

# **Justifying the Ultimate Sacrifice**

## **Civil and Military Religion in Frontline Blogs**

**Perché, dove è religione, facilmente si possono  
introdurre l'armi e dove sono l'armi e non religione,  
con difficoltà si può introdurre quella.**

*For, where there is religion, it is easy to teach men to use arms,  
but where there are arms, but no religion, it is with difficulty that  
it can be introduced.*

**Niccolò Machiavelli**

***Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio 1, 11***



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PhD Dissertation

# **Justifying the Ultimate Sacrifice**

## **Civil and Military Religion in Frontline Blogs**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you: 1. Jesus Christ 2. The American G.I. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom.”

These are the words of Steven Kane, aka Sack, a military blogger. Sack is a frontline soldier writing from Iraq; or as the land of the Fertile Crescent is referred to in the military blogosphere: “the sandbox”. Sack’s words are interesting for two reasons. First, by placing Our Lord and the American soldier on the same footing, he is implying that the death of the soldier is a sacred act. And secondly, the fact that these words are articulated by a soldier contributes to the verification of national mythology.

### 1.1. Latent and manifest functions of sacrifice

As for the former, Sack does not compare Jesus Christ and the American soldier *ex nihilo*. The same phrase with exactly the same wording is circulating in the military blogosphere. In fact, it is a paraphrase. Hence, the last verse of Julia Ward Howe’s “the Battle Hymn of the Republic”, written in 1861, expresses the very same notion of the soldier’s sacrifice as a sanctifying act:

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:  
*As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,*  
- While God is marching on

Julia Ward Howe’s words were written at a time when the outcome of the Civil War remained most uncertain. The Union was suffering one defeat after another. At this time, well before Lincoln’s second presidential campaign and before his archetypical articulation of the national sacrifice in the Gettysburg Address, the abolitionist cause did not enjoy wide support in the North (Jewett, 1973: 36ff). However, Julia Ward Howe’s apocalyptic expression of the ultimate cause of the Republic helped fill the void. Johnny Reb had “Dixie”. The Union soldier now had “The Battle Hymn”, a song which rendered death purposeful in a few words.

This brings us to the second reason why Steven Kane’s paraphrase is interesting and the reason why I focus on the justifications of sacrifices among soldiers in this dissertation: Why do soldiers die? This question has many answers. From a sociological perspective, however, the most important answer is that *by dying, soldiers prove that something is worth dying for*. I refer to this as the latent function of the sacrifice. The manifest function is the justifi-

cation itself, the sacrificial ideology, articulated by referring to the nation, freedom or God.

All participants in a sacrifice, including the victims, must regard the death for the sacrificial cause as purposeful; they must agree with the sacrificial ideology. If not, the latent function of the sacrifice is in danger of being revealed. Should that happen, the sacrificial ideology cannot prevail. All ideology is based on certain assumptions; axioms that cannot be questioned without drawing the ideology itself into question. The axiom of a sacrificial justification is a certain perception of worth. The latent function of the sacrifice is what defines and reaffirms this particular perception of worth. Revealing this latent function means that the contingency of this perception – the notion that it could have been different – also becomes overt. It becomes obvious that the sacrificial ideology is not the ultimate truth but simply ... ideology.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine whether soldiers and marines justify their sacrifices – their participation in warfare – in accordance with the ideology articulated in the national mythos of the ultimate sacrifice: Is the sacrificial ideology intact? Do the victims, the deployed servicemen, affirm the verity of the sacrificial ideology, of civil religion? Or do they, in fact, refer to secondary or tertiary motives?

## 1.2. War and justification

We may bewail it, but apart from religion, few cultural phenomena have proven to be as constant as warfare. Engaging in sociality is a fundamentally violent endeavour, and as far back as archaeological sources can tell us, social entities have engaged with each other politically as well as continued “the political intercourse with a mixture of other means” (von Clausewitz 2004 [1832] VIII, 6B: 674; Keeley 1997). If war, defined as armed conflict between social entities, has always existed, so have the justifications of war. In warfare, the soldier is asked to violate the two most fundamental norms of social conduct: the obligation to self-preservation and the prohibition of killing. Much like religious rituals, war therefore constitutes a socially institutionalised breach of social norms. This requires justifications.

The social stability of the phenomenon of warfare draws the universality of the claim about the functions of sacrifice into question. If that claim is to be rendered universally true, then, first, the latent function of the soldier’s death must have always been to serve as a proof that something is worth dying for, and, secondly, the soldiers, as victims, must always have agreed with the mythology defining their death as a sacrifice for that particular cause. Needless to say, that has not been the case.

Granted, in tribal feuds and armed conflicts between smaller social entities, personal and group motivation presumably interact with one another.

Fighting for the survival of a concrete community is fighting for your own survival and, perhaps even more importantly, for the survival of your loved ones. Nevertheless, we can hardly infer from that assumption to the constitution and justification in wars fought between larger social and abstract entities. Historically, such wars have primarily been fought by mercenaries, auxiliary armies and troops recruited by force. Little indicates that these types of soldiers should consent to the purposes for which they bleed and die. The use of citizen soldiers in the Poleis of Ancient Greece and the Roman Republic before the Marian Reforms is famous not because this practice constitutes the historical rule, but rather because these cases represented exceptions to the rule.

Rules changed, of course, with the *levée en masse* in the wake of the French Revolution. Even in the modern age, however, studies in soldier motivation, mainly a 20th century phenomenon, have not shown that soldiers agree with the ideological causes for which they are sent to war. The most renowned example of this genre, the World War II study entitled *The American Soldier*, shows how among soldiers in combat units, "...any talk of flag-waving variety" was "taboo", and regarded as next to treason (Stouffer et al: 1949b: 150).

In other words, data do not appear to support the claim that, in order to prevail, the sacrificial ideology must be regarded as valid by all participants. In fact, judging from history, to the extent that sacrificial ideology has prevailed, it has done so in spite of – not because of – the soldiers' consent. However, before discarding the hypothesis of the importance of maintaining sacrificial ideology by ensuring the consent of the soldiers, one must consider that not only has the threshold of accepting violence in western societies been lowered, but contemporary military servicemen have a hitherto unseen access to the public sphere. Hence, both the call *for* and the potential impact *of* justifications of sacrifice have increased.

### **1.3. The *inarticulation of violence and the soldiers' access to the public sphere***

War as a social phenomenon may be constant. However, the conduct and conditions of warfare are not. Measured in the degree of exposure to physical assaults, we live in a fundamentally less violent society than our fathers and grandfathers, a development which remains ongoing. My brother was in day-care on a farm. When a pig was butchered, I remember seeing him and the other kids jumping in the pools of blood. That was 25 years ago. Today, in Denmark, home-butchering is forbidden and the number of children or adults who ever see an animal killed is very limited. Characterising death as a modern taboo, as forbidden, would be imprecise; nevertheless, we live in a cul-

ture in which death has been concealed (Walter 1991: 307). The social and medical revolutions, increased urbanisation and the prohibition of the corporal punishment of children all contribute to the *inarticulation* of violence and death in the private sphere. I therefore assume that when men and women are asked to commit violence and to prove willing to die in the name of society, the demand for justification in the public sphere is stronger today than previously.

The most important aspect in regard to this inquiry, however, concerns the opportunity for the soldiers to participate in public discourse. In World War II, radio broadcasts, motion pictures, letters, telegrams – virtually all communications from the frontline – were subject to censorship. 20 years later in Vietnam, things had changed radically. Not only had troop censorship been abandoned in the 1950s, but the journalist access to the combat zone, the dissemination of television and the Rotation System, which ensured that drafted soldiers only stayed 365 days “in country”, meant that the military could no longer maintain control over the lines of communication.

Measures were successfully taken in the Gulf War to control public discourse. An important factor in that regard was the technological superiority of the US military. CNN’s viewers could thus look on in awe as American “smart weapons” tore Hussein’s defences apart while allegedly reducing the collateral damage. The virtual story of technological supremacy became a weapon unto itself; a factor in warfare *alongside with* or perhaps *more important than* the actual impact of the high-tech wonders in the heat of battle (Baudrillard 1991).

However, while the brave new world of communications helped win the war, it also heralded new challenges to the American military. Ironically, these challenges rendered the question of warfare communications even more relevant, since they were not only of concern to the relationship between the military and the media but also to the military personnel’s own access to the public sphere. Thus, the Gulf War witnessed the introduction of a new media of direct communications used by frontline soldiers: Via electronic newsletters and using the military technological infrastructure, servicemen in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could keep a large group of readers informed about their everyday experiences. The impact of such information depends wholly on access to the – primarily military – technology enabling the soldiers to mass-distribute their newsletters. In the early 1990s, such access was not widespread. That changed, radically, with the World Wide Web.

#### **1.4. Blogging for justification: *Morituri te salutant***

Today, the servicemen on the frontlines of the conflict formerly known as the War on Terror have very direct access to the public via the new media. Not



only do soldiers and marines use the official lines of communication, either on closed military networks or on-line, they also upload movies on YouTube and are on Social Network Services such as MySpace or Facebook. Finally, they Twitter and they blog. In this context, I will focus on the blog for two main reasons. First, compared to the other media mentioned here, the blog is the most elaborately written media of communication. Thus, if we want to look for elaborate justificatory arguments of warfare participation, military blogs are the place to look. This also provides the researcher with a methodological advantage. Military blogs are written for a large number of reasons. However, the great benefit of studying them is that they are written by the servicemen themselves. The topics discussed and words used are not probed by the research questions or the words chosen by the interviewer. Blogs might be censored. They are written with the knowledge that the Pentagon might be reading along. Nevertheless, they are products of the deliberations of the soldier or marine who has posted them on the Internet. There are no interviewer effects in the blogs.

The second reason for analysing military blogs is that the blog distinguishes itself from the other new media by being public (with YouTube.com as a prominent, but not written, exception). Inspired by the social and political upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars, which according to von Clausewitz had changed the fundamental nature of war and brought it as close as perceivable to its absolute state, he distinguished between three factors in modern warfare: the military, the political authority and the people (von Clausewitz VIII, 2: 644). Whereas the question of defining the partial and final goals of war primarily regards the relationship between the political authority and the military, the justification of warfare, of sacrifice, in a modern democracy has primarily been a matter of concern between the political authority and the people.

Until recently, whether or not the soldiers agreed with the sacrificial ideology therefore mattered very little. Soldiers were enrolled in the military and subject to the political and military authorities. Hence, they remained detached from their position as citizens participating in public debate. They could obviously disagree with the political dispositions, but as long as they were in the military and as long as that disagreement did not result in open mutiny, their opinions would only affect public discourse posterior to their enlistment. The stab-in-the-back legend, which created fertile soil for the rise of National Socialism among German World War I veterans, might be seen as such a delayed effect of soldier discourse on public discourse.

Letters travel at the speed of the existing means of transport. Letters only become known to a greater public if printed or referred to by widely read,

heard or seen media, i.e. edited media. Remember: “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” only had an impact because *the Atlantic Monthly* decided to print it in 1861. Conversely, blogs travel at the speed of light. Blogs can become famous via references in existing printed or electronic media, but a blog can also reach a greater public simply via the blogosphere. Most importantly, blogs are not edited. Whether a blog is widely read is therefore subject to a number of complex factors, including reader-response, and only to a minor degree to the decision of editors of other media.

Soldier stories have probably existed for as long as man has gone to war. However, the military blog is distinguished from the other media used to communicate soldier stories in as much as they are instantly accessible to virtually anyone, anywhere. Numerous determinants influence what is written in a blog and how it is written. Nevertheless, blogs are not prone to the same re-interpretative filters as letters or diaries that are edited and selected with the advantage of hindsight.

### **1.5. Approach of the study**

Historically, the national or civil religious justificatory regime has prevailed in public discourse without the consent of soldiers. The fact that soldiers are now also able to participate in public discourse via access to modern media raises the question of whether the justificatory regimes they refer to in public discourse affirm or cast doubt on the prevalence of the civil religious sacrificial ideology.

In light of the potential challenge posed by the publicity of the blogging genre to the maintenance of sacrificial ideology, the aim of this inquiry is thus to answer the three central questions:

1. Is the ultimate sacrifice justified by the victims by referring to a civil religious justificatory regime?
2. To the extent that other justificatory regimes are present, does civil religion remain the predominant form?
3. Are references to civil religion constant regardless of differences in gender, political affiliation, rank and exposure to combat?

I do not presume that military blogs give us the whole truth about the motivations of soldiers. Nevertheless, I intend to examine how soldiers from different backgrounds justify their participation in warfare. In that regard, the blog is a new, indispensable source for examining which justificatory regime soldiers refer to and how they do so. Blogs may be virtual, but as far as the questions asked in this project, they are the real thing: *Real* words written in *real* time by *real* servicemen who are *really* participating in public discourse.

This is not an explanatory project; rather, it is explorative and interpretative. I analyse justifications. A justification is founded on a justificatory regime, a discourse articulating a particular world view, which we, as researchers, must assume makes sense on its own terms, and therefore try to understand. Granted, interpretative approaches always pose hermeneutic challenges. I differ from the typical American serviceman by being European, civilian and liberal. Nonetheless, three years of in-depth studies of the writings of men and women of my generation, who have sacrificed more for what they believe in than I probably ever will, have had an impact on my personal sympathies.

Nevertheless, the project approach is strictly descriptive. I have no normative agenda regarding the war in Iraq, which in this context I simply regard as a case for analysing how sacrifices are currently justified. Likewise, I have no intention of celebrating or making a laughing stock out of the American servicemen and -women analysed in this context. I am aware that they would probably not agree with my interpretations and for that reason alone might consider them as normative. Let me therefore emphasise that what I study in the following is not what the soldiers and marines actually *mean*. I study what they actually *say*.

### **1.6. Structure of the dissertation**

The argument in the dissertation is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, I first introduce the theoretical framework for interpreting sacrifices and for distinguishing between the latent and manifest functions of sacrifice. I then turn to the two dominating justificatory regimes: civil religion (or the national mythos) and unit cohesion, the latter the hitherto dominating interpretation in soldier motivation literature. According to the theory of unit cohesion, the soldier does not fight and die for the nation in whose name his blood is shed, but for the man next to him. I argue that identifications with the military – of which unit cohesion can be seen as a subset – may be articulated both in strictly secular terms or as entailing a religious dimension; a dimension which I define as military religion.

Chapter 3 is a methodological chapter. Here, I present the scientific theoretical approach as well as the three main analytical strategies which I pursue: Critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and, finally, content analysis. Chapter 4 is a data chapter. The already-mentioned advantages of analysing blogs will be reiterated in this chapter. Here, however, I will also point out some of the weaknesses connected to using a source that is subject to censorship, overtly and in disguise, and a source that is also largely politically biased.

The analyses in Chapters 5 to 11 fall in three parts. None of the case analyses have been chosen randomly. Instead, via a focused case selection method, I have attempted to build as much variation as possible into my sample. The approach of this explorative study can best be described as a comparative research design consisting of three parts: two qualitative inquiries and one quantitative. In the first qualitative study in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the focus is on how the two justificatory regimes – civil religion and military religion – are expressed by four very different bloggers, each representing an ideal type. *GI Joe*: Ma Deuce Gunner is a conservative combat soldier who supports the war and regards the liberal media's coverage of Iraq as treacherous. *GI Jane*: Rachel the Great is a liberal woman taking care of Marine Corps re-enlistment service and primarily serving inside the wire. She loves her country but doubts the cause and finds it difficult to adjust to the masculine ideals of the Corps. *The American Centurion*: Lieutenant Rusten D. Currie is an Army intelligence officer, serving both on base and outside the wire. He is African-American, believes in the mission, and he plans to run for Congress. *The American Job*: Zack is a veteran. He was fighting on the frontlines in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. In 2005, he is back in Iraq as a changed man. He does not believe in the war anymore, and he despises warmongering bigots who have no idea what killing does to a man.

In the initial comparisons, I use Critical Discourse Analysis. In the second part of the qualitative analysis, I change the approach; instead of only examining single posts, I consider the blog as a story: a story with a middle, beginning and an end; a story in which we can follow the development of the soldier's perception of the war. I analyse these stories as narratives, and, instead of looking at very different profiles, I regard two bloggers whose profiles match in all respects save one: They serve in the same company, deployed at the same time. They are both men. They are both conservative. They are both exposed to combat. Yet whereas Teflon Don is a private first class, Badger 6 is a captain and Company Commander.

In the final analysis in Chapter 11, I expand the data set from six to 39 bloggers and conduct a content analysis, in which I, by means of word search queries, map the use of civil and military religion in the blogs and analyse the interrelationship between these two discourses in light of the known background variables of the respective bloggers. In this study, my approach is primarily quantitative, and I use descriptive frequencies, cross-tabulations and regression analyses.

The conclusion sums up the results and points out future fields of research which have been identified by this project.

La Religion est sans contredit le premier et le plus utile frein de l'humanité: c'est le premier ressort de la civilisation; elle nous prêche et nous rappelle sans cesse la confraternité, adoucit notre cœur (Mirabeau: L'Ami des hommes, ou Traité de la population).

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition  
(Shakespeare: Henry V Act 4, Scene III).

## Chapter 2

### Theory

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: First, I will provide a general framework for understanding sacrifices and how they are legitimised. Secondly, I will explain why I consider it plausible that soldier sacrifices are legitimised by servicemen in terms of *civil* religion. And finally, I will take into consideration the most prominent challenge to that hypothesis: unit cohesion and its religious equivalent: *military* religion.

#### 2.1 The sacrifice

My central claim in the following is that sacrifices are justified at two different levels: *Manifestly*, the cost of sacrificing a victim is justified by the benefits gained by the social entity in whose name the sacrifice takes place. Each particular justification reflects a particular model of calculus, by which costs and benefits can be weighed up against each other, a *cité* or a discourse that makes the sacrifice purposeful. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the relations between such models of calculi. The aim of this chapter is to identify the two strongest discourses in that regard. However, it should be noted that the reason why I study soldier justifications is closely connected to the second, *latent* function of the sacrifice. The crux of the matter is that by means of this function which I call the inverted logic of the sacrifice, the models of calculi become meaningful; because of the costs, not in spite of the costs. **The death of the soldier serves itself as a justificatory proof that the social entity in whose name his blood is shed, is worth dying for. Yet, for a sacrifice to be regarded as justified, the latent function must remain concealed. For the latent function to actually work, the victims, in this case the soldiers, should believe in the manifest function, the straight-forward justification of the sacrifice.**

### 2.1.1 Sacrifier and Victim

Formally seen, we can regard the sacrifice in grammatical terms, as a simple clause, with a subject (S), a verb (V), and an object (O): Somebody (S) acts (V) on somebody else (O). As for the action, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss who in 1899 published their “Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice”, define a sacrifice as an act of sanctification, an act in which something is made sacred: “dans tout sacrifice, un objet passe du domaine commun dans le domaine religieux ; il est consacré” (Hubert, H. 1929 [1899]: 11). The question is, however, who inflicts that transference from the profane to the sacred, and on whom?

Most sacrifices have a *concrete* subject, “le sacrificateur” (the sacrificer), e.g. a sacrificial priest, who conducts the ritual. Le sacrificateur should be distinguished from “le sacrifiant” (the sacrificer), who initiates the sacrifice, and who should be seen as the *actual* subject. In the sacrifices analysed in the following, the sacrificer is difficult to identify. It can be the enemy who inflicts the kill or it can be the military, the power that executes the sacrifice by sending the soldiers to death. The difficulty in distinguishing between sacrificer and sacrifier is, however, not unusual. In religious mythology we see examples of sacrifices where the sacrificer and the sacrifier are not distinguishable either. Notably, in the story the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:2-19), Abraham embodies both, and in the sense that he is asked to sacrifice his own son, his own flesh and blood, he can in fact also be seen as the object of this sacrificial act, as “la victime”.<sup>1</sup>

The victim is the concrete object of the sacrifice, that person or thing which undergoes a radical change in the act itself. However, just like we can distinguish between the concrete subject (the sacrificer) and the actual subject (the sacrifier), we may also distinguish between a concrete and an actual *object*. The example of Isaac’s sacrifice is emblematic in that regard, because due to Abraham’s devotion, God promises that he shall be the father of a great people:

(17) (...) I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which [is] upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies (18) And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice (Gen 22: 17-18).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the Hávamál, the Norse god Odin hangs himself to gain insight in the knowledge of the underworld (Elder Edda: 138-141). Even more clearly than in the example of Abraham, he embodies all three functions.

<sup>2</sup> All Biblical references in the following are to the King James Version

The sacrifice does not only inflict a radical change on Abraham's son, the victim,<sup>3</sup> but also, in a further perspective, on the people to be. The actual object of the sacrifice is not Isaac, who is consecrated in the act, but the social entity which is blessed by the act, and that social entity is no other than the sacrificer, le sacrifiant: "Nous appelons sacrifiant le sujet qui recueille ainsi les bénéfices du sacrifice ou en subit les effets. Ce sujet est tantôt un individu et tantôt une collectivité, famille, clan, tribu, nation, société secrète" (Hubert & Mauss 1899 [1926]: 12). In that view, the sacrificer, who can designate either an individual or a collective, is both the actual subject and the actual object of the sacrifice.

Sacrifices inflict changes: First the consecration inflicts a change on the victim, which makes it possible to mediate between man and the divine (ibid: 13); secondly, this mediation makes another, secondary, change possible, by which the sacrificer, the moral person, achieves the divine blessings, the actual purpose of the sacrifice: "*Le sacrifice est un acte religieux qui, par la consécration d'une victime, modifie l'état de la personne morale qui l'accomplit ou de certains objets auxquels elle s'intéresse*" (ibid: 14 [italics in original]).

### 2.1.2 The Manifest Function: calculating costs and benefits of the sacrifice

The central question in analysing sacrifice is who the actual subject and object is: For which social entity does the sacrifice take place? Accordingly, the question in the following analysis is, is the actual object of the soldier sacrifice actually the nation?

The pains and sufferings of the victim are justified by the effect of the sacrifice on the social whole. Hence, the relation between the two fundamental elements of a sacrifice, the victim and the sacrificer can be depicted as a weighing of costs and benefits: As long as the general benefits of the sacrificer exceed the particular costs of sacrificing the victim, the sacrifice is purposeful. The same logic may apply to the soldier sacrifice: As long as the death of the soldier is regarded to take place for a higher purpose, e.g. making society safe, it can be justified. What that higher purpose is, is what will be analysed in the following.

Cost/benefit analyses are not only allotted to sacrifices, but to all justifications. However, as argued by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot in *De la Justification, les économies de la grandeur*, costs and benefits cannot be regarded as constant: What it takes to justify a cost depends wholly on how the distribution of benefits is perceived. Boltanski and Thevenot distinguishes

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<sup>3</sup> Which it does not anyway in either versions of the myth. God intervenes in the last moment. In the Quran (Surah 37: 99-109), the identity of the victim is unclear, but the common view is that the son is Ishmael and not Isaac.

between six different types of justifications, articulations of six different “economies of worth” (Boltanski, 2006: 159ff).<sup>4</sup> The key concept in that regard is “la cité”. Each way of justifying is founded on a particular cité, on a conceptual whole that defines a particular explanatory logic, according to which the distribution of costs and benefits of an action can be estimated (ibid: 130).

When I talk about “discourses” in the following, it is in a way that lies very close to Boltanski’s & Thevenot’s understanding of “cité”. There may be differences, of course. Differences that are not quite caught by the English translation, “world”, either. Strictly speaking, discourses define linguistic aspects of sociality, aspects which I assume have an impact beyond the sphere of language, but aspects that are, nevertheless, linguistic. Boltanski’s and Thevenot’s concept on the other hand, seems to imply a structure of thought, which metaphorically can be understood as a confined physical place, as a walled city, hence the term “cité”. Nevertheless, in a 2002 article co-authored with Norman Fairclough, Eve Chiapello, who wrote *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (1999) with Boltanski, a book that continues the line of thought from *De la justification*, emphasises that the two terms can be used interchangeably (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002: 192).

Cités share two fundamental traits with discourses. First, a cité offers a particular code for understanding the world, a code by which the world becomes codifiable, accessible. Second, each cité exists in constant competition with other cités, in a struggle for dominance, or in the words of discourse theory, of “discursive hegemony” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112). No matter whether the “ultimate sacrifice” is regarded as an ultimate *act* or as made for an ultimate *purpose*, describing it in terms of the ultimate entails that all other acts and all other purposes are perceived as secondary. The choice of words contributes to the establishment of a particular hegemonic order.

When, in the model of Hubert and Mauss, it is emphasised that the sacrifice takes place to the benefit of the sacrificer, the definition of the actual object, is a cité or a discourse, a justificatory regime that determines the worth of the sacrifice. The cité of a sacrifice defines the calculus by which dying for a particular social entity, a sacrificer, is made purposeful. In that view, the question why do soldiers fight and die, can be reduced to the question, what social entity can be rendered important enough to serve as sacrificer? The central goal of the analyses in Chapters 5 to 11 will be to answer that question

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<sup>4</sup> “Worth” is English translation of “grandeur”, which, however, also covers connotations of greatness or dignity. This ambiguity is crucial in Boltanski’s and Thevenot’s work, where each cité is structured around an ideal typical form of sacrifice, a “greatness” by which the “worth” of other sacrifices are measured.



and to analyse how these *cités* are distributed. Thus, when I ask, how do soldiers justify their sacrifices, my question regards both which *cités* they are actually using, and how they are interrelated.

### *2.1.3 The logic inverted: The victim of his people*

Thus far, I have identified the two central actors in a sacrifice, the victim and the sacrificer. I have defined a sacrifice as an act in which a radical change inflicted on the former is assumed to benefit the latter, the social entity constituting both the actual subject and the actual object of the act. Lastly, I have argued that justifications of sacrifice depend on certain models of calculus, by which this weighing of costs and benefits becomes meaningful. But why should it be particularly interesting to consider how soldiers justify their sacrifices? After all, soldiers do not fight and die in just wars only, and even in a democracy where the question of political justification is crucial, justification is an affair concerning the relation between politicians and the public.

However, the victims are important when it comes to the maintenance of the sacrificial ideology, i.e. of the discourse officially defining the sacrifice. And that ideology can only be maintained as long as it is allowed to conceal the latent function, or the inverted logic of the sacrifice, saying that victims are sacrificed in order to prove that something is worth dying for. In the above I have focused on how costs and benefits are evaluated on the same footing because of a *cité* that defines what is worth dying for. In the rest of this section I will focus on how such perceptions of worth are established. The claim is that all participants in the sacrifice, including the victims, must agree with the official sacrificial ideology. For if the latent reasons are revealed, the worth of the sacrifice will be brought into questions and the official ideology cannot be maintained.

The theoretical basis of this claim, which I call the inverted logic of sacrifice, is provided by the French philosopher, Rene Girard, and, inspired by his work, by Carolyn Marvin and Martin Ingle who have written specifically on studies of American sacrificial rituals (Girard, 1987; 1979; Marvin & Ingle 1996). In the book, *La route antique des hommes pervers* (1985)<sup>5</sup> Girard offers a reinterpretation of myth of Job, in which Job's denial of guilt is seen as a threat to the validity of the sacrifice, in which he is supposed to be victim

According to Girard, traditional analyses of the Book of Job have failed to recognise the presence of two very different layers in the Biblical text. Thus, the framework of the story, explaining the hardships of Job, and describing his redemption, are all later additions, which have disguised the original meaning of the text, contained in the dialogues between Job and his three

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<sup>5</sup> English title: *Job, the victim of his people* (1987).

friends (Girard 1987: 3-4). In the dialogues, his friends try, in vain, to convince him of his guilt. They do so, not because he is actually guilty, but because Job is about to be sacrificed. Unless it can be proven that he is guilty of a crime, of trespassing the rules of the society which his death is supposed to confirm, he cannot be liable to the punishment of this type of sacrifice. On the contrary, his lack of consent may draw attention to the latent function of the sacrifice, and thus undermine the ideological justification contained in the assumption of guilt. Job's denial of guilt makes the fundamental deception of the sacrifice implausible. Without his consent, he may be killed, but never become a valid victim: "Job is a failed scapegoat. He derails the mythology that is meant to envelop him, by maintaining his own point of view in the face of the formidable unanimity surrounding him" (Girard 1987: 35).

The argument here follows this line of thought. If the death of the soldier is to be considered as a valid sacrifice, the soldiers must himself consent with the sacrificial ideology. If he does not, he might draw attention to the latent function of the sacrifice, that soldiers die to prove that something is worth dying for, and likewise "derail" the official mythology of the civil religious sacrifice.

#### *2.1.4 The Latent Function: When the sacrifice becomes the justification*

In order to explain why Girard argues that the consent of the victim is necessary in Job's case, and why I consider it a matter of crucial interest in regard to American Servicemen, a short introduction to Girard's general perception of the sacrifice is necessary.

In spite of the fact that Girard devotes a great deal of his book on *La violence et le sacré* (1972) to dissociating himself from Hubert's and Mauss' interpretation of the sacrifice, they nevertheless share some common traits. Most importantly, Girard too holds the view that sacrifices take place with the benefits of society as their final purpose. The point is, however, that this idea of the sacrifice may also imply that the justificatory cost/benefit-calculus is short-circuited. As for the costs, the irreversibility of death means that it can fairly easy be argued, ethically, that the price of a sacrifice exceeds the benefits of any cause. And, regarding these benefits, if it is true that the idea of an ultimate sacrifice implies the existence of an ultimate cause, how do we prove, socially, that this particular cause, and not any other cause, is sufficiently worthy?

That proof can only be made by focusing on the constitution of worth instead of on the justification of death. How is worth established? It is established by the inverted logic of sacrifice. It is inverted because it does not prove the worth of death, but, on the contrary, uses death as a proof of worth. The straightforward cost/benefit-logic, described above, argues that

the sufferings of the soldier are endured because the benefits of the social entity he dies for exceed the cost of his life. The inverted logic, on the contrary, claims that the soldier's death serves as proof of the worth of the social entity.

The central point of Girard's *La violence et le sacré* is that violence *is* the sacred (Girard 1979: 19). Violence is the contingent force which at one time is a power of potential destruction and a source from which social life itself is shaped. Man is fundamentally violent. Not because he is ruled by a Freudian "death drive" or "Thanatos" (generally, Girard pays little heed to classical notions of desire, fuelled by want). No, man is violent because violence is a fundamental condition in all social relations (ibid: 174-175). Engaging in the social is engaging in a struggle for dominance, which may not be articulated physically, but nevertheless characterises as a profoundly violent relation. And, if violence is allowed to prevail indiscriminately, society will perish (ibid: 144-145).

Therefore, all lasting social relations are based on the discrimination of violence: Society is founded on the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate violence. Illegitimate violence is random violence. Legitimate violence is violence that takes place within certain boundaries (ibid: 15). Thus, for society to exist, the fundamental violence of sociality must be canalised. The religious sacrifice is undertaken with the purpose of canalising violence, of allowing violence to take place on legal terms.

Violence is all-devouring. Ultimately it will consume society. Therefore, it is necessary to canalise violence by sacrificing a victim in lieu of society. However, that canalisation can only take place if we pretend that the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence is not arbitrary: If we consider the victim as the legitimate object of the violence that is bestowed on it. This is the reason why Girard emphasises time and again that the victim is not a *substitute* for society, but a *surrogate*. A substitute is simply a replacement. A surrogate, however, pretends to be the real thing. And this act of deceive, the fact that the victim is not only devoured *instead of* the actual object, but is *perceived as* the actual object, is reflected in all cultures at all times (ibid: 101-102). This is the reason why the Wolf dies thinking that the stones in his body really are the Little Red Riding Hood and her Grandmother. And this is the reason why soldiers are sent to die on the battlefield as our legitimate representatives in violence.

Thus seen, the sacrifice is not the seamy side of the matter. The sacrifice is the matter. By dying for a particular cause, e.g. the society, the sacrificial death serves as proof that that cause is worth dying for. By the canalisation of violence for protecting a particular social entity, the existence of that entity is

made legitimate. Not by reference to a underlying principle of justice, but simply by the fact that all legitimacy is founded on the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence.

### *2.1.5 The victim: From Job to the American Soldier*

Following Girard, we may therefore distinguish between three categories of victims:

1. *the actual victim*, i.e. the actual object of violence, the social entity, which should be protected by the canalisation of violence, and whose worth is proven by the cost of the sacrifice
2. *the surrogate victim*, i.e. the archetype which is regarded as a valid surrogate for the actual victim: “the martyr”, “the king”, “the witch”
3. *the ritual victim*, the particular person sacrificed: Joan of Arc, Dietrich Bonhöffer, Robert F. Kennedy

According to Girard, it is Job’s status as Idol, as the embodiment of happiness, that makes him qualify to the role as scapegoat, i.e. as a surrogate victim that can fulfil the function of the actual victim and thus maintain the deception of violence (Girard 1987: 13). As ritual victim, however, Job denies that he is guilty and liable to the punishment of sacrifice. And, by denying guilt, Job challenges the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence. By denying guilt he sheds light on the arbitrariness of the sacrifice’s claim for legitimacy.

Applied to the general hypothesis of this project, the actual victim is American society, and the surrogate victim is the American soldier. Seen in light of Girard’s theory, the soldier is sent to war to fight and die for proving that America is worth dying for (Marvin & Ingle 1996). The project’s focus, however, is on the last category, the ritual victim, i.e. on the individual soldiers on the battlefield.

Two central objections can be raised against this theory of the inverted logic of sacrifice. First, is it really so that soldiers fight and die in order to prove that the nation is worth dying for? And, second, does it actually matter what the soldiers say in this regard? Fighting men are killed for numerous reasons, but primarily because they go to war, and wars are not justified by reference to the inverted logic of the sacrifice. Instead they are justified by reference to land, resources, sovereignty, and first and last, to justice. I do not assume that I will find empirical evidence that soldiers consider themselves as participants in the great social deception of violence, because theoretically there is no reason to assume that they should do so. For the deception of the inverted logic of sacrifice to remain intact, the victims should regard the sac-

rificial ideology as real and not draw the establishment of worth, the latent function of the sacrifice, into question.

The inverted logic of the sacrifice does not claim that other reasons of justification do not exist, but just like we, in regard to rain dance rituals, should distinguish between the manifest meteorological function of producing rain, and the latent social function of “reinforcing group identity” (Merton 1996: 91), we should distinguish between the manifest and the latent functions of the soldier sacrifice. Whereas justifications made with reference to land, resources, sovereignty and justice are manifest functions, the inverted logic by means of which land, resources, sovereignty and justice become perceived as causes worth dying for, is a latent function.

There is all the more reason to maintain that distinction between manifest and latent functions, since the very idea of this inverted logic depends on the continuous denial of the latent function of the sacrifice. This is exactly the reason why it is interesting to see, whether the ritual victims of modern war, the soldiers on the ground, regard the justification of their sacrifice as valid: **For the national ideology to be intact, the soldiers must share the fundamental notion of the worth of the nation.**

**This brings us to the second objection against this theory: Is it really so that if the soldiers call the worth of the sacrifice into question, it will pose a fundamental threat to the sacrificial cult and the national mythology whose existence depends on the maintenance of this deception?** After all, justification of war is an issue that primarily concerns politicians and the public. Nevertheless, since the *levée en masse* in the wake of the French Revolution, modern warfare has been founded on the assumption that soldiers are soldiers of the people (Janowitz, 1965).<sup>6</sup> And whereas the means of communication did not used to allow soldiers to utter their opinions publicly, this has changed radically in the last decade. As I will argue below, military blogs are methodologically interesting because they provide us with elaborated arguments written without any intervention of the researcher. Substantially, however, they are also interesting because through this media soldiers can participate and affect public debate, and in that regard their views matter in the maintenance of the sacrificial ideology.

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<sup>6</sup> Janowitz’ position is not unchallenged. Samuel Huntington has argued that maintaining a difference between soldiers and civilians is the only way of keeping the military free from political interference (Huntington 1957; Rukavishnikov 2006: 133-134)

## 2.2 Civil religion

### 2.2.1 Sacrifice and religion

Historically, sacrifices and religion are closely connected. The analysis conducted by Hubert and Mauss shows clear parallels to the functionalism of Mauss' friend, colleague and uncle Emile Durkheim. Durkheim identifies the idea of society with the soul of religion: "Si la religion a engendré tout ce qu'il y a d'essentiel dans la société, c'est que l'idée de la société est l'âme de la religion" (Durkheim 1968 [1912]: 396). And if the idea of society is the soul of religion, then Hubert's and Mauss' definition of the sacrifice as "*a religious act which (...) modifies the condition of a moral person*" implies that the sacrifice is the embodiment of that idea.

The influence worked both ways, though (Strenski 2005). The notion of rituals in Durkheim's *Les forms elementaire de la vie religieuse*, was clearly inspired by Hubert and Mauss. Above, I argued that Boltanski and Thevenot provide a fairly simple framework of justificatory practises, only to show that the variations within this framework, potentially, are legion. Likewise, Hubert and Mauss identified the elementary forms of sacrifice with the purpose of showing how much sacrifices may vary within this scheme (Hubert & Mauss 1929 [1899]: 50ff). This point of view which is repeated in Durkheim's description of rituals as fundamentally divided into two forms which, in spite of the fact that they fulfil the same purpose of establishing communion, are nevertheless incompatible:<sup>7</sup>

Les sentiments mis en commun varient de l'extrême abattement à l'extrême allégresse, de l'irritation douloureuse à l'enthousiasme extatique; mais, dans tous les cas, il y a communion des consciences et réconfort mutuel par suite de cette communion. (Durkheim 1968 [1912]: 391).

When we refer to the death of the soldier as "the ultimate sacrifice", we imply, both by means of the word "ultimate" and by the definitive article "the", that this act has no peer. It is distinguished by being unique and singular. In that sense it already shares a fundamental characteristic with the sacred. Moreover, assuming the act is unique; we would intuitively expect that the social entity on behalf of which the sacrifice is enacted is also unique. The

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<sup>7</sup> Hubert and Mauss explicitly formulated their theory in opposition to the views of Edward B. Tylor, who saw sacrifice as an reminiscent of magic, and William Robertson Smith, according to whom the purpose of the sacrifice was the establishment of unity between totem and tribe (Henninger 2005). Nevertheless, central aspects of Durkheim's *Les Form Elementaire*, notably the focus on the totemism, are clearly inspired by the evolutionary pioneers (Jones 1986: 614-615).

sacrifice, in the singular, can, logically, only refer to one community. The question in the light of the sacrificial ideology is what that community is.

### 2.2.2. *Why Civil Religion?*

As mentioned in the introduction, the idea of the continuous presence of a mechanic component of religion in modern society is basically the idea of civil religion, and civil religion theory is fundamentally a functional theory of religion. Whereas essentialist theories of religion focuses on what religion *is*, functionalist theories of religion focuses on what religion *does*, on what social function it fulfils.

A turn from an essentialist to a functionalist approach has advantages and disadvantages. One clear advantage is that by looking at social functions instead of conceptual essentials, we avoid ruling out phenomena, e.g. Buddhism, that appear to be religious, but nevertheless can be difficult to fit into traditional definitions, which regard religion as the belief in a transcendent being. Moreover, we can look at phenomena that borders religion, but which a majority of the participants will hardly categorise as such, with the tools and vocabulary known from analyses of religion, as for instance football matches or national ceremonies. This, however, also directs attention at two of the disadvantages: First, if the participants do not themselves recognise a phenomenon as religious, are we then not crossing a problematic ethical line by nevertheless doing so? And, secondly, using a functionalist approach easily makes the researcher prone to accusations of categorising everything as religion. In other words, to proceed down this line calls for a clear definition.

Most theories of civil religion, and in particular the two general trends defined by Martin Martin on the one hand, and Stephen Mead and Robert N. Bellah on the other, agree that civil religion is a uniquely modern phenomenon. As a result of the process of secularisation, or rather as defined by Durkheim, the process of *differentiation*, the function of the church has been gradually specified. Traditionally, religion was a gatekeeper of society. Religion integrated man into society, both in the classical Durkheimian sense, as the motor of social integration through the ritual worship of society itself, as well as in the historical significance of the Church: Without approval of Rome, marriages could be declared illegal and thrones could fall. In modern society, churches still function as gatekeepers, but in a much more specific way. Now, ecclesiastic religion only integrates a certain aspect of man, namely *l'homme*, man as a private individual. Furthermore, the society whose gates it keeps is the celestial society, which, ideally, should be separated from the immanent political reality.

But which social institutions have taken over the role as gatekeeper of the immanent political reality? Who integrates man as *citoyen*? The fundamental



claim of civil religion is, that society still takes care of that itself, not only through the actually existing institutions of social integration, e.g. schools and armies, but through the maintenance of belief in the historical role of society, and through rituals in which society is worshipped. Civil religion establishes long-lasting feelings of social cohesion among the citizens. The function once fulfilled by the Church has now been transposed into other social spheres.

### 2.2.3 Why Civil Religion?

Society has always recognised the importance of religion in regard to the full integration of its members. Socrates was condemned to death on the accusation that not only was he “a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth”, but also because he, allegedly, did “not believe in the gods of the state” and had “other new divinities of his own.” (Apology: 24b-c). Niccolò Machiavelli returns to the subject more than once in *Discorsi* (Machiavelli 1950: 243), and in *Du Contrat Social* Jean-Jacques Rousseau devotes a whole chapter “De la religion civile” to the subject (Rousseau, 1762: 76ff). When Robert Bellah in 1967 wrote his classical article “Civil Religion in America”, he adopted Rousseau’s name of the concept, and marked it as the sociological term for the religion of society (Bellah, 1991 [1967]).

Bellah wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Tokugawa Religion which in the early modern time revolutionised Japanese society, and which was notoriously known for its establishment of a state cult under which all other religious beliefs were subordinated (Bellah 1957; Kitagawa & Ebersole 2005).<sup>8</sup> Yet, in his civil religion article, Bellah did not seek to adopt the elements of social engineering advocated by Machiavelli, Rousseau and Tokogawa Religion alike. On the contrary, he tried to dissociate himself from this top-down interpretation of civil religion, and to adopt a more neutral position from where it would be possible to test the hypothesis “that most of what is both good and bad in our history is rooted in our public theology“ (Bellah, 1998: 21). Bellah thus became a stern advocate for a toquevillian or strictly sociological interpretation of the phenomenon, and in the initial article he explicitly stated why an alternative to Rousseau’s interpretation was needed. Ironically, however, by focusing on presidential speeches in that very same article he made his theory subject to the very same critique of elitism.

Ernest Gellner already reintroduced Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s term in 1965, translated as *civic* religion (Marty 1974: 140), and it may have added

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<sup>8</sup> Tokugawa Religion is popularly but misleadingly also known as “Japanese Shinto”, which due to its strong element of state hegemony is often used as a derogatory term.



to the confusion that Bellah adopted the term *civil* religion without considering that “civile” in french covers both the meaning of “civil” and “civic”. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but not always. They can also be seen as signifying historically or conceptually distinct phenomena. Historians often refer to the state cults of ancient Athens and Rome as instances of *civic* religion, whereas *civil* religion is used to signify a specifically modern, and public, phenomenon. This is in accordance with Bailey’s conceptual distinction, which also leads him to the conclusion that Bellah should have talked about American *Civic* Religion, when choosing to analyse political statements (Bailey 1990). Coleman, on the other hand, regards Civil Religion as one among three different instances of the more general concept of Civic religion, which in his eyes simply signify any religious worship of society (Coleman 1970).

The debate which has been going on now for more than 40 years, is not only about what we should call the phenomenon, but also about whether it actually signifies anything, and, to the extent that it does, how we should distinguish it from other cultural phenomena? In 1994 the intensive and sometimes uncivil debate led Philip E. Hammond, the co-author of *Varieties of Civil Religion* (1980), to suggest that the term “Civil Religion” should be replaced by “Legitimizing Myth”. Not because it substantially seen is a better term, “but because ‘legitimizing myth’ invites the question ‘How do you understand it’ rather than ‘Does it exist?’” (Hammond et al 1994: 2). And Bellah opened his 1978 article “Religion and Legitimation in the American Republic”, with the following words:

Just over a decade ago I published an essay that I have never subsequently been allowed to forget. In that essay I suggested that there is such a thing as civil religion in America. My suggestion has roused passionate opposition as well as widespread acceptance. Opposition to the idea has shown little unity. Some of my opponents say there is no such thing, that I have invented something which does not exist; others say there is such a thing but there ought not to be; still others say there is such a thing but it should be called by another name, “public piety,” for example, rather than civil religion. Unfortunately for me my supporters are in even greater disarray. The term civil religion has spread far beyond any coherent concept, or at least beyond anything I ever meant by it. (Bellah 1998: 16)

In the following, I do not intent to solve this debate. Yet, in order not to add to the confusion either, I will first try to distinguish the different approaches to civil religion, and then try to specify what I mean when I use the term, and why I consider it plausible that we will find civil religious justifications prevalent among US Military personal.

#### 2.2.4. Types of civil religion?

The most thorough mapping of the civil religion debate was undertaken by Gail Gehrig in her PhD and published in 1979 in the *Monograph Series of Society of the Scientific Study of Religion* under the title *American Civil Religion: an Assessment*.

Gehrig differentiates between five types of American Civil Religion: 1) *Democratic faith*, 2) *Protestant virtues* 3) *Folk religion* 4) *transcendent civil religion* 5) *religious nationalism*. Of these, I will categorise the first two as weak and the last three as strong forms of civil religion. It should be noted that these five main categories are not necessarily mutually excluding, neither in practical sense nor conceptually. People's identities are not coherently constructed. What researchers regard as logically enclosed systems may for social actors just be different tools in their justificatory tool-kit (Swidler 2001). And, sometimes the categories are even mutually confirming.

##### 1) Democratic faith:

Gehrig exemplifies this category with the theories of John Dewey, but in a wider perspective it covers all sorts of worship of civil rights that can be compared to religious worship proper. One may add that this is true in both a negative and in an affirmative sense: In debates on secularism, as for instance in the Cartoon Crises, the religious opponents may categorise the worship of freedom of speech as a form of idolatry.

An affirmative approach to this view of democratic ideals as a form of religious worship proper, would claim instead that these ideals provide modern society with the social glue that would otherwise have dried out in the process of secularisation. Thus seem, democratic faith is close to Durkheim's idea of the cult of the individual, both historically and conceptually: Juridical rights are normally centred on the individual, and rights are only rights as long as they apply universally (Durkheim 1893: 159).

##### 2) Protestant virtues:

The idea that a number of social practises can be regarded as remnants of religion is an often repeated statement. Put very simple, the argument of Max Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* is an argument of the continuous, albeit unrecognised effect of a particular religious mindset (Weber 1973).

Turning from descriptive sociology to normative political debates, the so-called re-enchantment theory is by and large a theory of the continuous impact of religion, and as to whether we should recognise that impact or not. Recent examples at an international level are the discussions regarding the mentioning of Christianity in the preamble of the Lisbon Treaty, and the de-

bates over Turkey's eligibility as an applicant for EU membership. At the national level, critics of the possible impact of Islam often infer from the fact that civil rights were developed in Christian Protestant countries to the assumption that some religiously embedded cultures are more fit for democratisation than others.

### 3) Folk Religion

Gehrig attributes the idea of Civil Religion as Folk Religion to Alexis de Tocqueville and Martin Marty. Marty and de Tocqueville shares the assumption that the religiously founded beliefs ensure public and private virtues and define a people's historical development. It is not difficult to see the parallels to the views of residual religion categorised as protestant virtues above. The point is, however, both in regard to de Tocqueville's "moeurs" and Marty's "religion in general" that religion not only continuously plays a role, but that its importance in this regard is also continuously recognised.

A central aspect in de Tocqueville's diagnoses of modern society is the everpresent threat of equality turning into fragmentation, and in his analyses of the *Democracy in America* he points to the particular traits of Puritanism as a bulwark against this development (de Tocqueville 2004: 335-340). In spite of the fact that there was more freedom in 18th century France, under *l'ancien régime* than in the British Colonies ruled by the Puritans, there was from the outset a close alliance in these colonies between church and community in regard to the struggle for freedom against oppression (Kessler 1977: 131). And, further, the form of freedom, nourished by Christianity, was from the outset characterised by a fear of God and a morality that provided the guarantee against developing into despotic freedom (ibid: 132).<sup>9</sup>

Like de Tocqueville, Marty also regards religion as the basis of a political superstructure, characteristic of American society. Unlike Bellah who sees civil religion as a distinguishable form of religion, Marty regards civil religion

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<sup>9</sup> This reading of de Tocqueville's interpretation of religion is not undisputed. Bellah points to the fact that de Tocqueville along with other republican thinkers "have wondered whether Christianity could ever manage to create good citizens" (Bellah 1978: 16). Sanford Kessler notes that de Tocqueville, besides his historically and conceptually optimistic analyses of Christianity in America, also notes that in order to ensure the continuous support of religion, Christianity must be revised, and in that revision is a potential danger of watering down the authoritative element of religion and, hence, of a slide towards democratic despotism (Kessler 1977). For thorough discussions of the role of religion in de Tocqueville's work, see Mitchell (1995) & Wolin (2001).

primarily as articulations of “religion-in-general”, articulations of views common to religious people across different denominations.<sup>10</sup>

In his essay: “Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion” (1974) Marty emphasises that given the fact that nations constitute very powerful social symbols, they may replace the functions of religion proper. However, as far as civil religion is concerned he defines the phenomenon as being placed somewhere between the particular sects and the most general acceptance of the existence of an ultimate reality. In that regard he specifically compares the phenomenon to Berger and Luckmann’s “social construction of reality”, and he states that civil religion primarily exists in the heads of researchers, or as a derogatory term used to characterise elitist “American Shinto”. On that Background, Marty argues that instead of claiming to study civil religion in general, the researchers should be more specific in regard to which aspect of civil religion they study.

#### 4) Transcendent Civil Religion

Thus, Marty’s focus is on what we may call religious politics of particular groups, and he is suspicious in regard to studies that focuses on civil religion solely on a very generalised level. And, in spite of the fact that he agrees with Stephen Martin and Bellah in regard to the identification of the structural conditions which have lead to the development of civil religion, his approach to the phenomenon differs fundamentally from theirs.

Marty sees Civil Religion as being placed between sectarian religions and universal ideas of ultimate existence, and regards the particular positions in the debate as articulations of that generalised thought. Stephen Mead, on the contrary, sees Civil Religion as a particular religion, *the Religion of the Republic*, whose views and practises may be derived from, but cannot be reduced to the views and practices of different denominations. Likewise, Bellah devotes a great deal of his first essay on Civil religion in America to refuting the idea of a “lowest-denominator” religion

While some have argued that Christianity is the national faith, and others that church and synagogue celebrate only the generalized religion of “the American Way of Life”, few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America. This article argues not only that there is such a thing, but also that this religion or perhaps better, this religious dimension – has its

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<sup>10</sup> In the light of that it is hardly surprising that Marty together with R. Scott Appleby in the beginning of the 1990s led the “Fundamentalism Project”, a large scale research project aiming at mapping Christian Fundamentalism in America.

own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religion does. (Bellah 2005 [1967]: 40)

This view, that Civil religion is just as particular as any sectarian religion, is supported by John A. Coleman, who differentiates between three types by which religion and society can be integrated in the modern world: In England and Scandinavia we find a relation of “continued undifferentiation” or “Church sponsored Civil Religion”. Here, the Church still provides the ideological framework for the state. In totalitarian regimes, as Nazi Germany and the USSR we have examples of the second type of interaction between religion and society: “Secular nationalism”. Here, the cult of the state aims at replacing all institutions of civil society, including the churches, with state institutions. Last, but not least we have the civil religion proper which is characterised by fulfilling an integrated function in a differentiated society side-by-side with other, sectarian, religious practices. In Coleman’s view, Civil Religion may define a mechanic component, since it defines what we, as a society, have in common, but it does so on the premises of a thoroughly organic solidarity: it fulfils its role in recognition of the existence of other roles (Coleman 1970).

#### 5) Religious Nationalism

Gehrig describes Religious Nationalism as *either* a radicalised version of Folk Religion, *or* as the opposite of Transcendent Civil Religion. Following Coleman’s framework above, I see it as both/and. Secular nationalism and religious nationalism are two of a kind, because they, unlike Transcendent Civil Religion are both fundamentally mechanic: They may be derived from religion-in-general, and in that sense they can be seen as subsets of folk religion. More important, however, they are both thoroughly exclusive, based on the notion that social equality cannot prevail unless we hold the *same* “truths to be self-evident”, (and, it could be added, regard all other truths to be self-refuting or even idolatrous). Thus seen, even in a democracy civil religion may entail totalitarian elements.

#### *2.2.5. Defining Civil Religion*

Had I followed Hammond’s advice and stuck to the term “legitimizing myth”, all five of Gehrig’s categories would probably have been included. However, in the following definition of civil religion, I do not, indiscriminately, include the two weak forms, as I do not consider them as sufficient proof of the presence of civil religion.

Thus, I will only regard the worship of the universal ideals, associated with Dewey, as civil religious articulations if it, empirically, can be rendered

plausible that these ideals are seen as bestowed on the people by some sort of divine authority or at least signifying a particular historical manifest role to fulfil. There is a fundamental dilemma in the debate about “constitutional patriotism” as to whether it should be seen, fundamentally, as a Kantian or as a Hegelian idea. Should we emphasise its constitutional, and potentially universal, aspects or its patriotic and potentially particularistic aspects? Habermas was aware of this dilemma when he in the wake of the German Historikerstreit coined Dolf Sternberger’s term, and opted for the middle ground: the particular political culture of a country determines how the universal ideas are articulated (Habermas 1997: 143). In this context however, the crucial point is whether faith in the universal ideas is articulated as faith in the nation, and whether the individual is actually willing to die for them.

As for the notion of American ideals as remnants of religious beliefs and practices, we may historically be able to prove that democracy was derived from a set of ideals particular to one religion. However, we cannot, based on that observation, infer backwards and regard the mere presence of democratic ideals as a sign of religion. The fact that a jury consist of 12 members, just like the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of our Lord, does not make it a religious court. Again, the crucial point in this regard is whether such remnants are articulated as entailing a religious meaning in itself, e.g. if the decisions of the court are perceived as fulfilling divine purposes.

This leaves me with the remaining three types: Religion-in-general, Religious Nationalism, and Transcendent Civil Religion. Unlike Religion-in-general, both Religious Nationalism and Transcendent Civil Religion see religion as a particular, and differentiated aspect of society. The two latter, however, differ internally, by holding different views on differentiation. Religious Nationalism is mechanic. It regards the acts of the nation as incarnating the will of God. Transcendent Civil Religion on the contrary is organic, regards God as the ultimative, and external source of blessings and doom (see Table 2.1).

I prefer “religion-in-general” to the more traditional term “folk religion” since the latter often implies a differentiation between true and degenerate forms of belief that is highly problematic in regard to the study of religion. Granted, there might be perfectly good reasons for distinguishing between civil religion as elite and as a popular phenomena. After all: “Those who are nearest the center of a regime are more likely than those at the periphery to perceive the authority of the nation in religious terms” (Fenn 1977: 507)

Table 2.1: Civil religious types distributed by solidarity form and status of religion<sup>a)</sup>

		<b>Form of solidarity<sup>b)</sup></b>	
		<b>Mechanic</b>	<b>Organic</b>
<b>Status of Religion</b>	<b>Particular-religion</b>	Religious nationalism [a]	Transcendent civil religion [c]
	<b>Religion-in-general</b>	(de Tocqueville) [b]	(Marty) [d]

a. Like the two particular-religion types differ by form of solidarity, I differentiate Marty's position from de Tocqueville's, since Marty fundamentally agrees with Mead's and Bellah's historical analyses of civil religion as a modern concept derived from the split between the individual and the social functions of religion (Gehrig 1979: 9; Marty 1974: 141-142). As can be derived from the above presentation, not all interpretations of de Tocqueville would characterise his view of religion-in-general as articulating mechanic solidarity.

b. Due to the distinction between mechanic and organic solidarity, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 are interrelated. Yet, whereas Table 2.1 maps different types of *civil religion*, Table 2.2 maps different types of *sacrifice*.

These are the words of Richard Fenn, one of Bellah's most staunch critics, whose important objection against the idea of civil religion theses is that even though we may accept the existence of implicit faith in society, there is no reason to assume that this faith signifies the same across cultural, ethnic, racial or socio-economic lines of demarcation:

The "civil religion" is more likely to be seen as a cultural fiction to the extent that the nation itself seems to be merely an arena for the conflicting and cooperative activities of the classes, ethnic groups, large corporations, and various organizations which pursue their ideals and their material interests under rules enunciated and enforced by the state. (Fenn 1977: 514)

Same sort of critique has been raised by Thomas Luckmann, who argues that all religions-in-general share one fundamental characteristic: they are thoroughly individualised. Hence, civil religion may be even closer to the Durkheimian "cult of the individual" than actually assumed by Bellah in the studies of Civil Religion.<sup>11</sup>

As the transcendent social order and the great transcendences cease to be generally significant, matters that are important to the privatized, partly egoistic

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<sup>11</sup> *Habits of the Heart* Bellah's opus magnum, actually focuses on the individualisation of society, and the dangers of fragmentation identified by de Toqueville (Bellah et al 1996 [1985]).

and hedonistic, partly ecological, symbolically altruistic individual become sacralized (Luckmann 1990: 138).<sup>12</sup>

Another devastating critique, raised by both Fenn and Marty, is that Bellah's and Mead's approaches are profoundly normative. In spite of the fact that Bellah attributes both good and bad "to our public theology", this accusation is justified, as he, along with this descriptive approach to the phenomenon, also seems to imply a distinction between good and bad civil religion.

This is most clearly expressed in Bellah's description of American history as sequential "times of trial". In both the Struggle for Independence, in the great Blood Sacrifice of the Civil War, and at the height of the Vietnam War, America had to decide whether civil religion should degenerate into zealotry, or whether the acts of the Nation should be seen as subject to divine judgement: "Without an awareness that our nation stands under higher judgement, the tradition of the civil religion would be dangerous indeed. Fortunately, the prophetic voices have never been lacking" (Bellah 2005 [1967]: 185)

This is clearly normative distinction. When Marty regards Mead as a "prophet" of a particular, elitist, type of Civil Religion, he could just as well have chosen Bellah. Bellah's aim of distinguishing between voices of "prophesy" and voices of "zealotry" is two-fold:<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, he tries to provide sociology with a descriptive tool of analysis. On the other, he uses that tool to pursue a normative agenda. He distinguishes between good and bad civil religion. Methodologically seen, it seems as if Bellah tries to have his cake and eat it.

Distinguishing between dangerous and benevolent types of Civil Religion, we should examine whether they reflect actual dimensions. This is what Marty does when he distinguishes between a "Nation-under-God" approach and a "Nation-as-Transcendent" approach (Marty 1974). This is what Bob Wuthnow does when he differentiates between conservative and liberal civil religion (Wuthnow, 1988). This is what Wimberley and a group of co-researchers did when they showed, statistically, that civil religion was a better measure for support for Nixon than faith, Socio-Economic-Status and a

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<sup>12</sup> Luckmann's individualised perception of religion is in accordance with Durkheim's interpretation in his early works. His co-author of *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger, emphasises the collective elements of religion instead, and his perception seems closer to the later interpretations of Durkheim (Berger 1990)

<sup>13</sup> This distinction is developed further by Robert Jewett. In *The Captain America Complex*, he sees American history as an ongoing exchange between "Zealous Nationalism" and "Prophetic Realism" (Jewett, 1973). In Jewett's analysis there is little left of Bellah's descriptive ambitions. Marty also talks about "prophetic" and "priestly" elements, but in another sense, where the deeds of the priests and speeches of the prophets are mutually reassuring (Marty 1974).



number of political measures. Finally, this is what I do, too, when I, in the first analysis below, distinguish between immanent and transcendent Civil Religion.<sup>14</sup>

My primary concern is whether civil religious justifications are used by US military personnel, and how they interact with other types of justification. Therefore, I cannot on normative grounds alone allow myself the luxury of assuming that “real” American Civil Religion is necessarily affirmative or critical. Likewise, since both religion-in-general and particular-religion arguments have been promoted in the debate, I will not exclude either beforehand. Instead, to test the hypothesis that Civil Religious Justifications are used by military personnel, a definition of civil religion is needed that covers the range of both distinctions. But, of course, this inclusive approach to the *measures* should be distinguished from my *hypothesis*, assuming that as part of a fundamentally state supporting institution, and due to the conservative dominance in the military, I expect affirmative civil religion to be stronger.

With reference to Coleman, Gail Gehrig defines “American civil religion as the religious symbol system which relates the citizen’s role and American society’s place in space, time, and history, to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning.” (Gehrig 1979: 4). By defining civil religion as a “symbol system” Coleman’s approach bears the trademarks of Clifford Geertz’ debated but still frequently used definition of religion as:

- 1) [a] system of symbols which acts to
- 2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
- 3) clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality that makes
- 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1973: 90)

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<sup>14</sup> Just as well as there may be good reasons for distinguishing between these two dimensions, it is necessary to be aware of the fact, that even though what I call Immanent Civil Religion is primarily affirmative, it, also has its “prophets” or internal critics. The awakening of the religious right in the late 1970s was in both words and self-understanding largely seen as an endeavour of criticism. Likewise, in spite of the fact that Transcendent Civil Religion is primarily critical, it has also, historically, had its moments of affirmative dominance, as reflected in Abraham Lincoln’s and Woodrow Wilson’s speeches.

Thus seen, Affirmative and Prophetic approaches are not necessarily mutually excluding, but probably better described as different instances on the same continuum. The critical voice of the Jeremiad presupposes the affirmative voice of the Manifest Destiny. They mark different strains, but also strains that derives from the same religious origin and strains that should both be taken into account in an analysis of American Civil Religion.

The great advantage of both Geertz' general definition of religion and Coleman's specific definition of American Civil Religion, is that they are neutral both in the sense that they are strictly descriptive, and not particularly exclusive. However, some of the same critical voices that have been raised against Geertz, primarily by Talal Asad, also apply to Coleman's definition.

First, it lacks specificity. What are e.g. "the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning", and, what is it in regard to American Civil Religion? Unless that is specified, it becomes very difficult to distinguish Civil Religion from other religious or cultural phenomena. Secondly, it misses the dimension of power, entailed in all religious practises. In regard to Civil Religion this is what Fenn and Luckmann were both aiming at, when criticising the approach to Civil Religion as an all-inclusive phenomenon. Thirdly, defining religion as a system of symbols may lead to an extremely logo-centric understanding of religion which is problematic in at least three regards: It defines religion as a contemplative instead of emotional phenomenon, and thus easily gives priority to an elitist approach; it focuses on myth instead of ritual; and to the extent that it does not exclude enacted religion, it leads to the assumption that that myths and rituals are symbolic actions of the same cognitive dimension.

I have revised Coleman's words and settled for the following working definition:

A system of either symbolic meaning or symbolic actions can be regarded as an expression of American Civil Religion when it defines individuals or groups as members of American society by referring to the idea of the nation's radical transcendence, i.e. as guided by divine providence, as subject to divine judgement or as a national community that reaches beyond death.

In the definition, I have taken all three points of critique into consideration. First, even though I do not address the question of power directly, I deliberately mention both groups and individuals in order to cover both very *universalistic* conceptions of civil religion as well as very *particularistic* definitions implying the exclusion of other individuals or groups. Secondly, I include both myth and ritual but as potentially different symbolic domains. And thirdly, I limit the concept of "radical transcendence" to three forms of expression.

As for the latter, I deliberately talk about "radical transcendence" to distinguish between modes of weak, moderate and radical transcendence. Weak transcendence is what we encounter as members of any given community within our "horizon of experience", for instance on the job, playing a game, or going to a party. Such encounters are transcendent to the degree that we

experience them as a unitary whole, which we, narratively can split into sequences, but nevertheless will continue to perceive as distinguishable *durées*. It is weak, however, as we do not perceive them as existing beyond the given frame of time and space. Moderate transcendence is what we encounter as members of a long-lasting social entity, for instance a nation state. All nations are “imagined communities”, and, to follow Anderson’s definition, the image of the nation is the perception of a social entity existing “across homogeneous, empty time” (Anderson, 1991: 145). We assume that we inhabit the same social and moral space as people, whom we will never meet, either because they live in another place or because they lived a long time ago. Thus, moderate transcendence transcends the short *durée*. It can establish a sense of community across history and geography. Radical transcendence is based on the assumption that the homogeneous, empty time is perceived as entailing a divine element: either by the image of a place, beyond death, a paradise; or by the notion that the individual member by his death contributes to the worth of the imagined community: If the nation is worshipped by sacrifice.

#### *2.2.6 Civil religious justifications*

Soldiers engage in a practice that demands ultimate justification: They trespass the two fundamental social rules: the prohibition of killing and the obligation of self-preservation. But how do they justify their sacrifices?

Pragmatically seen, soldiers fight and die in wars fought by societies, and accordingly, should they choose to justify their death with reference to another social entity, it would compromise the justice of the war in the long run. Historically seen, however, soldiers have died for all sorts of reasons, and if that has not been a problem before, then why would it be a problem now?

It might be, because, ideologically, the close association of the citizen with citizen soldier has reached its height in the national state. From Machiavelli to Rousseau, from the *levée en masse* of the French Revolution, to the abandoning of drafting in the wake of the Vietnam War: the notion that the most loyal soldier is the citizen soldier, who serves not for money or prestige, but for the defence of his homeland, has as already mentioned been celebrated and mocked. But today after 30 years of the All Volunteer Army, we still refer to the troops as “our troops”; the ideal still seems to be intact.

When I assume that it is also intact among the troops, it is because of the inverted sacrificial logic described in the above. Both war and religion are enactments of legitimate violence, by which the distribution of legitimate and illegitimate violence is settled. This means two things: 1) The society provided with legitimacy is the society for which the soldier fight and dies. 2)

Any other society should, logically seen, be regarded as an illegitimate aim of sacrifice. There might be other sources of justification, other warrants to refer to, but ultimately these other sources should be subordinated to the one, ultimate sacrificer: the Civil Religion.

### **2.3. Military Religion**

In this, the third part of the theoretical chapter, I will regard the most important rivalling hypothesis concerning soldier motivation, the unit cohesion.<sup>15</sup> I will look historically at the establishment and the development of the notion that soldiers fight for each other, and not for the nation, from the birth of the genre in the wake of the Franco-Preussian War, to the empirical studies in an American context in the Second World War, in Korea, in Vietnam, and in Iraq. In the next, and final section (2.4), I will argue why that this notion constitutes a rivalling hypothesis, not only in terms of motivation in general but also in terms of a rivalling sacrificial cult.

#### *2.3.1 Études sur le combat – birth of a genre*

At the turn of the last century, French military thought underwent a revolution, initiated by a group of young officers, “the French School” (or “the Young Turks”), among them Ferdinand Foch, whose thinking inspired a generation of officers, and whose deeds in the Great War, are still a cornerstone in French national identity. Foch’s ideas, expressed in his *École Supérieure de Guerre* lectures, reflect what has later been known as “the cult of the offensive”: the notion that battles are won, not by rallies of bullets, but by the courage of men (Arnold 1978: 64).

Traditionally, Colonel Charles Ardant du Picq is seen as the key source of inspiration to the French School (Arnold 1978: 62). As shown by a number of military historians this is, however, a qualified truth. The ‘cult of the offensive’ was not undisputed in French Military Thought (Echevarria II, 2002: 209-210), and the idea of the human factor in battle was primarily a product of the introduction of German military thinking, especially the writings of Carl von Clausewitz, and not the introduction of du Picq’s works (Holborn, 1942: 156; Irvine, 1940: 161). The real fame of du Picq is of a later date. The 1921 English translation of *Études sur le combat*, du Picq’s compiled writings, includes a letter of recommendation by Foch in which he exhorts du Picq as an “exponent of ‘moral force’, the most powerful element in the strength of

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<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, the literature differentiates between ‘esprit de corps’ (the identification with formal institutions or larger organisations), ‘cohesion’ (the identification with informal institutions or smaller organisations) and ‘motive’ (the drive of the individual soldier) (Siebold, 1999: 15), a vocabulary which I have tried to maintain in the dissertation.

armies”. And, in the foreword, Frank H. Simonds draws a direct line from the late French Colonel’s insights to the successes of the French armies in the Great War (Du Picq, 1947).<sup>16</sup>

Granted, du Picq did devote his intellectual career to rethinking the organisation of the French Army, and hath his superiors taken his advice seriously, the Franco-Prussian War, including the battle of Metz in 1870, in which du Picq fell, may very well have turned out differently. But, du Picq never recommended soldiers to plunge headlong into battle. On the contrary, assuming that the fearful nature of man remains unchangeable, he sought to outline the practises necessary to ensure cohesion in modern warfare:

Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid, will attack resolutely. There is the science of the organization of armies in a nutshell. (Du Picq, 1947: 110).<sup>17</sup>

Colonel du Picq’s claim was that morale is decisive in battle. The influence of this idea clearly shows from the US Army’s Field Manual (FM) 100-5, formulated at the brink of yet another war, which paraphrases the first lines of *Battle Studies*: “Man is the fundamental instrument in war” (Glenn, 1998)<sup>18</sup> All the more important, however, was the conclusion du Picq drew from that insight: We have to rethink military tactics, through discipline and organisation – structured to support cohesion – so that man becomes able to overcome his all-pervasive fear.

Of course, the notion that mutual support between soldiers plays a role in war is by no means new. Etymologically, the term ‘company’ designates those who ‘share bread’, and by signifying how soldiers are subject to the same extreme conditions, this organisational term bears witness to the idea that fighting men share a bond comparable to that of the family. Hence, the ancient practice of recruiting soldiers coming from the same towns or rural areas; a practice which remains the basic foundation of for instance modern militias and of the National Guard. More explicitly, both ancient and modern literary sources, with the “Saint Crispin’s Day Speech” in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, as the most famous example, frequently refer to the indispensable character of the brotherhood of soldiers. What makes du Picq’s contribution interesting in

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<sup>16</sup> This interpretation is repeated in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, by E. M. Evans who invented the idea of the French School (Gat, 2001: 309-310)

<sup>17</sup> I quote from the English translation, through which du Picq’s thoughts were introduced to the military community.

<sup>18</sup> Du Picq’s original reads (in the English translation) “man is the fundamental instrument in *battle*” [my italics, MB].

this regard is the fact that he gave the theoretical background and explanation for such practices. This theoretical insight was confirmed empirically in the Second World War.

### *2.3.2 The American Soldier*

Like the Second World War changed society, it also changed social sciences: empirically, theoretically and methodologically. The new world order which emerged from the ruins of the old, faced researchers from all disciplines with new empirical challenges: Technology during the war changed *social interaction* which needed to be studied anew. New social experiences, from the terror of the Holocaust to the successful integration of women into the labour force, pushed the limits of the perceivable – hence the limits of *theory* also had to be redefined. Finally, as exemplified by the *The American Soldier – Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, studies undertaken with wartime purposes also initiated a *methodological* revolution in the social sciences.

*The American Soldier* is a four-volume work, edited by Samuel A. Stouffer, re-analysing data collected by the Research Branch of the War Department's Information and Educational Division. The initial scope of the Research Branch, which Stouffer led till 1946, only allowed the study of a limited sample of the military personnel. (Stouffer et al., 1949a: 12). Nevertheless, the Branch ended up compiling an enormous amount of data. 16 million Americans served in the Second World War, and the Research Branch conducted more than 200 studies, including 600,000 interviews with personnel in the Theatres of Operation and on the home front (Lazarsfeld, 1949: 377; Stouffer et al., 1949a: 12).

Well before the attack on Pearl Harbour, Frederick H. Osborn, who knew President Roosevelt and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson personally, and who had won the confidence of Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, was appointed as leader of the Information and Educational Division which should keep a steady eye on the morale of the soldiers. As President of the Carnegie Foundation, Osborn had all means at hand to single out the best social scientists of the time (Clausen, 1984a: 184; 1984b: 207; Lee 1949: 179).

Methodologically, social sciences had improved significantly in the course of the 1930s. In the wake of the *Literary Digest's* notoriously wrong prediction of the '36 Presidential election, the importance of sampling had come to the fore. Likewise, Louis Guttman and Paul Lazarsfeld, two famous researchers closely affiliated with the Research Branch, had developed their respective theoretical frameworks of factor analysis and the study of media

effects.<sup>19</sup> And, under the leadership of Stouffer, the most influential survey analyst of the time, these theories were applied to practise.

No doubt, many of the surveys conducted by the Research Branch, such as “whether men in New Guinea wanted boxing gloves or basketballs for recreation”, may seem ridiculous from a purely deductive perspective, and critics have accused *The American Soldier* of simply compiling statistics with no theoretical focus. (Smith, 1984: 193-194; J. A. Clausen, 1984: 209). Yet, the opportunity of applying new methods on this unique material contributed immensely to the refinement of social science, through “(...) attitude scaling, scalogram analysis, experimental methods, participant observation, questionnaire design, and field experiments on interviewer effects” (Williams, 1989: 158). The accessibility of an immense statistical population, the opportunities for building variance into the samples and the allocation of economical means in the process of analysing the results, provided these social scientists with opportunities for testing and for drawing inference which none of their predecessors in the discipline would ever had ever dared dreaming of (Williams Jr., 1984: 187) (Williams, 1989:160) (Smith, 1984:196) (Lumsdaine, 1984: 202).

That regards the results too: “Never before have so many aspects of human life been studied so systematically and comprehensively. The findings have major implications for the understanding of civilian as well as military life.” (Lazarsfeld 1949: 378) Conceptually, the ideas of “relative deprivation” and “ sleeper effects” can be attributed directly to the discoveries of Stouffer’s team (Lumsdaine, 1984) 204(Gosnell, 1949)519 (Williams, 1989) 163. And, the Research Branch’s comparative studies of racial attitudes (notably conducted without the permission of the Army) showing that the presence of African-American soldiers weakened racism in the companies, can be directly linked to the desegregation of the armed forces in the 1950s (Williams, 1989: 162, 167).

However, the most important purpose of the Research Branch was to survey what kept the men going. Their central finding in that regard is of crucial importance to this project. Stouffer and his team of researchers confirmed empirically what had been theoretically assumed by Colonel du Picq, the importance of social cohesion. Among American soldiers in World War II, high spirits were kept up, neither by affiliation to the nation nor by hatred to the enemy, but by mutual bonds, “the pride in outfit”, which kept the military group together:

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<sup>19</sup> Factor analysis was originally developed by the psychologist Spearman earlier in the century, but Guttman made it accessible to the social sciences (Schuster 2005; Levy 2005).

Loyalty to one's buddies was founded on the fact of vital mutual dependence and supported by the cluster of sentiments grouped under the term 'pride in outfit'. (...). Combat veterans in both the Pacific and Mediterranean theaters agreed in rating highly the supporting value of this motive in keeping them fighting when the going was tough. (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 136)

The mutuality of this 'group loyalty' ensured the individual that in case he was wounded, others would back him up, also beyond the call of duty: "Where strong mutual ties had developed, a man could feel sure that the other men would take the extra trouble and extra risk to care for him if he was hit" (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 144). Furthermore, the unit cohesion regulated the norms of proper conduct in extreme situations: "Pride in outfit was thus both an indication that the soldier had identified with his fighting unit and one of the forms in which this identification supported him in his combat role" (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 137).

Two specifications are needed here. First, this is a characteristic of the combat soldier, not of servicemen in general. Whereas 54 pct. of the soldiers in combat infantry divisions said they were 'very proud' of their company, the equivalent evaluations of soldiers without combat experience was about 25 pct. (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 138). Thus, the role attributed to mutual dependency depended on the actual experience of battle. Secondly, these findings regarded the rank and file, not the officers, who answered quite differently on similar questionnaires. The officers also ranked group loyalty high, but not more important than "sense of duty" and less important than "discipline and leadership". These two points should be kept in mind in the following analyses.

The fact that the mutuality of the military primary group was rendered important did not mean that other aspects did not have an effect, or that these would not be valued higher than belonging to the outfit.<sup>20</sup> However,

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<sup>20</sup> In an April 1944 survey (S-100) 14 pct. of the respondents answered 'solidarity with the group' to the open-ended question asked to enlisted men in the European Theatre: "Generally, from your combat experience, what was mostly important to you in making you want to keep going and to do as well as you could?". Group solidarity was only exceeded by one other type of answer, 'ending the task', but no less than 39 pct. gave this reply (Stouffer, 1949b: 108). Judging from this, we should not regard the altruism of group solidarity as a universal or unchallenged. On the contrary, these answers may indicate the necessity of viewing the sense of belonging in terms of self-preservation, an aspect which Moskos elaborates.

A similar question, but with closed categories was also posed, in which the respondent had to answer how much prayer, solidarity, finishing the job, hatred of the enemy, and the ideological purpose of the war, helped him, when the going was tough (Stouffer, 1949b: 174-175). Again, among the enlisted men, the group soli-



what is crucial in this regard is that among these several causes mentioned by the soldiers, the bonds between soldiers always ranked extremely high and national affiliation always ranked extremely low. The Soldier kills and dies, not for the country in whose name his blood is shed, but for the man next to him. Idealism is not only absent, but banned from the soldiers mind:

Probably the strongest group code, except for condemnation of expressions of flagrant disloyalty, was the taboo against any talk of flag-waiving variety. Accounts of many informal observers indicate that this code was universal among American combat troops, and widespread through the Army. (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 150)

This is reflected both directly in the surveys where combat soldiers were asked what enabled them to move on in spite of the hardships, and indirectly in the difficulties of integrating replacements into combat units (Stouffer et al., 1949b: Chapter 5). Realising these difficulties as well as recognising the importance of the bonds between soldiers, led to a central organisational implication: If the soldiers' morale depends on the existence of such communities of shared experience, then maintaining such communities is crucial in order to maintain morale.

To sum up, on the basis of thorough large-N analyses, conducted in different settings and among men of different ranks, the study of *The American Soldier* provides us with the empirical verification of the theoretical assumption of Colonel du Picq and his readers, and thus poses a serious challenge to the hypothesis of this dissertation, that Civil Religion, a subset of national affiliation, is the most important factor in justifying the soldier sacrifice.

### *2.3.3 Qualitative World War II studies of soldier motivation*

The most famous qualitative World War II study is S.L.A. Marshall's *Men against Fire – The Problem of Battle in Future War*. Marshall was employed as an Army Historian, and he collected his data through qualitative interviews

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and spirituality was valued very high, 61 pct. of the respondents say that it 'helped a lot', and again it was exceeded by another category. Here however, only 41 pct. of the respondents regarded self-preservation as important, whereas 70 pct. emphasises that praying helped a lot. (I report the findings from enlistments in the European theatre only, even though this part of the survey was conducted in both the Pacific and the Mediterranean Theatres, and the wording was the same regardless of the rank of the respondent). The different answers may derive from differences occurring in the answers to open and closed categories, respectively, or from the different wordings. This does not alter, however, the core issue of the finding that religion is of importance in combat. This empirical confirmation of the saying that 'there are not atheists in a foxhole' should be taken into consideration in regard to civil religion among soldiers.

with soldiers immediately after combat.<sup>21</sup> Marshall's controversial and famous claim, that in battle less than a quarter of the infantry fire their weapons against the enemy (Marshall, 1947: 56), is closely connected to the idea of group cohesion. Colonel du Picq's puzzle was how to deal with the universally fearful nature of man in modern warfare. Marshall's puzzle was what differentiates those 25 pct. who actually fire their guns from the rest? In this regard, his views are in accordance with du Picq's assumptions and Stouffer's findings: Man's will to fight depends on trust in significant others in the immediate surroundings.

Lofty ideas and ideals we must have, if only to assure that man will go forward. But it is unworthy of the profession of arms to base any policy upon exaggerated notions of man's capacity to endure and sacrifice on behalf of ideas alone. In battle, you may draw a small circle around a soldier, including within it only those persons and objects which he sees or which he believes will influence his immediate fortunes. These primarily will determine whether he rallies or fails, advances or falls back (Marshall, 1947: 154).<sup>22</sup>

Marshall is often quoted by journalists and researchers. However, both his findings and his methods have been questioned (Spiller, 1988; Bateman, 2007). He cannot have conducted the number of interviews he claims to. His D-day interviews were conducted weeks after combat actually took place. His measure of the fire ratio is doubtful. And he is accused of systematically excluding contradicting findings. Of course, this critique may derive from the fact, that Marshall challenged the myth of the heroic American GI. However, in light of the methodological problems his findings cannot be used to confirm conclusions of the Research Branch. Instead we must be content with the fact that other research seems to confirm that Marshall was "right for the wrong reasons" (Jordan, 2002).

We do have another study conducted by US researchers in the European Theater, also qualitatively examining the motivation of World War II soldiers,

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<sup>21</sup> The American Military still employs personnel with qualifications from Academia or the Arts to document soldier life. In the marine blogs written from Iraq which I have collected, there are two Artists and one Historian.

<sup>22</sup> It is worth noticing, that Marshall here not excludes the potential effect of "lofty ideas and ideals", but explicitly states that we "must have" such notions in order to "go forward". The interpretation hereof depends on the understanding of the stance to "go forward". Does that regard the drive of man-being in general, the motivation for young men to enlist, or specifically what makes soldiers go 'against fire'? As Marshall in other passages univocally states the primacy of group cohesion, I opt for one the first two interpretations or simply regard this ambiguity as an attempt to please readers who render ideology important.

and undertaken independently of the two other studies. In this case the interviewees were not American GI's, but German POWs, and the researchers, Morris Janowitz and Edward A. Shils were analysts in SHAEF's Psychological Warfare Division under Dwight D. Eisenhower. Shils' and Janowitz' puzzle was why the regular German Army kept fighting so intensively in spite of the obviously futile prospects. Even in the very last days, with the eastern part of the Reich overrun by the Russians and the Western Allies well across the Rhine, the Wehrmacht remained an able and feared opponent. Like Stouffer and Marshall concluded regarding American servicemen, the Wehrmacht maintained its fighting ability due to the affiliation between the soldiers. Stouffer emphasised the outfit, Marshall the importance of those within the soldier's immediate horizon. Shils and Janowitz underline the crucial status of the "primary group"<sup>23</sup>:

It must be recognized that on the moral plane most men are members of the larger society by virtue of identifications which are mediated through the human beings with whom they are in personal relationship. Many are bound into the larger society only by primary group identifications (Shils & Janowitz, 1948: 315)

For the interviewed German POWs the military primary group worked in lieu of the family – the brothers in arms were bound together by bonds socially comparable to family bonds (Shils & Janowitz, 1948). Organisationally, this structure was supported by the fact that German combat units were not split up in spite of heavy losses, but were given time to integrate replacements before returning to the frontline. Only when this system was given up, the morale of experienced soldiers was broken (Shils & Janowitz, 1948: 287-289).

Yet, at two points Shils' and Janowitz' conclusions run counter to those of the Research Branch. First, even though they were able to show that the primary group and not secondary symbols, e.g. ideology, were crucial for the German soldiers, they did not exclude the importance of the Führer cult. The German "Frontschwein" did not believe in Nazism, he was not properly informed about progress or defeats and he mistrusted the leaders of the Party, but he stayed loyal to the Chancellor, and trusted that the Führer would turn the tide of war, a notion which did not alter until after Hitler's death (Shils & Janowitz, 1948: 304-306).

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<sup>23</sup> Shils and Janowitz did not invent the idea of the primary group, but they coined the concept within military sociology, where they were the first to use the term (Siebold, 1999: 10). In spite of the fact that their study is neither as extensive as Stouffer's nor as often quoted in popular literature as Marshall's, it is generally their vocabulary which is used in the genre.

Second, the conclusions regard only Wehrmacht soldiers serving on the Western Front. As Shils and Janowitz explicitly state themselves, for the SS soldier who had joined an elite corps serving as an ideological gatekeeper, Nazism probably played a different role (Shils & Janowitz, 1948: 284).<sup>24</sup> Without disregarding the hardships experienced by soldiers participating in the battles in Normandy or in the Ardennes, the war fought between Germany and the Western Allies was in general more humane than warfare on other fronts.<sup>25</sup> We know from *the American Soldier* that GIs serving in the Pacific regarded their adversaries with much less respect than soldiers serving in the European Theater (Stouffer et al., 1949b: 156-167). Hence, as ideology in the garments of racism made a difference for American soldiers, depending on the geography, we may also assume that ideology played a different role for German soldiers engaged in a racially defined war in the East, than it did for their comrades in the West (Fritz, 1996)<sup>26</sup>

The prevalence of ideology along with primary group affiliation discovered by Shils and Janowitz study, points to the fact that *taboos* about ideology should not necessarily be confused with the *absence* of ideology. This differentiation between ‘talking about ideology’ and ‘possessing ideology’ played a crucial role in later studies of soldier motivation.

#### *2.3.4 Motivation in Korea: The soldier’s two bodies*

Generally, both S.L.A. Marshall’s post-combat studies of American GIs, and Shils’ and Janowitz’ POW interviews are in accordance with the main conclusion of Stouffer’s study: soldiers in the World War II mass armies were *primarily* driven by their affiliation to their brothers in arms. The insight that morale depends on group cohesion, was confirmed in studies in both Korea and Vietnam, the two main US engagements during the Cold War. Two important observations should be emphasised. First, the range of the primary group seems to shrink; from ‘the band of brothers’ to the ‘war buddy’ and finally to the individual soldier himself. Second, Shils’ and Janowitz’ implicit

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<sup>24</sup> Shils and Janowitz mention the role of the politically appointed officers, but have been accused of underplaying it, and of underplaying the role of ideology in general (Fritz, 1996: 684-685).

<sup>25</sup> This notion is not undisputed. Recently, Anthony Beevor has claimed that the bestiality on the Western Front did not fall short of that on the Eastern Front (Beevor, 2008). Yet, given that units on the Eastern Front experienced greater losses, it may still contribute to the understanding of the different role played by ideology in that scenario.

<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is reached by Stephen G. Fritz after studies of letters from the Eastern Front. As he, unfortunately, only quotes affirmative sources, it is not clear from his article, whether he actually studies the presence of Nazi ideology or the extension hereof.

assessment, that we in order to deem whether ideology can be viewed as an independent variable have to specify what we mean by ideology, is re-articulated by the development of the notion of 'latent ideology'.

In *The New Military, Changing Patterns of Organization*, a 1964 anthology edited by Janowitz, Roger W. Little sums up the conclusions of a four months participant observation study conducted during the Korean War. He also emphasises the significance of the primary group, and rejects that of the 3 other main explanations (organisational identity, masculine identity and national identity). However, he also claims that in order to understand the importance of the primary group, we must understand how its inner logic works through the tacit reciprocity of the buddy system (Little, 1964: 204-207). Thus, he urges his readers to move focus from the company to the dyadic structure established between fighting men. Without thorough knowledge of such relationships, we cannot understand why men are actually willing to fight and die for other men with whom they have little else than the hardships of soldier life in common.

Little takes a step down the sociological ladder, to shed light on the institutional basis of the structures observed organisationally, and he emphasises that the buddy system regulates one's membership of the 'echelon of risk' constituted by the military platoon or squad. It does so because the war buddy always has two bodies. A buddy is both a concrete person and he potentially is any member of the military outfit (Little, 1964: 195). On the one hand, he is the military equivalent to the significant other of the biological primary group, the family. The fact that you have a buddy to relate to determines your in- or exclusion of the brotherhood of men. Of course, the boundaries of such 'echelons of risk' are partly determined by the formal, organisational structure of the squad or the platoon, but they are also more than that. Every military unit has its 'duds' and its 'heroes', persons who, in lack of the will or ability to decode the rules of the buddy relationship, either do too little or too much, and thus never become fully accepted as members of the echelon (Little, 1964: 202-204). That is why, on the other hand, even though the place of the concrete buddy can potentially be replaced with any other person, this is only so in theory. In practice, concrete buddies can only be replaced with persons already accepted as members of the informal institution, constituted by the echelon of risk; that is with other buddies. Therefore, a soldier seldom explicitly says who his buddy is, because by doing so, he would exclude other potential buddies from taking that place, and thus short-circuit the necessary openness of the system (Little, 1964: 198, 200).

### *2.3.5 Motivation in Vietnam: Self-interest and latent ideology*

By recommendation of the Research Branch, the demobilisation of the Armed Forces after World War II was organised by the development of a Point System: Soldiers who had served longest and participated in the hardest-earned parts of the Victory, were allowed to leave service first (Stouffer, 1949a: 7). In Korea, this principle was combined with the Rotation System in order to secure continuous manning of military units in a time of limited mobilisation (Moskos, 1970: 142). In World War II, people were deployed with their company until the end of the War, total victory. In Korea, and later in Vietnam, no such end was defined, and the soldier's time of service was determined by the Rotation System. However, Little questions whether the Rotation System actually lives up to the intentions of securing an equal distribution of the hardships:

Socially the policy [of rotation, MB] was ineffective and disruptive. The risks of combat were not spread more extensively through the society because the policy required only the induction and exposure to combat of a relatively larger number of men with the same social attributes (Little, 1964: 221).

Charles C. Moskos, who conducted a participant observation study very similar to that of Little, but during the Vietnam War, widens the critique of the rotation system. *Individually seen*, he admits that the system may affect the morale positively: The soldier only served a year on the ground in Vietnam. Therefore there was little time for critique to take root and ripen, before his time was up (Moskos, 1970: 142). *Collectively seen*, however, the system undermined the cohesion of military units. Due to the Rotation System, combat soldiers in Vietnam were only really efficient during the 9th & 10th months of their deployment. Before that they were too inexperienced. After that they were too eager to get home in one piece (Moskos, 1970: 142-144; 146).

Ironically, the Rotation System introduced together with the point system, recommended by the Research Branch, proved destructive for the group cohesion particularly emphasised by Stouffer and his team. Moskos is fully aware of this irony, and he explicitly states that his findings seriously challenge Stouffer's study on two major points: the interpretation of the primary group, and the alleged absence of ideology.

What Moskos observed in Vietnam was not reciprocity, but self-interest. He does not render the primary group obsolete, but if Little went one step down the sociological ladder, Moskos takes two steps in order to determine at the individual level where the institutional elements of altruism come from: "This is not to deny the existence of strong interpersonal ties within combat

squads, but only to reinterpret them as derivative from the very private war each individual is fighting for his own survival” (Moskos, 1970: 156).<sup>27</sup>

As already mentioned, one of Stouffer’s contributions was the idea of “relative deprivation”, the notion that the perception of what one has to give up is always mediated through one’s social frame of reference (Stouffer, 1949a: 125ff): married men felt that their sacrifice was greater than that of unmarried men; soldiers serving in the rear echelons would – in spite of their hardships – still be grateful that they did not have to serve at the frontline (Stouffer, 1949a: 172-173). A key concept coined by Moskos, however, is “absolute deprivation”. In combat there is little room for reciprocity, and therefore it is not the comparison with the conditions of others which determines the efforts of the soldier, but concern of his own survival (Moskos, 1970: 140-141). In Moskos’ eyes, the establishment of the primary group is simply the expected reaction of any individual thrown into a situation of Hobbesian ‘Warre’:

To carry the Hobbesian analogy a step further; one can view primary-group processes in the combat situation as a kind of rudimentary social contract; a contract which is entered into because of advantages to individual self-interest (Moskos, 1970: 156).

Elements of self-interest are at the root of all primary group relationships, but Moskos claims that the rotation system has amplified the counterproductive elements hereof (Moskos, 1970: 146). For the World War II soldiers, the private vices may have been turned into public virtues as a result of the continuity of the military units. In Vietnam, no such continuity existed. The self-interest remained both private and vice.

Whereas Little repeats the observation that combat soldiers never boasted of their national sentiment, he also emphasises that ideology plays a more subtle role in the development of motivation, by the fact that members of the individual’s primary group, be it his family or his unit, personifies certain ideals (Little, 1964: 205-206). The notion of such a subtle ideological impact also constitutes the core of Moskos’ second critique of Stouffer.

In Vietnam, American soldiers were also “extremely reluctant to voice patriotic rhetoric” (Moskos, 1970: 147). But Moskos maintains that “this should not obscure the existence of more latent beliefs in the legitimacy, and even superiority, of the American way of life” (ibid). He defines “Latent Ideology” as “those widely shared sentiments of soldiers, which though not overtly po-

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<sup>27</sup> Moskos’ claim about the lack of cohesion in Vietnam War units has been challenged by Segal, according to whom the primary group still ... (Williams ass. 165, Segal & Segal, 1983)

litical or even necessarily substantively political, nevertheless have concrete consequences for combat motivation” (ibid).<sup>28</sup>

The *claim* is straightforward: primary group coherence does not come from nothing. It is founded on a deeper ideological feeling of attachment, of identification with a larger social system. For the sociologically trained reader, the *warrant* is also pretty clear: underlying all social relationships, there is a resonator of shared values:

I propose that primary groups maintain the soldier on his combat role only when he has an underlying commitment to the worth of the larger social system for which he is fighting. This commitment need not to be formally articulated, nor even perhaps consciously recognized. But he must at some level accept, if not the specific purposes of the war, then at least the broader rectitude of the social system of which he is a member (ibid).

What we need then in order to evaluate this claim is *data*; empirical instances of values held by the deployed soldiers, values which we can claim reflect the shared, unconscious, ideological basis of the social system.<sup>29</sup>

According to Moskos, such values do exist, but if we approach them directly, like the Research Branch did, we will find little but manifest social norms (Moskos, 1970: 137-138). However, by asking about what the US was doing in Vietnam, how the soldiers viewed the enemy, the ARVN (the Army of the Republic of VietNam), and the civilian population, how they regarded America in comparison with other countries, and about their view of the peace movement, Moskos revealed a clear picture of the value system: The soldiers considered themselves engaged in a war against communism, not for the sake of the free world, and especially not for South Vietnamese (their esteem of the enemy was much higher), but for the sake of America; and for the soldier America was defined by its material abundance.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The concept is, of course, not unproblematic. Can we by any means falsify the existence of the latent? It always appears a bit suspicious when researchers in lieu of overt, manifest findings, develop concepts of the hidden nature of the research object in support of their hypotheses. On the other hand, if we were to take this critique to its full extent, would there be any social science left?

<sup>29</sup> Recent research in ad hoc established Israeli units, with people from different branches and with very different backgrounds, confirms Moskos’ (and Wong’s) claims. If Stouffer’s findings were still true, merged units would prove significantly inefficient. That is, however not the case. Group cohesion seems also to be guaranteed by other means than long-lasting social interaction (Ben-Shalom, Lehrer & Ben-Ari, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, whereas the soldier did not deem the war just or unjust, he mobilised support for it, when confronted with the messages of the peace movement: from his perspective constituted by ignorant college kids, willing to trade soldier



Following Moskos, Group Cohesion is not primary. It depends on the existence of latent ideology. He explains the prevalence of ideology as a result of changed conditions for the primary group. When soldiers, due to the Rotation System, were only part of “the outfit” for a limited time span, identification with the group became weaker, and they had to compensate for the lack of cohesion through ideology.

The differences between the conclusions of the Research Branch and those of Moskos’ Vietnam War study, point to the trivial, but important fact that context matters.<sup>31</sup> The values are always there. What is of interest, however, is how the context affects the way values are articulated, and the role they play in the motivation – a point which should be kept in mind when I turn to the findings of more recent studies. After Vietnam, context changed. In 1973, drafting was abandoned. This solved, of course, a major issue in the public debate: how can a democratic nation send men to a war opposed by large quanta of the population? However, the introduction of all-volunteer enlistment also raised new questions concerning the issue of cohesion: 1) How can cohesion between civilian society and the military, a society ruled by values nominally incompatible with civilian ideals, be maintained? (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz & Little, 1965; Rukavishnikov & Pugh, 2006: 2) How can cohesion within the military be nurtured, when the political, social and racial backgrounds of the soldiers change? (Savage, 1976; Janowitz, 1974; Jennings, 1977; Price, 1993: 3) How can cohesion within the military units supported by masculine ideals and a feeling of *brotherhood* prevail when more women enlist (Rosen, 2003; Feld, 1978; Titunik, 2000; MacCoun, 1993)?<sup>32</sup>

### *2.3.6 Motivation in Iraq*

In July 2003, in the wake of the American led invasion of Iraq, Leonard Wong, Thomas A Kolditz, Raymond A. Millen, and Terrence M. Potter from the Army War College and the U.S. Military Academy published *Why They*

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sacrifices for sympathy with the enemy (Moskos, 1970: 148-154); (C. Moskos, 1971: 234-236).

<sup>31</sup> Several of the researches who were part of the Research Branch, direct their attention towards Moskos’ study. They seem to agree about the importance of Latent Ideology, and Williams even points to the fact that the possibility of the impact of such general notions is actually mentioned in *The American Soldier* (Williams, 1989: 162, 166). At the same time, he emphasises that the notion of warfare has changed and that widespread antiwar-movement has created radically different conditions for the soldiers.

<sup>32</sup> Naturally, the changes are most vivid in the branches which dependent most on drafting. Compared to the Army, the Marines have only drafted in times of total mobilization, and only in a very limited amount.

*Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War*, a report describing and discussing the results of their inquiries among Iraqi POWs and American military personnel regarding their drive for participating in the war (Wong, Kolditz, Millen & Potter, 2003).

*Armed Forces and Society* devoted a whole issue to the findings and the debate following the publication of *Why They Fight*. In here, Robert J. MacCoun, Elizabeth Kier, and Aaron Belkin launched a severe attack on both the approach and the findings of the study (MacCoun, Kier & Belkin, 2006). Methodologically, MacCoun, Kier and Belkin questioned whether the authors were able to generalise their findings from the size of their data and from the selection criteria used in collecting these. Conceptually, they attacked Wongs' and his colleagues' claim that unit cohesion is important because it affects war performance. In reality, according to MacCoun and his co-authors, it is the other way around: Success on the battlefield affects feelings of unity.

In his answer, Wong states that his critiques simply misread *Why They Fight*, because they confused a merely descriptive study with an explanatory one. It was not his intention to draw any causal inference between soldier motivation and soldier performance. The aim of the study was to discover what the soldiers themselves considered as important. Granted, that pulls the teeth of much of the critique. However, the misreading is not quite as surprising as Wong seems to imply, as the report is saturated with an explanatory vocabulary.<sup>33</sup>

Causal claim or not, Wong's and his colleagues' study is relevant in regard to this research project because they find that the motivation of American enlisted men today is twofold: The American soldier is not only driven by loyalty towards his immediate peers, his primary group, but also by more abstract ideological notions: "As this study has shown, soldiers still fight for each other. In a professional army, however, soldiers are also sophisticated enough to grasp the moral reasons for fighting" (ibid: 23). Thus seen, they combine the findings of the Research Branch with those of Moskos. Like Stouffer, and his team of researchers, they point to the continuous importance of unit cohesion. Like Moskos, they say that ideology plays a central role for fighting men too. Now, however, ideology is no longer latent, it is manifest.

In accordance with Moskos and with James M. McPherson's historical studies of motivation in the Union and Confederate Armies, Wong empha-

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<sup>33</sup> "This monograph, however, argues, that the true strength of America's military might lies not in its hardware or high-tech equipment, but in its soldiers" (Wong et al: iii). "The U.S. Army is the best in the world because, in addition to possessing the best equipment, its soldiers also have an unmatched level of trust" (ibid: 22).

sises the difference between *talking about* ideological motives and *possessing* ideological motives (McPherson, 1994; Moskos, 1970; Wong et al., 2003: 19-20). Ideology has always been there, what has changed now, is simply its visibility. He explains this change by referring to the professionalization of the armed forces. Today, citizens do not enlist out of dire necessity. They enlist voluntarily, as an act of consent with the values of the military and of the society which the military is obliged to defend, and when they justify their participation in warfare these reasons are important to them too (Wong et al., 2003: 21).

Wong's findings are supported by a quantitative study undertaken by John Eighmey on the basis of questionnaires given to new enlistees in the years 2001, 2003 and 2004 (Eighmey, 2006). Eighmey finds 7 clusters of reasons, which can be divided into two main categories, 'Organisational Reasons' and 'Institutional Reasons'.<sup>34</sup> What is interesting here is that in all 3 surveys, the Institutional Reason 'Fidelity' with an approximate Eigenvalue around 7 (out of 20 variables) was clearly the dominating reason given by male recruits (Eighmey, 2006: 315, 318, 320).<sup>35</sup> Fidelity can of course be both mechanic and organic directed either towards the primary group or towards more abstract ideals. A closer look at how the variables constituting this factor actually load, confirms that. Whereas the vertical relationship, reflected in the variable 'do something for my country' constantly loads very high (0,527; 0,716; 0,645) on fidelity in all 3 surveys, the horizontal dimension is more ambiguous. Both 'work with people you respect' (2001), 'be part of an elite team' (2003), and 'develop teamwork skills' (2004) may be defined as directed towards the comradeship, but each of these reasons are only mentioned once, and as far as the first two of these variables are concerned, they both load somewhat lower than the vertical, national dimension (Eighmey, 2006: 315; 318; 320). This is not very surprising. Affiliation towards a group of significant others cannot be very developed among recruits who have not been acquainted to these others yet.

Ideology is not necessarily constant. Vertical, ideological motives may be challenged by the hardships of warfare, they may be replaced by horizontal

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<sup>34</sup> All three surveys were conducted after 9-11. We cannot, therefore, infer from the changes observed in these surveys to any assumptions about the impact of the attacks on America on the enlistees' motivations (Eighmey, 2006: 310).

<sup>35</sup> Among the female enlistees the picture proves somewhat more blurred. In 2001 and 2003 the Organisational Reason 'Dignity' clearly had the highest Eigenvalue. In the 2004 survey 'Fidelity' became the dominating factor among the women as well (Eighmey, 2006: 316, 319, 321). Apart from the fact that one should always be aware of the possible differences affected by the gender, these findings urge us to pay attention to this variable in the following analyses as well.

drives, e.g. primary group affiliation, or they may even be amplified by the experience of success. Further, such changes are not necessarily irreversible. Ideology may matter, but it definitely also matters how context changes.

Supported by Eighmey’s quantitative analyses, Wong’s and his colleagues qualitative findings suggest that unit cohesion exists side by side with abstract notions of justification; not as an ideological latent basis and an articulated manifest superstructure, but as two equally important cités or discourses. The central question in the following analyses is whether this conclusion can be supported by looking at another source, the military blogs, in which the servicemen justify their warfare participation independent of the researchers’ inquiries. To the extent that this is the case, what does it mean for the interpretation of either of these discourses of justification: First, do these two articulations simply co-exist, or are they structured in systematic hegemonic orders? And second, are such patterns of hegemony constant across the cases, or do they vary systematically in accordance with tertiary variables?

**2.4. Structuring the inquiry: A typology of soldier sacrifices**

The analyses in Chapters 5 to 11 are based on the following display, in which four types of soldier sacrifices, all of which have been mentioned above, are identified.

Table 2.2: Sacrificial types distributed by solidarity form and type of society

		<b>Common conscience articulating</b>	
		<b>Mechanic components</b>	<b>Organic components</b>
<b>Type of community</b>	<b>Abstract</b>	National sacrifice [1]	Patriotic sacrifice [3]
	<b>Concrete</b>	Buddy sacrifice [2]	Officer’s sacrifice [4]

The table is structured by two different theoretical distinctions: between two different articulations of common conscience, and between two different types of society.

*2.4.1 Common conscience and solidarity forms*

The first distinction is based on Durkheim’s classical conceptualisation of organic and mechanic solidarity, articulated in his doctoral dissertation, *De la division travail social* from 1893. Solidarity should in this connection be understood as the residual between the sum of individuals and society as a whole. **Solidarity is what ties society together. Solidarity is what we today refer to as social cohesion.**

Primitive societies are societies in which mechanic solidarity dominates: In fact that is what makes them primitive, because they are bound together by means of equality, not difference. The constituting element of a notion of mechanic solidarity is that all members of the group share some essential common traits, something which in spite of all individual characteristics defines them as members of this particular group.

Modern societies, however, are as a product of the division of labour, characterised by their high degree of differentiation. Therefore, modern society is not tied together by means of equality, but, paradoxically, by difference. The division of labour is possible, exactly because the process of differentiation is a *functional* process of differentiation, in which all necessary functions are continuously maintained. The point is that this maintenance is based on increased specialisation of functions. This means that the mutual dependence in society is increased too. As a result of the differentiation, society becomes more and more comparable to a body, where each part, each organ, takes care of a task, without which social unity could not be maintained. Cohesion in a differentiated society is ensured by this interdependency, and therefore it is called organic solidarity.

In regard to the interpretation of the role of religion in modern, organic, societies, there is, however, a fundamental ambiguity in Durkheim's works. On the one hand, in *De la division travail social*, the distinction between mechanic and organic forms of solidarity leads Durkheim to conclude that in modern society religion is on the retreat. What is worshipped in religion is the third element, by which two empirically different individuals can be considered as inhabiting the same moral sphere. In organic, or modern societies, that function is ideally seen taken over by the process of differentiation itself. Mutuality is guaranteed by differentiation, by the interdependency developed by the division of labour: Ideally, a third is not needed. Therefore, in his work on the social division of labour, Durkheim regards functional differentiation as synonymous with secularisation and reaches the following conclusion:

Or, s'il est une vérité que l'histoire a mise hors de doute, c'est que la religion embrasse une portion de plus en plus petite de la vie sociale. (...). Dieu, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, qui était d'abord présent à toutes les relations humaines, s'en retire progressivement; il abandonne le monde aux hommes et à leurs disputes (Durkheim: 1967 [1893]: 157).

However, in his later studies of religion, particularly in *Les formes élémentaire de la vie religieuse*, Durkheim emphasises that aspects of primitive religious systems continue to play an important and indispensable role in modern societies as well: "Il y a donc dans la religion quelque chose d'éternel qui

est destiné à survivre à tous les symboles particuliers dans lesquels la pensée religieuse s'est successivement enveloppée" (Durkheim, 1968 [1912]: 403). By means of the logic of religious classification, all successive classificatory systems have been developed. This is the theoretical fundament on which all later theories of civil religion are built: The function of religious rituals in primitive society is the same as the function of so-called secular rituals in modern society, as for instance in the commemoration of the French Revolution in the Fête Nationale on July 14. In both cases the ritual establishes a feeling of community by means of which social crises can be averted (ibid: 403-404).

In his early writings Durkheim argued that the function of religion had fundamentally changed in the process of modernisation. In his later writings he claimed that this function is fundamentally the same. It is debated how these two interpretations in Durkheim's opus should be understood: as mutually exclusive or as two instances on the same continuum? (Jones, 2005; Turner, B.S., 1992). What is important in this regard, however, is the fact that Durkheim already in his doctoral dissertation emphasised the continuous existence of mechanic components in modern societies.

#### *2.4.2 Abstract and concrete communities*

The consequence of this is that the type of society cannot be reduced to the existence of one or the other solidarity form. Hence, the second distinction in the table above: between concrete and abstract communities. In a concrete community everybody knows everybody. In an abstract community nobody knows everybody. With a phrase borrowed from Benedict Anderson "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact" are abstract communities (Anderson, 1991: 6). With a phrase borrowed from Berger and Luckmann concrete communities are communities in which every other is a "significant other" (Berger, 1967: 131).<sup>36</sup>

Of course, organic elements will play a prevalent role in an abstract community: Its sheer size necessitates a division of labour. Therefore, since

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<sup>36</sup> To my knowledge it was Karl Popper who first introduced the distinction between concrete and abstract societies. Popper describes the move from the first to the second as a fundamental change in human history, and as the fundamental condition for the strife between *the Open Society and its Enemies*. Contrary to tribes or villages, both Open and Closed Societies are abstract societies. The ideal of the latter however is the concrete society, in which everything has and can be kept in place (Popper, 2003 [1945]: 186). However, whereas Popper distinguishes between concrete and abstract *societies*, politically institutionalised social entities, my focus here is on concrete and abstract *communities*, a general framework of social interaction of which political institutionalisation is merely a subset.

organic solidarity is more prevalent in abstract communities I also suppose that it is less prevalent in concrete communities. Yet: The reason why I distinguish between the type of community and the type of solidarity is, first, that the mechanic elements in an abstract society cannot be reduced to mere historical residues. Conceptually, the fundament of organic solidarity is the continuous existence of mechanical components, of a common conscience. Durkheim emphasises that, in modern society, common conscience is “very general and very indeterminate” (Durkheim, 1967 [1893]: 159). Nevertheless, it is by means of a common conscience that society comes into being.

Secondly, organic components are never totally absent either, not even in the most primitive community. The biologically determined functional differentiation between men and women entails mutual necessity by difference. And, if we stick to the *social* division of labour, a group of hunters will increase its success rate, and, ultimately, the tribe’s chances of survival, if the members of the group perform different functions.

#### *2.4.3 National and patriotic civil religion*

In Table 2.2 above, I distinguish between two kinds of civil religion: Both are civil in the sense that they are enacted on behalf of an abstract community. Functionally seen, both are mechanic, i.e. religious, too, since the purpose of both is to place the individual within a collective whole, by defining basic traits shared by all members of this particular social entity. What differentiates the two is how this social whole is perceived. And in that sense, they correspond with the two different definitions of the function of religion in modern society entailed in Durkheim’s work.

*Patriotic* civil religion corresponds with the notion that religion, common conscience, is the articulation of “general and indeterminate” ideas. This is the view expressed by Durkheim in *La division travail social* and in the type of civil religion in which God is seen as an external source of blessings and doom (transcendent civil religion). It is organic in the sense that it supports the existence of organic components, and in the sense that the common characteristics it emphasises are, potentially, universal. In a patriotic civil religious sacrifice the death of the soldier is justified by referring to his inalienable rights. The course he fights for can be defined as ideology, but it is still associated with a particular social entity. That is what makes it patriotic, and that is what differentiates it from a purely idealist sacrifice, in which the death of the victim is justified by reference to the universal idea alone, without associating it with an actually existing community.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Such sacrifices are, historically, rare, but not totally inconceivable. The volunteers of the International Brigades in The Spanish Civil War, the Eastern Front volunteers

*National* civil religion corresponds with the perception of religion as a social constant, accentuated in Durkheim's later works, and amplified by the type of civil religion in which the acts of nation are seen as the realisation of God's will. In the *National* civil religious sacrifice, the soldier's death is justified by referring to mechanic or particularistic components: The national characteristics referred to in the justification are perceived as exclusive, as privileges reserved for the elect. Accordingly, the requisites for membership, of inclusion, are articulated in dichotomies; they are defined by exclusion.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the relation between national and patriotic civil religious sacrifices, between the two cells in the upper row of Table 2.2, is analysed by comparing the articulations of civil religion in four different military blogs.

#### *2.4.4 Buddy sacrifice: transcendent and mundane*

The buddy sacrifice placed in the lower left corner of Table 2.2 is associated with the unit cohesion discussed in the above. The community of the military unit is horizontal in a two-fold sense, understood both as defining the perspective and as defining the range of vision: As *perspective* it is horizontal in the sense that unit cohesion is *mechanic solidarity*. Its members are characterised by their similarities, not by their differences, e.g. differences in rank. Hence, privates and officers may know and respect each other, but they cannot be buddies, because their relation is by definition characterised by difference. As *range of vision* the community of the unit is horizontal in the sense that it defines what is actually visible. The unit constitutes a *concrete community*. A company contains a maximum of 200 men, approximately as many individuals as a single person can sincerely regard as belonging to his in-group (MacCoun, 1993: 303). It is a community of significant others, and the relation between the individual members is a relation of absolute reciprocity.

The buddy sacrifice is an articulation of mechanic solidarity in a concrete community. The individual dies for a person like himself, and he dies for a person he knows. Unit cohesion can both be expressed in religious and in secular terms.

The notion of civil religion is founded on the functionalist assumption that for social life to work, certain tasks have to be fulfilled. Historically, the strongest and most visible heir of that function has been the cult of the nation, and I have reserved the term civil religion for religious practices associ-

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in German service during the Second World War, and the foreigners volunteering for the fight against Coalition forces in Iraq and against NATO forces in Afghanistan could all be seen as engaged in a, primarily, ideological fight in which the concrete boundaries of the social entity for which they are willing to die are difficult to plot.



ated with the national community. However, other social entities in modern society can also include religious dimensions. The emblematic example of this is the feeling of community established in subcultures, e.g. between football fans<sup>38</sup>: The fact that Liverpool FC is associated with the song titled “You will never walk alone” clearly reflects the social entity’s “*as a community that reaches beyond death*” which I used as the criteria of American Civil Religion too.<sup>39</sup> To the extent that unit cohesion entails such transcendent elements, it can also be regarded as an articulation of what we, to use a more general term, can refer to as “implicit religion”.

This reflects the same structure of thought we saw expressed in Durkheim’s perception of common conscience in primitive societies: Between two equals, reciprocity can never be absolute. The very assumption of similarity entails the existence of a third, of something in regard to which they can be rendered equal. This third is the mechanic solidarity.

The World War II combat soldier needed not to resort to generalised motives. The social entity in which he fought and died was sufficient. In fact, just like in primitive societies, the mechanic solidarity of the primary group, the pride in outfit, also entailed a religious dimension:

Pride in outfit for the combat man included something over and above personal identification with the ‘other guys’ and the leaders of the outfit. He took pride in its history as well as its present, and identified with the men who had died in the outfit as well as with the living (Stouffer et al., 1949b).

On the basis of his Vietnam War studies, Moskos’ rejected this interpretation. Thus, with an indirect but nevertheless clear reference to this quotation from *The American Soldier* he emphasised that a fundamental characteristic of unit cohesion is that it does not extend the boundaries of the immanent.

When the soldier feels concern over the fate of others, it is for those he personally knows in his own outfit. His concern does not extend to those who have preceded him or will eventually replace him (Moskos, 1970: 224).

In Moskos’ view, unit cohesion is based in good, old Hobbesian interdependency. The reciprocity of the in-group relationship is a zero-sum-game. It does not render space to an external value system. In order to work, reciprocity has to be regarded as absolute. For in a combat unit, the will to die for the

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<sup>38</sup> The term “sub-culture” may be misleading in this regard, since it seems to imply the primacy of a *Leitkultur* under which other forms ideally should be subordinated.

<sup>39</sup> “You will never walk alone” is the title of a Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s song from the musical *Carousel*, which became immensely popular in the 1963 version of Gerry and the Peacemakers.

others can only be maintained as long as each individual member believes that other members are willing to do the same for him. This mutual trust depends on the assumption that allegiance to the unit is unchecked, and the only way to guarantee this allegiance is by not articulating any secondary reasons for one's sacrifice. Therefore, references to the nation become taboo, and as a subset of national identity, civil religion must inevitably be banned as well.<sup>40</sup>

Unit cohesion provides the individual with an alternative category of identification, with an alternative articulation of sacrifice, in which the sacrificer, the actual object for whom the soldier dies, is not, as assumed by the sacrificial ideology of civil religion, the nation, but the military unit. Unit cohesion can be mundane or unit cohesion can constitute a full-blown transcendent alternative, and when I in the following talk about “military religion” it is in this sense:

A system of either symbolic meaning or symbolic actions can be regarded as an expression of Military Religion when it defines individuals or groups as members of the military society by referring to the idea of the military unit's radical transcendence, i.e. as guided by divine providence, as subject to divine judgement or as a community that reaches beyond death.<sup>41</sup>

In Chapters 7, 9, and 11, I compare the use of civil religion (national as well as patriotic) with the use of military religion in front-line blogs. In Chapter 7, I focus on how these forms of implicit religion are articulated by four very different bloggers. In Chapter 9, I compare the use of the two by a private and an officer from the same company. And in Chapter 11, I look at the frequencies of each within a larger sample.

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<sup>40</sup> However, in accordance with Durkheim, Moskos also presupposes the existence of a third by means of which it becomes possible to render two empirically separated individuals equal. That is the very point of the concept of latent ideology. The reciprocity can be maintained only because the soldiers initially share the same, latent world view.

<sup>41</sup> This definition does not confine military religion to the outfit or the company, i.e. as unit cohesion, but also includes more broad expressions of belonging: the *Esprit de Corps*, regarding other members of a particular military branch; the *Military Identity*, including all members of a country's armed forces; and the *Warrior Cult*, including armed personnel from countries or social entities other than those of the subject in question. However, I regard unit cohesion as the ideal typical form of military identity, as 60 years of research within the field of soldier motivation has that it constitutes the primary competitor to national identity, of which civil religion is a subset.

#### *2.4.5 Officers sacrifice*

Above, I used a group of hunters as an example of the constant presence of organic components in social relations, even in primitive societies. In accordance with that observation, the definition of unit cohesion as concrete *and* mechanic should not make us neglect the fact that in military units, organic components are also very prevalent. The military is a highly differentiated community, and not only at the macro-level: Simple tactical manoeuvres in the field are only possible if soldiers understand how important it is that each person fulfils his or her particular task. Yet, the most emblematic example of the division of labour in military units is probably the organisationally defined difference of rank.

We may assume that unit cohesion is strong in the lowest enlisted ranks, where men share the same hardships and depend on each other, horizontally. However, they also depend on the officer's decisions, and this responsibility places the officer in an exposed position. On the one hand, he must know his men well in order to lead them well. On the other, he cannot be part of the reciprocal relation. The decisions he might have to make, requires the maintenance of a certain distance. His relation to the men is not horizontal. It is by definition vertical.

The last of the four sacrificial types is the Officer's sacrifice. Due to the fact that the officer knows his men, it is concrete. Due to the fact that their relation is vertically defined, it is organic. With reference to the exposed position of the officer, Durkheim defines the officer's suicide as the archetypical form of altruistic suicide, determined by the personal bonds between the officer and his men, and by his obligations as a leader:

de meme, comme l'esprit militaire est nécessairement plus fort chez les rengagés et chez les gradés que chez les simples soldats, il est naturel que les premiers soient plus spécialement enclins au suicide que les seconds (Durkheim, 1897: II, 88).

Thus in Durkheim's view, what gives the officer's death its meaning is the organisationally founded relation of difference between him and his men. As mentioned above, this theoretical assumption was partly supported by Stouffer's findings in the World War II: Whereas the rank and file defined the pride in outfit as the most important motivating factor, members of the officer's corps emphasised duty.

In Chapters 8, 9 and 10, I compare the two sacrificial ideologies placed in the lower row of Table 2.2. The buddy sacrifice [2] and the officer's sacrifice [4], by analysing justifications of war made by a private and a captain serving in the same company at the same time.

#### 2.4.6 Civil religion: present, dominant and constant?

Why do soldiers fight and die in wars? For sacrificial ideology to stay intact the perception of the sacrifice should be shared by both the sacrificer and the victim, by both the nation and the soldiers. Civil religious sacrificial ideology should be *present*, *dominant* and *constant* in the soldiers' perception of war.

What we know is that soldiers have not always identified with the nation. In fact, studies of soldier motivation from both World War II and the Vietnam War showed that the identification with the nation was considered as a breach of the fundamental rule of reciprocity between fighting men: I die for you because I know that you will die for me. Historically seen, the real answer to the question, why do soldiers fight and die in wars, is: they do it for each other.

Until recently, that has not been a problem. As long as the soldiers were perceived as legitimate victims in the great sacrifice called war, as long as that perception remained unchallenged, sacrificial ideology could prevail. Today, however soldiers can participate in public discourse. Today, the continuous existence of sacrificial ideology depends on the victims', the soldiers', continuous consent. Recent studies of soldier motivation seem to suggest that this is also the case. Interviews with veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as surveys examining the motivations of enlistees show that unit cohesion and abstract motives exist side by side.

The question to be pursued in the following is, whether this can be confirmed by analysing the soldiers' own dispatches in front-line blogs, and how this motivational cohabitation of national and military identity should be understood?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

In the last chapter, I presented the general argument of this project: The true nature of sacrifice can only remain concealed as long as the justificatory explanation remains intact, i.e. as long as the discourse is not brought into question. On that background, I advanced the hypothesis that soldiers justify their sacrifices in accordance with the general sacrificial ideology of the nation, i.e. in accordance with the civil religion. The research findings provide the most prominent rivalling hypothesis, revealing that that the soldier dies not for the country in whose name his blood is shed, but for the man next to him: his brother in arms.

I further argued that when studying the justification of soldier sacrifices, we ought to focus on the warrants of justificatory arguments. In that regard, I defined the warrant as a *cit * or discourse, i.e. as a particular model of calculation by which a benefit can outweigh a cost; in this context the ultimate cost. The question addressed in this chapter is how such discourses should be approached analytically.

The chapter consists of four sections. In section 3.1, I specify the two fundamental aspects of the research design: the variables analysed and the cases selected. In sections 3.2 to 3.4, I introduce the three different strategies pursued in the respective analyses: critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and content analysis.

#### **3.1. Designing the inquiry**

As already mentioned, this is primarily an exploratory rather than an explanatory enquiry. Yet the basic rule that cases should be chosen on the basis of the independent variable also applies here. If justifications are my dependent variable, then the known characteristics of the bloggers analysed can be defined as the independent variable. These are the characteristics which may determine whether civil religion is present, dominant and constant across the cases.

##### *3.1.1 The dependent variable: From causes to justification*

I have already distinguished between the latent and manifest functions of sacrifice as well as between latent and manifest ideology regarding soldier-motivation research. It can be difficult, however, to discern the sociological distinction between the manifest and the latent from the psychological distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, for not to mention the methodological distinction between the explicit and the implicit. In the fol-

lowing, I focus on justifications, which are explicit – though not necessarily conscious – articulations of motives.

Motives ought to be distinguished from causes. We study causes when attempting to explain why soldiers fight by primarily scrutinising the objective reasons which appear to make a difference. Causes exist independently of the individual. When men are more inclined to enlist than women, we are therefore able to explain it causally by referring to the natural disposition among males for aggression (should we accept that premise).

Motives are different. Contrary to causes, motives are by definition subjective. In World War II, Stouffer and his group of researchers revealed that highly educated young Americans were more inclined to join the military than their working-class compatriots. This is a finding which naturally could be regarded as an issue of concern for any democracy engaging in a large-scale war. However, the researchers were able to explain this difference by controlling for the number of people which each respondent knew had been drafted. This is the logic of “relative deprivation”, a concept Stouffer coined in the wake of this research: Working-class kids with experience in peacetime production easily fit into the economic transition to war-time production. They were needed and therefore not drafted very often. College kids, however, had no working experience and had to go to war. As opposed to their working-class compatriots, the college youth did not regard being drafted as unjust, because he went to war with his friends from college; those with whom he was normally comparing himself.

Yet a motive is not necessarily recognised. It may be subconscious. The fact that we can explain why a particular person regards being drafted as just does not imply that they actually know why that is the case. This is what distinguishes motives from motivation. I define motivation as the perceived reason for enlisting. It is both subjective and realised. Thus, when John Eighmey analyses the questionnaires completed by new recruits explaining why they have joined the military, he is tapping their motivation (Eighmey 2006). Nevertheless, there might be actual reasons, aspects of the motivation, which the respondents do not communicate in a questionnaire. If a young man joins the army in order to escape problems at home, he will not necessarily list these reasons among his justifications. His actual motivation might of course be escape. If the researcher intends to clarify the full range of motivations, more indirect means of enquiry or other analytical approaches might be necessary, e.g. factor analysis. In that respect, it might be difficult to distinguish the unarticulated motivation from the unrealised motive.

Just as language and perceptions interact (a point which I will return to below), the absence of articulation is probably also closely related to the ab-

sence of realisation. However, while we may infer from absence of articulation to absence of realisation, we cannot necessarily infer from the presence of an articulation to the existence of a conscious realisation. This brings us to the final category: justifications. Justifications are articulated motives. They include the articulation of conscious motivations together with motives which have not been realised but are nevertheless expressed by the social actor. This is why I stated in the introduction that my object of analysis was what the bloggers say, not what the person behind the blog actually means. However, this also means that the challenge of analysing justificatory regimes is the challenge facing most disciplines of in-depth analysis: distinguishing the latent from the absent. If an element is merely latent in the justificatory act, we assume that it is still there and still plays a significant role in defining the worth of the justification. If it is absent, then inferring anything from it is a fallacy.

Table 3.1: Reasons and levels of explication<sup>a)</sup>

	<b>Subjective reason</b>	<b>Realised reason</b>	<b>Articulated reason</b>
Cause	0	0	0
Motive	+	0	0
Motivation	+	+	0
<b>Justification</b>	+	<b>0/+</b>	+

a. When I in the following frequently use the term “vocabulary of motive”, coined by Wright Mills, it is in this sense, as an articulated motive (Wright-Mills 1940). I do not, however, fully share Wright Mills’ perception of the concept, saying that motives only come into being as they are articulated, a view that lies closer to Laclau & Mouffe’s.

My object of analysis is the justifications of American Servicemen on the ground. Hence, I am interested in their subjective and articulated motives. This is the main reason why I am analysing blogs: Unlike sources derived from asking respondents, directly or indirectly, there is no “interviewer effect” in blogs. The topics of a blog are chosen by the blogger and the posts are written in their own words. Hence, the justifications I find are real in the sense that I have not probed the answers or nourished specific structures of thought in the articulations of my “respondents”. The legitimising discourses I find in a blog reflect a specific economy of worth articulated independently of my research questions.

Hence, I do not claim to be able to say much about the actual causes or the actually unarticulated motives (or motivations) of these servicemen. At best, my findings will be reflecting some of these factors. However, since my

material is not representative – and probably even biased – I will not be able to deem the extent to which that is the case. My findings are not inferable to the US military in general, and perhaps not even beyond the scope of my sample of bloggers to the military blogosphere in general. Nevertheless, by approaching the articulated motives systematically, my hope is to reveal a number of generalisable truths about how justifications are structured and interrelated. Furthermore, I will claim that my findings are representative in the sense that they do cast light on what is actually said. This point leads to the theoretical axiom of this dissertation: language reflects, interacts with and creates reality. When some motives are articulated and others are left to dwell in the dark, the crux of the matter is not whether the text provides us with an image of the author’s mindset, but that it contributes to the confinement of how motives are articulated; it reaffirms the institution of justifying soldier sacrifices.

This is also important for the status of the subject. Bloggers use pseudonyms, a *nom de blog*, thereby safeguarding their anonymity and providing them with a virtual identity in the “blogosphere”. Whereas few readers of military blogs would recognise the name Michael Bautista, many are familiar with Bautista’s alias: MaDeuceGunner. This is also interesting analytically, because it places a natural barrier between the soldier writing and the text as it appears on the screen. In literary criticism, it is unproblematic to regard the text as an autonomous, semantic whole, which should be distinguished from whoever the author is; or, less radically, to regard the author as merely one among a number of different contextual elements in the production of a text. This is not quite as uncontroversial in the social sciences, which have generally been dominated by types of text in which intentionality is crucial, e.g. laws, political speeches and interviews (David & Sutton, 2004: 27ff).

Here, however, I view the blogs as “discursive events”. I regard these text sources as independent of the subjects who have originally produced the words. The blog says something about the author. That is the whole point of analysing military blogs and attempting to distinguish the characteristics of each blogger in order to pursue a comparative logic. Nevertheless, once a blog is posted, it can be read by anyone at anytime. Unless it is actively removed from the Internet, unless access is deliberately restricted, or unless the content is actively changed, the post represents a virtual and lasting image of the blogger, regardless of the attitudes of the person behind the blog.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The institutionalist claim that blogs reaffirm the boundaries of justification and the related view that it does not matter whether the author actually believes what he says in a blog are obviously both subsets of social constructivism. We can distinguish between radical and moderate strands of social constructivism. I define radical social



### *3.1.2 The background variables and case selection*

This dissertation is based upon an exploratory research design. I wish to determine whether and how American civil religion is used in the justifications of sacrifice by military bloggers and how doing so relates to the competing explanatory variable: military religion. If my theoretical assumption is correct and if the sacrificial ideology is intact, civil religion should be the dominant discourse; and it should be so, regardless of the particular characteristics of the blogger. In other words, I am searching for a constant.

To render a constant plausible, the units of analysis should be chosen with the greatest possible variation (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 34-36). The blogs only provide knowledge about a limited number of background variables, but gender, political affiliation, rank and type of service can be revealed fairly easily<sup>43</sup>: Gender is relevant, because the military has traditionally been dominated by typically masculine values. Hence, I assume that women face different challenges adapting to the military brotherhood than men. Should that be true, we cannot reject the possibility that women, in order to compensate for problems of belonging, emphasise civil religion relatively stronger than unit cohesion; or, given that the two forms of implicit religion are closely connected, that these challenges of adapting have a negative impact on both forms. In either case, gender may make a difference regarding the assumed constancy of the civil religious justificatory regime.

As for political affiliation, the liberal serviceman may face many of the same challenges of adapting as his female colleagues. Civil religion is not necessarily conservative; but whereas civil religion articulated in support of liberal motives tends to focus on the divine judgement of the nation, the form of civil religion traditionally associated with conservatives emphasises the divine call of the nation (Jewett, 1973; Wuthnow, 1988). Conservatives are overrepresented in the military, and I suppose that military values fit the affirmative form, the call, better than the critical form, the judgement. Thus

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constructivism as entailing an ontological claim about the social world as constructed, whereas moderate social constructivism first and foremost sheds light upon about our epistemological access to the social world, as it is assumed to exist independently of our perception hereof. I lean towards the latter position. In the following, when I distinguish between classical and critical discourse analysis, I understand it as following the lines of the distinction between radical and moderate social constructivism.

<sup>43</sup> I have also registered the characteristics of race, military branch and time of deployment. I report these variables but have not used them actively in the study, since they are either constant or cannot be controlled for in relation to the other variables. I have only been able to identify a single African-American blogger. I collected my data before the surge actually started to work in 2007, and the data has not made it possible to hold the other variables constant in regard to the effect of branch of service.

seen, we might expect that for the liberal as for the woman, difficulties in adapting would mean that he, too, expresses less of both civil and military religion. Contrary to the woman, however, the liberal serviceman is able to compensate, socially, for his lack of civil religion by strengthening his articulations of military identity. In this light, it is therefore worth examining whether liberals articulate unit cohesion or military religion stronger than they articulate civil religion.

Rank is relevant both because it serves as a proxy for length of service (between privates and sergeants) and because the organisational position of the serviceman is also expected to affect his perception of the military (especially for the officers). On average, privates have served less time than sergeants. They have had less time to develop genuine social relations with other servicemen and less time to cut the bonds with the civilian world. Hence, the initial reasons for enlisting, including civil religion, may be stronger among the privates than the sergeants. For the sergeants, their longer career may have reinforced their sense of military identity. The officers are interesting; by shouldering the responsibility for life-and-death decisions while being detached from the brotherhood of the rank and file, they urgently require an ideological underpinning for their feelings of identity. Hence, it is important to consider that officers possibly express stronger feelings of both civil and military religion than the rank and file.

Last but not least, we cannot reject the possibility that combat experience also makes a significant difference. As already shown in the research conducted during World War II, feelings of unit cohesion and the rejection of national cohesion were strongest in combat units in which the need for mutual reassurance was most outspoken. In light of the results from research conducted during the Vietnam War and the conclusions reached after Operation Iraqi Freedom, national affiliation is not excluded from the mind of the combat soldier. However, since the fundamental condition of interdependency is experienced strongest in battle, feelings of unit cohesion or military religion may be strongest among the soldiers who have been exposed to combat.

Thus, on basis of the known variables, I have selected the following cases for comparison:

Table 3.2: The cases: nom du blog and known background variables

<b>Name</b>	<b>Military rank</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political attitude</b>	<b>Branch of service</b>
<b>Acute politics</b>	<b>Private or corporal</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Combat</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>USARMY</b>
American at heart	Private or corporal	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
Lumberjack in the desert	Private or corporal	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
Ma Deuce Gunner	Private or corporal	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
blog machine city	Private or corporal	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
Junglegym	Private or corporal	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
Smokeymchek's arena	Private or corporal	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
1000 words from Iraq	Private or corporal	Female	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
Sailawaynow	Sergeant	Female	Combat	Conservative	USMC
Grey eagle	Sergeant	Female	Combat	Unassigned	USARMY
Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq	Private or corporal	Female	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
Akiluna	Private or corporal	Female	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
Koneco	Private or corporal	Female	Non-combat	Unassigned	Unassigned
BurnBerlinBurn	Private or corporal	Male	Combat	Liberal	USMC
Fire & Ice	Sergeant	Male	Combat	Liberal	USMC
MiloFreeman	Private or corporal	Male	Combat	Liberal	USARMY
Doc in the box	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
Misoldiersthoughts	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USARMY
Quietkidd	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
Sup3rman83	Private or corporal	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
In Iraq for 365	Sergeant	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
Sketchpad warrior	Sergeant	Male	Combat	Unassigned	USMC
Snipereye	Sergeant	Male	Combat	Unassigned	USARMY
Dadmanly	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
Half a world away	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
It's a living, sorta	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USMC
1romad	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USARMY
2005-2006 tour of duty	Sergeant	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USARMY
Armor geddon	Officer	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
From my position, on the way	Officer	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
Midnight in Iraq	Officer	Male	Combat	Conservative	USMC
One marines view	Officer	Male	Combat	Conservative	USMC
Si vis pacem, para bellum	Officer	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
<b>Badgers forward</b>	<b>Officer</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Combat</b>	<b>Unassigned</b>	<b>USARMY</b>
Lt. smash	Officer	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	Other

Sandgram	Officer	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USMC
365 and a wakeup	Officer	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USARMY
Sandbox chronicles	Officer	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
The desert wind	Officer	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	Other

The table is distributed by the control variables; each group is divided by single spacing (in black).

The blogs in light grey-coloured cells are the four bloggers which I study using critical discourse analysis.

The blogs in dark grey, hatched cells are the two blogs I analyse in the narrative comparison.

## 3.2. Analysing discourse

### 3.2.1. Defining Discourse

In *Discourse and Social Change*, Norman Fairclough distinguishes between five main uses of discourse: three linguistic and two sociological (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999)<sup>44</sup>:

1. Discourse can be understood in a way that lies close to the etymological meaning of the word, as speech in opposition to written text.
2. Discourse can be understood as communication in a broader sense, i.e. as including both speech and written text, and as implying a distinction between sender, expression and addressee.
3. Discourse can define a particular way of speaking (or writing), implying a certain codification of the world, often used by particular groups or in particular contexts, e.g. the juridical discourse, working-class discourse or political discourse.

This sense, which lies close to the Luhmannian perception of a system, also bridges to the sociological understanding of the concept characterising the last two uses:

4. Discourses are ways of codifying and constructing the world, and discourses are struggling against each other for hegemony. In this sense, which defines discourse as it is perceived in the Laclau and Mouffe analyses, language determines society.
5. Finally, Fairclough also lists his own understanding of Discourse,<sup>45</sup> namely as a linguistic media through which social changes can be stud-

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<sup>44</sup> At least two more interpretations can be added to these five. Within linguistics and literary criticism, the term discourse is often referring to a specific aspect of the form of a text that defines its sequential structure, an understanding which I will return to below (Andersen & Larsen, 2001); and within Ethics – and particularly within Jürgen Habermas' theoretical framework – the discourse signifies an ideal structure of communication, underlying all practical use of language (Habermas, 1996).

ied. Fairclough emphasises that contrary to Michael Halliday, who understands the relationship between society and language as a one-way relation in which language is unequivocally placed on the effect-side, he regards it to be a dialectic relationship.<sup>46</sup>

Thus far, the focus has been on the essentials, i.e. what a discourse is. If the concept is understood sociologically, however – as having an effect on social life – then we must also ask what a discourse does. In that respect, Fairclough distinguishes between three functions of discourse:

- A. Discourses construct identity: by adhering to a particular discourse, the individual is placed in a particular position.
- B. Such positions are only particular in so far as they are distinguishable from other possible positions. Thus seen, discourses establish relationships between individuals.
- C. Last but not least, a particular discourse entails a particular codification of the world through which the world becomes perceivable, but by which other – possible and real – perceptions of the world are also excluded.

In other words, discourses are structuring principles articulated linguistically through which man is given a particular perspective on the world that both defines him as a particular person and defines his interaction with other persons.

As mentioned above, I regard discourses as equivalents to *cités*. *Cités* constitute the framework used to define worth in a justificatory clause, and in that sense, the *cit *, like Discourse, functions as a structuring principle, through which meaning is articulated. I am analysing a limited aspect of that structuring principle: Limited in the sense that I am not interested in all of the construction of meaning in the military blogs and in the sense that my focus on how justifications work through the identification with a worthy sacrificer means that I focus more on identity than on social relations.

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<sup>45</sup> Following Fairclough, I write Discourse with a capital “D” when it is used in the general sense, as signifying all linguistic representations of social praxis, and discourse with a small “d” when referring to a particular articulation of meaning through language, both generally as e.g. a civil religious discourse or specifically as e.g. a discourse of Manifest Destiny (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002: 192).

<sup>46</sup> In the words of J rgensen and Phillips, discourses can both be regarded as subjects, as initiating a certain effect, as actions, as the content of that effect, and as objects, as being acted upon by external, non-discursive factors.

### *3.2.2. Language and society*

Broadly speaking, Discourse Analysis is derived from a modern reinterpretation of three major strands of 20th century social research: Structuralism, Psychoanalysis and Marxism – a reinterpretation which has maintained (but also rejected) central aspects of these positions; first and foremost the notion that the structural logic revealed in the study of social life reveals universal and unchangeable truths (Esmark et al., 2005: 12ff).

Structuralism, Psychoanalysis and Marxism find common ground in Althusser, who, contrary to traditional materialist readings, claims that ideology is not merely a superstructural bi-product of the dialectics between the forces and conditions of production, but should be regarded as a part of the basis itself (Beck Holm, 2005: 344-345). And in spite of the fact that Althusser never solves the fundamental dilemma of ideology as a simultaneously repressive and emancipating tool (a dilemma that also haunted Marx), discourse analysis has adopted his notion that ideology should rather be regarded as a cause than an effect: non-material factors, e.g. language, can also be regarded as the structuring principles of social reality.

Another central element in 20th century Marxist thinking adopted by Discourse Analysis is the concept of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci. Like Althusser, Gramsci emphasised the crucial function of ideology in maintaining or destabilising social order. In fact, there are close parallels between Althusser's ideological interpretation of the Freudian concept of overdetermination and Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony. However, Laclau and Mouffe deliberately adopt Gramsci's concept and reject Althusser, because overdetermination entails a notion of social fixation that is incompatible with their view on the function of language.

The crux of the matter in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is that discourses struggle for dominance, for the subordination of other codifications of the world, i.e. for discursive hegemony. However, as discourses are constantly redefined – or rather, as discourses only exist insofar as a process of redefinition constantly takes place – this hegemony can only be partial. In that respect, they take the consequence of what they see as a fundamental ambiguity regarding the status of “discursive formations” in Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Along with structuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxism, Foucault's opus can be regarded as the fourth pillar of Discourse Analysis (Foucault, 1972: 34-43). It is in regard to the interpretation of this ambiguity that Laclau and Mouffe's theory differs radically from Fairclough's theory.

Laclau and Mouffe emphasise the fundamental instability of the hegemonic order due to their rejection of Foucault's assumption that discourses

can be distinguished from “the non-discursive practises that surround them” (Foucault, 1972: 174). In their view, there is nothing beyond the discourse, beyond the linguistic articulation of reality in which reality comes into being. Identifying hegemony is therefore identifying the elements of a structure that “is never complete” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 107). According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structuralism, all signs are constituted by a signifier (le signifiant) and a signified content (le signifié) (de Saussure, 1986: 65ff). The signifier is the word as mere form: S-A-C-R-I-F-I-C-E. The signified content is meaning of this word, which through the structural logic of language is distinguished from the meaning of other words, e.g. M-U-R-D-E-R. In accordance with de Saussure, who regards the meaning of the sign as completely arbitrary, Laclau and Mouffe emphasise the fundamentally arbitrary nature of the linguistically defined social order.

Conversely, Fairclough regards Discourse as an element of reality that interacts with non-discursive practises (Fairclough, 2001a: 122-123). In that respect, his analytical strategy is not as close to de Saussure’s semiology as it is to the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce, whose triadic theory of the sign entailed an assumption of the ontological (but inaccessible) reality of the object represented (Jørgensen, 1997). Since discourses are maintained by aspects of social life other than articulations, Fairclough is also able to regard discourses and interdiscursive relations as being more stable than Laclau and Mouffe. Furthermore, instead of regarding such interdiscursive relations as merely relations of subordination, (as implied in the word hegemony), the corresponding concept in Fairclough’s theory, the “orders of discourse”, also includes dialectic and co-ordinated relations. An order of discourse is the linguistic equivalent to the sociological concept of an institution. Identifying orders of discourse and revealing how they change is the main purpose of critical discourse analysis, because linguistic changes also echo social change.

The differences between Laclau and Mouffe and Fairclough, are amplified by the fact that they also represent different methodological approaches. Laclau and Mouffe tend to focus on macro-sociological and very abstract developments, whereas Fairclough is known for his notoriously thorough analyses. It can be tempting to see this as a result of the pragmatic tradition which also characterises Fairclough’s scientific theory.

However, the differences between Fairclough and Laclau and Mouffe should not conceal the similarities between their approaches. First, the distinction between the two perceptions of ontological reality is a distinction between two axioms. Axioms form the basis of research. They cannot be proven by research. And whereas the two positions can easily be distinguished in theory, it is extremely difficult to tell the one from the other in

practice. After all, in keeping with moderate social constructivism, once we assume that we have no privileged access to the social world, we have deprived ourselves of the possibility of answering the question as to how we can claim with any certainty that, epistemologically, what we find is true as to how things really exist, ontologically.

Secondly, Laclau and Mouffe and Fairclough may differ regarding the interpretation of the ontological state of Discourse, but they share a fundamental interest in the relationship between language and society. The fact that Fairclough regards Discourse as part of a social reality that also contains non-linguistic aspects, does not mean that he altogether rejects Laclau and Mouffe's position. Entailed in his dialectic interpretation of the relationship between language and society is also the assumption that language affects social life.

Likewise, Fairclough may emphasise that discourses are not determined by articulation alone. Nonetheless, the very notion that meaning is established through language entails that meaning is fundamentally articulated as relational, a point Laclau and Mouffe emphasise in their definition of discourse as "an articulated (...) totality, where every element occupies a differential position – in our terminology, where every element has been reduced to a moment of that totality – [and in which] all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 106).

Last, but not least: Laclau, Mouffe and Fairclough share a fundamentally emancipatory approach to science. Language should be analysed in order to reveal the true conditions of social life; to make man conscious of the structures of dominance which he is subject to (Fairclough, 2001b: 232-233). As regards the following analysis, it should be emphasised that I do not share this emancipatory ambition of discourse analysis. When stating that I use critical discourse theory, I understand the critical dimension as an epistemological form of criticism as opposed to an emancipatory or normative form of criticism.

### *3.2.3. Critical discourse analysis: How?*

Fairclough emphasises that any given speech act contains three analytically distinguishable elements: a discursive event, i.e. the text or words and forms analysed; a discursive praxis defining the conditions under which this particular text and the particular discourses entailed within it have come into being; and lastly, it is affected by a particular social praxis reflected in the order of discourse defining the context of the text and revealing important information about how the social setting is structured and undergoes change.

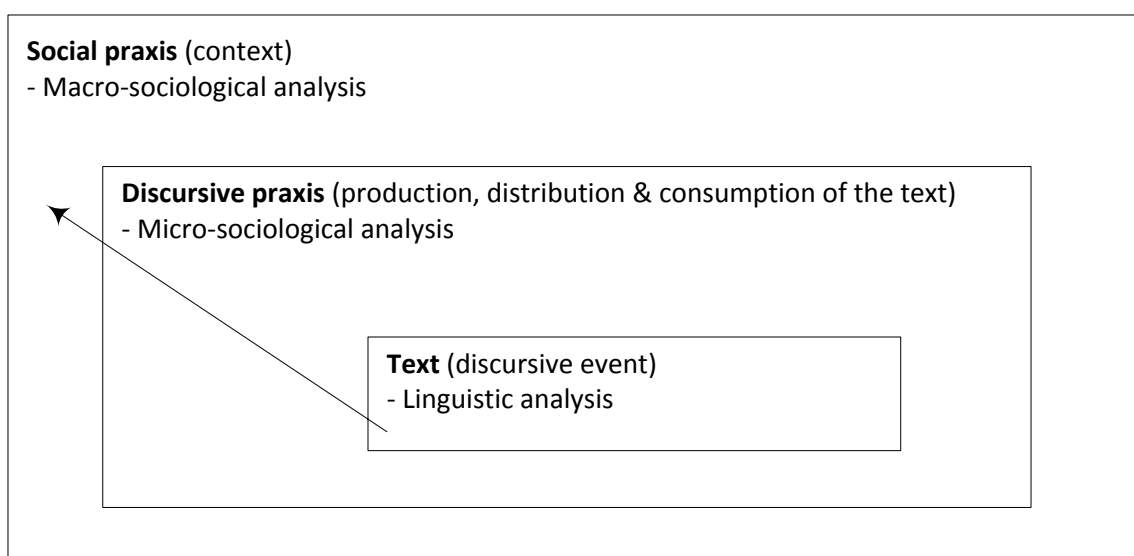
In the following analyses, the discursive event is the blog; or to be more precise, it is the blog post, a semantic entity including a headline, text



(maybe pictures and links), and finally information about when it was written and by whom.

The schematic structure of Figure 3.1 belies the fact that Fairclough explicitly states that there is no universal user's guide to critical discourse analysis. Fairclough has made close text readings his trademark for the very reason that he holds the view that all analyses should be empirically sensitive. One way of complying with this sensitivity is to acknowledge that different data call for different approaches.

Figure 3.1: Critical discourse analysis



(Fairclough, 1992: 72).

This has led Fairclough to redefine central categories of classical text analysis in his later works. For instance, when distinguishing discourse from genre and style, his use of these two analytical categories differs somewhat from our common perception hereof. Elements of style, in traditional literary terms, are included in Fairclough's definition of the genre. Thus, he regards the analysis of genre as the analysis of the fundamental linguistic elements of a text (defined by the discursive event above), but focuses on the interpellation of an established relationship between the persons in the text (an aspect of the discursive praxis above) regarding the analysis of style (Fairclough, 2001a: 123-124). In my view, this is more confusing than enlightening. In the following, when I analyse blog posts as discursive events, I therefore stick to the classical categories. When I speak of style, I mean style as opposed to content, i.e. the grammatical, syntactic and figurative elements of a text. When I speak of genre, I mean genre as a fixed combination of content and style, the literary equivalent to the social institution. I will return to this point.

The discursive praxis defines the conditions of production under which a text has come into being. This includes practical circumstances such as the

medium of publication and the distribution of the text as well as the intertextual or interdiscursive circumstances defining the tradition (the genre) which the text enters and which defines the boundaries of meaning in the text: What you can meaningfully express in a political debate differs from what you would express in a love letter or an academic article. These boundaries can be pushed and redefined by the text. In Fairclough's eyes, identifying such changes is actually the very purpose of conducting critical discourse analysis. That does not, however, alter the fact that the text will always be drawing on existing discourses and genres.

In the following, I focus on discursive praxis in two respects: concerning the characteristics of blogging and the characteristics of the blogger. As discussed at length in the next chapter, the use of milblogs also has its advantages and disadvantages. Military blogs provide us with valuable insight regarding the structure of the justificatory regimes drawn upon by servicemen. Yet censorship and conservative bias, a characteristic both of the genre and military discourse alike, draw the generalisability of the conclusions drawn using military blogs into question. As already mentioned, the characteristics of the genre call for a carefully focused case selection. In the discourse analyses below, I have chosen four cases which vary as much as possible in relation to the known background variables: Ma Deuce Gunner, Rachel the Great, Rusten D. Currie and Zack (see Table 3.1).

As for the last step, the central point in the analysis of social praxis is to identify how the discourses included and implied in the text relate to each other.<sup>47</sup> This is the identification of the order of discourse. In Fairclough's view, this reflects the social order with which the text interacts, and it is in the interpretation of this relation that his view differs radically from that of Laclau and Mouffe. In this context, the point becomes seeing how civil religion relates to other justificatory regimes. Is it present, dominant and constant, as the sacrificial ideology assumes? Or are there systematic variations which can be traced back to the known background variables?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A discourse may be implied without being included in the sense that it is not explicitly mentioned but nevertheless constitutes a framework of understanding in which the other – explicit – discourses make sense. An example is provided below in the analysis of Ma Deuce Gunner's statement "Feel No Pity", which is seen as an implicit reference to the liberals' derailing of the sacrificial cult.

<sup>48</sup> Following the distinction between scientific theory and strategy of analysis, nothing indicates that I could not have done the same with Laclau and Mouffe's approach. It would affect the conclusions I draw, but not the tools I use.

### 3.3. Narrative analysis

My analytical strategy shifts in the second part of the qualitative analysis. Thus, while the emphasis in the first three analytical chapters is on the presence and distribution of different discourses, I focus on the narrative unfolding of these discourses in Chapters 8 to 10.

#### 3.3.1 Narratives and discourses

Narratives and discourses are interrelated – but not overlapping – phenomena. They relate to each other as form and content and as content and form: A narrative is one way of articulating a discursive content, and the defining stylistic aspect of all narratives – the plot – is also called the discourse.

I distinguish between two kinds of narratives: identity narratives and event narratives. Identity narratives are narratives writ large. The discourses of civil and military religion identified and analysed in Chapters 5 to 7 can both be defined as identity narratives. National identities are expressed as Stories of Peoplehood (Smith, 2003). When the value of freedom is defined by reference to the hardships of the founding fathers or to the sacrifices of the “greatest generation” (Brokaw, 2004), identity is expressed in the form of a historical narrative.<sup>49</sup>

Event narratives are narratives writ small: stories about particular occurrences experienced or told by a particular narrator himself. Engaging in social life is engaging in the ongoing re-interpretation of the meaningfulness of events in the social sphere. We cannot help communicating in a narrative form. It is entailed in the structure of language itself. The basic clause, consisting of a subject, verb and an object, implies the presence of actors and actions, the basic elements of any given event (Franzosi, 2004: 43ff): “Peter (S) killed (V) his wife (O)”.

Furthermore, reason-giving, i.e. how events are connected by means of pronouns, adverbs and conjunctions, also takes place in the form of stories. “Peter (S) killed (V) his wife (O) because she (S) was cheating (V) on him (O)”. There might be numerous reasons why this family tragedy takes place. But by placing the acts of adultery and murder in the same sequential line of events, the fact that she cheated on him establishes the meaning of the killing. This point relates both to the micro-process of binding singular events together in event-narratives as well as the macro-processes of presenting oneself with reference to greater historical structures in identity narratives. Considered objectively, the historical process leading from the US Revolutionary

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<sup>49</sup> In that respect, national history shares fundamental elements with salvation history. Elsewhere, I have shown how close readings from the constitutive phases of modern nations combine elements of both (Brænder, 2007).

War to Operation Iraqi Freedom may not form a uni-linear development, but by framing the contemporary conflict as an instance in the same continuous struggle for freedom first heralded by the Founding Fathers, it also becomes meaningful for the participants.

The central function of all narratives, large or small, is to apply meaning to the world. Whether the narrative tells a story of belonging that places the individual within a larger social whole and defines him as a particular person or whether it is that individual’s way of recounting a specific course of events, the central contribution of the narrative is that it structures reality, thus establishing meaning.

Regarded as either stories of nationhood or as personal stories, the narrative relates to discourse as form to content; or more specifically, as signifier to signified. Considering discourses as content and narratives as form is in line with the sociological perception of discourses as particular and different ways of rendering meaning to the world. A fundamental point in this regard is that the discursive content can also be communicated by other stylistic tools, which, like narratives, provide a particular interpretation of one or more events. The narrative is a very strong and, historically seen, perhaps the most fundamental way of structuring reality. But reason-giving can also take place in the form of conventions, codes and causal explanations (Tilly, 2006).<sup>50</sup>

In this light, the narrative is a subset of discourse. Yet in literary analysis, discourse can also be seen as a subset of narrative.

*3.3.2. Defining narrative*

Like discourse analysis, narrative analysis was developed in the wake of structuralism. The fundamental distinction between the two elements of a narrative – the story and the plot – is conceptually very close to the distinctions between the elements of language first articulated by de Saussure. The story, or in French, *histoire*, defines the events as they unfold; the events that

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<sup>50</sup> Tilly’s distinction is based on a differentiation in degrees of specification and relation type. He places the four types of reason-giving in the following scheme. The examples given here all concern the death of Peter’s wife.

		<i>Degree of specification</i>	
		<i>Popular</i>	<i>Specialised</i>
<i>Type of relation</i>	<i>Formula</i>	<b>Convention</b> “Honey! It’s not what you think.”	<b>Code</b> “Officer, we have a 187.”
	<i>Sequence</i>	<b>Narrative</b> “Peter killed his wife, because she was cheating on him.”	<b>Technical account</b> $y_i = b_0 + b_1x_i + \epsilon_i$ (Where $y$ = degrees of murder & $x$ = the risk of being caught)

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(Tilly, 2006: 19).

are related within the sequential structure of the narrative. The plot, discours, is how this relation is established.

In his book on historiography and narratives, Hayden White distinguishes between annals, chronicles and history proper. Annals merely list a sequence of events in chronological order (White, 1987: 4ff; Czarniawska, 2004: 17-20). Thus, annals clearly have a sequential structure, but no syntagmatic or explicit connections are made between the events. They are lacking a story. In order to understand the annals, we must understand the world of the medieval monk: to understand a life being subject to a single all-saturating narrative, i.e. the eschatology, according to which worldly events merely emphasise the importance of the world to come. The chronicle is different. While it also describes a row of events and has a sequential structure, unlike the annals, it binds the events together in syntax as well as in content. The events are not merely listed; they are told and made part of a dramatic whole in which each event has its place and is related to other events. Yet the chronicle still lacks a plot. It does not reveal why it communicates these events in a dramatic whole. The chronicle has no end. When the chronicler stops writing, it simply ends. Like the annals, we can only understand the chronicle as part of a larger – but implicit – context, e.g. the divine plan or the hidden logic of the world.

The historical narrative has a sequential structure, a story and a plot. It reports a row of events and relates these events to each other. And it tells us how we should understand these events as part of a larger context. Todorov defines a plot as consisting of “the passage from one equilibrium to another” (Todorov, 1971, quoted in Czarniawska, 2004: 19). It has a course of events, but these events take place within a certain framework. They have a beginning, i.e. the first equilibrium; a middle in which the equilibrium is disturbed and the events take place; and an end in which the equilibrium is restored and the meaning explained. The narrative is a journey “There and back again”, with the important feature that even though “the second equilibrium is similar to the first (...) the two are never identical” (ibid).<sup>51</sup>

Because a second, different, equilibrium is achieved, the events become meaningful or, more precisely, significant. The changes reported in the events and bound together in the story do not merely take place; they take place for a reason. This reason is revealed in – and sometimes identical with – the second equilibrium. As stated by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, the archetypical plot is the detective novel. Brooks analyses Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Musgrave Ritual* in which Sherlock Holmes, by solving the mys-

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<sup>51</sup> “There and back again” is the subtitle of one of the most famous neo-classical narratives: JRR Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.

tery of a present crime unfolding in the story, also solves an ancient mystery: the lost Crown of the Stuarts. The ancient mystery is the plot. It is by revealing the true meaning of the ritual of the Musgrave family that the story becomes meaningful itself (Brooks, 1984: 23ff).

Just like the dichotomy between signifier and signified was broken up by de Saussure's analytical descendants, so has the distinction between story and plot been moderated by subsequent approaches to narrative. The most famous example in that regard is probably Ronald Barthes' combined re-interpretation of structural and narrative analysis in his approach to modern mythologies. Whereas classical structuralism focuses on the sign – the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified – Barthes emphasises the importance of acknowledging that the signified content also fulfils a signifying function: a picture on the front page of Paris Match showing a black man in uniform saluting the tricolore thus signifies both a particular event on the Fête Nationale and a myth relating to benevolent French colonialism (Barthes, 1972: 114-117).

Barthes' distinction is important for two reasons: First, it provides a plausible explanation of how event narratives (what happened on July 14) can be subordinated to identity narratives (colonial mythology). Secondly: it enables us to perceive more closely this establishment of mythologies as an arbitrary process in line with the micro-level establishment of linguistic meaning. Thus seen, de-mythologisation will not lead us to the actual meaning, because the very definition of meaning is entailed in the mythology.

### *3.3.3 Blogs as narratives: genre and style*

In historical narratives, nations constitute excellent plots. They connect history and community, time and place. Historical events become accessible when read as somebody's history. As shown by the debate following Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *L'Europe – Histoire de ses Peuple* in 1993, national narratives die hard. It is possible to make peasants into Frenchmen by constructing a historical plot; however, making Frenchmen into Europeans, challenging the existing perceptions of the relation of time, place and people and replacing an existing historical plot is a different endeavour. Yet that does not mean that dominating narratives go unchallenged.

When Jean-François Lyotard published his epoch-making study *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* in 1979, he not only challenged the concept of the modern as the apotheosis of mankind, he did so by stating that the central feature of the modern – the great narrative – would be replaced by smaller, individual narratives: identity narratives, writ large, would be replaced by event narratives, writ small. The determinants of common knowledge, e.g. political ideologies and the national historiography,

would be replaced by non-determined, individualised and constantly changing postmodern knowledge.

Today, 30 years later, the occurrence of new, interactive media appears to confirm Lyotard's theoretical hypothesis empirically: Instant Messaging, Social Network Services and blogs, all phenomena associated with the Web 2.0 revolution, have challenged the monopoly of information distribution. We do not depend on national media to tell us, i.e. to narrate, who we are. We can simply create our own profile, choose our own sample of RSS feeds, and merge our own news sources. Perhaps most importantly, we do so fully aware that our identity is never complete. Personal identity is subject to constant change. By changing its constituents, we contribute to these changes ourselves.

In the light of this development, Jill Walker Rettberg contrasts the serial narrative of blogging with traditional narratives, as for instance found in the detective novel, by stating that whereas the narrative desire in reading a novel is a desire for the end, reading a blog is reading for continuance:

While Brooks discussed the reader's desire to reach the end, a blog reader's desire is instead always for the next post. The blog reader hopes that there is no end. An end would not tie up all the loose ends, answer the questions and make the narrative into a neat, comprehensive whole. It would simply be a stop (Rettberg, 2008: 118).

Rettberg might be correct in her characterisation of the blog as fundamentally defining a new kind of narrative. In my view, however, her dichotomy between the two types of reader desires is distorted. Her premises therefore do not correctly support her conclusion.

We cannot infer from the circumstance that reading a narrative can be described as a desire to reach the end to the assumption that the reader actually wants the story to end. To the contrary, the very strength of the desire-metaphor is that reading, like sex, is an act of ambivalence: On the one hand, you do it to reach the climax. On the other hand, a central part of the sexual act as well as of the process of reading is holding on to the excitement: the constant build-up towards the climax. The climax can only become a climax by going through certain phases, and it is only a climax if it reaches a second equilibrium, similar to the first, but never the same. In the narrative, the little death at the end marks the death of the world constructed within the story. Anybody who has read a really good novel knows the absurd feeling of missing the fictive actors. Therefore, sticking to the metaphor, a really good narr-

ative makes the reader want more. Even when the end is reached, there is still a fundamental wish to return, to re-vitalise the desire.<sup>52</sup>

Granted, events need not be reported in a narrative manner. As White shows, events can merely be listed, as in the annals, or bound together by grammar and content into a logical whole, as in the chronicle. Events can be related on three different levels in blogs. First, the blog as a whole contains a number of posts, each of which can be seen as an event. Since a web log is a log, a listing of events in (reversed) order, we cannot refute the possibility that blogging has more in common with annals or chronicles than with narratives proper. On the other hand, a military blog written from Iraq tells a story of a deployment which structurally shares fundamental characteristics with the narrative: The deployment has a beginning, a middle and an end, and the experiences will often have an impact on the protagonist. Thus, whereas blogging as a genre does not necessarily entail narrative elements, the theme of the blog may. A similar point can be made in regard to the posts, the second level, on which blogs combine events. The experiences of servicemen in the field differ radically from what most Internet users ever endure in real life. The breakthrough of the milblogging genre was Colby Buzzell's "Men in Black", a detailed and well-written description of an ambush in Mosul in 2004.<sup>53</sup> Combat blogs offer extreme examples, but most military bloggers tell stories, and stories often come in the form of the narrative.

Thirdly, blogs combine events by linking posts with similar topics together. This is the point where blogs differ most from the classical communication media. A novel is read from beginning to end. The reader of a novel has no choice but to follow the plot as it unfolds. The reader of a blog, however, contributes actively to the combination of events by choosing which links to follow. Thus, whereas single posts and military blogs describing the deployment process can easily be seen as narratives proper, the combination of events in topics at the thematic level challenges our perception of the narrative. Yet following Rettberg's redefinition of narrative as "serial narratives" in regard

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<sup>52</sup> An interesting example can be derived from the archetypical narrative: the Sherlock Holmes novels. In "The Final Problem" from 1893, Conan Doyle let Sherlock Holmes tumble off the cliffs over the Reichenbach Falls in Austria in a struggle with Moriarty. The hero dies, and so does his arch-enemy, the incarnation of evil. The climax is reached. Public pressure, however, forced Conan Doyle to give Sherlock Holmes a comeback in 1903; even in the archetypical narrative, the longing for continuation had an impact.

<sup>53</sup> Buzzell had the story removed from the blog when it received excessive attention. The blog has since been published in book form entitled *My War*, and, with reference to copyright rules, the most interesting passages have been deleted.



to blogs, we may distinguish between the narrative as a genre, as “narratives proper”, and the narrative as an element of style.<sup>54</sup>

The narrative can be regarded as a genre; and a very stable cultural genre at that. Yet as a genre, it is bound to certain media of expression which may change, rapidly or slowly, over time. A classical ideal of the tragedy is the unity of time, space and action; a useful limitation if you want to tell a story on a stage.<sup>55</sup> These ideals are not necessary, however; at least not to the same extent as when told in another media. In a film or novel, explicit or subtle signs would effectively inform the able reader that we are now in a new setting.

Genre and style are often difficult to distinguish from one another. Style is both broader and smaller than genre. On the one hand, style is understood in contrast to content. It denotes how a message is articulated, not what it articulates. In that (very general) respect, genre can merely be understood as an aspect of style. On the other hand, different genres may make use of the same elements of style. The narrative as an element of style is therefore not only prevalent in story genres, but also in e.g. scientific articles.

If I want to publish a scientific article, I need unique data, a unique methodological approach or a unique theory in order to get an editor take my contribution seriously. However, I also need a narrative. The very idea of ‘contributing to the common pool of knowledge’ tells a story in itself. It contains a sequential structure. One thing follows another, and the sequential elements are bound together, because such a connection is the ‘sine qua non’ of the article, of the idea of the contribution: “until now, we have thought that (...) In the following, however, I will show that (...)” Unlike a Russian Folk Tale, narrative is not the fundamental aspect differentiating the scientific article from other genres. If present, the article probably becomes more readable, and its chances of being published will increase. If not – well, too bad. The rejection will not, however, alter the scientific value of the data collected

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<sup>54</sup> I differentiate between linguistic institutions (genres), discursive institutions (orders of discourse) and social institutions. Orders of discourse articulate social institutions. They constitute the linguistic element of complex social wholes including physical conditions, biological needs, bravery, stupidity, change and actions. Hence, they reflect the social reality behind language. Genres are also institutions. Unlike orders of discourse, however, genres are institutional aspects of language itself. They interact with non-discursive elements, but the aim of analysing genres is to map and codify the composition of language, regardless of extra-linguistic aspects of social life.

<sup>55</sup> The three unities have mistakenly been attributed to the Poetics of Aristotle. In fact, the juxtaposition of these unities are of a somewhat later date, from 16th and 17th century criticisms of French and Italian drama (Abrams, 1985: 211).

or the method pursued; only the perceived value of the contribution they make.

Sequence is fundamental for the narrative, and the mere occurrence of a sequential structure or something similar makes our brain look for and register narratives, even when, linguistically speaking, they are not there (White, 1987: 9). Annals and scientific articles may not be regarded as narrative genres. Nevertheless, they can contain narrative elements of style. You might have to be a medieval monk to capture the narrative of the annals; if you are, however, it is clearly there. This is the respect in which I differentiate between narrative as genre and narrative as an element of style. In the narrative genre, narrative elements of style cannot be thought away without fundamentally altering the genre. However, just like non-narrative genres can benefit from the use of narrative elements of style, narratives contain numerous non-narrative elements: Ascertainments, descriptions, definitions, evaluations, advocacies and justifications. The devil is in the details. A narrative without digressions is a bone without flesh. Digressions serve as veils. It is not the veiled truth, the Musgrave Ritual, that is interesting, but the process of unveiling it. The process of reading – of novels and blogs alike – is therefore not merely a desire for revelation but also for continuation. Plots are everywhere. They are entailed in the very structure of language, as the element of style with which two events are meaningfully bound together. The question, however, is whether blogging should be regarded as a narrative genre or as a genre containing narrative elements of style.

#### *3.3.4. How should blogs be analysed as narratives?*

The value of changing the analytical strategy from CDA to narrative analysis is that it enables us to focus on the development of how the servicemen justify their warfare participation. The two cases chosen here are two servicemen, Teflon Don and Badger 6, who are similar with regard to gender, political affiliation, time of deployment, branch of service and exposure to combat. They serve in the same company and have experienced many of the same events. Yet whereas Teflon Don is a Private First Class, Badger 6 is a Captain and company commander. Combined, the method of case selection and the narrative approach should enable us to analyse the effect of differences in rank and exposure to combat.

The narrative genre is characterised by the composition of a plot. In the plot the story unfolds as a process leading from a first equilibrium to a second, and by means of the plot the events can be read as part of a meaningful whole. By means of these characteristics William Labov distinguishes between 6 fundamental elements in the composition of a narrative (Labov, 1998: 362-370; Riessman, 1993: 18-19):

1. An abstract, which summarises the story and substantiates the purpose of telling it
2. An orientation which presents the actors and the context at the outset (the first equilibrium)
3. One or more complicating actions in which the events unfolds
4. Evaluations which explains the significance of these particular events (the second equilibrium)
5. A result presenting the outcome of the events
6. A coda in which the story as a whole is set into a larger context

Some of these elements may be left out or implied in other phases of the narrative. Yet, what distinguishes narrative genre from narrative style is that in narrative style only the complicating actions are present.

As described in the above, narrative genre and style can be expressed in three different ways in a military blog: as descriptions of single events, in blog topics, and in the process of deployment – described in the blog as a whole. The structure of the analysis in Chapters 8 to 10 follows this distinction. In Chapter 8, I focus on the two bloggers' respective descriptions of one particular event: the death of three of their comrades on February 8, 2007. In some respects, the analytical strategy pursued in this chapter is very similar to that of the foregoing analyses: First, it is not an analysis of a development over a large time span. Instead, the sequential structure, which I have defined in the above as a central characteristic of the narrative, is placed within a rather tight frame on that particular day. Secondly, the analysis emphasises the structures of identity of the two bloggers; the focus of the analyses in Chapters 5 to 7. Yet the tools I use are new. Instead of merely considering how the order of discourse is structured in a single post, I focus on the composition of this order by analysing the construction of a plot, the use of narrative and non-narrative clauses, and the relations of the actants within the stories told.

The second analysis in Chapter 9 engages directly in the debate on blogs as narratives, because it focuses on the crucial element in Rettberg's distinction: the fact that blogs are not structured as stories. In this chapter, the occurrences on February 8 are read in context. In both blogs, the experience of losing the three men is placed within a larger framework of events. As I will show, this framework can still be regarded as a narrative in spite of the fact that the establishment of a sequential structure also partly depends on the reader.

In the last qualitative analysis, in Chapter 10, I examine the whole blog as a narrative. The deployment is a journey. Journeys lead actors “there and back again”; from one equilibrium to another. Describing a narrative as a journey is therefore a common figure: in classical narratives such as the Odyssey; in folktales such as Grimms’ “The Story of a Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was”; and in modern narratives, such as the Hollywood Road Movie.<sup>56</sup> In that respect, I suppose that the narratives told in the Teflon Don and Badger 6 blogs can be analysed as narratives proper. The focus in this particular analysis, however, is on how the events described regarding the tragic events on February 8 affect the style and content of the two bloggers.

### **3.4. Measuring Discourse**

#### *3.4.1 Words as numbers*

I have shown in the above how the studies of the Research Branch summarised in *The American Soldier* constituted an excellent example of the methodological revolution in the social sciences that took place during World War II. Harold Lasswell’s studies of Nazi propaganda offer another example of this development. By coding the content of messages broadcasted by the Nazi media and comparing the results of his coding with German military initiatives, Lasswell showed that quantitative approaches to texts could reveal valuable information about the speaker; even information which the speaker himself was probably not aware of. The airwaves revealed the strategy. Lasswell could predict German military initiatives on the battlefield by means of the propaganda alone (Franzosi, 2004: 33-34).

Lasswell’s studies led to the development of content analysis. Content analysis is coding, i.e. basically changing words into numbers. This has great advantages: Words are treacherous, the ambiguity entailed in the fact that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, makes the study of words – of texts – an extremely time-consuming process. In this process, we will have to reduce the complexity by pursuing one of two possible strategies: Either by reducing the number of cases in order to analyse in depth or by reducing the number of variables in order to analyse in breadth. The qualitative analyses conducted in Chapters 5-10 pursue the first strategy. In Chapter 11, I pursue the second, quantitative, strategy.

Reducing the number of variables by coding – by applying a given value to a given content or expression – enables the reader to survey larger sections

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<sup>56</sup> Roberto Franzosi pursues the journey metaphor in the introduction of *From Words to Numbers* (Franzosi, 2004).

of text and study how they are interrelated or even, as Lasswell did, how they relate to social phenomena beyond the text. Furthermore, having quantitative estimates also enables us to deem, quantitatively, the quality of our measures in terms of validity, reliability and generalisability.

### *3.4.2. Content analysis of civil religious discourse: advantages and challenges*

Changing the paradigm from a basically qualitative approach to a basically quantitative approach inevitably raises the question of the value of either research strategy. What is the purpose of conducting in-depth qualitative studies? Is it merely to provide the information necessary to pose the right question in larger, quantitatively based, studies? Or does the in-depth study provide us with valuable information about the micro-processes of justification in itself? Furthermore, in light of the fact that the strength of content analysis – the possibility of studying a large number of texts – is facilitated by the reduction of variables, the discipline appears to be fundamentally incompatible with the explorative aim of this project.

In Chapter 11, when I analyse the results of a word-based coding of the 39 blogs included in Table 3.1, I use quantitative methods to test whether the findings of the two qualitative studies are more generally applicable when we consider a larger sample of bloggers and whether the systematic differences observed also seem to follow the same patterns. The quantitative findings may affirm or question the qualitative findings; nevertheless, I regard them as part of the same fundamentally explorative endeavour.

By expanding the study from six to 39 cases, I therefore hope to test the strength of the conclusions reached in the first six studies in order to see whether these findings reflect more general patterns in the blogs. However, despite the fact that I change analytical strategy and use statistical tools that are normally associated with studies of larger populations, data provide me with little chance of testing the generalisability of these conclusions.

First, I may have a sample of bloggers – selected with maximal variation – in order to test the constancy of civil religion. Yet I have no known population to infer to. The blogosphere is constantly changing, and the lines between the publicly accessible blogs that I study and other Web 2.0 phenomena are blurred. Secondly, the number of known background variables is very limited. I can study the effects of gender, political affiliation, military rank and exposure to combat, but I have few chances of testing how socio-economic status and racial background affect the bloggers' use of justificatory regimes. Hence, the number of factors I can actually control for is limited, a fact which the third fundamental problem of the data amplifies: The cases might be chosen to maximise variation, but if variation does not exist, it is very difficult to control for the effect of the variable. The number of liberally

minded and female bloggers, for instance, is very limited. Neither category is represented in the officers' corps in my sample. Hence, the full effect of rank cannot be tested for these two groups.

A general critique of content analysis is that it does not measure the content very well. The strength of in-depth readings is the measurement validity, but coding in width using particular words or passages calls our measures into question: Can we measure the meaning of the signified by the frequency of particular signifiers? Furthermore, the price of coding the meaning is that the reliability of the coding will inevitably also be called into question: Will two different readers interpret the same passages in the same manner?

I have based my content analysis exclusively on the signifiers. Based on an open pilot coding and the findings of the qualitative analyses, I have thus coded particular clusters of words as signifiers of either civil or military religion.<sup>57</sup> This provides a highly reliable measure. As just mentioned, however, its validity is debatable. By searching for clusters of words, I am thus able to catch the relevant cases, though also a number of cases which a closer reading will reveal are not expressions of either form of implicit religion. I measure words, not intentions. The validity is high in the qualitative studies, where I focus on the actual justifications. In the quantitative study, reliability is maximised. Here, based on the assumption that the words used reflect the life-world of the writer, I focus on the frequencies of vocabularies of motive in the military blogs instead.

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<sup>57</sup> How this coding has been done in practice is described in detail in Chapter 11 and in the Appendix.

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat (Sun Tzu: 3.18).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data: front-line blogs**

Above, I have argued *why* the justification of sacrifice can be assigned to different communities of conscience: vertically to national mythology and horizontally to the brotherhood of men. And, I have addressed *how* I will proceed methodologically, by using critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and content analysis. In this chapter, my aim is to present *where* I intend to study these patterns of justification: namely in online diaries, weblogs, written by American military personnel on the ground in Iraq.

The study of blogging is still in the making and even more so the study of military blogging. As I will show in the following, using milblogs as a source raise questions in regard to the external validity of the study. I also argue, however, that first-person war accounts provide an extensively elaborated written documentation of the serviceman's thoughts, unmediated by interview-effects or research questions, and that military blogs provide a unique and, in regard to the internal validity, a very valuable source in the study of soldier justifications.

I first present the characteristics of blogging in general and of military blogging in particular. Second, I address what should be regarded as the central part of this chapter: why military blogs should be studied? And third, I discuss the challenges which the use of this data source offers the researcher in general and in regard to this dissertation in particular.

#### **4.1. From Weblogs to Milblogs: general characteristics of the genre**

##### *4.1.1. What is a blog?*

A Weblog, or blog, is usually defined as “a page that is frequently updated with entries placed in reverse chronological order, with links to the online material you cite” (Blood, 2002: 39). Thus, whereas a homepage may be static (if for instance its primary function is to offer durable information to potential users of a public or private enterprise), an active blog is by definition dynamic. As a log, its primary function is to provide the reader with frequent updates, an element of novelty which is also emphasised by the fact that the blog's most recent entries, the newest pieces of information are

placed at the top. To read a blog is to read back in time, and efficient blogs are updated at least several times a week.

The Internet provides modern man with hitherto unseen possibilities of exhibitionism, and the idea of online diaries already occurred as early as the 1990s with the spread of new technology (Blood, 2002: 1). Thus, strictly speaking, the first online diaries occurred very early. However, the real proliferation of blogging came with the accessibility of easy-to-use software, provided by e.g., *blogspot.com* and *livejournal.com*, which made the genre available to everyone around the turn of the millennium. In the pioneer days, posting on the Internet required knowledge of homepage programming. Today, any internet user can easily establish his or her own blog without any prior knowledge of for instance HTML-coding or CMS-technology. During the past couple of years, the number of blogs has grown with an immense speed. Between 2002 and 2008, *Technorati.com*, a site surveying the Internet, and especially focusing on the use of blogging, registered 133 million blogs (State of the blogosphere 2008; Technorati 2008), and the number is exponentially increasing. A rough estimate says that the number of blogs double every five months (State of the blogosphere, 2007). Blogs are now part of everyday language not only as a simple noun. 'To blog' is a verb. 'A blogger' is a title. And 'the blogosphere' indicates a (virtual) space, characterised by its own rules of social conduct (Blood, 2002: 101-125).

Yet, just like access to the fair new world of posting on the Internet has changed over time, so has the content of this genre. The first blogs were "news sites" or "filters", which collected information about subjects of interest for a particular group (Blood, 2002: 3; Roering, 2007: 184). Especially dominating among these "community sites" were, on the one hand, groups with an interest in Information Technology (who could increase their knowledge both by networking and by running the network sites), and groups devoted to the same political course: First and foremost conservatives, who, in a hostile world, found a sanctuary on the Internet.<sup>58</sup> However, with the proliferation of the technology, another type of blogs came to dominate.

By the end of the 1990s, everybody could post their thoughts on a personal site. Therefore, blogging also became more personal (Blood, 2002: 5). A media of public debate now became an extremely individualised media of self-reflection. Yet, this did not alter the fundamentally opinionative nature of blogging. Community blogs bring together individuals and enable them to share opinions in a common space. In that perspective, a blog entails, by

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<sup>58</sup> Recent research shows that this might be changing. At least since 2007 the left has taken lead in the blogosphere as well (Karpf, 2009: 33).



definition, a personal dimension.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, personal blogs constitute a media of debate. Most entries are attached with an invitation to respond, and even though the owner of the blog may edit, delete or add responses, the intention of establishing a genuine two-way communication is clearly a significant characteristic of the blog (Wall, 2005: 156, 165).

Blogs can be divided into numerous subgenres, distinguished from one another by *who* the blogger is, *why* he blogs, *to whom* he addresses his postings, and *how* – which technology does he use to spread his messages. Thus, blogging can cover ordinary diaries (stretching from superficial day-to-day annals to very detailed and intimate descriptions of all aspects of private life); blogs with the purpose of sharing knowledge (among researchers or groups with mutual interests); opinion blogs; mediablogs (which either supplement or compete with more common ways of journalism); and eyewitness blogs (Dearstyne, 2005: 40; Snider, 2003: 40). We can also distinguish between ordinary *written blogs*, *moblogs* (i.e., picture blogs, where the owner uploads pictures from the camera on his cell phone) and *vblogs* (i.e., postings primarily consisting of filmed sequences). Last but not least, blogging is also an integrated part of related Web 2.0 phenomena, such as social network services (e.g., MySpace, Facebook and especially Twitter), and video sharing websites (YouTube).

#### 4.1.2. *Milblogs, warblogs and front-line blogs*

Military weblogs cover all these subcategories. Milblogs can be written *by* men and women of all ranks, by military personnel, private contractors, journalists, civilians on the ground, relatives, and people with an interest in or an opinion on military affairs. Milblogs can be written *for* relatives back home, fellow servicemen, the readers of a newspaper, other bloggers or the general public. Milblogs can contain information *about* personal beliefs or doubts in the course, about feelings of loneliness or comradeship, and about everyday life on the Forward Operations Base (the FOB) or the muddy and bloody reality of warfare.

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<sup>59</sup> That counts even for blogs published on the domain of a private or public enterprise. Many modern organisations encourage or demand their employees to use a blog probably due to three reasons. First, a log is an excellent tool of documentation. In that respect, the blog can offer both the employer and the employee a very clear and instantly accessible picture of the progress of a specific job. Secondly, the blog gives the outside reader a personal angle, a valuable PR asset for any enterprise. Thirdly, the blog offers a media of debate which can be useful both in regard to discussing questions that suddenly come up, or to get an idea of what is going on among the employees.

Like blogging in general the heterogeneous subgenre of milblogs has also undergone a development from networks to personal accounts, but access to milblogs is still very much mediated by larger networks sites such as *the Mudville Gazette*, *Blackfive*, *the Sandbox* or *Milblogging.com*.<sup>60</sup>

The heterogeneity of the genre makes further specifications necessary. Johanna Roering distinguishes between milblogs in general and warblogs in particular, i.e., blogs specifically written by participants in hostile actions.<sup>61</sup> The term “warblog” is, however, also ambiguously used.<sup>62</sup> Let me therefore specify that, even though I will use the terms indiscriminately, the posts I analyse in the following are all “military front-line blogs”, i.e., blogs written by persons serving in the Armed Forces in a war zone. Hence, this study does not include civilians or private contractors.

Serving in a war zone does not necessarily mean participating in actual fighting. Therefore, I distinguish between “combat” and “non-combat front-line blogs”.<sup>63</sup> In a Low Intensity Conflict, like the counter-insurgency war fought by the Coalition in Iraq, (and by NATO in Afghanistan), the line between the combat soldier and other groups of personnel may, of course, be blurred. This is clearly emphasised by the fact that soldiers in Iraq receive combat bonus as part of their salary, regardless of their function on the

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<sup>60</sup> Jill Walker Rettberg, whose hypothesis in regard to the study of blogs as narratives I addressed in the last chapter, distinguishes between blogs as a medium, a technological framework developed in the late 1990s, and blogging as a genre, a particular combination of style and content (Rettberg, 2008: 19-21). Following this distinction, we may regard military blogging as a particular subgenre of the general phenomenon, and, in that respect, distinguish between the characteristics of this subgenre and the different media in which military blogs occur more and more often, e.g., on MySpace. Yet, in this context, focus will be on military blogs posted by means of traditional blogging software solutions, provided sites like blogger.com and livejournal.com because these blogs are publicly accessible.

<sup>61</sup> “Um eine direkte Beteiligung am Kriegsgeschehen zu kennzeichnen, wird häufig der Begriff Warblog gewählt” (Roering, 2007: 186).

<sup>62</sup> With reference to Roering but, nevertheless, defining the phenomenon differently, Kellner distinguishes between milblogs as blogs written specifically by servicemen, and warblogs as blogs reporting from a warzone, but not necessarily written by military personnel (Kellner, 2008: 320). This would include the widely read blog Pax Salaam written by a young Iraqi man before, during and after the invasion of his country. The online discourse of civilians in a battlefield is beyond the scope of this study, and therefore I prefer to use the more specific term: military front-line blog.

<sup>63</sup> Strictly speaking, a “combat blog” could be any weblog depicting fighting of any kind, regardless of the extent of the conflict or the actors involved, from gang wars to regular wars between states. In this context I focus on *military* front-line combat (and non-combat) blogs only.

ground. Nevertheless, building on the findings in earlier studies of motivation, a fundamental assumption of this study is that actual combat experience may make a difference. I distinguish between front-line blogs containing pieces of information about fighting in which the author has actually been engaged, and blogs which do not.

Naturally, combat front-line blogs contain many other things than combat stories. They also describe dullness of the everyday life for the serviceman placed in a war zone far away from home, helping civilians and facing opponents in a culture which he struggles to understand. However, different from blogs written by servicemen solely on a Forward Operations Base (FOB) or in the Green Zone in Bagdad, the authors of combat blogs have faced death as part of their service, an experience which, according to the literature in this field, should make all the difference. In the category, I therefore include all soldiers whose functions have placed them in the line of fire, and not only soldiers and marines serving in actual combat units.

So, who is covered by the sample? First, I focus on American servicemen, not on their British, Israeli or Danish brothers in arms. Second, I limit my sample to military personnel serving in Iraq, not Afghanistan, not in Central America, not back home in the United States. Third, despite the fact that some military frontline bloggers began to write before their deployment to Iraq, and that some have chosen to continue their blog after returning home, I focus on what they write during their deployment.

Limiting ones focus may be one of the most valued virtues of any scholar, but as any other choice, it also has its consequences. Thus, readers of this dissertation will look in vain for comparisons of statements by American bloggers and blogs written by other nationalities. Likewise, I pay little attention to the differences between military blogging and blogging in general.

## **4.2. The advantage of studying milblogs**

Why study military blogs? For four main reasons: Unlike interview data, collected using either a quantitative or a qualitative research strategy, military blogs give us access to the thoughts and minds of soldiers in their own words. Unlike letters and diaries, military blogs provide us with this information shortly after the occurrences described have actually taken place, and unlike any other source, milblogs are instantly publicly accessible. Lastly, front-line blogs should be studied because they constitute a new and unexplored field of research in regard to soldier justifications.

### *4.2.1 Milblogs: A new source*

As far as the last reason is concerned, Front-line blogs should be studied, simply because they are there. They exist and have caught the attention of

both the press and the military authorities. They are part of the discursive totality which contributes to our perception of the war in Iraq. Today, more than 2000 military blogs are registered on milblogging.com, a number that has been constantly growing, since the opening of the site in 2005.<sup>64</sup> To this number, we should add the blogs not registered on this site, which includes most of the 20,675 persons who, on their MySpace profile, claim to write from the war zone in Iraq.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Milblogs: A valuable qualitative source

Front-line blogs are elaborate written statements. Compared with for instance quantitative survey data, blogs provide us with the opportunity of analysing justification in-depth. By no means, do I wish to disregard the advantages of quantitative sources, neither in general nor regarding the study of motivation in particular. As mentioned above, the achievements of the large-n, quantitative study per se, the study of *The American Soldier* still constitutes the basis of both all later studies in soldier motivation, (including this), and, largely speaking, of modern social sciences. However, since blogs share some of the characteristics of a diary proper, they provide us with more dense material than can be contained in any quantitative, or deductively produced source.

The world is complex. The goal of all science is to produce systematic knowledge about the world. Therefore science is all about reducing complexity. Social sciences are no exception to this rule. The quantitative-qualitative debate is not about whether we need to reduce complexity, but how to do so; by reducing complexity you cannot have your cake and eat it: Either you can go in depth or you can go in width. By doing the latter, quantitative studies reduce the number of variables and maximise the possibility of inferring from

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<sup>64</sup> It does not mean that the actual number of new military blogs does not vary over time. The number of servicemen deployed, military regulations, and the introduction of new, supporting or competing, means of communication, may very well influence the use and the publicity of blogs. Milblogging.com search the web for new blogs, and thus it is the editor's effort and work load which in the end decides how many new blogs the site registers per month.

Milblogging.com started up as one of many private initiatives in the blogosphere and aimed at collecting and distributing the knowledge of online discourse from the war zone. Today, the site has been taken over by military.com, a semi-official site for servicemen, relatives and people with a general interest in the military. Other initiatives, none of which to my knowledge have reached the number of blogs as milblogging.com, are Lt. Smash' *mudvillegazette.com*, Matthew Currier Burden's *blackfive.com* and the cartoonist G. B. Trudeau's *Doonesbury's the Sandbox (Blackfive.; Doonesbury-the sandbox.; Milblogging.com.; The mudville gazette.)*

<sup>65</sup> That number includes the 18,627 men and the 2,048 women, who also provide their site with a photo. *MySpace.com*, accessed September 5, 2008.

the findings. Therefore, most quantitative studies are also deductive: In order to limit the number of variables, the variables have to be chosen beforehand. The great advantage of this procedure is that it enables us to gain general knowledge about a phenomenon across a large number of cases. The great disadvantage is that it forces us to fit reality into categories, deriving from theory, and not necessarily from reality itself.

Had I used data limiting the characteristics of justification to a fixed number of values chosen beforehand, I would have violated the explorative purpose of this study. Using blogs allows me to study how the social actors themselves structure the justifications. Unlike data deriving from a large-n survey, or even a semi-structured qualitative interview, military blogs provide us with the viewpoint of the military personnel, independently of the theoretical categories or operationalised questions developed by me as a researcher.

Apart from not being affected by pre-categorisation, blogs are not contaminated by the problems of interview-effects either. In that regard, using blogs solves a fundamental hermeneutic problem connected to all social research in general and to qualitative research in particular: The interaction between social actor and social scientist. Granted, as I shall return to below, solving one hermeneutic problem may lead to others: Technology or the public exposure might determine what is articulated and what is left in silence. Yet, these effects cannot be tracked back to the researcher, and hence mediating effects are reduced to a minimum: I may be accused of over-interpreting the data at hand, but not of probing the questions.<sup>66</sup>

#### *4.2.3. Front-line blogs and other first person accounts*

In that regard, blogs share some essential characteristics with letters and diaries proper. Like milblogs, soldier letters and diaries are first person accounts, written from a war zone by those who fight and experience war on the ground. Like milblogs, such letters and diaries are written by the social actors themselves, not by the researcher. And like blogs, letters and diaries are genuine sources, created for a range of different reasons, but not for the sake of research.

Soldier stories are not exactly a new genre. In fact, the first person war account has probably existed as long as man has gone to war, and in that as-

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<sup>66</sup> One could, of course, construct an experimental research design in which the researcher placed comments on different blogs in order to see if the reactions varied systematically according to social background, type of blog or type of comment. I have chosen not to, and tried to interact with the military bloggers as little as possible in order to avoid possible effects of self-selection or satisfying.

pect the genre predates art and writing. Nevertheless, the differences between letters and diaries on the one hand, and blogs on the other should be taken into account.

First, war letters and war diaries are fundamentally private. They only become part of general public discourse when someone other than the soldier on the battlefield decides to make them public.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, military blogs are instantly accessible to anyone, anywhere. The time lack between the actual events and the articulation of these events in the milblog is significantly shorter. It should be counted not in years, but in minutes, hours or days. Reading military blogs is reading expressions of the servicemen, written and published while they are deployed, and (allegedly) not through the filter of personal, commercial or political interests of the relatives and the newspaper or publishing house editors who chose to print them.

We know combat soldiers' experiences change over time and are influenced by both the patterns of evaluation and reporting within the military system and by the readjustment to the norms and values of civilian life (Allison, 2004: 78-79). In that aspect, the analysis of milblogs may offer an invaluable source in reconstructing such processes of change. Even though the soldier diary is not a new genre, milblogs offer a unique access to the deliberations of the deployed servicemen while the occurrences they describe actually take place. In that aspect, they differ radically from other instances of first-person accounts which, if actually written during the wars, are normally published years later.

#### *4.2.4. The public-private quarrel*

Finally, milblogs are publicly accessible. Milblogs engage in the public debate and affect public opinion. That is, in regard to this dissertation, the most central feature of the genre. Implied in the logic of the sacrifice, described above, is the assumption that soldier sacrifices have always been justified with reference to the common good, to the community in whose name they die. Earlier, the soldiers themselves had little say in this matter, and in that respect the justificatory regime of the national ideology could remain absolute despite that soldiers actually died for each other and not for the nation. The sacrificial ideology could remain unchallenged, and the latent purpose of the sacri-

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<sup>67</sup> Objectively seen, the person who decides to publish a diary or a written correspondence between a serviceman and his relatives at home might of course be the serviceman himself. Yet, for practical and military reasons, he will only be able to do so after he has left the front-line. He will do so not as a front-line soldier, but as a *former* front-line soldier.

fice could remain concealed. The publicity of blogs might change that, and therefore justifications in blogs should be studied.

The fact that military blogs are publicly accessible does not mean they are unfiltered. The very publicity of the genre probably limits, filters, what is actually contained in these war accounts. A diary written for no one else can include information which cannot be part of a publicly accessible document. As I shall return to below, information from a battle zone is of interest to both friends and foes. Hence, the milblogger must be cautious when he writes, and so must the researcher when he reads. For now, allow me for a moment to dwell at another, more general effect of the publicity of a genre.

We normally understand the public in relation to the private. In the private sphere, we can allow ourselves to express things differently than we would normally do in public. Applied to the different genres of war accounts, we may say that whereas the paper dairy is private, the whole idea of running a blog is that it should be public.<sup>68</sup> The media determines the message. In that perspective, we should not expect the same extent of sincerity in military blogs as in military diaries. On the other hand, we should take into consideration that the limits between public and private are constantly negotiated: Moral boundaries have always been changing, and today the possibilities of proliferating written statements, excerpts from personal correspondence or debates, pictures, sound recordings, and videos challenge the way we distinguish between public and private. Therefore, when reading blogs we should be careful not to apply our own (or our parents'), perception of what can be said in private and in public.

Certainly, there might still be differences between what will occur in a paper diary, and what we may find in a blog. Thus, Rachel the Great, the female marine whose posts will be analysed in the next chapter, states:

What's funny, is besides this, I also keep a journal that I write REALLY personal stuff in and I haven't written in that since I got back. I just don't have the heart to. I guess for reasons that I can't name over the internet, I am just broken-hearted (*Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq*: November 18 2005).

Rachel clearly distinguishes between what can be written in her private journal, and what can be said online. However, my point is that what can be regarded as private, as "REALLY personal", changes, from time to time, from one context to another. What used to be private is now personal, is part of the public. It does not necessarily mean that the private space is diminished

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<sup>68</sup> Ordinary, private dairies need not to be on paper. In fact, today most are probably written on laptops. Yet, to keep the distinction between the two genres clear, I stick to the term paper diary.

or will disappear. Moving moral boundaries probably also causes the limits of articulation to change. Hence, a private diary of today might be a whole lot more private than a diary written 40 years ago. Thus seen, the milblog cannot be regarded as a substitute for paper diaries. What is written on paper differs from what appears on a blog. The blog represents something uniquely new. The limits between personal and private are not constant, and personal information contained in a blog may cover articulations which would formerly have been regarded as strictly private.

However, we should not draw the conclusion that the blogosphere is a new public sphere where autonomous individuals exchange their views according to the discourse ethic rules of communicative action (Habermas 1996). Granted, as already mentioned, the blogosphere is regulated by certain rules of interaction and some are *genre specific*. In blogs about science, you do not want to be too political. Some are regarded as *universal*. Blogs invite readers to debate, but to seriously offend other discussants would be regarded as out of place. Some are *pragmatic*. The blogosphere is all about getting read. If your blog is boring, it will not be read.

Yet, in spite of these rules, the sheer size of the blogosphere, and the possibilities offered by the technology for people with specific interests in very specific fields to get in touch with each other, also makes it a highly divided sphere of social interaction. In that respect, the blogosphere is only public by name. Blogs are divided into enclaves of varying isolation, in which people of the same opinion or with similar interests simply confirm each other.

Is that not a great disadvantage when it comes to the study of military blogs? No, only if we see front-line blogs as an unfiltered source to the mind of fighting men. Instead, we should acknowledge that they are not. We should distinguish between the *actual motivation* of the serviceman, and the *discourses of war justification*, discourses which have probably been changing along with the changing boundaries separating public and private. Thus seen, military blogs can be studied on their own terms. True, we can say little about the motivation of the serviceman by studying blogs. However, as for the study of justification they provide an invaluable source of information.

#### *4.2.5. The indirect impact of military blogging*

Granted, Compared to other actors in the ongoing battle of defining public perception of the war in Iraq, for instance the government, the opposition, the military organisation, and other media, bloggers constitute a minor voice. On the other hand, this voice is the voice of the serviceman, and may therefore be of pivotal interest to any observer because it claims to be authentic: This is what war is *really* like. This is what *really* happened. This is the *real*



improvements we are making. This is what is so appealing about the front-line blog, for the media, for the ordinary internet user, for the researcher.

Some milblogs have sunk into oblivion, some are only known by friends and relatives, and others are widely read. According to measurement tools set up on their own home pages, popular combat blogs like *365 and a Wakeup* and *Armor Geddon* have had more than 817,000 and 440,000 visitors, respectively, since they started blogcasting from Iraq in 2005.<sup>69</sup> However, what is important in regard to the impact of blogging is not necessarily the number of readers, but also who the readers are, and how they read and interpret the posts. Thus, what should be taken into consideration is the indirect impact of blogging, when blogs interact with other media.

In 2004, when the gloves had been taken off in the presidential debate between Bush and Kerry, a network of conservative bloggers showed that compromising documents, quoted by CBS' Dan Rather on *60 minutes*, regarding George W. Bush' military career were forged. *Swift Boat Veterans for Truth* had successfully been smearing Kerry's reputation as a Vietnam Veteran, and the CBS story was deliberately construed to counter this campaign. But it backfired. The scandal forced Rather, the most respected anchor on news media, to resign. It has ever since been regarded as a powerful evidence of the impact of blogging. However, what really did force Rather to go? Was it the conservative pundits or the fact that other news media were willing to quote them and dig further into the story? The answer is probably both: Blogging made it possible for Rather's critics to get in touch with each other and to find the evidence. Media made the story (Thornburgh & Boccardi, 2005: 22-23; Walsh, 2008)?

Regarding military blogging, the media is important when someone regards it as important. When relatives question whether the military equipment used in Iraq meets basic security demands, these concerns, first raised in military blogs, have a political impact. When other media quote them, military bloggers are given a voice far beyond that of the blogosphere. When military authorities set up rules to control the stream of information from the front-line, including blogs, it indisputably signifies that blogging is regarded as a challenge the military must deal with. When President George W. Bush delivers an encouraging video-speech on the annual milblogging conference, and when he invites a number of the most important military bloggers for tea, it means that someone considers it important to give the impression that

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<sup>69</sup> Accessed October 20 2008. It should be noted that such measures are often defective: What do the counters count – number of different visitors, number of entries (including returning visitors), number of entries on the blog's domain as a whole, or the aggregated number of entries on all subdomains?

there is concordance between the policy of the administration and the opinions of the soldiers. In other words, really depicting reality or not, military blogs are “real in their consequences”.

### **4.3. The volatility of the genre**

Related to the question of the novelty of military blogging, one more general reason to analyse milblogs is the contingency of the phenomenon. The proliferation of new technology and the possibility of storing much information in little space make electronic sources appear more durable than paper sources. Yet, whereas we can restore information written on paper (or parchment) bleached by sunshine, exposed to fire, or soaked in water, electronic storage still has some way to go in that respect. Furthermore, the accessibility, in the future, of information stored electronically, now, depends on the continuous access to technology that can decipher it: Who owns a computer with a 3.5” floppy disc drive today?

Last but not least, by what logic of selection is information preserved for the aftermath? What is stored and what simply disappears? New sources call for new source criticism. That regards military blogging too, a phenomenon that might disappear as fast as it emerged.

#### *4.3.1 From the server to the book shelf*

Milblogs come and milblogs go. Some sites are actively shut down by the writer, either because he cannot maintain them or because he fears abuse of the content. Some are hijacked by companies or interest groups, who use a popular site or an appealing headline to link on to advertising pages. And some blog profiles are removed because of personal commercial interests.

A number of bloggers have been offered book contracts by publishing houses. Colby Buzzell (*My War: Killing Time in Iraq* 2006), Jason Hartley (*Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq* 2005), “American Soldier” (*Soldier Life: A day in the Life of an American Soldier* 2005) and Derek McGee (*When I wished I was here* 2007) have had most of their blogs published in full, whereas those included in anthologies as Matthew Currier Burdens, *The Blog of War* 2006 and Garry B. Trudeau’s, *Doonesbury.com’s the sandbox* 2007, have only had single entries or excerpts hereof published in print.

The translocation from the server to the book shelf ensures the preservation of the blog for the future. Yet, seen from a researcher’s point of view, this is not only an advantage. First, in the cases when a full blog has been published, the blog as a whole, or the passages which can be of greatest interest to the book readers (i.e., the most interesting entries), is no longer accessible

online.<sup>70</sup> Second, the publishing house, not the researcher, decides which blog entries should be preserved, and which will simply be forgotten. Third, decisive elements of the genre of the military blog, e.g., the spelling, the abrupt way, the use of military abbreviations and slang, are all easily lost in the editorial process (Griffin, 2006). This may make the blog more readable for outsiders, those who are not familiar with military slang as well as those who are not familiar with blogs, but it also compromises the authenticity of the milblogs, one of the most important attributes of the genre.

#### *4.3.2 Competing media of expression*

Unlike traditional Internet services based on one-way communication, blogs facilitate reader-response. In that regard, blogs are one significant example of what has been called the second Revolution in Information Technology, or Web 2.0, characterised by a move from vertical to horizontal lines of interaction. Apart from blogging via non-written media, such as the cell phone (moblogs) or video sequences (vblogs), other examples of this development are Instant Messaging (e.g., Microsoft Live Messenger), video hosting websites (YouTube), Voice over Internet Protocol systems (e.g., Skype), and the social network services, (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter).

Milblogs emerged with the development of certain technological advances. The spread of the phenomenon was fuelled by three factors. Practically, new generations of recruits were already confident with the new media when they entered the military. Personally, the blog made it easier for soldiers to keep in touch with those back home. Ideologically, the blog enabled the serviceman to give his version of the story (Baum, 2005). Yet, if these conditions change, so may the use of the media. The fact that blogging is now only one opportunity among many others in the fair new world of Web 2.0, emphasises the conditionality of the milblog.

In that respect, we may already have seen the peak of the military blogs. Social network services provide an alternative media of expression offering the same opportunity to express yourself and stay in touch with those at home in an easy and fairly unconditional way. At the same time, they minimise the risk of compromising Operational Security (the primary concern of the military in regard to these media) because these networks can be closed

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<sup>70</sup> This applies to both Colby Buzzell's blog, *MyWar*, and the blog of *American Soldier*. A non-commercial explanation of why blogs are removed from the internet when published as booklets is that it is in the interest of the writer himself, who risks coming under siege from hundreds of well-meaning therapists, quacks, distant relatives and former school teachers who offer their help. (email correspondence with "American Soldier", October 2007; email correspondence with editor Alexander Bick, April 2008)

or can demand the writer's consent before someone is allowed to read a given site, and generally these media centre more on the network and less on the content of the profile than traditional public blogging.

Military blogging may not exist in future wars. Developments in online discourse challenge both the publicity and the elaborate writings signifying this genre, two main reasons why this phenomenon is particularly interesting in regard to soldier justifications. In order to preserve the knowledge which can be derived from this genre, and in order to enable comparisons with other media used by soldiers in future wars, public front-line blogs ought to be studied.

#### **4.4. Problems and challenges in using milblogs as data**

Studying front-line blogs may contribute to our knowledge of justification in practise, but as any other source it should be used with caution. Some of the general reasons for approaching blogs with a critical distance have already been introduced above. In the following, I will focus on the particular reasons for concern in regard to military blogs. Above all, this hesitance is related to the fact that these blogs are written by military personnel and concern military matters. First, military blogs are biased. Second, front-line blogs short-circuit the military's hierarchical system of communication. Third, blogs jeopardize operational security on the ground.

##### *4.4.1. Milblogs: a biased source*

In a double sense, front-line blogs live their own life. Like other blogs, milblogs are part of more or less closed networks where people of very similar political observance and with very similar views on soldiery most often link to each other. There is little interaction between different groupings, for instance between liberals and conservatives. Moreover, the blogosphere constitute a world of its own. Therefore, milblogs are not necessarily a representative sample of the military.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have found very few African American bloggers. And, even though the typical military employee would be Caucasian and male, the share of ethnic minorities grew significantly in all military branches with the introduction of the All Volunteer Force in 1973 (Segal, 1994: 619; Moskos & Janowitz, 1974: 112). This is not represented in the milblogs.

One very simple explanation of this misrepresentation is that ethnicity correlates with Socio-Economic-Status. According to *Technorati.com* and to PEWs major *Internet and American Life* project, American bloggers tend to be higher educated than the average American internet user (State of the blogosphere 2008; Lenhardt et al., 2006: 23). Given the fact that white Ameri-

cans are higher educated than black Americans, they might therefore also be more prone to express themselves in writing, in for instance blogs. As the PEW report also shows that black internet users are more likely to blog than white internet users, this is probably not the only reason why African Americans are underrepresented in the military blogs (Lenhardt et al., 2006: 3). Its explanatory value is, nevertheless, strengthened by the fact that on MySpace, where blogging is only an option and not the aim of the media, the distribution of whites and blacks matches that of the armed services much better (State of the Blogosphere 2007; Population representation in the Military Services).<sup>71</sup>

A second and more severe problem in this context is the overrepresentation of conservatively minded milbloggers. Again, this is not surprising: A majority of the personnel are men, and men are usually more conservatively minded than women. The military is almost by definition a conservative institution. Since drafting was abandoned in the wake of the Vietnam War, when liberal became another word for anti-military, a military career has attracted more conservatives than liberals (Ricks, 1997; Holsti, 2001: 98). Yet, what makes it difficult to infer from online discourse to real-life discourse in this respect is the problem of a potential “double bias”: military blogs are conservatively biased because they are written by military personnel, but the fact that they are blogs also amplify this characteristic.

Everybody blogs, but with talk radio as a prominent exception blogging is the only media that does not exclude the political right, and many conservatives view blogging as “their” media (Adamic & Glance, 2005). When conservative pundits forced Dan Rather to resign, the agenda was clearly political, but the attack was not only perceived as an attack on Rather’s attempt to smear George W. Bush. It was also seen as a clash between a dominating media network (CBS) and a group of courageous individuals (the bloggers) who successfully revealed the truth.

Among conservatives, there is a widespread notion that leading media, reaching from television and cable networks to newspapers and the intellectual elite in general, are liberally biased. Despite the fact that the liberals have not dominated the legislative, executive or judicial powers for the past 40 years, they have still, in the eyes of the conservatives, been able to domi-

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<sup>71</sup> Another explanation might be that white Americans are more eager to engage in public debates than black Americans, who instead stick to media as MySpace that enable them to keep in touch with their friends and family without the interference of others.

nate public discourse by dominating the main stream media.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the empirical value of this notion, which is debated, it offers an extremely useful narrative which military bloggers also make use of (Kuypers, 2002: 19; Alterman, 2004: 3). Thus, conservative military bloggers see themselves as engaged in a struggle against the critical and sensationalist war coverage of the main stream media.

This struggle clearly has mythological potential too. Structurally, it is David against Goliath, Open Range Cattlemen against Landowners. Historically, it applies to the conservative self-perception of victimization. As reflected in the name of Jerry Fallwell's "Moral Majority", conservative Christians regard themselves as being deprived of, and obliged to strive for winning back their fundamental (majority) rights. Starting from Fallwell's staunch rhetoric, the movement has refined the arguments, so that they fit not only the idea of a great conspiracy, but also the argumentative structure endorsed by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s: that the equality of men has been tampered by those who admit "special rights" to certain groups. For the civil rights movement, it was the special rights for whites, for the Conservative Christians, the special rights for homosexuals, Darwinists and pro-choice physicians (Klemp, 2007: 539-40).

Why is this relevant in regard to military blogging? Because many military bloggers emphasise that they provide the public with an alternative to the biased war coverage of the liberal media. Like weblogs in general, military weblogs are seen as engaged in a battle over the hearts and minds of the public. In fact, the wish to tell the *true* story is the second-most important reason for starting a milblog, only superseded by the wish to stay in touch with those back home (Robbins, 2007: 110). This mistrust can be expressively political as when milbloggers characterise CNN as the "Communist News Network" (Roering: 186; Sandgram January 27, 2006). Yet, the scepti-

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<sup>72</sup> For the past 40 years, the Democrats have had majority in the House in 13 out of the 20 congressional terms, and in both chambers in 11 out of 20. Yet, since 1969, the GOP has been in office in 7 out of 10 presidential terms. During the 1970s, the Supreme Court was dominated by judges nominated by Kennedy and Johnson. In 1972, the Court prohibited the death penalty (*Furman vs. Georgia*) and in 1973, it made abortion legal (*Roe vs. Wade*). Yet, starting in 1980 (*Beck vs. Alabama*) and speeding up when William Rehnquist in 1986 became Chief Justice, things changed: The court showed concern regarding the use of Affirmative Action, became more tolerant towards integrating religion and politics, and finally the death penalty was reintroduced and the view on abortion was moderated (a moderation which, however, still confirmed the right to a first trimester abortion, and therefore could hardly be characterised as unequivocally pro-life.)

cism also reflects a more general widespread frustration about news coverage among military personnel.

This constitutes an emblematic example of the difficulty of combining, in a modern democracy, the very different interests of the news, of the military authorities and of the individual soldiers. For news reporters and editors, the primary criteria according to which they choose and frame their stories, is that of *novelty*. This is likely to put them at odds with military interests: In a Low Intensity Conflict, there is no victory and no defeat, only what may seem as small insignificant steps forward and backwards, and in lieu of grand narratives of success, stories of small failures will do.

For the military authorities, the media represent a necessary evil to be endured in order to achieve the public attention without which financial requests will be hard to meet. Yet, in a military context, “the lesson from Vietnam” was the lesson about what goes wrong when the stream of information is left uncontrolled: The US was never defeated in Indo-China, but the media, the liberal media, caused opinion on the home front to change irrevocably, and the battle over the hearts and minds was lost (Merom, 2003: 22).

Finally, the individual soldier’s interests are at odds both with those of the news media and those of the military authorities. Their frustration about the superficial and sensational war coverage centring on tragedies and back steps is outspoken in the blogs and reflected in their wish to tell another, more personal and more authentic story. Yet, as will be discussed in the following, fulfilling this wish is not necessarily in accordance with the military authorities’ interest in controlling the stream of information from the battle field.

#### **4.5. Milblogs and War 2.0<sup>73</sup>**

The original ambition of the Internet was to create a network whose existence depended not on the centre but on the connections between the nodes – a network where everything could be seen as periphery. The idea was that by establishing such a horizontal, centre-less structure, communicative infrastructure could be maintained even in the case of a full-blown nuclear war (Hughes 1998). In that view, the debate about milblogs and the military is not without its moments of irony: The horizontal structure of the Internet, originally created with a clear military purpose, is now a problem for the very same military because it challenges its vertical lines of command and communication.

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<sup>73</sup> The subtitle War 2.0 is from Thomas Rid’s 2007 article, referred to below.

#### *4.5.1 Short-circuiting the vertical lines of communication*

It can be discussed whether Web 2.0 should in fact be seen as a revolution or simply as a natural development, a more in-depth utilization of the potentiality of modern Information Technology. Yet, in a military context, any amplification of horizontal lines of communication is bound to be at odds with existing hierarchical practices of the system.

Few organisations are as hierarchical as the military: The “line of command” determines not only who does what but also who talks to whom. This has its clear advantages. It reduces the risk of losing information. When communication follows already sketched out guidelines, it leaves little doubt about with whom to share a given piece of information. Further, it makes it easier to place the blame when something goes wrong, when the lines of communication are broken. Finally, clear vertical lines of communication create order in chaos. Communication is the fundament of manoeuvres: Without knowing where the enemy is, or where your friends are, there is no flanking, no holding the position, no tactical retreat. Communication is the fundament of discipline: Without clear orders, soldiers do not fight, they run.

Today, however, the structure of the military hierarchy is challenged at, at least, three levels: *War has changed*. In Low Intensity Conflicts, traditional distinctions between friends and enemies, lines and staff, combat soldiers and non-combat soldiers, can be difficult to maintain (van Creveld, 1991). *Technology has changed*. The possibilities of communication across the hierarchical structure have never been greater, and military blogging provides an excellent proof that these new lines of communication are not only confined to the military system. *Military personnel have changed*: Contrary to many of their superiors, new recruits were not born into a bi-polar world with symmetrical adversaries, and they have not been brought up accepting the inevitability of traditional hierarchical structures (Baum, 2005; Rid, February 2007).

New recruits tend to master new technology better than their superiors. Hence, the advantages of experience, separating junior and senior personnel, are counterbalanced by advantages of insight into the fair new world of Information Technology. On the one hand, this lack of respect for hierarchical structures and this asymmetry between technological knowledge and military rank potentially undermine the organisational structure of the military. On the other hand, in a time when both the conduct of warfare and the technology available provide new challenges, this might just be the sort of human resources, the military needs.

The Vietnam War was a hard-earned lesson for the military in terms of information control. This regarded not only external lines of communication



(how to handle the press), but, as argued above, also the question of how to maintain unit cohesion. Since the early 1980s, the US Army has therefore tried to facilitate the exchange of experiences between men on the ground, for instance by establishing the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), at Fort Leavenworth, Ka. The problem with CALL was that it was still structured as a military institution in accordance with the vertical, hierarchical lines of the military. Information had to be verified and declassified, and it could be added only by following existing lines of command (Baum, 2005).

In the end, the most important step in regard to facilitating horizontal exchange of information within the military was taken by two private individuals, Major Nate Allan and Major Tony Burgess. They established two internet-based homepages, *companycommand* and *platoonleader*. In these sites, captains and lieutenants could ask questions and exchange experiences about everything, ranging from the appropriate reaction if a subordinate gets pregnant to the best way of placing sandbags in a vehicle in order to minimise the impact of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

At first, military authorities reacted by routine and tried to have the web-sites shut down. Luckily, however, especially for the two Majors, who faced a swift and dishonourable end of their military careers, the Army chose to implement and improve the two services. Today, *companycommand* and *platoonleader* are placed on a West Point server, and CALL has established the service CAVNET, where soldiers, regardless of rank, can exchange daily up-to-date information about occurrences in their Area of Operations.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4.5.2 *The advantages of milblogs for the military*

We know that individuals who consider enlisting, and servicemen who are about to be deployed, read milblogs in order to prepare themselves (Robbins, 2007).<sup>75</sup> As the most relevant information concerning military matters are often classified, a military blog is not an appropriate medium to exchange experiences. Yet, the benefits of the integration of *companycommand* and *platoonleader* also point to some of the advantages which front-line blogging may offer the military.

First, knowledge about the morale of the men is crucial for any military organisation. Milblogging offers a window to the morale. Granted, blogs do

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<sup>74</sup> The advantages of these US ARMY solutions have even been emphasised by officers of the United States Marine Corps. Thus, Thomas Rid quotes a Junior Marine officer for describing *companycommand* and *platoonleader* as “superior to anything the Marines have, because they treat their users as peers” (Rid 2007)

<sup>75</sup> See for instance *Dadmanly*, “Tips for deployment to Iraq”, August 6 2005; “Profiles: the CSM”, August 14 2005, and *Austin Bay Blog* “Advice For A Troop Deploying To Iraq”, May 8 2005.

not provide the military authorities with sufficient knowledge of soldier morale. We cannot necessarily infer from online discourse to real-life discourse. However, if something is on the online agenda, it would be hazardous not to check if this is a general matter of concern among the men. Shutting down blogs, may deprive the military of a daily updated insight in what is debated in the barracks.

A second good reason for the military to encourage a continuous use of milblogging is that the media may serve as a safety valve, a way of letting out steam. We live in a time when the perceived distance between the deployed serviceman and his relatives (thanks to VoIP, digital cameras, and blogs) seems to shrink. Yet, we also live in a time where the distance between the reality of war and civilian everyday life is probably increasing: Soldiers who were deployed in World War II had grown up (and left their loved ones at home) in a civilian world where death played a much more significant role than it does today. Their experiences on the front line were still extreme compared to what they were used to, and in the transition from military to civilian life, they could probably have been offered more and better ways of coping with these experiences. Yet, they belonged to a generation that had grown up under the great depression, in a society where child mortality rate was significantly higher than today, and where a larger part of the population lived in the country side. Hence, the cycle of life probably played a more eminent part of their lives than it does for young men and women today. In a time, when coping with war experiences is regarded more important than ever before, the therapeutic potential of writing about and sharing ones experiences, should be taken into consideration by the military authorities (Calvert, 2006; Kimball, 2006).

The third advantage is closely related to milblogs being viewed as authentic. Milblogs offer an extremely valuable PR-asset. Unlike press releases sent out via the military's official channels, milblogs are regarded as the voices of the individual servicemen on the ground: the voices of American fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters; not of a faceless organisation. Even though the interests of the individual serviceman and the military organisation may sometimes be at odds, most of the time both parties have a genuine interest in promoting the military cause, which would probably also apply even if the vast majority of the military weblogs were not conservatively biased (Anderson, 2006: 36).

No matter whether you were for or against the war from the outset, military failure on the front-line may affect the course of your own life drastically here and now. Furthermore, if primary group cohesion is still a strong factor in morale, giving up the cause in Iraq would easily be regarded as letting

down those who have sacrificed their lives there. The fact that the blogs are likely to be conservatively biased, only amplifies this pro-military tone. Shutting down milblogs would deprive the military an important voice in the public sphere, a voice which by the press, the politicians, and interest groups can be framed as more authentic and less engaged in the game of politics than the military organisation itself (Griffin, 2007).

#### **4.6. Blogging and security**

Despite these, theoretical, advantages, focus in the debate about blogs and the military, has mostly centred on the disadvantages of milblogging, disadvantages which can be divided into three sub problems.

##### *4.6.1. Information control*

First, who controls the stream of information? In World War II, all communication between soldiers and relatives was by post. In Vietnam, it was possible for soldiers to call home via telephone. In Iraq, today, every serviceman has brought his own cell-phone, can use email and VoIP, or keep his relatives updated on a daily basis via Web 2.0 media: blogs, videos or Social Network Services. When information not only travels by the speed of light, but is also disseminated by the speed of light, the potentially damaging effect of the messages sent out via other channels than the military's own comes into question with renewed strength. The messages may contain information which can be damaging for morale: either the morale of the troops or, just as devastating, morale on the home front.<sup>76</sup>

The dilemma is clear, but not easy to solve. On the one hand, the military has an interest in close contact between servicemen and relatives in order to avoid isolation from the surrounding society; in the end, their judging of the justification of the military engagement determines whether the continuous war effort will be supported. On the other hand, the right information in the wrong place (or the wrong information in the right place), can turn the tide of public opinion. Were it not for digital photography and the fact that the pictures from Abu Graib flourished on the Internet before reporters became aware of them, rumours of Americans humiliating Iraqi prisoners would have been little more than rumours.

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<sup>76</sup> For that reason we cannot reject the possibility that some bloggers may be paid or placed by military authorities to strengthen morale. Commercial blogging is a widespread phenomenon (Chenelly, 2005).

#### *4.6.2. Discipline*

The second problem in regard to milblogging and the military concerns the maintaining of disciplinary standards. These standards are articulated in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), where especially articles 88, 92, 133, and 134 have been discussed in regard to milblogging (Lytle, 2006; Den Bleyker, 2006; Michel, 2005; Robbins, 2007; Rosengarten, 2006; Kiel, 2007; Kimball, 2006). Article 92 regards neglect of a direct order which would be most relevant if a serviceman violated operational security and refused to remove the material from his blog. Both article 88 and article 133 concern only officers.<sup>77</sup> Article 133 specifically regards conduct unsuitable for “an officer and a gentleman”, and article 88 regards the use of derogatory remarks about the President or other public authorities. Here, the latter is especially relevant because the blog is a media of debate. Hence, the risk of very opinionative expressions about the leadership is very concrete.

Yet, whereas Air Force Major General Harold Campbell was sacked and fined 7000\$ after characterising President Clinton as a “dope smoking’, ‘skirt chasing’, and ‘draft dodging’ Commander-in-Chief”. And, in spite of the fact that GOP policy may be regarded as more pro-military, high-ranking officers have also been released of their duties for contemptuous remarks about George W. Bush (Kiel, 2007: 75-76). Article 134, known as “the general article”, was created with the clear purpose of collecting all violations of military order, not caught by the rules of the other articles. The fact that it does not regard any specific scenario makes it therefore a useful tool in the regulation of swiftly changing online discourse.

#### *4.6.3 Operational Security*

The third problem with military blogging regards the observance of Operational Security (OPSEC). OPSEC rules concern information which can be used by the enemy, and Army policy in that respect is articulated in article 530-1 of the Army Regulations (Army Headquarters 2007). The most obvious violations of these rules regard the disclosure of information about tactics, military equipment or personnel.

Giving away information about tactics, about how military units act and react may enable the enemy to seize the Clausewitzian “momentum”, to take and to hold the initiative in battle. Information about the advantages and weaknesses of military equipment enables him to distribute his efforts in order to inflict as much damage as possible. Likewise, information about per-

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<sup>77</sup> Central parts of the UCMJ, including these two articles, which emphasise the officer’s duties as a role model, were adopted from similar regulations used by the British Army before Independence.

sonnel may provide the enemy with valuable tools of prioritising his means, how to spot officers, how to tell experienced units from inexperienced ones, where to aim to inflict most psychological damage.

It is in this regard that the problems concerning milblogging have been most intensely debated (Anderson, 2006; Arndt, 2007; Brant, 2005; Robbins, 2007; Rosengarten, 2006; Griffin, 2007; Keyes, 2007; Kimball, 2006). In all cases, where milbloggers have been charged, the violation of OPSEC rules has been the core issue (Den Bleyker, 2006). Private First Class Leonard Clark from the Arizona National Guard disclosed information about what day a specific attack on a convoy took place and what sort of damage the IED had caused. In this case, the violation was pretty straight forward. By help of the date, the bomb man would be able to locate “his” bomb, and then use the information about the damage inflicted to improve his handicraft. Clark was fined 1700\$ and degraded.

Specialist Jason Hartley of the New York National Guard and the author of *A Year on the Ground in Iraq* was also degraded and fined (1000\$). Allegedly, he had violated both OPSEC rules and the Geneva Convention. As for the latter charge, Hartley had revealed pictures of Iraqi prisoners on his blog, which is no doubt illegal (despite that neither Americans nor Iraqis showed much caution in that respect after the capture of Saddam Hussein). Concerning Operational Security, however, the violation is less clear cut. He had revealed which route the plane that brought him from Kuwait to Iraq followed, and had described how he loaded his weapon. Granted, it is not impossible to imagine a situation in which such information could be used. Yet, this information would not be difficult, (in fact it would probably be a lot easier) to get hold of in other ways.

US Army Major Michael Cohen revealed information about casualties inflicted by a mortar attack on the FOB. In this case, his disclosure of information both violated OPSEC rules, by confirming the success of a particular attack, and the ethical standards normally observed by the Armed Forces, i.e., no one reveals anything about casualties until the family has been notified. Cohen was asked to stop blogging which he did.

Finally, Specialist Colby Buzzell of the US Army caught his superiors' attention because of his famous “men-in-black” entry, in which he describes a skirmish between his Stryker Brigade and Iraqi Insurgents. It was claimed that Buzzell violated OPSEC rules by mentioning the fact that they had to return to the FOB because his unit had run out of water. Again, this could be used by the enemy, but compared to revealing information about the impact of a given IED, it appears rather innocent. Buzzell's CO defended him, and contrary to Clark and Hartley, he was neither degraded nor fined, but simply

asked to let his immediate superiors read his entries before posting them. This demand caused Buzzell to shut down the blog, because he would not want his sergeant to spend time reading diaries when there was a war to fight (*The ground truth from Iraq, to the beltway and back*. 2007).

All these cases are from 2005, at a time when the military had no clear policy on blogging. Therefore, the soldiers involved had their cases formally tried. However, after 2005, the first proper regulations came in place, which meant that dealing with blogging was not a legal issue anymore. Now it was and is a purely administrative case which can be handled independently of legal expertise and public attention.

The first regulations specifically regarding military blogging appeared in 2005, in memos authored by Army Vice Chief of Staff Richard Cody, Army Lieutenant General John R. Vines and Army Chief of Staff Peter A. Shoomaker (Shoomaker, 2005; Cody, 2005; Vines, 2005).<sup>78</sup> In order to avoid the potentially damaging effects of blogging, the 2005 regulations demanded that military bloggers had their blog registered in the line of command. Hence, the military authorities could, on a regular basis, control the information coming out of Iraq, and the Army established a unit, the Army Web Risk Assessment Cell (AWRAC), with the exact purpose of surveying military blogs in order to avoid OPSEC violations.<sup>79</sup>

In April 2007, a revised version of article 530-1, the OPSEC article, was released. The revised version integrated and extended the 2005 regulations concerning blogs. Now, army bloggers were not only obliged to have their blogs registered by Army Authorities. They also had to have each entry read through by their immediate superiors before posting it on their blog:

All Department of the Army (DA) personnel (...), and DOD contractors will (...) [c]onsult with their immediate supervisor and their OPSEC Officer for an OPSEC review prior to publishing or posting information in a public forum. (1) This includes, but is not limited to letters, resumes, articles for publication, electronic mail (e-mail), Web site postings, web log (blog) postings, discussion in Internet information forums, discussion in Internet message boards or other forms of dissemination or documentation. (...) (530-1, Chapter 2G April 19, 2007).

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<sup>78</sup> Already in 2003, based on information from an Al Qaida memo saying that 80 pct. of all relevant information about the US military came from open sources, Shoomaker and Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, expressed concern about existing OPSEC regulations (Michnowicz, 2006: 5).

<sup>79</sup> The Virginia National Guard has supplemented this effort by employing ten men, whose sole purpose is to surf the web for OPSEC-violations (Keyes, 2007: 14).

Not surprisingly, this was not received too well in the blogosphere, where tightening control over front-line bloggers was regarded as censorship. Formally speaking, of course, the US military has not used censorship since Korea in the early 1950s, and nothing in article 530-1 prevents the serviceman from saying anything in his blog, as long as it does not violate OPSEC rules. Practically, however, any such regulation is bound to have an effect. First, just like Colby Buzzell retired as a blogger because he did not want to waste his superiors' precious time, others may also choose to stop blogging, or simply refer from starting up a blog at all. Either because they do not want to bother their superiors or simply because having ones entries proofread kills spontaneity, a central element of blogging. Second, when an employer shows expressive concern about using a media of communication, any employee would probably consider not using that media at all. Thus, the regulation of OPSEC behaviour is likely to become a regulation of behaviour in general.

The fear of coming at odds with ones superiors may affect both who blog and what they blog about. In other words, if military bloggers were not already conservative, Army regulations may cause them to appear so anyway. Hence, to the double conservative bias (determined by the facts that more conservatives join the army, and that blogging contrary to other media also attract conservatives), we should probably add a third: the censorship dimension.<sup>80</sup>

When President George W. Bush appeared on screen at the second Mil-blogging Conference, held in Arlington, Va., in early May 2007, it was only a fortnight after the revision of article 530-1. This could be seen as a genuine recognition from the Commander in Chief, despite the Army's attempts to silence the bloggers. Another, more cynical interpretation would be that the gesture signifies exactly the opposite: another mean of controlling the stream of information. Whereas the Army can silence critics by law, the president can silence critics by recognition. The latter interpretation may be supported by the fact that almost simultaneously with Bush' gesture, Army spokesman Paul Boyce moderated the tightening of the OPSEC rules, and emphasised that they should not necessarily be followed word by word. According to the spokesman, the revisions were primarily undertaken to focus attention on, and to teach the servicemen about, the importance of Operational Security (Shane III 2007).

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<sup>80</sup> The suspicion that the tightening of Operational Security rules is used as a form of censorship seems to be confirmed. In three of the four known cases mentioned above, where information revealed online has led to the punishment of a blogger, the person was also critical towards the war in Iraq (Den Bleyker, 2006).

Again, the message may be regarded as a genuine gesture towards the bloggers, or it may be seen as a way of denying accusations of censorship, without actually depriving the military authorities of any of the means articulated in 530-1. What more is, the word was out: The Army has taken precautions against blogging, and has now the means at hand to strike down, whenever it finds it appropriate. If the intention was to scare servicemen from blogging and, in regard to those who do it anyway, to put OPSEC rules on top of the agenda, then the goal was certainly reached (*The ground truth from Iraq, to the beltway and back* 2007).

An inevitable consequence of the tightening of the rules is that bloggers try to move out of the spotlight. They can skip writing online, or they can continue to do so using less public media. The latter can be done in more than one way: They might use a Social Network Service like MySpace or Facebook. Apart from differences between the cohorts who have been going to Iraq, and apart from the fact that differences in Socio-Economic Status might mean that some are less inclined to run a blog than others, the OPSEC concern is probably an important factor in explaining why the number of MySpace profiles maintained from Iraq is so high compared to the number of regular front-line blogs available.<sup>81</sup>

Another way to reduce exposure is to go back to mass-distributed emails. The most moderate endeavour in that regard would be to use the names from your own address book. Hartley chose a more expansionary way, when he was forced to remove some of the most central entries on this blog. He simply gave his readers the opportunity to receive emails containing the information he could not post online.

Ironically, this transposition of online discourse from the public to the private sphere might expose US servicemen more, not less, to violations of OPSEC rules. First, those who are most eager to get the word out will probably try to “fly under the radar”. Thereby the military’s changes of catching sensitive information may become severely diminished (Griffin, 2007). Both blogs and emails are explicitly mentioned in the revised version of AR 530-1. Yet, if you blog, you write to anyone. You compose your entries *knowing* that the enemy might read along. If you write to family and friends, there is less holding you back. However, the information you give is still out, and it can be used by for instance well-meaning relatives and politicians. There are no

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<sup>81</sup> In 2008, the Department of Defence has blocked access to both Social Networks Services and to Video Hosting Services from DoD equipment. The larger FOBs have privately run Internet Cafés, where servicemen can easily update their MySpace profile or upload video sequences, but they must choose to do so actively in their spare time. They cannot simply use a couple of minutes on their work computer.



known examples of violations of OPSEC rules, committed by a front-line blogger that has been used by the enemy. Not surprisingly, who has a greater interest in Operational Security than those who are put in the line of fire. Yet, in public debate relatives as well as politicians and the Department of Defence have frequently revealed details about tactics, equipment and troop morale.

#### **4.7. Analysing milblogs**

If we apply the fundamental criteria for estimating the quality of data, it should be noted, first, that using military blogs as sources poses some fundamental challenges in regard to the *reliability* of these data: The blog is a media in flux, and in regard to milblogs, direct and indirect censorship, copyright laws, and the possibility of fake writers only add to the difficulty of replicating the data collection.

We know very little about the bloggers: What segments of the military do they actually represent? Conservatives are overrepresented in the Armed Forces and also tend to be overrepresented in the military blogosphere. We cannot, however, assume that the latter represents a representative sample of the former. Other factors, e.g., education, media familiarity, or simply boredom, may also determine who chooses to blog and who chooses not to. That problem is even more relevant considering that the Department of Defence has gradually tightened guidelines as to soldiers' use of electronic communication. In the light of that, it cannot be excluded that particular groups, e.g., soldiers critical of the war, simply abstain from blogging out of fear of reprisals. Furthermore, the fundamental prerequisite for making a representative sample cannot be met either since it is extremely difficult to define the actual boundaries of the total population of milbloggers that covers a period of four years. Thus seen, the *external validity* of this inquiry can also be questioned.

However, the crucial question in estimating generalisability is, what do we assume our findings should be representative of? The purpose of this study is not to make general claims about servicemen's general support of the war, but to examine *how* justifications are structured when they are actually made, and, as outlined in regard to the third hypothesis above, to study *whether* civil religion is constant across the differences between the servicemen. In that perspective, it would make little sense to make a random case selection, which, in light of the critique outlined above, would probably result in a sample with very little variation.

For this reason, the cases have not been chosen randomly. Instead, I have tried, by a focused case selection, to build as much variation as possible into my sample, both in the initial comparative analyses as in the large-N study. Moreover, representativity in this context should be measured in regard to

the potential influence in public discourse of a particular blog, or, more specifically, of its argumentative structure. Within each cluster of variation, I have therefore, when possible, chosen the most widely read blogs.<sup>82</sup> Using this approach enables me to map how the most influential bloggers within each of these clusters justify their participation in war and to identify systematic differences between them.

The impact of OPSEC regulations also regards the *ecological validity* of the data. On the one hand, what you write on a blog is bound to differ radically from what you would write in, say, a personal diary, especially being aware that Pentagon is reading along. The blogosphere is not the real world, and we can hardly infer from what we find in the military blogosphere to the genuine thoughts and reflections of the deployed serviceman. On the other hand, the word creates what it articulates. The blogosphere might not be the world, but it is part of the world, and what is said on-line is read and will, presumably, have an effect off-line too. Furthermore, what I am interested in here is not only *what* the serviceman says on-line, but also *how* he says it. Thus seen, I assume that as long as I can isolate different argumentative claims, the justificatory regimes used to support these claims will not alter. If the aim is to examine how justificatory regimes are structured, virtually *and* really, milblogs are the place to look. And in that perspective, the genre is interesting exactly because it represents the real thing: genuine words written by genuine soldiers, and not transcribed, semi-structured interviews in which the findings in the end can be traced back to the words chosen by the interviewer.

Following the line of this argument, both the *measurement validity* and the *internal validity* of using milblogs in this exploratory study and in answering the research questions sketched above, is very high. First, the military blogs provide elaborate written sources, posted by servicemen in the field. In comparison to for instance letters or paper diaries, the accessibility of these sources makes it possible for the researcher to choose relevant cases independently of editors or other researchers, and to analyse data with no risk of the mediating effects, prevalent in both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. Secondly, even though both the quality of my measures and the reach of the conclusions drawn in the last, quantitative analysis, may be discussed, the close focus in the text analyses, allows me to map, with precision, the structure of discourses as well as the processes of development of the blogs analysed, in regard to the single posts and to the development of the narratives.

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<sup>82</sup> Since the military blogosphere is dominated by conservatively minded bloggers who tend to give each other Kodus, this has only been possible in some cases.

## Chapter 5

### In the name of the father(s):

### Dimensions of civil religion in war accounts<sup>83</sup>

In the closing scene of Steven Spielberg's fivefold Oscar winning World War II epos, *Saving Private Ryan*, the wounded Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) addresses the private (Matt Damon), whose life Miller's men were sent out to save in order to secure continuous support for the war effort on the home front. With his dying eyes glancing over the mutilated bodies of those who have fought and died under his command, Miller's last words are "James, earn this ... earn it!" Then the scene changes and we are back at the American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, where the aging James Ryan urges his wife to tell him that he has led a good life, that he has been a good man. By means of both style and content – the change of time, the Stars and Stripes waving over the white crosses behind the Ryans – is it clear that Miller's demand not only concerns the young 101st Airborne GI, who preferred to stay and fight instead of returning with the rescuing squad. First and foremost it addresses us, the moral descendents. Thus, this scene also highlights a central aspect of the sacrifice: that the value of death is defined not by the sacrificial act in itself, but rather by the subsequent interpretations and reaffirmations of this act. In this view, the strength of the sacrifice lies not in the divine references by which it is performed, but in its ability to become a rule of conduct. Spielberg uses the past to create a mirror in which we – posterity – can see our better selves.

Thus, on the one hand, such narratives of the nation seem like modern expressions of a social constant: Only through the myths revealed in such narratives, passed on from one generation to another, can we acknowledge our past and gain a notion of right and wrong; through them we become who we are (Anderson, 1991: 6; Ricoeur, 1980: 189). On the other hand, as Jürgen Habermas argued in the late 1980s, collective identity is not necessarily dependent on the existence of such cross-historical bonds. Patriotism can also be defined by the bonds of the constitution, by the rules defining mutual relationships recognised within a geographically confined space (Habermas, 1997: 143). Hence, we have two ruling notions of national identity: One defined by bridging between past, present and future, and another character-

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<sup>83</sup> This Chapter was published in the anthology *Religion and Normativity*, volume III: Religion, Politics and Law pp. 71-83 (2009). Apart from the members of Research Priority Area that sponsored the publication, I would like to thank Robert Wuthnow for enlightening comments and response on the idea and the study of the dimensionality of American Civil Religion.

ised by the existence of a transcendent principle, by which human interaction can be measured. At face value, both these interpretations of national identity are secular (Anderson, 1991: 36). Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the first of these (the notion that national unity is maintained by the reaffirmation of acts of sacrifice) can also be viewed as an expression of civil religion – that the cult of the national martyr can be seen as a cult proper, situated outside the domain of traditional religion. The question raised in this article, however, is whether the second of these interpretations (the notion that collective identity is established by principles transcending the collective) also has a civil religious equivalent.

I will not claim to be the first to address this question. With reference to Andrew Greeley, Gail Gehrig, who summoned up the civil religion debate in 1979, distinguished between Robert N. Bellah's 'transcendent' civil religion, and American 'folk religion' or 'religion in general' as analysed by Conrad Cherry and Martin E. Marty (Gehrig, 1979: 11-18). Furthermore, in the 1970s as well as today, the distinction between these two dimensions of civil religion was deliberately used to politicise the question of national identity. Hence, Robert Jewett has juxtaposed 'prophetic realism' with 'zealous nationalism' and seen the latter as the dark side of American domestic and foreign policy (Jewett, 1973; Jewett & Lawrence, 2004).

Thus, my contribution in this respect is first and foremost empirical. From Bellah's pioneer article on 'Civil Religion in America' to the study of George W. Bush's post9-11 rhetoric, the political speech has been considered as the archetypical media for expressing civil religion (Bellah, 1991; Bostdorff, 2003; Lincoln, 2004). However, if civil religion is to be evaluated on the same footing as traditional religion, if it is to be seen as something else and more than tropes used by cunning politicians, then these tropes must have a resonator – someone must believe in them. Unlike the surveys in which this demand has been met with regard to the general public, my focus is on those who put their life at stake in the name of the nation – or to be more specific, the military personnel participating in the Global War on Terror.

### **5.1. The two dimensions:**

#### **Transcendent and immanent civil religion**

To sum up, following the distinction between transcendent and immanent national identity, my aim here is to show that we can also find two different ways of civil religious national identity, and that these two dimensions are both present in the justifications presented by servicemen deployed in Iraq.

Table 5.1: Dimensions of national identity

	<b>Transcendent</b>	<b>Immanent</b>
Religious	Vertical civil religion 'prophetic' civil religion (Bellah)	Horizontal civil religion 'priestly' civil religion, folk religion (Marty)
Non-religious	Patriotism Justice before loyalty, constitutionally bound (Habermas)	Nationalism Loyalty before justice, unity across history (Anderson)

'Vertical civil religion', placed in the upper left-hand corner, detaches the actual conductor the nation from that of the national ideal. This is the reason why transcendent civil religion is often regarded in normative approaches as 'prophetic': By means of this detachment the actual deeds of the nation can be deemed just or unjust, in or not in accordance with an external ideal, or in Bellah's words with 'the covenant' (Bellah, 1992: 179). The role of the prophecy – be it in the vision of an Old Testament prophet or in the discourse of prophetic civil religion – is to check the use and abuse of the privileges derived from this covenant.

But unlike patriotism, which exists 'etsi Deus non daretur', its civil religious equivalent specifically implies the existence of a divine being. In this regard it is, of course, similar to 'horizontal civil religion', which is placed in the upper right-hand corner. What sets the two apart is the relation between this divine being and the nation. Immanent civil religion does not detach the divine ideal from the conduct of the nation. Unlike vertical civil religion, in which the nation and the divinity are set apart, horizontal civil religion can only be mediated through the commemoration of the nation itself. To put it in another way: Whereas vertical civil religion emphasises a vertical relationship between temporal and eternal existence, horizontal civil religion focuses on the horizontal relation between past, present and future.

As reflected in the Old Testament vocabulary used in differentiating between 'prophetic' and 'priestly' civil religion, it is not new to distinguish between vertical and horizontal dimensions of religion. In fact, the distinction can be viewed as a core aspect of religion as such. The schism within Christianity which caused the breach between Rome and the Protestant Churches in the 16th century is – at least from the Protestant side – viewed as discord about the interpretation of the relationship between the vertical and the horizontal dimension of religious life. The distinction also transcends the boundaries of theology. In 1972, the sociologist James Davidson conducted a survey among Baptist and Methodist church members in which he showed the pres-

ence of both these dimensions, and demonstrated the way in which denominational affiliation, congregational affiliation and socio-economic status affected these dimensions differently (Davidson, 1972).<sup>84</sup>

As for civil religion, the very idea that our affiliation with society is expressed and enacted religiously is – to certain extent – founded on the distinction between vertical and horizontal religion. In contrast to what is often called ‘political religion’, civil religion does not compete with traditionally institutionalised religion. Political religion, of which the most spectacular example is probably the abuse of religious-like symbols and rituals in totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, deliberately tries to take the place of church religion. It regards church religion as a threat, because the church offers the citizen a social locus beyond the reach of the state, and – as shown by modern history – rightly so.<sup>85</sup> Civil religion has an unexpressed but firmly institutionalised concordance with church religion. As the latter becomes privatised, the former offers a way of publicly expressing unity and community without leaving any breaches in the Jeffersonian ‘Wall of Separation’. As a result of the ongoing process of differentiation, the functions of religion are split in two: Whereas church religion maintains the communication of individual salvation and individual rites of passage, the destiny of society and the observance of public rituals fall within the functional domain of civil religion.

This notion of functional differentiation easily leads to the assumption that church religion only concerns the vertical relation between individual and divine authority, and that the main purpose of civil religion is to maintain the social or horizontal dimension of religion. If this is true, it will render the distinction between immanent and transcendent civil religion implausible. However, before we reject the notion of a transcendent civil religion, two things should be taken into account. First, if the lines of demarcation drawn by social theory are not confirmed in practice, it is the theory that needs to be reconsidered and not the practice. Second, why should civil religion not entail the same complexity as that of church religion? As already noted above, all religion relates the individual both to the realm of transcendence and to

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<sup>84</sup> Davidson’s conclusions apply, of course, mainly to the Protestant denominations which he studies, and the possibility that the results would be different in e.g. a non-Protestant setting cannot be excluded.

<sup>85</sup> I am referring, of course, to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, which was in part facilitated and mediated by the churches. However, the relationship between state and religion in totalitarian regimes is not as unambiguous as expressed by this merely theoretical distinction between civil religion and political religion. In times of trial, the state – no matter how totalitarian it is – will need all the resources at its disposal, including the established churches.

the realm of the immanent. No church is an island. Even though the functional emphasis of church religion is on the personal salvation of the believer, it is forced to relate to the surrounding world, theologically as well as socially. Likewise, the main stance of civil religion may be on the establishment of social unity and coherence, but by implying the existence of a divine being it also implies the possibility of an external perspective on the nation itself – that is the possibility of a transcendent civil religion. Thus, the question is whether our analysis reveals expressions which can be rendered as both civil religious and transcendent – i.e. expressions which relate the “citizens’ role and (...) society’s place (...) to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning” (Coleman, 1970: 70) without identifying this society with the divine cause itself.

Two final theoretical remarks are needed to build a bridge to the methodology. First, I do not imagine that the model proposed above by any means offers a satisfactory framework for interpreting the complex relationship between religion and nationalism. The model is a proposal, and like all proposals it should be subject to criticism and revision in order to meet the intention of the model, which is to offer a point of departure for empirical sensitive studies of civil religion.

Second, it is not my intention to contribute to the politicisation of the civil religion debate. The model is meant to be descriptive. We may with good reason assume that the civil religious dimension one adheres to is connected to one’s political background. Whereas conservatives will probably tend to find immanent civil religion appealing, liberals are more likely to make use of transcendent civil religion. However, bearing this insight in mind I will only use the terms ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ civil religion hesitantly. The insight that political preferences are connected to notions of the relationship between the national and the religious is interesting enough on its own terms, but politicising civil religion easily leads to normative misinterpretations. Claims about good and bad civil religion are more likely to fractionise the common pool of knowledge than to actually contribute to it. Furthermore, such claims also lead to the assumption that these two dimensions are mutually exclusive, which is probably not the case. As the two dimensions coexist in other religious contexts, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of assuming that this is not the case with regard to civil religion. Ann Swidler has convincingly shown that justificatory accounts are extremely context-sensitive; and if that goes for civil religious justificatory accounts, too, we should only infer from discourse to firmly established meanings with great caution (Swidler, 2001: 104).

## 5.2. Data: Milblogs

In order to illustrate the difference between immanent and transcendent civil religion, I will analyse two examples taken from my research into US military blogging in the Global War on Terror.

War stories have probably existed as long as socially organised violence, and to a certain extent the ‘milblog’ (an internet diary or web-log written by one or more servicemen in the field) is a modern version of the classical war letter or soldier diary. Unlike letters or diaries, however, milblogs are written and published shortly after the incidents described have actually taken place. It is therefore tempting to regard the milblog as a hitherto hidden source reflecting the thoughts and feelings of the serviceman— before the evaluation of the military, the development of the war and the concern of the surrounding world frame his view (Allison, 2004: 78-79). This is, of course, only a qualified truth. Like letters and diaries, milblogs do not exist independently of the context in which they emerge. What makes the discourses expressed in the milblog interesting is the fact that they are created while the author is still deployed and without the advantage of hindsight. But they are (and should be) analysed as discourses and not as an unfiltered description of a sequence of events.

Furthermore, milblogs should not necessarily be regarded as a representative sample of the military as a whole. On the contrary, blogging has always been a haven for conservative pundits, and as far as milblogs are concerned this trait has probably only been reinforced by the fact that on April 17, 2007, a number of ‘Operational Security’ rules aimed at digital communication in general and blogging in particular came into effect (OPSEC, 2007: 2-1g).

This point of concern is crucial with regard to the question of horizontal and vertical civil religion. If we regard conservatives as being more inclined to choose a horizontal justification for their participation in the war, will an analysis of milblogs reveal anything but horizontal justifications? No, probably not if we select our cases randomly. The two cases analysed in the following are therefore deliberately chosen because they differ with regard to a number of central points. Both cases have been chosen because they reflect on the legitimacy of the war, because I consider it most plausible to find expressions of civil religion in passages of justification. Both were published in 2005 at a time when the authors were corporals, and both bloggers use blogspot.com, one of the most popular domains among bloggers in general and milbloggers in particular. There, however, the similarity ceases: “Ma Deuce Gunner” is a man of Hispanic origin, serving in the army, and politi-



cally situated on the right. “Rachel the Great” is a white, female marine with a liberal stance.<sup>86</sup>

### **5.3. Ma Deuce Gunner: ‘Happy Independence Day’<sup>87</sup>**

Ma Deuce Gunner’s blog is saturated with a martial aura. Not only do all his posts end with one or two commands, emphasised by the use of exclamation marks ‘Scouts Out!!!... MDG... Out’, a ‘Ma Deuce Gun’ is slang for the M2 machine cannon, usually placed on a HMMWV or in a helicopter, a weapon that has been in use since the Second World War. In this regard the subtitle of the header is interesting: “Protecting freedom ... half an inch at a time”. Half an inch may, of course, refer to the line spacing, indicating the author’s on-line fight for freedom *one line at a time*, but it also fits the 0.5 calibre size of the M2, thus referring to the notion that freedom should be defended *one bullet at a time*.

#### *5.3.1 Style and grammar*

Most blogs follow a fixed pattern. The header as well as general information about the author, along with gif-banners and links usually placed in the margin, indicates what sort of blog you are reading. Each post is marked by a title and a date, referring to the time it was *written*, and each ends with permanent links to the post as well as links to the comments made on it, marking the time when it was actually *published*.

As far as the post chosen for the present analyses is concerned, the fixed pattern regards not only the context but the text as a whole. The post was published on July 4, 2005, and it is clearly Ma Deuce Gunner’s intention to imitate an Independence Day speech, in style as well as in grammar. The language is grandiloquent. The three paragraphs of the post are composed as a classical logical judgment: Two premises, one general, and one specific, followed by a conclusion. And patterns of diathesis, mode and time are repeated and developed in the course of the text. By means of these patterns

The author establishes a bridge between past and present, between the founding fathers and the martyrs of the nation on the one hand, and himself and his fellow soldiers on the other. Thus, “We celebrate our freedoms gained and maintained by the blood of the men and women who *stood to defend* their countrymen, their republic, their liberty.” He and his brothers-in-arms

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<sup>86</sup> In my analyses, I aim at using the pseudonym or ‘nom de blog’ of the author, even in the cases in which the real name is known. The only exception to this rule is when the information about the author specifically concerns his or her life apart from the blogosphere.

<sup>87</sup> <http://madeucegunners.blogspot.com/2005/07/happy-independence-day.html>.

“proudly *stand to defend* the freedoms you [the readers] celebrate today.” [my italics, MB].

This element of marking differences in time, and bridging between them, is also reflected in the use of pronouns. The solemn outlook of the text is supported by the dominant use of main clauses. Hence, there are only four relative pronouns in the text as a whole. Three of them, however, are used to establish some of its most central demarcation lines. In the first paragraph the use of ‘who’ serves twice to mark out the historical frame of interpretation; denoting the exemplary persons and acts of the past, and making them a measure of the present. In the second paragraph, the use of the relative pronoun in the sentence “Today, I write from the sands of Iraq, *in which we now* endeavour to secure a new democracy” [my italics, MB] serves both to underline the spatial reality of the present, the fact that the narrating subject is situated in the geographical periphery, and to establish a historical relation, this time by means of the implicit ‘then’, following from the explicit ‘now’. The importance of the historical and geographical framing of the text is underlined by the repetition of personal pronouns in the second and third person plural. The reference (in the first paragraph) to the martyrs of the past who “stood up to defend *their* countrymen, *their* republic, *their* liberty (...)” reflects the imperative demand of the third paragraph “Eat with *your* families, drink with *your* friends, play with *your* kids.” [my italics, MB]. The spatial mirrors the temporal, and in between the two, literally in the second paragraph, the narrating subject, writing from Iraq, is situated. He is the one who has taken the burden of heritage on his shoulders, and he is the one who can thereby serve as the necessary means of realising the freedom of others.

### 5.3.2 Content

The fixed stylistic and grammatical structure of the text is also reflected in the content. Ma Deuce Gunner’s July 4 speech presents a world in which everything has its proper place. This is probably most vivid in the notion of the sacrifice. It is noteworthy that in this respect the concrete mission in Iraq does not seem to play a significant role. The country, the purpose of the American presence in the Fertile Crescent and progress ‘towards freedom’, are all central elements in the second paragraph, but neither the insurgency nor the insurgents are mentioned. The sacrifice is not a question of living and dying, not a matter of friend or foe. It is a question of proper conduct. The concrete mission is only one in a long row of missions undertaken to fulfil the destiny of the nation, and in that respect both the adversary and the client are only steps on the way. What matters is – to follow the structure of the text – the relation between nation, soldier and civilian.

The soldier must serve; serve to make the world safe for democracy. The civilian must enjoy, and not abuse, his “freedoms (...), and pray for the prosperity of our nation, wisdom of our leaders, and safety of our soldiers.” The connection between the two, between soldier and civilian, between periphery and centre, is secured by the notion of a unity existing across history; by the recognition of the present sacrifice as being in continuity with the sacrifices of the past. The sacrifice can only be recognised as a sacrifice proper by means of establishing this continuity between past and present. So the order of things comes at a price. The balance between the purpose of the sacrifice and the continuous recognition of this purposefulness is extremely delicate. Next to the header of the blog is a drawing of a man on horseback, wearing a Stetson and carrying a Winchester rifle. Like many other conservative milbloggers, Ma Deuce Gunner depicts himself as a lone rider, living on the fringes of society. Like many other conservative milbloggers, he quotes George Orwell’s famous statement that “[g]ood people sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”<sup>88</sup> Their presence and their deeds may be unwelcome in the civilised world, but they, and their willingness to commit such deeds, are all that stands between civilisation and chaos. In the real world, people die to protect the freedom of others; so that others can maintain the illusion that such deeds are not necessary (Jewett, 1973: 90-98). Freedom is not free. Someone must defend it. The notion that this is the calling of America, a notion with which the author fully identifies, is commonly referred to as the idea of Manifest Destiny.

However, the idea that God has given the inhabitants of the New World a task to fulfil has always been connected with the warning that failure in following this call would lead to the loss of Divine Providence. This is the American Jeremiad, and this, the seamy side of belonging to the elect, is also present in the post – most importantly in the passage where Ma Deuce Gunner emphasises the conduct of those back home. This is the only time he uses capital letters in the text: “(...) on this day, feel NO pity for me and my men”. Why? Probably because pitying would imply a differentiation between the mission and the soldiers, a differentiation with which the idea of the deeds of the soldiers as a sacrifice in continuity with the sacrifices of the past could not be maintained. In that perspective the phrase commonly used by Democratic

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<sup>88</sup> Dadmanly: July 29, 2005, Fire and Ice: November 24, 2005, Madeucegunner: June 10, 2005, Snipereye: January 6, 2007.

politicians, that they are “against the war, not the soldiers”, is an archetypical expression of such a patronising pity.<sup>89</sup>

According to Norman Fairclough, the final aim of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to reveal the way in which discourses are structured or interwoven in a certain pattern. This pattern or ‘texture’ describes the internal relationship of the discourses, which in our analyses we assume represents, reactualises and re-interprets a certain order of discourse, the linguistic expression of what sociologists name institutions (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002: 189, 195). Following the observations made in the analysis of style and grammar, it is not surprising that the dominant discourses in Ma Deuce Gunner’s Independence Day speech are America’s universal call and the sacrificial vocabulary. As a speech made for a national holiday, instituted for the remembrance of the historical occurrences which led to the foundation of the collective, the natural grid of the statement is the connections between the past and the present, and between centre and periphery in the present. The rites of the national ritual, enacted in the centre of the present – apparently so crucial for maintaining the covenant – only make sense if they are properly connected to the past and to the periphery. As a whole, these discourses describe the pattern of a national cosmology, within which the past is made an exemplary model of sacrifice, and the sacrifices made in the periphery have the dual purpose of re-enacting the past (thereby proving it right), and of safeguarding the centre, the community, through which the continuity of the heritage can be secured.

#### **5.4. Rachel the Great: “Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for”<sup>90</sup>**

##### *5.4.1 Style and grammar*

The post chosen from Rachel the Great’s blog is clearly not written with the intention of imitating an eloquent speech. On the contrary, as in Rachel’s blog in general, the style here is very close to that of a diary proper. She often uses spoken forms like can’t, isn’t or ain’t. The verbs are in the present, indicative, active, and the dominant grammatical subject is the first person personal pronoun.

Generally, personal pronouns are useful in drawing up social fields and in establishing social lines of demarcation. However, even though the pronouns

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<sup>89</sup> The Jeremiad is a very ‘prophetic’ or corrective element, and the use of this trait in this context points to the fact that contrary to the interpretation of Jewett, ‘prophetic civil religion’ is not necessarily tolerant civil religion.

<sup>90</sup> <http://everydaygroundhogday.blogspot.com/2005/11/pray-that-your-loneliness-may-spur-you.html>

used in this post do establish a set of different categories which are relevant for the justification of Rachel's deployment to Iraq, the way she depicts the relation between soldiers and civilians, periphery and centre, differs very much from what we saw in the above. The 'I' faces a 'you', but 'you' is used only in its general sense to denote conditions shared by all men and women: "You can't pick and choose when you will or won't love your country. Either you do or you don't". The second person, singular personal pronoun is not the addressee of her remarks. The I/you-relation is not a face-to-face encounter, but a question of relating and submitting to a set of general conditions. Likewise, both 'those' and 'we' are used to denote categories in which Rachel herself is or may be included: "(...) I guess that *those* who do [love their country] are willing to pay the price for living in such a blessed place". "(...) it's the fact that *we* keep trying that matters most." The line of demarcation established by the pronouns is not a social boundary. It is a way of differentiating between the universal and the particular.

#### 5.4.2 Content

The title of Rachel's blog refers to the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, in which the main character, played by Bill Murray, is forced to live through the same day, experiencing the exact same series of events every time he wakes up. Neither this theme nor the reference to this movie is unusual in milblogs from Iraq. In fact, it is probably one of the most common ways in which these bloggers, regardless of rank, branch, gender and political values, describe the military experience.<sup>91</sup> Ironically, whereas the title of the blog thus emphasises the unchangeable nature of time in the service, it is exactly the opposite – the changes of time – which is the theme in this post. This notion of changeability contextualises Rachel's frustrations both as an inward effect, "*today* I am feeling so alone and trapped (...) [but] *tomorrow* I will wake up and feel much better", as a cause, i.e. as changes inflicted on her from the outside: "[t]here are such huge ups and downs and the roller coaster of it all is exhausting", and, most importantly, by contrasting the deployment to Iraq with the outer world.

As seen in the example above, reflections about the relationship between the world 'out here' and the world 'back home' is not an unusual theme in milblogs. It touches a number of core issues for those who are sent abroad:

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<sup>91</sup> See Sergeant Lizzie: October 20, 2004, Si vis pacem para bellum: February 13, 2005, A soldier's thoughts: April 10, 2005, Ma Deuce Gunner: May 10, 2005, From my position ... on the way: May 23, 2005, Quiet Kidd: September 13, 2005, Semper Fidelis: December 8, 2005, Lumberjack in the desert: July 10, 2006. Sail Away Now: January 16, 2007.

How strong are the bonds of the military brotherhood compared to one's family bonds? To whom do I owe loyalty? How should the people back home relate to us out here? And, of course, why am I here? Neither is it unusual to interpret this relationship in ontological terms. One of these worlds is real, while the other is based on an illusion. In Ma Deuce Gunner's blog, as in most conservative blogs, the world at home was revealed as the illusionary world. The civilian does not see that everything he takes for granted is being maintained only because, beyond the reach of his notions, others willingly sacrifice their lives for his rights and for his security. In Rachel's blog, however, this ontological scheme is reversed. Here, 'home' designates the real world, whereas the world and the people 'out here' are depicted as fake:

I think since I came back from R&R it's been harder on me. It made me realize how fake people can be out here and it made me miss the real world. Everyone leans on each other, so for the most part everyone acts like they are your friend, when in reality if you weren't trapped out here with them, you would never talk to them and you both know it. It makes you miss your real friends and real relationships.

By turning this scheme upside down, the answers to the questions of loyalty which follow from the experience of inhabiting two different worlds also change. Thus, the way Rachel distinguishes between the world at home and the world out here serves to amplify the way she justifies her participation in the war: The notion that the personal relationships in the world out here are superficial and momentary undermines the idea that the warrior enters the ranks of a community existing across history. Instead, life in Iraq, in 'Groundhog Day', is an artificial world, existing apart from history. In Rachel's blog not the people but the place, and not the nation but the country are blessed. This becomes abundantly clear in the first lines of the post, in which she presents her answer to the question, "Why am I out here?" As in the Dag Hammarskjöld quotation in the title of the post, Rachel answers this question by defining what should be regarded as "great enough to die for". Just like Ma Deuce Gunner, she relates justification to sacrifice. Unlike Ma Deuce Gunner, however, Rachel does so by distinguishing between the cause and her love for her country:

I don't believe in this cause enough to die for it. I guess I believe i[n] my country though and support it and you can't just say something like that. You can't pick and choose when you will or won't love your country. Either you do or you don't and I guess those that do are willing to pay the price for living in such a blessed place. I really think America is the most beautiful country in the world and although it's not perfect, it's the fact that we keep trying that matters most.

I wonder if those that have paid the price though would look back from where they are and say it was worth it.

The proper interpretation of the ambiguous last sentence of this statement could, of course, be the subject of a larger discussion. What is most interesting here, however, is the way Rachel emphasises the power of patriotism without establishing a trinity of interdependence between the serviceman, the civilian, and those who have paid the highest price.<sup>92</sup> In spite of the alleged meaninglessness of this concrete mission, and in spite of the lurking suspicion that even the sacrifices of the past may seem meaningless in the eyes of the martyrs, she still maintains that dying for one's country can be regarded as purposeful. The purpose is just not one which she can "pick and choose". Here, the justification of the sacrifice does not refer to the birthright of the nation or making the world safe for democracy. It is not modelled on the narratives of Manifest Destiny or the American Jeremiad. There is no call for civilians to recognise the value of the sacrifice by supporting the troops. Instead it is the serviceman herself who emphasises that "I believe in my country and *support* it". Here the justification is not horizontal but vertical, and therefore the function of the justified also becomes another. Instead of being a constitutive act in the continuous existence of the nation, it becomes a way of confirming a love which is bestowed on the individual independently of his or her will.

### **5.5. Concluding remarks**

The first post analysed above was written by a conservative, and the second by a liberal. The first expressed confidence in the cause, while the second doubted its legitimacy. Ma Deuce Gunner is a man, Rachel the Great a woman. He serves in the army, she in the Marine Corps. The differences between their ways of justifying their presence in Iraq may derive from one cause or a combination of several causes – or they may simply be accidental, and determining which is which would demand broader comparative analyses.

What is important in this context is that neither of the authors confines their justificatory accounts to mere this-worldly justice or ideology. On the contrary, they both clearly draw on civil religious discourses in so far as they both use 'symbolic system[s]' by which they relate "the citizen's role and

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<sup>92</sup> The word 'patriot' has changed its meaning over the years. Here I use it in a strictly descriptive sense to designate a person who loves his country and who is ready to defend it, regardless of political stance. In the conservatively biased sense, 'a true patriot'. I regard the word 'nationalist' as a more precise term.

American society's place in space, time and history, to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning" (Coleman, 1970: 70).

However, the symbolic systems they make use of, as well as their notions of society's place in space, time and history, differ radically. Ma Deuce Gunner emphasises how the right conduct follows from the cross-historical role of the community and the interplay between sacrifice and covenant. Rachel the Great describes how, in spite of all the good reasons against dying in this war, something greater than herself and greater than historically determined bonds still determines her will to sacrifice. In *Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq* there is no mention of the nation or of the maintenance of interdependence between servicemen and civilians. Instead, Rachel the Great consistently uses the word 'country', and the relationship in focus is univocally vertical: Love of one's country is predestined. It is from this love and not from the proper conduct of those at home or from one's participation in a brotherhood of warriors existing across time that the willingness to fulfil one's duties flows.



## Chapter 6

### Religious and Secular Patriotism

#### 6.1. *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* & *MiSoldierthoughts*

Ma Deuce Gunner and Rachel the Great varied as far as gender, combat experience, branch of service, and political affiliation were concerned: He serves outside the wire, in an Army combat unit, and expresses devoted conservative views; she primarily serves inside the wire, taking care of Marine reenlistment, and in another post she explicitly states, that she disagrees with George W. Bush: She did not vote for him, but for “the right man for the job” (*Every Day is Groundhog Day in Iraq* December 16, 2005).

The two bloggers compared in the following, Rusten Currie of *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* and Zack of *Misoldierthoughts*, differ on another set of items: Race, rank, and, again, political affiliation. Thus, whereas Rusten Currie is a conservative, African-American lieutenant, Zack is a liberal, white NCO. Two further differences of interest should be mentioned. First, even though they have both experienced combat, Zack has not served outside the wire during this deployment. He participated in the March 2003 Invasion, and in a large number of his posts he reflects on his memories from that time, but strictly speaking, while blogging, he served on the FOB only. Second, they both serve in the Army, but before his officer’s career, Rusten Currie was a Marine. The strong *Esprit de Corps* of the Marines, famously expressed by the legendary sayings “once a marine ...”, and “there is no such thing as a former marine”, is still clearly reflected in Currie’s blog. He celebrates the birthday of his former branch of service, and he frequently ends his posts with the motto of the Corps: “*Semper Fideles*” (always faithful).

#### 6.2. Rusten Currie: Transcendent and Immanent Civil Religion merged

Rusten Currie writes under the pseudonym “War, or something like it”. It would be a misinterpretation to understand this nom-du-blog as expressing a fundamentally war critical message. Rather, the alias should probably be seen in connection with the name of the blog *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* “if you want peace, prepare for war”.<sup>93</sup> Appeasement will not bring peace. To confront a regular enemy you must prepare for regular war. And, accordingly, to

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<sup>93</sup> The saying is a re-translation or a condensation of the more elaborate *Qui Desiderat Pacem, Bellum Preperat; nemo provocare ne offendere audit quem intelligit superiorem esse pugnaturem* (the one who desires peace, prepares for war; for no one provokes or dares to offend those who they know to be superior in battle), which occurs in Flavius Vegetius Renatus’ “*De re militari*” from 390 BC.

confront a terrorist, an irregular enemy, you must prepare for “War, or something like it”.

Rusten Currie often quotes in Latin, not only in the title of the blog, but almost as often as he finds it appropriate to do so. This serves two purposes: Quoting in Latin – for centuries the language of the learned and of the Catholic Church – gives the blog an aura of eternal or divine wisdom; a notion which is also amplified by the Goethe quotation in the headline. Secondly, and probably more important, the way he uses the Latin phrases, by opening the blogs with the salute ‘salve’ and by closing them with the abbreviation ‘SPQR’, points to yet another meaning, namely that the quotations bridge between the two most powerful imperial armies in World History, the Roman and the American.<sup>94</sup>

The comparison between America and Rome is not unusual. In fact, it has been deeply embedded in American identity since the forging of the Constitution; a republic, modelled across the lines of the Ciceronian ideal of checks and balances. Architecturally, Washington D.C. can best be described as a New Rome, not in the ecclesiastical but in the imperial sense of the word, with the ‘Senate’ placed on ‘Capitol Hill’ and the Mall as a new Forum Romanum. And, whereas America, the New Republic which proved able to take the best from the Ancient World, can be seen as the ideological equivalent of Rome, Europe constitutes the equivalent of the Greek City States: Torn by decadence and paralysed by internal quarrels. This interpretation was nourished, of course, by the establishment of a de facto American “Empire” in the 20th century, when only America could make the world safe for democracy.

In *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum*, not only Rusten Currie’s openly expressed sympathies for these interpretations are interesting but also how the comparison of Rome and America in his description becomes an association of Roman and American military identity. Like Ma Deuce Gunner, he sees himself as an American Soldier, defending Freedom in a hostile world. However, he also identifies with a greater, universal community of Warriors, defending the Republic and its Freedom, Libertas, by safeguarding the Imperial Peace.

### *6.2.1 Style and grammar*

The blog is written in white on a black background and, compared to other blogs, the descriptions in *Si Vis Pacem* are quite often supplied with pictures. Rusten Currie usually ends his posts with his nom du blog and he usually uses headlines in miniscule. Entries with a political content, as the July 4 post analysed here are signed with his real name and a title in capital letters. The

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<sup>94</sup> SPQR, Senatus Populus Que Romanus, “the Senate and the People of Rome” was written on the standards of the Roman Army.

title of this post, “SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY”, directly refers to the second line of “America” – the semi-official national anthem of The United States, written by Samuel F. Smith to the tune of the British counterpart “God Save the King” in 1832 – and together with the July 2 post it refers to the first line of that song; Thus seen, Rustin Currie’s July 4 post is, like the above analysis of Ma Deuce Gunner’s, framed as the soldier’s speech to the nation.

The post consists of two main parts: First a poem, dedicated to the nation as a mother, and second, three larger paragraphs. Due to the fact that each of the six lines of the poem are divided by a one line spacing, and that the poem and the prose are divided by a four line spacing, the eyes of the reader are kept at the verses, and the poem constitute the frame for understanding the content of the following.

Each of the paragraphs in prose describes central elements of July 4, and each opens with a specification of the day in focus. Even in the first paragraph, which opens with the more formal and more elaborate specification of the date (Monday July 4th, this day ...), the content is modelled over the use of “Today”, and the central phrase, “Today was a good day, no one died”, is framed in a chiasitic structure: “today no *one was hit* with an IED in our sector, and *no one was injured. Today was a good day* [my italics, MB]”. Apart from the change between poem and prose, and apart from the fact that the text oscillates very much between the individual and the collective, two remarkable ruptures of style occur: The deliberately misspelled word “Respect his A U T H O R I T I E!!” written with capital letters and spacing, and paraphrasing the South Park character Cartman’s shrilling exclamation “respect my authoritie”.<sup>95</sup> Second, the three little dots (...) in the last line of the last paragraph are used to tie together the two parts of this translation of the motto of America (E Pluribus Unum). The use of these dots forces us to lower our pace of reading and thereby to focus at how the unity, the one-ness, is established. Moreover, the dots are situated where the head of the bald eagle, the national symbol, is normally placed on the Great Seal of America. Thereby, the status of the post as a dedication to the nation and its symbols on this day is not only emphasized in the introducing poem but also in the last lines of prose.

Each line of the poem is constructed along a specific pattern: First, a felicitation, switching between “dear” and “sweet mother”, second a declaration, describing the relationship between either the nation and her ‘children’, or the nation and God. The only exception is the last line which serves as an apposition to the mother or the nation herself. Out of the remaining five

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<sup>95</sup> Cartmann is an overweight 9-year old bigot with Nazi sympathies, whose frequent use of this expression, only serves to underline how little authority he actually has.

lines, the first two are in the past tense stressing the underlying conditions of the nation's relationship to the individual and to God. The two following lines are both in the future, each containing a promise, and in the fifth line, which is in the present, the individual's longing to re-establish the original unity, is underlined.

The first paragraph in prose begins with reflections about the day. It opens with the present moment and reflections kept in the present, a look into both the near future, the approaching end of July 4, 2005, and a more distant future when the memories of this specific day will fade. Then, in his reflections about the occurrences of the day, the form, naturally, changes from the present to the past, but also from the active to the passive. In the last section of the paragraph, the personal angle is re-introduced through the revealing of his friend's plans to marry; again the active form dominates leading up to the general and mainly passive reflection about the passing of time, which finishes the paragraph. This statement, "it's amazing what can happen in a year", refers to the fact that in one year the author will be best man at his best friend's wedding, but there are also traces back to the reflections in the July 2 post, where he informs us that on the Independence Day Weekend, exactly one year has passed since he got the news that he was going to Iraq. By placing this day as the anchor in his reflections about time, July 4 becomes the centre of gravity in the cycle of the year, and the national holiday becomes a day of commemoration like in classical New Year's rites.

In the beginning of the second paragraph, time continues to be a pivotal point, now emphasized by using *adverbs* of time. The "Today" of the opening sentence, is countered with the "Tomorrow" of the third sentence, and then again brought into focus with the almost fatalistic use of "For now". However, the use of this prepositional group facilitates a change of focus from time to place: "For now" is reflected and resituated in the following sentence as "For America", and the geographical distance between the narrator and the nation he yearns for, comes into focus too.

The first part of the third paragraph describes the course of the day, and the abandoned atmosphere at the FOB is mainly kept in the past tense. But in the second part the mode changes. The felicitation of the poem, "Happy birthday", is compared and becomes "Happiest of Birthdays", and just as in Ma Deuce Gunner's July 4 blog, the importance of sustaining the proper conduct of celebrating the national holiday, and of commemorating the deeds of the soldiers, is underlined by using the imperative. In the last lines of the post, the dominating adverb of time, "Today", is replaced with another indication of time, "On this day", which is both more specific and more general. On the one hand, "On this day" indicates that the day today should be distin-

guished from other days. It is a certain day when we should behave in a certain manner. On the other hand, as “this day” is a specific day of the year, it can serve as a milestone in the life of both the individual and of the nation.

### *6.2.2 Content*

A central element in the use of tropes is that the choice of a metaphor is never neutral. It affects the perception both of the metaphor itself (in this case, the motherhood) and, of course, that which it is used to designate (the nation). It is safe to say that the way motherhood is here used to describe the relationship between the individual and the nation, draws on, and thereby reproduces a rather archaic view of the roles of men and women in society: Sons should defend the mother, whom they long for, and daughters should “bear fruit and life anew”.

The composition of the poem draws a conceptual map of the relationship between nation, individual, and God. The first line unequivocally states that the individual owes his birth as a free man to the nation. In the following, however, agency changes. First of all, it is stressed that, ultimately, it is the supreme author, God, who blessed the nation. Second, the divine gifts of life and liberty, bestowed on the nation are now described conditionally; their continuous prevalence depends on the will of the nation’s strong sons and fertile daughters to fulfil their earthly covenant, and make the nation, their mother safe. In that perspective, the promises made by the narrator in these lines have all the characteristics of an oath proper; an oath designating that he and his fellow Americans will seek to realize the purpose of the existence of the nation herself.

This change of agency, from the transcendent to the immanent, from God and the nation to the citizens, is amplified in the prose text. In the first paragraph, the main character is the day itself, the grammatical subject of the first sentence. Accordingly, the following descriptions all concern the characteristics of this day: Its significance for the narrator, the weather, and, most importantly, the fortunate absence of bloodshed which has, apparently, characterized this specific day. The descriptions in this first paragraph move from the general to the specific, from the significant lack of notable occurrences to the good news received by the narrator. In this paragraph there is a clear-cut duality between life and death, between the absence of violence and the good news of the wedding on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the underlying perceptions of how the soldiers’ days normally proceed, with violence, fear and bloodshed. By honouring “God, whoever God is” for this blessed triviality, the life confirming characteristics of this particular day are united into a whole.

The second paragraph contrasts the day today with the unknown tomorrow. The already mentioned fatalistic tone in these lines is amplified by the stoic calm with which the narrator puts the unavailable into the hands of destiny. Then, from the day and the narrator's way of dealing with the unseen, focus is directed towards America. Like he, the narrator, has been cared for with prayers and well wishes, she, the nation (still personified as a woman) should be looked after with kisses and affirmations. With reference to the long separation, mirroring the yearning of the fifth line of the poem, the narrator swears that he will "do it all over again [if] so she asked"; an oath confirming the promise of the poem, that he, as a true son of the nation, will always defend her.

In the third paragraph, the plural 'we' designates the community of soldiers, starting with remarks which could fit jesting young men almost anywhere in the world, and then in the course of the description more and more names or aliases are mentioned. The Major (MAJ K) and the person who leaves a message on Currie's keyboard (Thunder 6) are also both very active bloggers. Thus, the gradual specification not only describes the comradeship between the soldiers but also points to a certain fellowship among these mil-bloggers. MAJ K, Thunder 6, and Rusten Currie are not only personal friends, but also war and blog buddies alike. Therefore, even though the comparison with Cartmann from South Park is not very flattering, it should not be taken for more than it actually is: A joke. And, to return to the point, the description of the soldiers' joking describes the triviality of the day, but would also support the meaning of the invocation, "Today was a good day, no one died": Compared to being exposed to the danger of IEDs, making fun of the Commanding Officer emphasizes the unusual normality of this day.

Towards the end of the third paragraph, America is once more personified and becomes the main character of the text, but in a style which clearly differs from the description of the nation as a woman in both the poem and the second paragraph. First of all, the use of the imperative concerns America, and, therefore, instead of a potentially disconnected third person form "she", or as a passive indirect object "her", it is the second person "you", a present subject of whom certain things may be demanded that becomes the dominant pronoun. Second, not the nation but only the national symbol, the flag, is detached from the individuals, and thus, by projecting the nationality into a symbol, the nation can honour itself. Underlying the commandment that the flag should both embellish the porches and be honoured, as it passes by the individual members of the nation, lies of course a description of the July 4 parade. However, this implicit reference to the arch American symbol of unity in difference, serves a double purpose.

First, the parade brilliantly illustrates the logic mentioned above, viz. that the nation is both subject and object for itself: The very idea of this rite is that the individuals both applaud and participate in the parade.<sup>96</sup> Second, the description of the military patrol in the following last lines of the text clearly reflects the description of the July 4 parade at home. Like the parade passes by the audience in every American main street, the patrol rolls by the narrator as it leaves the FOB. And, to extend the comparison, just like the parade displays different parts of the community and its heritage, every patrol is an American micro-cosmos, composite of men and women of different backgrounds, different races, different ranks, but with one common purpose: to serve their country.

Whereas the description of the patrol is modelled over the description of the parade, it is emphasised, however, that the soldiers of the patrol has the ontological and moral precedence for the participants in the parade, and that in reality the latter reflects the former. Today, like every day of the year, soldiers have earned the freedom we, the people, should enjoy by celebrating Independence Day and by commemorating the unity of the nation.

Thus, as we saw in the analysis of Ma Deuce Gunner, the horizontal view of the nation, what I have called “immanent civil religion” in the above, is clearly also present in Rusten Currie’s post. However, his July 4 speech also differs from Ma Deuce Gunner’s in a number of respects.

First, whereas Ma Deuce Gunner’s exclamation “feel NO pity” implied a differentiation between those who worship the nation in the right way, and those who use the soldiers’ sacrifices to promote their politically flawed war-criticism, Rusten Currie simply states that “[o]n this day, there should be no Partisan politics, on this day we are all Americans, who owe much to few.”

Secondly, the horizontal view is not unchecked in Currie’s post. The description of the nation as a mother, blessed by God seems to be closer related to the type of civil religion, we saw represented in Rachel the Great’s November 18 post. Needless to say, there are fundamental differences between Currie and Rachel the Great: Currie’s faith in the mission leaves little room for the doubt, profoundly present in her post; his choice of metaphors are very traditionalistic and fully ignorant of the existence of female soldiers and marines. Theologically, however there are structural parallels between their vertical or transcendent descriptions of the relation between the nation and the

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<sup>96</sup> In that respect, the American parade differs significantly from for instance the Summer Marches of the Orange Order in Northern Ireland, which serve not only to confirm the unity of the Protestant community – as the advocates for the maintenance of this culturally unique tradition claims – but also to differentiate it from its Catholic counterpart.

omnipotent deity. Whereas agency is given to man in the second part of the post, the vertical relationship described in the poem leaves only one real subject: the ultimate subject, God.

Lastly, whereas the distribution of roles between soldiers and civilians in the prose text clearly draws on a logic of reciprocity, called immanent civil religion in the above, Rusten Currie's description of his military identity seems more detached from his national identity than what we saw in the analysis of Ma Deuce Gunner. Granted, he talks of love and marriage, civilian affairs: "Today one of my dearest friends asked me to be his best man 365 days from this day". Yet, he describes the significance of this friendship in purely military terms: they have served together in the Corps.

Likewise, Rusten Currie's descriptions of the men he serves with is far more concrete. In his July 4 post, Ma Deuce Gunner did not mention a military brotherhood, merely an anonymous first person plural "we". Rusten Currie, on the contrary, names his war and blog buddies, he describes how they "watched the news" together, how they "joked with one another", and how they write each other. In his July 4 post, the men he serves with are men of flesh and blood.

Ma Deuce Gunner's military identity is confined to his identity as an American soldier. He places himself in a long line of fighting men stretching back to 1776. Rusten Currie, on the other hand, sees himself as both soldier and marine. Moreover, his identification with the military brotherhood stretches further back in history. He sees himself as a modern legionnaire, an American centurion. Like his Roman predecessors fought for Libertas within the boundaries of Pax Romana, he fights for the freedom ensured by Pax Americana.

By emphasising the status of July 4 as a birthday, the nation is personified, and the day becomes a day of remembrance; a notion resembling the vertical view of the poem: on this day of the year, the citizens commemorate their common heritage and the gift of freedom bestowed on them so many years ago. On the other hand, the close parallel between the parade and the patrol gives way to another interpretation: The parade first and foremost reflects the effort conducted by American soldiers, around the clock, every day of the year. The relationship between those who earn freedom and those who enjoy it thus becomes horizontal. In that respect, every day is Independence Day – even though it is only celebrated on July 4.

Compared to Ma Deuce Gunner's statement, which reflects a firm structure closely following the pattern of a traditional July 4 speech, the reflections in *Si Vis Pacem* are less strictly composed. Probably as a result of these differences, the two posts deal differently with the two-sided notion of the



nation, the vertical relationship between man and God on the one hand, and the horizontal relationship between centre and periphery on the other. Whereas Ma Deuce Gunner only describes the transcendent dimension in regard to the historical heritage, God is much more prevalent in Rusten Currie’s poem. He, too, unites historical heritage and identity. He is a member of a community of legionnaires existing across history. But, again, this description seems to pull the text in yet another direction. Like Ma Deuce Gunner, he subordinates competing discourses to the great national narrative, but this subordination is less complete.

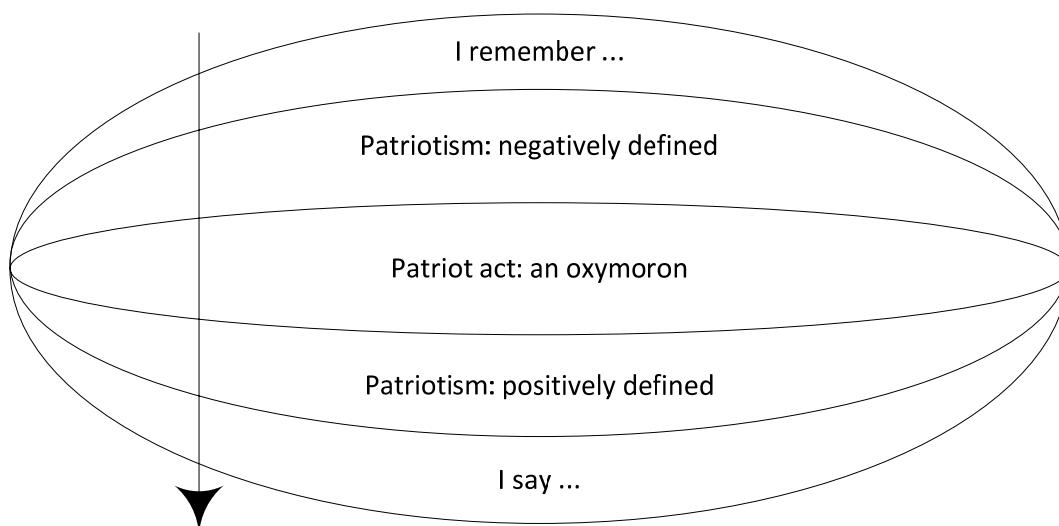
### 6.3. Zack: Patriotism without religion

Zack’s September 15 post, “The Patriot” is the closest we get to reflections about nation and national identity in his blog. However, as we shall see in the following, it is openly liberal and apparently devoid of any of the characteristics of civil religion which the analysis, thus far, has shown. Instead, Zack focuses on his rights as a citizen.

#### 6.3.1 Style and grammar

The post consists of five parts tightly structured through five concentric argumentative circles: the narrator’s own view, a negative definition of patriotism, the patriot act as an exemplification of the negative, then a positive definition and, finally, the post returns to the narrator’s own evaluation.

Figure 6.1: Argumentative structure of “The Patriot”



This structure is also reflected in the opening clauses of each paragraph. The first and the last paragraphs begin with the first person singular “I” followed

by verbs in indicative active; in both clauses, the protagonist relates to the misuse of the word patriotism in the dominant political discourse: “*I remember* when it used to mean something to have a flag”; “*I say* only this in the closing, they can call it any number of patriotic names, but let them pry your rights from your All American hands only when you are dead”.

Paragraphs two and four both have opening clauses consisting of the noun “patriot” and the copula, “to be” used in a definitory form: first, negatively, “*A patriot is not* just someone waving a flag”; and then, in the fourth paragraph, positively, “*The true patriots are* people who exercise their rights” [my italics, MB]

The first clause of the third paragraph – which constitutes the centrepiece of the text – is in the imperative and points to the ideal typical example of political misuse of patriotism, the Patriot Act legislation, and, by means of a well-wrought linguistic criticism, it also bridges between the negative and the positive definitions of patriotism in part 2 and 4: “Take a look at the **Patriot** act. Where once US citizens had privacy they now have a catchy term, an oxymoron ...”.<sup>97</sup>

### 6.3.2 *The content*

As reflected in the style, Zack is utterly aware of how to use language effectively. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, despite his fundamental scepticism concerning the war in Iraq, and despite his very politicised approach to nationalistic discourse, he uses words traditionally associated with nationalism just as frequently as any other blogger. He differs, however, in the *way* he uses these words.

When talking about the “United States”, Zack primarily does so critically, questioning Administration politics. When talking about “America”, his preferred term in this regard, he seems to differentiate between, on the one hand, political criticism, and, on the other, what could be defined as a fundamentally patriotic notion. Thus, he often refers to the contractual relation between him and the “American people”, a relationship which in his eyes has been violated by the stop loss policy.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The central significance of the third paragraph is further amplified by the fact that it contains most examples of the use of stylistic tools to set off parts of the text, e.g. using *italics*, underlining, CAPITAL letters or, as here, **bold** and using punctuation (...) to end the text indefinitely.

<sup>98</sup> “Stop Lossing” is when a military contract is prolonged without the consent of the individual in question. When recruitment difficulties rose in 2005, the US military was forced to stop loss large numbers of the personnel, among them Zack from Mysoldierthoughts. His criticism of Stop Lossing, which he regards as the re-

So many want to know why I came back to Iraq, even though I have been involuntarily extended (stop-lossed) and I don't believe in the War here. I came because I **do** honor my country and the contract I have signed (even if my enlistment time is not honored by the Department of Defense) (*Misoldierthoughts*, September 4, 2005).

Zack's notion of national affiliation is fundamentally a matter of morality. His contract with America cannot be reduced to a vague idea of reciprocity between soldiers and civilians in the historical course of events. It is a real contract, on paper, between him and his country. And as a contract it entails both a legislative and a moral dimension reflected by the fact that he specifically talks about *honour*, not only in regard to the paper, but also in regard to the other contractual part, the Department of Defence, who by stop-lossing the soldiers have deprived both the soldiers and America the possibility of honouring the contract.

You (the army) have taken enough time away from me. I have served you, fought in the front lines of your war. Let me (and others like me) go, let us walk away, back to our lives and families. All I ask is that you let us do this with our honor and the honor of our Great Country (*Misoldierthoughts*, April 19, 2005).

The last line in this quotation is interesting because it clearly shows that Zack is neither equivocally critical nor indifferent in regard to America. In the quotation above, he emphasises that he honours his country. Likewise, elsewhere in the blog he also describes his country as an antropomorphised being: "Are you proud of me Mother? I am a soldier. Are you proud of me Father? I have killed. To my *country* I ask *you*, are *you* proud of me?" (*Misoldierthoughts*, December 2, 2005 [my italics, MB]). At face value, the close association of parenthood with this direct address to the country seems very similar to the idea of the nation as a mother, which we saw in Rusten Currie's July 4 poem which I defined as an expression of transcendent civil religion.

In a radical, Durkheimian interpretation, the description of the social entity as a person – a person you can address, a person who can feel proud or disappointed – is a fundamental trait of totemism, of religion at its very core: What is worshipped in religion is the residual between the sum of individuals and society itself. The antropomorphic projection of that residual is the totem, God. However, in Zack's patriotism, this personification seems to entail few assumptions of religious transcendence. Instead, it fits the notion of relig-

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establishment of drafting in practice and as a profanation of his service, is a recurrent theme in the blog.

ion as the “generalised and indeterminate” ideas characterising the cult of the individual in modern society, entailed in Durkheim’s earlier works.<sup>99</sup>

In the text at hand, this is clearly expressed by his definitions of patriotism. In Zack’s view, the ideal of the patriot has been watered down. Hence, the two fundamental distinctions in the text, a historical, between past and present, and a social, between talkers and doers, both concern the true and the false interpretations of patriotism. In the first paragraph, he regards today’s devaluation of patriotism as a result of the commercialisation of the concept. Today, the flag simply constitutes an element of advertising strategies, and little beyond that. Thus, “Then, when it “mean[t] something to have a flag” is contrasted to “Now”, when “you wear a flag lapel pin and it really doesn’t mean anything.” However, there is more than simple nostalgia to Zack’s concerns.

In Zack’s eyes, the devaluation of the concept has had severe consequences in regard to the values once entailed in the proper understanding of patriotism. Socially, first, the fact that anybody can and will try to profiteer from patriotism, means that the core values of the patriot – to act, to “exercise [his] rights”, to “make America work” – are replaced by empty words, which any person can “shout (...) out from the top of buildings or through the bullhorn of the media”.

A second, and even worse result of this process, is the political exploitation of the concept, which leads us to associate patriotism with the limitation of rights, as expressed in the Patriot Act legislation. From being merely a matter of emblematic actions versus empty words, the “newspeak” of the Bush Administration, expressed in oxymorons as “**Patriot** Act” and “Operation Iraqi **Freedom** or Operation Enduring **Freedom**”, aims at replacing the true interpretation of patriotism with a false one, according to which any voice of dissent becomes a voice of treason.

There is little doubt that Zack’s statements in this regard are thoroughly politicised, and it is interesting to follow his argumentation. Of course, his historical reconstruction of the true meaning of patriotism is not necessarily true. There seems to be a tension between his initial statement, that once, it really “mean[t] something to have a flag” and that anybody who serves the patria should be defined as a true patriot, regardless whether they serve as a “fireman”, a “policeman”, as “the people who bring you your mail”, as “doctors” or “teachers”. Nevertheless, his historical reinterpretation signifies, rhetorically, a brilliant move.

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<sup>99</sup> It could also be seen as an expression of Dewey’s “democratic faith”, which I in the above have not included in the definition of civil religion unless it is explicitly stated with reference to other religious elements.

By questioning the depth of conservatives' patriotic feelings, he undermines the main criticism raised against liberals and war-critics – that they are not sufficiently patriotic – and places the burden of explanation on the shoulders of his opponents: The fact that they *talk* a lot about patriotism does not mean that they are truly patriotic. In fact, a lot of talking more likely indicates that they are not.

What is most interesting in regard to the personified view of the country, however, is the ambiguity of Zack's interpretation of the flag. Traditionally, the flag is the ideal typical emblem of the national totem. No other symbols, not even the dollar bill, signify America as unequivocally as the Stars and Stripes. There is, nevertheless, a tension in the text between, on the one hand, the idea that *having* a flag once used to *mean* something (something more than merely flag-waving nationalism) and, on the other, the equation between simply making "America work" and being a "true patriot". The first interpretation leaves room for the unique, for seeing the flag as a symbol of those who actually serve, of those who make a difference. The second is so all-inclusive that it hardly qualifies as a symbol of excellence. At least, the two are only compatible if the extraordinary meaning, the "something", is merely a matter of consciousness, of personal effort and not of effect.

The important point is, however, that none of these interpretations leads to the assumption that the flag signifies something beyond the horizon of the present, even when it "means something". None of these interpretations seems to indicate that America exists beyond the immanent community of serving patriots. In that respect, none of them can be categorised as civil religious.

In the above analysis of *Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq*, I have shown that Rachel the Great questioned both the cause of the Iraq war and whether those who had paid with their lives in the service of their country would actually now, *ex post facto*, regard their sacrifice as justified. In that respect, she challenged not only the sacrificial equation, saying that the benefits of the cause should exceed the costs of the sacrifice, but probably also the fundamental notion that for a sacrifice to be valid, the victim should, voluntarily, consent to give his life. In spite of that double challenge, Rachel's deliberations imply that the sacrifice remains valid. Not for justificatory reasons, but, rather, for emotional or existential ones, that patriotism, love of the patria, and hence the will to die for your homeland is not a matter of choice but a given thing:

I don't believe in this cause enough to die for it. I guess I believe it my country though and support it and you can't just say something like that. You can't pick and choose when you will or wont love your country. Either you do or you don't

and I guess those that do are willing to pay the price for living in such a blessed place (Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq: November 18, 2005).

By addressing the country as a personified being, Zack seems to assume that the national community cannot merely be reduced to the sum of its parts, a view also reflected in the essentialist definition of the nation implied in his description of the patriot as someone who “make[s] *America* work”. Even in the weak sense of the word transcendence, the homeland does exist across time and space of the singular individual.

Contrary to Rachel, however, Zack does not imply the existence of an omnipotent deity whose blessings and condemnations the country is subject to. There is no element of eternity in his patriotism.

I wonder how many parents back home will never see their sons and daughters, how many wives and husbands will become widows waiting for loved ones who will never be coming home, and how many children will have only a folded American flag to remind them of their mother or father? Every day I pray to God that my son Jacob, my daughter Linnea, and my wife Tara will have more than just a piece of folded cloth. I pray that I make it home (*Misoldierthoughts* May 8, 2005).

Like Rachel the Great, Zack describes the individual soldiers’ sacrifice as a personal tragedy. Like Rachel the Great, he thereby challenges the fundamental characteristic of the sacrifice: The notion that the benefits for the sacrificer exceed the costs for the victim. However, unlike Rachel the Great, Zack does not resort to any existentialist loopholes in his critique of the sacrifice. Not only does he emphasise that the sacrificial equation is false. He also explicitly questions the validity of the flag as a symbol in that regard.

The flag does not signify a valid cause. The country, the greater ideal for which the soldiers allegedly are killed, will never be able to compensate for the personal loss: The war-orphans “will (...) *only* have a folded American flag to remind them of their mother or father.” Even the symbolic value of the flag is seen as invalid. The flag is nothing “more than just a piece of folded cloth”.

A central feature of all critique of religion is to question the validity of religious symbols: If it can be shown that “The Host is merely dough; the Relics merely bones” (Hegel, 1997 [1840]: 230), the very sources of the power of religion, e.g. the salvation guaranteed by the Eucharist, can be dried out. And the critique may even go a step further, showing that not only can the religious symbolism be seen as a *result* of a false judgement, but, moreover, that the *effect* of religion is damaging too. Thus, by his famous statement that Religion “is the opium of the people” (Marx, 2007 [1844]: 11), Marx indicates

both that the people can find consolation in religion, and that by maintaining this comforting function of faith, the ruling classes can postpone the revolution indefinitely.

Zack's description of the flag as nothing "more than a folded cloth", applies both these fundamental assets of critique to American civil religion. Explicitly he challenges the notion that the flag signifies anything beyond the realm of the present. For a child, who has lost a father or a mother, possessing a cloth does not validate their loss. And, by placing this fundamental critique of the sacrifice in the context of the ongoing war in Iraq, a context in which soldiers are killed and children made orphans, he also accuses the sacrificial practise of producing sufferings rather than averting them: This accusation is only implied in the quotation above, but when, in his September 28 post (which will be analysed in full below), he defines Iraq as a "martyr factory", it becomes a central and explicit part of his critique of the war.

Zack's critique of civil religion is not a critique of faith as such. In fact, God is mentioned in the quotation above. But not as a source of abundant blessing for America. He is a personal God, a God whom the individual can address despite the follies of nationalism. Rachel, in *Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq*, as well as Zack question the validity of the Iraq war sacrifices. If the cause is not just, how can the sacrifice be? Likewise, Rachel and Zack believe in a transcendent deity. Thus, neither regards the actions of their country as the incarnation of the divine will. On the contrary, the transcendence of God makes Him the ultimate judge of the actions of man. However, they combine these two elements, their doubt in the cause and their faith in God, in two radically different ways. Zack turns to God for personal consolation because his country has abandoned all reason. In Rachel's eyes, on the contrary, God's blessings enable her to love her country anyway, beyond all reason.





## **Chapter 7**

### **“Duty, Honor, Country”**

#### **Military religion subordinated**

In the first part of the close readings, I have compared the interpretations of soldier sacrifices seen in the light of national identity of four bloggers: Michael Bautista of Ma Deuce Gunner, Rachel of Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq, Rusten Currie of Si vis pacem, para bellum and Zack of Misoldierthought. In the following, I analyse posts by the same bloggers, but this time in regard to the competing justificatory practise, their expressions of military identity.

#### **7.1. Rachel the Great: The people and the military**

Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq is among the shorter blogs in my sample. The December 16 post analysed in the following is by far her longest, and together with the November 18 post analysed above it constitutes nearly one third of the whole blog.

##### *7.1.1 Style and Grammar*

The 16 post is divided into an introduction and six paragraphs with single line spacing but without indentation. As seen in the November 18 post, Rachel’s style is straightforward with few high-flown terms and more structured as a stream of conscience, a dairy proper, than a public speech. Yet, as also touched upon in the above, Rachel is fully aware of the publicity of the blogging genre. She writes knowing that what she can say here differs from what can be posted on a private site, and she is aware of the reader’s lack of knowledge regarding the situation on the ground in Iraq.

In this post, the public aspect of blogging is, however, more emphasised. On November 18, “we” occurred only twice in the whole text, whereas “I” was clearly the dominating personal pronoun. Here, the personal pronouns are used less frequently and when used, the plural “we” occurs almost as often as the singular “I”. Judging from this, the identity aspect is here less prevalent, but to the extent that it is present, it regards collective identity much more directly than in the post analysed above. Who is “we” then? Out of the 38 references to this word, six are more or less indefinite, two refer directly to the Marine Corps, and three to the nation without implying the military. The rest, 27 in all, use an inclusive form, e.g. “[w]e are here to guide these people”, which refer to the military and the nation as one social entity, an inclusive approach also reflected in the content.

### 7.1.2 *The content*

This post was written in response to a comment on the November 18 post. The comment questions the validity of Rachel's claim that "it is the fact that we keep trying that matter's most". The commenter takes the opposite position: that both the problems of the war and Rachel's personal doubts and concerns are reinforced, not solved, by the fact that nobody seems to recognise that everybody else also pursue their goals, that they also "keep trying". Instead of addressing this challenge directly, Rachel instead asks herself whether, actually, "we try hard enough?"

This leads her to emphasise that she, contrary to many of her fellow marines, regards this war as just – not in the sense that she supports the politics of the Bush Administration, but in regard to the progress made on the ground. Already in the post analysed above, Rachel contrasted dying for the mission and dying for your country: "I don't believe in this cause enough to die for it. I guess I believe it my country though and support it and you can't just say something like that" (November 18, 2005). Here, accordingly, she emphasises that "trying" not necessarily implies agreeing with the initial goals of the war, but refers to the personal efforts and believes:

We are trying to make a difference out here. You can't tell me that every Marine is just following orders. We all believe in something. There are ways to get sent home, if you really want to. We all believe in something, if not in each other. I think I have gone on a very long tangent now ... the point is ... I don't really agree with President Bush, I didn't even vote for him, but he is my commander and chief and was elected by the majority of the people.<sup>100</sup> I don't have to agree with his reasoning to know that we do need to be here. I don't have to agree with the execution to know that in the end, we are doing the right thing. (Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq: December 16, 2005)

"We" clearly refers to the marines in this passage. And the statement that "we all believe in something, if not in each other seems like an unequivocal decla-

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<sup>100</sup> In other words, when later in the paragraphs she says that she prefers "to vote for the best man for the job" she more or less explicitly states that she voted for Kerry in the 2004 elections. Had she been referring to Al Gore, she would hardly have emphasised that Bush was elected "by a majority of the people", since he, in the 2000 elections, was elected by a majority of the electoral votes. In spite of the fact that she says she is neither Republican nor Democrat this, along with her liberal views in other regards, has led me to code Rachel as liberal. Yet, this vote could also be understood as a vote for Kerry, the decorated soldier, and not necessarily as a vote for Kerry's politics.

ration of unit cohesion or esprit de corps.<sup>101</sup> Marines do not necessarily fight for the cause, but they most certainly fight for each other. In that view, the faithfulness, expressed in the motto of the USMC first and foremost regards the relation between the Corps and the individual marines, and not between the Corps and the country. Yet, two things should be noted in regard to Rachel's faithfulness.

First, Rachel's transcendent civil religion and her unit cohesion do not seem to be related. Her faith in America is a personal matter between her and God. It is not competing with her unit cohesion, her faith in the marines. Secondly, her unit cohesion does not seem to entail a religious dimension. There is no identification with members of the outfit that seems to extend her horizon of experience. In fact, she might believe in the other marines, but personally, she finds it difficult to comply with the masculine ideals of the corps:

Sometimes I look in the mirror once I have all my gear on and I don't recognize myself at all and I think I look like a little boy or something. It's strange. By saying all this I am not meaning that females are not fully capable of what we are tasked with out here ... I am just saying that I don't think it comes naturally to us like it does to men and it just takes some getting use to. After 5 years in the Marine Corps I wonder if I will ever get use to it ... (ibid: August 29, 2005)

Unlike most of her fellow marines, Rachel emphasises that for her, being in Iraq is also an emblem of a commitment to a higher cause. Yet, believing in the cause need not be associated with the initial reasons for going to war or with ones political affiliation. Rachel did not support this war in the first place, but she is proud of the progress they make on the ground and she emphasises that, regardless of one's view on these initial reasons for going to war, should the United States choose to withdraw from Iraq before security is restored, a social and political disaster will follow.

(...) I know that we can't save everyone. I know that there is suffering everywhere. But you have to pick and choose your battles. This is the one we have drawn. We can't give up because by giving up, we are giving up on much more than our policies. We are throwing living, breathing individuals to the wolves (ibid: December 16, 2005).

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<sup>101</sup> Normally, unit cohesion and esprit de corps should be separated. Yet, in regard to the Marines, whose pledge for loyalty specifically concerns their military branch, it may be more difficult to distinguish between the two. Even though this difference is only moderately supported by my data, I use the two terms indiscriminately in the analysis of Rachel's posts.

Along with the fact that the coalition forces have started an irreversible process, Iraq's problems should not, according to Rachel, be associated with the Iraqis, but with structural factors, e.g. poverty, and, most significantly, the lack of legitimate political leadership.

The people here both want and need us. The representatives they currently have, in my opinion, are not very good representatives of the local populous. The people here are dirt poor and live in fear all the time. Family is the most important thing to them. They lost faith in their government and its ability to take care of them a long time ago. Local Sheiks run things around here.... more like the mob ran old Chicago. When Saddam fell out of power, these local tribesmen saw this as an opportunity. They were in power before and men who have had power are never happy until they have it again. The tribesmen want the US out because then it allows them to be as corrupt in their decision making as they would like (ibid).

Unlike the corrupt Sheiks, who want the Americans to leave so that they can utilise the country and people at will, the Iraqi people supports the American presence because the US military is all that stands between them and the culturally legitimised kleptocracy. However, in Rachel's eyes, Iraq is really moving forward, and the slow progress in this country should be viewed in light of the long time span, developing democracy has taken in other countries

I think it is amazing how far they have come. I am no history buff, but if you think about how long it was between when we declared our independence and when we actually had a functioning government and constitution, I think it was something like 13 years, right? Give or take? It has been only a little over 3 years (ibid).

Thus, in regard to Iraq, Rachel structures a dichotomy between the people and the politicians. And, in the same way as she compares Iraq today with the United States in the formative years between 1776 and 1789, Rachel repeats this dichotomous structure, the differentiation between the people and the politicians, in regard to the United States.

Going to war was a political decision, and, mistaken or not, as a member of the US military Rachel must follow the decisions of her "Commander in Chief". However, to support the mission does not necessarily imply that you support the decision. Just as the civilian Iraqis are sincere in their support for continuous US military presence in the country, the American people are sincere in their support for the military:

I love America. While I agree that there is so much wrong with what we do, there is also so much right. I think that America is a young country and maybe

because of that, so much like a young person, we are idyllic. I think our hearts as a whole are in the right place. I am not saying that the policy makers' hearts are always in the right place when they propose things ... I am saying that the American people as a whole actually do care. When I came home from R&R, at the Atlanta airport I was greeted by hundreds of Americans clapping their hands and cheering for us. Are they happy with Bush or the politics or the idea of the whole war, maybe not. They were proud of us though, of our sacrifice, maybe because they know that we are acting as an extension of our American ideals (ibid).

As we shall see later, Rustin Currie of *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum*, emphasises that the duty of the military is to do the right thing, in spite of public opinion, in spite of the alleged lies of the liberal main stream media. In that respect, the soldier resembles the brave politician, he who knows the long-term consequences of letting things drift, and dares make the unpopular, but necessary decisions. And war, an always unpopular but sometimes necessary decision is the true extension of this bravery, the true continuation of politics.

Rachel, on the other hand, who contrasts the sinister motives of the politicians with those of the people, with "their hearts in the right place", does not regard war as the continuation of politics, but, rather, as the continuation of the true will of the people: "they know that we are acting as an extension of our American ideals". Note, how the inseparability of the people and the military are amplified by both form and content: The personal pronouns "they" and "we", nominally signifying two separate social entities, become one in the emphasis of the ideals as "our (...) ideals". Furthermore, these ideals are not merely empty notions. They are American ideals: "Life", the thousands of lives of civilians which must be protected by continuous US presence in Iraq; "Liberty", the "functioning government and constitution", which it took America nearly 13 years to establish; and, finally and above all, "the pursuit of happiness", the "fact that we keep trying".

### *7.1.3 Transcendent civil religion and sacrifice*

In the analysis above, I showed that civil religion – despite Rachel's background and the facts that she is a woman and has deep concerns about the general cause of this war – is present in her blog. Yet, I also showed that it is a different type of civil religion than the 'priestly' and ideological belief in America's infallible supremacy as we saw in *Ma Deuce Gunner*.

Rachel's civil religion is an individual faith in the just cause of America, a faith which is valid despite the flawed political decisions that have led to the present situation. Hence, the cause is not proved, but tried in the course of history. It is in that respect that Rachel's civil religion is transcendent, not

immanent. It serves as a guideline for the individual to follow in his or her pursuit of fulfilling shared American ideals.

Immanent civil religion, on the other hand, regards history as the unfolding of the nation's true cause. As will be shown in the following, sacrifice in Ma Deuce Gunner's perception presupposes a distribution of roles between the military and the civilians, (a point which was also touched upon in the discussion above regarding Ma Deuce Gunner's statement "feel NO PITY"). "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf": Soldiers endure hardships, they fight and die, they guard the border between chaos and cosmos. All they demand in return is recognition; recognition of their sacrifices.

Rachel's blog has no such clear distinction between the soldier and the civilian. Yes, soldiers and marines endure hardships. Yes, civilians show their gratitude by applauding on their return. But they do so spontaneously, knowing that the soldiers and marines act on behalf of themselves, as an extension of shared ideals, American ideals. Marine or soldier, the serviceman is a citizen. He or she is like, not different from, other individuals in the greater society they serve. Practically, of course, Rachel does distinguish between people "out here" and people "back home". However, she does so emphasizing the falseness of the military world. If there is a demarcation line between civilian and serviceman, Rachel belongs on the side of the former, in spite of the catch 22 experienced by the returning serviceman: the real friends, back home, will never be able to fully understand or share your deployment experiences. The fake friends, out here, will never sincerely wish to.

The idea of the sacrifice is not absent from Rachel's writings. Yet, since the acts of the serviceman ideally represent the enactment of a "volunte generale" shared by all citizens beyond the flawed sphere of politics, sacrifices are not sacrifices for fellow soldiers or marines, but sacrifices for these ideals. The death of her fellow marines leaves Rachel heartbroken, but the sorrow she feels is a personal grief. She explicitly mentions her difficulties to associate herself with the immanent community of warriors, dominated by male ideals, and the grief she feels does not imply the existence of a transcendent one.

## **7.2. Ma Deuce Gunner: Fiddler's Green**

From Ma Deuce Gunner's blog, I have chosen to focus on his Memorial Day entry from May 29, 2005, in which he posts and comments on the poem, "Fiddler's Green".<sup>102</sup> In the mythology of the U.S. Cavalry, "Fiddler's Green is

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<sup>102</sup> In 2005, Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, fell on the 30th. This post was published the day before.

where a cavalry man meets his comrades who have gone before him, at an old canteen, surrounded by a broad meadow, dotted with trees and crossed by many streams. Here, the cavalry man stops, unsaddles his horse, and joins his comrades for a visit with many stories, reminiscences, and camaraderie, before continuing his journey. Soldiers of no other branch of service must stop at Fiddler's Green, they must continue to march" (US Cavalry, 1996: 7). The verse lines were first published in the Cavalry Journal in 1923, but its roots go further back, and are almost mythological themselves.

Originally, Fiddler's Green was associated with seamen, and as early as in the 1825 edition of the Oxford English Concise Dictionary, the term is known as signifying the sailors' paradise, and Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable defines it as a place with "plenty of grog and unlimited tobacco" (Evans & Brewer, 1963). The tale is probably Irish in its origin,<sup>103</sup> as probably is the displacement of Fiddler's Green from sea vessel to horseback. Thus, it is assumed that the U.S. cavalry adopted the myth from members of the 5th Royal Irish Lancers, a regiment that had been disbanded by the British Army in 1799 under suspicion of rebel sympathies. The title of the song of the 5th Lancers "Garryowen" literally means "Owens Garden", and thus reflects, at the level of the signified, the same paradisiacal idea.<sup>104</sup> That song later became associated with the 7th Cavalry, Custer's Regiment, legendary in itself.

### *7.2.1 Style and Grammar*

The post is structured with a short introduction followed by the poem itself and interrupted by a picture between verses two and three, and finally ends with a short tribute "all who has given their lives in sacrifice, so that others may live in freedom". The poem consists of four verses; the three first each have six and the last seven lines. Thus, the verse lines of the poem constitute the major part of the post, 25 out of a total of 33 lines, including the date, the

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<sup>103</sup> Elements of the structure, however, seem to be part of a more general Indo-European mythological framework. The Irish myth says that "an old salt who is tired of seagoing should walk inland with an oar over his shoulder. When he comes to a pretty little village deep in the country and the people ask him what he is carrying, he will know he has found Fiddler's Green" (Page & Ingpen, 1985: 105). Likewise, when approaching the spirit of "the blind seer", Tiresias, at the fringes of Hades, the hero Odysseus is told that to find the proper place to appease Poseidon, he must walk inland with an oar over his shoulder, until somebody calls it a shovel (Odyssey XI: 126-131).

<sup>104</sup> "Pairidaeza" the Old Persian root of the term "Paradise" means "walled enclosure, pleasure park, garden" (Partin, 2005), connotations which are maintained in both the Judeo-Christian notion of the Garden of Eden and in Fiddler's Green as a "meadow green".

headlines (which – strictly speaking – are part of the poem too) and the blogging frame.

The picture shows a horse with an empty saddle at a memorial ceremony, probably at Arlington; it is interesting in regard to the above-mentioned connection between the myth of Fiddler's Green and the 7th Cavalry, and of the message of the post in general. When reinforcement arrived at the scene after the battle at Little Big Horn, the only "survivor" of the 7th Cavalry was a horse, named Comanche. That horse appeared riderless at all 7th Cavalry parades, and today, as in this picture, the horse with an empty saddle serves as a powerful symbol of the dead serviceman or leader.<sup>105</sup>

### *7.2.2 Content*

In the opening line of the poem, Fiddler's Green is described as being "[h]alfway down the trail to Hell". In accordance with the folkloristic origin of the myth, Hell should probably not be understood as the Christian Hell, a place of eternal punishment and the dwelling place of evil. Rather, it is probably closer related to the heathen understanding as the place where most deceased souls go, as "Hades" in Greek mythology or "Hel" in Norse mythology. Yet, the Kingdom of death is not a particularly attractive place in either of these mythologies. In the *Odyssey*, the Soul of Achilles tells Odysseus that he would "rather be a serf on Earth than a king in Hades" (*Odyssey* XI: 490), and in Norse mythology "Hel" is for those who have suffered death from disease or accidents. Warriors who have died on the battlefield go to "Valhalla" instead, where they will rest in joy and heroic fighting until the end of times. There is no equivalent to Valhalla in Greek mythology. Yet, some Greek sources refer to the "Elysian Fields" and the "Isles of the Blessed" as places reserved for the souls of heroes (Bremmer. 2005). And, in the original description of the myth, Fiddler's Green is compared to The Elysian Fields (*Cavalry Journal* 1923. Quoted from Truscott, 1989: 177).

Thus, phenomenologically, Fiddler's Green constitutes the Cavalry mythology equivalent to the heathen idea of an extraordinary life beyond death for the souls of those who have led an extraordinary life on Earth. Thus, when in verse two it is specified that members of no other branches rest at Fiddler's Green, but are "marching past, straight through to Hell", it should probably not be understood as a repudiation of "the Infantry (...) the Engi-

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<sup>105</sup> This practice, however, also resembles a much older tradition, probably leading back to medieval times, of letting "the knight's charger in mourning [follow] the knight to his last resting place", and in the American Military it can probably be traced back to the Civil War, and thus predates the Indian Wars (Truscott, 1989: 110).



neers, Artillery, and Marines”<sup>106</sup> but simply as a statement of the Cavalry’s special privileges, (and maybe of more ancient connotations of nobility associated with mounted forces): Whereas the commons must spend afterlife in a world of grey dullness, the Cavalrymen can enjoy theirs in the green meadows, drinking and chanting with their peers.

Christian, or dualist, connotations are not totally absent from the poem. Hence, in verse three, Hell, which the Cavalryman may “seek”, is described as “a warmer scene”. This is, however, primarily used to emphasise, once more, the privileged state of the trooper: Unlike members of other branches, the trooper has a choice. He can stay at Fiddler’s Green, or choose to continue to Hell, but even in the case he chooses the latter, he will eventually return to “this eternal resting place (...) known as Fiddler’s Green”.

Though some go curving down the trail  
To seek a warmer scene.  
No trooper ever gets to Hell  
Ere he’s emptied his canteen<sup>107</sup>  
And so rides back to drink again  
with friends at Fiddler’s Green

As a mythological framework, “Fiddler’s Green” is closely related to notions of the afterlife of the warrior, and hence, I will argue, military religion. A crucial point in this warrior mythology is that the cavalry men are part of an imagined community, and, moreover, a community which transcends life itself: deceased servicemen not merely die, and not merely go to an afterworld, such as Heaven or Hell, particular to an organisational religion. Instead, they continue to be distinguished in death as they were in life. In “Fiddler’s Green” this transcendent community is solely reserved for cavalrymen.

Obviously, in the poem, mentioning members of other branches serves the function of excluding other servicemen from participating in the transcendent community of troopers. Yet, it is noteworthy that the poem only mentions fighting men and no civilians. This is a thoroughly militarised afterworld: The cavalry may here have a privileged status, but this particular road to Hell, (and maybe even this particular Hell), is reserved for warriors.

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<sup>106</sup> The sailors, from whom the myth of Fiddler’s Green derived, are not explicitly mentioned and hence not explicitly excluded from resting at Fiddler’s Green in this passage.

<sup>107</sup> The concurrent conditional and causal forms (“ere” & “and so”) make the last lines difficult to understand. What is meant, according to the 1923 description of the myth, is that “none [of the troopers, MB] had ever reached the gates of Hell, but having finished up their liquor had returned to Fiddler’s Green.” Cavalry Journal 1923 (Quoted from Truscott, 1989: 177).

In that respect, implied in the strong, and exclusivist, esprit de corps of the poem is a broader notion of warrior religion. The cavalryman may choose to break the porous demarcation line between the branches and journey to Hell with other fighting men. The line between dying in the straw and dying on the battlefield, however, cannot be crossed.

Originally, the last verse contained one more line, and in its full version it reads:

And so when man and horse go down  
Beneath a saber keen,  
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee  
You stop a bullet clean,  
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,  
Just empty your canteen  
And put your pistol to your head  
And go to Fiddlers' Green. (US Cavalry, 1996: 7)

As reflected by both the picture of the riderless horse, by the content of the song in general, and by this verse in particular, the mythological framework of the Cavalry, and of Fiddler's Green, is closely connected to the Indian Wars. The line refers to a historical fact: in the wars on the plains, all Cavalry Officers carried a purse in their belt containing one bullet meant to be used in case death or capture was inevitable (Slotkin, 1998: 12). Thus, what this line implies is the idea of an honourable death. This idea of suicide does not fit Durkheim's classical categorisation. Instead, it seems to combine elements of egoism and altruism: the cavalryman chooses to end his life by his own hand to avoid sufferings, but also to maintain his own and his regiment's honour by depriving the enemy the satisfaction of capturing him alive.

Ma Deuce Gunner is conscious of military history and clearly sees himself as a defender of civilisation in a hostile world. In the header of his blog, he has a picture of what could very well be a cavalryman. Yet, in his version of Fiddler's Green, this line is omitted. Why? It could of course, simply be a matter of coincidence. Maybe the line was already omitted in his source. After all, this line does not fit the structure of the other verses, and the message, death rather than capture, fits archaic ideals of nobility better than rules of modern warfare.<sup>108</sup> This leads to the second possible explanation: by leaving out these context-specific elements, fundamental in the Indian Wars, but not so today, the cross-historical nature of the soldier's sacrifice can be amplified. Hence,

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<sup>108</sup> I have found one other blog, on a MySpace site, where the line is omitted: <http://www.myspace.com/denofsouls> Hence, a reduced version of the poem is in circulation. Yet, why that is the case, I do not know.

by leaving this line out, Ma Deuce Gunner can regard the Savage Wars of Peace (Boot, 2002) and the great campaigns of the age of total war as part of one great historical narrative: America's battle against the enemies of Freedom.

This would fit well with the last two lines of the post in which Ma Deuce Gunner dedicates the poem to the martyrs of freedom. Two points of interest should be noted in regard to this tribute. First, contrary to the message of the poem and to the self-conception of Cavalry mythology, his tribute is universal. Whereas the poem only implies, and only weakly so, a notion of a universal afterworld for all warriors, Ma Deuce Gunner explicitly dedicates the poem to "all who have given their life in sacrifice, so that others may live in freedom". Hence, in Ma Deuce Gunner's version the meaning of the poem is expanded from depicting a very confined esprit de corps to include all martyrs in the universal struggle for Freedom.

Moreover, by explicitly describing the soldier's death as a sacrifice, as an altruistic act of community made with a higher purpose in mind, he not only expresses notions of both military and national identity. Instead, by defining this higher purpose as the gift of Freedom, he subordinates military identity to national or ideological identity. Thus, whereas the verse lines of "Fiddler's Green" fit neatly with the idea of a military sacrificial cult in which a community of fighting men reaching across time, space and life itself is established, it becomes in Ma Deuce Gunner's framing a symbol of the bond between the victims and the sacrificers of the national cult instead.

This framing of the poem is in accordance with his leaving out the line describing suicide as within the confines of an honourable officer's death. Neither of the combined elements of this type of an officer's suicide fit well with a national sacrificial martyr cult. Egoism and sacrifice are by definition mutually excluding: the egoist acts in his own interest; the sacrificial victim is acted upon in spite of his own interest. Likewise, militarised altruism, choosing honour instead of capture, may fit well with archaic ideals of nobility, but not with the idea of national martyrdom: the officer takes his own life to avoid the dishonour which would contaminate his regiment. The national martyr gives his life "so that others may live in freedom". Capture and sufferings only add to his martyrdom.

By subordinating the discourse of military sacrifice to the discourse of national sacrifice, Ma Deuce Gunner repeats and amplifies what was already implied in the analysis above: the soldier as a guardian. The soldier stands between chaos of the outer world and order, symbolised by the constitutional rights. In his description of the celebration of the nation, in his July 4 post, Ma Deuce Gunner focused on the proper conduct of the sacrificant, of the

community for whom the soldier's sacrifice are conducted. In his description of the commemoration of the victims, in his Memorial Day post, he frames the soldier's sacrifice as a sacrifice for freedom. "I believe we are trying to spread freedom to the oppressed. To give those masses, who have been persecuted under tyrannical and murderous dictators a chance at freedom" (Ma Deuce Gunner: June 10, 2005).

### **7.3. Rusten Currie: For the Soldier so loved the world, that he gave his life, that whosoever honoured him should not be serf, but enjoy everlasting freedom.**

Whereas Ma Deuce Gunner's July 4 speech, analysed in Chapter 5, unproblematically combined notions of sacrifice, Rusten Currie's more explicit style also meant that he actually ended up telling two stories: one horizontal, about the necessity of maintaining reciprocity between the citizens, and one vertical, about the transcendent blessing of the national entity. The presence of this transcendent element also means that although Rusten Currie describes civil-military relations in contractual terms – the freedom earned by the soldiers should be honoured by those who enjoy it – he does so in a more inclusive way. Freedom is explicitly described as "our' freedom". The central message of the post is unity, expressed in America's motto "from many ... one". Therefore, it is emphasised that "[o]n this day, there should be no Partisan politics, on this day we are all Americans, who owe much to few".

Thus, the analysis of Rusten Currie's July 4 speech, in Chapter 6, showed a clear ambiguity between the nation as a mother blessed by a distant, omnipotent deity, and the nation as enacted virtue in parallel rites of the July 4 parades and the patrols gathering for a mission outside the fence. I am not saying that these two religious narratives cannot be combined. Actually, the coexistence of transcendent and immanent elements is probably more the rule than the exception in most religions.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, as argued in the analysis, it is difficult to combine the different notions of agency, deriving from these two different civil religious "theologies" into a coherent whole In Currie's post.

Moreover, whereas Ma Deuce Gunner constantly uses the plural, but anonymous, "we" when describing his fellow soldiers, Rusten Currie's de-

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<sup>109</sup> The fundamental difference between Protestantism and Catholicism in the 16th century was, at least in the Protestant self-conception, a difference between the horizontal approach of the Church, placing agency within the human sphere, and the vertical approach of the new denominations, emphasising the omnipotent nature, or agency of God. The status of the Prophet in Islam describes a similar dilemma. He is both, vertically, the deliverer of the divine message, and horizontally a man, an exemplary one, but a man, nevertheless.

scriptions of unit cohesion and esprit de corps describes people of flesh and blood. These are his brothers in arms, and he not only says so. His very personal reflections also make us, as readers, feel so. Bearing these similarities and differences in mind, I will now turn focus towards the understanding of military identity in *Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum*, as expressed in his post Veteran's Day, published on November 12, 2005.<sup>110</sup>

### *7.3.1 Style and Grammar*

The post consists of four paragraphs, divided by a one-line spacing. Even though none of these divisions are incomprehensible, the first three seem to add little to the general readability of the text, since very different topics occur within each of these paragraphs.

However, what seems as slovenliness in regard to the disposition of the post is contradicted by a grandiloquent style at the clause level. Even though the vocabulary is more straightforward than, for instance, in his July 4 poem quoted above, the frequent use of alliterations and the repetition of syntactical forms provide the post with a solemn appearance that supports what is also said in the first lines: "Veteran's Day is one of the most sacred days of my year".

Thus, in the following quotation, the presence of the narrating subject is repeated, but the subject changes from the first person singular "I" to the plural "we", thus anticipating the final words, and the central message of the post: "Semper Adsumus ... we are always here":

Tonight I am still here, and though my hand is shaking, from fatigue, sadness, and anger. I am still here. Though this war may be increasingly unpopular, we remain (my italics, MB).

Likewise, in his reflections about the nature of the war in Iraq, the repetition of "it is", in 12 successive clauses, subordinates American military history, geography, world history, sacrifice, doubt and faith, and personal clarification, under one narrative: **The war in Iraq.**

**This war is indeed different. It is not Tripoli, or Luzon, it is not reminiscent of Foy, or Gettysburg, it is not Berlin, or Tokyo. It is towns that yet again we didn't know existed before we got here. It is towns that we still can not easily pronounce. It is specs on the round where history was born, it is a place where far too many of our young have grown old beyond their years. It is a place where far too many of us paid for freedom with blood. It is a place where my**

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<sup>110</sup> Veterans Day is celebrated on November 11, the date of the First World War Armistice. Rusten Currie's post was uploaded the day after the actual holiday, on November 12.

faith in God and humanity have been shattered. It is a place where my faith in God and humanity have been reaffirmed. It is a place where I come to grips with my own life, and the possibility of my end. Yet, despite it all and despite world opinion it is a place where I have found the faith to believe in something that I am willing to fight to the death to defend. (my italics, MB)

### 7.3.2 Content

The clarity of the last sentence, saying that the narrator here, in Iraq, has “found the faith to believe in something” he is willing to die for, is at variance with the fact that judging from the context, it is not unequivocally clear what that something actually is.

Beyond doubt, this post written on Veteran’s Day is about the fallen, about the relationship established between fighting men. At least half of it concerns military friendships in general and the fallen in particular: about his two mentors and superior officers, Colonel William Wood and Captain Raymond Hill; about how they both served as an example for him as a man and as a soldier; about how honoured he feels to have served with such men. Lastly, and perhaps most important in this context, he tells how they, in his memory and by means of the place, are continuously present among the living:

I knew them all, I can still see them where last I saw them. I hear their voices as I past by the shadows of where they once stood. And at each memorial to the honored dead, I stood a little taller as taps echoed their memories.

Whereas focus in the first half is on the fallen, he repeats this soldier identity theme at the end of the post, but now in regard to the living

I push my doubt aside and stand next to better men than me, and we move forward ... together. I have wanted to do many things with my life; be a good husband, write, teach, hold office etc etc... The one thing that I have done for the entirety of my adult life I have been in and remain in uniform; what this says I do not know, but what I do know is this. Here, and now, of all the things I have wanted to be, I have always been a soldier.

The way Rusten Currie here subordinates past and present, the death and the living, under one discourse of the virtues and duties of soldiery on November 12, repeats a pattern of justification already used in an earlier post:

We sleep it off get up from the work induced coma, and jump right the hell back into it, not for pay, not for king and country, but for the 20 year old kid who counts on us to do our job, and not complain. For that 20 year old who is just trying to survive this horrible war, and make it home. But more importantly we push ourselves beyond reason for each and every one of our honored dead;

we push through exhaustion for those who sprinted that last mile (Si vis pacem para bellum: March 25, 2005).

Here, he specifically emphasises that he is not fighting for “king and country”, but instead, in a way that closely resembles Durkheim’s expectations in regard to the officers as well as the findings in the American Soldier, for his men: for the living as well as for the death. In that respect, duty and honour are Rusten Currie’s primary concerns. As an officer, he has a special responsibility for the men under his command: their survival depends on him. As a soldier, he is obliged to honour the sacrifice of those who have died, an obligation overshadowing all other duties. He can only fulfil this obligation by fulfilling the mission they died trying to accomplish: victory in Iraq. Thus, he establishes a notion of an imagined, military community, existing across time and space, and constituting a full-grown alternative to the national one. In fact, in this passage, he explicitly states that, as far as motivation is concerned, he does not fight for his country, but for the soldiers under his command and for the soldiers whose memory he will honour.

As far as the Veteran’s Day post is concerned, the idea of an imagined community, a military imagined community, is clearly there. I will, nevertheless, argue that it is not the dominating sacrificial discourse. Here, just like we saw in Ma Deuce Gunner’s post above, the importance of military identity is recognised, but also subordinated to the national identity. Duty is honour. Honour can only be achieved by fulfilling the cause for which the dead were sacrificed, by serving the country. Hence, in both the descriptions of Colonel Wood and of Captain Hill, his friends and superior officers, Currie emphasises that they died supporting the mission:

William Wood, my Battalion Commander, believed with his heart in our purpose here 10,000 miles from home in a strange land. (...) He died honoring his oath to defend his nation against all enemies, he believed when I doubted. Again Duty sir!

(...)

CPT Raymond Hill, (...)met his end trying only to help bring smiles to the faces of the children of this land for he truly enjoyed their company and saw the purity and innocence of their youth when I would not. He died believing in his cause, his end was also to a higher cause than just his own life. Honor sir!<sup>111</sup>

Both officers died for a “purpose”, a “cause”. Whereas we are told that Colonel Wood died “honoring his oath to defend his nation against all enemies”, it is not specified what Captain Hill died for, only that the way he died contrib-

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<sup>111</sup> “Duty, Honor Country” is the motto of the US Army.

uted to making his death, how sad it may ever be, purposeful. Later, however, in the passage already quoted, Currie states, in general terms, that Iraq is the place, “where far too many of us paid for freedom with blood”, and, in regard to his recognition of the sacrifice of the atheist.<sup>112</sup> “to be willing to die for our way of life to me that is just huge”.

Thus, the death of the soldiers, and not just any soldiers but of two people whose death Currie describes as a personal loss, is not described as a buddy sacrifice, but as a sacrifice, for – yes – “King and country”, or, more precisely, for nation and freedom. This interpretation is also supported by two central, albeit implied, intertextual references in the post: First, soldier sacrifice is compared to the sacrifice of the Lord, and, second, to the Orwellian idea of the soldier as the guardian of peace.

The post opens with a statement that could form the introduction in any textbook on civil religion:

As many of you know I am not an overly religious man, yet for me Veteran’s Day is one of the most sacred days of my year. This year doubly so. Christ died 2000 years ago, and a religion was born from his death, and ultimately his ascension. Yet for me, November 11th each year is a reminder to me of who I am.

Thus, the distinction between sacred and profane is, in Currie’s view, not necessarily bound to church religion, but can also be described in terms of personal experience. To him, being in Iraq, having lost close friends and faced death, November 11, a day of commemoration, is not just a holiday: it is a holy day. What is particularly interesting in regard to this distinction between what I, with reference to Martin Marty, call “church religion” and “civil religion”, is the meaning of the implied comparison with the sacrifice of Christ, and the consequence he draws in regard to his notion of the sacredness of Veteran’s Day.

Needless to say, the idea that the soldier’s sacrifice is a sacrifice for freedom is not new. Neither is the, implied, comparison of the soldier’s sacrifice with that of Christ. In fact, this comparison draws on a staunch discourse, expressed in American identity at least since the civil war, where it also found its most famous articulation in Julia Ward Howe’s apocalyptic “Battle Hymn of the Republic”. Thus, the last verse of the “Battle Hymn” reads:

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<sup>112</sup> The atheist is described in third person singular, as a more or less hypothetical person. Yet, seen in connection to the opening lines stating that he himself is not an “overly religious person” and in light of the discussion of losing and regaining faith in the above, it could very well be himself or Captain Hill.



In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on (Julia Ward Howe, 1862).

As mentioned in the introduction, this song played a significant role in promoting the Union's cause as a cause of freedom (Jewett, 1973). The crucial words in that regard were, of course, the direct comparison between the sacrifice of the Lord and the sacrifice of the American soldier, expressed in these lines.

The verse clearly states that the deeds of Christ cannot be compared to those of his humble servants: He was born "[w]ith a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me", (a necessary hesitation should the comparison not be regarded as outright blasphemy). Thus, the comparison does not make man on equal to Christ, but simply makes the Lord's sacrifice an example to be followed: like, He served mankind by redeeming us of sin, the American soldiers should serve mankind by redeeming us of serfdom.

In Begriffsgeschichtliche terms, the idea that American soldiers are sent to war to promote, among the oppressed, the freedom that they enjoy themselves (the idea of the Redeemer Nation) should become one of the most powerful, and controversial, vehicles of American politics: It formed the ideological basis of some of the bloodiest wars of the Reluctant Giant, from Wilson's crusade to make the world safe for democracy to G.W. Bush's struggle for freedom in Iraq. Here, the same idea is expressed among men on the ground (Tuveson, 1980).

Rusten Currie refers rather indirectly to that idea. He uses the comparison to contradict his own, secular, veneration of Veterans Day with the veneration of millions of Christians for a single person's death many years ago. Yet, among other bloggers, it is much more explicit and much more in accordance with the original and religiously based comparison, either as a direct reference to Julia Ward Howe's text,<sup>113</sup> or articulated in the other saying quoted in the introduction: "Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you: 1. Jesus Christ 2. The American G.I. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom."<sup>114</sup>

The comparison of the soldier sacrifice to that of Jesus Christ points to what I above have defined as a central element in all sacrifices: Justification

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<sup>113</sup> Among the bloggers in my sample, these lines of "The Battlehymn of the Republic" are referred to by both *Lt. Smash* (April 18, 2003) and *Dadmanly* (March 13, 2005).-

<sup>114</sup> Albeit often occurring in blogosphere, this saying is referred to in my sample only by *Half a World Away* (September 4, 2006).

works both ways. Death is made purposeful by subordinating it to a higher purpose which is associated with death, and by placing it in the justificatory equation it is comprehensible as a purpose worth dying for. This may seem controversial in regard to soldier sacrifices, but as far as the Christian understanding of martyrdom is concerned, it is a nearly trivial claim: Christ died on the cross. By means of his sacrifice, he redeemed us of our sins. This is in accordance with how sacrifices are normally understood: the deficits of the sacrifice (a) are being made up for by the benefits of a higher cause (b). This equation can also easily be applied to the soldier sacrifice. To put it very simple:

<b>Deficit (a)</b>	<b>Benefit (b)</b>
Christ died on the cross	By means of his sacrifice, he redeemed us of our sins
Colonel William Wood (...) died	“honoring his oath to defend his nation against all enemies”

What I claim here, however, is that (b) not only justifies (a), but that (a) also justifies (b), as justification enacted, i.e. as a cause worth dying for (Marvin & Ingle 1996). Regard the following: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The second half of this scriptural passage articulates what has already been said in the above. By the divine sacrificial act (a), the believer is blessed with “everlasting life” (b). However, the first part emphasises that the sacrifice of the Lord should be seen as proof of the depth of His love of mankind. In other words, the grace of salvation is worth the death of God himself. Thus, by serving as a proof of divine love, the sacrifice (a) makes the purpose (b), purposeful.

The question is, of course, whether the mere comparison of the soldier sacrifice with that of Christ makes it plausible to displace that inverse, or latent, sacrificial logic from the divine to the secular sphere. Do we actually see something similar at play in the blogs analysed here? I will claim we do, both directly in Currie’s metaphorical description of the soldiers’ blood sacrifices, and in the reoccurring theme of honouring sacrifices by accomplishing them.

Currie’s definition of Iraq as “(...) a place where far too many of us paid for freedom with blood”, quoted twice above, repeats in words and context his November 1 statement, when he, on the day of the memorial of Colonel Wood, Captain Hill and two other soldiers, opens his post with the statement that “The tree of liberty has yet again been watered with the blood of patriots” (Si vis pacem, para bellum: November 1, 2005). Both metaphors com-

bine blood and freedom, and neither of them merely describes blood sacrifice as a necessary evil justified by subordinating it to a higher purpose. On the contrary, by regarding blood as either the currency of freedom or as the nutrition of which the tree of liberty lives, sacrifice becomes a proof of true patriotism.

A similar logic is found in the notion that sacrifices should be honoured by fulfilling the purpose for which they were made. When Ma Deuce Gunner in his July 4 post emphasises that the civilians, back home, should “feel NO pity”, he does so because to pity the soldiers means that their sacrifice has been in vain. The same notion is expressed in Rusten Currie’s blog when he, repeatedly, quotes Colonel Wood’s saying: “Soldiers have fallen, we hold the line” (November 1, 2005). Honouring the fallen cannot be done without honouring what they fell for. Breaking the line would mean breaking the bonds tying together the living and the death.

Moreover, this metaphor of a line that should be held, also points at another similarity between Ma Deuce Gunner’s and Rusten Currie’s descriptions of the contractual relationship between soldiers and civilians:

Yet despite it all I ... we are holding the line, and more importantly we are crossing said line, and pushing back with all that we have, so that those of you at home don’t have to sleep with one eye open. Sleep well, for we are here. Semper Adsumus. I push my doubt aside and stand next to better men than me, and we move forward ... together (Si vis pacem, para bellum: November 12, 2005).

As mentioned, in regard to the analysis of Ma Deuce Gunner’s depiction of civil-military relations, the Orwellian saying “People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf” is often quoted in military blogs, and the intertextual reference to this line of thought is obvious in Currie’s expression “Sleep well, for we are here”.<sup>115</sup> He, too, seems to regard the belief in freedom and the maintenance of the reciprocity between soldiers and civilians as the *Sine Qua Non* of the military service. In Currie’s words, this is perhaps most emblematic in his fre-

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<sup>115</sup> This idea is also reflected in the often quoted text, “A different Christmas Poem” that describes how a man on Christmas night invites a marine to his home. The marine refuses and says that he, like his grandfather who died in Pearl Harbour, and his Father who fought in Vietnam, must remain outside on guard. He only asks one thing: “For when we come home / either standing or dead / To know you remember we fought and we bled / Is payment enough, and with that we will trust / That we mattered to you, as you mattered to us” (Sandbox Chronicles: December 22, 2005; Half a World Away: December 22, 2005; Fire and Ice: December 23, 2005; Airman in Iraq: December 26, 2005).

quent use of the Latin phrases: “Semper Paratus, we are always ready, Semper Fidelis, always faithful, and finally Semper Adsumus ... we are always here.”

However, in spite of these similarities, in spite of the fact that Rusten Currie, like Ma Deuce Gunner, subordinates the soldier’s sacrifice to that of the nation, and despite his reciprocal view of the relationship between soldiers and civilians, between sacrificial “victims” and “sacrifiants”, there are, nevertheless, some small, but important differences between their articulations of these ideas.

First, he implicitly compares the sacrifice of the American soldier with that of Jesus Christ and explicitly states that, “November 11th each year is a reminder to me of who I am”. He considers the sacrifice just and emphasises time and again, how the death of his comrades have made “Veteran’s day even more sacred”. Yet, his approach is much more personal. Whereas Ma Deuce Gunner makes a very general statement when he dedicates “Fiddler’s Green” to all who have given their life in sacrifice”, Currie more than once explicitly states his doubt: “he [Colonel Wood] believed when I doubted”, “I really want to believe and yet I falter”. He does not focus solely on the purpose of the sacrifice, but also on the victims. Hence, the military sacrifice is not totally subordinated to the national discourse. The memory of the people of flesh and blood, the buddies embodying the sacrificial act are always there.

Like Ma Deuce Gunner, Rusten Currie subordinates the soldier’s sacrifice to the national or idealist discourse. Yet, just as we saw in the analysis above, where he sought to combine transcendent and immanent aspects of civil religion, this subordination is only partial. His identity as a soldier is, on the one hand, tightly bound to the immanent or contractual element that defines the relations between nation and service, and enables civilians to “sleep peacefully in their beds” because he, always faithful, always ready, will always stand on the fringes of society, “ready to do violence on their behalf”. On the other hand, what defines him as a soldier, and what serves as the concrete proof of the worth of his sacrifice, is not only these abstract notions of social reciprocity. It is the concrete relations in which he is embedded, the examples provided by his friends and comrades who have paid the price. It is the knowledge that leaving before the job is done will compromise their sacrifice and, hence, deprive him of the honour he has felt serving under Colonel William Wood and Captain Raymond Hill.

#### **7.4. Misoldierthoughts: Sacrifice deconstructed**

As shown in the analyses, Zack reflects on patriotism, and his notion of national affiliation cannot be categorised as civil religion, unless we regard the Deweyan democratic faith as part of the civil religious spectre. In Zack’s writ-

ings there is no implication of a deity blessing the nation, no afterlife, and no idea of a collective destiny to be fulfilled.

Judging from the World War II findings of Stouffer's Research Branch, we cannot, however, conclude that the absence of civil religion by necessity leads to an absence of military religion. On the contrary, for the World War II soldier, national affiliation and unit cohesion were seen as mutually excluding. Hence, the absence of national religious references could indicate a more prevalent use of military religious references, especially in light of the fact that the content analysis above showed a significant increase in military identity among liberals exposed to combat.

#### *7.4.1 Style and Grammar*

Zack divides his September 28 post, "A Promise", into four paragraphs that logically form the structure of the two main arguments of the post by moving from the general to the specific. Thus, just like the first paragraph states that we as a nation should choose our battles carefully, the second defines the war in Iraq as a losing battle, the third paragraph claims that Iraq is a "martyr factory", and the fourth serves to illustrate that point.

Both the frequent use of rhetorical questions and a number of very telling comparisons and metaphors support this deconstruction of the sacrifice. Thus, by describing Iraq as "the new frontier of poor foreign policy and poor planning", Zack deliberately twists one of the most powerful metaphors of American heritage, the idea that the nation, after having conquered the West, must continue to strive and to find new plains to explore and master (Jackson Turner, 1996). Here, this idea of a Manifest Destiny instead becomes a symbol of everything that is wrong in America.

Likewise, when he describes what he regards as the great betrayal of the just war in Afghanistan, Zack cleverly avoids violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which explicitly prohibits any insulting references to the Commander in Chief, and still to describe the President in an unflattering light: "Afghanistan and Bin Laden lay forgotten as if they were discarded toys left by a spoiled child." The implied reference from this picture of a "spoiled child" to George W. Bush is obvious. Yet, by use of the passive form, in which Afghanistan, Bin Laden and the discarded toys are subject, and the agency of the "spoiled child" is underplayed, and by keeping the comparison hypothetical "as if they were", he avoids making it explicit.

#### *7.4.2 Content*

There is little doubt that Zack sees himself as a soldier. He participated in the 2003 invasion, and his 2005 blog was during his second tour to Iraq. He wants to fight, but he wants to fight only in just wars. His initial distinction

between what he describes as “battles which serve no good purpose” and “battles which need to be fought” also applies to the promise mentioned in the headline. Dying in Iraq is dying for “an empty promise. The promise that somehow staying in Iraq makes America safer”. The implied contrast to “an empty promise” is a genuine promise. We can derive at least two genuine promises from the text.

Straightforwardly, the description of the war in Afghanistan and Bin Laden as “forgotten (...) discarded toys” symbolises a genuine, but failed promise. Following a more subtle (and more sinister) reading, the last sentence of the post can also be seen as a promise: “Maybe then when we have enough names for a beautiful war memorial we can leave Iraq.”

In Zack’s eyes, unjust wars like Vietnam and Iraq only lead to one positive outcome: beautiful war memorials. Underneath the irony of that statement is a truth, the truth of the inverse logic of the sacrifice, already described in regard to Rusten Currie’s statement that “the tree of liberty has yet again been watered by the blood of patriots” (*Si vis pacem, para bellum*: November 25, 2005). The death of the soldier, even the meaningless death, serves as a means of justification: it justifies the nation as a social entity worth dying for. This is what beautiful war memorials do: “when we have enough names”, names of individuals, the death of each soldier can become a meaningful social act. Contrary to Currie’s description Zack does not celebrate this, he bewails it.

Zack ends his post on patriotism by warning against the hypocrisy of the Patriot Act: “(...) they can call it any number of patriotic names, but let them pry your rights from your All American Hands only when you are dead.” (*Mis-soldierthoughts*, September 15, 2005). This warning is interesting here in two regards. First, structurally, it repeats the dichotomy between the tragedy of each killed individual and the social act of posthumously applying social meaning to the death. Secondly, he clearly does not include the dead body of the patriot in the community of the living. As long as you are alive, you must stand up for your rights. Once you are dead, “let them pry your rights from your All American Hands”.

A similar reflection on death occurs in one of his posts from the Invasion, where Zack describes how members of a sister artillery unit had guard duties next to the dead body of an Iraqi soldier whom they named “Fred”:

When the guys at the paladin<sup>116</sup> had guard duty (one of them manned the hatch gun at all times) they would talk about Fred (or sometimes to Fred) to pass the long hours of guard duty. Fred didn’t have the best of manners though. He

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<sup>116</sup> A paladin is a very large piece of mobile artillery.

didn't shower and was very lazy (he spent his days just laying there in the grass).

On a serious side though I think that the reason we made light of the situation was because we lived next to a dead and sun bloated body who had been killed violently. I mean, if we didn't laugh we would probably have been loosing it. We had just fought a bloody war and now we were living IN the blood and violence of it all. I am glad though. Glad that Fred was a soldier. We understood that. Soldiers die. Us, them ... soldiers die. If it had been a civilian I don't know what we would have done. Civilians should be safe. (Misoldierthoughts: May 12, 2005)

Here, we see a clear expression of esprit de corps, and what seems as a mutual recognition of soldiers on the other side of the fence. The question is, however, whether this recognition reaches beyond death?

Clearly, they are alive and "Fred" is death, and had he not been death, they would probably never have "met". However, the recognition of his status as a soldier is more or less re-active. Zack was "[g]lad that Fred was a soldier". Not because of what he was, though, but because of what he was not. As he lies there in the grass, Fred is just a dead body. The dead body of a person they might recognise as of them, but not strongly enough to honour him and have him buried. Instead he merely becomes a piece of pastime.

The litmus-test of national identity, and of the idea of the national sacrifice, the inclusion of the dead and the living in one, perceived social entity, moving across history is simply not present here. There is neither civil nor military religion in Zack's blog. What matters for Zack is life here and now. The death of "Fred" in 2003 only reminds Zack and his fellow soldiers of their own mortality. The death of every American soldier today, only adds to the initial wrongdoing of going to war on an empty promise. According to Zack, all we can hope for is that when the bloodthirstiness of the nation has been satisfied, America can leave Iraq and soldiers' fight and, if necessary, die in just wars.





## **Chapter 8**

### **Analysing discourse as sequence:**

#### **The post as narrative**

The purpose of the previous analyses was to examine whether civil religion is present, dominant and constant in the blogs. Therefore, I compared four bloggers with very different profiles in order to cover the range of variation within the military blogosphere.

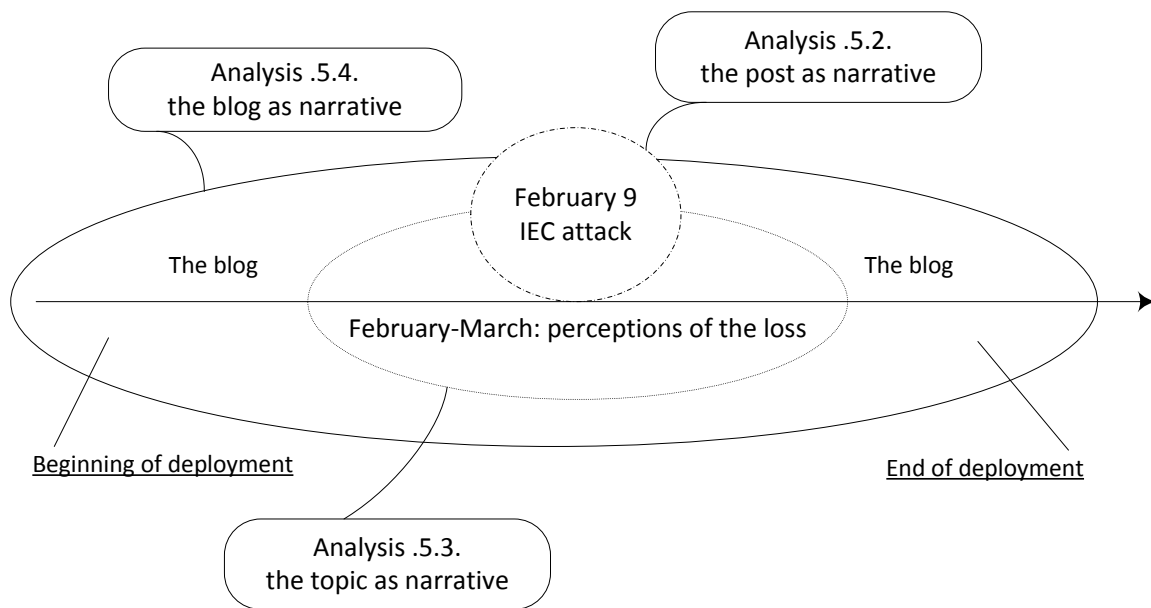
The two bloggers selected for the comparisons in the following three chapters have been chosen because they are similar in all aspects except one: Teflon Don is Private First Class; Badger 6 is Captain. Whereas this case-selection enables me to focus specifically on the effect of rank, the narrative method which I use in these chapters enable me to shed light on how servicemen are affected, practically, by the process of deployment in general and the exposure to combat in particular.

#### **8.1. The cases**

Badger 6 of *Badgers Forward* and Teflon Don of *Acute Politics* served in the same company at the same time. They are both men, conservative, and have participated in combat missions. Yet, they differ at one important point: Teflon Don is Private First Class in the 3rd platoon of the company. Badger 6 is Captain and Company Commander (CC). The “Badgers” is a company of reserve engineer troops taking care of route clearance. Their task is to find, and by the help of explosive experts (EODs) to remove Improvised Explosive Devices, IEDs, also known as road side bombs. Hence the name, the Badgers: They dig the way. Teflon Don says himself that next to special operations, this is probably the most dangerous task undertaken by any soldiers in Iraq, a claim which there is little reason to doubt.

The Badgers were deployed to Iraq from September 2006 to September 2007. This time span covers the great narrative, which I analyse in Chapter 10. The company’s main base was at Ramadi in Western Iraq, but they often supported units situated at Camp Falluja, some 50 km to the East, towards Baghdad. On February 8, 2007, the company lost three soldiers in an IED attack. Badger 6’ and Teflon Don’s descriptions of this tragic course of events, from receiving the news to their reflections after the memorial, are analysed in Chapter 9 as a topic covering several posts. Last but not least, both bloggers have detailed stories about what happened on that tragic day, stories that refer to this particular event. This, the narrative dimension of the post, is in focus in here in Chapter 8.

Figure 8.1.: Comparison of Event-narratives: Distribution of the analyses



### 8.1.1 Characteristics of the two blogs

*Badgers Forward* is a very elaborate blog. With its many and very long posts, it is in fact one of the longest in my dataset. In comparison, Acute Politics belongs to the medium length blogs. That difference alone may make comparisons slightly uneven. Furthermore, whereas Badger 6 constructs his blog with many archives and both internal and external links, this, the metatextual element of blogging is not very prevalent in Teflon Don's writings. Stylistically, both bloggers write quite well. When narrating events, Badger 6 very often uses direct speech and other dramatic elements that give his blog an aura of authenticity and action. Teflon Don's writings tend to be more straight-forwardly descriptive. He, on the other hand, often quotes poets, especially Robert Frost, and song-writers, and he writes poems himself, an element which adds an aura of high culture to parts of his blog.

Regarding the content, the most prevalent difference between the two bloggers is Badger 6's progressive pursuit of order, and Teflon Don's observant depiction of the chaos surrounding him. Whatever the challenge; discipline, order, and rationality is Badger 6's answer. Teflon Don, on the other hand, constantly questions the rationality of Army politics. Both implicitly and explicitly, the Army is depicted as an inefficient organisation. Its decisions are either withdrawn as fast as they are made, or they endanger the lives of the serviceman on the ground.

The content analysis in Chapter 11 reveals that both Badger 6 and Teflon Don use military religious vocabularies of motive in their blogs. However, whereas civil religion also constitutes a strong element in *Badgers Forward*, it

is virtually absent in Teflon Don's posts. In *Acute Politics* military religion is uncontested by civil religion; an observation which is confirmed by the following analyses too.

## **8.2. Structural characteristics of the posts**

In this chapter I compare two single stories about the same event: how Badger 6 and Teflon Don experienced the tragic day, on February 8, 2007 when three of their comrades were killed in action. Unlike the two other analyses, conducted at blog and topic level, the advantage of this analysis is that it enables a more focused methodological approach. Here, we have the description of a single event, a description written with the specific purpose of communicating its meaning in a semantic whole. The post has a beginning, a middle, and an end which can be analysed independently of the fact that it also forms a topic network, or enters an ongoing process with digressions and repeating of personal viewpoints, emblematic of the blog genre. The disadvantage is that it does not enable us to view the *longue durée*.

Thus, methodologically this sort of comparison comes closer to the one-dimensional "cross-sectorial" approach seen in the discourse analyses in the first chapters than to the sequential "panel" approach in the process analysis. On the other hand, if we distinguish between data-selection and strategy of analysis, nothing indicates that a narrative comparison cannot be conducted at a single point in time. Likewise, nothing indicates that a discourse analysis cannot cover a longer time span. In fact some of the best discourse analyses cover the development of a subject over time. Like Laclau & Mouffe focus on the *establishment* of hegemony, Fairclough's analyses centre on social *change*. In that view, this disadvantage may actually be turned into a methodological advantage: Using the same sort of data as we would in any discourse analysis enable us to pinpoint the differences characterising a narrative approach.

### *8.2.1 Composition of the posts*

Badger 6' report on the February 8 events actually covers two posts constructed as one narrative in two parts. As indicated by the title of the first post, "Badgers down: Prelude", it describes the course leading to the incident. However, even though I quote from both, I will focus on the latter, "Badgers Down: 8 February 2007" that specifically describe what happened on that day.

Above, in the methodological chapter I referred to Labov, according to whom narratives are characterised by following a fixed structure: A framework consisting of *abstract* and *orientation*, *result* and *coda*, and the unfolding continuously evaluated narrative events in the middle. In accordance with

this scheme, Badger 6' posts often pursue a very tight composition, and this post is no exception to that rule. It can be divided into 12 parts<sup>117</sup>:

- 1) Abstract and orientation [lines 1-23]
- 2) The impact [lines 24-37]
- 3) "they have two KIA" [lines 38-44]
- 4) "Get MEDEVAC NOW" [lines 45-72]
- 5) First duties [lines 73-99]
- 6) The breakdown [lines 100-126]
- 7) Alone before death [126-146]
- 8) "Mission not finished" [147-169]
- 9) Present arms [170-182]
- 10) To the morgue [183-198]
- 11) Sharing the loss [199-207]
- 12) Result and coda: "Too real, too raw" [208-218]

Teflon Don's post, "The Road To Hell" is, as generally, somewhat shorter, but, what is more important in this context – despite the fact that he does not utilise the tools of writing dramatically quite as well as Badger 6 – the construction of this particular post is also a narrative in the sense that it deals with "the temporal character of human experience" and contains narrative clauses arranged in a chronological order (Ricoeur, 1984: 52, Quoted from Franzosi, 1998: 528). It also has a clear beginning, a middle and an end, marked by both style and content.

- 1) Abstract and setting [lines 1-12]
- 2) "it's not just one guy, it's three" [lines 13-18]
- 3) What happened [lines 19-34]
- 4) "One of the dead men had been a friend of mine" [lines 35-41]
- 5) Coda: "rest in peace" [lines 42-51]

Badger 6' post was written on February 22, nearly a fortnight after the events took place. In comparison, there is a much smaller time lack between the events and Teflon Don's description, which was posted already on the 13th, and, according to himself, written on the same night.

### *8.2.2 Plot-line and story-line*

In the study of narratives, it is central to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative sentences, linguistic markers of dynamic and static "motifs" (Tomashevski), of "cardinal functions" and "catalyzers" (Barthes), or of "ker-

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<sup>117</sup> The lines refer to the numbers in the appendix "Single post narrative comparison".

nel” and “satellite” events (Chatman), (Franzosi, 1998: 521). The basic notion behind this distinction is that the fundamental asset of narratives is not only to tell something, but to tell about events and changes. Events and the changes they cause can be interpreted and framed differently. This process of interpretation, of highlighting something and leaving something else to dwell in the dark is a linguistic procedure. Any given text contains indispensable elements in regard to understanding its meaning and interpretation of reality. In narrative texts, such indispensable elements describe events and interpret their effects. These are the dynamic motifs, the cardinal functions or the kernel events, and their linguistic emblems are the active, indicative form. They report things that are done, things that happen. If they are removed from or changed in the text, the text itself changes its meaning. Static motifs, catalyzers and satellite events on the other hand are mere descriptions, characterised by passive, indefinite, or merely descriptive verbal forms (to be, to have). They are dispensable. We may learn something interesting about the persons, the circumstances or the consequences of the actions through these dispensable elements. But if they are removed, the text’s plot remains perfectly understandable (ibid).

A word of hesitation is necessary in regard to this distinction. The presence of dynamic motifs or, more straightforwardly put, of action verbs, is a fundamental asset of all narratives. Granted. Yet, there is no narrative without static motifs either. First, a text devoid of descriptions easily becomes devoid of its authenticity. Reduced to mere action, it becomes bones with no flesh. Second, reducing the narrative to the mere event, to the “*who did what to whom, where & when*” is reducing the narrative to the story-level. Narratives are not only stories. They are stories with a plot. They are stories told with a purpose. *How* did this event take place? *Why* did it take place? The way the story is told, and the way it is explained, interpreted, is what shapes our understanding of it. And both plotting and interpretation may very well be in descriptive form.<sup>118</sup>

Practically, however, the distinction between dynamic and static motifs may prove useful as a methodological tool. Listing the action clauses of a narrative enables us to highlight how the story is constructed: By comparing the plot-line, the sequential order in which the story is told, with the story-line,

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<sup>118</sup> Roberto Franzosi underplays this element already in his qualitative 1998 text, which I here use as my point of departure. His focus on the event side of the narrative has only been amplified by the development of Quantitative Narrative Analysis (QNA) which fundamentally aims at reconstructing and gaining valuable insight from the mapping of events.

the sequential order in which the events actually took place, we get a first impression of the complexity of this construction.

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 show how narrative clauses are distinguished from non-narrative clauses in extracts from the two posts analysed here<sup>119</sup>:

Table 8.1. Narrative and descriptive clauses in Badger 6' February 22 post

<b>Clause (Plot)</b>	<b>Time (Story)</b>	<b>Narrative Clauses</b>	<b>Descriptive clause</b>
1			Badgers Down: 8 February 2007
2	T7	At 0818 8 February 2007, Team Badger's 3rd Platoon departed Camp Falluja to return to the CH-46 crash site.	
3	T4	The Marine Aviators had been recovered,	
4			now we needed to recover the aircraft.
5	T2	The insurgents were claiming the bird was shot down,	
6		but some reports indicated there might have been a mechanical failure.	
7			The question of why the helicopter went down needed to be answered.
8			And the forces protecting the crash site need to be brought out.
(...)			
11	T1	They headed north, up an ASR (Alternate Supply Route)	
12		they had traveled often.	
13		They had traveled it twice less than 16 hours previously.	
15		The same road from which they had found six bombs the day before.	

<sup>119</sup> The tables are almost exact copies of the table used by Franzosi in "Narrative Analysis – Or Why (and How) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative", p. 529.

Table 8.2. Narrative and descriptive clauses in Teflon Don's February 13 post

<b>Clause (Plot)</b>	<b>Time (Story)</b>	<b>Narrative Clauses</b>	<b>Descriptive clause</b>
1			The Road To Hell
2	T19	The DOD has officially announced the deaths of our guys.	
3			This is the post I mentioned earlier:
4	T18	written on the 8th and held until the brief came out.	
5	T9	I reported this morning for guard duty at 1115.	
6		The sergeant of the guard told us,	
7	T6	that someone had been hurt in Falluja, and taken to the Falluja Surgical Center. Falluja	
8	T10	My thoughts ran wild:	
9			is it my guys, or another platoon?
10			Who was in front today?
11			Who was it?
12	T11	Right before we leave for the towers,	
13		the sergeant comes back outside and tells us	
14	T7	that the wounded man didn't make it. (...)	

As can be seen from these two tables, narrative and non-narrative clauses are almost equally distributed in the two extracts. The same can be said in general about the two texts: In both posts, approximately 50 pct. of the clauses are narrative.

Thus, contrary to what I suggested above, the distributions of narrative and non-narrative clauses do not seem to indicate a discrepancy between Teflon Don's story and the narrative genre. And, as shown by the construction of the story line (in column 2 of the tables), Badger 6' plot composition is not any more complex than Teflon Don's either: None of the two bloggers simply list the events in the same sequence as they took place. They both use flash backs (and flash forwards).

A closer look at the narrative clauses in the two tables nevertheless reveals two very different patterns of narration. In Teflon Don's story there is no distance between narrator and protagonist: He is either grammatical subject or grammatical object in most of the clauses listed in table 8.2., and when he recounts stories about events which he has not experienced himself, but only heard off, he does so referring directly to the person who told him in the first place. In the extract from Badger 6' post the narrator is not part of the story at all. He tells what other persons experience and endure, and, as we shall see, he sometimes he even does so as if he was that other person.

This difference between the composition of story and plot, between protagonist and narrator marks an important difference between the two posts, a difference which becomes even clearer when we turn to the content of the stories.

### *8.2.3 Bridging form and content of the narrative: the Actant Model*

In his further developing of Vladimir Propp's analyses of Russian Folk Tales, Algirdas Julien Greimas identified six central characters, actants, organised in pairs, through which all narratives can be interpreted (Franzosi, 1998: 523; Larsen, 2001: 133):

- Subject versus Object
- Sender versus Receiver
- Helper versus Opponent

The *subject* is usually the protagonist of the story: the prince, the prodigal son – the person who leaves home, faces a number of tests, and, finally, returns when the story reaches its second equilibrium. The *object* is his object of desire: the princess, wealth, to know fear – that which he pursues throughout the narrative, and which he, if they shall live happily ever after, achieves – receives – by the end. The *sender* is the supreme power in possession of the authority required for the hero as *receiver* to obtain the object: He is the king, the almighty God, or the Devil himself, who defines the tests required for the hero to pass in order to reach the second equilibrium. In his attempt to reach this goal, the subject must face an *opponent*, sometimes supernatural, sometimes human – a troll, a dragon, the black knight – whom he must defeat in order to pass the test. To reach that goal the hero is often aided by a *helper*, an old wife, the good fairy, the ghost of his father, who gives him either the advice or the necessary tools.

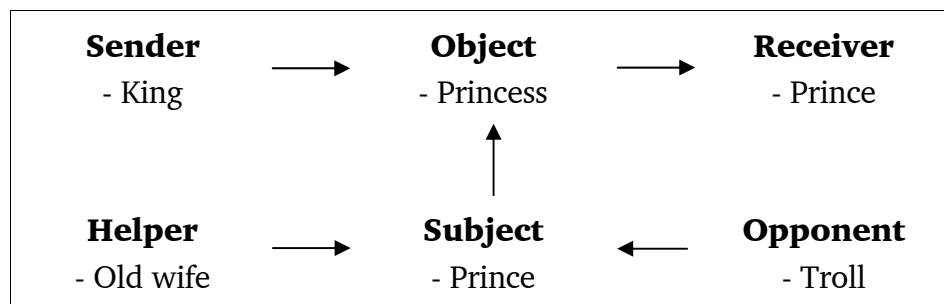
The actant is not a particular person. The actant is a narrative function, a role. In a story, this role is filled out by one or more particular persons (or anthropomorphous beings). Therefore, one person can also cover different



roles, represent different functions. Whereas the role of the subject and receiver, respectively, are most often filled out by the hero, the sender is most often distinguishable from the opponent. However, it need not be so. In folk tales, the role of the giver and of the opponent may very well be the same person, for instance the Devil. Likewise, in the great narrative of Christianity, the receiver of grace is not the hero, Jesus Christ, but humankind.

The opposite pairs of Actants can be organised in a composite model, which most high school students know as the “Actant Model” or “Butterfly Model”; it is most often depicted as in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2: Greimas’ Actant Model



(Franzosi, 1998: 523).

This model is a tool of analysis meant as a help and should be used as such. If all roles cannot be filled out, we should not necessarily discard the narrative function of the story at hand. Nevertheless, in comparing different stories, it may provide us with a useful tool in distinguishing strong narratives from weaker ones.

In the analyses below, I will argue that the Actant Model is applicable to both the two narratives of losing comrades in battle, told by Badger 6 and Teflon Don, respectively. Yet, as will also be shown, the Actant roles are filled out very differently. Not only in terms of who does what, but also in terms of overcoming the loss.

### 8.3. The content: Badger 6

#### 8.3.1 Abstract and orientation

The post starts out by presenting the general circumstances, by setting the perspective in which the events described in the following should be understood:

At 0818 8 February 2007, Team Badger’s 3rd Platoon departed Camp Falluja to return to the CH-46 crash site. The Marine Aviators had been recovered, now we needed to recover the aircraft. The insurgents were claiming the bird was shot down, but some reports indicated there might have been a mechanical

failure. The question of why the helicopter went down needed to be answered. And the forces protecting the crash site need to be brought out.

Badger 3-3<sup>120</sup> led the way in an RG-31, a South African-designed vehicle with a v-shaped hull designed for counter mine operations. 3-3 was manned by SGT James Holtom, the vehicle commander, SGT Ross Clevenger, the vehicle driver, PFC Raymond Werner, the gunner, and a Staff Sergeant, the Squad Leader responsible for coordinating with his Platoon Leader (3-6).

They headed north, up an ASR (Alternate Supply Route) they had traveled often. They had traveled it twice less than 16 hours previously. Their destination was a road that would take them to the east. The same road from which they had found six bombs the day before.

Back on Camp Falluja, I was monitoring the progress of 3rd Platoon as well as 2nd Platoon on a mission to the south. I was anticipating that 2nd Platoon was going to have the more challenging mission, and I was working with the supported unit to ensure that they understood how we could best be employed to accomplish their goals and missions. Both Platoons were making good progress. (*Badgers Forward*, February 22, 2007: Lines 3-22).

In this orientation, all five Ws of the narrative are present: *When?* 0818 (by the minute)! *Where?* On the way from Camp Fallujah to the crash site of a marine CH46 helicopter! *Who?* Badgers, or more specifically the 3rd platoon and the four men manning their front vehicle: Sergeant Holtom, Sergeant Clevenger, Private First Class Werner, and their Squad Leader. And Badger 6, the CC who follows the events from the Operations Centre! *Why?* To recover the crashed aircraft and the troops left behind! And finally *How?* By heading up a well-known alternative supply route!

Note the twist in the last paragraph of this section: “I was anticipating that 2nd Platoon was going to have the more challenging mission”. The implied meaning is straightforward: no-one could have anticipated this. This theme reoccurs several times in the post: Everything was done by the book. Everybody handled the situation as they should. Order was maintained despite the tragedy.

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<sup>120</sup> Badger 6' nom-du-blog is derived from his radio calling name. The number 6 indicates that he is Company Commander. The Platoon Leader, the lieutenant, with whom he is communicating, is called 3-6 because he is in charge of the 3rd platoon. All squads or vehicles have a two-digit number too, indicating both what platoon they belong to and what number they have in that particular platoon. Hence the name of this particular vehicle: 3-3.

There are only two exceptions to this rule: Badger 6' momentarily breakdown after the first dead soldier is returned to base, a point I will return to below, and the passage named "the impact", where the front vehicle disappears from sight from the rest of the convoy:

Approximately 1000 meters from the main road, a sharp turn was required. 3-3 made the turn well ahead of the other vehicles in the convoy. As they disappeared from view, 3-6 was concerned, but was getting frequent radio reports and he knew visual contact would return shortly. Then everything stopped (ibid: Lines 33-36).

### *8.3.2 Duty versus failure*

One of the first rules all American troops learn is that you never go on your own. By driving ahead, 3-3 clearly breaks that rule. There are two central points of interest in the description above of what seems to be a violation of a standard procedure. First, the fact that the persons involved are excused: In the post, the perspective of the protagonist changes between Badger 6' descriptions of his own experience of these dramatic events, and the perspective of an omniscient story-teller, describing not only what happens on the ground, but also, as in this case, what other actors think and say.

By means of this omniscient view, we learn that the Platoon Leader, 3-6, was actually worried when the vehicle turned too early. And, in the same sentence, we are told that he, judging from the circumstances, actually had no reason to concern: He "was getting frequent radio reports and he knew that visual contact would return shortly". By drawing our attention to this concern, and by, simultaneously, ensuring the readers that things, objectively seen, went on as usual, both the Platoon Leader and the men in 3-3 are cleared of any guilt. Nobody knew. They could not know.

Secondly, however, the paragraph also emphasises that even though they had no reason to *believe* this would happen, it *happened* anyway. Thus, another story is also told, viz. a story of duty and of the importance of sticking to standard procedures. One misstep, even a seemingly insignificant one, suffices. One misstep, the only one reported not only in the post but in the whole blog, created just the space necessary for the enemy to charge. Here, there is no room for gut-feelings or instinct. Following procedures, even those that seem foolish and redundant, will keep you alive.

The opponent in Badger 6' narrative is failure. Failure stands in the way of success, of doing things by the book, ultimately, of the desired object: honour. Failure leads to death. Later, the fear of the ever-lurking danger of failure becomes prevalent, when the 3rd platoon, hit by another IED, short of

another vehicle and with one more man evacuated, has to give up the mission:

(...). Less than 15 minutes later and 300 meters further down the road, another explosion, smaller, but still startling. The new lead vehicle (another RG-31) had been attacked. It was disabled and one Soldier was injured, ultimately requiring MEDEVAC (he is fine and back on duty), but 3-6 was faced with a very tough call to make.

3-6's voice cracked across the radio. "We are non-mission capable." I nodded with a discouraged acceptance knowing that 3-6 and the rest of platoon must feel the same. Soldiers dead and wounded. Mission not finished. (ibid: 156-163).

Faced with the circumstances, Badger 6 must accept that the platoon has to abandon their task. But he does so reluctantly, with "discouraged acceptance", not only because as CC he is ambitious on behalf of his company, but also because as a soldier he is disgusted by the fact that they cannot accomplish their mission, a feeling so strong that he without hesitation can state that "3-6 and the rest of the platoon must feel the same."

The two following infinite clauses, "Soldiers dead and wounded. Mission not finished" constitute the two sides of the equation which abandoning the mission leaves unsolved. The death of the soldiers requires that the mission, for which they have given the ultimate sacrifice, is accomplished. In Badger 6' view, this is the only way a sacrifice can be properly honoured. Yet, it would be irresponsible of both the platoon leader and the company commander to demand the 3rd Platoon, reduced of man-power and equipment, to continue. Their responsibility, their duty as leaders overrules their duty as soldiers.

They make the right choice. Yet, Badger 6' disappointment of having to make this choice is also vivid later in the post after the platoon returns when their colleagues from the other platoons help them unload their vehicles: The three remaining vehicles of the 3rd Platoon came into view, slowly and soberly. As they pulled up, I called the company to attention and present arms. The 3rd Platoon Soldiers, numb from the day's experience but with work remaining, climbed down and began to unload their equipment. Their brothers in the 2nd Platoon join and assist them in getting the work done. Quiet and purposeful, they went about the business of finishing their defunct mission (ibid: 177-181).

The fact that they have lost three comrades is implied by mentioning that the "3rd Platoon soldiers [were] numb from the day's experience". Yet, what is highlighted, what is said explicitly, is that the mission is "defunct": Badger

6' focus is not on death, but on how death should be dealt with in order to avoid failure.

### *8.3.3 The brotherhood and the fundamental loneliness of the officer*

When the 3rd platoon arrives torn between their “defunct mission” and the “tough call”, between failure and duty “[t]heir *brothers* in the 2nd Platoon join and *assist* them in getting the work done”. By means of this help, they can “finish their defunct mission”, and do so “[q]uiet and purposeful”, i.e. they can meet the difficulties in the right way: They can set duty above the lurking danger of failure, pass the test of the situation and acquire the desired object of honour. The 2nd platoon is not just a randomly chosen group of men. They are “their brothers”. Thus, what is emphasised is not only the fact that the 3rd platoon receives help, but that they do so because of the special relationship existing between fighting men in the same outfit.

By calling “the company to attention and present arms”, Badger 6 initiates this enactment of unit cohesion, but he does not himself participate. By using the third person personal possessive pronoun, “their”, (“[t]heir brothers join and assist them) he also excludes himself from this brotherly, horizontal relation. He initiates and observes the fulfilment of the brotherhood. He is not part of it.

In the light of that, I will argue that the actant role of the subject is filled out by two different personae in the text. First by the company, the social entity, whose honour is at stake. Second by Badger 6 himself, who is the individual embodiment of this social entity. Whereas the company regains its honour by help of its most important social component, the unit cohesion, the brotherhood of fighting men, Badger 6 cannot rely on his peers within this social entity, because as CC he has none. Instead, when he actually breaks down, having seen the dead body of Sergeant Clevenger, a person from the outside comes to assistance:

After they closed the bag back up, I thanked the NCO and left the tent. There was a bench outside the tent and I sank into it. My head dropped and I began to sob, lost to everything around me.

“Sir. Sir? You can see the Squad Leader now.” I faintly heard the Corpsman’s voice despite that she was standing less than 3 feet away. Her voice brought me back to the reality of the situation. I had Soldiers to care for and I would have to grieve later (ibid: 117-122).

Badger 6 initiates the unit cohesion, but cannot take part in it. Instead he must rely on *Esprit de Corps*, personified by a Navy *Corpsman*. As in the classical folk tale, the role of the helper is here filled out by a female character, but throughout the text the professionalism of other units coming to their aid

is emphasised. Like the Chaplain says his “words of comfort”, the people at the morgue showed courtesy and respect upon Badger 6’ arrival and “seemed to recede into the walls”.

Badger 6 is constantly aware of his role in regard to his men. He has a responsibility to fill out, “soldiers to care for”. Hence, he must set aside his own emotions, he will “have to grieve later”. Granted, in the Only in the closing lines, (“sharing the loss”), when Badger 6 is on his own with a fellow officer, 3-6, the lieutenant who was in charge in the field on that day, a feeling of community, which he does not merely initiate and observe from a distance, but which actually includes him too, is established. Yet, even at that point, being the superior officer, Badger 6 comforts 3-6: The relationship established is not horizontal, it remains hierarchic, and describing it in terms of brotherhood is probably not adequate. Rather, in terms of a family metaphoric, a father-son relationship would be more apt.

Just as Badger 6 can observe, but not participate in the enactment of the community which he personifies, he emphasises three times in the text that before the dead, the soldier is fundamentally alone:

(...) We observed as Holtom and Werner moved into the Morgue. Soon the rest of the Soldiers of the 2nd and 3rd Platoons joined us. We all went in. The tent was crowded with 30-40 people. The chaplain said a few words and then we were once again lost with our own thoughts (ibid: 186-188).

Depending on whether the actant role of the subject is filled out by the company or by Badger 6 himself, the role of the helper is either the internal unit cohesion or the external esprit de corps. In both cases, however, the object of desire seems to be the reaffirmation of the company’s honour and to achieve this, they must fight the lurking danger of failure.

#### *8.3.4 Fate, Duty and the emblem of the covenant*

The first time Badger 6 enters the morgue right after his breakdown the feeling of being alone with one’s thoughts is also present. More interesting in this regard, however, is the description of the interiors of the morgue in that passage:

The Corpsman stepped out of the tent. “They are ready for you, Sir.” I stepped into the tent. There was a table in the center with a long, closed bag on the table that clearly contained a body. It was incredibly quiet, as if the tent cut off the outside world and the mundane noises of the camp. The NCO in charge stood at the head of the table, there were at least two other people in the room, but they seemed to recede into the walls. I approached the table.

“I need to see him.”

The NCO unzipped the bag and rolled it back so that I could see Clevenger. I looked at him, but it seemed so unreal. Less than 24 hours ago I was talking with him, talking about plans for the immediate and distant future. My first thought: This could not be happening (ibid: 105-115).

The morgue is described as a sacred room, a confined space, isolated from the “outside world and the mundane noises of the camp” and with a table, an altar, in the middle. Like the Tabernacle of the Exodus, this tent in the desert also contains the Holiest of Holy, the emblem of the covenant: the soldier sacrificed. This implied mythological reference is interesting not only because of sacrificial ideology it seems to express, but also in regard to the identification of the sender of the Actant model

If the subject is Badger 6, or the company he embodies, and the desired object is honour, who or what is then the sender? One suggestion would be that the sender is, simply, duty: To pass the tests, which will enable the company to earn the honour it longs for, is to pass the tests of duty. Its straightforwardness and the fact that it is supported by the numerous passages in the blog, in which Badger 6 sets duty above everything else, favours this interpretation.

Yet, the possibility of failure, the fact that if duty is not obeyed, failure is inevitable, seems to suggest the existence of a transcendent power of fate behind duty. As I will show in the following chapter this interpretation is conceptually supported by the fact that in Badger 6’ eyes the only proper way to honour the sacrifice of the deceased is to fulfil their task of duty: duty is a form of worship.

Empirically, Badger 6 does not talk much about religion, and neither fate nor other divine powers are explicitly mentioned anywhere in the blog. Nevertheless, I will argue that this interpretation is supported by a close reading of the text.

The previous post, “Badgers Down: Prelude”, was prone with signs, with descriptions of events that could have been read as omens of the terror to come, and with explanations of why they were not; as if the pieces of an inscrutable puzzle were falling into place:

I regret ever feeling irritated with 3-6. (...)

This recovery mission was not anticipated and did not appear to be a big deal (...)

Same stuff, different day, Sir (...)

This is turning out to be a bigger deal than any of us imagined (...) (February 19, 2007).

More important, however, is the fact, that in passages where crucial events take place, events that ultimately mediate between the immanent and the transcendent, the actor is deliberately made anonymous. Thus, in the post analysed here, when the terrifying messages are delivered, the identity of the deliverer remains unknown, by replacing the name or title of that person by either a substantive or a pronoun: Badger 6 had just returned to the COC when “a *voice* announced the recovery mission had 4 urgent surgical cases and needed immediate evacuation” (February 22, 2007). Right after, “*Clarification* came (...) that it was my 3rd Platoon. Then *someone* said, “They have two KIA”<sup>121</sup> (ibid).

Granted, in spite of the fact that Badger 6 is a trained officer, in spite of the fact that this is the military where everybody have designated functions, it might not be possible, in the heat of the events, to recognise all voices in a Command Centre, where you do not necessarily know all people by name. What is important in this regard, however, is that Badger 6 emphasises the anonymity of the persons delivering these messages, not once but three times: “a voice announced”, “clarification came”, “someone said”. Furthermore, this stylistic trait is repeated later in the blog too. In his description of the memorial ceremony, Badger 6 states that the leader of the firing party can be heard but not seen by the mourning:

“Firing party, fire three volleys,” came from the *unseen* firing party commander just outside the hall.

“Ready . . . Aim . . . Fire.”

CRACK

“Ready . . . Aim . . . Fire.”

CRACK

“Ready . . . Aim . . . Fire.”

CRACK (Badgers Forward: March 12, 2007 [my italics, MB]).

As the ceremony takes place in a corner of the dining hall, it is not very surprising that the firing party, standing outside, cannot be seen. What is interesting, however, is the fact that Badger 6 regards it necessary to emphasise that this is the case: Just like he explicitly states that the identity of the messenger cannot be determined, he emphasises the invisibility of the firing commander.

Why? My best guess is that the anonymity of these actors is preserved because what they mediate transcends themselves. The final salute outside the chow hall has nothing to do with who is actually in command of the firing squad. This salute is an emblem of the final rite de passage of any soldier

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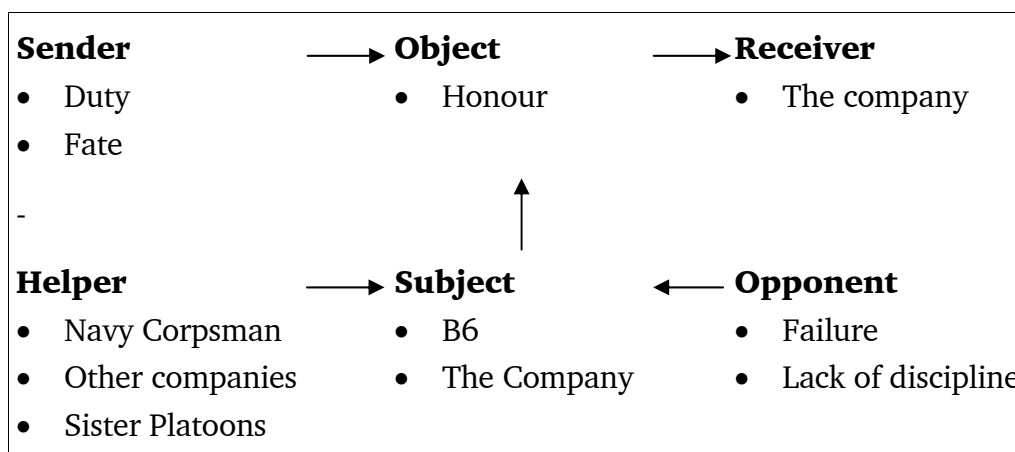
<sup>121</sup> KIA is the military abbreviation for “Killed In Action”.



who has paid the ultimate price; it is his initiation into the transcendent community of fighting men. Likewise, the fact that soldiers have been killed in action has nothing to do with the radio operators in the COC: This tragic event is a move of fate. They simply deliver the message, and it is up to the company to react, and act right, in response to it.

Following the analysis above, the Actant Model, applied to Badger 6' description of the loss of his men, is as follows:

Figure 8.3: The Actant Model, applied to Badger 6' narrative:



#### 8.4. The content: Teflon Don

Teflon Don's posts are usually less neatly constructed than Badger 6'. Yet, as shown in the introduction it has all the fundamental elements of that of a narrative proper. First it presents the context of this particular post, and next, it specifies the when, the who, the where, and the how of the story.

Nevertheless, I also showed that the perspective of the protagonist changes little in his story. He tells what *he* experienced from when he first got the message, until, by the end of the day, he helps sorting out his dead friends' things. There are few jumps back and forth, and even when he reports about what happened earlier, he, loyally, emphasises that this is how the story was told to him:

*I learn* that the mission they were on was clearing the route to the site of an American helicopter that crashed the day before. The previous night they had cleared a path out so that the bodies of the crew could be recovered. Today, they had gone back to clear a path home for the Marines left to guard the airframe until arrangements could be made for its recovery and/or destruction. After the the first truck had been hit, they had pressed on to reach the Marines at the crash site, only to turn back when the second truck was hit. (...) (ibid: 25-30 [my italics]).

As reflected in the words “only to turn back when the second truck was hit”, the feeling of disappointment, so prevalent in Badger 6’ post, is also present in Teflon Don’s description. Yet, here the disappointment is not understood within a general framework of duty versus failure. Instead, it refers to the fact that “they had pressed on to reach the Marines”, an endeavour which now proves futile: Instead of wading further into the mess, they might just as well have turned back in the first place. Badger 6 sets duty above inclination. Teflon Don does not.

#### *8.4.1 The strength of the brotherhood and longing for consolation*

An important difference between the two bloggers is the way they cope with the experience. As shown above, Badger 6 repeatedly mentions how he and his men, before the bodies of their dead comrades, “were each left alone with [their] thoughts” (*Badgers Forward*, February 22: 144-145). And, even in the passage where he talks with his fellow officer, the lieutenant, *he* is comforting *him*, not vice-versa: as a father or as a mentor, not as a peer.

Teflon Don and his friends, on the contrary, share their sorrow: “I take my leave again, and go with a few friends. We sit, and begin to speak of the dead” (*Acute Politics*, February 13: 32-33). The officers discuss whether they could have performed differently, whether they could have fulfilled their duty in any better way. The rank and file discuss neither performance nor duty, but, simply, the dead. The challenge they face, and accordingly, their opponent in the Actant Model, is the loss. And, coping with that, they become each others’ helpers.

Just like *they* tell each other about the dead, Teflon Don, in the following passage, clarifies to *us*, the readers, what his friend meant to him:

One of the dead men had been a friend of mine as long as I’d been in the unit. We’d laughed together, drank together, and talked about the future. He’d got me started smoking at NTC<sup>122</sup> at the same time that he was trying to quit. Tonight, I’m helping organize the things he left behind. His girlfriend of a year meets me at his room to give me another box. She’s from another company; they met just prior to our deployment alert, and have struggled to build their relationship through the midst of war. She looks smaller than I’ve ever seen her, as if she’s lost a physical part of herself (ibid: 35-40).

The word “friend” is particularly important in Teflon Don’s vocabulary, a point which I shall return to below. What is of interest here is that his use of the word tightly fits the use of “buddy” in military unit cohesion literature:

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<sup>122</sup> Probably the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Ca, one of the largest military training facilities in America.

He and the dead soldier have not only *known* each other. They have been friends, experienced joy and endured hardships “as long as [he had] been in the unit”. Likewise, Teflon Don does not share his loss with anyone (apart, ironically, from the fact that he shares it with any reader of his blog). He shares it with his friends, i.e. with others who qualify as military buddies.

Teflon Don’s description of the physically visible sorrow of his dead buddy’s girlfriend looks like a textbook example of projection: She looks the way he feels. Losing a friend is like losing a life partner. Losing a buddy is like losing a part of your body. And, their shared loss also points to the desired object of this narrative: consolation – a consolation that can only be partial, because what is lost is lost forever, as a physical part that will never be restored.

#### *8.4.2 From consolation to desire for revenge*

In the last lines of the post, Teflon Don describes how he, leaving his friend’s room, has an almost mystical experience of flash-forward:

Under a sky streaked blood-red and angry with sunset, I carry my friends belongings from his room. In my head I can already see another sun setting over the memorial to come; the breeze twisting dog tags around a rifle like a devil’s chime, and carrying once again the plaintive notes of the bagpipe playing Amazing Grace.

Rest in peace

SGT Holtom

SGT Clevenger

PFC Werner (ibid: 42-50).

The almost Wordsworthian use of nature as a figurative backcloth is a reoccurring theme in Teflon Don’s post. Sometimes, the beauty of nature is contrasted to the folly of man. Sometimes, the eternity of nature is contrasted to the transitoriness of history. Here, nature pictures his state of mind: the sky, like the company, is coloured with streaks of blood. Nature herself mourns. Moreover, the way nature reflects the thoughts and experiences of the protagonist is not merely passive. The sky is “angry with sunset”.

This agency of nature is interesting for two reasons. First, like the voice of fate in Badger 6’ post, nature, in Teflon Don’s descriptions, shares fundamental attributes with the divine: e.g. omniscience and eternity. And, in that respect, it can be seen as a distant yet never absent giver. Secondly, it also provides us with another, competing, interpretation of the other roles of the model.

In these lines, the object of desire seems rather to be revenge than consolation. Given that the description of the sky reflects the subject’s state of

mind, the choice of words in this description, “angry with sunset” at least seems to imply a more active response, namely anger, than the more or less passive longing for consolation, expressed just above in regard to the military brotherhood. And revenge definitely plays a role when Teflon Don, on a patrol a few days later, enters the same area where the members of his platoon were killed:

(...) The sky is brilliant with golds and crimsons- here and there a tendril of flame licks up a wisp of cloud.

*Some say the world will end in fire/Some say in ice/From what I've tasted of desire/I hold with those who favor fire*<sup>123</sup>

The sun has set, and Venus shines low in the sky in poor reflection. The others are starting to straggle out to the vehicles. It's time to prep for the mission (Acute Politics, February 18, 2007).

Again, the significance of the sunset is emblematic, and, again, associated with anger – in Robert Frost's words with “fire” and “desire”. And, whereas this designation of desire and hatred remains symbolic in the first part of this passage, it becomes explicit in the second where Teflon Don, very honestly, says:

Tonight, we're going back up into the general area where we lost three of ours so shortly ago – not the same road – and this is the first time we've been back that way. I look around at my friends and try to read their faces. They could be scared, and most of us are, a little. They could be numb – just doing their job. Again, most of us are, a little. However, I think that most of us are out for blood. It might sound horrible, inhuman, even medieval, but the fact of the matter is that someone out there killed friends of ours, and we're going back into a place where we *just might* get the guy that did it. We'll never know if it was him, of course, but there's always the chance that we'll even the scales unknowingly (ibid).

#### 8.4.3 “A devil's chime”

The description in the final lines of the February 13 post, can also be read as a more common, and perhaps less abstract, symbolic use of the sunset as referring to the end. The sun sets and this day – the worst in the protagonist's

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<sup>123</sup> This is the first verse of Robert Frost's poem “Fire and Ice”. The second verse reads:

*But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.*

life – ends. The sun sets and the life of his best friend has ended. The sun sets, and the post ends. Here, however, the view of the sunset is also used as a direct reference to events to come, as Providence in the literal meaning of the word: “In my head I can already see another sun setting over the memorial to come”.

Teflon Don’s description of the February 8 events was posted on February 13, the day of the memorial. At the memorial ceremony, the audience is facing a set-up, not unlike a reliquary, with the belongings of the deceased servicemen: The rifles, carrying the helmets and the dog tags, placed upside down; the empty boots; the medals. The symbolism of this memorial monument en miniature is extremely emblematic, and it draws on the same “semiotic of absence” as we saw in the picture of the rider-less horse, analysed above, and, perhaps, in the messages delivered without any sender in Badger 6’ post.

In the beginning of the post, Teflon Don explicitly states that it was written on the 8th, but “held back” until Pentagon released the names of the fallen. Yet, it is probably not a coincidence that he ends his description with a flash-forward to events on the day the post was actually published. What is of interest in this regard, however, is his perception of the elements of the memorial ceremony in regard to the roles of the narrative.

The reading of the sunset provides a different perspective on the giver, on the desired object, and on the agency of the subject: from passive longing for consolation to active desire for revenge. Likewise, his description of the “memorial to come” provides a different and, again, more active notion of the role of the helper and of the opponent: “the breeze twisting dog tags around a rifle like a devil’s chime, and carrying once again the plaintive notes of the bagpipe playing *Amazing Grace*.”

Teflon Don’s last post before he receives the message about the death of his friends is about the death and the memorial for a soldier from one of their sister companies, a post which I will return to below. That post is called “*Amazing Grace*” and opens with the following description:

The haunting wail of bagpipes is drifting over our corner of Camp Ramadi. Bravo company’s amateur pipist is slowly pacing while he practices a song none of us want to hear. The tune he plays is *Amazing Grace* (Acute Politics, February 9, 2007).

This description of the bagpipe and of the song is ambiguous. On the one hand, the piper is playing the theme of *Amazing Grace*: He mediates the message of the divine provision, a helper, redeeming the soul of the deceased warrior. On the other, the sound is described as a “haunting wail”, and as “a

song none of us want to hear". The message of celestial grace is communicated through the "haunting" sounds of Hell. In the February 13 post, the sound of the bagpipe, again playing Amazing Grace and thus mediating the message of divine provision, is described more neutrally, as being merely "plaintive". However the wind carrying "once again these plaintive notes" is the same breeze that twists the "dog tags around a rifle like a *devil's* chime" [my italics, MB].

Bells and chimes are ancient ways of communicating between the worlds of immanence and transcendence, and, especially in eastern religions, wind chimes have been used in different rites, e.g., as here, as markers of a reliquary's sacred space (Britannica, 2009). What is particularly interesting in regard to the wind-chime is the fact that the "musician", He who masters the wind, remains unseen.

In that respect the "instrument" is phenomenologically related to other religious practices where the divine powers are assumed to communicate through the unconscious, e.g. the interpretation of dreams, glossolalia or whooping (Goodman et al., 2005). Here, however, the powers associated with the wind chime are not the powers of celestial provision. They are explicitly described as the powers of Hell.<sup>124</sup>

Of course, we cannot completely exclude the possibility that a "devil's wind chime", as in the traditional use of wind-chimes, is meant to scare daemons away from the souls of the dead, i.e. as an instrument used *against* the devil. Nevertheless, the most straightforward interpretation of the mentioning of the devil, and of the possessive form, is to see it as a wind chime used *by* the devil; either as his way of putting His fingerprint on this particular event, or as an omen of more evil to come.

Thus seen in Teflon Don's flash-forward, the description of the memorial again oscillates between Grace and Doom, between Heaven and Hell. And hence, whereas the subject in the first interpretation of the post was being torn between the help of friends and the immanent feeling of sorrow, helper and opponent are here embodied by the transcendent powers of good and evil.

The two different Actant Models, following from the two different interpretations of the post, are as follows:

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<sup>124</sup> Due to the absence of an apostrophe in the possessive form "devils" it is not clear whether it is singular or plural.

Table 8.3: The Actant Model, applied to Teflon Don's narrative (passive subject):

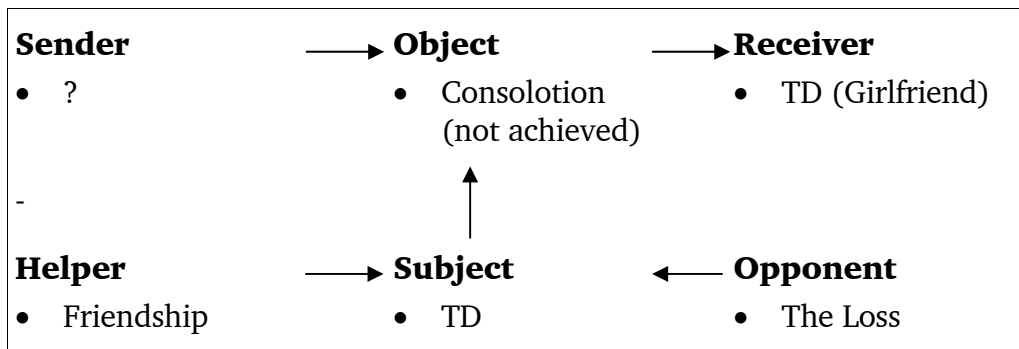
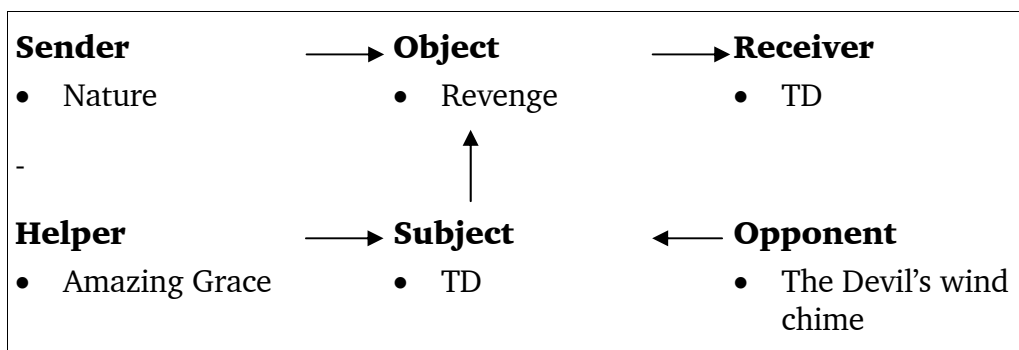


Table 8.4: The Actant Model, applied to Teflon Don's narrative (active subject):



### 8.5. Badger 6 and Teflon Don: Different world views, different narratives

Single posts are written with the advantage of hindsight that makes the construction of a plot possible: The writer ultimately knows what is going to happen, and therefore he, or she, can frame it into a meaningful narrative whole. Accordingly, the above analysis has shown the presence of a narrative structure in both Badger 6' and Teflon Don's posts. In their description of the tragic events of February 8, both bloggers use clear markers of setting, beginning, middle and end. Both tell stories of sequence and of change.

However, the analysis has also shown that the extent to which the authors pursue the possibility of plotting varies, as do their plots. Badger 6 uses more different narrative traits, and, as shown by the Actant Model, the two bloggers tell different stories based on the same event.

Change is not just change. Badger 6 tells a story about duty and honour, about the tragic consequences of even the least slack in discipline. Teflon Don tells a story about what happens when evil strikes. Likewise it differs how they cope with these changes. Badger 6 tells a story about the fundamental loneliness of the officer, how the heaviness of responsibility can weigh a man down, and how the ever present temptation of letting go, of allowing ones feelings to take control, must be checked by duty. Teflon Don, on the contrary, tells a story about the meaning of friendship and of sharing, about how man exposed to evil is torn between passive sorrow and desire for revenge.

No doubt, Badger 6' plot constitutes a more unified whole (it can be contained in one Actant Model). Yet, the fact that Teflon Don's post can fit into two different interpretative models does not necessarily mean that we have to choose one instead of the other. On the contrary, if we reject one of these interpretations as wrong or insufficient (given, of course, that it is not wrong or insufficient), we would deprive ourselves of important insights into the world of the serviceman.

Conceptually, the co-existence of ambiguities is a fundamental element of all mythology. This is what myths do: they present crucial dilemmas of life (Douglas, 2006: 48-50). Methodologically, as already stated in regard to the discourse analysis, co-existing discourses are rather the rule than the exception in all semantics. The point of analysing discourse is not to solve such dilemmas, but to show how different semeia are being placed within an order of discourse that may and may not be hegemonic.

Badger 6' narrative is hegemonic: duty is clearly the dominating concept no matter whether the giver is seen as duty itself or as an obscured power of fate. Teflon Don's narrative is not hegemonic. Here, the longing for consolation, reflected in the description of the dead buddy's girlfriend, exists side by side with the desire for revenge, reflected in the reoccurring theme of anger and sunset. His post presents a fundamentally unsolvable dilemma of human existence in time of war.

Whether the central object in Teflon Don's post is regarded as consolation or revenge, his focus on *feelings* is fundamentally in contrast to Badger 6' focus on *morality*, a difference also reflected by the fact that the two posts present different "theologies": Duty and honour, the importance of performing rightly, are attributes of a theology where the divine power is omnipotent, and where man can only relate to the fundamental problem of theodicy as a problem of fate (Weber, 2003: 361ff). Revenge and anger, on the contrary, are attributes of a theology where good and evil, Grace and Doom, face each other in a cosmic struggle in which man can, and must, choose to participate on either side.

As we have seen, the role of the deity, the giver, is the most difficult actant to define in both narratives, and the point of applying the classical theological distinction between radical monotheism and dualism is not to state that Badger 6 and Teflon Don are religious. Neither states his confessional affiliation openly. Neither makes much fuss about religion in general. The point is to show that their plots reflect different worldviews: that the way they fill out the remaining roles in the model, can be understood in terms of this distinction.



## Chapter 9

# Blogs as topics: narrative style and the description of the losses

### 9.1. The blog as a network text

One major reason for distinguishing between blogs and narratives proper is that blogs are *network texts*. Their mode of expression differs from that of for instance a folk tale, a novel or even traditional paper diaries. Not only do they appear with a backwards chronology. Ideally, reading a blog is reading across the chronology. The chronology – marked by the date and time of each particular post – is only one of the organising aspects of a blog. Most blogs are organised in topics. On the screen, the blogger can list the subjects which he or she pursues in the blog, and each post is marked with a number of labels, which enables the reader to find other posts with this particular subject.

Thus, as seen in the screen view extract from Akinoluna's blog (see appendix), she has a wide range of topics; some of them can be seen in the lower left corner (in the circle on page one). If we click on the topic "bootcamp" (in the dashed square marked by the arrow), all posts labelled with this subject will appear (the first two, September 10 and August 17, can be seen on page two). A reader who chooses to browse only through posts about the topic "bootcamp" will see a different text than the reader interested in seeing what is behind the label "arabcountry". And even though a number of posts might share some of the same topics, as do for instance "bathroom" and "sandbox" (both reflecting on the level of hygiene in Iraq), these two topics do not cover exactly the same posts.

Novels are not network texts; especially not crime novels. On the contrary, following the description of the course of events in a particular sequence, i.e. following the plot, is the fundamental asset of the reading process of a novel. If we on page one are told who the killer is and how the detective unfolds the riddle, well, then there is no riddle, and there has to be a very good reason to go on reading. Of course, not all novels are crime stories, but even those that are not most often contain a plot, a story that unfolds in a certain way. If it unfolds differently, it would be read as another story.

The same can be said about films. As Clint Eastwood has done in his two-part Pacific War epos, *Flag of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, we can tell the same story from different angles. In this case, we know the story perfectly well: we know that, eventually, the Americans are going to win. We know that the Japanese will defend their home soil bitterly. And we know that in the course of events a group of Marines will raise a flag on top of Mount Suribachi. Yet, we are still thrilled by seeing how these events are de-

picted, and the way we get the information, in drips, provides us with new tools of understanding the semantic whole of the narratives. When for instance we learn that the alleged Kempetai spy, Shimizu, has been sent to Iwo Jima in dishonour for having refused to follow a meaningless order to shoot a family's dog in front of the children, we start perceiving both his actions and those of the main character, Saigo, differently. And, more generally, seeing the battle of Iwo Jima from both the American and the Japanese side, provides us with a more nuanced view of both sides.

There are, of course, famous examples of books (and films) devoid of the fundamental aspects of the novel, of a unitary unfolding plot, for instance James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. They were written with the specific purpose of challenging the form of traditional novel: in the case of Joyce by telling a very simple story of adultery and forgiveness by means of a very special literary tool, the stream of consciousness; and, in the case of Musil, by telling a fundamentally virtual story – a story that could only have taken place if the First World War had never happened – about a man who is, as the title says, without any defining characteristics.

*Ulysses* was published in 1922, and the first parts of *The Man Without Qualities* in 1930. Both novels reflect the fundamental experience of meaninglessness after the Great War. And, the meaning of these stories lies not in unfolding the plot, but in their descriptive style of representation, not in the kernels but in the satellites, devoid of any action. Any extract of these very long texts can be read as equally meaningful (or equally meaningless), and can in that aspect be seen as predecessors of the network text: They should not necessarily be read from one end to another. However, this is exactly the way they are read, as exceptional, and within literary criticism they seem to constitute the exceptions that prove the rule. Thus seen, instead of challenging the narrative genre, they confirm the all-pervasive role of plotting.

The narrative, characterised by sequentiality and plotting is the dominant mode of style in telling a story, and, intuitively, I would expect that a strategy of writing in which events are described by topics would weaken this aspect, an expectation which would confirm Rettberg's claim that the narrative dimension of blogging should be juxtaposed with that of the novel.

## **9.2. Organisation of the texts in *Badgers Forward* and *Acute Politics***

In *Badgers Forward*, each post is carefully labelled, and in one of his first posts, which will be analysed in the next chapter, he justifies his purpose of blogging by thoroughly describing the main topics, "Telling our Soldiers' Stories", "Supporting the Mission", and "Honoring the Fallen". Besides these very

general labels, all posts, specifically those regarding the February 8 events, have the same two words in the headline: “Badgers Down”.

Above, I have analysed Badger 6’ description of the February 8 events, and compared it with the parallel post in *Acute Politics*. In the following, I will compare all posts placed under the sub-label “Badgers Down” and compare them with Teflon Don’s description of the same course of events.

However, already here, in the case selection, a fundamental difference between the two bloggers shows up. Teflon Don does not organise his posts in topics, labels or sub-labels. Of course, the confines of any given genre make it possible, at least to a certain extent, to determine whether a post describes a particular topic or not. Thus, we can distinguish between formal and informal labelling of texts.

Informal labelling does not necessarily mean that the label is less correct. In fact, the external observer’s estimate of genre can often constitute a more objective measure of the content; after all, the writer could, from an objective point of view, have forgotten, unwillingly or by purpose, to label a particular post “correctly”. Nevertheless, in cases where the author does not himself specify how his posts should be labelled, labelling becomes a matter of discussion, a matter in which the burden of proof is placed on the shoulders of the analyst.

Which posts should be included in the two stories about losing friends and colleagues, and of overcoming the loss? The question is particularly important in regard to determining when the story starts and when it ends. Regarding the end, Badger 6 is so kind as to neatly wrap up the story in the final post with the sub-label “Badgers Down”.

### **Tuesday, March 13, 2007**

Badgers Down: Postlude

So there you have it. Three of our friends, our brothers in arms were killed in action. We have the initial reportings, what people were saying in Boise prematurely, misrepresentation of the mission, progress reports, who they were, the reaction of the Don, the process of moving forward, what lead to the mission that fateful day, the mission, and the story of the Memorial Service.

We are back on mission and the Soldiers of Team Badger are doing well. We thought we would get through this without this happening, but it did. We are resilient and mission focused. We will get this done and by doing so honor our friends, SGT Holtom, SGT Clevenger, and PFC Werner.

We love them and their families. We will be home as soon as we can.

Badger 6.

Out.

***Posted by Badger 6 at 10:02 | links to this post***

Labels: Honoring the Fallen, Soldiers’ Story (Badgers Forward, March 13, 2007).

Badger 6 here clearly marks the end of the story by utilising three fundamental characteristics of narrative: He explicitly states that this is the end of the narrative, both by calling the post a “postlude”, and by defining the course of events as a semantic whole, implied in the opening sentence: “So there you have it”. He gives a coda, he sums up what has happened, “[t]hree of our brothers in arms were killed in action”, and he even provides the reader with links to each of the relevant posts, i.e. the posts with the sub-label headline “Badgers Down”. Last but not least, he puts the events in perspective, tells us how his company, by being “resilient and mission focused ... will get this done and by doing so honor (...) SGT Holtom, SGT Clevenger, and PFC Werner”, and he promises that they “will be home as soon as [they] can”. To serve is to honour.

Teflon Don’s description ends, on the contrary, much more abruptly with his February 22 post, in which he, after linking to Badger 6’ post about the events on February 8, merely states that he will not write any more about the dead.

#### **Thursday, February 22, 2007**

Badger 6: Badgers Down

Badger 6 has written here about the events that cost the lives of three of my friends, three members of my platoon, and three of his soldiers. He has other posts as well, telling about who they were as more than names and faces. Go there if you want to learn. Don’t mistake anything you read about them there as hyperbole- the CO is giving you the straight story. He knew these men, too. I doubt I’ll write more about them for a while.

**Posted by Teflon Don at 22.2.07 8 comments** (Acute Politics, February 22, 2007).

Since Teflon Don himself specifically says that this is the end of the story, I have chosen not to include any later posts. It could, however, be argued that especially the post “Nervous Tics” (February 25, 2007) and “War Cocaine” (March 2, 2007) should be included too, since both, in a very personal way, describe the feelings which run through the heads of combat soldiers. These reflections may be read as indirectly referring to his state of mind after having lost three comrades, especially in light of the fact that he, in earlier posts, focused on boredom instead. “Nervous Tics” contains a very detailed list of the things that scare him, from “Bumps in the Road” to “Wires. Cables. Strings that look like either.” “War Cocaine” describes the “rush” experienced by everyone encountering death in warfare:

I’ve never felt more alive than I do in the moments after a near miss. I feel the same way after a big jump skiing, or after jumping off a bridge, but here the

feeling is magnified a hundredfold. It's incredible when you do something that you shouldn't live through but do.

Some might call me sick, or crazy. I assure you that I am sane, and very much alive (Acute Politics, March 2, 2007).

It is just as difficult to state where Teflon Don's description of this row of events ends as it is to clearly state where it starts. Just before the events on February 8, a soldier from Bravo Company, Steve Shannon, died in another IED attack, and in Teflon Don's February 11 post "Heads up" – his first post after having received the message of his friends' death – he describes these two events as being related:

*It's been a rough week, especially on the tail of losing one from another company.* I have a post written that I'm hanging onto until that DOD brief comes out, and I'll post more as I'm able (Acute Politics, February 11, 2007 [my emphasis, MB]).

Even though Teflon Don does not consider Steve Shannon's death on the same footing as the death of his friends, a point which I shall return to below, he nevertheless describes it, here, as part of the same sequential order. The week has been "especially" rough, because Alpha Company lost three men "on the tail" of Shannon's death. Likewise, the two descriptions of the wailing notes of Amazing Grace, analysed above, also provides a link between the deaths of Shannon and Teflon Don's friends.

Badger 6 also mentions Shannon's death, and his "Distant Death Hits Home" post, describing how his friend, the CC of Bravo Company, the soldiers and the MEDEVAC team all handled that situation, is in style almost identical to the February 22 posts, analysed above. Thus, stylistically, there is no reason to exclude the story of Shannon's death from the loss of his own men. However, contrary to Teflon Don, who specifically places Shannon's death and the death of his friends within the same row of events, Badger 6 specifically distinguishes the story of Shannon's death from his own.

*The Task Force should be proud, in a dark hour, the leadership and the Soliders stood up. A final note, I find writing and reading in the first person compelling, but this is not my story, I am simply the camera* (Badgers Forward, February 6, 11:18 [italics in text, my underlining, MB]).

The structure of Teflon Don's description of this row of events is porous. We cannot say where it begins or where it ends. What we have is not a narrative. It is a chronicle: Dramatic events that are bound together in a sequential structure, but with a minimal plot. However, it is not difficult to characterise Badger 6' description of this row of events as a narrative. Even if some of the

single posts, substantially seen, do not fit into the narrative whole, he nevertheless presents a fixed structure with both a story and a plot.

By means of the header “Badgers down” and by explicitly stating that the description of Shannon’s death is not his story, Badger 6 clearly distinguishes between those posts that belong to the story and those that do not. The plot expressed in the last post with this header contains final evaluations, results and most importantly a coda, in which Badger 6 explains why this story of sacrifice should be told: to honour the fallen.

Ironically, in Badger 6’ case, this establishment of a narrative structure is enabled by the very tools that define the blog as a hypertext that differentiates it from the narrative proper. Teflon Don does not use the organising tools provided by the blogging media. Badger 6 exploits them fully. In Badger 6’ blog, narrative structure is not weakened by the hypertextual elements; it is strengthened by them. In Teflon Don’s blog, narrative structure is not strengthened by the absence of hypertextual elements; it is weakened by it. Thus seen, the fundamental asset in establishing a narrative is simply structure. By organising the events into a fixed structure under the same topic, Badger 6 can create a distinguishable story and define a clear plot.

### **9.3. Commemorating the fallen**

In the single post comparison of Teflon Don’s and Badger 6’ narratives, I argued that their descriptions of the events on February 8, 2007, reflected two very different world views; world views which theologially could be defined as dualist and radically monotheist. Thus, whereas the Actant Model derived from the analysis of Teflon Don’s post showed the soldier as participating in a struggle between the powers of good and evil, the analysis of Badger 6’ post revealed a picture of man as the humble servant of an almighty but unseen God. In that respect Badger 6’ world view was not unlike that of the predestined world of the puritan believer in the second generation of Calvinists, which Max Weber analysed in the *Protestant Ethic* and the *Spirit of Capitalism*. As we shall see in the following, Badger 6’ view of duty as a goal in itself also closely follows this ideal typical pattern.

#### *9.3.1 Badger 6: Civil and Military religion*

My analysis of Teflon Don was to a large extent based on his flash-forward to his description of the dog tags clanking in the wind as a “devil’s chime”, an emblem of evil: of the evil which has happened, and which, perhaps, is still in store for them. In his Memorial Day post, Badger 6 also mentions the dog tags wrapped around the rifles. However, his description contains none of the sinister elements implied in Teflon Don’s mystical experience. On the contrary, Badger 6 sees the display in the dining hall where the ceremony is go-

ing to unfold as not only appropriate, but more as part of an almost divine set up:

The front of the room contained the display. In the center, there were three two-tier stands. M-16 rifles were inverted on bayonets and stuck into the upper tiers. The rifles were topped with Army Combat Helmets with camouflage coverings. Silver dog tags dangled from the rifles' pistol grips. Dusty, well-worn, tan canvas boots were placed to create a V at the point where there bayonet entered the stand.

The lower tiers held the awards they have received. All three were awarded the Bronze Star for service, the Purple Heart for wounds received in combat, and the Combat Action Badge for engaging the enemy in close combat. Behind the stands, the Flag of the United States of America and the Battalion Colors stood crossed.

To the left were three large portraits of the fallen set up on easels. Further to the left, there was a speaker's podium and seats for the Chaplain, the Task Force Commander, myself, the Platoon Leader, 3-6, and the three Soldiers who will speak about their fallen friends.

To the right of the center display stands was a large screen, now blank but soon would display a video tribute (Badgers Forward, March 12, 2007).

Badger 6' reaction to the set-up is in accordance with its intended effect. It is seen as an altar: in the sense that it constitutes the central point of reference in a ceremonial space; in the sense that it contains the central characteristics of a shrine; and in the sense that it defines the participants in the memorial ceremony, present as well as absent, as participants in a sacrificial act.

As seen in the picture and described in the quotation above, the display resembles an altarpiece or a triptych, with the pictures (or icons) on easels on the left and the video screen on the right as its leaves. The central element, the empty boots and the guns pointing down, carrying the helmets and the dog tags signify both the void space left behind by the fallen soldiers, and serve as relics – an indispensable part of any shrine, and, historically, a crucial element in demarcating the altar as a space apart from the surroundings.

Most interesting in this context is probably the fact that “[b]ehind the stands, the Flag of the United States of America and the Battalion Colors stood crossed”. Thereby we have all actors of the sacrifice represented in the display: *the actual victims*, represented by the relics and the demarcation of the void space they leave behind; the display also emphasises their legitimate status as *surrogate victims*, they were soldiers; and *the sacrificer*, represented by the flags – the most emblematic symbol of a community.

The ceremonial display. Centre: Inverted guns and dog tags



(Badgers Forward: February 13, 2007).

Here, in the official military memorial, both the military community, the Battalion Colours, and the national community, the Stars and Stripes, are represented. And, judging from this set-up, the death of the soldiers can be depicted as a sacrifice for either. However, it is a crucial fact that the two flags “stood crossed” – that they are not depicted as separate entities, but as one. Thus seen, the sacrifice of the soldier should not only be regarded as a sacrifice for nation *or* corps, but ultimately for *both*.

Given the fact that it is an official ceremony, it is, of course, not very surprising. In fact, it would be a lot more surprising if the army corps depicted the death of the soldiers only as a military sacrifice. However, it is of central interest in this context that it is depicted as a sacrifice, and that Badger 6, by describing it, chooses to weight this merging of military and the national communities. Moreover, the military community is here represented by the Battalion whose colours stand with the Stars and Stripes. Thus, what is emphasised is not the horizontal, face-to-face community, the outfit, which traditionally is used to contrast military and national sacrifices, but the organisational whole that mediates between the soldier and the state.



Thus, the potential friction of civil and military religion is lessened, and the transition from one sacrificer to another made more smooth, in accordance with the subordination of military religion to national religion we saw in Chapter 7.

### *9.3.2 Teflon Don: Halls of Valhalla*

Apart from the description of the memorial display as a “Devil’s chime” in the entry posted on the day of the memorial, Teflon Don does not describe the ceremony. However, in his first mention of the loss of the company, he dedicates a poem of his own, Halls of Valhalla, to the fallen:

#### **Halls of Valhalla**

Four days ago, they left  
From safely guarded walls  
Three taken now by theft  
Four days, and yet it seems  
Fate made three captive thralls  
To laugh within our dreams  
Four days, and now they dwell  
Within Valhalla’s Halls  
Maidens, treat our fallen well  
Show them not the road to Hell;  
Rather gird the path with beams  
Hide them deep inside a cleft  
And Valkyries – heed their calls (Acute Politics, February 11, 2007)

As mentioned in the above analysis of Fiddler’s Green, Valhalla is the eternal resting place of warriors who have died on the battlefield. However, unlike Ma Deuce Gunner, Teflon Don does not frame the soldier sacrifice as a sacrifice for higher ideals. His description of the warriors’ afterworld mentions neither nation nor freedom. Instead, the poem describes exactly what the title implies: a safe haven in the afterworld.

There is a tension between safety and insecurity throughout the poem, both in regard to its descriptions of life here and in the afterworld. On the one hand, the Halls of Valhalla provide the dead heroes with the protection they were not offered in this world. Here, having left the “safely guarded walls”, they had nowhere to hide. Thus, by “Fate” they were made “captive thralls”, and, in that respect, the immanent and the transcendent are contrasted. On the other hand, there is a fundamental anxiety in Teflon Don’s description of his friends’ transition from this world to the next, most clearly reflected in the last verse when he prays that the Valkyries’ “Show them not the road to Hell”. Hence, like in Fiddler’s Green, the afterworld is split in

two:<sup>125</sup> one where the warrior can enjoy the eternal blessings of the afterlife, and another, Hell, clearly the less attractive alternative.

The tension between the safety enjoyed in the company of other warriors and the uncertainty facing everybody excluded from this brotherhood is present in both this world and the afterworld. Hence, in both content and form, by rhyming the “safely guarded walls” with “Valhallas Halls”, the poet draws a parallel between the Forward Operation Base, here, and Valhalla, there. Both are defined as safe havens. Both are uniquely military communities. Both are walled entities in a surrounding world of fundamental insecurity.

This parallel between the guarded community here and the guarded community in the afterworld has a long history. The same idea was reflected in the roman military camps (Helgeland, 1978), in the architecture and the ideology of the religious orders of the Middle Ages (Jørgensen, 1989), and in the organisation of immigrant communities in the new world in early modern times. Being a “City upon a Hill” subject to the Judgement of God is being an ideal picture, a New Jerusalem. In that respect, it is no surprise that we find the walled city ideology represented here as military ideology, expressed religiously by the moral descendants of the Founding Fathers. By drawing a parallel between this world and the world beyond, and by describing the continuous presence of his dead friends, they who now “laugh within our dreams”, Teflon Don seems to imply that the two worlds exist as instances on the same continuum; fully in accordance with his view of the soldier as participating in the cosmic struggle of good and evil.

The warrior cult described in Teflon Don’s poem is unchecked. He neither mentions idealism nor national identity. His friends are not described as martyrs for nation or freedom. The souls of the deceased heroes are picked up by deities associated with military sacrifices and, accordingly, the place where they now dwell is a place reserved for warriors killed on the battlefield. Moreover, the protagonist regards himself as a member of the same community. They are described as “our fallen”, they are still present among the living, and he can call upon the Valkyries to protect his friends.

In Badger 6’ memorial post, the presence of the altarpiece, and the description of the ceremony as a rite de passage closely resembled a ritual proper. And, defined in traditional Durkheimian terms, as an act of establishing a feeling of community, this is clearly a religious ritual. Compared to Teflon Don’s memorial poem, however, Badger 6 does not mention an afterworld. The sacrificer, the community for which the victim dies, is marked by the flags: the central element of the civil religious cult (Marvin & Ingle 1996),

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<sup>125</sup> Or three, if we regard the road to Hell, where the Maidens will “hide the heroes” until the Valkyries can take them to Valhalla, as a separate part of the afterworld.

but the important community is the community of those left behind, the community which celebrates itself in a memorial ritual. In the ritual, the soldiers are commemorated as friends, buddies and warriors. It does not imply the existence of an eternal resting place beyond the realms of life, where the martyrs, await the arrival of those who are still alive.

Thus, Badger 6' and Teflon Don's notions of military religion seem to differ radically on two points. First, whereas Badger 6 describes the memorial merely as a commemoration of the dead men, confirming the bonds of the community of the living, Teflon Don, in his first post about Sergeant Clevenger, Sergeant Holtom and Private First Class Werner, focuses on the afterlife and of the continuously existing mutual bonds that connect the living with the dead. Second, Teflon Don's military religion is not only explicit, it is also autonomous: it exists independently of the dominating national religious discourse, implied in Badger 6' ceremony description and prevalent in both *Ma Deuce Gunner* and *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.

#### **9.4 Reaction to the change: Revenge versus Worldly Asceticism**

Teflon Don is engaged in a battle between powers of good and evil, and his reactions to the events are primarily emotional: He stops writing about the fallen, probably because it will wear him down; he talks about revenge, that "there's always the chance that we'll even the scales unknowingly" (Acute Politics, February 18, 2007); and he describes the thrill of a near-miss as "War Cocaine", a feeling that evokes associations of a Freudian Death Drive:

No one really knows what it is, exactly, but we all feel it. It's physical. It's emotional. For some, it's spiritual. Some say it's endorphins or adrenaline; some say it's rage, or hate, or joy. Some say it's safety- the knowledge that Someone is watching out for you. It's different for everyone, but it's always there.

For me, the rush is mostly exhilaration. It's a feeling of invulnerability. I've heard the unforgettable sound of an RPG<sup>126</sup> somewhere very, very near my little sector of space, and stood a little taller yelling "Missed me, you bastards!" as I spin the turret and look for the shooter (Acute Politics, March 2, 2007).

Badger 6 is also engaged in a battle between chaos and order, but contrary to Teflon Don his battle is between inclinations and duty, a battle that primarily must be fought within himself.

In 1942 Margaret Mead made an anthropological study of American Identity, titled *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (Mead, 1942). The words constitute a saying traditionally attributed to Oliver Cromwell, who, before crossing a

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<sup>126</sup> An RPG is a Rocket Propelled Grenate, apart from roadside bombs and snipers the probably most feared weapon of the insurgents.

river to go into battle, allegedly said: “Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry”.<sup>127</sup> In modern English, only the second sentence has survived and, accordingly, the idiomatic of the words has changed. Today, the primary meaning of “keeping ones powder dry” is to await and see, to avoid using ones strength in vain or with a wrong purpose. However, the original meaning of Cromwell’s saying was quite another, and is also the meaning Mead referred to in her anthropological study of America. Thus, in accordance with Weber who, in “Zwischenbetrachtung: Theorie der Stufen und Richtungen religiöser Weltablehnung”, describes Cromwell as the ideal typical puritan (Weber, 1922: 553), Mead focuses on how faith and pragmatism are combined in the words of the Lord Protector.

In Weber’ view the Puritan Revolutions were articulations of Holy War as Worldly Asceticism (ibid). The Warrior of Faith fights more bravely than others, not because his sacrifice leads to eternal salvation, but because his self-sacrifice serves as a sign, a confirmation of certainty that he is among the elect. The invocation of God in the first part of the saying serves as purposes to legitimise what is about to happen and to motivate the men to fight. Regardless of the outcome, they must, as true believers, commit themselves to God. Neither the war nor defeat on the battlefield should be seen as evils, but as expressions of the will of the Almighty. War fulfils his will. War, service, becomes service for God. This was true both in regard to the classical as well as to the puritan idea of crusading.

The difference between these two ideas of crusading lies in how medieval knights and early modern puritans understood the relation between the transcendent and the immanent worlds (Walzer, 1965; Bainton, 1943). This difference is expressed in the second part of Cromwell’s saying, where the Worldly Asceticism comes into focus. The fact that the fighting man is situated in this concrete, worldly context can be read as a sign of the special role in the salvation plan, bestowed on him by God. If he does not commit himself to the conditions of that particular context, if he does not keep his powder dry, then he cannot fulfil that role. Worshipping God in battle does not mean that the soldier is enraptured into an apocalyptic fight between powers of good and evil. Serving means fulfilling the tasks with which you have been trusted in this world, and if the soldier is not even to that task, it can only be read as a

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<sup>127</sup> Colonel Blacker (1834) *Oliver’s Advice* quoted in Hayes (1856: 192). Historians disagree as to if and when the Lord Protector should have said those words. Carlyle, the notorious editor of *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches* mentions it in regard to the battle of Dunbar in 1650. Others, among them leading Civil War historian Christopher Hill, date it as early as Edgehill in 1642 (Carlyle, 1845; Hill, 1986).

sign that he is not able to serve God in the right way, that he should be numbered with the condemned (Brænder, 2007: 79).

As mentioned above, Badger 6' world view, the notion of being subject to an almighty power of fate, shares fundamental traits with the radical monotheism of the puritans as described by Weber. His focus on duty also resembles the Weberian description of Worldly Asceticism as a way of expressing faith through action: Everybody fulfils their tasks, and only by doing so, the memory of the fallen can be honoured. Thus Badger 6' memorial day post both begins and ends reflecting the dilemma of emotions and duty, and by stating the importance of honouring the fallen through professionalism:

I awoke just before 0600, before my alarm went off. I was immediately wide awake, fully aware that this was going to be a day filled with emotion and I was doggedly determined to get through it with dignity and strength. I was determined to honor our fallen with the same professionalism they demonstrated on the field of battle (*Badgers Forward*, March 12, 2007).

I think I hugged everyone in the company and much of the Task Force. The Company spent the rest of the day together, talking about our brothers. We rarely have the opportunity for all of us to be together in one place and we wanted to spend as much time together as possible. The next day we were back on mission (ibid).

As stated, in regard to civil religion theory, we cannot infer from the presence of religious residuals to the continuous existence of religion. Thus seen, I cannot infer from the presence of a Protestant Ethic in *Badgers Forward* to an actual faith in the Puritan Doctrine of Predestination. The point is, however, that the presence of both the monotheist world view and the Worldly Asceticism fits his description of the memorial ritual as a fundamentally immanent event well. There are subtle references to a radical transcendence: in the memorial represented by the flags, and in the worldview represented by the implied existence of a divine author. Nevertheless, they remain subtle.

### **9.5 Social boundaries: here and beyond**

The death of Steven Shannon, a Corporal from a sister company, affects both *Badger 6* and *Teflon Don*. However, their descriptions of the event, and how they relate it to the losses of their own company seem to differ. Badger 6 explicitly states that Shannon's death is not his story, and, despite striking stylistic similarities, it is not included in the row of events he calls "Badgers Down". Teflon Don explicitly sees all the deaths as instances on the same continuum of events. Yet, in both style and content the post dedicated to Shannon differs radically from the post dedicated to his friends.

### 9.5.1 *Badger 6: Organisationally defined boundaries*

As we saw in the quotation from the memorial ceremony above, Badger 6's rejection of the emotions is not absolute. Granted, as shown in the last chapter, he clearly regards his break down outside the morgue as a personal failure, and most of the memorial ceremony post expresses the same view. However, in the descriptions of the barbecue after the memorial, mentioned both in the March 12 post and in a post written on the day of the ceremony, he emphasises how all men in the company commit themselves to emotions. The element of serving the fallen by accomplishing what they sacrificed their lives for is still there, but has less to do with duty than with pleasure:

One of my Soldiers asked rhetorically, "How do you honor men that were always laughing and smiling? You smile and then you laugh. And that is what we started to do again today (*Badgers Forward*, February 13, 2007).

In the March 12 post, Badger 6 clearly includes himself in the collective "we": "Today *we* grilled and drank Non-Alcohol beer toasts to *our* friends and comrades. *We* ache and many of *us* will for a long time, but *we* are getting back on the horse" (ibid [my emphasis]). This is not organic solidarity as we saw it expressed in his focus on duty in regard to both the death of his men and the solemn part of the ceremony. This is clearly a mechanic component, expressed because of the special setting and confirming Durkheim's hypothesis that lower ranking officers experience a cross-pressure of mechanic and organic obligations.

Pleasure can of course be a duty too, and this is how, by and large, Badger 6 here describes it. Not as compromising, but as contributing to the obligations, as part of the ceremonial course: There is a time for everything, and when the solemn part of the ceremony is over, it is time for pleasure; and, one might add, like all sacrificial ceremonies this one ends with the re-establishment of *communitas* through the meal.<sup>128</sup> Thus, like this horizontal feeling of community is confined within the ceremonial framework, as the reintegrative phase of the ritual, it is also confined to the organisational and organically determined framework of the company.

This organisationally founded distinction is also prevalent in Badger 6's description of Steve Shannon's death. After having supported his colleague, the other CC, Badger 6 withdraw in order to let Shannon's buddies support each other: "The Company of the injured Soldier heads off for their area. Those of us not in the Company decide to let them come together and sup-

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<sup>128</sup> In the light of that it is interesting that the meal is a barbecue. They have just been through a sacrificial ceremony and they share burnt meat.

port each other as a family” (*Badgers Forward*, February 6, 2007). Each company is a family, and Badger 6 is not part of this one.

### *9.5.2 Teflon Don: Emotionally defined boundaries*

Teflon Don also distinguishes between the death of Steve Shannon and the death of his friends. He too emphasises that he is not as close to Shannon as those in his company, and when he posts a poem dedicated to Shannon, he explicitly states that the dead soldier’s friends has asked him to do so:

He was from another company- one of the few from that group that I’ve spoken with. I didn’t know him well, but I’m proud to say I knew him. I wrote a poem in his memory that I didn’t plan to post, but one of his friends asked me to (*Acute Politics*, February 9, 2007).

Contrary to Badger 6, Teflon Don does not only describe the social boundaries in organisational terms. The keyword that determines inclusion and exclusion in his vocabulary is “friendship”. In the quotation above, Teflon Don stated that he was “proud to say I *knew* him”. Yet, he also emphasises that he would not have posted a poem merely to an acquaintance. He posts it because a *friend* of Shannon asks him to.

Friendship cannot be reduced to acquaintance. A central point in regard to Teflon Don’s description of his and Badger 6’ relation to the death:

#### **Badger 6: Badgers Down**

Badger 6 has written here about the events that cost the lives of three of my friends, three members of my platoon, and three of his soldiers. He has other posts as well, telling about who they were as more than names and faces. Go there if you want to learn. Don’t mistake anything you read about them there as hyperbole- the CO is giving you the straight story. He knew these men, too. I doubt I’ll write more about them for a while (*Acute Politics*, February 22, 2007).

Again, *being friends* with someone is implicitly contrasted to merely *knowing* someone. Teflon Don mentions the dead as “*my* friends, three members of *my* platoon, and three of *his* soldiers.” Teflon Don describes his relation to the three dead men as mixed between friendship and unit cohesion. Badger 6’ relation to the men is merely described in professional, not emotional terms, which is also emphasised by the fact that Teflon Don towards the end of the post says that Badger 6 “knew these men too”, instead of “these men were also Badger 6’ friends”.

The social boundaries marked by Teflon Don’s use of the conceptual difference between friendship and acquaintance are not simply interchangeable with the organisational boundaries of the company emphasised by his officer. Unlike the view reflected in Badger 6’ description of the post-ceremonial bar-

because, where “friends and comrades” seem to be synonyms, Teflon Don’s distinction between being friend with and knowing is more informal in the sense that membership of the unit does not automatically entitle a person to be included in the friendship.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, the way Teflon Don seems to imply that Badger 6 is not part of the buddy network seems to indicate that even though unit membership is not a sufficient condition for a relation to qualify as a friendship, it is, nevertheless, a necessary one.

When Teflon Don explicitly defines Badger 6’s relation to the men as an acquaintance relation, he does so – likewise explicitly – mentioning the rank: “(...) the *CO* is giving you the straight story. He *knew* these men, too.” For Badger 6, the sole condition for social membership is to belong to the company, the group of men he is responsible for. Teflon Don, on the contrary, seems to include only the rank and file in the buddy network. Judging from his choice of words, the Commanding Officer can know his men, but not befriend them. Whereas the officer must define his group membership in both mechanic and organic terms, the private is a member of a uniquely horizontal relation, which enables him to distinguish between degrees of belonging.

The distinction between friends and acquaintances also shows when we compare Teflon Don’s tribute to Steve Shannon with that which he dedicates to his friends. Not only does he emphasise that he would not have posted the poem, if he had not been asked to do so by one of Shannon’s friends, but content of the two poems also differ radically.

See now, the soldier-  
So far away from home  
He’s staring into night  
And wishing it would end  
See now, the bomber-  
Fighting war for Allah  
He’s laying in the grime  
Waiting by the trigger  
See now, the splinter-  
Chased by fiery lace  
It’s flying with the blast  
And tearing flesh in flight  
See now, the father-  
A bomb-hole in his heart

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<sup>129</sup> In his February 11 post, Teflon Don seems to distinguish between degrees of friendship. Here, the term only categorise the relation to two of the dead: “All three were from my platoon, and I was pretty good friends with two of them.”



He's weeping for his son  
So far away from war  
Rest in peace, Steve (Acute Politics, February 9, 2007).

Here, there is no mentioning of a community of warriors transcending the boundaries of death. There are only the four actors: the soldier who hopes it will end, the enemy who pulls the trigger, the splinter that kills, and the father that mourns his son. The last line of the poem does not reveal whether the person "So far away from war" is the heartbroken father back home or the dead son resting in peace. Even if it signifies the son, and even if that place "far away" is seen as an emblem of the transcendent, these words are still devoid of the strong implications of warrior identity which ran through "Halls of Valhalla".

Teflon Don *knew* Shannon. He was not his friend. And accordingly, he does not regard himself as part of the same horizontal, and transcendent, community as Shannon. Granted, assuming that the person "So far away from home/ Staring into night / And wishing it would end" actually is Shannon, Teflon Don does describe him as a soldier. It is doubtful, though whether he describes him as a brother in arms. They are brothers only as far as they are both sons of fathers, who anxiously wait back home. And unless the four verses are read as a course of events, the soldier described in the first four lines may in fact just as well be Teflon Don or any other deployed soldier. Thus, the bonds of community tying Teflon Don to Shannon are, at most, the bonds of a shared destiny, not the bonds of a military community, transcending death itself.

## **9.6 Conclusion**

Rettberg's juxtaposition of narratives and blogs is only partially justified. Granted, the narrative genre presupposes the advantage of hindsight. The two stories compared in Chapter 7 both recounted an enclosed sequence of events in the past tense, and could both be seen as narratives proper. In comparison, only one of the two collections of different stories united by a common theme, which I have analysed here in Chapter 8, can straightforwardly be defined as a narrative. The other should rather be seen as a chronicle.

Despite the fact that he does not actually recount the events with the same sequential structure as they actually took place, and despite the fact that there is a longer time gap between event and narration, Badger 6 deliberately frames his description of the course of events from the IED attack to the memorial ceremony as a semantic whole. He uses topic categorisations and topic headlines to structure the sequential structure as a unified whole.

And in that respect his presentation of the topic “Badgers Down” shares the fundamental aspects of a narrative proper: the plot.

Teflon Don’s description, on the contrary, does not contain a clear beginning: On the one hand, he explicitly regards Steve Shannon’s and his friends’ death as instances of the same sequential structure. On the other hand, the bonds of community tying him to Shannon are much more universal and wobbly than the strong transcendent bonds still tying him to his dead friends now resting among other warriors in the afterworld. Teflon Don’s story is not a story with a clear end, either. On February 22, he states that he will not write about his friends anymore. Yet, it is difficult to reject a connection between the loss of his friends and his deliberations, in subsequent posts, about the excitement and fears of combat experience.

Badger 6 also mentions the dead men later in the blog, and if we alone judge from the content of the posts categorised under the sub-label headline “Badgers Down”, little indicates that his categorisation actually can be regarded as a unified whole. However, his stylistic confinement of the events means that the reader will automatically read them as an enclosed sequential structure. And, in regard to the idea of a juxtaposition between blogs and narratives, Rettberg’s expectation is not supported. The more organised a collection of texts are, the more it reminds of a narrative proper, in spite of the presence of non-narrative elements.

Of course form and content cannot be wholly separated. Badger 6’ focus on duty is in fact a focus on form in praxis, and if that is reflected in his style, his form of writing may also be more inclined to look like narratives proper, than Teflon Don’s. Structurally, the form of the narrative is closely related to the form of the ritual, as described by Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep (van Gennep, 2004; Turner, 1995). Like narratives, rituals describe a movement, through a critical phase, from one equilibrium to another. This does not necessarily mean that we, like Mircea Eliade, should infer that rituals are cover-versions of original myths (Eliade, 1997: 59). As already mentioned in regard to the definition of civil religion, rituals may express their own semantic structure, wholly independent of any subsequent rationalisations. Nevertheless, ritual enactment and narration share fundamental structural characteristics.

When Badger 6 describes the memorial ceremony, he closely follows the structure of both rituals and narratives: When the identity of the leader of the firing squad remains veiled, it is fully in accordance with classical ritual descriptions where experiences of the critical, liminal phase, of the ritual are veiled in secrecy. Likewise, it is obvious to interpret Badger 6’ description of the meal after the ceremony as a re-integrative meal of communion. Contrary

to the descriptions of being lonely before dead, and the emphasis of difference, constantly prevalent in the blog, Badger 6 here focuses on similarity. At the same time, however, it is also emphasised that this re-integrative meal takes place within a very limited time frame: After the solemn ceremony, and before they, on “the next day (...) were back on mission”. Badger 6 is an officer. He is never only bound to the men by member mechanic bounds. The organic components, articulated as duty, are always present too.

Contrary to Teflon Don’s description of the afterworld, both civil and military religious elements remain implicit in Badger 6’ blog. To the extent that they are implicit, it is primarily as symbolic representations: in the description of the display, the inverted guns, the crossed flags; in the description of the course of the ceremony, closely following the phases of a religious ritual proper; and last but not least, in the constant focus on duty as not only a moral obligation but also a means of honouring the dead in a way that, in spite of the fact that we should only infer from effect to cause with great hesitation, seems like a subspecies of Worldly Asceticism.

Even if Badger 6’ ritual description contains elements of implicit religion, they, nevertheless, clearly differ from the focus on the transcendent realm of the dead soldiers, described in *Acute Politics*. The two bloggers’ views of civil and military religion differ not only in regard to their level of explication, or in regard to their world view or theology: Whereas Teflon Don confines his descriptions of the afterworld to descriptions of the transcendent military community, Badger 6 views civil religion and military religion as two sides of the same matter.



## Chapter 10

### The full blog as a narrative

The final comparison looks at the blog in its full length as a narrative. Above, I listed the elements of a narrative as defined by Labov, and this distinction also constitutes the framework in the analyses in this chapter.

I distinguish between the following constituents of a narrative: setting, consisting of the *abstract* and the *orientation*; the unfolding and continuously evaluated events with a beginning, a middle and an end; and, finally, the interpretation, containing the results and the coda. In the following analyses I will compare the general frameworks of the two blogs, the setting and the interpretation, and a sample of early and late deployment missions in order to shed light on whether and how the bloggers' perception of the war changes after the tragic events on February 8.

#### 10.1. The setting

Headers and footers are particularly interesting in regard to framing a blog, because they remain visible throughout the reading, and thus constantly offer a key of interpretation. Whereas *Acute Politics* only has a header, Badgers Forward contains both a header and a footer. Apart from these constant elements, two posts from Badgers Forward (December 9, 2006) and (July 4, 2007), and one post from Teflon Don, (November 18, 2006), aim at setting the general meaning of the blog.

##### *10.1.1 Badgers Forward: From the frontlines of the war against Islamofascism*

Badger 6' header consists of two parts, a general one-line presentation of the blog and three lines emphasising that the blog should be read as a personal description and not as an official document.

#### **Badgers Forward**

A milblog from the front lines of the War against Islamofascism.  
The views expressed here are mine alone and do not reflect the views of the US Government, the US Department of Defense, the US Army, or any other official agency (Header: *Badgers Forward*)

The first line is most interesting in this regard – for two reasons. First, he specifically says, “the War against Islamofascism”, not the war on terror. In Badger 6' eyes the enemy is a religious ideology. Not religion, he neither says “the War against Islamism” nor “against Islamic fundamentalism”: The adversary is an ideology with a history. Thus seen, the battle, in which Badger 6 takes part, is not only a battle against a present enemy. By linking Islamic fundamentalism to political fascism, to the ideology of the World War II ad-

versaries, the battle against the ideological adversary becomes a battle taking place across history.

Secondly he says *frontlines*. The logical interpretation of this plural form would be that Badger 6 wishes to emphasise that this battle is not only fought in Iraq, but is part of a global war. Linking the war in Iraq to the war on terror of course justifies the war in Iraq, and makes it part of something greater, a global struggle. Not only does the enemy exist across history, across time. He also exists across space. The implied historical link to World War II also points to a second interpretation of the use of this plural form: it implies that America is a nation under siege,<sup>130</sup> surrounded by enemies, and forced to fight its battles on more than one front. This view is supported by the Ronald Reagan-quotation that constitutes Badger 6' footer:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free (*Badgers Forward*, July 3, 2006).

The fact that this quotation is one of the very few examples of explicit references to America in *Badgers Forward* challenges rather than a supports the nation under the siege-interpretation above. Yet, national identity is here made part of a general framework of idealism: the necessary struggle for freedom. And along with the header, this coupling of national identity and idealism is placed at the probably most constitutive place in the blog.

The quotation can be seen as a key to understanding the continual references to idealism in the blog as a whole: Freedom must be defended. In order to defend it, somebody must choose to do so. This choice lies at the shoulders of America. In that view, the advocacy of freedom is a way of justifying the war, not only by referring explicitly to its purpose, the defence of freedom, but also by implying that this defence is a way of fulfilling America's duty to make the right choice. The quotation ties together the two historical instances of America's struggle for freedom implied in the term islamofascism by adding a third, namely the context of the Reagan era: the Cold War showdown with Soviet Communism.

Regarding civil religion, Badger 6' way of expressing national affiliation in terms of abstract idealism places him closer to *Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum* than to any of the other blogs, analysed above. Like him, he is also officer. Like

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<sup>130</sup> This is a particular version of the City upon a Hill-narrative, closer to the Old Testament Zion-theology, from which it derives, than to the rephrased American image of being an image to the world.

him, he is also conservative. Like him, he has also been exposed to combat. And like in his blog, the abstract also meets the concretely embedded in an expression of patriotism in *Badgers Forward*.

In the post, “The Tenets of Badgers Forward”, Badger 6 lays out the purposes of the blog in general. He lists four reasons: “Telling our Soldiers’ Story”, “Supporting the Mission”, “Caring for the Wounded” and “Honoring the Fallen”. The first is in accordance with the reasons most bloggers give for blogging: to stay in touch with those back home, and to counterweight the biased and sensationalist war correspondence of the Main Stream Media.

Badger 6’ description of his support of the mission is in accordance with the general interpretation of the Iraq War as a struggle for freedom, as reflected in the above. Yet, he does not claim that the fulfilment of this mission has been unproblematic, and he does not deny that there still is a long way to go:

The mission in Iraq is important. There have been missteps, but I believe in telling the story you will learn about what is being accomplished here, at least in one small way (December 6, 2006).

The mission is not spotless. Therefore, he points to the results reached by individual soldiers. And by doing so, he bridges between ideology and concrete achievements in order to gain support for the mission from his readers:

My hope is that when you understand what we are doing and what this means in a larger context, you will then be able to support our efforts to achieve a good resolution for the Iraqi people, which in turn is a good outcome for us. (...) (ibid).

By emphasising “Caring for the wounded” and “Honoring the Fallen” among the main purposes of the blog, Badger 6’ attention shifts from the achievements to the sacrifices. The presence of a sacrificial ideology is reflected by the fact that Badger 6’ language changes from plain to grandiloquent whenever he talks about the dead.<sup>131</sup> Yet, it is not abundantly clear who the sacrificer is: For which social entity does the killing take place? On the one hand, the combination of national affiliation with abstract idealism seems to be in accordance with the national sacrificial ideology. Yet, the military brotherhood seems to play a significant role too, and so do the families back home:

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<sup>131</sup> “Some people have given the last full measure. Their families wounded, their loved ones taken from them, our chow halls emptier, our hearts heavier” (ibid).

We can show those family members that we care, that their loved ones life was not sacrificed in vain; that their contribution made a difference. We love them all, like the brother and sister in arms they are because:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition;  
And gentlemen in England now-a-bed  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day (ibid).

In his description of the memorial ceremony, analysed above, Badger 6 sees civil and military religion as two sides of the same matter. Likewise, here, both forms of implicit religion are present: Civil religion in the embedded ideology; military religion in the reference to the Saint Crispin's day speech. Here, however they are also combined by a third. The families left behind, whose sacrifice should also be honoured, the families who embody the connection between the nation and the military.

### *10.1.2 Acute Politics: War and politics*

#### **Acute Politics**

JUST ANOTHER STAR AMONG THE GROWING CONSTELLATION OF MILBLOGS THAT BRING YOU REPORTS OF LIFE IN A WARZONE FROM THE GUYS IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.

**OH MELIBOEUS, I HAVE HALF A MIND**

**TO TAKE A HAND IN POLITICS**

**BEFORE NOW POETRY HAS TAKEN NOTICE**

**OF WARS, AND WHAT ARE WARS BUT POLITICS**

**TRANSFORMED FROM CHRONIC TO ACUTE AND BLOODY?** (Acute Politics: Setting).

Teflon Don's header consists of two parts: a general introduction to the blog, and an extract from Robert Frost's poem, "Build Soil" (1936).

The first lines of the poem, opening with the vocation of Meliboeus,<sup>132</sup> state that the narrator intends "to take a hand", to be engaged in politics. To start a military blog, is to engage oneself in a political discourse. The very act of writing the blog is the enactment of "free speech from those who make it possible", a point also expressed in the general introduction: "milblogs (...) bring you the reports of life in a warzone from the guys in the middle of it".

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<sup>132</sup> Meliboeus is a classical pastoral figure, known from Vergil's *Eklogues* and used in both Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as well as in this Frost poem.



According to Carl von Clausewitz' classical definition "war is the continuation of policy".<sup>133</sup> Writing a blog from the war zone adds another, personal, dimension to this statement. Not only does the citizen soldier embody this continuation. By writing about it, he also executes the very rights which the democratic state is put in place to maintain. Yet, this understanding of correspondence between politics and warfare is ambiguously expressed in the poem. On the one hand, the poem rhetorically asks "what are wars but politics". On the other, wars are understood as "politics *transformed*", not as "politics *continued*". Following Frost's definition of war, quoted in the header and naming this blog, *Acute Politics*, wars express more than merely another articulation of the social constant of power struggle.

Politics are "chronic". They last. Politicians say the same. Politics stay the same. The changes inflicted by politics are only momentarily. Wars, on the contrary, are "acute and bloody". Wars inflict instant and irreversible change. Hence, two potentially conflicting views of politics are present in the header: one frames the writings as a political statement in itself, and another emphasises a view of war that goes beyond the political, and sees wars and politics as essentially different.

As already mentioned, there is little civil religion but plenty of military religion in *Acute Politics*, and the prevalent role of military identity in his blog is clearly expressed in his November 18 post "A long past due introduction", where Teflon Don tells us who he is by describing who the Badgers are and what they do:

I am a combat engineer.

I am one of a few thousand American soldiers lucky enough to be tasked with making a new mission work for the Army. That mission is route clearance (November 18, 2006).

This statement both defines and confines. The simplex, first person singular use of the copula, "I am", opens the post and is not utilised anywhere else in it. It settles the identity of the narrator as being univocally bound to his task and to his unit. What he is besides that, a man, a poet, conservatively bent, and generally mistrusting the saliency of army politics, is excluded from this

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<sup>133</sup> The interpretation of von Clausewitz' famous dictum is disputed. In his critique of Basil Liddell-Hart's and John Keegan's readings of Clausewitz, Christopher Bassford says that a great deal of the misunderstandings of Clausewitz' claim derives from the fact that here the German word "Politik" should not be translated in the restrictive sense as *policy*, but in its broader, descriptive meaning as *politics* (Bassford, 1994).

definition. First and last, Teflon Don is a combat engineer. Everything else is irrelevant.

This also leads to a clear distinction between in-group and out-group saturating both this post and *Acute Politics* in general: The Badgers are good at their job. They “have the best equipment in the world”. They enter the paths nobody else dares to go, and thereby conduct what “remains one of the most important roles to fill out”. If courage means doing what you have to do in spite of your fear, the Badgers are heroes: “Engineers are right at home in the thick of the fight, far from home doing the necessary but unwanted jobs.” In light of the fact that he is a combat engineer, all other aspects of Teflon Don’s identity seems irrelevant. Likewise, in light of the task his company is fulfilling, most other missions seem secondary: They cannot be conducted without the contribution of the engineers.<sup>134</sup>

The post is saturated by a strong military identity, by unit cohesion and esprit de corps, expressed in the promotion of the engineers’ virtues, and in the special role they fulfil. Furthermore, it is characterised by a latent optimism that only occurs few times in the rest of the blog. Elsewhere, Teflon Don talks about boredom, the inadequacy of army politics and his longing for the end. Here, he states “[i]f this were baseball, we’d have a damn good batting average” and emphasises the purposefulness of their job: “It’s not fun, it’s not glamorous, and it’s nothing to write home about, but we can see the difference we make.”

## 10.2. The Beginning

Whereas the setting, consisting of the categories of abstract and orientation belongs to the plot, the beginning is part of the sequential structure. A story does not necessarily open with the beginning. It may for instance be referred to in a flashback. Flashbacks, however, are tools of the narrator, of the plotting. When reconstructing the course of events, the story, the beginning will always be placed at first.

The entry analysed from *Badgers Forward* in this section is a flash back, posted on June 13, 2007, a year after the events described in it actually took place. From *Acute Politics* I have chosen blogs reaching from the unit’s arrival in Kuwait on September 24, 2006, to October 21 same year.

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<sup>134</sup> This point is also emphasised by the fact that the post ends with the exclamation “Essayons!” Essayons is the motto of the Engineer corps, and the title of its march, which shows how all other branches look to the engineers to clear the way.

### *10.2.1 Badgers Forward: The primacy of duty*

As CC, Badger 6 was mobilised before the rest of the company, in February 2006, and he played an active role in the collecting and training of the men. The first group of posts, written while the unit was about to be deployed and in the early stages of the deployment, are, compared to the rest of the posts in the blog, very short and concise. Far more elaborate and far more interesting in regard to this study is the post “Flashback: M-Day” (June 13, 2007), describing the events the previous year, when, at the Farewell Ceremony, the members of the company said goodbye to their loved ones.<sup>135</sup>

Typically of Badger 6, this is one long description of order, of how things should be (and, luckily, how they proved to be) in the right place. Preparing for employment is not a task to be taken lightly. As for himself, Badger 6 is constantly aware of his responsibility and role as CC.

Gowen field required extra preparation to ensure Soldiers could be housed and fed. They flew in from all over the country and would have no place to sleep.

Seeing that my NCO Corps had this integration well in hand, I left and checked into the Residence Inn, the place had been my home the bulk of the last six months (June 13, 2007).

As for his relation to the men, he emphasises the importance of maintaining the delicate balance between establishing the personal relations – necessary for building up confidence – and maintaining the distance – necessary for keeping up both authority and privacy. This balance characterises the role of all junior officers. Badger 6’ focus on the distribution of roles and his awareness of his responsibility as an officer fits well with the theoretical assumption that the junior officer’s solidarity, despite that the social unit with which he interacts is abstract and not concrete, is characterised by the presence of organic components. The functional distribution of tasks, the difference and not the similarity, ensures that the unit works properly. As an officer, he must see to that each member of the corps fulfils his or her task. As an officer, he must keep a necessary distance to enable the unit cohesion which he cannot be part of himself to flourish:

I stop at one BBQ to say hello and check on people, these men are mostly out of town and have no where else to go. I stay a while, but not too long, don’t want them to feel the overwhelming presence of a Commander.

(...) (ibid.).

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<sup>135</sup> It is interesting in regard to this comparison that the densest descriptions are those written with the advantage of hindsight, and actually violating the primary criteria for choosing blogs instead of other written sources of data, a point which I shall return to in the conclusion.

As observed above, in regard to another barbeque, Badger 6 can encourage the development of close mutual relations between the men, but he can only momentarily be part of this mutual relationship himself. Like everything should be in the right place, so should every person. This regards himself. This regards the men. This regards the distribution of roles between soldiers and civilians:

Shortly after 0900, we have a company formation. Soldiers kiss their loved ones good bye and fall in. The First Sergeant takes control and turns it over to me. I turn to the families and bid them farewell telling them we will return in 15 months, I want to add “safely” but I know some of that is out of my power.

I turn the formation back over to the First Sergeant and move to the front of the column.

”Right, Face,” intones the First Sergeant.

”Forward, March.”

We have begun the march across Gowen Field to the flight line, me in the lead, the guidon right behind me. The Task Force Commander joins me, and we lead them down to the aircraft.

At the charter civilian plane I step to the side of the stairs and shake the hand of each of my Soldiers as they mount the aircraft. I am the last one up the stairs and before I enter the door I turn and salute the family members that now line the run way” (ibid.).

The ceremony, in which the distribution of roles, of control, is *sine qua non*, is a description of a rite-de-passage. In these 15 lines, the word “turn” occurs five times, signifying at once the importance of things being in their right place, and the transformation from civilian life to the call of duty. When the soldiers have kissed “their loved ones good bye”, they “fall in”, i.e. they leave emotions behind and get ready to fulfil their task. They are transformed from a group of husbands and fathers to a unit of soldiers of which the “First Sergeant takes control and turns it over to me”. Now, in charge, Badger 6 stands between the soldiers and their loved ones, *practically* because he, as a representative of the armed forces, must speak to the families without being able to make the one promise they long to hear.<sup>136</sup> *Physically*, this cross-pressure is shown by his last gesture: Standing before the door to the aircraft, he turns once again, one last time. The families that “now line the run way” stand where the soldiers stood before, as a physical reminder of the empty spaces left behind by their husbands and fathers. They, the soldiers, are inside the airplane, behind the CC, and no longer visible. Alone on the stairs, in the

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<sup>136</sup> His awareness of this dilemma in the flashback should be seen in light of the fact that this post was written after February 8, 2007 when the company suffered its losses.

middle, standing between what according to nature should be connected, but which now, according to duty, must be divided, Badger 6 greets the families, shows the army's appreciation of the price they now have to pay. He salutes them, and by directing this military gesture to this particular group of civilians, he recognises their sufferings as part of the sacrifice they are now about to undertake.

### *10.2.2 Acute Politics: Welcome to the Twilight Zone*

In contrast to Badger 6's nearly obsessive focus on order, the re-occurring structure of *Acute Politics* is that of the dichotomy. This difference clearly shows when the following passage about the journey to Kuwait is compared with the ceremonial description above:

#### **Welcome to Kuwait**

Hurry up and wait – that's the motto of the US Army.

After being awake for over 36 hours, and suffering through an unplanned 7-hour delay for the plane, we finally boarded our flight for Kuwait. Including stops and time changes, it took us 24 hours to arrive. We landed in Kuwaiti City just as the sun was setting. A sunset in the desert is unlike any other. If you've seen the sunset over the ocean, you know the color of the sun; the difference here is that the sand in the air spreads the orange from one end of the sky to the other as the sun quickly slips below the horizon.

We boarded a line of buses an hour or so after sunset, and settled in for the long drive out to one of the military staging camps in the desert. I watched as civilian cars scattered in the path of the buses; some going off the road and stopping until the convoy passed, others driving the wrong way into traffic so as not to be delayed. Traffic rules are different here. The biggest vehicle owns the road (...) (September 24, 2006).

As already shown in the analysis of the setting, Teflon Don contrasts the company with the outside world, but here less optimistically. Whereas the contrast in the setting was between the company and other companies, between those who undertake one of the most dangerous jobs in Iraq, and those who show their head-shaking gratitude, the company is here depicted as being exposed to the constant inefficiency of the US Army.

It is important to note that the dominant personal pronoun in the blog is the first person plural "we", not the singular "I". Frustrations over army politics do not lead to personal isolation, as in the case of Rachel the Great. The "moral person" subject to army politics, is the company, not Teflon Don as an individual.

Badger 6 depicted the course of events at the brink of deployment as following a clear, already lined-out structure. Teflon Don, on the other hand,

weights the delays and the bad planning, and, elsewhere, the constant ambiguity of army decisions:

### **Welcome to the Twilight Zone**

The Army makes me laugh sometimes.

The other day we went out for a test fire, to make sure all our weapons systems worked before taking our trip north. We were told there was limited ammo, so we each got one magazine to fire.

Today we get told that there is “a lot” of ammunition allotted for training, and we need to use it, so we take a platoon out to the range and spend the rest of the day shooting.

(...)

Also, for those of you who asked, here is a picture of a Middle East sunset:

(...) (September 28, 2006)

The title, “Welcome to the Twilight Zone” can be understood in several ways. First, as described in the second half of the post quoted above, and as mentioned at the end of this post, the twilight, the sunsets of the Middle East are extremely beautiful. However, *The Twilight Zone* is also a TV series, originally from the 1960s but updated in a 1980s version, about tales of mystery, where things are not what they seem to be.

This fits both the arbitrary nature of army life, when one day there is only a limited amount of ammunition available and the next day there is more than plenty, and the situation in the Middle East, where “Traffic rules are different (...). The biggest vehicle owns the road.”<sup>137</sup>

Being in the Twilight Zone, being torn between the light of the safe world back home and the darkness of the world of war, normal rules do not apply. It is, as Teflon Don says himself, a world “on the wrong side of nowhere”, a world turned upside down, or as in the manifesto of colonialism, Kipling’s “Mandalay”, a world “somewhere east of Suez / where the best is like the worst / where there aren’t no Ten Commandments / and a man can raise a thirst” (Kipling, 2005: 285-287).

Whereas Badger 6’ structural hierarchy fits well with the presence of components of organic solidarity, Teflon Don’s constant use of dichotomies, his constant contrasting of the Company and the Army, of America and the Middle East, are unequivocally mechanic. In Badger 6’ descriptions, the difference between the members of the corps defined their mutual dependency. In Teflon Don’s descriptions, the difference is used as an excluding category.

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<sup>137</sup> Teflon Don’s descriptions of the beauty of nature, in general, and the sunsets, in particular, are often followed by, or metaphorically used as, descriptions of the folly of man.

Members of the unit are recognised because of their similarities, not by their differences.

### **10.3 Missions before February 8**

In this section, I analyse mission descriptions posted by the two bloggers before the company experienced its losses.

#### *10.3.1 Preparing for a mission: Rules of engagement versus high noon*

Both Badger 6 and Teflon Don describe what goes on before a unit goes on a mission, both posted on December 21.<sup>138</sup> The differences between the two bloggers, shown in the pre- and early deployment descriptions, are also very vivid here.

In Badger 6' post, "Preparing for a night on the town", everybody has a role to play, a place to fulfil. Control and Rules of Engagement are the keywords. Stylistically, the post is very neatly constructed. It entails all elements of a narrative proper: It begins with general remarks about the context, identifies the situation and the participants, and then, when the narrative actually begins, uses direct speech. The platoon prayer, a phenomenon which Badger 6 emphasises is not prevalent in all units,<sup>139</sup> is, like the liminal phase in a ritual description, mentioned but not described itself. As the description of the preparations ends, the form shifts once more to description, and the narrative ends too, notably with a real cliff-hanger: "And with those words from the Platoon Leader, we are off into the cold Falluja night" (*Badgers Forward*, December 21, 2006).

The importance of setting duty above inclination runs through this post, as it does through Badger 6' blog in general. The men cannot wear their fleeces. In case of a fire, the synthetics will melt and, apart from the pain, the damages inflicted might cause inadequate problems for their comrades and the medics. Despite their eager to get into the warm vehicles, the men must repeat the "Escalation of Force and Rules of Engagement criteria" before every mission, because "[t]hey save Iraqi civilian and Coalition Forces lives each and every day." At this particular day, Badger 6 chooses to recite these rules himself:

It occurs to me that none of these Soldiers know if I know the ROE/EOF procedures. I have seen them recite it; they need to see me recite it. So I step forward into the circle of shivering men.

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<sup>138</sup> These mission preparations took place well after the first missions analysed in the following, but since they claim to describe general truths about what goes on before any mission, I analyse them first.

<sup>139</sup> Apparently it is prevalent enough to have its own name.

“Escalation of Force. We will use the following procedures in an Escalation of Force situation. And I proceed to list those steps. Rules of Engagement. The Rules of Engagement require that you positively identify your target and that target demonstrates hostile intent and/or a hostile act. Nothing in the Rules of Engagement prevent you from defending yourself, your buddy, your unit, Coalition Forces, or innocent civilians.”

The Soldiers let out a big “hooah.” I think I surprised them by stepping forward to give the nightly lesson. I hope I have enhanced my credibility in their eyes (ibid.).

Again, we see that Badger 6 is very aware of his own task as an officer and as a role model. Again, we see how he as an officer focuses on the organic components of solidarity.

In Teflon Don’s post, “We pump you up!”, the mobilisation of uncontrolled hatred and the depiction of all Iraqis, not just the insurgents, as monsters is in focus. Stylistically, this post is dominantly descriptive, but the use of personal pronouns change, from the plural “we” to the singular “I” and back again, and the middle of the post consists of the first four lines of the lyrics from Project 86’ “My will be a dead man”.

As indicated in both the title of the post, “We pump you up”, and in the first lines, the central theme is the music played before a mission. Teflon Don points out that there are different ways for the soldiers to prepare for a mission:

Some get mad – mad at the Iraqis, mad at the Army for “screwing” them, mad at whatever makes them ready for whatever might be out there. Some guys become very quiet and focus on making sure that all of their gear is in exactly the right places. Some perform pre-mission rituals that they have established over the last few months in theater. Most of the guys, though, play music (ibid.).

Teflon Don remarks that the pre-mission rituals are more or less self-established rites, not semi-institutional collective rituals as in Badger 6’ post. Likewise, whereas Badger 6 focuses on duty, Teflon Don sees anger and hatred as the prime motives.

Here, there is no institutionalised description of a part/whole relationship between the company and the mission. Instead, Teflon Don emphasises that the anger can be directed both against the army and the enemy. In that regard, it is noteworthy that he neither in the quotation above, nor in the lyrics below seems to distinguish the insurgents and other Iraqis.

High noon cometh, not a moment too soon  
There’s gonna be a firefight tonight



A reckoning to confront the residents of this tomb

A gunpowder party and it feels just right (*Acute Politics*, December 21, 2006).

Since the US troops are engaged in counterinsurgency warfare, the “tomb”, whose “residents” should be “confronted” in the “high noon” showdown, cannot practically be distinguished from Iraq as a whole. Hence, hatred against the insurgents equals being “mad at the Iraqis”. In counterinsurgency warfare, the civilian becomes the enemy.

### *10.3.2 Badger 6: The enemy as adversary*

In January 2007, Badger 6 has a detailed description of a 24 hours mission. This description was posted in two posts, on January 15 and 16, respectively. Again, the story follows a tight structure.

The posts start with a setting introducing the readers to the general circumstances of this particular mission: the fact that it was unusual since the platoon had to fulfil two tasks at once. The answer to that challenge is, in the spirit of Badger 6, good planning: the unknown must be met with professionalism: “This is not the usual course of action, but we have a plan that will hopefully provide [us] with some rest” (*Badgers Forward*, January 15, 2007).

The narrative ends with a Coda when they return to base: “We pull in the gate, clear our weapons, and I look at my watch. Almost exactly 24 hours since we left the confines of the FOB. Everyone is back safe. Mission accomplished” (*Badgers Forward*, January 16, 2007). The journey has taken them “there and back again”, back to the “confines of the FOB”. They have reached the second equilibrium, signified both by the fact that they have kept the time limit, nobody got hurt, and they have “accomplished” what they were sent out to do.

The mission first takes them through Fallujah, a city that in Badger 6’s eyes still has some way to go before real improvements can be seen. Emblematically, they see Blackwater Bridge, where the mutilated bodies of four Private Military Contractors were hung during the 2004 fightings: a constant reminder of the violence that will always be associated with this city. Yet, after crossing the river, they move into the Iraqi countryside, which is repeatedly contrasted to the violence and the danger of the densely populated cities:

There is far more traditional dress down here than there are in the cities, but the children are prone to have casual western dress. The boys all favor football (soccer to Americans) apparel. I even notice a youngster with a sweatshirt with “U.S.A.” emblazoned across the front. Maybe not a ringing endorsement of US policy in the country, but still far from outright hostility or fear too (ibid.).

This optimism regarding the relation to the population is also emphasised by the positive way Badger 6 reports the fact that a militia has been started up because the “local sheikh has decided he has had enough of al Qaeda” (ibid). In that regard, one of his fellow officers makes the following remark:

(...)Technically of course militias are not allowed regardless of the alliances. Nonetheless we won't bother them but they need to keep a low profile. Don't be surprised to see guys with AK's and standing overwatch on roof tops. They know the deal so don't let your guys think they can't defend themselves, but lets avoid killing them if we can. They have the same goal as us (ibid.).

Badger 6 does not protest; neither in the situation, nor in his writing. On the contrary, the way he reports the other officer's view, and his own remark, “that's great”, in response to these news seems univocally to indicate that he considers it a good thing that the Iraqis have begun to take matters in their own hands.

Badger 6' inclusivist approach to the militias is in stark contrast to the implicit equation of all Iraqis being insurgents which we saw in *Acute Politics* above. Likewise, their interpretations of the anarchy on the Iraqi roads also differ radically. Badger 6 does not explain it as a sign of the deficits of Middle Eastern culture, but merely as a law of nature, “of physics”.

Off the main road we are on a two lane country road that alternates between dirt and asphalt. Our vehicles are so big though, we effectively take up both lanes of traffic. Oncoming traffic is forced off the road, not merely because of our rules, but because of the simple laws of physics that prohibit two masses from occupying the same space simultaneously (ibid.).

Basically, they are saying the same, everybody must yield to an American convoy, but the ways they say it differ radically. For Teflon Don, the traffic chaos is an emblem of the anarchy of Middle Eastern politics. For Badger 6 it is a curiosity characterising the peaceful countryside.

His view of the civilians differs from that of Teflon Don, and so does his image of the enemy. At their 24 hours mission, the unit stays overnight at an airbase that used to host a part of the Iraqi Air Force. Badger 6 notes with disappointment that the abandoned Soviet produced SU-27 fighters have been subject to American souvenir hunters and graffiti artists:

On our way to the gate we pass by the Su-27's I noticed in the early morning dark. Their distinctive markings have been carefully cut away. War trophies for the units making the initial push through this area. Follow on units have left graffiti indicating they were here. A time honored tradition, to the victor go the spoils. I am somewhat disappointed though, I would have enjoyed seeing one of

the fierce fighter jets of the enemy in full livery (*Badgers Forward*, January 16, 2007).

What is particularly noteworthy here is the singular use of the word “the enemy”. Which enemy does it signify? Historically seen, the enemy who produced these jets, the USSR, ceased to exist in 1991. Legally seen, the enemy who once owned these fighters, the Baath regime under Saddam Hussein, was efficiently removed in 2003. Whereas the enemy of today, in Badger 6’ own words the “Islamofascism”, is deliberately leading a low-intensity insurgency war, fighter planes are emblematic of high-intensity, manoeuvre warfare. Hence, associating these planes with the present war and the present enemy seems absurd.

Yet, if “the enemy” equals all enemies of freedom, the singular use makes sense, and it fits the historiography of *Badgers Forward*, in which the present conflict is not described in the light of earlier conflicts, but as part of the universal struggle for freedom. What he presents is a chain of equivalence:

Enemies of freedom = (Fascism)<sup>140</sup> = USSR = Saddam Hussein = Islamofascism

All these enemies have one thing in common: They all represent different regimes or ideologies. Badger 6, however, sees them as united in a struggle against the open society, and that distinguishes his chain of equivalence from the equation of Iraqi insurgents with all Iraqis implied in Teflon Don’s post.

Another interesting point in regard to Badger 6’ image of the enemy is that, in these passages, he seems to describe the insurgents in two, mutually excluding, ways. On the one hand, he recognises their strategic abilities. They do not waste bombs by using them in the open countryside, where the chances of hitting Coalition Forces are diminished. And they try to avoid hitting children because that will turn the population against them<sup>141</sup>

The area though is big, wide and distant from the leverage points of this war. A bomb down here is resource intensive for the enemy without the hope of a really large payoff. They are not unknown, but neither are they common (*Badgers Forward*, January 16, 2007).

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<sup>140</sup> Fascism, or the World War II adversaries, is not mentioned in this passage, but since it is included in the term Islamofascism and implied in the historical narrative of a universal struggle for freedom, I have included it in the chain of equivalence.

<sup>141</sup> Again, his description is in contrast with that of Teflon Don, who reports on how the enemy does not discriminate between children and adults (*Acute Politics*, March 26, 2007).

As we get closer to the city we encounter more traffic, people going to work, children off to school. This also indicates an easing of the threat. AIF knows it makes no friends killing Iraqi civilians (ibid.).

On the other hand, the insurgents are also described as undisciplined, almost like children; they obey their inclinations rather than follow their call of duty. Unlike the disciplined, professional soldier of the US Army, the enemy does not fight when it is uncomfortable: “Sometimes the enemy likes to slide in right behind us, but the same cold that chilled us last night has also discouraged him from coming out” (ibid.). This ambiguity, between seeing the enemy as an adversary that must be taken seriously, and regarding the enemy as undisciplined, as a savage warrior who only fights when it is not too uncomfortable, clearly shows in the following passage, where Badger 6 reflects on the lack of IED finds on this particular patrol:

One of my Soldiers comments on his disappointment on not finding anything over the last day and two missions. I understand. We know there must be something out there, and we are good enough that we should find it. I remark the AIF<sup>142</sup> as an insurgency is almost by definition without the discipline that puts people out in such weather. I also posit that paucity of road side bombs in this area might be a sign we are accomplishing our mission here (ibid.).

Badger 6 sees the lack of IEDs simply as either a sign of the insurgents’ unprofessionalism, or a sign that they are actually winning, that they are beating a regular enemy, whose number of attacks provide them with a regular measure of his strength. Badger 6’ optimism at this point is worthwhile keeping in mind in the following analyses.

### *10.3.3 Teflon Don: the primacy of instinct*

In Badger 6’ first mission post, “What you do for fun on a Saturday night in Ramadi, Iraq” from October 28, 2006, a clear, but latent feeling of boredom determines the ironic style of writing. Not surprisingly Badger 6 emphasises that this feeling should be countered by duty. In Teflon Don’s first elaborate mission description, from November 30, 2006, this feeling is not latent, but highly manifest: He is openly frustrated over the lack of excitement.

The very beginning of a security halt such as this one is exciting. Your body expects something to happen, and all your senses twinge at the slightest hint of the enemy. As the night progresses without incident, you slowly lose the initial anticipation, until the only thing keeping you in the moment is the mission, and

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<sup>142</sup> AIF or Anti-Iraqi-Forces is a common military expression for insurgents.

the knowledge that other soldiers and marines are out there depending on you.  
(...) (*Acute Politics*, November 30, 2006).

The last lines remind us of the descriptions of soldier motivation reported by the World War II Research Branch: Soldiers fight, not for abstract ideals or for the nation in whose name their blood is shed. They fight for each other. In this regard, it is interesting that this feeling of interdependency which seems to reach beyond that of the unit and to include “other soldiers and marines” corresponds with a latent critique of the war in the lines that follow: “The moon is just above the horizon, and the omnipresent Iraqi dust colors it blood red. For a moment, I consider that even the heavens seem to disapprove of the conflict here” (ibid).

As in the description of nature after his friend’s death, the description of nature here is not neutral: The moon is not just red, it is “blood red”, and the dust colouring it is not just dust, but “omnipresent Iraqi dust”, clearly marking his sinister mood and clearly raising a latent critique of Iraq and the Iraqis. However, the strongest expression is the following sentence’s reading of this as a sign, albeit a momentarily one, “that even the heavens seem to disapprove of the conflict here”. The use of the adverb “even” emphasises that nature is not alone in its opinion. The critique is shared by others, notably by Teflon Don himself.

Seen in the context of the precedent description of motivation as being primarily connected to the brothers in arms, this critique of the mission, which is only repeated once in the whole blog<sup>143</sup> only seems to support the parallel between Teflon Don’s frustrations and those reported by Stouffer’s Research Branch 60 years ago. Yet, it also emphasises the contrast between the two bloggers analysed here. Whereas Teflon Don’s frustration becomes both manifest and directed against the mission, Badger 6 underplays his sense of being bored and does not use it to raise a general critique of the war.

In November, Teflon Don was bored and frustrated. In December, he applies the same yardstick to Iraqi civilians and insurgents. In contrast, he seems both excited and sympathetic towards the Iraqi in January. The common denominator is the emphasis on feelings. In Teflon Don’s January 19 post, he describes how gut feelings prevent his platoon being blown up by an IED. It is one of the few places where Teflon Don makes use of the stylistic tool of direct speech, so often utilised by Badger 6.

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<sup>143</sup> In a post-trilogy from May 2007, Teflon Don has the following remarks: “The rain had started and was growing heavier- the wind was beginning to whip the drops sideways. The monsoon hit just as the lead truck found the second IED. They called up a tripwire stretched across the road, and I turned to ask the EOD tech *which war, exactly, we were fighting?* (May 2, 2007 [My Italics]).

The post actually covers two missions, two events, both taking place in Fallujah, at night. It opens with a short description of a route clearance task “[a] few nights ago”. The mission was significant because they were clearing the way for Iraqi forces:

This time, we were out there that night making sure the roads were clear for the Iraqis instead of US troops. This is what they did. Not too bad, I’d say. The Iraqi forces, at least around here, are certainly getting better (*Acute Politics*, January 19, 2007).

Despite the reservation, “at least around here”, this description of the Iraqis is miles apart from the equation of all Iraqis with insurgents which was seen in the analysis above. A couple of days after, they are back doing road clearance in Fallujah. Suddenly, the unit stops:

Last night, it was Falluja proper for us again. Leading off down one of the grittier streets that we patrol, something caught our eyes. We stopped, and took some time to look around. A lot of the time, you don’t immediately see a bomb—you first feel that something isn’t quite right. We’ve all learned to trust gut instinct and funny feelings (*ibid.*).

”[G]ut instinct and funny feelings: This is in stark contrast to Badger 6’ constant focus on discipline, professionalism, and the importance of doing things by the book.

Of course, discipline and gut feelings are not mutually excluding by necessity. A proverb, sometimes attributed to South African golfer, Gary Player, sometimes to Swedish tennis star, Björn Borg, says “It’s funny. The more I practise, the luckier I get”. Likewise, the maintenance of military discipline may be considered a necessary condition for gut feelings to come to the fore.

Nevertheless, even though duty and instincts can be seen as mutually reinforcing, the point in this context is that neither Badger 6 nor Teflon Don describes them as such. Badger 6 emphasises that the challenge of the unusual should be met with the strength of standard procedures. Teflon Don points out that paying attention to funny feelings keeps you alive. A point which is clearly emphasised by the course of events in this particular case:

The truck stops. I hop down from the turret.

TD: So what are we lookin... Oh, that looks nice!

SPC W<sup>144</sup>: Hey man, I just had a feeling.

SGT F: What’s that in the middle?

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<sup>144</sup> Even though those who died in the IED attack in February were all from Teflon Don’s unit, SPC W is probably not the same person as PFC Raymond Werner, who

I pull out the binos.

TD: It looks like a screwdriver... green handle, kinda bent.

We start to move our search out to the sides of the road. We've been sitting and looking for perhaps five minutes now. I move my gaze back to the funny green thing in the road, and as I do so, it disappears with a CRACKKKK-BOOM and the road vanishes behind the hail of sand and gravel. As we sit and listen to the chunks of road ping down on top of the truck, we take a look out at the 3'x2' crater left in the road a bare fifteen feet forward.

SPC W: Definitely not a screwdriver.

Indeed (ibid.).

The post ends there, *ex media res*, with no outro and no coda, simply with the laconic remark, that in this case too, things are not what they seem.

In spite of the apparently changed image of the enemy, Teflon Don's view fits well with his emphasis on emotions: Like mission preparations are characterised by the mobilisation of *hatred*, and like mission *boredom* is characterised by the lack of excitement, missions should be executed by being aware of gut *feelings*.

Other factors might play an important role in determining these differences. It is nevertheless noteworthy, that the findings in this regard seem to confirm the theoretical expectation: that officers, embedded in a hierarchical culture, where things have their right place, are driven by duty, and that privates, dependent on the saliency of the horizontal relationship, emphasise the importance of trusting each other's gut feelings.

## **10.4. Mission descriptions after February 8**

### *10.4.1 Badger 6: from hostis to inimicus*

In his post from May 1, Badger 6 again describes a mission outside the gates. Once more the city and the country-side are contrasted. Once more they pass through a city, and once more they cross a river. This time, however, the city is Ramadi, and instead of the dim view of Blackwater Bridge at the outskirts of Fallujah, the description here focuses on the "beautiful emerald color" of the Euphrates. Accordingly, the city they enter is also described in a far more positive light.

Passing Hurricane Point and crossing the Euphrates, which is a beautiful emerald color, we find ourselves on the approaches to downtown Ramadi.

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was killed in that attack. Specialist (SPC) is a higher rank than Private First Class (PFC) and in one of his memorial remarks, Badger 6 points out that he had recently promoted Werner.

There is nothing like a trip into Ar Ramadi, Iraq to remind you how far we have come since the Task Force arrived last year.

When we arrived in the Fall, the entire city was sectioned off by barriers, much like the ones in Baghdad that have caused so much teeth gnashing in recent days. Back then no shops were open, people hardly moved about the streets. The streets were filthy; the debris of city dwellers eking out a survival existence. The city landscape nothing but rubble, the product of the insurgents who wanted to bring sharia law to the people of Iraq.

Today the streets are much cleaner; large amounts of rubble have been removed. What were once the remnants of buildings have been cleared and turned into vacant lots ready for a new existence.

(...) (*Badgers Forward*, May 1, 2007).

What leaps to the eye in this description of the changes is the way civilian Iraqis and insurgents are fit into two contrasting chains of equivalence: By help for the task force, (the “we” in lines three and five), the local Iraqis are *now* able to rebuild their city, to *clean* up, to work, to *remove* the rubble in order to turn “remnants of buildings (...) into vacant lots ready for a new existence”.<sup>145</sup> Before, in contrast, nobody were working, “people hardly moved about the streets” and “the city landscape nothing but rubble, the product of the insurgents who wanted to bring sharia law to the people of Iraq”.<sup>146</sup>

Table 10.1: Corresponding chains of equivalence, civilians and insurgents

NOW = CLEAN = ORDER = VACANT LOTS = (rule of law)<sup>147</sup> = CIVILIANS

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THEN = FILTHY = RUBBLE = REMNANTS = SHARIA LAW = INSURGENTS

What is particularly interesting is not this description of the progress as such, but the way the insurgents and their religious bigotry are associated with the contradiction of clean and filthy, as shown by Mary Douglas, a fundamentally religious dichotomy in itself (Douglas, 2002).

This equation seems very different from the partly recognising (partly patronising) approach to the insurgents pursued in the January posts. In this post, the enemy is neither a worthy adversary, standing in the line of other great adversaries in the universal struggle for freedom, nor a childish undis-

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<sup>145</sup> Note how torn-down buildings are seen as emblems of hope and renewal, and not as signs of destruction.

<sup>146</sup> The picture of the civilians is not unequivocally positive throughout the post. When they later have to cross a checkpoint manned by a local militia, the description of these well-meaning but inefficient amateur soldiers is clearly patronising.

<sup>147</sup> In the dichotomies, the sharia law has no explicit corresponding positive category. Adding “rule of law” is my interpretation, founded on the general focus on fundamental rights in Badger 6’ posts.



ciplined villain, difficult to beat but unlikely to be beaten by as well. Instead he, and the ideology he represents, is now equated with the unclean, with “matter out of place” (ibid.), posing a threat to the cosmic order. From being depicted as “hostis”, a political adversary, the insurgent now has become “inimicus”, a personal enemy (Schmitt, 2007[1929]: 28-29).

This changed view of the enemy is also reflected in the last mission description in *Badgers Forward*, posted on August 21, 2007. In this post, Badger 6 describes how he, from the Tactical Operations Center (TOC)<sup>148</sup> follows the first platoon, which on this day beats all records and finds more IEDs than any of the other platoons have done on any other mission. Hence, the title of the post “Still A Gunfight”:

Back in to the TOC just after 0800 to get ready for the morning meeting.

”They found another one Sir.”

”What? Are they going for the record?”

I study the list of ordnance. This is not small stuff. We knew they were crawling around out there. We are back in familiar territory too. An area we are always ready to extract a little bit more from the enemy.

”Oh, and they have a detainee.”

”What are they doing? Why don’t they let the landowner take care of that? Send them a message and find out what is going on.”

”Roger that.”

If they really have captured a trigger-man, I admire their pluck, but that is not really what we are set up to do. I have a thousand different questions about that, and I know that my boss will have a thousand more. We need to find out what is going on (*Badgers Forward*, August 31, 2007).

”We knew they were crawling around out there”. Unlike what we saw in the descriptions from January, there is no implied recognition of the enemy in this passage. On the contrary not only are the adversaries depicted as faceless by the anonymous use of the third person plural “they”. It is also specified that they are “crawling around out there”.

The metaphorical use of the verb “crawl around” may of course be interpreted as a depiction of the enemy as a child: Just like a baby crawls around before it can walk, the enemy moves about with no clear goals, and no clear tactic by which these goals can be achieved. This would fit the earlier descriptions of the undisciplined opponent who must be met and finally defeated by professionalism.

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<sup>148</sup> The Badgers’ Tactical Operations Center (TOC) was based on Camp Ramadi. In his February 8 post, Badger 6’ reports from the Combat Operations Center (COC) on Camp Fallujah, where many of the units they support were based.

However, to crawl around can also be seen as a bestial attribute: The enemy is moving around like a serpent or an insect, an animal on the search for prey. This interpretation which not only seems to confirm, but also to amplify the interpretation of a profoundly dualist depiction of the enemy, is supported by the use of the prepositional phrase “out there”. The safe haven of the FOB is contrasted with the uncertainty and insecurity of the surrounding territories, where the enemy may lie in wait, anywhere (because he is crawling around), on the watch for the next American off-guard.

The change to a more negative image of the enemy, observed from January to May, and confirmed here, corresponds with two other changes in *Badgers Forward* – changes which are also manifest in this post: an amplified use of dichotomies, and a change from idealism to a more focused perspective on getting the company home safely.

The recurrent trope used to describe social order in *Badgers Forward* is the structured hierarchy, analogue with organic solidarity. The “Still A Gunfight” post, however, is dominated by the dichotomy, the figure of a mechanic mindset: us versus them. Of course, dichotomies are not totally absent in the other posts. Here as elsewhere, the recurrent focus on the proper distribution of roles, of the functional differentiation, also implies the establishment of lines of demarcation, dividing the tasks of one unit from those of another. The difference, however, is that here this focus has changes from being inclusive and affirmative to being exclusive and corrective. Now the us/them dichotomy also regards the company’s relation to other units. Thus, the task of the Badgers is contrasted with that of the Marines. When Badger 6 learns in the passage quoted above that 1st Platoon has a prisoner in custody, his immediate response is that this is not their job. “[t]hat is not what we are set up to do”. Detainees should be handled by the landowner, the military unit in charge of security in that particular area.

The change from idealism to pragmatism shows most clearly in the recurrent use of the headline “It’s still a gunfight” throughout the post.

Seventeen events; only one which did any real damage; evaced Soldiers who will live to fight another day, six dead terrorists; and a pretty clear road.

Badger 1 and Badger 2 did fantastic jobs out there once again proving their mettle, but as I keep telling them – -

It’s Still a Gunfight (ibid.).

Optimism is still there. The platoons have been “proving their mettle” and while six enemies or “terrorists”<sup>149</sup> have been killed, none of the events have

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<sup>149</sup> The use of the word terrorist supports the interpretation of a change in Badger 6’ image of the enemy. A terrorist is by definition *dehors le loi* of the state. Hence, he

caused any American deaths. Even the wounded soldiers will “live to fight another day”. Yet, optimism seems to have changed focus. In spite of all progress, the enemy has not been defeated. Civilians and soldiers still get killed. The enemy is still “out there”. He must still be fought. And most importantly, doing a “fantastic job out there” is laudable, but they cannot rest on their laurels.

Before, the optimism was ideological. It concerned the general mission to be supported, the freedom to be defended. Now, it concerns the goals achieved locally and on each particular mission. This also means that optimism now becomes even closer tied to professionalism, because the only measure of the temporary tactical successes is the way tasks are conducted. Idealism has been replaced by pragmatism.

#### *10.4.2 Teflon Don: “the ‘Oh Shit’ look” and the “Dead Eyes”*

This element of disillusion is also reflected in Teflon Don’s last mission post “Dead Eyes”, describing what the 3rd Platoon experienced on the same day, as the events described by Badger 6 in “Still A Gunfight” took place.

The new LT<sup>150</sup> asked “Is it always like this?”. His eyes had the dawning realization that he was now at war – that he was about to begin a year of one of the most dangerous jobs in Iraq. The “Oh shit” look, we call it. It’s the moment when you realize that these heavy armored trucks are not the panacea that Senators and Army trainers make them appear, not when faced with a determined and ingenious enemy. It’s what you get when you see something go wrong for the first time, and the guys around you accept it with a quiet prayer and stoic determination, rather than any outward signs of shock or fear. It’s the moment that makes you stop and wonder “Oh shit... what did I get myself into?” (*Acute Politics*, August 29, 2007).

“The ‘Oh shit’ look” revealing the new guys lack of experience is contrasted with the “Dead Eyes”, emblematic of the combat veteran:

The circle has turned, now, as it always does. Now, we are the veterans- the calloused, dead-eyed men who just want to turn over the mission and go home. There’s so many things that wear men down- the slow, slippery slope of progress, the questioning and lack of support in news from home, the steady churn replacing wounded (and God forbid, dead) men. The lack of sleep, the hectic stress of changing missions, the broken men, broken families, broken children.

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cannot be recognised as part of the historical line of regimes which have been fought in the struggle for freedom.

<sup>150</sup> LT is the common abbreviation for lieutenant.

I hope these new guys make it through all right, but for now, we just want to go home (ibid.).

“The ‘Oh shit’ look” and the “Dead Eyes” marks a difference in both space and time. Socially, it makes the new guy’s awe distinguishable from the veteran’s war fatigue. Personally, for the veteran, it becomes a reminder of the development he has gone through, the experiences that has made him one of “caloused, dead-eyed men who just want to turn over the mission and go home”.

When Teflon Don mentions “the slow, slippery slope of progress” he basically points to the same feeling of disillusion implied in Badger 6’ recurrent use of the phrase “It’s still A Gunfight”: The goal of war is not at hand. Yet, Teflon Don’s focus is different. Whereas Badger 6 seemed to weaken his initial idealism and optimism in regard to the mission, Teflon Don, who has expressed little of either, primarily describes how war and exposure to combat leads to personal disillusion. He mentions the lack of success among a number of other factors that also marks the path from “the ‘Oh Shit’ look” to “the Dead Eyes”.

In contrast to the change from *hostic* to *inimicus* in *Badgers Forward*, and in contrast to Teflon Don’s own characterisation of their adversaries as “residents of this Tomb” he here describes the enemy with human attributes, as “determined and ingenious”. However, he does not list the enemy among the causes that wears the soldiers down. What he emphasises in that regard are the changes in personal relations.

Thus, in the last sentence of the quotation above, Teflon Don expresses his hope that the new guys will get through the deployment, through the transformation from the “the ‘Oh Shit’ look” to the “the Dead Eyes” in one piece. Yet, he does so explicitly stating that “for now, we just want to go home”: For now, every company for itself; for now, every man for himself. This view is also reflected in the wording when Teflon Don lists the causes that “wear men down”. What is in focus is not the soldier’s commitment as a warrior or as a citizen, but as a man.

## 10.5 The End

The posts quoted in the following were published after the company handed over responsibility for route clearance in their area of operation. They were all written with the advantage of hindsight which allows the author to interpret the course of the deployment as a unison process.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Two posts have been chosen from each: From *Badgers Forward* “By the numbers” (September 14, 2007) and “Final Thoughts on our mission and command” (September 25, 2007); from *Acute Politics* “By the Numbers” (September 14, 2007) and “Back Online” (September 27, 2007).

### *10.5.1 Mission Accomplished or We are going home*

In the post, “By the numbers” Badger 6 makes an account over what the company has achieved during the deployment:

#### **By The Numbers**

Task Force Pathfinder and Team Badger are no longer responsible responsible for Route Clearance operations in Western Iraq. All of Team Badger should be safely out of Iraq. Here is what they accomplsihed.

To summarize in numbers Team Badger accomplished the following

- Missions Performed: 647
- Improvised Explosive Devices Reduced: 458
- Kilometers Traveled: 51135

The Soldiers of Team Badger were nominated for or received the following awards

- Bronze Star Medal with V Device for Valor: 1
- Bronze Star Medal for Service: 25
- Purple Heart: 35
- Army Commendation Medal with V Device for Valor: 3
- Army Commendation Medal for Service: 69
- Army Achievement Medal: 7
- Combat Action Badge: 97 (includes 7 awards from previous deployments; the Soldier was thus ineligible to recive the award again, but would have qualified had he not had the award.)
- Combat Field Medical Badge: 3

There were 35 Soldiers Wounded In Action – 16 required evacuation.

Three of our Comrades were Killed in Action.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED (Badgers Forward, September 14, 2007).

Of particular interest in this context are the last words of the post: “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED”. As we saw above, Badger 6 used finished his description of the two days-mission in January with the same phrase:

We pull in the gate, clear our weapons, and I look at my watch. Almost exactly 24 hours since we left the confines of the FOB. Everyone is back safe. Mission accomplished (*Badgers Forward*, January 16, 2007).

In both cases, the phrase clearly marks that we are now at the narrative coda. We have reached the end, and looking back we evaluate the result. The difference between the two statements is that in the quotation from September

14 the two words are written with capital letters. The figure of speech is repeated, but also amplified: It is not any journey outside the wire that is evaluated, but the mission as such. Now, the course of events as a whole can be surveyed at once.

The use of the word “confines” in the January 16 post marks another parallel to an entry posted after the company has left Iraq. Thus, the post “Final Thoughts on our Mission and Command” opens with the statement that “Team Badger and the rest of the Task Force Pathfinder are now safe back in the *confines* of the United States.” (Badgers Forward, September 25, 2007 [my italics, MB]). Like the two-day mission in January took the Badgers from one equilibrium to another, the journey to Iraq has also taken them there and back again. Now, however, they are not only back within the “confines of the FOB”, they are back within the “confines of the United States”. Now, the equilibrium is not temporary, limited by the fact that soon the course of events will lead to another disequilibrium. It is, potentially, eternal: Those who lived will live happily ever after.

A similar use of the FOB as a metaphor for the safe, but only temporarily safe, haven was seen in Teflon Don’s poem “Halls of Valhalla”, analysed in Chapter 9. There, however, the parallel was not drawn between the base and the nation, but between the base and the eternal resting place for warriors. The social unit of reference was not civil religious but military religious.

Teflon also has a post named “By the Numbers”. Much of that post is, as he states himself, taken directly from *Badgers Forward*, and he adds some more: He mentions how long the missions lasted and he gives an estimate over how many American or Iraqi lives the company may have saved. Yet, in contrast to Badger 6 who ends his post with the phrase “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED”, Teflon Don’s final words are “We are going home” (Acute Politics: September 14, 2007). Whereas Badger 6 sums up the course of events by focusing on the mission, the company’s external goals, Teflon Don directs his attention inwards, towards the individuals, the members of the group.

This difference seems to meet the theoretical expectation that whereas the private’s feelings of solidarity are primarily mechanic, the officer’s are primarily organic. The private interacts primarily with other privates, other individuals like himself. He focuses on the survival of the group. The officer, on the other hand, on whose shoulders the responsibility of fulfilling the task lies, must also take this higher purpose, and how, by the contributions of different members of the group, it can be reached into consideration. He focuses not only on the individual, but also on the mission.

Yet, this difference should not be overestimated. Throughout his blog, Badger 6 focuses on the importance of duty, but at the very end, he also em-

phasise the ease he feels, when relieved of its burden, and that what he really misses is the sense of community, the mechanic solidarity, characterising the relationship of war buddies:

It is in some ways a relief to be out of command now. I told Mrs. Badger 6 that I did not mind carrying that weight in my ruck sack, but there was a sense of relief now that it was gone. At the same time though I miss the collective sense we had (Badgers Forward, September 25, 2007).

Likewise, the change of focus, observed in Badger 6' last mission post, implying that the performance, how the missions were actually conducted, and what they achieved there and then, is more important than the higher, ideological perspectives with which the way was initiated and continued:

Now both cities [Falluja and Ramadi] are coming back. Certainly they have a long way to go, but they are both moving in the right direction. The Soldiers of Team Badger are one critical reason for that complete turn around. As I told the Soldiers last time we spoke as group, it matters not one wit what they thought about the mission coming to Iraq, what matters is what they did and the difference they made (ibid.).

He is, no doubt, still proud of the results achieved by his company. He can still state that to him “there will never be any finer Soldiers than those I served with in Team Badger, Company A, 321st Engineer (C) (C) (M)” (ibid). He can still with pride state that their mission was performed, accomplished, successfully. Yet, compared to the ideological statements, characterising the initial posts, his perception of the mission, nevertheless, seems to have changed. From having the explicit purpose of fighting the universal, cross-historical battle for freedom, the security they have provided for soldiers and civilians in the area are now in focus.

In that aspect, his view on the war is not that far from what we see in Teflon Don's last posts. As already mentioned, along with emphasising the importance of going home, Teflon Don adds an estimate over how many lives the company has saved to Badger 6' enumeration. Likewise, in his last posts, he also combines their collective achievements with the individual-centred view, expressing in the joy of being home:

We've traveled a long road to get back home again – along the way the 321st became the most decorated Reserve unit since World War II. We did our job well, and we were an example for the rest of the theater. All that is behind us, though... we're all back home (Acute Politics, September 27, 2007).

## 10.6 Conclusions

### *10.6.1 The blog as narrative*

Almost all of the single posts by Badger 6' which have been analysed in the above can be viewed as narratives. They start with a clear setting, a first equilibrium. They describe a development with genuine dramatic tools. And they end with a coda, a second equilibrium, in which the significance of these events is evaluated.

This is in accordance with Badger 6' almost ritualistic focus on order. The archetypal narrative is the religious myth, and in the case that rituals can be viewed as its enacted equivalence, the narrative and the ritual shares the tight structure as their most fundamental asset. We read a narrative, not in order to learn something new, but to be reminded about what we already know. That is the reason why children want to hear the same story over and over again. Only in due time, being confident with the basic narrative structure, we learn to accept and even to appreciate variations, twists.

Variations nevertheless must remain within certain confines. They must fit our notion of what can be perceived within the structure. Games, rituals, narratives – they all share the same fundamental condition: the structural rule. The confines of the structure enable numerous variations. The appeal of the game is that two matches are never the same. Yet, if the rules, the confines of the structure are broken, the game is over, the ritual fails, the narrative loses its authenticity. Part of the novel's contract with the reader is that the murderer should be among the actors of the novel (in the country house or on the train), and that we, judging from the information available, should be able to figure out who did what to whom on our own; at least in theory. If not, if the murderer shows to be a total stranger, what should have been a twist instead becomes a declaration of structural bankruptcy.

Teflon Don does not focus as much on structure as Badger 6, neither in content not in style. Therefore viewing them as narratives becomes more difficult too. His approach is more descriptive, he uses fewer dramatic tools, and perhaps most importantly, his stories are not wrapped up at the end. Instead, they tend more or less to simply stop. There are exceptions to this rule, as could be seen in the analysis in Chapter 8, but in comparison to Badger 6' stories, those of Teflon Don seem to lack plotting.



Plotting is the sine qua non of narratives. To qualify as a narrative, a story should be told with a purpose. That is the reason why a narrative, even if it is fiction, (and even if it is science fiction),<sup>152</sup> is usually told in the past tense.

This is also the reason why depicting the whole course of events from the beginning of the deployment to the homecoming as a narrative is not unproblematic. A large part of the authenticity of a blog is founded on its potential for change, i.e. on the fact that it does not, as do most narratives, depict the row of events with the advantage of hindsight. The blogger writes down his experiences with a much smaller time lack from event to depiction, than did for instance Ernst Jünger or Erich-Marie Remarque, whose (competing) World War I narratives only were published years after the Great War. Ideally, when the milblogger starts writing, he does not know whether or not there will be any “News from the Western Front” (Remarque, 1984; Jünger, 1985). In that aspect he reminds more of the chronicler than the narrator. Granted, unlike the annalist he does not merely list events sequentially as they happen: He ties them together as part of a semantic whole. Yet, this semantic whole does not necessarily qualify as a narrative. His stories are written as they occur, and not with the advantage of hindsight which allows the narrator to depict them as signifying a unison meaning. Whereas narratives are mostly written in the past tense, blogs are in the present or in the perfect.

A blog lacks the fundamental element of the narrative proper. The omniscient narrator’s knowledge about what is going to happen and hence his ability to fit the single episodes into a unison structure. If a gun shows up in the first act of a narrative, it is bound to be fired in the fifth. If a gun shows up in one blogpost, it may simply have sunk into oblivion in the next. Therefore blogs cannot be analysed as narratives with the plot as their point of departure.

Nevertheless, a milblog depicting a course of events, from the mobilisation order to the homecoming ceremony still describes a sequential structure that shares a number of fundamental elements with the narrative. Granted, deprived of the narrator’s advantage of hindsight, of his intentionality, its structure follows that of the story, the actual course of events, and not that of the plot. But even though it may not have a beginning, a middle and an end in terms of the plot, it still may have all these elements at the story level. When I have analysed the sequential development of the two bloggers in the above, I have done so assuming that to the extent the beginning, the middle and the end at the story-level are transformed to the plot-level, to the extent

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<sup>152</sup> Hence, each of the six chapters in the mother of all science fiction narratives, the Star Wars hexology, begins with the statement: “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.”

that they function as milestones, by means of which the story as a whole is given a sequential structure and eventually attributed with meaning, they still share the fundamental aspects of narrative style: sequence.

This assumption seems to be confirmed. Both blogs, analysed in the above, have a beginning, a middle and an end. They describe, throughout the blog, the same basic experience in a semantic whole; albeit not as a unison whole. Both have digressions, a trait that would have been even more evident if I had also included the numerous posts where Teflon Don and Badger 6 talks about politics, media bias, OPSEC rules, and blogging in general. Moreover, both bloggers change their opinions during the course of events. Together with the setting, depicted in the header and the introductory posts, the final posts evaluating the course of events, provide us with a framework, a plot, for understanding the blog and the deployment experience as a whole. There is little doubt where the story begins and little doubt where it ends.<sup>153</sup> Yet, a close analysis of the sequential structure reveals changing viewpoints, changing images of the enemy and of the mission, enables the reader to drive in a wedge between plot and story, and it is in the open space left by this wedge that the justificatory procedures show.

#### *10.6.2 The development of Badgers Forward and Acute Politics*

In *Badgers Forward* we see a development from outspoken idealism to more subdued or pragmatic statements: Doing it right becomes more important than doing the right. Teflon Don's blog, *Acute Politics*, seems to move in the other direction. Throughout the blog he pays little heed to national identity or idealism, but his emphasis on the importance of making a difference by saving lives and providing an example for others is not weakened.

By the end of his blog, Badger 6 tells his men that they should focus on the improvements they have contributed with and not on the disputed fundament of the war or the missteps that have been made in Iraq. This dilemma was already present at the outset of the blog. The way he sought to solve it, however, has changed. At the outset, he emphasised that the purpose of his blog was to set the missteps in perspective by pointing to the concrete improvements, to contribute to the understanding and the support of the mission by binding together the macro- and micro-levels. Here, at the end, he

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<sup>153</sup> It may of course be continued, but that would demand a new narrative. A famous example is Lt. Smash's blog that changes title to "citizen smash" and later to "mr. smash" as he returns home and leaves the military (Rettberg, 2008) (Keren, M. 2006). The discourse continues but the new story framework demands a new narrator.

advises his men to tear them apart, to focus on the latter, and ignore the former.

In the analysis of the two blogs, I have shown that Badger 6' perception of the enemy changes after the tragic events on February 8. Before, he hesitates between, on the one hand, placing the enemy in a row of historical adversaries in the universal struggle for freedom, and, on the other, viewing him as a childish, undisciplined, but still dangerous adversary. After, the enemy becomes a personal enemy, a terrorist attributed with bestial traits, beyond any recognition. Moreover, leaving the idealistic image of the enemy he also seems to give up idealism. His professionalism, his warrior ethos and his sense of duty remains strong. Focus has changed, though. From being depicted as means to an end, duty and honour become ends in themselves. Serving becomes service.

In Teflon Don's blog, the emotional approach remains constant: Mobilising for a mission is the mobilisation of hatred, maintaining the motivation depends on the maintenance of excitement, and accomplishing the mission demands gut feelings and instinct. Likewise, the strong sense of unit cohesion and the emphasis on making a difference in the war theatre, viewed at the end, was already described in the "long past due introduction" (*Acute Politics* November 18). In that respect, the development of his blog seems to lead him back to the first equilibrium.

That does not mean, however, that the views expressed in *Acute Politics* do not change during the deployment. First and foremost, as shown in the two previous chapters Teflon Don is deeply affected by the death of his three friends. Furthermore, his view of the Iraqis, and perhaps of the enemy too, is moderated. From applying the same yardstick of enmity to all Iraqis, civilians and insurgents alike, he turns to describing the progress of the Iraqi Army in very positive terms.

### *10.6.3 Officer and private: the justification of war*

Given that we draw any general conclusions from these two cases, what has this analysis revealed about the justifications made by officers and privates, respectively?

First, the theoretical assumption seems to be met. Officers, who are not only part of a hierarchical system, but are also by actively executing their authority within this system, and thus contributing to the maintenance of the hierarchy, weigh elements of organic solidarity to a much larger extent than their subordinates. Privates on the other hand, who are much more embedded in a horizontal structure, weigh components of mechanic solidarity.

In the comparison above, this shows most clearly in the construction of ingroup and outgroup relations. The private, Teflon Don, primarily uses di-

chotomies: The unit is contrasted with the army; excitement with boredom; America with Iraq; and soldiers are contrasted with marines. The officer, Badger 6, on the other hand describes his identity and the purpose of the mission as elements of a greater structure, wherein things have their proper place and function. Analogously, however, with the change from idealism to pragmatism, however, Badger 6' use of dichotomies seems to increase, and correspondingly his emphasis on the mechanical components becomes stronger.

Secondly, the readings above also reveal that Wong's conclusions in regard to motivation should be revised. Granted, Badger 6 initial structuring of idealism and national identity, and his strong military ethos seems to confirm Wong's assumption, that today abstract ideals and military identity are coexisting. However, exposed to the terrors of war, this motivational cohabitation seems to be shaken, his idealism to be weakened. Thus seen, the analysis rather confirms the conclusions drawn by Wong's critics that the distribution of success and failure is a primary factor in explaining motivation. Furthermore, the analysis of *Acute Politics* did not show military identity and abstract ideals as coexisting. On the contrary, his emphasis on buddy cohesion seems to correspond with his rejection of the greater purposefulness of the war. He regards himself as a member of a cross-historical military brotherhood, and for him, as for the World War II soldier, the two aspects of motivation, loyalty towards the group and loyalty towards the cause, are rather mutually excluding than the opposite.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Proper Names into Variables**

My main focus thus far has been on the content and form of a very limited number of bloggers. These analyses have revealed a number of central points regarding the general hypothesis of this research project: the existence of civil religious justifications in military blogs.

Two ideal types of civil religion, immanent and transcendent, are present in the sources. As ideal types, however, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Transcendent and immanent dimensions cover different – vertical and horizontal – aspects of the religious function. They are therefore able to co-exist. Likewise, civil and military religion seem to get along well, an observation which confirms the findings of Wong and his colleagues that American soldiers fight both for each other and for higher ideals. In five of the six cases analysed above, however, the strength of civil religion appears to relate to the strength of military religion. As I revealed in the analysis of *Ma Deuce Gunner*, *Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum* and *Badgers Forward*, Civil and Military religion not only co-exist, they are mutually confirming, and the latter is subordinated to the former. *Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq* was used as the emblematic example of transcendent civil religion, because Rachel emphasises the importance of loving one's country despite the fact that she does not believe in the cause. And just as she doubted the purposefulness of the war, she did not seem to identify very strongly with her comrades. A weak or one-dimensional national identification co-exists with a weak military identity. Likewise, Zack from *Misoldierthoughts*, who openly disputed the validity of the national sacrifice – the cult of civil religion – did not possess much military religion, either. In *Acute Politics*, however, civil and military religion did not appear to be related. Instead, the references to the place beyond reserved for the warriors were articulated independently of any notions of the nation. The status and interpretation of this outlier position is crucial in the following, the last analytical chapter. There, my aim is to perceive the insights derived from the qualitative analyses in the light of a larger sample of blogs (N=39); in the words of Przeworski and Teune (1970), to “turn proper names into variables”.

#### **11.1. Mapping implicit religion**

The present analysis includes 39 of the 104 blogs I have collected. As in the first qualitative analyses, this sample has been chosen because it covers the spectre of variation which I wish to examine. I have thus expanded the number of coding units enormously (from about 50 to 5000 posts) and the num-

ber of sampling units significantly (from six to 39 bloggers). Nevertheless, a N at 39 may be enough for running basic statistical analysis, but not necessarily sufficient for reaching any robust or generalisable conclusions, a point of critique that regards both the descriptive study conducted in the first part of this chapter as well as the explanatory analysis conducted in the second. The severe difficulties deriving from the case selection problems remain. In spite of the fact that my method of selecting cases using a Most Different Systems Design may enable me to draw meaningful conclusions, it does not alter the fact that we should be careful when inferring from these data.

Nonetheless, the contribution from this quantitative analysis is, first, to shed light on the conclusions drawn from the qualitative study and, secondly, by means of this unique data, to identify systematic differences and similarities which may be tested in further research. This endeavour is worth the effort, because the results generate new insights concerning the role of implicit religion, the sacrificers in the justificatory patterns which are in focus here, and, more generally, because they contribute to the study of soldier motivation. In the following analysis, I will therefore argue that my data support – though only partly – the conclusions of Wong and his co-researchers that the American soldier fights and dies both for king and country as well as for the man next to him. I will show that the use of civil and military religious vocabularies is determined by a number of different factors – how national and military cohesion are articulated varies – and this variation follows systematic patterns throughout the cases.

### *11.1.1 Categorising the data*

In order to survey this vast material consisting of 4000-5000 pages, I have first conducted an open coding of a subsample, primarily including privates (conservatives and liberals alike), as well as one sergeant, one officer and a woman. In this pilot coding, I differentiated sharply between different aspects of identification relating to my dependent variable: between esprit-de-corps and unit cohesion, between transcendent and immanent aspects of both, and between different types of national identification and idealism.

In the present analyses, I have applied the insights from this open pilot coding to conduct a more focused survey of the data. First, by analysing how elements of implicit religion relate to each other in the posts. Secondly, by exploring how different background factors affect civil and military religion, respectively. Thus, in this section (11.1), I focus on the distribution of Civil and Military Religion; or, more specifically, on the distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies. In relation to the general scheme of analysis in Table 2.2 categorising sacrificial types into four categories, these two forms of implicit religion roughly fit types [1] & [2]. Roughly, not exactly: As far as

military identity is concerned, the category is broader than what can be included in category [2] (the comradeship sacrifice). I simply code military religion as one value on the dependent variable covering everything from the heartbreaking accounts of having close friends killed to the traditional celebrations of the Marine Corps anniversary.

It should also be noted that I distinguish between national identity, of which I regard civil religion as a subset, and idealism. There are two reasons for doing this: Empirically, as seen in Figure A1 in the Appendix below, the open coding revealed that varieties of idealism played a significant role in the justifications for some military bloggers. Moreover, theoretically, there seems to be a slide in the motivation literature away from national identity and towards idealism. Thus, the “flag waiving nationalism” rejected by the World War II soldiers is not necessarily the same as the “higher ideals” which Wong and his colleagues found constitute a primary motivating factor in the mind of the modern soldier. Whereas Wong does not seem to distinguish between the two, my hope is to avoid adding to the confusion. Furthermore, a central point in the categorisation of sacrifices was the distinction between what I consider to be two different interpretations of religion in modern society in Durkheim’s opus. Thus, the universalised dimension of idealism cannot be reduced to a subset of the particularised national identity (or vice versa). Idealism and national identity cover different dimensions of the relationships between man, society and God. And in order to analyse the relationships between either of these and other identity forms, it is necessary to distinguish between them. In this context, I focus only on the latter: civil religion.

The focused coding has been conducted by running two different text search queries, one for each category: Civil and Military Religion. Whereas my sampling units are the bloggers, the writers to whom the values on the independent variables are attributed, my coding units, are blog posts. Thus, I change the unit of analysis from the persons to their writings. However, the consequence of this, that my N in the following consists of approximately 4000 units, does not alter the fact that the “real” N remains the 39 cases constituting the sampling units. The length of a post might vary from a few words to several pages, and there might be more than one post on the same date. A post consists of a headline, a text and an indication of who the author is (relatives and friends sometimes also post on a blog), when the post has been uploaded, and the number of comments made on this specific post. For that reason, I consider the post as a semantic whole trying to make a more or less uniform statement with a beginning, middle and end. The 39 blogs analysed here cover 3812 posts. The text search queries have been constructed on the basis of the open pilot coding.

Coding always involves a trade-off between reliability and validity. Here, I have categorised the posts in terms of clusters of words. Thus, in all of the posts which I have coded as national identity, “America” or “United States” occurs with any one of “freedom”, “believe”, “bless” and “remember”, and the civil religious posts have been identified by finding all of the occurrences of the words “fathers”, “flag”, “anthem” or “sacred” within this national identity subset.<sup>154</sup> This provides a highly reliable measure. Any other researcher can repeat my coding and reach the very same result. Alternatively, they could use the same methods on other text sources and produce results that would be comparable with my own.

Yet as for the validity, there are a number of points of hesitation. First, judging from the qualitative analysis, Zack can hardly be described as possessing either form of implicit religion. As we can see in Table 11.1 with respect to the two forms of implicit religion, however, two posts from *Misoldiersthoughts* have been categorised as military religious, and three, including the one analysed above, as civil religious. Zack openly attacks the misuse of national and civil religious symbols. He engages in an interpretative struggle. In so doing, he reuses central words from the dominant discourse. Likewise, as seen in the analysis of “*Fiddler’s Green*”, *Ma Deuce Gunner* dedicates the poem to “all who have given their life in sacrifice”, thus subordinating military religion to civil religion (or perhaps idealism). Nevertheless, due to the concurrent use of “sacrifice” and “soldier”, *Ma Deuce Gunner’s Memorial Day* post has been categorised as military religion, because this is the vocabulary of motive expressed in the post.

Word queries measure what people say, the signifiers, as opposed to the intended or signified meaning of the words. In that perspective, this coding strategy is clearly problematic. On the other hand, a word is a word. “America” may signify different things to different people, but the word cannot signify anything. And, even though our interpretations of the words “America” and “the United States” may overlap, they are not always interchangeable. A competent user of language may choose to engage in a discursive struggle about the understanding of a word. They may even succeed in changing the general meaning of that particular word. By doing so, however, they inevitably contribute to the general consensus regarding the importance of that word and the importance of what it signifies. Zack deconstructs one particular meaning of the national sacrifice, but his rearticulation also demonstrates the importance of sacrifices. Likewise, *Ma Deuce Gunner’s* contribution to the hegemonic dominance of civil religion does not mean that military religion is

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<sup>154</sup> The coding details are accounted for in the section of the appendix entitled: “Word query coding of blog posts”.



ousted from the order of discourse in his blog. Placing military religion within the framework of civil religion allows it to be rearticulated, thereby enabling its continued existence. In that respect, the coding remains valid, but that which it measures – the “discursive representativity” – is neither civil nor military religion per se, but articulations of vocabularies of these forms of implicit religion.

Moreover, the results of this automatic coding are very similar to the results achieved in a combined word query and hand-coding of the same blogs. The last method of selection obviously provides fewer but more valid results, since it implies that any combination of these words not expressing civil or military religious sentiments will be excluded. However, judging whether such sentiments are actually expressed is a matter of interpretation and therefore threatens the reliability. When it comes to choosing between reliability and validity, you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Yet as the conclusions in the following were also reached by using the subsample of the combined text search and hand-coding procedure, I have chosen to stick to the automatic coding procedure because it is more reliable and because it reflects the actual use of the two particular vocabularies of motive in accordance with what I have referred to as discursive validity.

### *11.1.2 The general distribution of the articulation of civil and military religious vocabularies*

Table 11.1 shows how the bloggers in my sample use combinations of words which can be seen as indicators of civil and military religion, respectively. Two central points can already be revealed at this point, one regarding the number of civil and military religious posts and the other regarding the relation between these two categories.

The total number of posts seems to be closely related to the number of civil and military religious posts. Thus seen, the length of the blog is decisive for whether the blogger refers to either of the religious sacrificers; the social entities for which he or she is willing to die. This fits the already-mentioned conclusions reached by Ann Swidler in *Talk of Love* (2001). Swidler states that justifications vary not only according to what we intend to justify, but also according to the justificatory context. The relevance of this question also became apparent in my open pilot coding, where I noted that bloggers with long blogs also used a very broad range of justifications. As shown in Figure A1 in the Appendix below, the open coding of Ma Deuce Gunner revealed a much broader range of justifications than for instance those of Smokey-wretch’s Arena and Junglegym. This illustrates how the size of the blog determines the variation range of the content.

Table 11.1: Distribution of civil and military religious posts, by nom du blog. Count and pct.

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>
1000 WORDS FROM IRAQ	65	0	0.00	3	4.62
1ROMAD	10	3	30.00	3	30.00
2005-2006 TOUR OF DUTY	219	1	0.46	1	0.46
365 AND A WAKEUP	33	4	12.12	12	36.36
ACUTE POLITICS	108	0	0.00	5	4.63
AKILUNA	240	0	0.00	1	0.42
AMERICAN AT HEART	28	0	0.00	1	3.57
ARMOR GEDDON	80	0	0.00	2	2.50
BADGERS FORWARD	394	8	2.03	30	7.61
BLOG MACHINE CITY	168	0	0.00	4	2.38
BURNBERLINBURN	80	1	1.25	4	5.00
DADMANLY	385	30	7.79	50	12.99
DOC IN THE BOX	111	1	0.90	4	3.60
EVERY DAY IS GROUNDHOG DAY	13	2	15.38	2	15.38
FIRE AND ICE	56	2	3.57	2	3.57
FROM MY POSITION, ON THE WAY	78	4	5.13	8	10.26
GREY EAGLE	4	0	0.00	1	25.00
HALF A WORLD AWAY	144	1	0.69	11	7.64
IN IRAQ FOR 365	165	14	8.48	19	11.52
ITS'A LIVING ... SORTA	114	8	7.02	13	11.40
JUNGLEGYM	29	0	0.00	0	0.00
KONECO	16	0	0.00	0	0.00
LT. SMASH	216	5	2.31	10	4.63
LUMBERJACK IN THE DESERT	50	0	0.00	3	6.00
MA DEUCE GUNNER	135	6	4.44	7	5.19
MIDNIGHT IN IRAQ	3	0	0.00	0	0.00
MILO FREEMAN	81	5	6.17	8	9.88
MISOLDIERTHOUGHTS	144	3	2.08	2	1.39
ONE MARINES VIEW	62	19	30.65	16	25.81
QUIETKID	79	0	0.00	0	0.00
SAILAWAYNOW	51	3	5.88	4	7.84
SANDBOX CHRONICLES	128	1	0.78	2	1.56
SANDGRAM	12	0	0.00	0	0.00
SI VIS PACEM PARE BELLUM	139	10	7.19	19	13.67

SKETCHPAD WARRIOR	20	0	0.00	1	5.00
SMOKEYWRETCH'S ARENA	68	0	0.00	0	0.00
SNIPEREYE	24	0	0.00	0	0.00
SUPERMAN83	34	0	0.00	0	0.00
THE DESERT WIND	26	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL: 39</b>	3812	131	3.44	248	6.51

Statistically, the total number of posts also correlates with the number of posts with identity content, but only as long as this correlation is measured in absolute numbers. If, however, we instead look at the percentage distribution, the correlation becomes insignificant. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the absolute number of posts is related to the absolute number of justifications, this does not necessarily reveal much about the content of these justifications. As the graphical illustration in the Appendix shows, Ma Deuce Gunner and the two other bloggers differ not only regarding the number of different ways in which they justify their participation in the war, but also in terms of which ways they choose. Hence, contrary to the two other bloggers, Ma Deuce Gunner refers to a broad range of idealistic, national and military reasons. Conversely, they both refer to socio-economic motives, and Junglegym appears to identify with his ethnic group (he is of Korean descent) while not with the military. The number of blogs may relate to the range of justifications, but not necessarily to what it actually covers.

The second point which can be derived from the table above is that the two forms of implicit religion also seem to be related. Not only does the presence of military religion coincide in more than half of the cases with the presence of civil religion, but the absence of military religion in about one-quarter of the cases is also accompanied by the absence of civil religion. Furthermore, the percentage of either category also provides a good estimate of the strength of the other. A simple bivariate regression between the two thus reveals a strong correlation with an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> at 0.584.

Of course, correlation is not causality. Rendering the presence of a causal relation plausible also requires sequence, a theoretical explanation and the exclusion of possible spurious variables. In this case, none of these prerequisites are unequivocally in place. Logically, and as confirmed by Eighmey's research of recruitment motivation, national affiliation comes before unit cohesion. While you may feel attached to your country since childhood, attachment to your brothers in arms cannot be established prior to serving. Nevertheless, we cannot reject the possibility of an endogenous relationship between the two in this case: The fact that enlistment can be traced back to the presence of national motives – of which I regard civil religion as a subset –

does not rule out the possibility that once you have enlisted, exposure to the values of the armed forces also reinforces national affiliation. Lastly, as already mentioned, our knowledge of the bloggers is limited. The number of variables which can be used to test the strength of this correlation is therefore also limited. The question which then begs to be asked is how the close connection between civil and military religion should be interpreted.

Military Religion occurs twice as often as Civil Religion. This is true at the aggregate level, where only 3.44 pct. of the 3812 posts coded here have been categorised as being civil religious, as compared to 6.51 pct. of the military religious posts. This also holds true for the single blogs. Thus, only two bloggers, including *Misoldierthoughts*, have more civil religious than military religious posts, and only four have an equal distribution of the two implicit forms of religion. As we saw in the analyses above, military religion may be autonomous, but nobody has civil religion alone, and the dominant form is that they occur in the same blogs. Thus, whereas a group of nine bloggers have neither civil nor military religion, and nine others have military religion alone, both forms of implicit religion are present in 21 of the blogs analysed in this sample.

In the next section, I will turn towards a more explanatory approach. For now, I will examine what characterises the bloggers exhibiting neither of the forms of implicit religion, those who have military religion only, and, finally, the last group, in which both forms are present. As for the latter, I will scrutinise the overlap of the two forms of implicit religion more closely in order to see under which conditions they simply co-exist and when they are actually mutually confirming, as indicated by the qualitative analyses.

### *11.1.3 Neither/Nor*

The first thing that may be said about the blogs without either form of implicit religion is that, on average, they are shorter than the blogs with military religion only, which are again somewhat shorter than the blogs containing both posts with civil and military religion. Thus, contrary to the findings above, where I concluded that the number of posts does not correlate with the relative number of either form of implicit religion, there actually seems to be a clear connection between the number of posts and the distribution of civil and military religion into interrelated groups.

However, the fact that the number of posts and the distribution of the content seems to be related does not necessarily mean that the former determines the latter. The number of posts may just as well be regarded as a dependent variable along with the distribution of posts into subsamples. In other words, there may be a reason why this group of bloggers chooses both to write less and to abstain from writing about civil and military religion.

That point has already been mentioned regarding the different distributions of justifications between Ma Deuce Gunner as opposed to Junglegym and Smokeymcheh's Arena. In fact, the latter two are both represented in this subsample. It might therefore be worthwhile to see whether there is any systematic pattern in the background variables which may determine both that this group of bloggers writes less and that they abstain from referring to either form of implicit religion.

Table 11.2: Known characteristics of bloggers articulating neither form of implicit religion

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political affiliation</b>	<b>Branch of service</b>
MIDNIGHT	3	OFFICER	Male	Combat	Conservative	USMC
SANDGRAM	12	OFFICER	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USMC
KONECO	16	PRIVATE	Female	Non-combat	Unassigned	Unassigned
SNIPEREYE	24	SGT	Male	Combat	Unassigned	USARMY
THE DESERT WIND	26	OFFICER	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	Other (AIR FORCE)
JUNGLEGYM	29	PRIVATE	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
SUPERMAN83	34	PRIVATE	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
SMOKEYWRETCH	68	PRIVATE	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
QUIETKID	79	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
<b>Total: 9</b>	<b>291</b>					
<b>Average number of posts</b>	<b>32.33</b>					

First and foremost, similar to Smokeymcheh's Arena and Junglegym, seven of these nine bloggers are not conservative. The two exceptions to this rule, Midnight in Iraq and Sandgram, also differ from the rest of the bloggers in two other aspects. They have the fewest posts and are both officers. While the number of posts is not necessarily decisive in itself, and in spite of the presence of one other officer in the sub-sample, the fact that Midnight in Iraq and Sandgram differ in three aspects from the rest seems to indicate that the general rule for the bloggers who do not refer to either form of implicit religion is that they are non-conservative enlisted soldiers or marines. Furthermore, apart from Snipereye, neither of the servicemen in this group have combat experience. They serve inside the wire. Hence, in accordance with my theoretical assumptions, their need for justification is less urgent.

### 11.1.4 Military Religion only

Table 11.3: Known characteristics of bloggers only articulating Military Religion

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political affiliation</b>	<b>Branch of service</b>
BLOG MACHINE CITY	168	4	2.38	PRIVATE	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
ACUTE POLITICS	108	5	4.62	PRIVATE	Male	Comb	Conservative	USARMY
AMERICAN AT HEART	28	1	3.57	PRIVATE	Male	Comb	Conservative	USARMY
LUMBERJACK IN THE DESERT	50	3	6.00	PRIVATE	Male	Comb	Conservative	USARMY
SKETCHPAD WARRIOR	20	1	5.00	SGT	Male	Comb	Unassigned	USMC
ARMOR GEDDON	80	2	2.50	CO	Male	Comb	Conservative	USARMY
AKILUNA	240	1	0.41	PRIVATE	Female	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
GREY EAGLE	4	1	25.00	SGT	Female	Comb	Unassigned	USARMY
1000 WORDS FROM IRAQ	65	3	4.61	PRIVATE	Female	Comb	Conservative	USARMY
<b>TOTAL: 9</b>	<b>763</b>		<b>21</b>		<b>2.75 %</b>			
<b>AVERAGE NUMBER OF POSTS</b>	<b>84.78</b>	<b>2.33</b>						

Again, those whose vocabulary can be described as military religious but not civil religious have fewer posts, on average, than those articulating both civil and military religion, and more posts than those expressing neither of these forms. Like the group analysed above, most of the bloggers in this category are from the enlisted ranks. One reason for this under-representation of officers in these two groups may of course be that privates and sergeants are both younger, less educated and have less access to computers on the bases. In other words, they simply have fewer opportunities to run very extended blogs. This assumption may be challenged by the fact that in one of the two subgroups analysed below of those articulating both civil and military religion; the rank and file are also over-represented. On the other hand, it is supported, at least for this group, by the fact that seven of the nine of these bloggers have experienced combat and are thus serving outside the wire.

The idealtypical military blogger who uses a military religious vocabulary but does not express any civil religious sentiments is thus a conservatively minded private serving in a combat unit. This seems to support the classical

research finding that military cohesion constitutes an autonomous means of identification for the enlisted combat soldier. Moreover, this identification exists independently of – and often in explicit contradiction to – “flag-waving nationalism”. In that respect, the conclusions drawn by Wong and his colleagues are only partially confirmed. Instead, my findings seem to suggest that exposure to combat plays a decisive role in determining how justifications are made.

#### *11.1.5 Both-and*

The bloggers expressing both military and civil religious vocabularies can be divided into two subgroups, depending on whether or not their articulations of either form of implicit religion occur in the same posts.

Table 11.4 shows how seven of the bloggers sometimes express civil religious sentiments and sometimes military religious sentiments; however, according to the word query coding, never simultaneously. As for the 14 bloggers in the other subgroup, those below the two-line separator, their expressions of implicit forms of religion are concurrent, reaching from a 9 pct. to a 100 pct. intersection of sets. I will therefore consider these two subgroups separately.

As mentioned above, officers are underrepresented in this subsample. Sandbox Chronicles is the sole exception to the rule. In fact, bloggers using both a Civil Religious and Military Religious vocabulary – but in different posts – are generally from the rank and file; most of the six remaining bloggers are sergeants. The only exception to that rule is Ma Deuce Gunner. Granted, as a corporal he can still be seen as a member of the NCO corps, but as opposed to the five others, he also serves outside the wire. The number of civil religious posts in his blog vastly exceeds the other blogs in this subsample. Moreover, as already mentioned, the fact that he is categorised as having no overlapping posts is challenged by the findings of the qualitative analysis, which showed how he subordinated the military sacrificial cult to civil religion. Likewise, the fact that Misoldierthoughts, who rejects the validity of the sacrifice in Iraq, is also placed within this category seems to question the validity of this coding procedure.

Table 11.4: Distribution of posts containing both civil and military religion, sized by the percentage of intersection between the implicit religious posts

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of inter-section covering civil religion</b>	<b>Inter-section of civil and military religion</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of inter-section covering military religion</b>	<b>Number of posts containing either form of implicit religion</b>	<b>Inter-section, pct. of total implicit religious posts</b>
2005-2006 TOUR OF DUTY	1	0.00	0	1	0.00	2	0.00
HALF A WORLD AWAY	1	0.00	0	11	0.00	12	0.00
SANDBOX	1	0.00	0	2	0.00	3	0.00
DOC IN THE BOX	1	0.00	0	4	0.00	5	0.00
MISOLDIER-THOUGHTS	3	0.00	0	2	0.00	5	0.00
SAILAWAYNOW	3	0.00	0	4	0.00	7	0.00
MA DEUCE GUNNER	6	0.00	0	7	0.00	13	0.00
FROM MY POSITION, ON THE WAY	4	25.00	1	8	12.50	11	9.09
LT. SMASH	5	40.00	2	10	20.00	13	15.38
DADMANLY	30	40.00	12	50	24.00	68	17.65
BADGERS FORWARD	8	75.00	6	30	20.00	32	18.75
1ROMAD	3	33.33	1	3	33.33	5	20.00
365 AND A WAKEUP	4	75.00	3	12	25.00	13	23.08
BURNBERLINBURN	1	100.00	1	4	25.00	4	25.00
MILO FREEMAN	5	60.00	3	8	37.50	10	30.00
ITSA LIVING, SORTA	8	62.50	5	13	38.46	16	31.25
FIRE AND ICE	2	50.00	1	2	50.00	3	33.33
IN IRAQ FOR 365	14	71.43	10	19	52.63	23	43.48
SI VIS PACEM, PARE BELLUM	10	90.00	9	19	47.37	20	45.00
ONE MARINE'S VIEW	19	63.16	12	16	75.00	23	52.17
EVERY DAY IS GROUNDHOG DAY	2	100.00	2	2	100.00	2	100.00



Table 11.5: Known characteristics of bloggers expressing both forms of implicit religion, but not in the same posts

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political affiliation</b>	<b>Branch of service</b>
SANDBOX CHRONICLES	128	1	0.78	2	1.56	CO	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USMC
MA DEUCE GUNNER	135	6	4.44	7	5.19	PRIVATE (Corporal)	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
HALF A WORLD AWAY	144	1	0.69	11	7.64	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
2005-2006 TOUR OF DUTY	219	1	0.46	1	0.46	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Unassigned	USARMY
SAILAWAY-NOW	51	3	5.88	4	7.84	SGT	Female	Combat	Conservative	USMC
DOC IN THE BOX	111	1	0.90	4	3.60	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
MISOLDIER-THOUGHTS	144	3	2.08	2	1.39	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Liberal	USARMY
<b>Total: 7</b>	932	16	1.72	31	3.33					
<b>Average number of posts</b>	133.14	2.29		4.43						

The rows marked with a light grey background colour mark the bloggers who primarily use transcendent civil religion.

However, a closer look at each of the 16 posts coded as expressing a civil religious vocabulary in this subsample does not lead to the conclusion that they should be rejected as invalid. It is true, though, that how American identity is expressed in these posts differs radically. Thus, to follow the distinction used in the first analysis, how the national and the eternal are coupled in the posts of 2005-2006 Tour of Duty, Sandbox Chronicles, and Half a World Away follows the pattern of immanent civil religion identified in Ma Deuce Gunner's blog. And, just as in Misoldierthoughts, the posts registered as civil religious from both Sailaway Now and Doc in the Box are characterised by a very sceptical approach to national identity which, historically, has been emblematic of transcendent civil religion. What differentiates these two groups? Very little, actually, apart from the fact that those two who have been designated as liberals are both placed within the subgroup whose coupling of the divine with the national identity are used to express scepticism about the course of the nation. This point should be kept in mind when I turn towards more explanatory tools of analysis towards the end of this chapter.

Table 11.6: Known characteristics of bloggers expressing both forms of implicit religion in the same posts

<b>Nom du blog</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>	<b>Pct. of total</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political affiliation</b>	<b>Branch of service</b>
DADMANLY	385	30	7.79	50	12.99	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USARMY
ONE MARINE'S VIEW	62	19	30.65	16	25.81	CO	Male	Combat	Conservative	USMC
IN IRAQ FOR 365	165	14	8.48	19	11.52	SGT	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
SI VIS PACEM, PARE BELLUM	139	10	7.19	19	13.67	CO	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
BADGERS FORWARD	394	8	2.03	30	7.61	CO	Male	Combat	Un-assigned	USARMY
ITSA LIVING, SORTA	114	8	7.02	13	11.40	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	USMC
MILO FREEMAN	81	5	6.17	8	9.88	PRIVATE	Male	Comb	Liberal	USARMY
LT. SMASH	216	5	2.31	10	4.63	CO	Male	Non-combat	Conservative	Other
365 AND A WAKEUP	33	4	12.12	12	36.36	CO	Male	Non-combat	Un-assigned	USARMY
FROM MY POSITION, ON THE WAY	78	4	5.13	8	10.26	CO	Male	Combat	Conservative	USARMY
1 ROMAD	10	3	30.00	3	30.00	SGT	Male	Non-combat	Un-assigned	USARMY
EVERY DAY IS GROUNDHOG DAY	13	2	15.38	2	15.38	PRIVATE	Female	Non-combat	Liberal	USMC
FIRE AND ICE	56	2	3.57	2	3.57	SGT	Male	Combat	Liberal	USMC
BURNBERLIN BURN	80	1	1.25	4	5.00	PRIVATE	Male	Combat	Liberal	USMC
<b>Total: 14</b>	<b>1826</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>6.30</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>10.73</b>					
<b>Average number of posts</b>	<b>130.43</b>	<b>8.21</b>		<b>14.00</b>						

Rows marked with a light grey background colour mark bloggers with less than 10 posts referring to either form of implicit religion.

Compared to the group of bloggers just analysed, those using both Civil and Military Religious words and who do so simultaneously have slightly fewer posts on average. This does not mean, however, that they use fewer justifications. On the contrary: The group with an intersection of sets has an average of 8.29 (6.3 pct.) posts with a Civil Religious content and 14.00 (10.73 pct.) posts with a Military Religious content. The former group, without intersection, has 2.29 (1.72 pct.) and 4.43 (3.33 pct.) posts with Civil and Military Religious content, respectively. For the bloggers who use both forms of implicit religion, the number of posts therefore does not determine the number of justifications; neither in absolute numbers nor relatively.

In only one of the 14 cases in this subsample, One Marine's View, does the number of Civil Religious posts exceed the number of Military Religious posts. He is clearly also among the bloggers in the dataset who has the most of both, and, closely followed by Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum, One Marine's

View is one of those who has the largest overlap of references to both kinds of implicit religion. In regard to the intersection of sets, however, Rachel the Great surpasses both of them. Nevertheless, compared to One Marine's View's 52.17 pct. overlap between a total of 23 posts containing either form of implicit religion, her 100 pct. overlap between two posts seems less impressive.

In fact, taking the absolute numbers into consideration may be worthwhile in regard to estimating the general characteristics of this subsample. At face value, these 14 bloggers share little in common. They include privates, sergeants and officers. Most are men, but that is the case in all of the subsamples above. Some are liberal, some conservative. Some are serving outside the wire, some inside. However, if we distinguish between those with few references to either form of implicit religion and those with many, the variation is reduced within each of the groups. Thus, along with Rachel the Great, three other bloggers have less than 10 references to civil or military religion. Three of these four are liberal (the last is unassigned). None of them are officers. Combat experience still does not seem to make a difference. About half (two out of four and four out of ten) in each of these groups have seen combat. The other half has not. With a single exception, however, the 10 bloggers in the first group share a number of central characteristics: They are all men; they are all either sergeants or officers; and they are all conservative. Milo Freeman is the sole exception. He is, however, an exception both in regard to rank (he is a private) and political affiliation (his attitudes towards the war, gender equality and racism clearly reflect his liberal views. At one point, he even receives a death threat on his blog for this reason).

#### *11.1.6 Distribution of civil and military religion: Descriptive conclusions*

My aim in the first part of this chapter has been to show that the bloggers' Civil and Military Religious vocabularies are interrelated and that they seem to be interrelated in systematic patterns. These patterns are what I refer to in the table below as types of soldiery. Again, these are idealtypes; neither of these patterns is totally waterproof. There are exceptions in each of the analyses above, and challenges remain despite the fact that most of these exceptions also appear to follow certain patterns (if a blogger does not fit the profile of the other bloggers in the category, they likely differ in other respects as well). Some of the obvious but unexplainable differences between the different groups of bloggers may thus derive from the characteristics of the genre of military blogging. For example, the large representation of bloggers whose political affiliation cannot be identified and the close relation between the number of posts and the characteristics of the bloggers possibly results from the overwhelmingly conservative persuasions within the military in general and the milblogging milieu in particular. Fear of reprisals either from the

DoD or their comrades may silence liberally minded bloggers or cause them to keep their views to themselves. And if no variation exists, it is difficult to have it represented in the data. All in all, the few available variables together with the limited and probably skewed sample of cases render it difficult to make very solid statements as to why some seem to follow the rules while others deviate from them.

Nevertheless, the Civil and Military Religious discourses represented in the sample of bloggers analysed here can be divided into three general groups: those referring to neither Civil nor Military Religion; those only referring to military religion; and those referring to both forms of implicit religion. The latter group can be divided into two subgroups, depending on whether or not their use of Civil and Military Religious motives occur in the same posts. These two subgroups consist of seven and 14 bloggers, respectively, and the latter of the two can be subdivided once more depending on the length of the blogs.

This leaves five idealtypes – five ways of relating civil and military religion – which appear to vary systematically with political affiliation, type of service and military rank.

Table 11.7: Idealtypes, distributed by relation of civil and military religion in the blogs

<b>Civil &amp; Military Religion</b>	<b>Soldier type</b>	<b>Political affiliation</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Military rank</b>
<i>Neither/nor</i>	1	Liberal	Non-combat	Privates or Sergeants
<i>Only Military Religion</i>	2	Conservative	Combat	Privates
<i>Both No intersection of sets</i>	3	<i>(No fixed pattern)</i>	Non-combat	Sergeants
<i>Intersection of sets</i>	4	Conservative	<i>(No fixed pattern)</i>	Officers
	5	Liberal	<i>(No fixed pattern)</i>	Privates or Sergeants

Liberals of the rank and file who carry out non-combat functions tend to write little. That goes for both the liberal privates and sergeants in the first group, who abstain from referring to either form of implicit religion in their writings, as well as for the bloggers in the fifth group, who are characterised by referring to both Civil and Military Religion. The only visible difference between these two groups is that whereas the members of the former unequivocally serve inside the wire, combat soldiers are also represented in the latter. However, that difference can be reduced to two very short cases. In that sense, it may be practically invisible.

On the other hand, the notion that exposure to combat actually makes a difference is confirmed by the second group, likewise consisting of privates.

In accordance with the classical motivation study in the American Soldier, the soldiers in this group consisting primarily of conservatives with combat experience do not refer to the nation; only to the military brotherhood. Thus, the importance of combat experience may be worth pursuing. The third group consists of bloggers who refer to both categories, though only in different posts. This group is dominated by non-combat sergeants with no clear patterns of political affiliation. The idealtype of the fourth group is the conservative officer who writes a lot (albeit less than the members of the third group) and refers more to both kinds of implicit religion than any of the other groups.

## **11.2. Explaining the presence of implicit religion**

The analysis above has been strictly descriptive. From the distribution of posts containing the two forms of implicit religion, I have categorised five groups of bloggers differentiated in terms of political affiliation, combat experience and military rank. In the following, my aim is to explore how knowing these factors enables us to foresee the strength of civil and military religious vocabularies.

### *11.2.1 The background variables*

It should be emphasised that the data placed some restraints on the actual number of background variables that I can control for. Theoretically, it is not very difficult to argue that gender, political attitude, military rank and combat experience all may have a decisive effect on the two main variables in question here. In accordance with earlier empirical studies, the qualitative analyses above have also confirmed these assumptions. Unit cohesion is a brotherhood of men. Hence, as reflected in Rachel the Great's Internet diary, the challenges facing women when integrating into a military unit may be different than those of their brothers in arms. The military is a conservative institution and mainly recruits from conservative social strata. Hence, as reflected in *Misoldierthoughts*, liberals may face a difficult time adapting to military values. Military rank determines the boundaries of social interaction. Officers should be respected, not loved. Hence, as reflected in the comparisons of *Acute Politics* and *Badgers Forward*, everything else being equal, the world views held by officers and privates differ. Finally, as shown by the reactions of these two bloggers to the events of February 8, 2007, the emotional rupture caused by exposure to combat may also change the bonds of allegiance and identity.

The list of empirically relevant background variables is obviously much longer; and my data does not allow me to control for two of the most important factors discussed in the soldier motivation literature: race and socio-

economic status (SES). Analysing Social Network Sites (such as MySpace and Facebook, where pictures play a crucial role), the skin colour of the site owner can be determined quite easily. MySpace even allows you to browse for racial background. Conversely, the blog is a written genre. While a blog may contain pictures, its primary media of communication is the written word. That makes it a valuable source in this context, as I am able to study the articulations of the servicemen with the classical tools of textual analysis and without interviewer effects. However, it also becomes a problem in regard to determining all – and sometimes the most important – aspects of a person's identity without simply guessing. Unless a blogger explicitly states that they are African-American or uploads pictures, there is little chance of determining their racial background. In fact, this characteristic of the genre – the fact that it is a written media – may in itself affect the representativity, especially regarding SES; consequently, however, also regarding race. The lower your SES, the less education you have, and the less inclined you probably are to choose a media of communication demanding an intensive writing process. As African-Americans are generally lower educated than their Caucasian or Asian compatriots, this might help explain why they are practically invisible in my data.

The variables fall into two groups: Rank and combat experience are closely related to soldier (or marine) life; gender and political affiliation are nominally independent of the military. Nevertheless, we cannot reject that since men are overrepresented in the military and since exposure to a conservative environment may affect the attitudes of the individual, the relationship between the two latter factors and military life may be more complex than a simple cause-and-effect model might suggest.

The dependent variable in the research project is the sacrificer, the moral person for whom the sacrifice takes place. This is the person with whom the victim should identify in order for the sacrifice to be valid. The measures of Civil and Military Religion can be regarded as indicators of that identification. The qualitative analysis has confirmed that the two are more closely related than as suggested by the classical findings of Stouffer's Research Branch. The aim in the following is to see how these two are affected by gender, political affiliation, rank and exposure to combat.

### 11.2.2 Gender and politics in the foxhole

Table 11.8: Gender of blogger and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>
Man	2252	75 3.33%	138 6.13%
Woman	389	5* 1.29%	11* 2.83%
Total	2641 100.00%	80 3.03%	149 5.64%

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*= $p < 0.0005$ , \*\*= $p < 0.005$ , \*= $p < 0.05$ .

I report the level of significance as a measure of the robustness of the tests within the sample I analyse. It should not be mistaken as a claim regarding the generalisability of the findings.

Table 11.8 clearly shows that gender makes a difference regarding the use of both forms of implicit religion. The clusters of words which I have coded as signifying either civil or military religion are used significantly less in posts written by female military bloggers as compared to the posts written by their blog brothers.

As mentioned above, the number of women included in this sample limits the number of controls which I can meaningfully apply to this relation. Of six female military bloggers in the data-set, only one is liberal. The remainder are either conservative (2) or politically unassigned (3). Yet as far as combat experience is regarded, the cases are evenly distributed. The effect of gender on the use of the civil and military religious vocabularies is worth a look, albeit with some hesitation regarding the total number of sampling units.

Judging from Table 11.9, gender still makes a moderate difference regarding the use of the civil religious vocabulary among bloggers serving inside the wire and a strongly significant difference for bloggers serving outside the wire. As far as military religion is concerned, however, the difference between men and women has diminished within both groups.

Table 11.9: Gender of blogger and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies by type of service

Type of service	Gender	Total number of posts	Civil religious posts	Military religious posts
Non-combat	Man	1505	47 3.12%	88 5.85%
	Woman	269	2 * 0.74%	3 1.12%
	Subtotal	1774	49 2.76%	91 5.13%
Combat	Man	747	28 3.75%	50 6.69%
	Woman	120	3 *** 2.50%	8 6.67%
	Subtotal	867	31 3.58%	58 6.69%
Total		2641	3.03%	5.64%

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*= $p < 0.0005$ , \*\*= $p < 0.005$ , \*= $p < 0.05$ .

Thus, the theoretical expectation that women refer less to civil and military religion can only be partly affirmed. At a general level, it is true that men make use of either vocabulary of motive more often than women, but distinguishing between combat and non-combat soldiers provides us with a more nuanced picture. Whether or not combat experience is held constant, civil religion is affected by gender. The same is not true as regards the use of a military religious vocabulary. Especially in regard to the combat soldiers, there is virtually no difference between how much men and women, respectively, uses the terms associated with that form of implicit religion.

It should be noted, though, that the difference between how much men and women serving inside the wire refer to military religion remains quite large. It turns out to be insignificant because of the very small number of observations, which in itself should cause some hesitance in regard to reaching these observations. Nevertheless, combat experience seems to make an important difference. This point should be kept in mind in the following.



Table 11.10: Political affiliation and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies

<b>Political attitude</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>
Liberal	598	14	22
		2.34%	3.68%
Conservative	1413	62 *	120 ***
		4.39%	8.49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>142</b>
	100.00%	3.78%	7.06%

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*= $p < 0.0005$ , \*\*= $p < 0.005$ , \*= $p < 0.05$ .

Political affiliation also seems to have a moderate effect on the use of a civil religious vocabulary and a strong effect on the use of military religious vocabulary. This alone seems to undermine the hypothesis of compensation, saying the liberals – in lieu of consent with the mission – choose to identify with the military brotherhood. Before rejecting that assumption, however, it should be considered that this relationship is not necessarily constant across differences in rank or types of service.

As shown in Table 11.11, privates and sergeants, respectively, relate political affiliation to the use of implicit vocabularies of motive in two very different ways. Liberal privates refer more to vocabularies of motive and significantly more to civil religion than do conservatives of the same rank. Liberal sergeants, on the other hand, are less inclined to refer to either form of implicit religion than conservative sergeants. In fact, as far as the sergeants are concerned, the difference between the two groups is strongly significant. The close relationship between political attitude and the use of civil and military religion, respectively, is illustrated in Figure 11.1.

I did not include the politically unassigned in the analysis above, and the plot clearly illustrates why. With 1romad as the sole exception, the unassigned all centre around zero in regard to civil religion (x). But with different scores on military religion (y) and compared to the conservatives and the liberals – whose scores on both civil and military religion clearly place them within two groups – the position of the unassigned remains difficult to interpret.

Table 11.11: Political affiliation and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies by rank

<b>Military rank</b>	<b>Political attitude</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>
Private	Liberal	208	8	14
			3.85%	6.73%
	Conservative	554	6 *	23
			1.08%	4.15%
	Subtotal	762	14	37
			1.84%	4.86%
Sergeant	Liberal	390	6	8
			1.54%	2.05%
	Conservative	859	56 ***	97 ***
			6.52%	11.29%
	Subtotal	1249	62	105
			4.96%	8.41%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2011</b>	<b>3.78%</b>	<b>7.06%</b>

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*= $p < 0.0005$ , \*\*= $p < 0.005$ , \*= $p < 0.05$ .

The subtotals in Table 11.11 show that privates refer less to both forms of implicit religion than sergeants. I will return to this point below when analyzing rank. The table also showed that whereas conservatism seems to be negatively correlated to the use of civil and military religious vocabularies among privates, the opposite appears to be the case with sergeants. Thus, rank and political affiliation also appear to be closely related, a fact that might explain the lack of liberal officers in the blogs I have found.

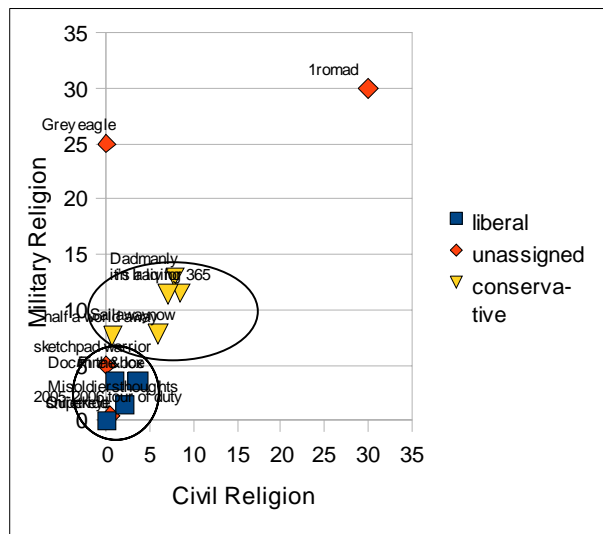
I have shown in the above that the relationship between gender and the use of the implicitly religious vocabularies should be revised when exposure to combat was held constant. The same is actually also the case with political affiliation.

It should be noted that introducing a third variable diminishes the number of observations within each of the possible outcomes, especially for the soldiers serving inside the wire. Keeping this in mind, the table still shows

that the differences between privates and sergeants observed above conceal a very important difference between non-combat and combat soldiers.

Table 11.11 revealed a moderately significant difference between liberals and conservative privates and a strongly significant difference between liberal and conservative sergeants. These findings are repeated in Table 11.12, but for the non-combat soldiers. For personnel exposed to combat, the effect of political affiliation is not significant. There is no politics in a foxhole. Or alternatively: to the extent that there is politics in a foxhole, its significance is clearly reduced by being under fire.

Figure 11.1: Plot of liberal, conservative and politically unassigned sergeants



The fact that the difference between liberals and conservatives is less when exposure to combat is held constant does not mean that the combat soldier refers less to civil religion than his non-combat brothers in arms. In that respect, the Research Branch findings cannot be confirmed. Rather, the observation seems to support Wong's conclusions that modern soldiers fight for king and country and for each other. Thus, examining the subtotals for each group in Table 11.12 reveals that combat soldiers, regardless of rank, refer more to both categories. Furthermore, as mentioned in regard to the analysis of gender, the fact that the difference between liberals and conservatives ceases to be significant does not mean that it disappears. Conservative sergeants still refer to civil and military religion more frequently than their liberal colleagues. Finally, in spite of the fact that it turns out to be insignificant, we cannot reject the possibility that rank also actually has an impact.

Table 11.12: Political affiliation and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies by rank and type of service

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Political attitude</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>
Non-combat	Privates	Liberal	47	2 4.26%	2 4.26%
		Conservative	168	0 * 0.00%	4 2.38%
		Subtotal	215	2 0.93%	6 2.79%
	Sergeants	Liberal	334	4 1.20%	6 1.80%
		Conservative	643	39 *** 6.07%	74 *** 11.51%
		Subtotal	977	43 4.40%	80 8.19%
Combat	Privates	Liberal	161	6 3.73%	12 7.45%
		Conservative	386	6 1.55%	19 4.92%
		Subtotal	547	12 2.19%	31 5.67%
	Sergeants	Liberal	56	2 3.57%	2 3.57%
		Conservative	216	17 7.87%	23 10.65%
		Subtotal	272	19 6.99%	25 9.19%
<b>Total</b>			<b>2011</b>	<b>3.78%</b>	<b>7.06%</b>

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*=p<0.0005, \*\*=p<0.005, \*=p<0.05.

A closer look at the impact of rank and exposure to combat on the use of civil and military religious vocabularies requires also taking the last rank group – the officers – into consideration. It should be kept in mind, however, that including the officers also reduces the opportunity of taking the already-

observed effects of gender and political affiliation into consideration, since my sample does not include any examples of female or liberal offices. In the following analyses, I have therefore excluded both women and liberals from the sample.

### 11.2.3 Rank and combat experience

Table 11.13: Rank and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Total number of posts</b>	<b>Civil religious posts</b>	<b>Military religious posts</b>
Private	586	6 1.02%	20 3.41%
Sergeant	1081	57*** 5.27%	98*** 9.07%
Officer	1171	51*** / - 4.36%	99*** / - 8.45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2838</b> 100.00%	<b>114</b> 4.02%	<b>217</b> 7.65%

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*= $p < 0.0005$ , \*\*= $p < 0.005$ , \*= $p < 0.05$ .

(0.0--) insignificant but  $p < 0.1$  (p-value in parenthesis).

The level of significance of the difference between officers and privates is reported before the slash [/]. The level of significance of the difference between officers and sergeants is reported after the slash.

Rank makes a difference, both in regard to civil and military religion. Yet that difference is primarily between the privates and the two other rank groups. Thus, as already shown, there is a highly significant difference between privates and sergeants. Likewise, privates also differ significantly from officers. Sergeants and officers, however, do not seem to differ.

These observations do not support the hypothesis that the exposed position of the officers makes them differ radically from the rank and file. On the contrary, the results seem to suggest that the privates constitute the group of outliers. Yet just like we have seen in the above in regard to gender and political affiliation, this changes when exposure to combat is held constant.

Table 11.14: Rank and distribution of civil and military religious vocabularies by type of service

Type of service	Rank	Total number of posts	Civil religious posts	Military religious posts
Non-combat	Private	265	0	4
			0.00%	1.51%
	Sergeant	872	43***	78***
			4.93%	8.94%
	Officer	415	10*/*	24*/(0.050)
			2.41%	5.78%
	Subtotal	1552	53	106
			3.41%	6.83%
Combat	Private	321	6	16
			1.87%	4.98%
	Sergeant	209	14*	20*
			6.70%	9.57%
	Officer	756	41*/ -	75*/ -
			5.42%	9.92%
	Subtotal	1286	61	111
			4.74%	8.63%
Total		2838	4.02%	7.65%

Pearson's Chi-square indicates the difference between the observed values within the groups.

\*\*\*=p<0.0005, \*\*=p<0.005, \*=p<0.05.

(0.0-) insignificant but p<0.1 (p-value in parenthesis).

The level of significance of the difference between officers and privates is reported before the slash [/]. The level of significance of the difference between officers and sergeants is reported after the slash.

As far as the group of non-combat soldiers is concerned, the table still shows a significant difference between the three rank groups. In fact, whereas there was no difference between sergeants and officers in the initial examination of the effect of rank, Table 11.14 clearly shows that non-combat sergeants use civil and military religious vocabularies of motive significantly more than non-combat officers do. That which ought to be noted here, however, is that the clearly significant differences between the rank groups are all diminished when we turn to the soldiers who have been exposed to combat (except for

the difference between privates and officers, which remains moderately significant for both groups).

Furthermore, closer examination of the relationship between combat and non-combat soldiers within each rank group reveals that the non-liberal male sergeants analysed here only refer slightly – and only insignificantly – more to either form of implicit religion if they have been exposed to combat. This is in accordance with the observation made above, i.e. that the effect of political affiliation is strongest within the group of sergeants. Despite the fact that controlling for combat experience reduces the difference between privates and sergeants, Table 11.12 also shows that this is a result of an increase in the references made by the privates, not a decrease in the use of either form of implicit religion by combat sergeants. Thus, political affiliation continues to be the strong explanatory factor for this rank group.

However, privates and officers with combat experience refer significantly more to both civil and military religion than do their non-combat comrades. And as far as these two groups are concerned, the observations seem to confirm the findings produced by Wong and his colleagues: for the American soldier, both national and unit cohesion (analysed here as civil and military religious vocabularies) play a role. In fact, judging from how the two dependent variables are related, it seems as though they are not only co-existing but also mutually reassuring. This correlation is even stronger for the combat soldier. Exposure to the life-shattering experience of combat calls for interpretation. For the modern soldier, this interpretation seems to be provided by civil and military religion. In the qualitative analyses above, I showed how these two forms of implicit religion co-exist in the blogs produced by Ma Deuce Gunner, Rusten Currie and Badger 6: Not only did they articulate both forms of implicit religion, they did so simultaneously. These quantitative observations reflect the co-existence enabled by the subordination of military religion to civil religion.

However, examining the distribution of the two forms of implicit religion for combat privates and combat officers also illustrates the limits of that conclusion.

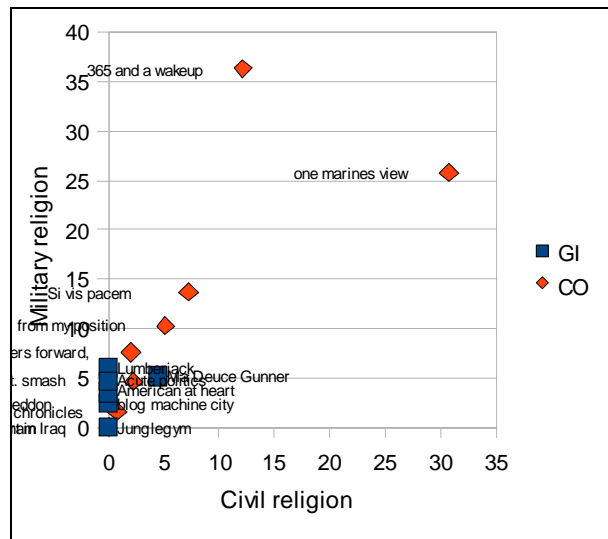
The plot shows three things. First, for the conservative male combat soldiers compared here, the use of a civil religious vocabulary seems to correlate with the use of a military religious vocabulary. This observation is confirmed by a bivariate regression analysis showing a strong and moderately significant correlation of civil and military religion for this group.<sup>155</sup> Secondly, however, the plot also reveals that with Ma Deuce Gunner as the sole exception, military religion is actually not predicted by the strength of civil religion as far as

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<sup>155</sup> Constant = 2,953 Correlation coefficient = 0,883\*\*. Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0,719.

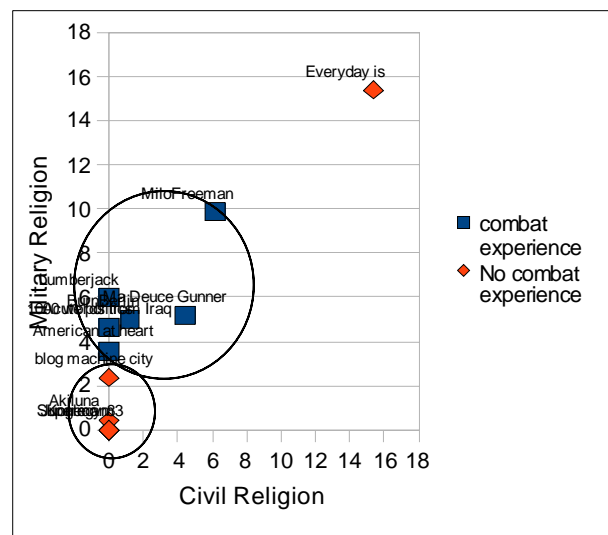
the privates are concerned. Instead, they tend to centre on the constant of the regression-line just estimated, i.e. around zero in regard to civil religion.

Figure 11.2: Plot of combat soldiers, privates and officers



As shown in the cross-table above and confirmed by Figure 11.3, privates exposed to combat score higher on military religion than privates serving inside the wire.

Figure 11.3: Plot of privates in combat and non-combat units



Thus, the general effect for the privates in regard to both civil and military religion, as observed in Table 11.14, conceals the fact that exposure to combat does not seem to have any effect on civil religion for a group of soldiers, whereas their use of the military religious vocabulary clearly distinguishes them from soldiers serving inside the wire. This group, which includes Teflon Don, is group 2, identified in the analysis of the distributions of civil and mili-



tary religious vocabularies above. In these blogs, the two forms of implicit religion do not seem to co-exist. Instead, the reign of the military religious justificatory regime is supreme. Accordingly, the analysis of Teflon Don provided an example of the continuous existence of autonomous military religion. In that sense, the observations made in the World War II studies that soldiers fight primarily for each other cannot be rejected.

Of course, these observations do not alter the fact that politics still matter; especially for the group of sergeants, and especially among soldiers not exposed to combat. Likewise, the comparison of men and women also revealed that gender plays a role. In fact, the role played by gender is strengthened – not weakened – in regard to civil religion when exposure to combat is held constant. However, the fact that combat experience remains crucial in regard to the soldiers' choice of justification supports the conclusions, especially for the privates for whom the use of the two justificatory regimes may still be mutually exclusive.

### **11.3. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have approached the data differently than in the six qualitative analyses above. Despite the fact that I have used both descriptive and explanatory tools of analysis, the aim has remained explorative, i.e. to reveal whether the differences found in the qualitative studies fit systematically into a larger pattern.

They do. The analysis in this chapter has revealed three important factors in that regard. Rank matters. Civil religion and military religion are related, but they are not related in the same way for privates, sergeants and officers. Political affiliation matters. For the sergeants, their political views affect both civil and military religion. Last but not least, combat experience matters. The prerequisites for concluding that combat has a moderating effect on military religion for the officers may not be met. However, whereas the analysis has shown that political and national ideology play a central role for sergeants and officers alike, it has also revealed that exposure to combat still makes a difference for the privates. Particularly interesting in this regard is the group of privates whose very frequent use of military religious references is not correlated to civil religion.



## Chapter 12

### Conclusion

#### 12.1. The Closing of the American Soldier's Mind

Thursday, September 21, 2006

##### **Myspace is taking over the world**

Ask the average 20 year old Marine what a blog is and they will say it's that button on Myspace (that most of them don't use) (...) These kids aren't there to journal their lives or even tell a story, this is just a platform to network themselves out, meet girls and such (I already have a very lovely girl). Gives them an outlet to touch someone outside of the wasteland that they are in (*Doc in the Box*)

New trends quickly fall out of fashion. When I started this research project in 2006, I had to explain to both junior and senior researchers what a blog actually was and how it was different from a traditional homepage or an electronic newsletter. The Web 2.0 was still in its very early phases.

As I write these lines, a new media is on everybody's lips: Twitter. Twitter is currently the talk of the town because of what is going on in Iran, where supporters of the opposition fill the streets of Teheran protesting over what they regard as rigged ballots in the June 2009 presidential elections. The authorities have cracked down on homepages and blogs. Until the time of writing, however, the protesters have managed to communicate with each other, and with the outside world, via Twitter.

Social Networking Services such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter have also had an impact on soldiers' communication. Go to MySpace.com. Browse for persons aged 18 and 19 who are in Iraq right now and you will get about 2400 hits, which is about the same number of blogs, all included, registered on [www.milblogging.com](http://www.milblogging.com). Then consider that MySpace is already yesterday's news and on the way to becoming old-fashioned. There are still plenty of military blogs to choose from, but the phenomenon has peaked. Why? Two reasons: First, in spite of the fact that blogs may contain justifications, few military blogs were initially made to justify sacrificial ideology. Instead, the main purpose of running a blog for most servicemen is to keep in touch with family and friends. That purpose may be fulfilled just as well, or perhaps even better, using a Social Networking Service. Secondly, the initiatives to restrict the use of private communications from war zones, undertaken by military authorities with reference to Operational Security, are likely to scare people away from the public sphere of blogging and into the enclosed circles on the Social Networking Services.

Blogs are generally open to outsiders. With twitter as a prominent exception, Social Network Services are generally exclusive. In order to view a profile on Facebook, for example, the owner must actively register you as a friend. As for MySpace, most profiles are publicly accessible. Even on MySpace, however, the site owner can choose to make parts of the site off-limits for outsiders, an opportunity utilised increasingly by soldiers, especially by the few actually running a MySpace blog. Thus, the practical consequence of the great escape into the Networking Services may be that the window to the soldier's mind that opened with the dispersion of public blogging – and which enabled me to analyse the discursive struggle between civil and military religious justificatory regimes – may already be closing.

## 12.2. The findings

Civil religious sacrificial ideology remains intact. Most of the blogs analysed in the above confirm the general hypothesis of this inquiry: References to the nation as a transcendent entity are present and dominant in the sample of military blogs which I have analysed in the above. However, while the rule of this justificatory regime may prevail, it is not absolute.

The qualitative analyses revealed that when civil and military religions appear together, civil religion dominates. The quantitative analysis showed that most of the bloggers included in the 39 N sample referred to both kinds of vocabularies of motive. Nonetheless, none of the military bloggers referred to civil religion alone. One group of bloggers used neither a civil nor a military religious vocabulary, and, perhaps most importantly, some referred only to military religion. Civil religion is present. Generally seen, it may be present and dominant, but it is not constant. Its appearance differs, and how it is related to other justificatory regimes also differs.

The comparison of Rachel the Great and Ma Deuce Gunner revealed that we can distinguish between two kinds of civil religion: immanent and transcendent. Both can be included in the general definition of the concept, as *symbolic meanings or actions that define national affiliation by referring to the idea of the nation's radical transcendence*. Yet as shown in the subsequent analyses, Ma Deuce Gunner and Rachel the Great do not support sacrificial ideology in the same manner.

Ma Deuce Gunner's July 4 post emphasises the importance of maintaining the *immanent reciprocity* between soldiers and civilians. His warning against pitying the soldiers can be seen as a warning against undermining the sacrificial ideology. Pitying the soldiers is denying that the social entity is sanctified by the soldier sacrifice. It is tantamount to denying the worth of their sufferings. If the soldiers do not die for the right reasons, the sacrifice cannot be valid. The worth of sacrifice is also a central element in Rachel the Great's

post. Thus, she emphasises the necessity of finding “something to live for, great enough to die for”, and states that the love for one’s country is proven by being “willing to pay the price for living in such a blessed place”. To pay the price is clearly also a metaphor of reciprocity, but here the reciprocal relation is vertical rather than horizontal. It is a *transcendent reciprocity* regarding woman and God, not soldiers and civilians. Sacrifice is not a matter of consent; rather, it is a matter of faith (or fate). Therefore, she can both emphasise the importance of “finding that one thing” worth dying for while doubting that those who have paid the ultimate price will subsequently think that it was worth it. Ma Deuce Gunner sees his sacrifice as a re-enactment of the sacrifices of the past; as a way of continuously sanctifying the nation. Rachel describes the sacrifice in terms of an act of repayment to God. She believes in the sacrifice, but her statements can hardly be seen as supporting the sacrificial ideology.

In Rusten D. Currie’s July 4 post, both immanent and transcendent elements of civil religion are present. Like Ma Deuce Gunner, Currie also emphasises the notion of reciprocity between soldiers and civilians. Currie’s blog also has a strong emphasis on military religion and the idea that the soldiers are also part of another transcendent community of sacrifice. Like Ma Deuce Gunner, however, Currie also subordinates this element of implicit religion to the general ideology of civil religion. In expressing this ideology, by stating that “[t]he tree of freedom has been watered with the blood of patriots”, Currie even comes close to manifestly articulating what I have defined as the latent purpose of the sacrifice: With his death, the soldier proves that something is worth dying for.

The perception of patriotism is crucial in this regard. In the analysis of Rachel the Great, I distinguished between nationalism and patriotism, and whereas I saw immanent religion as a subset of nationalism, the implicitly religious equivalent of patriotism was defined as transcendent civil religion. When Currie sees the soldier’s death as a patriotic act, his firm belief in the course, emphasised by his associating the war in Iraq with the “tree of freedom”, means that he and Rachel perceive patriotism differently. Nevertheless, according to Currie, civil religion is not merely immanent civil religion. America is likened to a mother who has been bestowed with the grace of God – clearly a vertical relationship. Likewise, in accordance with the republican notion of patriotism, Currie associates the universal concept of freedom, *libertas*, with a particular place, the *patria*. His national affiliation is articulated as belief in freedom; to worship that the citizens were “born free”, from the womb of mother America, the death of the soldier will nurture the “tree of freedom”.

This idea of patriotism is also clearly expressed by the other officer in the qualitative data set, Badger 6. This is particularly seen in the quotation from Ronald Reagan in the footer of his blog. Here, the universal, the transcendent, also meets the particular, the immanent: Freedom cannot be taken for granted. Freedom must be defended. And freedom can only be realised by its actual existence, as real freedom in a real, particular, place. Likewise, both immanent and transcendent elements of civil religion can be found in Badger 6' blog. In fact, he re-articulates the ideal-typical junction of the transcendent and the immanent: worldly asceticism. No explicit mention of God is to be found in *Badgers Forward*; or even, as Rachel the Great expresses, of blessings (he only uses the word when quoting others). Nonetheless, as shown by the implied references to an unseen power of fate, an element of divinity is nevertheless present. If it is God, it is as “Deus Abscondicus”, as a – literally – transcendent God. And as in classical Puritanism, the faith in a radically monotheist, transcendent God can only be expressed by a devotion to the immanent: to serve is to honour the fallen; to establish a horizontal relationship between the sacrifice of the dead and the duty of the living.

Obviously, patriotism is an empty signifier. Whereas Rusten Currie embraces the notion that the blood of patriots sanctifies America's course for freedom, there is a fundamental ambivalence in the perception of patriotism in *Misoldierthoughts*. On the one hand, Zack rejects the notion that individual sacrifices can be justified by referring to collective benefits. Instead, he claims, like an American Job, that the main purpose of the Iraq war is to create a “beautiful war memorial”; a place of worshipping the nation. On the other hand, Zack bewails the post 9-11 watering down of true patriotism. Today, the term has been captured by those who have never given more for their country than the price of a bag of “Patriot's Choice bottled water”. “The true patriots”, however, “are people who exercise their rights”. While this notion of patriotism is more lax than Rusten Currie's sacrificial ideology, it nevertheless implies the existence of a true patriot. Likewise, his derailing of national mythology, his attack on this particular sacrificial ideology, should not necessarily be perceived as an attack on the worth of sacrifice as such. His outrage with the stop-loss policy implies the notion that the Army has profaned his rights as a soldier; the notion that duties in general should be honoured. His criticism of the injustice of the war in Iraq implies the notion that wars in general ought to be just.

The four cases studied in the first part of the qualitative analyses were chosen to answer the question of whether civil religion is present and dominant in military blogs. Badger 6 and Teflon Don were analysed in order to shed light on the significance of rank and the impact of exposure to combat:

The comparison of two soldiers sharing all of the fundamental attributes examined in this context, except for rank, enables an examination of the how that variable affects their views. The analysis of the two blogs at length enables an examination of how these views develop. I therefore also use another analytical strategic approach in the second part of the qualitative analyses. In the first part, I emphasised the articulation of *identity narratives* in stories of belonging as part of the general notions of sacrifice. In the second part, I centred on *event narratives* – real-life occurrences recounted by the deployed serviceman – on sacrifice experienced.

Military blogging is a narrative genre, and milblogs can be analysed as narratives. A milblog tells a story: a story with a beginning, a middle and an end; a story in which the actors relate to each other structurally in ways comparable to narratives proper, e.g. Russian folk tales. Even though the blog is a network media in which the reader also plays an active role in developing the plot, its structural frame and the process of plotting entail reading it as a narrative, i.e. with sequence and meaning. Last, but not least, the serviceman's deployment is a journey, and journeys share a fundamental trait with both narratives and ritual descriptions: the structural move "there and back again", from one equilibrium to another.

Teflon Don and Badger 6 were deployed together. They know each other. They refer, and link, to each other. During the crisis, when the company lost three men, Badger 6 keeps the readers updated about how Teflon Don is doing. Despite these similarities, however, they perceive the deployment differently and relate differently to the radical experiences they go through: Badger 6 is an officer. He focuses on duty. Components of organic solidarity are strongly accentuated in his blog, and his world view can best be described in terms of a secularist subset of radical monotheism. Teflon Don is a private. He is very emotional, elements of mechanic solidarity are much stronger in his posts, and his world view is predominantly dualist. Most importantly: Whereas civil religion is strongly articulated in the Badger 6 blog, it is virtually absent in Teflon Don's writings. Instead, he focuses on the military brotherhood, here and beyond.

When exposed to the shocking experience of losing three men, Badger 6 reacts as expected. He emphasises the importance of maintaining professionalism; however, his ideals seem shattered. After the losses, Badger 6 no longer focuses on the fight for freedom but on simply getting the rest of his men home in one piece. Teflon Don is also strongly affected by the losses. Two of his friends were among the casualties, and his emotional focus is reinforced by a death drive and lust for revenge. Contrary to Badger 6, Teflon Don did not seem to be an idealist from the outset. After the tragic events,

however, he becomes more focused on the actual contributions of their mission than was previously the case.

### 12.3. Combat Motivations among Ground Troops<sup>156</sup>

T U E S D A Y , S E P T E M B E R 2 0 , 2 0 0 5

#### **On Killing**

I remember back in Baghdad in 2003 when the 1st Armored Division had just arrived. I was in line at the PX (post exchange, it is the army's version of Walmart) and I overheard two soldiers from the 1st Armored Division talking about how they couldn't wait until they had killed someone. What kind of desire is that? I felt sick.

I had already killed and I remembered a quick rapid fire succession of feelings upon learning just how many my platoon and I had killed. First I felt glory, then sickness, and now I have only empty sorrow...

That day so long ago I didn't say anything to them, those two soldiers. I did pray that they never got their wish because they did not know what it was they were asking for (POSTED BY ZACH ATTACK AT 9:34 AM 45 COMMENTS)

*misoldierthoughts*

The qualitative analyses suggest that gender, political affiliation, military rank and exposure to combat all affect how the soldier exercises civil and military religion. This is confirmed in the quantitative analyses. Among the bloggers in my sample, men use a civil religious vocabulary of motive more readily than women, and rank and political attitude seem to interact with the use of both kinds of implicit religion: Conservative sergeants refer more to both civil and military religious vocabularies than liberals and conservatives among the lowest enlisted ranks.

Whereas political affiliation seems to be most important to the NCOs, the crucial factor regarding the lower enlisted ranks and officers alike proved to be combat experience. Nonetheless, as shown in the juxtaposition of Teflon Don and Badger 6 and as partly confirmed by the quantitative analyses, these two groups have fundamentally different perceptions of duty and comradeship, as well as fundamentally different ways of being affected by exposure to combat. Teflon Don is particularly interesting in that respect, because his profile fits the group of lower-ranking combat soldiers who never refer to civil religion. The form of implicit religion which Teflon Don refers to is military religion, described in the above as *symbolic meanings or actions that define*

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<sup>156</sup> The title of this section is taken from Chapter 5 in *The American Soldier*. The chapter was written by M. Brewster Smith with the assistance of Robin M. Williams. The findings reported in it summarise what is probably the most important conclusion of the study: in combat, only the buddy counts.



*membership of the military society by referring to the idea of the radical transcendence of the military unit.* Thus, in the poem “Halls of Valhalla” dedicated to his lost friends, Teflon Don describes the community of deceased warriors as a world of unto itself, which also transcends the boundaries of death.

This brings us back to the classical studies of soldier motivation. The combat soldier fights for the man next to him; not for the nation, not for higher ideals, but for his buddy. The reciprocity between combat soldiers can be articulated as unit cohesion, as a resort to interdependency in a Hobbesian state of “Warre”; or it can be expressed as a full-grown common conscience enabled by the establishment of a religious superstructure. In either case, it provides us with an empirical instance that draws the presence and dominance of civil religion into question. This does not mean that the results from the research carried out by Wong and his colleagues in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom should be rejected. In accordance with Wong’s observations, many of the bloggers I have analysed actually refer to both higher ideals and unit cohesion.

However, assuming that my observations of justifications in military blogs are valid – not only in regard to this sample, but also, more widely, in regard to how different justificatory regimes are interrelated in soldier justifications in general – I have shown that the relationship between military and civil religion is not constant. Military religion can exist as a manifest form side-by-side with civil religion; but only as long as it is subordinated to it. Conversely, if military religion is articulated as an autonomous form of sacrificial ideology, then today, as in World War II, the two remain mutually exclusive for the American Soldier in combat.

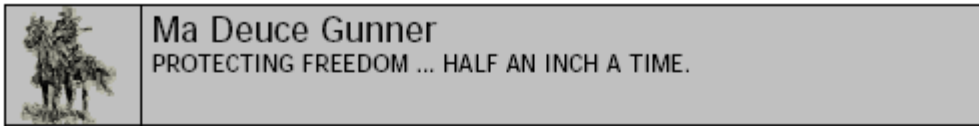
I have claimed above that the latent function of sacrifice is to prove that something is worth dying for; a function which must necessarily be maintained in order to transfer contingent violence into meaningful violence. All of the participants in the sacrifice, including the victims, must consent to the sacrificial ideology, because only then can the latent reason remain latent, remain functional. However, both Zack’s analysis in *misoldierthoughts* and Teflon Don in *Acute Politics* showed that this is not necessarily the case for combat soldiers exposed not to contingent but actual violence. For Zack, combat has led to disillusionment. He has lost his faith in the sacrificial ideology. For Teflon Don, exposure to violence instead leads to an alternative ideology; to the articulation of an alternative myth of a military community with its own beliefs and rituals. Entailed in this myth is not only the potential danger of undermining sacrificial ideology but of the development of combat soldier pretorianism in the professional military.

In most of the cases analysed above, this is not very likely. Especially among the officers, military religion is subordinated to civil religion. Nevertheless, the existence of the autonomous faith in the military presented in this explorative study demonstrates the need for further systematic enquiry regarding the effect of exposure to combat for the lower enlisted ranks. Combat still as an effect. The impact of combat on the choice of justificatory regime therefore still needs to be studied.

The great defect of this study has been the limited knowledge about the background of the frontline bloggers, because it has reduced the number of possible factors to control for. Nevertheless, even with knowledge of only a handful of factors, I have still been able to explain much of the variation in the examined cases. To study systematically the effect of these factors in general, and of combat experience in particular, we may need to supply this study with traditional tools of inquiry. By means of qualitative interviews and quantitative large N-surveys we can use more advanced mechanisms of control and might gain further insight into the factors determining soldier justifications. My hope is that I, by conducting in-depth studies of the justificatory regimes in frontline blogs, have facilitated such research in the future, substantially as well as methodologically: I have pointed to the need for further studies in the effect of exposure to combat, especially among the rank and file, and by revealing systematic differences in the soldiers' own construction of justificatory regimes in frontline blogging, I have provided tools necessary for conducting such studies.

# Appendices

## Chapter 5



**Monday, July 04, 2005**

### **HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY**

Happy Independence Day, All...

Today our nation celebrates its independence from tyranny. We celebrate our freedoms gained and maintained by the blood of men and women who stood to defend their countrymen, their republic, their liberty. We hoist our colors proudly, launch our fireworks powerfully, and sing our anthem vigorously. We remember our Founding Fathers, who risked their lives, families, homes and their entire way of life to create a new nation.

Today I write from the sands of Iraq, in which we now endeavor to secure a new democracy. There have been great steps towards freedom here in Iraq, and many more are needed. We have given these people a great chance at democracy. Let us hope that they will be able to celebrate, in the future, as we do now.

So, enjoy your BBQs, your family picnics, city parades and fireworks shows. Play some John Philip Sousa, for me, will you? And, on this day, feel NO pity for me and my men. We proudly stand to defend the freedoms you celebrate today. Many people ask, "What can I do to support the troops?" Do this: Enjoy your freedoms, abuse them not, and pray for the prosperity of our nation, wisdom for our leaders, and safety for our soldiers. Eat with your families, drink with your friends, play with your kids. That would give all of us who wear a uniform of the Armed Forces of the United States the greatest pleasure today. Enjoy yourselves, that's why we do it.

SCOUTS OUT!!!!

MDG....OUT.

*posted by MDG @ 5:27 AM 12 comments links to this post*

## EVERYDAY IS GROUNDHOG DAY IN IRAQ

A CHRONICLE OF EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF A FEMALE MARINE STATIONED IN CAMP FALLUJAH, IRAQ. THE TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, EXHILARATION AND TOTAL EXHAUSTION OF A YEAR LONG DEPLOYMENT. THIS IS MEANT FOR PERSONAL CLEANSING MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, SO I WILL HAVE TO BEG THE PARDON OF THOSE UNLUCKY FEW WHO WILL STUMBLE ON MY DIATRIBE DURING A SEARCH FOR WORTH WHILE READING MATERIAL.  
HEMMINGWAY I AIN'T.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2005

### **Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for.**

I really like the quote in the title. If only we could all find that one thing. Why am I out here? I don't believe in this cause enough to die for it. I guess I believe it my country though and support it and you can't just say something like that. You can't pick and choose when you will or wont love your country. Either you do or you don't and I guess those that do are willing to pay the price for living in such a blessed place. I really think America is the most beautiful country in the world and although it's not perfect, it's the fact that we keep trying that matters most. I wonder if those that have paid the price though would look back from where they are and say it was worth it.

I don't know why but today I am feeling so alone and trapped. I go through really big mood swings out here. There are times when I am perfectly happy to be out here and then there are times when it feels like the walls are pressing in on me and I just want to be able to get out and be with loved ones. Today is one of those days where I definitely don't write my parents or call home, because they would worry about me. I think it's just normal to every once in a while be hit by the realization of where I am at, what I am doing and it makes me feel so separated from everyone, not only by distance, but also because the people who are out here with me will move on and yet they are the only ones that will really understand the experience. I keep my chin up for the most part and I make the best of it..... I always do no matter where I am at and you would think I

would be use to this by now. I think since I came back from R&R it's been harder on me. It made me realize how fake people can be out here and it made me miss the real world. Everyone leans on each other, so for the most part everyone acts like they are your friend, when in reality if you weren't trapped out here with them, you would never talk to them and you both know it. It makes you miss your real friends and real relationships. I am just feeling low and I know that tomorrow I will wake up and feel much better and that maybe I just need to drink more water and get more sleep. I miss home. I miss my family. I wonder to myself if I should have gone home and visited them. I miss my best friend and I want to give them all a big hug. I feel like I have changed out here so drastically that when I get home, things wont be the same at all. What's funny, is besides this, I also keep a journal that I write REALLY personal stuff in and I haven't written in that since I got back. I just don't have the heart to. I guess for reasons that I can't name over the internet, I am just brokenhearted. Completely broken hearted and disappointed. I haven't been writing on here when I feel like this, but I guess I realized that it's going to give the misconception that everything is always just peachy over here with me and that it's not that bad. For the most part it isn't, but it can be really challenging out here from time to time too. There are such huge ups and downs and the roller coaster of it all is exhausting. One day I could be attending a memorial service for a fellow Marine and the next minute I am expected to just brush it off and keep doing my job. My job entails dealing with people everyday and being persuasive and convincing people to stay in the Marine Corps and sometimes I just don't think I should be talking to anyone. Anyways, tomorrow I will be better so don't fret. Just one of those days that you should have never rolled out of the sheets is all and the rest of the day you spend it regretting that you did. Should have just stayed in bed. I was comfortable and I wasn't thinking about anything but pretty pink and blue thoughts.

POSTED BY RACHEL THE GREAT AT 5:08 PM - 1 COMMENTS 

## Chapter 6

### *SI VIS PACEM, PARA BELLUM*

*"divide and rule, a sound motto. unite and lead, a better one."*

*johann wolfgang von Goethe*

*04-07-05*

#### SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY

---

Happy birthday dear mother, from your womb I was born free

Happy birthday sweet mother, God indeed shed grace upon thee

Happy birthday dear mother, your sons will defend you

Happy birthday sweet mother, your daughters bear fruit and life anew

Happy birthday dear mother, my home, the nation, my heart yearns for thee

Happy birthday sweet mother, cherished land of liberty

Monday July 4th 2005, this day is nearly over for the men of the 1st Battalion 184th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. In 25 minutes this day shall be a thing of the past, in time it will fade from my memory as just another Monday that I was in Iraq. When I cross it from my calendar, I will have roughly 190 days left here. This day has passed virtually without incident. For that I can only thank God, whoever God is. The air today was vindictively hot, despite the dust clouds overhead it appeared we were forced to trade the relative peace of the day for more heat. Today there were no fireworks in our sector, today no one was hit with an IED in our sector, and no one was injured. Today was a good day. Today one of my dearest friends asked me to be his best man 365 days from this day. He will be a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps. I have known him since he was a young Lance Corporal. He will soon wed, and he will soon be here. It's amazing what can happen in a year.

Today was a good day. No one died. Tomorrow is another day, we shall see what tomorrow holds. For now, I am grateful for your emails, prayers, and well wishes. For America it was her birthday, I hope she is treated well. Give her a kiss for me, if you can find the time. Let her know that you love her as much as I do. I have spent a lot of time away from her over my 17 years of service, and despite all the pain, suffering and heartache; I'd do it all over again if she so asked.

Today was a good day, no one died. We watched the news, and joked with one another, silly pranks were all around, a news paper article displaying Turkish wrestling was plastered on Murph's door. CPT A, posted a "Cartman" likeness near the Intel shop and the name tag said MAJ K, and it demanded that we " Respect his A U T H O R I T I E!!" I had a crude message from Thunder 6 on my keyboard when I walked into the office.

Happiest of birthdays America, fly your colors with pride. Hang the stars and stripes from your homes, in your garages, stand tall as they pass you by. On this day, there should be no Partisan politics, on this day we are all Americans, who owe much to few. Today our patrols suited up and rolled out, today they as I watched them roll by as I stood on the street watching them roll by, I realized something, those kids are the best. Today they earned "our" freedom, so enjoy it. On this day appreciate that there are more important things than us as individuals, on this day; from many...one.

Today was a good day.

Semper Fidelis, War, or something like it

Rusten Currie

2005.07.04 in | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(12\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

## A Soldier's Thoughts

Just a US soldier in Tikrit Iraq and his thoughts on life, family, the stop loss, and other insights.\*\*\*\*DISCLAIMER\*\*\*\* In accordance with AR 600-20, para 5-3(1)(a), ALL opinions expressed on this blog are those of myself in my private capacity and not as a representative of the DoD, DA, or any particular element of the Army By viewing this site you accept and agree to this disclaimer in the use of any information accessed in this website.

**Thursday, September 15, 2005**

### *The Patriot*

I remember when it used to mean something to have a flag. When it wasn't just the popular thing to do. Now you wear a flag lapel pin and it really doesn't mean much. Just go to your local supermarket for proof. There you can find things like Patriot's Choice bottled water and red white and blue chips.

A patriot is not just someone waving a flag or some sharply dressed business man with a flag tacked on his suit jacket. The patriot is known for their actions. The patriot doesn't have to shout it out from the tops of buildings or through the bullhorn of the media.

Take a look at the Patriot Act. Where once US citizens had privacy they now have a catchy term, an oxymoron... What kind of person must reiterate how patriotic they are by using such lovely names. Names like Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. I thought you were supposed to endure hardships, not freedom. Perhaps you can tell me what kind of person that would be.

The true patriots are people who exercise their rights. They are the voters (yes all of them, not just the liberals). They are the people who make America work. People like the fireman and policeman, the people who bring you your mail, doctors, and teachers. They are all those things you wanted to be when you were little. They are the scientists, the farmers, and yes, even the soldiers.

I say only this in closing, they can call it any number of patriotic names, but let them pry your rights from your All American hands only when you are dead. To

trample and walk so blatantly on American rights is not the action of a patriot, and let no one tell you otherwise.

posted by Zach Attack at 7:39 AM 53 comments



## Chapter 7

# EVERYDAY IS GROUNDHOG DAY IN IRAQ

Friday, December 16, 2005

In response to an interesting post I just got.....

Not more than 10 minutes after I had posted my last post, I received an interesting comment.

I am going to quote him, as he quoted me....

I had posted earlier "it's the fact that we keep trying that matters most."

He commented: "it's the fact that we refuse to understand the fact that EVERYONE keeps trying that perpetuates war, and probably your inner conflict."

It lead me to ponder if everyone in fact continues to try. Do we try hard enough?

While I was in Cpls course, the instructor led us in a discussion about why we are out here and whether or not we should just go home. The response from the class was interesting. A lot of Marines felt that we were butting in where we didn't belong. That we need to mind our own business and let other countries worry about themselves and fight their own battles. That we are staying and helping a country that no longer wants our help or us here at all. I disagreed and this is why. I will be the first to tell you that when it comes to politics, I am not exactly a scholar. I don't really watch the news too much. I joke and say that if I watch the news then it is like peeking before Christmas and I would much rather be surprised by the next round of deployments rather than following all the different tragedies all over and wondering which one I will end up helping with. That's no fun. I am no idiot though. I have been out here long enough to know first hand a little bit about Iraq and it's people. I have been out to the city's. I have talked to the locals here. I keep myself just informed enough to be able to make informed judgments without driving myself crazy. The people here both want and need us. The representatives they currently have, in my opinion, are not very good representatives of the local populous. The people here are dirt poor and live in fear all the time. Family is the most important thing to them. They lost faith in their government and it's ability to take care of them a long time ago. Local Sheiks run things around here.... more like the mob ran old Chicago. When Saddam fell out of power, these local tribesmen saw this as an opportunity. They were in power before and men who have had power are never happy until they have it again. The tribesmen want the US out because then it allows them to be as corrupt in their decision making as they would like. They can hire everyone in there families in political offices and government jobs and we would be back where we started. We are here to guide these people. The citizens of Fallujah are largely appreciative of our efforts. They know that we are hear trying to make it safer for them. Women have come up to me and given me hugs and pinched my cheeks. Men have come up to me to shake my hand and then tell me I am too pretty to be here and that I need to go home and make babies. I don't take offense to this, because I know that in there culture, having children is the most important thing you can do. As a whole the people are genuine and interesting and educated. I guess college was free out here. But this country is a shit hole if, if you would pardon the expression. It is hot as hell in the summer. Gets cold as hell at night. The dirt is like a fine power clay mixed with sand. If it were all sand, then it wouldn't have the sand storms that they have. When it rains, which it rarely does, everything turns into this horrible sucking mud. This is the only place that I know of that smells worse after it rains. After the dust settles and isn't clogging your nose, you can smell the filth in the air. The people live in complete poverty for the

most part. It makes you wonder why anyone would want to stick around and fight for a place like this. I would just leave. I would take the wife and Ali 1, Ali 2, Ali 3, little Habib, and junior and the goat and leave. But the people love their country. Maybe because they have fought so hard for so long that they don't want to give up. Who knows. The thing Americans don't realize though, when they talk about pulling out is this. Right now this country is weak. It can't police it's own streets let alone defend its borders. If we pull out, that would leave it open to invasion and all we have done is set them up for failure.

I think it is amazing how far they have come. I am no history buff, but if you think about how long it was between when we declared our independence and when we actually had a functioning government and constitution, I think it was something like 13 years, right? Give or take? It has been only a little over 3 years.

I know that sometimes what people want and what they need are two different things. Does that mean we are playing daddy right now, .... maybe. There are more things at stake here then right or wrong or politics or my life. There are many many lives at stake. How much is it worth to ensure that the adorable little girl that came up to me and gave me a hug and kiss and thanked me, is alive tomorrow. How much is her happiness worth? Is it worth any less than that of an American child? I know that we can't save everyone. I know that there is suffering everywhere. But you have to pick and choose your battles. This is the one we have drawn. We can't give up because by giving up, we are giving up on much more than our policies. We are throwing living, breathing individuals to the wolves.

Anyways, to answer the question though that was posed.... I don't think that everyone tries. If we did then I don't think that we would be the only ones so invested in this war. We are not the only ones with assets enough to make a difference. Why are we the ones that are laying our lives on the line? At some point, you have to decide what you believe in and stick by it and put up or shut up. I am sick of people crying about all the problems of the world. We can all do so much. We are not just one person trying to make a difference. You are one person, but I idea is bigger than yourself. If everyone did something to make the world better, to help human suffering, if we all tried more, then they could put me out of a job. War is caused by human suffering. It is caused by injustice. It is caused by selfishness. Everyone is not trying.

I think though that maybe what he meant though, is that everyone is just trying to live their lives in peace. I can understand that. Everyone is trying to build a better life for their families. But no, I don't think that many people are actually reaching outside of themselves to try to help someone else and make things better. I love America. While I agree that there is so much wrong with what we do, there is also so much right. I think that America is a young country and maybe because of that, so much like a young person, we are idyllic. I think our hearts as a whole are in the right place. I am not saying that the policy makers' hearts are always in the right place when they propose things.... I am saying that the American people as a whole actually do care. When I came home from R&R, at the Atlanta airport I was greeted by hundreds of Americans clapping their hands and cheering for us. Are they happy with Bush or the politics or the idea of the whole war, maybe not. They were proud of us though, of our sacrifice, maybe because they know that we are acting as an extension of our American ideals. We are trying to make a difference out here. You can't tell me that every Marine is just following orders. We all believe in something. There are ways to get sent home, if you really want to. We all believe in something, if not in each other. I think I have gone on a very long tangent now..... the point is.... I don't really agree with President Bush, I didn't even vote for him, but he is my commander and chief and was elected by the majority of the people. I don't have to agree with his reasoning to know that we do need to be here. I don't have to agree with the execution to know that in the end, we are doing the right thing. I am not a democrat, I am not a republican. I try not to vote with any one party, but for the right man for the job. Anyways, that all I

have to say about that for now..... whew! I hope my thoughts were cohesive enough for at least some of you to understand....

*posted by Rachel The Great at [11:42 AM](#) [1 comments](#) .*

# MA DEUCE GUNNER

**Sunday, May 29, 2005**

Memorial Day with a CAVALRY Touch

## FIDDLER'S GREEN

The Unofficial Poem of the U.S. Cavalry  
Author Unknown

Halfway down the trail to Hell,  
In a shady meadow green  
Are the Souls of all dead troopers camped,  
Near a good old-time canteen.  
And this eternal resting place  
Is known as Fiddlers' Green.

Marching past, straight through to Hell  
The Infantry are seen.  
Accompanied by the Engineers,  
Artillery and Marines,  
For none but the shades of Cavalrymen  
Dismount at Fiddlers' Green.



Though some go curving down the trail  
To seek a warmer scene.  
No trooper ever gets to Hell  
Ere he's emptied his canteen.  
And so rides back to drink again  
With friends at Fiddlers' Green.

And so when man and horse go down  
Beneath a saber keen,  
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee  
You stop a bullet clean,  
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,  
Just empty your canteen  
And go to Fiddlers' Green.

I post this as a tribute to all who have given their lives in sacrifice, so that others may live in freedom.

SCOUTS OUT!!!!

MDG

posted by Michael @ [8:31 AM](#) [7 comments](#) [links to this post](#)

# WAR, OR SOMETHING LIKE IT

**2005.11.12**

## **VETERAN'S DAY**

As many of you know I am not an overly religious man, yet for me Veteran's Day is one of the most sacred days of my year. This year doubly so. Christ died 2000 years ago, and a religion was born from his death, and ultimately his ascension. Yet for me, November 11th each year is a reminder to me of who I am. I reflect and today, I found myself deeply saddened by Veteran's day. COL William Wood, my Battalion Commander, believed with his heart in our purpose here 10,000 miles from home in a strange land. He died honoring his oath to defend his nation against all enemies, he believed when I doubted. Again Duty sir!

CPT Raymond Hill, a man who in his noticeable absence I can, only in a way a soldier can, call friend. I knew him for only 3 years. His soul was gentle, and his heart enormous. He met his end trying only to help bring smiles to the faces of the children of this land for he truly enjoyed their company and saw the purity and innocence of their youth when I would not. He died believing in his cause, his end was also to a higher cause than just his own life. Honour sir! Ray's death has hit me hardest, because each day I was here, I spoke to him. Each day, I saw him, and each day his smile was genuine, and real. Like in grade school when you met someone you liked they became your friend on the very same day. Ray was like that, when he got a box from home, he shared it with everyone. Each day I see his empty desk, my heart stops, and I get a little colder.

Ray would not have let me feel down, he would have told me some joke, or given me a reflection of home, and I would have felt better if only for a minute. I knew all of our fallen, and thus this Veteran's day is even more sacred to me. Tonight I am still here, and though my hand is shaking, from fatigue, sadness, and anger. I am still here. Though this war may be increasingly unpopular, we remain. The job of the soldier transcends opinion, politics, or popular opinion. The job of the soldier is to do what despite opinion must be done, and despite my opinion here; daily I am reminded by the wall of the fallen, and the soldiers I see daily humble me just by being here. It is my honour to serve with them. It is

my honor to be here. I knew them all, I can still see them where last I saw them. I hear their voices as I past by the shadows of where they once stood. And at each memorial to the honored dead, I stood a little taller as taps echoed their memories. This war is indeed different. It is not Tripoli, or Luzon, it is not reminiscent of Foy, or Gettysburg, it is not Berlin, or Tokyo. It is towns that yet again we didn't know existed before we got here. It is towns that we still can not easily pronounce. It is specs on the ground where history was born, it is a place where far too many of our young have grown old beyond their years. It is a place where far too many of us paid for freedom with blood. It is a place where my faith in God and humanity have been shattered. It is a place where my faith in God and humanity have been reaffirmed. It is a place where I come to grips with my own life, and the possibility of my end. Yet, despite it all and despite world opinion it is a place where I have found the faith to believe in something that I am willing to fight to the death to defend. To the agnostic, or the atheist here there is more at stake. To the agnostic and atheist this life is all there is, so to be willing to risk it all, to be willing to die for our way of life to me that is just huge. I really want to believe, and despite it all I falter. Yet despite it all I...we are holding the line, and more importantly we are crossing said line, and pushing back with all that we have, so that those of you at home don't have to sleep with one eye open. Sleep well, for we are here. Semper Adsumus. I push my doubt aside and stand next to better men than me, and we move forward...together. I have wanted to do many things with my life; be a good husband, write, teach, hold office etc etc... The one thing that I have done for the entirety of my adult life I have been in and remain in uniform; what this says I do not know, but what I do know is this. Here, and now, of all the things I have wanted to be, I have always been a soldier.

Happy Veteran's Day... My mind is lost and words escape me, so I'll say this. Semper Paratus, we are always ready. Semper Fidelis, always faithful, and finally Semper Adsumus...we are always here.

RDC

# MISOLDIERTHOUGHTS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

## A Promise

There are battles which need to be fought and there are battles which serve no good purpose. Afghanistan and Bin Laden lay forgotten as if they were discarded toys left by a spoiled child.

Iraq is the new frontier of poor foreign policy and poor planning. Even the soldiers can see it. Why do you think nobody is re-enlisting? They don't want to keep leaving their families to go fight a losing battle and to die for an empty promise. The promise that somehow staying in Iraq makes America safer.

We have created a martyr factory here, and we are beginning to wade through the next Vietnam. How wrong do you want to be before you close down shop and send the troops home? 2,000 dead? Is that wrong enough? How about 10,000?

There is a field back home at Ft. Stewart, Georgia. There a tree has been planted for each soldier who has been killed in Iraq. After we returned in 2003 there were only a few trees, now an entire side of the field is full of them. My sister asked where they would plant more now that the row was complete and sadly I replied, "we still have three more sides to fill." Maybe then when we have enough names for a beautiful war memorial we can leave Iraq.

*posted by zach ATTACK AT [3:42 AM](#) [32 COMMENTS](#)*



## Chapter 8

### Badgers Forward

1 **Thursday, February 22, 2007**

2 [Badgers Down: 8 February 2007](#)

3 At 0818 8 February 2007, Team Badger's 3rd Platoon departed Camp Falluja to return to the CH-46  
4 crash site. The Marine Aviators had been recovered, now we needed to recover the aircraft. The  
5 insurgents were claiming the bird was shot down, but some reports indicated there might have been  
6 a mechanical failure. The question of why the helicopter went down needed to be answered. And  
7 the forces protecting the crash site need to be brought out.

8

9 Badger 3-3 led the way in an RG-31, a South African-designed vehicle with a v-shaped hull  
10 designed for counter mine operations. 3-3 was manned by SGT James Holtom, the vehicle  
11 commander, SGT Ross Clevenger, the vehicle driver, PFC Raymond Werner, the gunner, and a  
12 Staff Sergeant, the Squad Leader responsible for coordinating with his Platoon Leader (3-6).

13

14 They headed north, up an ASR (Alternate Supply Route) they had traveled often. They had traveled  
15 it twice less than 16 hours previously. Their destination was a road that would take them to the east.  
16 The same road from which they had found six bombs the day before.

17

18 Back on Camp Falluja, I was monitoring the progress of 3rd Platoon as well as 2nd Platoon on a  
19 mission to the south. I was anticipating that 2nd Platoon was going to have the more challenging  
20 mission, and I was working with the supported unit to ensure that they understood how we could  
21 best be employed to accomplish their goals and missions. Both Platoons were making good  
22 progress.

23

24 A little after 0900 3-3 made the turn onto the east bound road they had proceeded down the night  
25 before. Even though they had cleared this road the night before, they were well aware there was a  
26 likelihood they had not found everything the enemy might have laid. They reduced their already  
27 slow speed looking for any visual indicators that would lead them to a bomb.

28

29 3rd Platoon inched along, confident in their abilities but well aware that there were things about this  
30 road they did not know. Eighteen-foot tall reeds lined the road obstructing some views of the road  
31 ahead.

32

33 Approximately 1000 meters from the main road, a sharp turn was required. 3-3 made the turn well  
34 ahead of the other vehicles in the convoy. As they disappeared from view, 3-6 was concerned, but  
35 was getting frequent radio reports and he knew visual contact would return shortly. Then everything  
36 stopped.

37

38 I walked back into the COC with my notes ready to discuss the finer points of route clearance  
39 operations when a voice announced the recovery mission had 4 urgent surgical cases and needed  
40 immediate evacuation. It was unclear who had been hit, but there was cause for immediate concern.  
41 Even assuming the triage of the wounded was conservative, this was the most severe level of injury  
42 indicated that people were seriously hurt. Clarification came quickly that it was my 3rd  
43 Platoon. Then someone said, "They have two KIA."

44

45 One hundred yards back, 3-6 was confronted with the full horror of what happened. The earth had

46 erupted in a massive explosion and the 26,000-pound RG came into view as it rose off the ground,  
47 over the tops of the 18-foot reeds. 3-6 had his driver floor it up to the detonation site. He came  
48 around the corner and saw the vehicle broken in four pieces with the body of the vehicle was  
49 pointing back the way it came.

50  
51 3-6 called back to the vehicle behind him, "3-7, Get up here with the medic; get MEDEVAC  
52 NOW!"

53  
54 Werner, the gunner, had been ejected and was lying by the side of the road. Acting with complete  
55 disregard for his own safety, the Medic approached Werner, but it was obvious that he was dead.  
56 Nonetheless, the Medic called a Combat Lifesaver to see if there was anything that could be done.

57  
58 The Medic and several other Soldiers moved on to the vehicle to begin extracting the other  
59 wounded. The bomb had detonated directly beneath Holtom's place in the vehicle. It was  
60 immediately apparent that he too was dead. Clevenger and the Squad Leader were quickly  
61 extracted.

62  
63 The Squad Leader had a broken leg and ankle and was cursing a blue streak. One of the Combat  
64 Lifesavers attended to him, getting an emergency splint on him, and preparing him for MEDEVAC.  
65 Clevenger was in much worse shape.

66  
67 Seeing the Squad Leader was being well tended to, the Medic focused all of his attention on  
68 Clevenger. He put a splint on his leg, a "C" collar on his neck, and got him on a backboard. Both  
69 Soldiers were transferred to an armored vehicle and moved to a secure area 1200 meters back down  
70 the road to meet the helicopter for MEDEVAC to Camp Falluja. En route the Medic started an IV  
71 and talked with Clevenger as they made the quick trip to meet the bird.

72  
73 While 3-6 found himself managing an overwhelming situation, I was struggling to find out what  
74 was going on. With no Command and Control elements of my own here in Falluja, I was at the  
75 mercy of other units to provide me with information. I also had a number of junior Soldiers that  
76 were going to start hearing things and I needed to be able to manage that situation. From above, my  
77 higher headquarters was looking to me to let them know what was going on.

78  
79 My first struggle was to find out who was dead and who was wounded. I was able to do that in  
80 fairly short order. Then I needed to catch up with the wounded being MEDEVAC'd to Falluja  
81 Surgical. I was offered a ride to the surgical area, but I was so close that I double-timed it over to  
82 the hospital. When I got there, I was informed the Squad Leader was being attended to and it would  
83 be several minutes before I could see him.

84  
85 "What about SGT Clevenger?" I asked.

86  
87 The Navy Corpsman looked at me uncomfortably. I could tell she did not want to tell me.

88  
89 "Sir, he's in the morgue." I struggled to breathe as she said it.

90  
91 "I need to see him."

92  
93 "I'll take you."



94  
95 She led me out of the back of the hospital and to a tent behind an out building. She paused at the  
96 entrance.  
97  
98 "Sir, if you could wait a minute and I will see if they are ready for you."  
99  
100 I wanted to rush in, but I allowed her to do her job. I anxiously waited, thoughts racing through my  
101 mind. What would he look like? The only dead bodies I has seen were elderly relatives at their  
102 funerals after careful preparation of their remains. How would I handle whatever I was about to  
103 see?  
104  
105 The Corpsman stepped out of the tent. "They are ready for you, Sir." I stepped into the tent. There  
106 was a table in the center with a long, closed bag on the table that clearly contained a body. It was  
107 incredibly quiet, as if the tent cut off the outside world and the mundane noises of the camp. The  
108 NCO in charge stood at the head of the table, there were at least two other people in the room, but  
109 they seemed to recede into the walls. I approached the table.  
110  
111 "I need to see him."  
112  
113 The NCO unzipped the bag and rolled it back so that I could see Clevenger. I looked at him, but it  
114 seemed so unreal. Less than 24 hours ago I was talking with him, talking about plans for the  
115 immediate and distant future. My first thought: This could not be happening.  
116  
117 After they closed the bag back up, I thanked the NCO and left the tent. There was a bench outside  
118 the tent and I sank into it. My head dropped and I began to sob, lost to everything around me.  
119  
120 "Sir. Sir? You can see the Squad Leader now." I faintly heard the Corpsman's voice despite that she  
121 was standing less than 3 feet away. Her voice brought me back to the reality of the situation. I had  
122 Soldiers to care for and I would have to grieve later.  
123  
124 I was escorted into the treatment room. The Squad Leader was in a great deal of pain, but the  
125 doctors said he was going to be fine in the long run. He needed to go into surgery.  
126  
127 As I exited Falluja Surgical, I found six of my Soldiers from 3rd Platoon who were not assigned to  
128 this mission. They had already heard rumors and had come here for information. They had drawn  
129 and serious looks, they knew the news was not going to be good.  
130  
131 "The third squad leader is going into surgery. He's hurt badly, but he should be fine."  
132  
133 I pause, how do I say the rest of this? There is no way to soften the blow that is coming so decide to  
134 just say it. "Holtom, Clevenger, and Werner were all killed in the attack."  
135  
136 I said it. They knew. Shock and vulnerability spread across their faces. It could have been any of  
137 them in the RG-31. Tears welled up, and sucked back down.  
138  
139 "Can we see them?" one Soldier asked.  
140  
141 "Only Clevenger is back, but yes."

142

143 We walked over to the Morgue where we were joined by the Chaplain. We entered the small room I  
144 had been in a few minutes ago. The bagged remained closed, but we gathered around Clevenger.  
145 The Chaplain said a few words of comfort, but we were each left alone with our thoughts.

146

147 Back in the field, 3-6 was struggling to manage a seemingly impossible situation. The rest of the  
148 Platoon was trying to recover the damaged RG-31. The equipment initially intended for helicopter  
149 recovery was now being used to recover the vehicle. With the severe extent of damage, it took  
150 several hours to get the vehicle ready to be transported back to Camp Falluja. In the COC, I listened  
151 to the radio traffic. I could hear the strain in 3-6's voice, but he was doing a great job. I could do  
152 nothing for him so I just listened.

153

154 The vehicle recovered, 3rd Platoon prepared to "Charlie Mike" – Continue Mission.

155

156 The mission was underway again, the work continued. Less than 15 minutes later and 300 meters  
157 further down the road, another explosion, smaller, but still startling. The new lead vehicle (another  
158 RG-31) had been attacked. It was disabled and one Soldier was injured, ultimately requiring  
159 MEDEVAC (he is fine and back on duty), but 3-6 was faced with a very tough call to make.

160

161 3-6's voice cracked across the radio. "We are non-mission capable." I nodded with a discouraged  
162 acceptance knowing that 3-6 and the rest of platoon must feel the same. Soldiers dead and wounded.  
163 Mission not finished.

164

165 They could not, however, simply drive back. They had to clear they way back out just as they  
166 cleared it going in, this time hauling in two mangled vehicles and the broken bodies of their fallen  
167 brothers. If the next five hours pass by agonizingly slow for me, I can only imagine what it was like  
168 for 3rd Platoon marching back from the field.

169

170 2nd Platoon had returned several hours earlier and we delivered the horrible news. The company  
171 gathered together to wait for our 3rd Platoon's arrival.

172

173 The gate to the Camp Falluja is 2 km from our area. 3-6 and the Platoon Sergeant had dismounted at  
174 the gate to assist with the transfer of Holtom and Werner's bodies to an ambulance to be taken to  
175 the Morgue.

176

177 The three remaining vehicles of the 3rd Platoon came into view, slowly and soberly. As they pulled  
178 up, I called the company to attention and present arms. The 3rd Platoon Soldiers, numb from the  
179 day's experience but with work remaining, climbed down and began to unload their equipment.  
180 Their brothers in the 2nd Platoon join and assist them in getting the work done. Quiet and  
181 purposeful, they went about the business of finishing their defunct mission.

182

183 With the 3rd Platoon Soldiers safely returned to Camp, I quickly moved over to the Morgue. As I  
184 arrived, the ambulance was backing up to unload SGT Holtom and PFC Werner. 3-6, dropped off  
185 by another vehicle 50 meters away, ran up to join me. I grabbed his hand and put my arms around  
186 him. We observed as Holtom and Werner moved into the Morgue. Soon the rest of the Soldiers of  
187 the 2nd and 3rd Platoons joined us. We all went in. The tent was crowded with 30-40 people. The  
188 chaplain said a few words and then we were once again lost with our own thoughts. Minutes past  
189 and slowly people started to filter out. I followed 3-6 out and followed him the 10 meters to the

190 Surgical area.

191

192 3-6 was concerned about the Squad Leader, who was now out of surgery. We took turns going into  
193 visit him. Even though I had told him the status of the others from his truck earlier, the Squad  
194 Leader could not remember. He needed to be told again, and 3-6 insisted on doing it. From the  
195 doorway, I saw the pain strike the Squad Leader's face as word of his brothers' deaths reached him.

196

197 We needed to leave, the day was almost over and there was nothing left to do.

198

199 3-6 and I walked back to his tent. We talked about the events of the day, we revisited what we  
200 might have done wrong, and while hindsight makes it easy to second guess yourself, we had seen  
201 things this day we never expected to see.

202




203 We sat down on a concrete barrier and talked until there was nothing left to say. We were too  
204 exhausted to even cry. Rest and recovery were the only things to do. I put my arm around his  
205 shoulder and told him how proud I was of him and the performance of 3rd Platoon. We parted and I  
206 watched him step into his tent.

207

208 I turned and walked toward my room. It was all too real, and raw. This had been, by far, the worst  
209 day of my 38 plus years. As I entered my room and touched my rucksack filled with personal  
210 belongings and thoughts of home, I wondered if the families had received their phone calls or the  
211 dreaded knocks on the door. I sat down on the bunk and my heart ached for them, for my Soldiers,  
212 for myself.

213

214 I slipped into my sleeping bag and closed my eyes. I could see SGT Holtom, SGT Clevenger, and  
215 PFC Werner, but soon exhaustion crept over me and the images evaporated. I fell asleep.

216 **Posted by Badger 6 at 03:13**    [links to this post](#)

217 Labels: [Caring for the wounded](#), [Honoring the Fallen](#), [Soldiers' Story](#), [Falluja](#), [Supporting the](#)  
218 [Mission](#)

## Acute Politics

1 **Tuesday, February 13, 2007**

2 [The Road To Hell](#)

3 The DOD has officially announced the deaths of our guys. This is the post I mentioned earlier:  
4 written on the 8th and held until the brief came out.

5  
6 I reported this morning for guard duty at 1115. The sergeant of the guard told us that someone had  
7 been hurt in Falluja, and taken to the Falluja Surgical Center. Falluja. My thoughts ran wild: is it my  
8 guys, or another platoon? Who was in front today? Who was it? Right before we leave for the  
9 towers, the sergeant comes back outside and tells us that the wounded man didn't make it. I know  
10 the name- shit- it's my guys. The tip of my cigarette is glowing, but it doesn't seem to ash. Time is  
11 supposed to slow down when you're in the moment, not when you're hearing of it.

12  
13 The next four hours are glacial- slower and colder than I could have thought. The 1st Sergeant  
14 comes out to the tower to update us: It's not just one guy, it's three, and another in bad shape. The  
15 news is like a punch in the stomach. The lead truck took a hit from a massive bomb. Two of my  
16 friends died instantaneously. A third passed away on the helicopter flight back to the base medical  
17 center, and a fourth man lies badly wounded but stable at the FSC.

18  
19 The guard shift change comes with directions to go find the 1st SGT again- something has changed.  
20 I make my way to the company operations center, and find the entire staff and the few members of  
21 my platoon who stayed behind gathered around the big screen that shows the positions of vehicles  
22 on the ground. Another truck has taken a hit, and they've medevaced another wounded soldier by  
23 helicopter.

24  
25 I learn that the mission they were on was clearing the route to the site of an American helicopter  
26 that crashed the day before. The previous night they had cleared a path out so that the bodies of the  
27 crew could be recovered. Today, they had gone back to clear a path home for the Marines left to  
28 guard the airframe until arrangements could be made for its recovery and/or destruction. After the  
29 the first truck had been hit, they had pressed on to reach the Marines at the crash site, only to turn  
30 back when the second truck was hit. A Marine route clearance unit is diverted to the site, and  
31 eventually clears through. Meanwhile, we all sit and watch the screen track our platoons slow and  
32 painful progress back towards safety. I take my leave again, and go with a few friends. We sit, and  
33 begin to speak of the dead.

34  
35 One of the dead men had been a friend of mine as long as I'd been in the unit. We'd laughed  
36 together, drank together, and talked about the future. He'd got me started smoking at NTC at the  
37 same time that he was trying to quit. Tonight, I'm helping organize the things he left behind. His  
38 girlfriend of a year meets me at his room to give me another box. She's from another company; they  
39 met just prior to our deployment alert, and have struggled to build their relationship through the  
40 midst of war. She looks smaller than I've ever seen her, as if she's lost a physical part of herself.

41  
42 Under a sky streaked blood-red and angry with sunset, I carry my friends belongings from his room.  
43 In my head I can already see another sun setting over the memorial to come; the breeze twisting  
44 dogtags around a rifle like a devils windchime, and carrying once again the plaintive notes of the  
45 bagpipe playing Amazing Grace.

46  
47 Rest in peace  
48 SGT Holtom  
49 SGT Clevenger  
50 PFC Werner

51 **Posted by Teflon Don at 13.2.07 34 comments**





the semi-normal, day to day  
life of a female Marine

home blog photos us



A female Marine currently serving somewhere overseas. I like to sleep, eat, shower, and take photographs. I've recently started and never watch TV. I read lots of news and like reading about life in other countries. My dream job is to be modeling in a warm stretch of sunlight.  
More about me...

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SEPTEMBER 13, 2009

Sand Fleas



Isla, Honduras August 20, 8

This is me, looking from the wind, and also looking from the last few, super cheap sand fleas who managed to avoid getting blown away by hitting in the hollow of the boat. On the shore, these sand fleas were WORSE than the infamous sand fleas of Puerto Rican boot camp here. At least you could tick those and then bites stopped stinging after a few minutes. These sand fleas had black bodies the size of a speck of dirt and the bites lasted for days.

This was almost two weeks ago and I STILL have red marks on my legs!

Posted by [Akiholana - a female Marine](#) at 7:49 PM 2 comments [\[tag\]](#)  
Labels: [bootcamp](#), [honduras](#), [photos](#)

NOVEMBER 17, 2008

Weekly Links

Marines make war's most common use - 11-year-old building (journalist says Pacific Island visit was "sneaking").  
Ryle's visit to former island and a visit Thursday. In *Marine Corps*, the *Warrior* Magazine was the mark of a coordinated effort between the *Marine Corps Foundation's North Texas and South Carolina chapters*. *Marine's* writer, *Ray Smith*, said she wasn't sure whether the organization would be able to make her visit worth some time. *This was been what he's wanted to do ever since he heard of Marine Corps and the doctors said, "Let's something."* And they thought, "There's no way the Marine will do that," and we didn't think they would, either," she said.

Marines compete to make mess, preparing, serving food in remote rice test: On a wooded training area around Camp Lejeune, somewhere between *Marineville* and *Clayhouse Bay*, the *Marines of Food Service Company*, *Clayton Lamont*, *September 17*, *The Marine Corps*, *Weekend*. *How does it look for some time a month?*



## Chapter 11

Civil Religion has been found by running a Boolean query for the following combination of words within each post. If the combination occurs the post is registered as using a civil religious vocabulary:

*((america AND freedom\*) OR (america\* AND believe) OR (america\* AND remember) OR (america\* AND bless\*) OR ("united states"~1 AND freedom\*) OR ("united states"~1 AND believe) OR ("united states"~1 AND remember) OR ("united states"~1 AND bless\*)) AND (bless\* OR sacr\* OR fathers OR flag OR anthem).*

- The first part of the search, in the first parenthesis, can be defined as national identity.
- The second part, in the second parenthesis, limits the search to civil religious buzz words within this national identity subset.

"~" is a proximity operator. A search for "united states"~1 finds all occurrences where the two words are placed next to each other and only those.

"\*" is a truncation operator. A search for "america\*" includes words with different endings, such as "America's", "American", or "Americans".

Military religion has been found by first identifying a category of military identity (in the first parenthesis), based on the 200 most frequent words in the military posts of the pilot coding, and on the absence of these words in either idealist or national identity posts, and then by combining these with words that particularly regard military sacrifices in the Boolean query  
*((brothers OR comrade\* OR fellow\* OR friend\* OR marine\* OR proud OR soldier\*) AND (dead OR die? OR sacrifice\* OR memorial OR honor\* OR pray\*)) AND (bless\* OR sacr\* OR brothers OR memorial).*

Finally, a separate category of idealism that correlates closely with national identity can be found by searching for the following combination of words:

*(iraq\* AND people) AND (saddam OR country OR Government OR freedom).*



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## Dansk resume:

# Den højeste pris: civil- og militærreligion i soldaterblogs fra Irak

## 1. Offerhandlingens latente og manifeste funktion

Hvorfor kæmper og dør soldater i krig? Svaret på det spørgsmål afhænger af perspektivet. Når soldatens død betegnes som et nationalt martyrium, en handling som kan ihukommes med monumenter og ceremonier, retfærdiggøres hans individuelle offer med henvisning til det større samfundsmæssige gode, det tjener. Det er denne forestilling, jeg betegner som den national- eller civilreligiøse offerideologi eller offerhandlingens *manifeste* funktion. Set fra et sociologisk perspektiv er der imidlertid også en anden forklaring: Med sin død viser soldaten, at noget, samfundet, er værd at dø for. Den forestilling betegner jeg som offerhandlingens *latente* funktion.

Ifølge den franske filosof Rene Girard kan den latente funktion kun forblive virksom, for så vidt som den forbliver latent. Hvis den gøres til genstand for debat, sættes der ikke alene spørgsmålstegn ved offerhandlingens men også ved samfundets gyldighed. Derfor er den manifeste funktions opretholdelse af afgørende betydning, og derfor skal alle deltagerne i en offerhandling betragte offerideologien som gyldig: kun ved at vi opretholder troen på, at samfundet er værd at dø for, og kun ved at soldaterne ikke sår tvivl om deres offers gyldighed, kan vi holde ud at sende dem i døden i samfundets navn.

Historisk set er offerideologien imidlertid ikke intakt. 60 års forskning har vist, at soldater ikke kæmper og dør i samfundets navn. De kæmper og dør for hinanden. Det var tilfældet både under Anden Verdenskrig og i Vietnam, hvor soldater i kampenheder betragtede åbenlys nationalisme med åbenlys foragt. Men hvis soldaternes holdning ikke tidligere har betydet noget, hvorfor skulle den så gøre det i dag? Fordi i dag kan soldaterne deltage i den offentlige debat. I dag kommer soldaternes holdninger ikke kun til udtryk igennem personlige breve eller interviews, hvis udbredelse afhænger af de dominerende mediers mulighed for og vilje til at give dem et talerør. I dag kan hvem som helst, hvor som helst læse hvad soldaterne tænker og føler på soldaterblogs. I dag spiller soldatens retfærdiggørelse af krigen, hans accept af offerhandlingens manifeste funktion derfor en langt mere afgørende rolle end før.

Det er med udgangspunkt i denne problematik, at jeg i afhandlingen studerer amerikanske soldaters retfærdiggørelse af krigen i Irak i blogs med henblik på at undersøge, hvorvidt deres opfattelse af soldaterofret er i overensstemmelse med den civilreligiøse offerideologi. Projektet har således haft

til hensigt at besvare tre spørgsmål: Er den civilreligiøse offerideologi til stede? Er den dominerende? Er den konstant?

## **2. Soldaterbloggen som kilde**

Soldaterblogger udgør et unikt og indtil nu kun sporadisk studeret kildemateriale. Ligesom breve og dagbøger skriver soldaten sin blog, mens han er udsendt. Bloggen er imidlertid umiddelbart tilgængelig for alle. Tidsrummet mellem hændelserne og tilgængelige beretninger om disse hændelser er skåret ned til et absolut minimum, og læserens adgang til disse beretninger afhænger ikke af en enkelt arkivars eller redaktørs vurdering af netop denne kildes bevaringsværdighed. Der er ikke nogen intervieweffekter i soldaterblogger. De afspejler, hvad soldaten har lyst til at tale om, og de er skrevet med soldatens egne ord.

Den omstændighed, at soldaterbloggen er del af den offentlige debat, peger også på den centrale udfordring, der er forbundet med at bruge dette medie som kilde. Bloggen er frit tilgængelig, men den er kun tilgængelig, så længe nogen ønsker den skal være det. Vi ved ikke, hvem bloggerne er, og vi ved slet ikke, om de udgør et repræsentativt udsnit af amerikansk militærpersonel. Men de to omstændigheder, at blogger er et af de få medier, hvor konservative er stærkt repræsenterede, og at militæret traditionel tiltrækker et konservativt segment, giver anledning til mistanke om, at soldaterbloggere er overvejende konservative og derfor vil være tilbøjelige til at understøtte den civilreligiøse offerideologi.

Dertil kommer, at såvel civile som militære myndigheder har en klar interesse i at kontrollere informationsstrømmen ind og ud af en krigszone. Det gælder helt konkret i forhold til opretholdelsen af soldaternes egen sikkerhed. Fjenden kan jo læse med. Og med netop hensynet til sikkerhed som løftestang har det amerikanske militær indført ret skrappe restriktioner i forhold til soldaters brug af elektroniske medier; restriktioner hvis praktiske betydning har været, at netop soldaterbloggens offentlige karakter er i fare for at blive udvandet, og det kan bestemt ikke udelukkes, at personel, der ikke indvilger i den civilreligiøse offerideologi, simpelthen afstår fra at ytre sig.

## **3. Metode: case-udvælgelse og analysestrategi**

Hvis jeg derfor blot havde valgt et tilfældigt udsnit af de militære bloggere, ville der have været en overhængende fare for, at jeg uden videre kunne bekræfte, at civilreligion er til stede, dominerende og konstant blandt soldaterbloggere. Under indtryk af de metodiske problemer, der er forbundet med at dette kildemateriale, og med henblik på at kunne benytte den hårdest mulige test af projektets problemstilling, har jeg valgt mine cases med henblik på at få størst mulig variation i mit undersøgelsesmateriale. I afhandlingen under-

søger jeg således både kvinder og mænd, liberale og konservative, menige, sergenter og officerer, samt soldater med og uden kamperfaring.

Analyserne er bygget op i tre dele:

I kapitlerne 5-7 sammenligner jeg civil- og militærreligion i enkeltstående poster fra fire bloggere, der dels varierer mest muligt på de ovennævnte fire variable (samt på variablene race og militærgren). I disse analyser bruger jeg *kritisk diskursanalyse*.

I kapitlerne 8-10 undersøger jeg betydningen af variablene rang og kamperfaring. Casematerialet består her af blot to bloggere, udsendt på samme tid med samme kompagni, hvilket giver mulighed for en indgående *narrative analyse*.

I kapitel 11 udvider jeg casematerialet til at omfatte 39 bloggere. Udgangspunktet er en *indholdsanalyse* hvori jeg har kodet forekomsten af bestemte klynger af ord, som de to tidligere analyser har vist, kan associeres med henholdsvis civil- og militærreligion. Formålet er her dels at undersøge, hvorvidt de opnåede resultater fra de kvalitative analyser kan bekræftes, når casematerialet udvides, og dels at undersøge sammenhængen mellem de kendte baggrundsvARIABLE og brugen af et civil- og militærreligiøst ordvalg.

#### **4. Kvalitative analyser 1: Kritisk diskursanalyse**

I kapitel 5 sammenligner jeg brugen af civilreligion hos Michael Bautista (Ma Deuce Gunner) og Rachel the Great (Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq). De to bloggere er begge korporaler og skriver begge i 2005, men der hører lighederne også op. Ma Deuce Gunner er mand, konservativ og gør tjeneste uden for basen. Rachel er kvinde, liberal og gør primært tjeneste inden for hegnet. Dertil kommer, at han er i hæren (eller rettere Nationalgarden), mens hun er i Marinekorpset.

Disse forskelle til trods legitimerer de begge deres tilstedeværelse i Irak med henvisning til civilreligiøse forestillinger. Disse forestillinger kommer imidlertid til udtryk på to radikalt forskellige måder. Ma Deuce Gunners civilreligion er horisontal eller immanent. Den knytter sig til forestillingen om den udvalgte nation som inkarnationen af Guds vilje, og dens opretholdelse afhænger af opretholdelsen af et særligt forhold mellem soldater og nation. Rachels civilreligion er vertikal eller transcendent. Hun giver også udtryk for, at Amerika er udvalgt. Hun er også villig til at dø for sit land. Men denne opfattelse og denne vilje er en sag mellem hende og Gud. Den har intet med den konkrete konflikt at gøre.

I kapitel 6 sammenligner jeg bloggerne Rusten Currie (Si vis Pacem, Para Bellum) og Zack (Misoldierthoughts). De er begge mænd, og de har begge kamperfaring, men mens Rusten Currie er konservativ og officer, er Zack li-

beral og sergent. Hos Rusten Currie er immanent og transcendent civilreligion forenet. Hos Zack er ingen af delene til stede. Zack betegner sig selv som både religiøs og som patriot, men han er ikke civilreligiøs. For Zack handler patriotisme ikke om at ære flaget, men om at ære hvad flaget står for, menneskets grundlæggende rettigheder og menneskets grundlæggende værd.

Hvor fokus i kapitel 5 og 6 har været på civilreligionen, flyttes det i kapitel 7 til dennes, traditionelt set, primære konkurrent, våbenbroderskabet, der både kan have et rent sekulært udtryk, som udelukkende knytter sig til det konkrete kammeratskab og et religiøst, som også omfatter afdøde medlemmer af ens militære enhed.

Hos både Ma Deuce Gunner og Rusten Currie er det stærke civilreligiøse udtryk forenet med et stærkt militærreligiøst udtryk. Her synes de to forestillinger ikke at være konkurrerende eller gensidigt udelukkende, men tværtimod snarere at supplere hinanden. I begge tilfælde er der imidlertid ingen tvivl om, at civilreligionen udgør den dominerende diskurs. Militærreligionen kan udfolde sig i en åbenlys dyrkelse af våbenbroderskabets evigtgyldige status, men vel at mærke netop fordi dette våbenbroderskab forstås i lyset af et særligt forhold mellem soldat og nation, defineret af den civilreligiøse offerideologi.

Rachels transcendent civilreligion indbefatter ikke en forestilling om en sådan gensidighed, og skønt hun omtaler det særlige forhold mellem marinerne, så er det ikke uden forbehold, at hun betragter sig selv som del af dette forhold. Hun ser kammeratskabet som et nødvendigt onde, og hun giver udtryk for helt grundlæggede vanskeligheder med som kvinde at identificere sig med en hypermaskulin militær kultur.

Zack dekonstruerer forestillingen om det civilreligiøse offer. Han benævner offerets latente funktion: Han omtaler Irak som en "martyrfabrik" og siger, at soldaterofferets primære funktion er at skabe et flot krigsmonument, altså en helligdom hvor nationen kan dyrke sig selv via sine ofre. Hans respekt for andre soldater er knyttet til deres patriotisme, til deres vilje til at gøre deres pligt. Patriotisme knytter sig til ens rettigheder og forpligtelser som borger, og det forhold ændres ikke af, at man er soldat. Krigen i Irak har berøvet ham muligheden for at gøre sin pligt i en større sags tjeneste. Han har kun en medlidende foragt tilovers for soldater, der er drevet af deres lyst til at dræbe. Han har prøvet at slå ihjel og det har ikke knyttet ham til våbenbroderskabet, tværtimod.

## **5. Kvalitative undersøgelser 2: Narrativ analyse**

De to bloggere, jeg sammenligner i de følgende tre kapitler, ligner hinanden på alle punkter på nær et. De er begge mænd, de er begge konservative, de er udsendt samtidig med det samme kompagni og oplever begge kamp, men



hvor Teflon Don fra *Acute Politics* er menig, er Badger 6 fra *Badgers Forward* kaptajn og chef for kompagniet.

Blogs fortæller historier på 3 forskellige niveauer. Den enkelte post, der omtaler, hvad der skete en bestemt dag eller diskuterer et bestemt emne, kan fortælle én type historie. Bloggen som helhed fortæller en anden, fordi den binder et begivenhedsforløb sammen over længere tid. Dette begivenhedsforløb er særligt interessant som historie i denne sammenhæng, fordi det er historien om en udsendelse til Irak. Endelig fortæller bloggen også en historie i kraft af sin funktion som hypertext. Et centralt element i en blog er, at den indeholder links, enten til andre steder på nettet eller til andre poster i samme blog. Derfor spiller læseren en afgørende rolle i at sætte historien sammen.

Teflon Don's og Badger 6' kompagni *the Badgers* (grævlingerne) var udsendt i et år fra 1. september 2006 til 1. september 2007. Navnet skyldes, at de afsøger og med hjælp fra sprængningsekspertter demonterer vejsidebomber. I februar 2007 mistede kompagniet tre mand i et angreb. Beretningen om denne begivenhed, som den fortælles af de to bloggere, analyseres i kapitel 8. De to fortællinger afspejler to meget forskellige verdensbilleder. Badger 6 omtaler begivenhedsforløbet på denne tragiske dag som en opgør mellem pligt og svigt. Han er ganske vist ikke en åbenlyst religiøs person, men beskrivelsen fremstår alligevel som en prøvelse stillet af en skjult men dog tilstedeværende og almægtig skæbnegud. Anskuet i sådanne teologiske termer synes Teflon Don's post snarere at være dualistisk. Den kamp, han fremstiller, er snarere en kamp mellem gode og onde kræfter, hvori den enkelte må vælge side.

I kapitel 9 betragtes bloggen som hypertext. Igen er begivenhederne den 8. februar i centrum, men nu inddrages alle de poster, der relateres til denne begivenhed, enten direkte via links som i Badger 6' blog eller indirekte ved at betragte begivenheden som led i et sekventielt forløb, som Teflon Don gør det. Badger 6 er den, der giver læseren størst mulighed for selv at klikke sig frem i historien. Alligevel er det hans fremstilling, der fremstår mest som et lukket hele, med en klar begyndelse, en klar midte og en klar afslutning, hvor begivenhedernes betydning fortolkes og gives mening. Teflon Don's sporadiske omtale har ikke disse træk. På dette niveau udgør den ikke et egentligt narrativ, snarere en krønike, der slutter lige så pludseligt, som den begyndte.

Indholdsmæssigt er fokus i denne analyse på forholdet mellem civil- og militærreligion i de to blogs. Badger 6' profil og stil minder meget om Rusten Curries, og ligesom ham lader han også militærreligionen udfolde sig inden for rammer sat af den civilreligiøse kult. Det offerfællesskab, der henvises til i mindehøjtideligheden for de dræbte, er det nationale og den eneste måde,

hvorpå de kan æres, er ved at højtideligholde, opfylde den sag de døde for. Badger 6 og Rusten Currie er begge officerer. Teflon Don og Ma Deuce Gunner er begge menige. Men hvor de to første ikke blot deler rang, men også verdensbillede, så udlægger Teflon Don soldaterofferet radikalt anderledes end Ma Deuce Gunner. Ganske vist ser både Ma Deuce Gunner og Teflon Don sig selv og de døde som en del af et fællesskab, der transcenderer døden, og som er forbeholdt dem der er faldet i kamp. Men hvor Ma Deuce Gunner knyttede dette fællesskab til den civilreligiøse offerideologis formål, er militærreligionen enerådende i Teflon Dons fremstilling.

De to blogs analyseres som hele forløb i kapitel 10. Trods deres øvrige fællestræk gennemgår Teflon Don og Badger 6 to vidt forskellige udviklinger, udviklinger, som jeg argumenterer for, kan henføres til den afgørende forskel i rang. Badger 6 starter ud som idealist, men bliver under indtryk fra tabet af sine mænd mere pragmatisk. Fra at værne om frihedens fakkelt bliver hans primære formål at få mændene hjem. Ligeledes ændrer hans fjendebillede sig. Fra modstander til dødsfjende, fra menneske til dyr. Det, der forbliver konstant i hans fremstilling, er betydningen af pligt, men pligten ændrer fokus fra de højtbesungne idealer til den nære forpligtelse over for folkene.

Det, der forbliver konstant i Teflon Don's blog, er betydningen af følelser. Betydningen af spænding, betydningen af mavefornemmelser, betydningen af at kunne dele glæder og sorger. Også han påvirkes af drabet. Også han synes at ændre synspunkt i forhold til en række ting, men hvor Badger 6 bliver mere pragmatisk, synes Teflon Don at blive mindre pragmatisk. Han udvikler ikke en egentlig idealisme, men fra i begyndelsen at betragte såvel civile irakere som fjenden med foragt synes han at omtale begge parter med større respekt senere hen, og fra udelukkende at fokusere på det konkrete kick på en mission, omtaler han til slut med stolthed, de resultater kompagniet har opnået.

## **6. Kvantitativ indholdsanalyse**

I den sidste analyse sammenligner jeg brugen af civil- og militærreligion i 39 cases, udvalgt med henblik på at kunne undersøge betydningen af køn, politisk grundholdning, rang og kamperfaring.

Jeg har i denne analyse kodet civil- og militærreligion som tilstedeværelsen af bestemte kombinationer af ord i de enkelte poster. En klart fordel ved denne fremgangsmåde er reliabiliteten. Enhver vil kunne gentage denne undersøgelse eller sammenholde mine resultater med brugen af de samme ord i andre kilder. Desuden betyder denne kodningspraksis, at jeg fanger alle relevante eksempler, hvor civil- eller militærreligion forekommer. Den store validitetsmæssige ulempe er, at jeg også fanger mere end det. Det, jeg måler,

er altså ikke den faktiske forekomst af civil- og militærreligiøse ytringer, men tilstedeværelsen af et civil- og militærreligiøst ordvalg.

Analysen viser, at alle fire variable har en betydning. I de fleste af de valgte cases optræder der ganske vist såvel et civilreligiøst som militærreligiøst ordvalg. Men antagelsen af, at civilreligionen er konstant på tværs af forskelle i køn, politisk grundholdning, rang og kamperfaring, og at den civilreligiøse offerideologi derfor er intakt, modstår kun delvist testen. Undersøgelsen viser ikke alene, at der er variation. Den viser, at der er systematisk variation. Kvinder henviser mindre til civilreligion end mænd. Liberale henviser mindre til civilreligion end konservative, og menige henviser mindre til civilreligion end sergenter og officerer. Den afgørende faktor synes imidlertid at være kamperfaring. Med forskellen i køn som en prominent undtagelse, så reduceres forskellene på de øvrige variable, hvis vi udelukkende betragter tropper, der har været i kamp.

En gruppe er af særlig interesse i den henseende: de menige kampsoldater. Hvis denne indholdsanalyseres resultater står til troende, så udgør Teflon Don snarere reglen end undtagelsen, og Ma Deuce Gunner snarere undtagelsen end reglen. For alle øvrige grupper (og altså også for Ma Deuce Gunner) synes civil- og militærreligion at følges ad. Det synes imidlertid ikke at gælde de menige kampsoldater, der skiller sig ud ved primært at orientere sig mod det militære fællesskab. De benytter oftere et ordvalg, der associeres med militærreligion end menige, der ikke har været i kamp, men det betyder ikke, at de i nogen nævneværdig grad henviser til civilreligion. For denne gruppe er det ikke det nationale fællesskab, men kammeratskabet, der kvalificerer som offerideologi. Og på den baggrund argumenterer jeg i afhandlingens konklusion for behovet for yderligere studier i netop kamptroppers motivation.



## English summary

### 1. The latent and manifest function of sacrifice

Why do soldiers fight and die in wars? The answer to that question depends on the perspective. When the soldier is perceived as a national martyr, when his sacrifice is celebrated in national commemorations, his individual costs are justified by referring to the larger collective benefits, they serve. This is the perception I define as the national or civil religious sacrificial ideology or the *manifest* function of sacrifice. However, seen from a sociological perspective the sacrifice can also be seen as a justificatory act unto itself: by his death the soldier shows that something, society is worth dying for. This perception I define as the *latent* function of sacrifice.

According to Rene Girard, the latent function can only prevail as long as it remains latent, concealed. If it is revealed, debated, the worth of both sacrifice and society will be drawn into question. In order to keep the latent function concealed the manifest function of sacrifice must remain visible, justified, and all participants in the sacrifice must regard it valid: We can let soldiers die in the name of society, only as long as society is considered worth dying for, and only as long as the soldiers not cast doubt on the validity of their sacrifice.

However, 60 years of research has shown that soldiers do not fight and die in the name of society. They fight and die for each other. This was the case in both World War II and in Vietnam, where soldiers in combat units regarded nationalism with contempt. But if soldier motivation has not meant anything before, why should it mean something today? Because today soldiers can participate in public debate. Today, the soldiers do not depend on personal correspondence or press interviews to get the message out. Today, anybody, anywhere can read what front-line soldiers think and feel on military blogs. Therefore, today, the soldier's justification of war, his consent, is pivotal for the maintenance of sacrificial ideology.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how American front-line soldiers justify the war in Iraq in order to see whether their perception of the war is in accordance with civil religious sacrificial ideology. In the analyses I pursue three questions: *Is civil religious sacrificial ideology present? Is it dominant? Is it constant?*

### 2. Front-line blogs as sources

Front-line blogs constitute a unique and hitherto understudied source material. Like letters and diaries the soldier writes his blog while deployed. Unlike letters and diaries, the blog is instantly accessible to everybody, everywhere. The time span between event and description has been cut down to a mini-

mum, and reader access to these descriptions does not depend on how editors or librarians regards the value of each particular source. Last, but not least, there are no interview effects in front-line blogs. They reflect what soldiers wish to talk about and they do it in the soldiers' own words.

However, the fact that soldier blogs are part of public debate also point to the central deficit of the source. The blog is a media in flux. A blog is only accessible as long as somebody wants it to be accessible. In regard to the front-line blogs, we do not know who the bloggers are or whether they constitute a representative sample of American military personnel. Actually, along with talk radio the blog is one media which conservatives have embraced, and given the fact that the military traditionally attracts conservatives, this suggests the presence of a double conservative bias in the blogs. The typical military blogger would support sacrificial ideology, and we have no chance of estimating how representative his attitude actually is.

Furthermore, military authorities have clear interest in controlling the stream of information coming out of the warzone. Security depends on it, and security has also been used as the main reason for tightening the rules of soldiers' use of electronic communication. In reality the consequence of these restrictions is that the publicity of the front-line blogging is called into question and we must assume that military personnel who are not in accordance with prevailing national and civil religious ideology simply refrain from starting a blog.

### **3. Methodology: case-selection and strategy of analysis**

Had I therefore simply chosen a random sample of front-line bloggers chances are that I immediately would have been able to confirm the hypothesis that civil religion is present, dominant and constant in soldier discourse. Hence, due to the methodological questions raised by the data characteristics, and in order to actually test the strength of this hypothesis I have made a focused case selection in which I have tried to build as much variation into my sample as possible. In the dissertation I therefore study front-line blogs written by women and men, liberals and conservatives, privates, NCOs and COs, and, finally, non-combat and combat soldiers.

The analyses fall in three parts:

In Chapters 5 to 7 I compare perceptions of civil and military religion in four very different blogs. *Ma Deuce Gunner*, *Everyday is Groundhog Day in Iraq*, *Si vis pacem para bellum* and *Misoldierthoughts*. In these comparisons I use *critical discourse analysis*.

In Chapters 8 to 10 I study the effects of rank and exposure to combat. In this part of the analysis I compare two bloggers who are similar in all aspects

but one: Rank. Teflon Don is a private first class, Badger 6 is captain. The fact that they were deployed with the same company from September 2006 to September 2007 gives me an opportunity of following how the development of things affects the two of them differently. In this comparison, I use *narrative analysis*.

In Chapter 11 I expand my case material to 39 bloggers. The point of departure for the last study is a content analysis in which I have coded clusters of words shown by the earlier analysis to be associated with civil and military religion, respectively. The purpose of this primarily quantitative study is two-fold: to examine whether the findings of the qualitative analyses are confirmed when expanding the case material; to examine systematically the relation between the known background variables and civil and military religion.

### **3. Findings**

In accordance with the theoretical expectations, founded on the assumption that in order for the ultimate *national* sacrifice to be valid, the soldiers must consent with the sacrificial ideology, civil religion is both present and dominant in military blogs, but neither the presence nor the dominant status of this justificatory regime is absolute. Some bloggers refer neither to national motives in general nor to civil religious justifications in particular. Some make use of a vocabulary of motive that most precisely can be defined as military religious, and others refer both to civil and to military religion. None, however refer to civil religion only. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis showed that when the two forms of implicit religion occurred simultaneously, civil religion was the dominant form.

As far as gender differences are concerned, a theme referred to repeatedly in Rachel the Great's blog was the difficulties of adapting to the masculine values of the Marine Corps, and in accordance with my theoretical expectations the quantitative study also revealed that women seldom make use of a military religious vocabulary in comparison to men. However, the expectation that they compensate for these difficulties of participating in the military brotherhood by referring more strongly to civil religion cannot be met. On the contrary, they are also less inclined than men to refer to a civil religious vocabulary.

Political affiliation makes a difference to, and it does so primarily in regard to the NCO-corps, the sergeants. In that respect, the liberally minded veteran Zack from Misoldierthoughts seems to be an exception to the rule that whereas liberal privates more readily express their views, both in regard to civil and military religion, the opposite seems to be the case when we look at the sergeants: Liberally minded sergeants tend to say less than like-minded privates and less than their conservative colleagues in the NCO-corps.

Rank matters too. The qualitative analyses showed that officers were more prone to use both civil and military religious vocabularies than the rank and file, and that where the two forms of implicit religion occurred together they seemed to be mutually reassuring. However, another crucial factor in that regard was the exposure to combat. Officers serving in the field refer more to both civil religion and military religion than officers serving inside the wire. Exposure to combat also affected the justifications of the privates, albeit in a slightly different way: For a relatively large group of privates, exposure to combat only affects their articulations of civil religious vocabularies moderately, whereas their use of words associated with military religion is significantly strengthened in comparison to privates serving inside the wire.