering of the actress Claudia Doumit, who worked as an actress in this game (through motion-capture performance).
[829] The last avatar depicted in Figure 19.
[830] See Patrick Shanley, "Modern Warfare' Narrative Director Says It's 'Right Time' for Female Protagonist", *The Hollywood Reporter*, (May 30, 2019). https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/call-duty-modern-warfare-right-time-female-protagonist-says-narrative-director-1213502 (accessed September 2020).
[831] e.g. T. Lynch, et. al., "Sexy, strong, and secondary: A content analysis of female characters in video games across 31 years", *Journal of Communication*, 66, 564– 584, (2016).
[832] In the video "Are Women Too Hard to Animate?" Sarkeesian questions the disregard of game developing team to add playable female characters to their games. See Feminist Frequency, "Are Women Too Hard To Animate? Tropes vs Women in Video Games", *YouTube* video, 7:25 minutes July 16, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u64MGg3Hpp0 (accessed September 2020).
[833] See Carolyn Petit, Anita Sarkeesian, "Female Representation in Videogames Isn't Getting Any Better", *Wired*, (June 14, 2019). https://www.wired.com/story/e3-2019-female-representation-videogames/ (accessed September 2020).

seems to be contributing to gender diversity in gaming, and to an inclusive industry overall, with its digital military women[834]. On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge that *Call of Duty*'s – and the gaming industry overall – increase in gender diversity could be due to the desire of the military-industrial complex in capitalizing on the growing demand for more inclusive forms of representation[835].

It is also important to acknowledge that while the *Call of Duty* franchise is not funded by the US Department of Defense (DoD), it is nonetheless part of the group of games identified by David Annandale as 'cheerleaders', ultimately encouraging engagement with military practices which could lead to enlistment in the armed forces. To provide a basis for comparison, the non-DoD endorsed *Call of Duty* has a larger gender diversity than the DoD's *America's Army* (2002 – 2013). Regarding gameplay, *America's Army* is a multiplayer FPS video game. Players perform as soldiers in the U.S. Army as part of a team, engaging in tactical shooting. The game offers combat at squad-level and three fireteams. The first installment of *America's Army* offered as the playable character a young man, with three skin tones for the player to choose from. In this first game there were no female characters, either playable or not[836]. As Robertson Allen explains in *America's Digital Army*, a study on the connections between video games and warfare, at its core *America's Army* recycles hypermasculine heroic narratives, alienating possible female players[837].

The 2006 installment of *America's Army*, 'Real Heroes' (2006, US Army), sought realism beyond military practices and warfare settings, and offered nine playable characters based on real-life medal-winning soldiers. The only female character among these soldiers was Sergeant Monica Lin Brown, a medic who received a Silver Star[838] for providing medical care to wounded soldiers under hostile fire in Afghanistan. This single female representation reinforces stereotypes about women's role as a caretaker, a topic I

[834] On the other hand, an example of a video game that sexualizes women under the guise of pushing female characters forward in military-themed 'hardcore games' *Her War* (awaiting release), which despite allowing the player to experience a military game populated with only women, features characters with hyper-sexualized body types (slender with large breasts). https://www.herwargame.com/ (accessed October 2020).

[835] For a comprehensive analysis of how feminist ideals have been appropriated into marketable assets, see Andi Zeisler, *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to Covergirl, the Buying & Selling of a Political Movement* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016).

[836] For more details on the development of the game, see Margaret Davis, et.al., "Making *America's Army*", *America's Army PC Game: Vision and Realization* (United States Army, 2004).

[837] Robertson Allen, *America's Digital Army: Games at Work and War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2017), 20.

[838] The Silver Star Medal is the third-highest decoration for valor in combat in the US Armed Forces. Sergeant Linn was the second woman recipient of the Silver Star Medal since the WWII.

have already addressed in this thesis. About 'Real Heroes', Robertson Allen wrote that its half-truths work to "[…] obscure and deflect attention away from soldiers and their families"[839]. Thus, by crystalizing these real-life soldiers as avatars, the game offers players the chance to 'live' through their 'bodies', turning the soldiers into a symbol of heroism and stripping them of any vulnerability or human weaknesses. Furthermore, Allen emphasizes that by the third installment of the game the only women depicted were news anchors, shown in brief scenes. Even though this return to the alienation of female playable characters was not explained, it is possible that it was due to backlash from players which can be immediately perceived by the many interventions of players on the game's official website[840].

Only in more recent installments of the game were more female characters added, responding to critics that wondered why there were not more women in this game that claims to be very realistic, when in fact the number of women in combat roles was increasing. However, a quick research on the game's official website[841] shows how military women are perceived by the game developers (i.e. the US Army) as secondary (Figure 20).

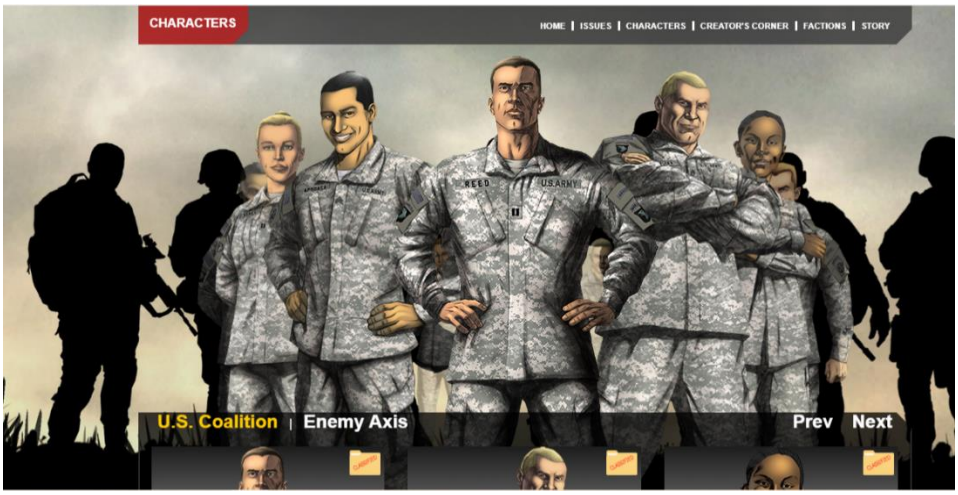

Figure 20 - Screenshot of America's Army: Proving Grounds' *(2013) characters. (open access official website)*

As Figure 20 shows, the first view of the available characters offers three male soldiers in assertive stances, and the only two female soldiers are partially hidden among

[839] Allen, *America's Digital Army*, 88.
[840] See the following websites:
https://steamcommunity.com/app/203290/discussions/4/1694919808735432762/, and
https://forum.americasarmy.com/discussion/3813/lady-soldiers (accessed October 2020).
[841] See https://legacy.americasarmy.com/comics/characters (accessed October 2020).

the ‘anonymous’ soldiers in the background. Since this is a game directed towards recruitment, I argue that the effort in recruiting women does not match the same effort in recruiting men. This leads me to the conclusion that women are still not considered a desirable addition to the US Army.

In a 2019 recruitment advert for the US Army, the viewer, and potential recruit is asked: “What’s Your Warrior?”[842]. This question appears after a series of digitalized images of soldiers in different capacities, whether it be in combat positions, strategic roles, and even in laboratories. The entire video is set up to resemble a video game advertisement. This deliberate choice in presentation reveals the US Army’s awareness of the importance of video games to their target audience. Thus, the ad plants into the possible recruits’ minds that joining the US Army is just like a video game, where you get to experience excitement for real. Even the terminology used alludes to this: ‘challenge’; ‘team’; ‘master the elements’; and finally, ‘command the tools of tomorrow’. The appeal to: ‘turn a global challenge into your daily mission’, suggests a game which can be played with the same intensity that gamers play ‘hardcore games’. If the approach was not revealing enough, the final question – ‘What’s your player?’ – really uncovers the desire to appropriate the gaming industry into a military agenda. The question addresses possible recruits as if they were merely picking a playable character in a military-themed game, and not risking their own lives. Furthermore, using ‘what’ instead of ‘who’ reinforces the idea that what is being chosen is not the profession of a human, but the adventure of a digital character. The advert is actively asking the viewer to ‘chose an avatar’, just like in *America’s Army*.

I recognize the topic of gender diversity in military-themed video games as being particularly important to the main aim of this thesis. As the research I have been addressing shows, video games now occupy a large portion of the entertainment market, thus, a wider range of gender representation in video games has a significant cultural impact, in the sense that it normalizes women’s presence in a military context. Diverse representation of female avatars in military games would allow a large portion of the population to virtually interact with military women, who are seen performing their duties as well as the player’s gaming abilities allows them, and not hindered by gender stereotypes. Therefore, including women as playable characters in military-themed games

[842] GoArmy, “What’s Your Warrior? | Join Forces | GOARMY | Commercial”, *YouTube* video, 1:00 minute, November 9, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TprgnuYfyQ (accessed October 2020).

would not only integrate female gamers into a widely popular (and lucrative) section of the entertainment industry, but it would also increase positive visibility of women in the armed forces.

Chapter 3.3

THE POSTHUMAN SOLDIER
Futuristic Creations of Female Soldiers

The Marine Corps does not want robots!
The Marine Corps wants killers!
The Marine Corps wants to build indestructible men!
Men without fear!

Full Metal Jacket (1987, dir. Stanley Kubrick)

The Physical Limitations of Soldiers and the Robotic/Virtual Body

Throughout this thesis I have examined representations of military women in fictional narratives that, for the most part, have a direct correspondence with reality. However, in this last chapter I intend to contemplate the future of fictional representations of military women. I believe it is important to do so as the technological progression of armed conflicts is raising new and challenging questions in the field of gender studies. My research has shown that the gendered body has been a site of debate in all stages of military life: boot camp, deployment, and discharge. In this chapter, I investigate how the gendered body is perceived – and represented – in an increasingly technological military.

The line of questioning that underlies the analysis in this chapter is circumscribed to a main inquiry: what type of soldiers does the military want? While this is a question that has come up throughout the thesis in different forms, I believe that it is in this final chapter – where I ponder on representations of futuristic soldiers – that it holds more significance. Military recruiting imagery has, comprehensively, evolved with the times. If we consider, for instance, the famous 'I want YOU" World War I (WWI) recruitment posters in both the UK and the US, we see that the abrupt slogan accompanied by the

figure pointing at the observer[843], conferred a sense of urgency, bestowing upon all men a need to join the Army. In 2019, the British Army released a recruitment campaign inspired by the WWI famous posters, entitled 'This is Belonging'. In this new campaign, young men and women were summoned to join the Army, but while the original WWI poster only asked for 'you', this new version appeals to pre-conceived traits of current youth culture.

Figure 21 - Examples of posters that were part of the 2019 British Army recruitment campaign, "This is Belonging". (open access images).

Even though the campaign was diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity, it nonetheless made use of negative perceptions of British youth, referring to them as overindulged millennials, 'snowflakes', 'selfie addicts', 'phone zombies', 'class clowns', 'binge gamers', etc. (Figure 21). The purpose of these offenses was to convey the idea that the British Army found positive aspects in these 'flaws', but the Army nevertheless managed to instill the idea that young people do exclusively fit into these stereotypical categories. This campaign still bears a strong similarity with the original one, in the sense that, even though both appear to be promoting inclusivity under an accepting military institution, both see the British Army adhering to strict criteria when it comes to the physical conditions of the ideal recruit. The military is not primarily looking for recruits with 'self-belief', or 'compassion', as the recent campaign posters might imply, they are looking for physically fit, young individuals who are able to fulfill certain prerequisites. In this aspect, the Army (either in the UK or in the US) has not changed dramatically. Since the nature of warfare is gradually shifting towards a technologically dominated

[843] This figure was Uncle Sam in the case of the US Army recruitment poster (1917), and Lord Kitchener in the case of the British Army recruitment poster (1914). The posters are very similar, with both figures staring ahead while pointing.

environment, the demands for the ideal body of a soldier started to be addressed in a different way.

Given the amount of investment and research that Western nations continue to make in the field of technologically advanced armed responses, it is necessary to ask what the place of the 'soldier' in this advancement is. To complicate matters even further, from a feminist point of view, it is also crucial to question the place of the 'female soldier' in this technological advancement. To do so, it is important that I first address specific theory regarding the intersection of gender, technology, and military, and how soldiers could be integrated into a type of warfare only previously conceived by fictional authors.

The idea of 'instrumentalizing' humans is not recent, and was perhaps most famously discussed by Michel Foucault in his seminal 1975 work *Discipline and Punishment*. In this pivotal study, Foucault denounced how the human body was by then becoming a site of technological inscription. Foucault described how the (male) soldier could be immediately recognized by the way his body moved in accordance with the institution which had enforced its rhetoric on him. Furthermore, Foucault explained how the soldier "[…] has become something that can be made out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed"[844]. Even though Foucault speaks of turning the soldier into a 'machine', he is using the term metaphorically, to suggest how the repetitive marching, etc., brings about an 'automatism of habit' which resembles mechanic repetition[845]. Foucault's groundbreaking theories on disciplinary techniques have informed later authors, which expanded on his work while accompanying the evolution of Western societies.

One of such authors is Donna Haraway, who drew on Foucault's work to write her important essay "A Cyborg Manifesto", which heavily contributed to the development of Cyberfeminism[846]. In this text, Haraway uses the concept of the cyborg[847] to theorize

[844] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books. 1991), 147.
[845] This phenomenon has been described many times by soldiers themselves. One of these instances is documented in *The Lonely Soldier* by Sergeant Eli PaintedCrow: "[…] you become hollow, like a robot. You get up, you do your job […]". Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 157.
[846] A ramification of feminism which questions identity boundaries and definitions by interlinking the human body with cyberspace, internet, and technology.
[847] According to Haraway, a cyborg is a "[…] cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction". Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.

on the breaking of strict boundaries that separate binaries such as man/woman or human/machine. Haraway saw humans as the "fabricated hybrids of machine and organism"[848], an amalgamation of both reality and myth. Moreover, Haraway deems Foucault's thoughts on biopolitics to be important, but limited, a "[…] flaccid premonition of cyborg politics", which she sees as "[…] a very open field"[849]. Defending the use of technology's transgressive potential, Haraway pinpointed the origins of the cyborg as "[…] the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism"[850]. Even though Haraway envisioned the cyborg as transcending militarism and patriarchal capitalism, both traits which she determined 'inessential' to its progress[851], time has shown that the present-day iterations of the cyborg are indeed intrinsically connected to the military, and patriarchal capitalism.

As the cyborg becomes less of a theoretical artifact and more of a literal reality, the military-industrial complex, moved by patriarchal capitalism have shown great interest in fusing human with machine. A prime example can be found in the work done by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), a research agency part of the US Department of Defense. DARPA is responsible for many technological advances in the field of military robotics, one of them being the creation of the life-sized humanoid robot Atlas[852]. This robot, primarily designed to assist troops in rescue missions, has ushered some concerns, causing one New York Times journalist to question if this robot would unleash an "age of 'Robo Sapiens'"[853]. Adding to this, the news that the US Pentagon is pressing DARPA into developing implants that would make the concept of the combat cyborg a reality[854], pushed the theoretical analysis of the cyborg into a different field.

Beyond embodying the results of the combined strengths of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, according to Cristina Masters, in "Cyborg Soldiers and Militarised Masculinities", a study on the connections between gender and military technology, the

[848] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 150.
[849] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.
[850] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.
[851] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.
[852] Unveiled to the public on July 11, 2013.
[853] John Markoff, "Modest Debut of Atlas May Foreshadow Age of 'Robo Sapiens'", *New York Times*, (July 11, 2013). https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/12/science/modest-debut-of-atlas-may-foreshadow-age-of-robo-sapiens.html (accessed October 2020).
[854] See David Hambling, "Pentagon Wants Cyborg Implant to Make Soldiers Tougher", *Forbes*, (June 5, 2020). https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/06/05/darpa-wants-cyborg-implant-to-make-soldiers-tougher/#48957efa6483 (access October 2020).

cyborg represents "[…] a desire for total masculinist control and domination"[855]. If the goal in increasing robotic parts into the body of a soldier is to diminish their vulnerability, it is appropriate to re-visit arguments that perceive female soldiers to be biologically 'weaker' than male soldiers. This raises the question if the strive for a cyborg soldier is leading to the effacement of military women. If we look at the current development of combat robots, we can see that they are molded after the default 'soldier': male. In her article, Masters questions the gendered subjectivity of the cyborg through masculinist discourses of power. Masters denounces how the human body is getting further from being the principal site of military practices, as it is the weakest part of the military triad: 'hardware' (i.e. weapons), 'software' (i.e. information and communication technologies), and 'wetware' (i.e. the human soldier)[856]. Thus, in an effort to decrease any vulnerabilities in the armed forces, the 'human' aspect of the forces is slowly being either minimized, or removed altogether. In this tentative merging of human and machine, there is a negotiation of what can and cannot be replaced by the mechanical[857]. However, while current concerns of military robotics have much to do with heightened senses, or physical endurance, this usually leaves out discussions regarding gender. Haraway wrote that "[t]he cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world"[858], with no defined gender characteristics, as it is sinuously beyond such limiting depictions. Nonetheless, what is apparent in the current developments in military robotics is that the 'male default' is dominating the products, which I believe can lead to a deepened alienation of women as an asset in the armed forces.

To discuss the issue of gender and the cyborg, I will now make use of the work of Dutch artist Bernard (Bee) Flowers, specifically, his collection entitled *Liberation!* (2007), already mentioned in this thesis. Flowers' artworks (Figure 22), based on the Abu Ghraib photographs scandal, and created with a technique of digital montage, portray the artist's idea of futuristic military women.

[855] Cristina Masters, "Cyborg Soldiers and Militarised Masculinities", *Eurozine*, (May 20, 2010). https//www.eurozine.com/cyborg-soldiers-and-militarised-masculinities/ (accessed October 2020).
[856] See Masters, "Cyborg Soldiers and Militarised Masculinities", 6.
[857] A topic I will return to in this chapter.
[858] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", 151.

Figure 22 - 'Bot2', 'Bot4', 'Bot1', and 'Lynndiebot', from the series Liberation! (2007) by Bernard Flowers. (images granted by the artist).

I argue that this collection emphasizes through exaggeration the disharmonious strangeness when combining 'woman', 'soldier' and 'technology'. The fact that these figures are placed on top of a shell, suggests their genesis, possibly alluding to Sandro Botticelli's famous painting *The Birth of Venus* (1483). This aspect could indicate the 'genesis' of this new version of a female soldier. Opposing the naked Venus, the figures feature an amalgamation of symbols, including angelic wings and weapons, thus, Flowers presents a 'military woman' made of what could be considered contradictory elements. Furthermore, these figures can be seen to evoke Julia Kristeva's preoccupations with 'horror' and the 'female' into a military setting, where through the incorporation of disembodied breasts, vulvas, and menstrual blood (seen on the leg of the third figure, 'Bot1'), the notion of *abject* is present in abundance. As discussed throughout this thesis, the concept of the abject female body finds particular significance in a military setting, as Kristeva's theories explain how the 'woman' can be subjected to cultural exclusion given common perceptions of her body as 'unclean' or 'sinful'[859]. These artworks thus demonstrate the turmoil in the debates surrounding the integration of women in combat. The bots in *Liberation!* give corporeality to the idea of the military appropriating female sexuality as a weapon.

Furthermore, I believe that these artworks illustrate the discussion in chapter 2.2, which centered on the appropriation of the female body for military purposes – which I refer to as 'weaponization' in this thesis –, here literally presented as part of military

[859] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

armor[860]. These smiling cyborgs give a new meaning to Foucault's 'docile bodies'[861] in the sense that they appear to submissively accept the unification of their bodies with the military institution. The figures in the collages appear to be oblivious of their exposed body parts, as they smilingly hold weapons, and bear military fatigues[862]. I argue that the figures in the *Liberation!* series can also be read as a response to Haraway's hopes for a transgressive cyborg that is 'post-gender'. As the artworks evoke, even when combined the elements of 'woman', military' and 'technology' are evidently segmented. This segmentation thus denies the possibility of cyborg fluidly transcending the gender binary, as Haraway had theorized[863]. Flower's artworks offer a way to discuss the uncanniness of a 'female cyborg', forcing us to contemplate an assemble of elements that provokes uneasiness given its charged history within military studies.

The bots in *Liberation!* can additionally help discuss the idea of military robotics being a way to 'de-gender' war. One of such claims comes from Tom Digby in *Love and War*[864], where he contends that, through the technological advancement of military robotics, and that through "[…] lacking any direct connection with human gender, such devices [military robots] may represent the ultimate degendering of war"[865]. The figures created by Flowers make apparent that the growing presence of women in the armed forces demands consideration regarding how the female body is incorporated in technological advancements, and also how these changes are imagined and portrayed in visual culture.

I find that, in the context of this thesis, it is important to examine the figure of the cyborg in connection with military institutions, as it provides another interface from which to discuss the 'military body', and women's relation to it. Here I reiterate all of my previous concerns regarding the 'body of a soldier', as we are entering an era where bodies are not only controlled by powerful institutions – as Foucault discussed –, they are now *created*, or *modified* by these institutions. In the next sections of this chapter, I identify three main ways in which the military creates/modifies a human body: Digitally/virtually (i.e. avatars); by developing a fully robotic subject; and by

[860] This is illustrated by the fusion of armor and female body parts, achieved by Flowers through digital collage in his artworks.
[861] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 147.
[862] A further connection could be made between these smiling women and the smiling women in the Abu Ghraib torture photographs.
[863] See Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto, 153.
[864] A work I have already discussed in Part I - chapter 1.3.
[865] Tom Digby, *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Sexuality and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

incorporating robotic parts into the bodies of human soldiers (i.e. cyborg). I will address each of these possibilities, articulating their fictional representations with previous considerations of the gendered body of the 'soldier', in order to discuss how women are included in this next step in warfare.

Virtual Therapy and the Soldier as Avatar

To begin addressing the ways in which the military creates/modifies a human body, I will first examine the digital creation of human bodies for military purposes. Therefore, in this section I will focus on the idea of the soldier as 'avatar', that is, an electronic figure that can be manipulated by a computer user in a game, or other virtual settings. Since Part III of this thesis mainly concerns military discharge, here I provide a discussion on how technological advancements are represented in fictional narratives as capable of offering innovative ways for the military to address psychological/emotional issues soldiers may have when returning from combat. To conduct this analysis I will use the film *Voir du Pays* (2016, dir. Muriel Coulin, Delphine Coulin) as a case study.

As I have explored in chapter 3.1, one of the vulnerabilities of human soldiers is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)[866], which affects a large number of military veterans[867]. As awareness about this condition grows, military technology increasingly strives to provide solutions to soldiers diagnosed with PTSD. Aside from the possibilities combat robots may offer – given that robots do not get sick, feel stress, or get pregnant – , the technological advancements made in the fields of digital renderings of combat, also allow the military to use virtual therapy to address PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD are often triggered by situations that cause the person to recall a traumatic incident, which in soldiers' cases mainly pertains to combat related events. Therapeutic approaches to PTSD aim to induce said triggers, but in a controlled environment. Since PTSD is a common disorder (especially among soldiers) there are

[866] PTSD is an assortment of conditions which stem from the subject's having experienced traumatic events. See chapter 3.1 – Gendered PTSD for an extensive definition.
[867] For statistical references on the number of soldiers diagnosed with PTSD in different conflicts, see Matthew Tull, "The Rates of PTSD in Military Veterans", *verywellmind*, (February 20, 2020) https://www.verywellmind.com/rates-of-ptsd-in-veterans-2797430 (accessed October 2020).

different ways in which therapy can be pursued. For instance, through Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)[868]; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)[869]; group therapy[870]; medication[871], etc. Since the field of psychotherapy lies outside of the scope of this thesis, I will not be addressing these particular treatments[872], I will instead discuss a virtual form of therapy, in order to pursue my analysis of the representation of servicewomen in technologically advanced military contexts.

One of the employed treatments for PTSD in military personnel is exposure therapy[873], which consists of providing a controlled environment to the subject, where they can re-experience the traumatic incident(s) in the presence of a mental health professional. These sessions mean to "[…] de-condition the learning cycle of the disorder via a habituation/extinction process"[874], hopefully reaching a point where certain triggers no longer cause anxiety, or other symptoms. A way in which exposure therapy can be conducted is through the use of virtual reality[875]. Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) has been employed to aid soldiers coping with PTSD since the late 1990's, when US researchers from Georgia Tech developed a way to bring together exposure therapy and the emergent technology of virtual reality. The product was labeled *Virtual Vietnam*[876], as it was created to help Vietnam veterans to overcome PTSD. With the aid of a VR headset, the subjects of this clinical trial would be 'transported' in space and

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[868] See Daniel J. Taylor, et al., "Impact of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Disorder on Sleep and Comorbid Symptoms in Military Personnel: A Randomized Clinical Trial", *Sleep Research Society*. (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 2018).
[869] See Francine Shapiro, *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy: Basic Principles, Protocols, and Procedures* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2018).
[870] See Andrew Khoo, et al., "Group Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Military Service-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Effectiveness, Sustainability and Repeatability", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. (August 2011).
[871] John Krystal, "Adjunctive Risperidone Treatment for Antidepressant-Resistant Symptoms of Chronic Military Service–Related PTSD", *Journal of American Medical Association*. (August 3, 2011). Vol. 306. No. 5.
[872] For a comprehensive approach on mental health treatments in a military context, see Carrie Kennedy, Eric Zillmer, *Military Psychology: Clinical and Operational Applications* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006).
[873] See American Psychological Association, "What is Exposure Therapy?", *PTSD Clinical Practice Guideline*, (July 2017). https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/exposure-therapy.pdf (accessed October 2020).
[874] Albert Rizzo, et al., "A Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Iraq War Military Personnel with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder", *NATO Advanced Research Workshops on Novel Approached to the Diagnosis and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington DC: IOS Press, 2006), 236.
[875] Other ways include 'in vivo exposure'; 'imaginal exposure', 'interoceptive exposure', etc. See Jonathan Abramowitz, et al., *Exposure Therapy for Anxiety: Principles and Practices* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2019).
[876] For access to the graphic experience of Virtual Vietnam, watch the documentary Skip Rizzo, "Virtual Vietnam PTSD Documentary", *YouTube* video, 9:15 minutes, (May 24, 2010). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2ZkvAMih8 (accessed October 2020).

time, and into a combat zone in Vietnam. Then, the therapist would listen to the subject detailing their trauma, and would adjust the virtual setting (e.g. increase or diminish sounds, etc.). This program was immensely successful[877], to the point where it was replicated and expanded upon. VR therapy has been researched not only in the US, but in European countries as well, like the UK[878], France[879], Netherlands[880], Portugal[881], among others.

Subsequent PTSD VR therapies aimed to aid victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks[882], and veterans from 'War on Terror' conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The *Virtual Iraq* program (and the following program, *Virtual Afghanistan*), funded by the US Department of Defense[883], follows a similar structure to the *Virtual Vietnam* program, as the therapy sessions are tailored around the subject's 'sentinel event' (i.e. a traumatic event, which triggers PTSD symptoms). Aside from the principal aim of reducing PTSD symptoms, the VR therapy sessions also work to remove the stigma associated with combat-related PTSD. This technological approach helps to ease subjects, who can associate the experience to entertainment (e.g. video game), and not directly to therapy, which can be seen as a sign of 'weakness'[884]. In a study of virtual therapy applied to Iraq War military personnel with PTSD there is further evidence of how insidiously the military-industrial complex and the gaming industry are connected, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. The program *Virtual Iraq* PTSD Virtual Reality, which recycled the virtual graphics of a combat tactical training simulator, was subsequently the

[877] "Now operating at dozens of sites across the country, Virtual Iraq and its more recent counterpart, Virtual Afghanistan, are the most widely used virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) treatment programs in America". Corey Mead, *War Play: Video Games and the Future of Armed Conflict* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 124.
[878] One of these programs is 3MDR, led by Professor Jon Bisson, at Cardiff University.
[879] See P. F. Rousseau, et. al., "Increase of Precuneus Metabolism Correlates with Reduction of PTSD Symptoms After EMDR Therapy in Military Veterans: An 18F-FDG PET Study During Virtual Reality Exposure to War", *European Journal of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging*, (August 2019), 46 (9): 1821.
[880] M. J. Van Gelderen. "Interactive Motion-Assisted Exposure Therapy for Veterans with Treatment-Resistant Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Randomized Controlled Trial". *Innovations*. (March 23, 2020). https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/505977 (accessed October 2020).
[881] P. Gamito, "Virtual War PTSD: A Methodological Thread". Paper presented at the 10th Annual Cybertherapy Conference, Basel Switzerland, June 13-17, 2005.
[882] J. Difede, H. Hoffman, "Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy for World Trade Center Post Traumatic Stress Disorder", *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*. 5:6, 529-535. 2002.
[883] Both *Virtual Iraq* and *Virtual Vietnam* were developed by Dr. Albert 'Skip' Rizzo, who is a clinical psychologist, and associate director for Virtual Reality therapy at the Institute for Creative Technologies (Los Angeles), which is funded by the US Army.
[884] See Pair, "A Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Iraq War Post Traumatic Stress Disorder", 70.

inspiration for the video game *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004, Pandemic Studios)[885]. According to Corey Mead in *War Play*, "[i]f we ask what effects the military's use of video games will have on society at large, one of the areas of greatest influence will be in the field of mental health"[886]. By addressing the military use of video games graphic materials in PTSD therapy, I am therefore expanding on the previous chapter of this thesis (3.2), where I described the importance of video games as a cultural product that both affects, and is affected by military agendas. Thus, research shows that not only are video games developed using military themes (e.g. *Call of Duty*), but they can also be adapted to both train soldiers for warfare, and treat them upon discharge[887].

A fictional discharge narrative that explores PTSD VR therapy is the French 2016 film *Voir du Pays*, written and directed by sisters Delphine Coulin and Muriel Coulin[888]. The film tells the story of a group of French soldiers as they return from the Afghanistan war and go through a period of decompression (military leave) at a hotel in Cyprus[889]. The film focuses primarily on two female soldiers, Marine and Aurore, as they deal not only with combat-related PTSD, but also with sexual harassment from their fellow soldiers. The decompression leave includes VR therapy, or what reports in the field call a "[…] VR delivered combat exposure as part of a comprehensive "assessment" program administered upon return from a tour of duty"[890].

The original title[891] of the film, *Voir du Pays* (i.e. 'See the World') alludes to the characters' enlisting in the military for a chance to see the world, which does not happen. This desire is common to a large percentage of prospect soldiers, who believe (largely because of military propaganda campaigns) that they will get to 'see the world' by joining

[885] See Albert Rizzo, et al., "A Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Iraq War Military Personnel with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder", *NATO Advanced Research Workshops on Novel Approached to the Diagnosis and Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington DC: IOS Press, 2006).
[886] Mead, *War Play*, 125.
[887] For a comprehensive approach on this topic see Robertson Allen, "Virtual Soldiers, Cognitive Laborers", *Virtual War and Magical Death: Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing*, edited by Neil L Whitehead and Sverker Finnström (London: Duke University Press, 2013), 152.
[888] Awarded with Best Screenplay at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival.
[889] The French military (akin to armed forces in US or Canada) provides a brief period for soldiers returning from war to relax, engage in group activities and sports, but also participate in therapy.
[890] Rizzo, "A Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Iraq War Military Personnel with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder", 249.
[891] According to the *imdb* page for *Voir du Pays*, the English title *The Stopover* is an alternative title for the film. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4699444/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas (accessed October 2020). This alternative title does not convey the same idea as the original title, as it focus of the leave period as the principal element of the film, whereas the original title offers more possibilities for interpretation.

their countries' armed forces[892]. The betrayal of this expectation is evidenced throughout the film, as not only the characters discuss their disillusionment with what they actually got to 'see' out of the world, but the VR therapy they are a part of suggests how the military might attempt to manipulate their combat memories. Also, there is room for further interpretations of the film's original title, as it can be seen as a nod to societies that consciously ignore conflicts, signaled by the official poster for *Voir du Pays*, which depicts the two protagonists (Marine and Aurore) in their military uniforms walking past tourists peacefully enjoying their vacation by a luxurious pool[893]. The film carries many themes worthy of discussion[894], but to maintain the cohesion with the main topic of this chapter, I will only address the VR therapy sessions shown in the film.

The first scene devoted to VR therapy features a young male Corporal being asked to be the first one to experience the VR immersion. This session, as well as the ones which will follow it, take place with the entire group of soldiers present in the room, with the soldier with VR headgear in front of a large screen, where the VR images are projected for the everyone present to see. Throughout my research of PTSD VR therapy I have found much information regarding group therapy sessions, yet I have not found mention of a session taking place with other people aside from the subject and the therapists/technicians. The obligation of participating in these sessions, coupled with the stigma surrounding portraying vulnerability, and exposure to fellow soldiers, would theoretically not produce the desired 'controlled stimulus environment'[895], aiming to minimize the subject's anxiety. The multiple scenes showing the (reprimanded) interventions by soldiers watching VR therapy sessions, and their generalized look of discomfort makes it apparent that this approach is not beneficial to any of the soldiers.

The next soldier seen in a VR therapy session is Aurore (Figure 23), who is very nervous, removing her VR headpiece during a recount of an attack which led to multiple deaths of French soldiers. Aurore is increasingly agitated, and requests to stop the session,

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[892] We find examples of this, for instance, in Helen Benedict's *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).
[893] This is further highlighted by the fact that the hotel here the French soldiers are staying is in Cyprus, which is located 100 km from war torn Syria.
[894] For instance, the theme of military rape. This topic is also interesting to examine from a VR exposure therapy point of view, as there are preliminary studies that are testing the applicability of VR therapy for soldiers who have been diagnosed with PTSD due to sexual trauma. See Barbara Rothbaum, "PTSD Treatment for Military Sexual Trauma (MST)", Emory University School of Medicine website. http://www.psychiatry.emory.edu/research/clinical_trials/ptsd/rothbaum_MilitarySexTrauma.html (accessed October 2020).
[895] Jarrel Pair, et al., "A Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy Application for Iraq War Post Traumatic Stress Disorder", *IEEE VR2006 Proceedings*, (2006), 64-71.

and when her request is denied, she continues to recall her 'sentinel event', which includes the digital image of fallen soldiers covered in blood. Even though the film centers on two women, only Aurore is shown undergoing VR therapy. Moreover, out of the four VR sessions scenes, there is only one featuring a female soldier. Regarding the differences in demeanor from Aurore to the three male soldiers, the scenes convey the idea that male soldiers are inclined to show less vulnerability. When one of these male soldiers is asked about how he will cope with the return to a civilian life back in France, he responds "I'm not a big talker or a pussy"[896]. Meaning that he will not search for professional help regarding his mental health, nor will he complain about it, because that would be perceived as a sign of weakness. The idea that a soldier should suffer in silence suits the notion of military masculinity I have been addressing in this thesis. Overall, the male soldiers in *Voir du Pays* show more reluctance to participate in therapy than the female soldiers, and their behavior during therapy is also more aggressive.

Figure 23 - Screenshot of Voir du Pays *(2016). Aurore undergoes VR therapy.*

The VR therapy sessions presented in *Voir du Pays* do not accurately represent the full extent of the possibilities of VR therapy. In the film, there is no mention of the presence of scents or vibrations, the subjects do not move, or hold weapon replicas, all elements present in sessions with *Virtual Iraq/Virtual Afghanistan*. Aside from the VR gear, soldiers participating in the *Virtual Iraq/Virtual Afghanistan* programs were also connected to machines measuring their heart rate, respiration rate, skin resistance,

[896] *Voir du Pays*, DVD.

peripheral skin temperature, and eye movement, in an effort to pinpoint the Subjects' Unit of Discomfort (SUD)[897]. These objective measures of arousal are not seen in the film. This could have been a deliberate choice from the production of the film, given budget requirements, or even a desire to simplify the scenes, to focus the attention on the soldiers' experiences, and not on technological paraphernalia. Whichever reason lies behind the decision, we are left with scenes that merely use the VR therapy as a superficial device, used in a similar way as 'flashbacks' as used in a film to inform the audience about a past event in a character's life. Through the avatars, we see what the soldiers described as their 'sentinel event'. Since we are never shown in the film the actual scenes the soldiers describe during therapy, this raises questions regarding selective memory, avoidance, and even about deliberate manipulation of memories.

During a scene where a couple of soldiers are discussing the VR therapy sessions, Marine comments on the digital renderings of the wounded/killed soldiers in their 'sentinel events', declaring: "they, [the military] want to replace our memories with clean images"[898]. This sentiment is expressed by Marine given her belief that no 'clean' digital portrayal could ever accurately represent the horrors of war, and that, she would therefore "rather kill 200 Iraqis in *Call of Duty*"[899]. Marine's questioning of the VR therapy session's intentions sparks a conversation between the characters about the distinction between real memories and real history, and fabricated memories and manipulated history. I understand that discussion to be insidious given that it is, itself, presented through a fictional narrative, which is subjected to its own set of regulations and contextualized within a particular timeframe, and creative vision. Despite this acknowledgment, the issues raised by the film are worthy of discussion. One of the aspects that supports the questioning of a possible manipulation of perspective, is the options offered by the VR programs.

According to reports on the application of PTSD VR therapy on Iraq veterans, aside from a wide assortment of scenario settings (e.g. city, military base, checkpoints, etc.), VR programs offer different options of user perspective. For instance, a therapy

[897] See Dennis Patrick Wood, et al., "Lessons Learned from 350 Virtual-Reality Sessions with Warriors Diagnoses with Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", *Cyberpsychology*. Vol. 13, nr 1, (2010); and Simon Parkin, "How Virtual Reality Is Helping Heal Soldiers With PTSD", *nbc news*, (March 16, 2017). https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/innovation/how-virtual-reality-helping-heal-soldiers-ptsd-n733816 (accessed October 2020).
[898] *Voir du Pays*, DVD.
[899] This reference to *Call of Duty* is yet another example of how military-themed video games are constantly permeating military representations, and are often a cultural reference for addressing the portrayal of inconsequential armed combat. *Voir du Pays*, DVD.

session can have the subject navigating the virtual world in a first-person perspective (viewpoint of the avatar), or in the third person, seeing the full body of their avatar. In *Voir du Pays* these options are not explored, as the soldiers who are seen undergoing VR therapy navigate the virtual settings through a first-person perspective, and using the same avatar, which is male by default.

Exploratory research on the levels of 'presence' (i.e. one's perception of being physically present in a virtual world) shows that using an avatar that does not correspond to the gender of the VR subject can have a negative influence on the subject's identification with that character[900]. If this seems apparent in third person VR experiences, it might seem less apparent in first person experience, where only the hands and legs/feet can be seen by the subject. However, a 2017 study shows that participants would engage differently with the VR scenario when assigned different types of hands (i.e. 'male hands'/'female hands'). Regarding the results of the participating women, the study revealed that "[q]uantitative and qualitative results show that women perceive lower levels of presence while using male avatar hands"[901]. With these explorative results, the researchers, while acknowledging the need for further investigation in the area, still address VR designers to "[…] suggest […] avoid[ing] gender-swapping in very immersive VR applications and to provide male and female hands if human avatars are desired"[902]. Another report detailed the results from a study on the effects of gender swap in VR exposure therapy, alerting to the fact that, depending on the context, gender swapping could be "[…] cognitively or emotionally taxing, or lead to imposter syndrome"[903]. These findings not only provide further validation for the importance of gender diversity in all platforms, but can also serve as tool for the analysis of the VR sessions in *Voir du Pays*. Therefore, I consider the VR therapy of Aurore to be indicative of an effacement of the female 'presence' in multiple levels. By not presenting a female avatar for this military woman's VR therapy session, the film suggests a decrease of her 'presence' (i.e. perception of her being in a virtual world). I understand this to be

[900] See Anna Felnhofer, et al., "Is Virtual Reality Made for Men only?: Exploring Gender Differences in the Sense of Presence", (paper presented at the 2012 International Society for Presence Research Annual Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, October 2012).
[901] Valentin Schwind, et al., "'These are not my hands!': Effect of Gender on the Perception of Avatar Hands in Virtual Reality", (paper presented at the 2017 CHI: Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Denver, Colorado, USA, May 2017), 1.
[902] Schwind, "'These are not my hands!'", 5.
[903] Tabitha C. Peck, et al., "The Effect of Gender Body-Swap Illusions on Working Memory and Stereotype Threat", *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, (April 2018). 24 (4):1604-1612.

evidenced by the fact that she removes the VR headgear twice during her session, which to me implies to some level a sense of disconnection with the avatar. As I see it, the film criticizes the way its female characters are perceived as a dispensable minority in the military, not really part of the troops[904].

Overall, I consider *Voir du Pays* to be an important addition to the limited number of military/war fictional narratives centered on military women during the 'War on Terror', as it explores relevant themes while not subjecting the plot to the recurrent tropes I have discussed in previous chapters. For instance, the (real) body of the military woman is represented, first and foremost, as the body of a soldier. This is clear when we see the naked body of Aurore, as she removes her uniform to take a bath upon arriving to the hotel room she shares with Marine. While this may appear to be following the tropes that I have identified in this thesis regarding a common frame for the sexualization and objectification of the bodies of female soldiers, *Voir du Pays* shows us Aurore's body in a non-fetichized way. As Aurore undresses we can see bruises and deep lacerations on her skin, and as she stretches her aching body, the film establishes her physical wounds, before introducing the audience to her psychological ones.

Representing Robotic Bodies and Cyborg Soldiers

Since the very beginning of warfare, the forces involved have always tried to increase human ability to fight, be it with the aid of swords or firearms. As technology developed over time, it was partly directed towards military use. The increasing inclusion of technology in armed combat has now reached a point where it has given rise to imagery only previously created for science fiction narratives. The importance of science fiction, as a genre, to the development of awareness about the future in general, and to the development of awareness regarding possible wars and their consequences in particular, should be here acknowledged. As the science fiction genre provides a way to consider possible consequences of present military actions and technological developments, it also

[904] This is evidenced in several scenes, for instance when Marine is told to go play with her doll upon requesting to leave the therapy room, or in the scene were, after the rape of a fellow military woman, the protagonists comment on how the male soldiers, not having Afghans to fight, chose them (women) as the enemy to target.

actively provokes audiences with dystopic visions of the future. One element that consistently resurfaces in the cross between the genres of science fiction and military/war, is the figure of the soldier as cyborg. The instrumentalization of the soldier's body, to which Foucault alerted to in *Discipline and Punishment*, is taken to the extreme in science fiction depictions of the futuristic soldier. Military science fiction narratives can offer a portal to possible futures, forcing the audience to consider the implications of those possible futures, and apply those considerations to their real-life support/opinion of military innovations.

The incorporation of weaponry onto the external body of soldiers, as a way to increase their fighting capabilities is not a recent affair. As a consequence, the use of mechanical suits has found many different representations in popular visual culture[905]. The mechanical suit, being an external (and therefore disposable) device, does not interfere with the human body and its normal biological functioning. Since I am interested in exploring that element in fictional narratives, I now turn my attention to fictional narratives which portray the incorporation of technology into the human body in a military context.

A fictional narrative that forces us to look beyond the practical capabilities of the implantation of military technology into the human body, and into possible negative consequences of this evolution, is the episode 'Men Against Fire' (2016) from the British TV series *Black Mirror* (2011-). The episode, set amidst a futuristic war in an unspecified location, centers on Stripe, a male soldier who is part of a unit that locates and kills humanoid mutants ('roaches'[906]) that carry a sickness capable of infecting humans. All the soldiers of this unit (male and female) possess a mandatory neural implant (MASS), which projects information onto their retinas, allowing the soldiers to exchange information and communicate without the need for other devices. The MASS implant also provides the soldiers with better firearm accuracy, manipulates their sensory systems, and records whatever they see. After a conflict, Stripe's MASS implant suffers some damage, and he (along with the audience) is able to see that the 'roaches' are regular

[905] Perhaps one of the most famous was seen in *Aliens* (1986, dir. James Cameron), driven by the protagonist Ripley. Other examples include *Avatar* (2009, dir. James Cameron), *District 9* (2009, dir. Neill Blomkamp), *Elysium* (2013, dir. Neill Blomkamp), and the *Iron Man* franchise (2008-2013).

[906] According to the writer of the episode, Charlie Brooker, the term 'roach' was inspired British media hate speech, specifically by a British columnist for the *Sun*, who wrote that migrants were akin to cockroaches. See Charlie Brooker, Annabel Jones, *Inside Black Mirror* (London: Ebury Press, 2018), 249.

people who have been targeted for extermination for carrying undesirable genetic traits[907]. Described as "the ultimate military weapon"[908] by one of the scientists, the MASS implant conditions the soldiers to 'see' the targeted individuals as a monster instead of a person[909], for, as the scientist explains to Stripe: "It's a lot easier to pull the trigger when you are aiming at the bogeyman"[910]. This trait of the MASS implant goes against the very first definition of cyborg, from a 1960's article, which stated that "The purpose of the Cyborg, […], is to provide an organizational system in which such robot-like problems are taken care of automatically and unconsciously, leaving man free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel"[911]. The cyborg in 'Men Against Fire' is thus not free at all, as their decisions are heavily conditioned by a military device they permitted to be implanted into their bodies.

The fact that in order to embed the implant into the soldiers they must consent to it, further aligns this narrative with Foucault's theories on the 'docile body', as the soldiers' willingly embraced this blatant instrumentalization from the military. This *Black Mirror* episode thus presents a dystopic world, heavily inspired by History's expressions of eugenics[912], while making use of futuristic military technology's potentially damaging capabilities. 'Men Against Fire' does not follow Donna Haraway's theory for the liberatory potential of the cyborg, as the episode presents it as being under the complete control of the State. Nonetheless, while the narrative portrays the demonization of the 'other' in a familiar sense, its depictions of a multi-ethnic/gender military force offers a strong counterpoint with present day sociocultural realities. Given the main purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the questions of gender raised by 'Men Against Fire', and what they add to the debate about the representation of military women in visual culture.

Even though the protagonist (Stripe) is a man, women play significant roles in this dystopic reality. There are four women with relevant roles in the narrative, two civilians,

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[907] Listed, among others, are 'higher rates of cancer', 'criminal tendencies', and 'substandard IQ'.
[908] *Black Mirror*, DVD.
[909] Also, the MASS implant allows the military to erase memories and choose the soldiers dreams, it can substitute the cries of the targeted people for inhuman shrieks, block the smell of blood and feces.
[910] The title of the episode derives from the 1947 work *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*, written by US Brigadier General Samuel Lyman Atwood Marshall. Based on a series of interviews, General Marshall explained that fewer than 25% of soldiers in both WWI and WWII actually fired their weapons with intent to kill, which he attributed to a social conditioning that teaches that killing is wrong.
[911] Manfred E. Clynes, and Nathan S. Kline, "Cyborgs and Space", *Astronautics*. September 1960. http://www.guicolandia.net/files/expansao/Cyborgs_Space.pdf (accessed October 2020), 27.
[912] See Tony McKenna, "Behind the Black Mirror: The Limits of Orwellian Dystopia", *Critique*, 47:2, (2019), 365-376.

and two military: Raiman and Medina. Raiman (rank not specified) is Stripe's fellow soldier, characterized by her fierceness in apprehending and eradicating 'roaches' with maximum efficiency. Commander Medina, the squad leader, is a competent commanding officer, displaying qualities associated with strong leadership: she is assertive, diplomatic, and shows concern for the squad members. Raiman exhibits characteristics that popular culture has usually associated with military men: a self-proclaimed 'hunter', she makes sexual jokes, is crude, and aggressive. Both female characters deviate from perceptions of servicewomen as 'inferior' in any capacity. In this fictional representation, Raiman and Medina symbolize the full achievement of gender equality in the military.

These two military women challenge traditional views of 'femininity', and of gender roles within the military, which would coincide with Haraway's conceptualization of how the cyborg surpasses gender binaries. However, as I have stated, they are subjected to State control and manipulation like Stripe, and therefore the episode follows Haraway's approach to the cyborg at the intersection of feminism and technology, but it does not see Haraway's theories to their conclusion that the cyborg is a means to challenge systems of oppression. The 'Men Against Fire' cyborg might function beyond gender, but it exists only to reinforce the State's power, not to challenge it, a product of the Western military-industrial complex. Furthermore, even if gender binaries are erased, the division between 'humans' and 'roaches' re-instates a binary befitting of Western logics, further separating the episode's cyborg from the one envisioned by Haraway. As I have discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, futuristic narratives often present women who occupy powerful positions in military institutions[913]. This is due to the genre's obligatory distancing from reality, which does not carry implications to real life gender mainstreaming in the armed forces. I believe Raiman and Medina are two examples of this tendency.

Even if the portrayal of the cyborg in 'Men Against Fire' is close to becoming a reality[914], I consider it to be visually demure as a fictional character. The only perceptible difference on the soldiers' bodies is the occasional white film that covers their eyes when the MASS implant is projecting something only they can see. In order to discuss the body of the cyborg, I now turn to a much more recognizable media franchise, which has

[913] e.g. In the military science fiction film *Stealth*, DVD, directed by Rob Cohen (Culver City: Columbia Pictures 2005), where a female soldier is one of the pilots of a new automated aircraft.

[914] According to an article on the *CNN* webpage, "The U.S. military is spending millions on an advanced implant that would allow a human brain to communicate directly with computers. If it succeeds, cyborgs will be a reality". Ryan Browne, "U.S. military spending millions to make cyborgs a reality", *CNN Politics*, (March 7, 2016). https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/07/politics/pentagon-developing-brain-implants-cyborgs/index.html (accessed October 2020).

decisively contributed to establishing the cyborg in popular visual culture: the *Terminator* franchise (1984-2019).

In *Gendering War Talk*, Cook and Woollacott discuss post-Vietnam representations of muscular bodies in war films, defining the bodies of heroes played by Schwarzenegger or Stallone as part of a 'techno-muscularity'. This term describes an 'inflated' characterization of a cartoonist depiction of hyper-masculinity, the authors highlight the importance of an "[…] arsenal of high-tech killing devices that this genre [military/war genre] obsessively imagines as necessary extensions of the male body power"[915]. This is evident in the character of the T-800 cyborg, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator* franchise. The impact of Schwarzenegger's terminator in popular culture is undeniable, as it has been one of the main frames of reference in the imaginary of futuristic combat robots since the 1990's[916]. The first film's description of the T-800 cyborg informs us that: "It can't be reasoned with, it can't be bargained with... it doesn't feel pity of remorse or fear... and it absolutely will not stop. Ever"[917]. In this sense, this cyborg embodies the military's ultimate desire for the perfect soldier, a mission-oriented killing machine who would never stop until the mission was completed.

The metal structure under the organic skin of Schwarzenegger's character has helped to accentuate his categorization as an incredibly strong man[918]. Beyond the dominance of Schwarzenegger's terminator throughout the franchise, it also featured strong female characters, notably, Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991, dir. James Cameron). I have previously addressed (chapter 1.2) how, in the 1991 film, the tough body of Connor is allowed to be physically empowered as long as she is primarily seen as a 'mother', and as a supportive character. I likewise examined Yvonne Tasker's concept of 'musculinity', which determines that a developed musculature is not exclusive of male action characters[919], which certainly applies to Connor. After the success of *Terminator 2,* the franchise expanded on its female characters, experimenting with changes to the previously all-male terminators. As a result, the third installment of the

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[915] Lynda E. Boose, "Techno-Muscularity and the 'Boy Eternal': From Quagmire to the Gulf", *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 74.
[916] See Tim Hornyak, "Be Afraid: DARPA Unveils Terminator-like Atlas Robot", *C|net,* (July 11, 2013). https://www.cnet.com/news/be-afraid-darpa-unveils-terminator-like-atlas-robot/ (accessed October 2020).
[917] *The Terminator,* DVD.
[918] For an important analysis of how Schwarzenegger's character in the Terminator franchise contributed to a shift in masculine representation within Hollywood cinema in the Regan era, see Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Regan Era* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1994).
[919] See Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

franchise (*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, 2003, dir. Jonathan Mostow) has a woman in the role of antagonist T-X, an android which is female by default. To have a woman being the imposing power to face the T-800 cyborg allowed for a widening of gendered representation[920]. Furthermore, by having an android designed to be female by default, the franchise encouraged a consideration on the gendered design of robots/cyborgs.

The latest installment in the *Terminator* franchise, *Terminator: Dark Fate* (2019, dir. Tim Miller) is, in terms of plot, a reworking of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. A cyborg is sent back in time with the mission to protect a person whose fate is instrumental in the future opposition to the world domination of 'machines'. Still, the 2019 film brought new nuances to the gender approach in the franchise, as for the first time there is a female cyborg assuming the mission usually tasked to Schwarzenegger's cyborg, protecting a person against an unstoppable terminator. This cyborg is Grace, a soldier who voluntarily underwent a process to be cybernetically-enhanced[921], in a procedure which is referred to as 'augment'. The term 'augment' suggests an improvement on the human body, evoking the current military's perspective on technological implants on soldiers. Despite giving Grace superhuman strength, increased agility and heightened senses, the 'augment' technology is not self-sustained, like that present in the other cyborgs/androids in the franchise. This means that after intense battle, Grace must inject a medication cocktail into her body, otherwise she would 'overheat', leading to the loss of consciousness, and death. Opposing Grace, is the terminator Rev-9, a highly advanced android that can sustain serious damage and quickly recover, showing no weaknesses. The person who must be protected is now a Mexican woman[922], Dani Ramos, the future leader of the Resistance. It is significant that the targeted woman is not only important as a future 'mother' – as the plot the first *Terminator* conveyed – but she is now assuming the role of 'heroic leader', which was previously only attributed to John Connor[923].

Joining Grace in this fight is Sarah Connor, whose role was reprised by Linda Hamilton. Both Grace and Sarah Connor display strong muscular bodies, a reinstatement

[920] Even if character of T-X, played by fashion model Kristanna Loken, is still heavily subjected to conventional ideals of 'femininity'. This is evidenced in a scene where the cyborg increases the size of her breasts after seeing a billboard for a *Victoria's Secret* advert.
[921] This element again calls to mind Foucault's aforementioned theory of 'docile bodies'.
[922] The choice of having a Mexican woman be the protagonist of a beloved US franchise could be seen as a political standpoint at a time where the US undergoes a period of political turmoil headed by President Trump.
[923] In *Terminator: Dark Fate*, it is revealed that John Connor died after the events of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, eliminating him from the timeline and requiring a new person to assume the role of leader of a Resistance against a new enemy, Legion.

of Tasker's 'musculinity'. Also, I consider to be important that this successful franchise has brought back such an iconic character as Sarah Connor, bringing much needed visibility to an older woman portraying a (still) muscular action character. Besides Sarah Connor, Grace is also joined by Schwarzenegger's T-800 cyborg. However, this character is introduced in a significantly different way from its previous versions. Schwarzenegger's T-800 went from unstoppable antagonist (*The Terminator*, 1984), to heroic savior (*Terminator 2*, 1984/*Terminator 3*, 2003) to most recent depictions of fatherhood (*Terminator Genisys*, 2015), culminating in a terminator that is a stepfather, owner of a drapery business, and who goes by the name 'Carl' (*Terminator: Dark Fate*, 2019). This latest portrayal of a 'retired terminator' could be seen as a domestication of the original character, or, since the actor has aged considerably since the first film, this could be a way to 'adjust' the character to its old age. Nonetheless, the film quickly abandons this portrayal, as Carl reverts back to the demeanor that fans recognize, proving to be indispensable in the fight against the new and improved antagonist. At the end of the film, Carl sacrifices himself in order to definitively kill the Rev-9, confirming how crucial this character continues to be in the franchise[924].

The contrast between Grace, a supposedly strong cyborg who turns out to have weaknesses, and Carl, the supposedly weak cyborg who turned out to be strong ends up reinstating the gender dynamics of the franchise[925]. By not allowing a woman to carry, and resolve, the plot without the aid of Schwarzenegger's T-800 cyborg, the film reinforces the central place of Schwarzenegger in the franchise, as it relapses into the 1980's representations of masculinity exposed by Susan Jeffords in 'Can Masculinity Be Terminated?'. In this text, Jeffords pinpointed how the first two *Terminator* films evoked "repetition as self-reproduction, as the future steps back to re-write the past"[926]. Thus, I contend that the *Terminator: Dark Fate* also follows this pattern, rather than reinventing the formula, the franchise has reproduced it to achieve the same conclusion. While it is understandable, from a commercial standpoint, that this blockbuster franchise would want to repeat a successful formula, this approach restricts the potential of female characters

[924] This exacerbated, for instance in *Terminator: Salvation* (2009, dir. McG), where, despite the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger not being a part of the project, his body is still featured, created through the use of special effects.
[925] For instance, both cyborgs require external elements for their sustenance (Grace requires food/medicines, and the T-800 requires food), but only Grace goes into a comatose state if deprived of these external elements.
[926] Susan Jeffords, "Can Masculinity Be Terminated?", *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 247.

like the soldier Grace, to ever reach similar levels of cultural importance as that of Schwarzenegger's cyborg. Cultural productions like 'Men Against Fire' and *Terminator: Dark Fate* show that there is room for non-stereotyped fictional representations of technologically enhanced soldiers. However, they also point to a difficulty in breaking representational patterns, which may hinder the advancement in the representations of military women in the military science fiction genre.

Summary and Conclusions

Women in military, or warfare, contexts have historically been sidelined in fictional depictions of the military/war genre, predominantly assuming either the peripheral role of girlfriends/wives, or the secondary role of nurses/caretakers. However, in the current context of the 'War on Terror', this marginalization is becoming more and more evident and misguided. As the topic of the integration of women in the military continues to be pertinent in current debates on the evolution of the armed forces, with this thesis I have examined how this progression has been translated into fictional portrayals of the military women in Western visual culture during the 'War on Terror'. This study was developed resting on the belief that fictional depictions – and the frameworks disseminated through them –, are of extreme importance to the society's collective understanding of a particular topic. In the case of this thesis, I set out to examine what kind of spaces and voices were attributed to fictional military women, and what those choices signify. Though the number of fictional narratives centered on military women is much smaller than those centered on their male counterparts, I was able to gather a cluster of examples that have allowed me to discern specific patterns emerging out of a comparative analysis of the case studies.

With the research I have conducted in this thesis, I have verified that the fictional depictions of military women during the 'War on Terror' are generally still confined to an established stereotypical framework of representation. I was able to confirm a continuation of the patterns identified, for instance, by Yvonne Tasker in World War I and II films, as well as the fictional application of the theories expressed by Kelly Oliver regarding the instrumentalization of servicewomen for political purposes. Keeping to the triparted way in which I have segmented the thesis, I believe that I have demonstrated how each stage of military life (boot camp, deployment, and discharge), carries a particular set of themes which are evidenced in fictional narratives in the military/war genre. Through this compartmentalization, which to my knowledge is an original

approach to critically examine and compare cultural products, I have uncovered that the typical story arcs in each theme are often adapted according to the gender of the protagonist.

In Part I of the thesis (BOOT CAMP), I have pinpointed how fictional military women are still bound to their markers of femininity (e.g. hair), and how their bodies continue to be a site of contention in military (fictional) spaces. I have furthermore demonstrated the types of characteristics fictional military women must possess in order to exist in a traditionally male genre. The negotiation of 'femininity' for the sake of a 'military masculinity' has been explained in this thesis, with an emphasis on narratives specific to the 'War on Terror' period. I have addressed how mainstream fictional narratives have presented controversial topics like Military Rape and Sexual Assault, ascertaining that this important issue has largely been both misrepresented, and underrepresented.

Grounding my research in important works detailing the representation of military women in previous wars, I have verified not only a continuation of many representational stereotypes, but I have also highlighted their reformulation, and adaptation, to a new kind of exerting warfare. Throughout my research I have discovered, for instance, that a large number of fictional military women who are protagonists in narratives taking place during the 'War on Terror' are engaged in romantic connections that make for a large part of the narratives' plot. This aspect has not changed significantly since it was pinpointed in criticism of early war narratives[927]. I believe that such findings are fundamental in establishing patterns that reveal a larger trend in consigning military women to a limited set of possibilities regarding their representation in visual culture.

In Part II of the thesis (DEPLOYMENT), I have detailed how the narratives of real military women have been 'weaponized' (i.e. instrumentalized), by the news media and government rhetoric to achieve political interests. From this groundwork I have built a comparative analysis based on the cases of Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch, which then permitted a unique viewpoint on fictional narratives of military women. I focused on filmic narratives that closely related to the stories of those two soldiers, and I was able

[927] Most significantly, by Yvonne Tasker in *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War* II (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

to reflect on the appropriation, and deliberate manipulation of those stories. All in all, I have identified the tendentious fictional adaptation of the stories of real military women, which, coupled with the governmental financial support on those projects, helps to shed a light on the intended message meant to be incorporated by the public at large regarding women in the military.

Moreover, in Part II I closely examined how women were integrated in narratives addressing military torture during interrogation. I was specifically interested in the angle of the so-called 'torture chicks', female soldiers instructed to use their bodies and sexuality to coerce detainees into revealing information. Although I did not find many examples in mainstream popular visual culture that commented on this issue, the works of Coco Fusco were instrumental in my analysis. I have mainly focused on Fusco's satirical book *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (2008), which provides multiple forms of reflection and critique on the topic of military women who engage in 'enhanced interrogation techniques'. Furthermore, Fusco's staged performance "A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America" (2006) also contributed to my development of this topic, cementing the impact of my research topics in Western cultural productions.

Lastly, in Part III (DISCHARGE), I focused on fictional representations of the end of military careers, and also on the possible futures for military women in the armed forces. I was able to discern the specificities of discharge narratives applied to fictional servicewomen, and how the role of 'family' is presented differently in the lives of fictional soldiers leaving the military depending on their gender. I discussed gendered depictions of homecomings, being considered a 'hero', and how fictional narratives portray the common disorder of Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD). I identified that military women with injuries are generally submitted to a particular set of visual characteristics, which tend to exclude major physical injuries (e.g. amputations). I have also determined that when female military characters do have noticeable physical injuries, these are often counterbalanced with the fact that the actress playing that character is usually conventionally attractive. This section was instrumental to reiterate how military women continue to be placed in narratives which cater to stereotypical view of 'woman as nurturer', which is in discharge narratives evidenced by a problematic return to the 'home'. Based on the case studies I have examined, the issues encountered by fictional male and female soldiers upon discharge are different, and often, servicewomen are the

ones who get blamed for their abandonment of the 'home', family, and more importantly, children.

In the following two sections of Part III, I explored what I deem to be a crucial topic when considering the representation of military women in Western visual culture. In an increasingly technological military, I discussed how servicewomen's fictional portrayal was being impacted. I first examined the figure of the military woman in videogames, and found that, even though the gaming industry is still primarily populated by men, which has traditionally resulted in a rejection of female gamers, some video games (for several reasons) are featuring more female military characters who are not sexualized, or deprived of capabilities usually bestowed upon male characters. I found this advancement to be important for its propagation of gender diversity and normalization of women in military/masculine spaces. Yet, I am cautious in this analysis, since it can also suggest a capitalist appropriation of feminist ideals for commercial profit. Moreover, when analyzing how the US military has dealt with the incorporation of military characters in their own game, *America's Army*, I have found that this process is much slower.

In my analysis of selected case studies, I was able to pinpoint specific trends that appear to be emerging. With the analysis of *Voir du Pays* I could determine that virtual constructions of soldiers are male by default, even though studies support the benefits of incorporating both male and female avatars in virtual military simulations. In my analysis of representations of cyborgs – a way to consider possible futures for the representations of military women – I have discussed the film *Terminator: Dark Fate*, which, not focusing on an armed conflict part of the 'War on Terror', was written and produced during this timeframe, and influenced by it. With this case study, which I compared to the entire *Terminator* franchise, I was able to identify the particularities attributed to a 'female cyborg', which include vulnerabilities not seen in 'male cyborgs'. In opposition, the episode of the TV series *Black Mirror* that I analyzed offered a non-conventional depiction of futuristic military women, which opened up possibilities for representations in an increasingly technological military.

My overall findings were that fictional narratives in the military/war genre (and/or any of its sub-genres) with a female soldier as protagonist usually are circumscribed to ramifications of stereotypical assumptions regarding women in the military. My study revealed that these assumptions are mostly grounded on two factors: They are inherited

from a long tradition of fictional productions that objectified women and/or considered them less able to perform at a high level as soldiers. Secondly, they are developed by incorporating a more or less detailed re-working of mediated events and cases (as was demonstrated with the cases of Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch). I have discovered that even though Western armed forces are (for the most part) increasingly more inclusive, with women occupying positions previously only filled by men[928], in the military/war genre, there are few women occupying central roles. When women do occupy a protagonist role, their specialty is frequently either auxiliary, or related to health care. This trend is linked, as I see it, to the propagation of the stereotype of the 'woman as nurturer', which relegates women to caretaker positions, avoiding placing them in direct danger. It is important to question what reasons could be behind the insistence in portraying this trope, which I believe are related with an attempt to control the fictional portrayals of women, that have been growing and becoming more diverse in multiple genres (e.g. action, fantasy, etc.).

The patterns I have collected throughout the chapters that compose this thesis align with the referential literature I have researched for my analyses, particularly in the way they discuss fictional constructions of military women being subjected to a set of limiting characteristics. My study adds to this literature by delivering a comparative-based close analysis of relevant case studies, identifying patterns that speak to the fictionalization of military women, and also to a larger framework of gender equality in Western visual culture. With this thesis I have furthermore pinpointed the deliberate exclusion of a variety of representations for military women, resulting in a lack of visibility for real female soldiers who now occupy a myriad of ranks and positions in Western armed forces.

My study has revealed that despite the growing presence of women in a multiplicity of positions in Western armed forces, the cultural productions in the military/war genre have not incorporated significant changes regarding representational approaches to the military woman. Fictional service women during the 'War on Terror' continue to be represented as primarily caretakers (e.g. *Our Girl*); physically inept (e.g. *Private Valentine*); accessory to combat (e.g. *Camp X-Ray*, *Megan Leavey*); in need of rescue (e.g. *Saving Jessica Lynch*); unapt mothers (e.g. *Fort Bliss*, *Return*, *Grace is Gone*);

[928] For instance, 2020 has seen the first woman joining the Green Berets, a US Army Special Forces Unit. See Scottie Andrew, "A woman soldier is joining the Green Berets - a first for the Army Special Forces unit", *CNN*, (July 10, 2020). https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/10/us/us-army-green-berets-first-woman-trnd/index.html#:~:text=Inside%20U.S.%20Special%20Operations&text=(CNN)%20A%20woman%20soldier%20for,according%20to%20the%20US%20Army (accessed November 2020).

emotionally unfit (e.g. *Voir du Pays*); motivated by romance (e.g. *Volontaire*, *Les Combattants*, *The Lucky Ones*, *Home of the Brave*). The fact that these cultural productions continue to frame military women within the same representational patterns first observed in much early fictional military/war narratives is revealing of a desire to control the portrayal of women in this context which is still dominated by men. Thus, the limited narratives in which servicewomen are featured in central roles appear to resort to traditional tropes to negotiate their presence, oftentimes offering a justification for their 'unnatural' presence in military settings. Ultimately, I see this effort as a perpetuation of Western cultural anxieties about women in military, which points to a larger issue with representing strong women (physically, emotionally, and mentally) in visual culture.

The aforementioned compartmentalization of the thesis (into boot camp, deployment, and discharge) has aided me in understanding the specific challenges that women encounter in each stage of military life, and it has allowed me to observe that fictional servicewomen are framed differently depending on which military stage they are. This is not, by itself, a surprising observation, as fictional military men are also framed differently in different phases of their military careers. What is in fact worthy of notice is that the framing of servicewomen throughout the three military stages presented in this thesis are subjugated by different forms of control: (1.) During *Boot Camp*, women are overall characterized as not corresponding to the model of the default 'soldier'. This is manifested by their 'untransformed' bodies, and physical markers of femininity. Their 'non-soldier' bodies are seen as abject, and military women are often raped (whether this reality is visually portrayed, or only implied). Above all, servicewomen's presence is negotiated as *permissible* when they are involved in a military romance, sometimes a 'love triangle' with military men.

(2.) During *Deployment*, fictional military women are often subjected to a perceived framework of representation established by accounts of military women in popular media cases, as is the case of Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch. These two cases, along with the reports of military women participating in torture during the interrogation of detainees have contributed to shape some fictional characters, along with other cultural depictions of servicewomen. This assessment is revealing of the importance of news media in the production of cultural products, suggesting that cultural interpretations of military women during deployment are regularly subjected to a dyad in representation: military women are either sexualized torturers, or victims in need of rescue.

(3.) During *Discharge,* servicewomen are often depicted as having neglected their obligations to their homes, and to their families. This causes some narratives to center on a return to a domestic sphere. Furthermore, fictional military women are seldom depicted exhibiting common symptoms of PTSD (e.g. outbursts of rage), unlike fictional military men. I consider this portrayal of a quasi-inconsequential return from war as a suggestion that women are not as affected by warfare as men are, which again, reinforces their status as 'auxiliary'.

Moreover, my examination of virtual depictions of military women (both in Virtual Therapy settings, and video games), and futuristic depictions of the cyborg soldier has demonstrated that the limiting frames of portrayal for military women are extended to these fields. However, the case studies examined reveal new ways in which the military woman can be depicted, offering new paths for representation that cross the military/war genre with science fiction.

I have confirmed that the patterns, tropes, and trends identified in each of the three chapters are not only found in cultural productions developed in the US. Despite the fact that the US is the country with a larger percentage of cultural productions centering on the 'War on Terror' (both mainstream and independent productions), the UK and France also feature many of the same representational patterns. For instance, the proclivity in engaging a protagonist servicewoman in romance is not only seen in US productions such as *The Lucky Ones*, *Fort Bliss*, or *Home of the Brave*, but is also featured in the UK narrative *Our Girl*, and in the French films *Les Combattants,* and *Volontaire*. Even though I have only analyzed a representational sample of case studies, I consider my observations to be suggestive of a transatlantic cohesion regarding the limited ways military women can be represented on screen, and also, more importantly, these observations denote the collective dismissal, and misrepresentation, of military women in Western countries. I believe these results also point to a Western unity regarding military and political interests, observed in the similar messages conveyed by the case studies I have examined in this thesis.

The need to funnel the research by creating deliberate boundaries for analysis has unfortunately led to the exclusion of important issues, that I could not fully address in this thesis. I mention some of them here not only to demonstrate that I do recognize their significance, but also to highlight the many possibilities in which my research could be expanded. First of all, my research was intentionally limited geographically (US, UK, and

France), and by timeframe (2001-present), since I have determined these restrictions were necessary to narrow the study, allowing me to focus on a particular number of research questions. Furthermore, when discussing the impact of the case studies on the general population, I have only based my data on secondary texts (both academic and non-academic). Therefore, other methodologies like interviews or questionnaires could be employed by other researchers to evaluate a causal impact of the case studies.

Additionally, there are other limitations that are related to the extension of the subject. Despite the large number of cultural productions (across all genres) that feature military women in both major and secondary roles, I have conducted a thorough research of the available narratives, even expanding to non-fictional productions. I believe that this research, coupled with an examination of the academic and non-academic literature concerning the most relevant fictional narratives featuring military women, have allowed me to select an appropriate, and relevant, group of core case studies (see Appendix).

Since the topic of how military women have been represented in Western visual culture is an extensive one, I list below some ways in which my research can be further developed, either expanding on the issues I have addressed in each chapter, or exploring related issues that were either left out, or only briefly mentioned, for the sake of concision. One example would be an examination of depictions of LGBTQ+ women in the military/war genre, another would be an expanded analysis on the representations of non-Caucasian women in this genre. Both these examples, while lightly addressed throughout the thesis, demand further investigation, as the road to equity in gender representation is necessarily grounded in an intersectional approach. I believe that the representation of military women in visual culture could be further pursued through the analysis of the exclusion of non-Caucasian, non-heterosexual ways of framing the female soldier. As I have explained throughout the thesis, the 'default' soldier in the military/war genre is a Caucasian, heterosexual male. This tendentious representation exerts a deliberate rejection of different ethnicities, sexualities, etc. In line with this possibility for further research is the academic interest in examining fictional depictions of military in other Western countries. Furthermore, the analysis of how military/combatant women are represented in Eastern countries, which would imply an altogether different

contextualization, would also provide an important wider perspective on the original topic[929].

Another field that demands further attention concerns the virtual depictions of soldiers. My research was mostly focused on virtual depictions of servicewomen during the 'War on Terror', which consequently excluded important research paths. Video games and other virtual depictions of military women should also be examined from psychoanalytic, philosophical, and sociological points of view, mainly pertaining to issues of 'identification', which I have mentioned briefly during my thesis.

The examples of fictional narratives featuring military women that I have examined, predominantly reiterate the traditional gender roles attributed to women and men within the armed forces. This study reveals that Western visual culture during the 'War on Terror' has recycled stereotypes, finding new forms to adapt them to the new ways of enacting warfare. As visual entertainment is a widely popular tool of socialization, I believe it is important to interrogate fictional representations as I have done in this study. After conducting a lengthy research for this thesis, I believe that there is still much room for improvement when it comes to balanced, and positive, representations of military women in Western visual culture. Specifically, types of representations that depict the female soldier not as a site from which to propagate patriarchal ideologies, but rather as a source of disruption of narratives that privilege men's experiences during warfare. Hopefully, this cultural study will contribute to an increase in fictional roles and representations that have previously only been assigned to men. Ultimately, I hope that this thesis will contribute to a shift in the current gendered representations towards minimizing power imbalances and creating new spaces for a multiplicity of depictions in the military/war genre.

[929] e.g. the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), the all-female militia involved in the Syrian civil war.

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Appendix

Table of Core Fictional Narratives During 'War on Terror' with Military Women in a Major Role (USA, UK, France)

Year	Title	Director(s)	Production	Conflict	Boot Camp Deployment Discharge	Romance (plot or sub-plot)	PTSD/ Disability
2003	*Saving Jessica Lynch*	Peter Markle	USA	Iraq War	Deployment		
2006	*Home of the Brave*	Irwin Winkler	USA	Iraq War	Discharge	✓	✓
2007	*Grace is Gone*	Jim Strouse	USA	Iraq War	Discharge		✓
2008	*Private Valentine: Blonde and Dangerous*	Steve Miner	USA	(non specific)	Boot Camp	✓	
2008	*The Lucky Ones*	Neil Burger	USA	Iraq War	Discharge	✓	✓
2011	*Return*	Liza Johnson	USA	(non specific)	Discharge	✓	✓
2014	*Camp X-Ray*	Peter Sattler	USA	Iraq War	Deployment	✓	
2014	*Les Combattants*	Thomas Cailley	France	(non specific)	Boot Camp	✓	✓
2014	*Fort Bliss*	Claudia Myers	USA	Afghanistan War	Discharge	✓	✓
2014	*Our Girl* (TV series - season 1)	David Drury, Anthony Philipson, Richard Senior	UK	Afghanistan War	Boot Camp/ Deployment	✓	✓
2016	*Voir du Pays*	Delphine Coulin, Muriel Coulin	France	Afghanistan War	Discharge	✓	✓
2017	*Megan Leavey*	Gabriela Cowperthwaite	USA	Iraq War	Boot camp/ Deployment/ Discharge	✓	✓
2018	*Volontaire*	Hélène Filières	France	(non specific)	Boot Camp	✓	