

DRAMATIZING IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN:  
VETERAN VOICES FROM THE WAR ON TERROR

By

STEVEN MICHAEL DE LOOSE

Bachelor of Arts

University of Alaska, Anchorage

Anchorage, Alaska

2011

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 2014

DRAMATIZING IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN:  
VETERAN VOICES FROM THE WAR ON TERROR

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Maria Beach

---

Thesis Adviser

Prof. Heidi Hoffer

---

Prof. Peter Westerhoff

---

Name: Steven De Loose

Date of Degree: MAY, 2014

Title of Study: DRAMATIZING IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: VETERAN VOICES  
FROM THE WAR ON TERROR

Major Field: THEATRE

Abstract: Veteran written and inspired drama exists in a unique place in theatrical history. Many of the earliest dramatic writers were veterans, and many of their plays dealt with social and political responses to war. Dramatizing war on theatrical stages gives the veteran an avenue of expression for his or her wartime experiences, and it opens a space for social and political dialogue about the nature of war and its effects on veterans. This thesis examines the social and political relevance of three plays that have emerged from veterans from the War on Terror. Previous scholarship has examined the dramatic contribution of other veteran groups. However, because only a short time period has elapsed between the beginning of the War on Terror and today, a gap in the field of significant scholarly contributions to plays from this generation of veterans exists. This thesis addresses this gap by analyzing three plays to emerge from the War on Terror. These plays are veteran written or veteran inspired and each comes from unique perspectives and experiences from the war. War on Terror veterans writing about their experiences find a unique place in the body of veteran inspired dramas. The experiences these dramatists present in their plays—LGBT service, gender discrimination, and military sexual trauma—should open up a dialogue about socially and politically relevant issues to this veteran cohort. The specific approaches to the texts vary from chapter to chapter, and are based in large part on the nature of the play the chapter examines.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	2
Opening Remarks.....	2
Review of Literature.....	7
Methodology.....	19
II. A WARRIOR POET DEPLOYS: JEFF KEY AND <i>THE EYES OF BABYLON</i> ...	25
III. <i>AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS</i> ON PATROL IN AFGHANISTAN.....	51
Acts of Acculturation.....	55
Acts of Aggression.....	59
Acts of Aborted Assimilation.....	68
IV. ADAPTATIONS OF ANCIENT WARTIME TRAUMA: <i>AJAX IN IRAQ</i> .....	80
Remembering.....	88
Violence and Reconciliation.....	91
V. CONCLUSION.....	106
WORKES CITED.....	111

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq arose out of the catastrophic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The now thirteen year old war in Afghanistan is drawing to a close, with US combat forces expected to be out of the country by the end of 2014. The theatrical responses in the United States to the events surrounding September 11th began almost immediately after the Twin Towers fell. In the days following the attacks, journalist Anne Nelson assisted a New York City Fire Department captain with writing eulogies for the firefighters he lost on that horrific day. Shortly after, Nelson wrote the play, *The Guys*, about this experience. The play opened in an Off Off Broadway theatre in December of 2001. Critically acclaimed actors rotated in and out of the two roles in the play. Despite reviews that the play “has the earmarks of a first draft” (Marks), the play gives an incredibly powerful voice to the experiences of that day.

At the time of the production New York—and much of the world—was negotiating a period theater scholar Jenny Hughes calls a “crisis of democracy” (94). In those early months, as fears and uncertainties mounted, the course of democracy in the United States changed significantly. The implementation of the Department of Homeland Security and expansions in the powers of the federal agencies

to gather and collect information through the US Patriot ACT are just two examples of this change. The unprecedented attacks and the extreme loss of life proved difficult to comprehend, and the response was equally difficult and perhaps more uncharacteristic than normal. Theatre became an especially effective tool during this crisis to address and give voice to these responses. In those early weeks and months, US stages engaged with the crisis in powerful ways. By representing these responses in dramatic form, the theatre gave voice to these experiences, sometimes in metaphorical and other times in literal ways. *The Guys* gave a voice and began a dialogue among US audiences concerning the devastation and sense of loss when the towers fell.

This period of crisis continues, and the motivations behind the theatrical responses staged in response to the crisis still finds relevance on US stages. The veteran voice is one largely removed from critical attention during this crisis of democracy. Veterans have turned to theatre to dramatize their experiences for millennia. A number of extant dramatic texts from veteran playwrights of ancient Greece address war and wartime experiences. In the 20th Century, veterans of the Vietnam War similarly turned to the theatre to give voice to their wartime experiences. The plays of David Rabe concern themselves with acculturation into the military and to the experiences of the war itself. David Berry's *G.R. Point* dramatizes the wartime experiences of a GI whose mission in Vietnam was to package the bodies soldiers killed in action. Amling Gray's *How I Got That Story*, is a play about a journalist embedded with a combat unit in Vietnam. Each of these plays is significant for its dramatization of wartime experiences during a period of crisis and from the perspective of veterans and professionals who experienced this war firsthand

The operations in Iraq and Afghanistan saw a continuation in the crisis of democracy, as political parties, media outlets, and individual citizens voiced opposition to and promotion of the conflicts. The United States has since concluded operations in Iraq. At the time of this writing, the United States is nearing the conclusion of operations in Afghanistan. Throughout this period supporting and oppositional voices have taken to the stage to give voice to their perspectives. One voice that did not receive much attention from the theatre community in the United States during this period is the voice of veterans. A marginalization of the veteran voice in the landscape of theatre responding to this crisis is occurring. In this thesis, I argue for a critical engagement with the voices of the veteran population, who represent a distinct minority of not only voices in US theatre, but of the US population as well.

The genesis of this thesis comes out of an exercise engaged in while pursuing a master's education in theatre at Oklahoma State University. A dramaturgy course assignment asked class members to propose a list of plays for a theatre season. The expectation was that the selected plays would provide a considerable source of dramaturgical activity for the student. The decision to anchor a season in a group of plays that explored theatrical responses to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> influenced the initial play selection. At the outset, a number of plays covering an array of responses to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> dominated the season selection. By reading the plays, and writing short individual responses, the exhaustive list narrowed in size, but not in scope. The realization that the broad scope of plays would prove difficult for meaningful dramaturgical activity prompted a second edit. This second edit produced a series of plays about wartime experiences. The project gained focus with the decision to place the

locus of the season around a selection of plays written or inspired by veterans and about their wartime experiences. The focus narrowed even further to a season selection by and about veterans of the wars on terror. With this centralized focus in mind, the question became what veteran experiences represented a distinct veteran voice, and more precisely, how does this voice find expression through performance?

My background as a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom is reflected in my research interest. I joined the United States Navy in July of 2001; I was stationed at Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois when the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks occurred, and recall that morning in crystal clarity. The morning of the attacks, the division I was assigned to for boot camp waited outside to begin shipboard firefighting training. Two Chief Petty Officers approached us and asked the recruits if anyone had family who worked inside the World Trade Center towers. After escorting away the recruits who raised their hands, they then informed us that a plane had flown into one of the towers. Speculations among the recruits abounded, but what seemed to stand out most in conversation was the likelihood we were going to war.

Despite the best efforts of the Navy not to interrupt the isolation of recruits from the world outside as they processed through boot camp, in the days that followed it quickly became apparent that more was taking place outside the gates than our division commanders let on. Continuously tardy division commanders broke the continuity of the boot camp experience up to that time. In the days that followed, the Navy permitted recruits one phone call to inform family members of the cancellation of public access to the upcoming boot camp graduation commencement. Eleven days after 9/11, my division



and ten others all newly caped United States Navy sailors marched their graduation pass-in-review before an empty drill hall.

The transition from recruit to active duty afforded privileges heretofore denied; the day of boot camp graduation was the first time the division saw any news concerning the attacks. Two months later, I flew to Manama, Bahrain and from there to the USS Port Royal, already on duty in the North Arabian Gulf. This was the first of three total deployment in support of the US operations to the war on terror.

During deployments, I would often perform short skits and improvisations to break the monotony of long periods at sea. In the final months of my enlistment, an officer aware of my intention to leave the service to pursue a college education asked if I had considered studying theatre. The conversation piqued my interest and I soon found myself exploring theatre degree programs. I would eventually go on to pursue a theatre degree at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. In my first year at UAA, the university put on a production of Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven*. The director, a Vietnam War era veteran, introduced me to the body of Vietnam era plays. Having a fellow veteran as a professor and mentor was an invaluable source of support and direction in completing my undergraduate degree. The research path of unpacking and interpreting plays about war comes from the guidance of my graduate thesis advisor, who writes on American stage women's activism and the First World War. The interest in pursuing scholarly research on veteran voices in the theatre comes from the influence of these two professors.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Establishing the body of knowledge to explore this thesis proved challenging in the early stages of research. The recently concluded war in Iraq, and the on-going war in Afghanistan have not yet produced a substantial body of knowledge exploring the experiences of veterans in a dramatic context. To understand how veterans' experiences during war might be expressed through dramatic form, it was necessary to first examine drama in diverse conflict situations. A text that clearly stands out for its examination of the dramatic form in places of conflict is James Thompson's, Jenny Hughes's, and Michael Balfour's book *Performance in Place of War*. The book "explores theatre and performance practices in places of conflicts" by examining "grass roots performance practices" that attempt to place in context the effects of war on the lives of people living within zones of conflict (Thompson, Hughes, and Balfour 2). The authors explore the ways that theatre and performance become tools to make and unmake war. The research in this project is situated in the question, "why, how, and when do theatre makers or performance artists make work in places of conflict" (3). The book documents a multitude of individual artists and artistic groups who live, work, and create performance events in international zones of conflict. The authors break the book up into chapters that explore the practice of drama in various communities who find themselves "in place," "displaced," "in between," and in "the aftermath" of war (PAGE).

Another text that assisted the framing of this document is *Performance in a Time of Terror: Critical Mimesis in an Age of Uncertainty*, by Jenny Hughes. Hughes examines "an array of performances that caused a stir during the war on terror of the first decade of the twenty-first century" (3). In this book, Hughes looks at performances which

“played a role as weapons of war as well as performances that determinedly searched for the happy exception to the rule” (3). The first half of the book explores how terrorists and counter-terrorists use performance to enact violence on bodies. The second half of the book focuses on dramatic texts that comment on the violence of war. This book’s specific significance to this thesis comes from Hughes’s examination of several plays written in response to the British response to the war on terror as laid out in the chapter “A crisis of voice: democratic performance on the London stage” (91). The plays examined in this chapter are framed in what Hughes calls a “crisis of democracy” (94) arising from the response by the United States and Great Britain to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> (91). The plays in this chapter “engage critically with a time of terror” (93), and each of the plays explored falls into the category of verbatim theatre—a theatre form that is shaped from the words of the people dramatized on stage (Hughes 92). Hughes’ purpose was to show how the plays dramatized the voice of the characters in the specific plays the chapter examined. The companies and productions analyzed in these two books gave context in the earliest stages of the veteran voice this thesis intends to examine.

Sarah Brady’s *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: Whatever It Takes*, addresses performance practices inside and outside the context of theatre (xvi). The book approaches political performance responses to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the two wars that followed. It begins with an examination of the response of politicians and civilians in the first few years after the terrorist attacks. Brady then examines performances of protest by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in the chapter “Protests Visible and Invisible” (33), where uniforms and uniformed resistance are explored in the context of post 9/11 acts of antiwar protests. Brady goes “undercover” in “War, the Video

Game”, to analyze the US Army’s use of video game immersion as a recruiting tool at the Army Experience Center in Franklin Hills Mall, Pennsylvania (65). The chapter also examines anti-war protests carried out in multi-massive online first-person shooter video games. The book closes by again examining the political response to the war on terror seven years later with the election of US President Barrack Obama and the policy changes that occurred and remained the same after his election.

Jeffrey Fenn’s book *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era*. Fenn describes the dissimilarities in theme and substance he saw in cinema and television fictions about Vietnam that appeared years after the war ended, as compared to the plays written during and immediately following the Vietnam War. Fenn’s work examines several plays from this period to address the theatres’ response to “the social upheaval” brought about because of the Vietnam War (11). The plays that Fenn explores come from veterans and professionals who served in some capacity in the Vietnam War. In describing the importance of the plays of this era, Fenn says,

These dramatists offer the most profound insights concerning the ordeal and its consequences for both the veterans and their society . . . these authors confronted the fact of war directly and . . . their plays, which attempted to portray the magnitude of the event and its immediate and long-lasting effects on both the individual and the collective American psyche, best illustrate how the theatre eventually managed to come to terms with the devastating experience of the conflict (12).

Fenn’s exploration of first-hand dramatic representations of the Vietnam War is a major influence on the exploration of the plays examined in this thesis. Like Fenn’s book, the

plays examined in this document come from veteran experiences and from veteran inspired experiences of the war on terror. Like Fenn's book, the plays documented here have not yet received substantial critical attention.

Fenn breaks up his examination of Vietnam War plays into distinct themes based upon the overall messages that the plays seem to express. These themes are, "Plays of Initiation", "Plays of Experience", and "Plays of Homecoming". Each chapter includes a substantial account of plays selected for the significance of their dramatic potential, and their contribution to an understanding of the veteran's experience at specific phases of his period of service. "Plays of Initiation" includes several plays that examine the Vietnam veteran's experiences prior to his deployment to Vietnam. "Plays of Experience" includes several plays about Vietnam veteran's experiences in Vietnam. In addition, it includes those plays that came from peoples whose professional functions took them to Vietnam to cover the war. "Plays of Homecoming" includes several plays written by Vietnam veterans about their experiences returning home from the war. In addition, it includes plays about the struggles many Vietnam veterans encountered in their reintegration to their lives as civilians.

An interesting point Fenn makes in his analysis of Vietnam era plays is that of the Vietnam veterans who used the power of live theatre to express their stories, few had written for the theatre prior to creating their war dramas. In the same vein, the veteran playwrights in this document have little prior dramatic writing experience. Jeff Key, the author of *The Eyes of Babylon*, is a Marine Corp veteran. He has his degree in Theatre from the University of Alabama, and was living in Los Angeles and pursuing an acting career prior to his deployment to Iraq. Army Veteran Johnny Meyer had no theatre

experience before spending a summer with Shakespeare at Winedale, a Shakespeare summer immersion program at the University of Texas at Austin. After this summer Shakespeare immersion, the PhD Government Studies student reworked a novel of his titled *American Volunteers* into a stage play. His enthusiasm for Shakespeare shows through his play's blank verse. Ellen McLaughlin is the only established playwright in this thesis. Her play *Ajax in Iraq* takes its emphasis from interviews conducted with veterans and other professionals who worked in the war zones or persons connected personally to veterans. All of the plays examined in this document are direct accounts of, or come from interviews with veterans, and each play represents a particular veteran experience.

Lucy Nevitt's *Theatre & Violence* is a short but critical engagement with the performance of violence. The *Theatre &* series, published by Palgrave Macmillan, defines itself as "a long series of short books which hopes to capture the restless interdisciplinary energy of theatre and performance" (viii). The tag, "long series of short books" speaks to the extensive volume of topics the series covers in brief single reading session books. Each title in the book series explores some aspect that theatre shares with political or social issues in a wider context that makes up the human experience. The series juxtaposes social and/or political issues in the world in the context of their associations with theatre and theatre's associations with them. *Theatre & Violence* contributes to this series by examining several ways theatre, performance, and violence intersect. Nevitt's book is "inescapably fascinated with the idea of reality"(2). This fascination is presented through performance analysis of presentations of violence in performance. For Nevitt, even simulated violence on the stage has connections to reality

that make it difficult to assign it a non-real value. Nevitt compares several depictions of violence as they occur in various performance modes. The first is violence that appears in the media. This violence appears to be actually occurring and often carries with it a “spectatorial distance” (3). This distance permits the observer to distinguish themselves and their experiences from the violence they are witnessing. This is contrasted with several distinct types of simulated violence that may appear in theatrical settings. It seems no performance of violence is off limits, as fights, battle re-enactments, professional wrestling, and violence in war zones and analyzed for their performance value. As these performances of violence are explored, Nevitt situates the violence from the perspective of the “act of showing” (28). Thesis and book intersect in the investigation of spectating violence in terms of its impact on audiences. Violence occurs in several forms in the plays explored in this thesis. Violence takes the form of combat, perceptions of combat, gender based discrimination, sexual trauma, and rape. An aim of this thesis is to explore how these plays present violence, and how spectating this violence contributes to an understanding of these veteran’s experiences.

A rapidly rising genre of theatre practice is devised theatre. The book *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, explores the history of devised theatre in the context of practicing contemporary devised creation. Devised theatre is a challenging practice whose history has ensured an audience eager to watch this intriguing performance form (Govan, Nicholson, Normington 3). Within the umbrella of devised performance practices is the genre of autobiographical performance. Govan, Nicholson, and Normington write, “Autobiographical narratives are spaces where an individual’s private stories are offered up for public consumption” (57). By this, they

mean that integral to autobiographical performance is the idea that private experiences are performed for a willing public. Louis Renza mirrors this idea in his book *The Power of One* when he says that autobiographical work is a “unique self-defining mode of self-referential expression” and a form of performance that “disrupts conventional modes of presentation and reception and encourages fresh perspective on the relationship between life and art within the performance event” (61). The point that Renza, and Govan, Nicholson, and Normington make here is that the spectators of an autobiographical event bear witness to the testimony that the performer provides. The audiences in an autobiographical performance are not as separated from the performance event as they might be from a traditional theatrical endeavor. When this thesis explores the solo-performance work of Jeff Key, these two texts will clarify how Keys uses self-referential expression to tell audiences about his tour in Iraq, and how the audience as spectator stands as a witness to his story offered up for public consumption.

David Roman uses the book *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* to address the rise of performance art in response to the AIDS epidemic during the '80s and '90s. In his text, Roman defines solo-performance as “live art” by artists (Roman 119). During the 80s and 90s performance art became a tool for gay artists' to bring their voice to the people without the support of established art institutions. In the summer of 1990, the National Endowment for the Arts began a process of silencing voices—especially voices speaking out for gay and women's right—by eliminating funding for solo-performance projects. The NEA directed the attack at artists whose work did not fit into the socially correct narrative of that time. The performance artists whose grants were withdrawn became known as the NEA Four (Roman 301). Roman addresses



this issue by saying, “some earlier advocates and producers of performance art viewed the medium as radically outside of theatrical conventions” (119). In a similar fashion, Jeff Key uses solo-performance work as a vehicle for giving voice to gay veteran identity.

A substantial body of research exists on the issues presented within the dramatic texts surveyed in this thesis. In collaboration with the Department of Defense and the individual service branches, research organizations and other nonprofit groups regularly report on issues of major concern to the veteran and active duty community. A cursory glance at the pertinent issues affecting the veteran and active duty community includes veteran and active duty suicide, sexual assault, gender discrimination, recruiting trends, sexual orientation discrimination, policy changes to LGBT service, and issues relating to transitions from military service to civilian status. Pre- and post-deployment research conducted by nonprofit and research institutions have found that these issues may contribute to post-traumatic stress disorder. One or more of these issues are present and sometimes compete with one another in each of the dramatic texts surveyed in this document. In addition to the research organizations and nonprofit groups’ reports disseminate these findings to the public through media and news-related sources.

In 2011, Research and Development (RAND)’s Arroyo Center, with the support of the Office of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, and the Army Quadrennial Defense Review, presented a research document called “Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan”. The RAND Corporation regularly contributes peer-reviewed research reports addressing policy and decision making in public and private sectors. The 2011 report updates the findings from the original research conducted in 2008. At the time, the Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army requested RAND look into the Army’s total troop-

year deployments to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The report tracks the number of Army soldiers deployed in support of the wars on terror. This particular document summarizes the 2008 findings, and updates them to reflect the latest data as of 2011. RAND based its findings upon data obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center, which tracks personnel in all branches who have deployed in support of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Baiocchi 1). The research report focuses on quantitative data from the Army, but includes data from the other service branches as well. Deployment statistics are reported in total troop-years; a troop-year is any deployment period that when combined cumulatively equals one year. One service member deployed for 12 months equals one troop-year, similarly, two service members who deploy for six months each equal one troop-year. The report found that as of December 2011, the Army contributed 1.5 million troop-years to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This figure represents more troop-years in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than all of the other service branches combined (Baiocchi 2-3). The report goes on to show that the number of soldiers cumulatively deployed for more than two years has increased since 2008. The purpose of the report is to show that the active component Army retains very few unutilized soldiers, and that further deployments will come from an already exhausted pool of soldiers. An interesting finding of this report is that the number of new recruits entering the service is down, at the same time the number of service members remaining in and advancing in rank remains high. This comports with the finding that additional deployments will utilize an already exhausted pool of active component soldiers. Each of the dramatic texts surveyed in this thesis concerns US service members deployed to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In January 2009, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) released an issue report “Invisible Wounds: Psychological and Neurological Injuries Confront a New Generation of Veterans” (Williamson and Mulhall). The focus of the report is to address occurrences of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) on Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The report finds that, in general, TBI injuries are milder and more difficult to distinguish from PTSD. The report contributes a significant wealth of information about TBI, PTSD, and the related effects of these invisible wounds on active duty and veteran service members. Williamson and Mulhall write:

No one comes home from war unchanged. But with early screening and adequate access to counseling, the psychological and neurological effects of combat are treatable. In the military and in the veterans’ community, however, those suffering from the invisible wounds of war are still falling through the cracks. We must take action now to protect this generation of combat veterans from the struggles faced by those returning home from the Vietnam War. (2)

This source reports how TBI and PTSD injuries can occur. The dramatic texts presented in this thesis do not mention TBI and PTSD, within certain scripts, when acts of violence occur, the nature of the violence and the way it is carried out mirror the types of violence this report suggests may lead to TBI or PTSD.

*The Future of Children* published an article in their spring 2010 journal entitled “The Military and Transition to Adulthood” (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal). The authors examine how military service may positively and negatively factor into the young adult’s transition to adulthood (Kelty, Kleykamp, Segal 1). This transition is more stable for young adults who choose to enlist in the armed services compared to their civilian peers.

The authors begin by addressing how military service effects socio-demographic characteristics of young adults, like age, gender, and sexual orientation. They then examine how military service affects family formation and responsibilities. The article finds that a transition into family roles is more stable for military members than their civilian peers. They examine the educational and employment transitions of young adults who chose to enlist in the military, and then conclude by addressing some of the dangers inherent with military service such as the physical and psychological effects of wartime military service. The article highlights some important issues about women in the service including sexual assault and gender discrimination. The plays in this thesis mostly concern young men and women in the beginning stages of their adult lives, and so this source is returned to periodically throughout the thesis. The makeup of the soldier groups dramatized in the scripts reflects several findings from this source, issues of acculturation, and violence, especially military sexual trauma, is backed up by findings from this article.

This thesis borrows materials from a wide range of research documents. The documents all explore issues important to establishing a war on terror veteran identity. The plays in this thesis touch upon some or all of these research issues in their dramatic action. That the research into veterans' issues mirrors the experiences the veteran playwrights of these plays choose to dramatize fulfills the objective of exploring plays that speak to the post 9/11 veteran experience.

## **Methodology**

After nearly a decade and a half of a protracted, two-front war on terror, the longest combat engagement the United States has ever embarked upon will soon be at an end. Approximately 2.2 million US service members deployed in the nearly decade and a half war. The principle aim of this thesis is to look at a group of plays documenting the experiences of veterans of the war on terror. As such, the plays examined in this thesis were selected for their presentation of h veterans' issues that seem to speak most to the Iraq and Afghanistan experience. Research has turned up very few plays from the veterans of the War on Terror. The plays examined in this thesis represent some of the earliest War on Terror dramatic texts.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine several dramatic texts written by or inspired by War on Terror veterans. I selected the plays for the war experiences they dramatize. The four plays primarily take place in Iraq and Afghanistan. They address wartime stressors that veterans face when they deploy. There are multitudes of stressors that a service member may face while deployed, and at times, they may be experiencing several at the same time. The four plays in this thesis explore these stressors as they appear in several military members. The stressors appear in several different forms. The contribution of wartime plays from the War on Terror is still relatively small. The wars are only now ending and it may be some time before veterans are able to put into words the experiences they bring home with them from Iraq and Afghanistan. These plays are some of the earliest contributions to this field. The performance approaches of each play are unique. They include a solo-performance piece, a blank verse play, a straight play, and a devised play. Recurring themes emerge in each play, suggesting that the issues

stemming from the individual deployments that these veterans share in common likely exists in a greater number of the veteran population as well.

There has been a war in every generation since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Discussions involving and revolving around veteran issues have played an important part in national dialogues of each era. Some issues surrounding these discussions are perennial while others are unique to particular conflicts. For instance, the veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not conscripted into service. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans voluntarily made the decision to serve during a time of war. The percentage of female service members, both enlisted and officer, has increased significantly since the end of conscripted service. A characteristic unique for War on Terror female service member is the increased access to military positions. With greater inclusion of women in varying roles within the military structure, there has been an increase in reports of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and rape. Whether it is in the form of unfair comparisons between sexes, expectations of sexual favors for promotions, or unwanted sexual advances, the acts fall under the umbrella military sexual trauma (MST). What is significant is the obstruction these traumas place on a safe command climate. The increase is certainly a topic worthy of discussion. Is the increase in cases of sexual assault to do with the increase in the number of female service members now serving in the armed forces? Alternatively, is the more aggressive approach by the military to address MST providing victims with the assurance that the perpetrators of the crimes committed against them will be punished? The increased number of female service members has had the result of increasing female service members' participation in combat encounters. Despite continuing provisions prohibiting female service members from serving in

combat or combat support roles in the War on Terror, women have seen an increased operational role, and this has led to an increase in female service members directly participating in combat and combat support. In 2013, the controversial law prohibiting gay and lesbian service members from openly serving in the US military was overturned. This marked the first time that gay and lesbian service members could serve openly.

The playwrights examined in this thesis either are veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan, or worked with these veterans while writing their play. In the case of Afghanistan, the war is still ongoing, and the occupation of Iraq only recently ended. The dialogue surrounding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the information disseminated to the public dominated American culture during the last decade. In the theatre, a voice that went largely underrepresented is the voice of the veteran. As such, very few scripts from the veterans of these wars exist. Even with this minor complication, the plays surveyed in this thesis are worthy examples of veteran's voices about Iraq and Afghanistan.

The principle aims of this thesis are: to investigate several veteran written and veteran inspired dramatic texts from the war on terror, to unpack these texts for their dramatic potential, to situate the texts as representations of distinct veteran groups' experiences, and finally, to classify these texts as representations of an overall veteran experience. To accomplish these aims, the thesis has selected four plays on the subject of post 9/11 veteran experiences. Two of the three plays, *The Eyes of Babylon* by Jeff Key, and *American Volunteers* by Johnny Meyer come from veterans of the War on Terror. The third play, *Ajax in Iraq*, is a devised piece written by Ellen McLaughlin and the 2009 Harvard/Moscow Art Theatre MFA Acting class. *Ajax in Iraq* explored several veterans and family member's experiences. These are some of the earliest veteran written and

inspired plays to come out of the War on Terror. The plays in this thesis are broken into three chapters, and within those chapters, the thesis explores them for their dramatic potential. The chapters situate the plays into both the marginalized identity of the specific veteran, and the war on terror veteran population at large.

Chapter 2 examines Jeff Key's *The Eyes of Babylon*, a one-man show lifted from the sandy pages of the journal he kept while a US Marine deployed to Iraq. The play was selected for inclusion for its frank and open discussion of a Marine's deployment experience. Because this particular play's language comes word for word from the journal Key kept, it is the most open and sincere play examined. The journal documents his journey from the days immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup>, through his deployment to Iraq, and into his transition back to a civilian. Several recurring themes from the other plays examined here are present in Key's account. What sets it apart is Key's self-identification as a gay man. Key voluntarily hid his sexual identity in order to serve in the Marine Corps during the period of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. In the months following his return to the United States Key struggled with a number of psychological issues stemming from his service in Iraq that may be attributed to PTSD. Key's personal account of his war experience situates it securely in the parameters of a war play penned by a veteran of Iraq.

Chapter 3 examines Johnny Meyer's *American Volunteers*. Meyer deployed to Afghanistan. *American Volunteers* address deployments by combat service members. It focuses on the fears and stressors of an Army unit patrolling in Afghanistan. *American Volunteers* also addresses issues of gender discrimination and the sexual harassment of a female Army private attached to the insular, testosterone-charged unit. The



dramatizations of an Afghanistan combat veteran is similar to other plays that came from combat veterans of the Vietnam War, and specific struggles that Vietnam Veterans carried during their deployments resurface in the plays of the veterans from the War on Terror. It is telling that the issues surrounding wartime experiences closely mirror conflicts separated by almost three decades.

Chapter 4 examines Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* the final play analyzed in this thesis. A contemporary adaptation of Sophocles' *Ajax*, this play explores issues of gender discrimination, sexual trauma, PTSD, and suicide. The play was selected for inclusion in this thesis because, while it was not written by a veteran, the events that transpire in the play are veteran inspired. McLaughlin's text dramatizes the experiences of several veterans and veteran's family members through a series of vignettes created from interviews conducted by the students of the 2009 American Repertory Theatre MFA acting company. The inclusion of actual experiences alongside the fictional account of AJ, a female Army Specialist, and the title character of *Ajax in Iraq*, gives voice to several veteran's and their wartime experiences.

Each of the plays examined in this thesis represent some of the earliest examples of veteran written War on Terror drama. As the thesis progresses, the themes of the plays and the chapters they are broken into will draw comparisons between scholarly research on veteran's experiences, and the dramatization of those experiences in theatrical form. In particular, themes of gender discrimination, military sexual trauma, acts of acculturation, aggression, and (abandoned) assimilation, gay veteran experiences, and combat exposure and its effects will be examined in detail.

## CHAPTER II

### A WARRIOR POET DEPLOYS: JEFF KEY AND *THE EYES OF BABYLON*

United States Marine Lance Corporal Jeff Key made the decision to come out as a gay man on CNN before Paula Zahn and her five million viewers (Key 2003). This bold decision by Lance Corporal Key led to his discharge from the Marine Corps under the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy. Key came to the conclusion he could no longer support a war in Iraq after it became apparent that no weapons of mass destruction existed there, a defining instigator in the invasion. Lance Corporal Key used entries made in a journal he kept during his deployment to write his award winning autobiographical performance piece *The Eyes of Babylon*.

This chapter investigates *The Eyes of Babylon* as a solo-performance work written by a veteran and giving voice to an individual veteran's experience. The performance work exposes the audience to Jeff Key's experiences while serving in the United States Marine Corps. The performance begins on the morning of September 11th, and takes the audience through the events Key witnessed while deployed in Iraq and concludes with the journey that led him to leave the Marine Corps. The reason why Jeff Key's solo-performance is so compelling is that he has at his disposal a performance mode capable of both shaping communities and challenging current social issues in society. Jeff Key

served as a closeted gay man during a period when military policy forbade the open service of LGBT individuals. *The Eyes of Babylon* is an examination of a closeted gay man's experiences serving under DADT. This chapter will explore this production as a voice of an LGBT veteran. However, to position the play as only a play about LGBT service would ultimately undermine the contribution Key's work makes to the war on terror veteran experiences this thesis addresses. Jeff Key mentions his sexual orientation only at those points where his orientation is relevant to the telling of the story, in all other aspects, his solo-performance is an Everyman soldier's deployed experience. It addresses issues that many veterans may be familiar with, interactions with the Iraqi community, loneliness and companionship resultant from the months spent away from family, daily discomforts of the desert, exposure to violence and the realization of the individual's mortality, and how Jeff Key's understanding of the mission in Iraq evolved in the months after his deployment ended. Even more compelling than Key's status as an LGBT Marine in the performance of the piece, is the transformation Key undergoes from macho Marine to passionate peace activist. Key's sexual identity becomes more important within the context of his transition from a member of the armed services to a member of the civilian community. Jeff Key's veteran status, his transition to peace-activism, and his self-identification as a gay man position this performance as a unique veteran voice in the post-9/11 theatre.

To begin to understand how Key's solo performance play represents a unique veteran voice it is important to first explore how solo performance is used to define and give voice to individual experiences. Two artists who share similar performance approaches to Jeff Key, are John Leguizamo and Tim Miller. An exposure to their

approach should put into context how Jeff Key gives voice through his own solo performance. Leguizamo's and Miller's success as solo-performance artists is found in the approaches they take to their art. Their use of solo-performance to voice their life experiences evolved out of the avant-garde movement, which sought to dismantle the establishment definition of art (Champagne xi). In his extensive anthology of the work of solo-performance artists, Jo Bonney explores the rise of solo-performance art. This anthology consists of short introductions to iconic artists from respected members of the theatre community. John Leguizamo's high-energy solo performances explore his troubled past with his family. In one production, John Leguizamo plays in total forty-nine characters in a two-hour period (Mosher 306). Similarly, Key plays the roles of fellow Marines, his mother, and an Iraqi man. Subtle changes in body posture and voice do more than suggest, they allow him to become a multitude of characters throughout the performance. Both Leguizamo and Jeff Key show prowess in this ability to flow seamlessly between characters.

Tim Miller is a gay solo-performance artist who came of age and began performing solo work during the 1980's AIDS crisis. His performance piece *My Queer Body* is a collection of stories about his life as a queer man. David Roman in *Acts of Intervention* says the piece "presents cartography of desire" (146). *My Queer Body* explores homosexual identity through embodiment. "My skin is a map," he begins, and as the piece continues, he references the cartography of his body, the map he knows by heart. Jeff Key explores the identity of a veteran deployed to a war zone. Just as Miller explores the mountains and the valleys of his body, Jeff Key's terrain is a conflict that transforms him from a Marine trained to kill, to an Iraq War peace activist.

In devising a performance, solo artists take into account the audience's reception of the work, often times adapting performances slightly based upon the responses received (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 62). John Leguizamo's *Freak* played before audiences for ten months, during which time it went through many rewrites before running for twenty-four weeks at the Court Theatre in New York (Bonney 305). Leguizamo incorporates aspects of his Latino heritage into his stories of early childhood, however, the energy and enthusiasm he brings to the performance allows non-Latino audiences to share in and empathize with him in performance.

Tim Miller's work is watched by gay and straight audiences alike, the stories he performs, and the attacks against his body that he highlights are representational of attacks against other queer bodies. Solo-performance artists become cognizant of the dynamic of their audience night to night and play off the energy that they receive from them. The audiences that arrive for a performance by Tim Miller may be gay or straight, and while a gay audience member may identify more closely with the attacks against the queer body than a straight member, this does not exclude a straight audience member from empathizing with the stories Tim Miller presents.

A performance of *The Eyes of Babylon* may include audience members who are veterans of war. Much of Jeff Key's performance is about his individual reaction to deployment stresses. An audience member that shares Key's status as a veteran may react differently to Key's performance than an audience member that does not share this unique identifier. Similar to John Leguizamo, Jeff Key perfected his solo-performance over a period of months before opening the show in Los Angeles. This period allowed would allow Key to adapt the performance based the reactions received from earlier

audiences. A small number of scenes from the performance are available for viewing online. These videos allow anyone interested to see Key in performance mode. The energy and enthusiasm of Key in these videos suggests that a live performance will be both entertaining and insightful for veteran and non-veteran audience members alike.

As evidenced by the previous examples, the methodology behind the creation of an autobiographical performance is an intimate and self-reflexive examination of the author's own experiences (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 60). Central to solo-performance is the presentation of self. Many discussions of solo-performance concern the degree of fictive and non-fictive elements in the story. Several books on autobiographical performance express this notion (Bonney 306; Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 60). "Questions of authenticity are raised when fact is blended with fiction" (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington. 60). Elements that are facts and elements that are fictions are important considerations to keep in mind. Key's performance comes from the journal he maintained during his deployment to Iraq. This journal is central to the story Key tells. Its significance to Key cannot be overstated. Key tells us that when he first returned from Iraq, he struggled answering the question when people would ask him "What was it like?" He would turn to his journal and read to them from it whenever the question arose. A journal might suggest that the entries contained within it are more factual than not; however, questions of authenticity should still be considered in the examination of this performance.

In *Making a Performance*, Govan, Nicholason, and Normington make the statement, "The act of witnessing is central to the reception of autobiographical performance" (68). The authors continue by implying that the audience becomes an

active participant in the performance event. An expectation of authenticity on the part of the performer is one draw that brings audiences to an autobiographical performance (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 69). The notion that such performances include fictive and non-fictive elements in the telling of the story certainly complicates this expectation. For these authors, the idea of witnessing shapes the form and the content of what is presented. Key's performance is drawn from his journal entries. The entries that Key uses to shape and form his performance follow a distinct path that allows the audience to witness Jeff Key's transition to peace activism. Jeff Key's work as a peace activist after his departure from the Marine Corps seems to suggest that there is at least some credible level of truth to his performance. A topic that needs addressing then concerns where there is authenticity presented in the piece, and where embellishment is presented. In addition, the level of authenticity present in the work speaks to the quality of this work as a depiction of the veteran's voice. This particular play was selected for its representation of a gay veteran voice.

Only 2.2 million total American service members have deployed to the War on Terror since the September 11 attacks. The veteran population in the United States stands at just over 10 million people. As established earlier, belonging to the community to which a performance piece may speak to the most is not a prerequisite to relating to the performer's voice. An audience member who is not a veteran is not excluded from engaging with and responding to the dynamism of Jeff Key's performance work. The audience will act as both witness to situations that Key acts out, and at other times Key directly addresses the audience. The stories he shares give a glimpse into the time he spent as a light-armored vehicle driver in Iraq.

When the audience enters the stage, three boxes, one long, and two small, painted Marine green greet them. On one of the boxes sits a pair of Marine issue desert combat boots. On another box, an open journal and pen. *The Eyes of Babylon* opens to the sound of a ringing telephone and Key asleep on stage, while behind him are projected a series of images from his childhood home and formative years growing up. Eventually, Key stirs and answers the ringing phone. On the other line is his mother; she wakes him to ask if he is watching the television. After a brief moment in which he mimes turning on a television he asks, “Are we going to war?”, and she responds, “You might be” (Key 3). Key believes the purpose of her call is two-fold; to check up on her son and to seek assurance that he will protect her. Key sat at his bedside unable to move for hours after turning on his television that morning. The pictures of planes flying into the Twin Towers on a loop, the fall of the towers shortly thereafter, and the shock of the attacks left him transfixed. The events of that day, witnessed by millions of people across the globe, exposed audiences to what Christine Muller calls the “crisis of the permeable self” (Muller 45). Muller explains the permeable self as, “the experience of tension between identification with and resistance to those who are vulnerable because their vulnerability prompts consideration of our own contingent power and fortune” (23). Key recounts his feelings on that day, “I didn’t know what I’d be doing. So until I got the call I knew to expect, all I could do is wait” (3). When he recalls watching the attacks play out before him, he confides how the events were likely to affect him in a very real way. An actively participating audience is assessing Key’s response and contextualizing it to his or her own memory and response from that day. When Key makes mention of the repeated image of the planes flying into the World Trade Center, the audience is likely to recall



with clarity the experience of witnessing those images. The matter of fact delivery by Key does not seem to suggest embellishment on his part; rather, Key's delivery and the mutually shared experience of seeing the same image positions the short scene as an authentic delivery of one man's experience on September 11th. As Jeff Key sat watching the planes fly into the World Trade Center, as he watched the people in the towers jump from the smoke and heat of raging fires, and as he watched the towers come crashing to earth in a heap of metal, concrete dust, and bodies, he became aware of his own mortality. And the images so permeated his mother's sense of mortality that she called her son seeking assurance that he would protect her.

Key raises a key distinction early in his narrative between his personal response after September 11th, and his response to the decision to invade Iraq. He responded to the attacks on September 11th by reading voraciously about its perpetrators. He confesses his lack of awareness of events taking place outside the United States before the attacks, "I had never really heard of Osama Bin Laden, or the Al Qaeda, or the Taliban" (Key 3). In the wake of that day, the dialogue that came out of Washington, and from the media, focused predominately on a forthcoming American response to the attacks. Key did not delude himself when he joined the Marines. "I always imagined that I might meet my end on some foreign battlefield" (31). As a Marine, he was prepared to deploy to Afghanistan and fight against the men who perpetrated the attacks and the supporters who protected them. In the months that followed the attacks Key visited Ground Zero as he prepared for war. He "ate better and smoked more" (Key 35), and as the months passed, he grew angrier and angrier about what had happened to his country.

In the aftermath of the attacks Key's anger was tempered by the patriotism he saw exhibited across the country: American flags were flown in front yards and cars and motorcycles flew flags as they drove through cities and down highways. In the aftermath of the attacks, many countries around the world stood in solidarity with the people lost in the attacks. The attacks may have targeted American citizens as personifications of U.S. policy, but inside the towers on that day were members from many nations. In the aftermath of the attacks, people came together as a global community determined to remember the lives of the lost and emphatic in the desire to bring those responsible for the attacks to justice. Key's highlights the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and the editorial they ran on September 13, 2001. In this editorial, they say, "In this tragic moment when words seem so poor to say the shock is felt, the first thing that comes to mind is this: We are all Americans! . . . How not to feel indeed, as in the worst moments of our history, strong solidarity with the people and this country, the United States, we are so close and to whom we owe our freedom, and therefore our solidarity" (Colombani par. 1). The overwhelming show of support for America displayed across the world, and documented in the French newspaper that morning touched Key in a very real way.

Shortly after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan the Bush administration began tailoring a narrative to change wartime priorities from the mountains of Afghanistan to cities and streets of Iraq. The necessity of invading Iraq was argued by the Bush administration before Congress, the United Nations, and the world. Jeff Key humorously addresses the sudden change in the war effort. In quite simple terms Key says, "Know your enemy, they always say . . . and then the strangest thing happened. One night while I was sleeping they switched the enemy!" (4). The war effort pushed initially by the Bush

administration capitalized on weeding out the people responsible for the September 11th terrorist attacks. Almost immediately after the attacks, the Bush administration drew a distinction between being with the United States in toppling terrorism, and being with the terrorists. This distinction would set up a precedent for the legitimacy of a war with Iraq. In the performance, we witness Key concentrated on taking the fight to Bin Laden and the mountains of Afghanistan while the trajectory of the war changed course, its aims now focused on Iraq.

As Key addresses this narrative further there emerges in the performance a man conflicted with his response to the potentiality of war in Iraq. Key understood political realities that blurred the distinctions for war made by the administration and he addresses these political issues through his performance:

I knew that they were sitting on something like the second largest oil cache on the planet and that we consume about seventy-five percent of that petroleum, so I figured, hell, if he was dangerous and powerful we basically made him that way . . . giving him the gun and then buying the bullets! (35)

This revelation by Key seems to comply with the belief of many Americans in the early weeks and months in the lead up to the war in Iraq, where many were under the impression that Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. The contentious nature of this proposal by the United States to the world that legitimized the decision to invade Iraq has since been disproven. However, at the time there were sections of the population that, like Key, accepted the narrative. An audience for Key's performance may consist of people who felt as Key did in those early days and weeks. They may be more likely to excuse Key's acceptance of this narrative. There may also be members of the audience

who did not accept the narrative put forward by the United States to justify going into Iraq. These members may be less likely to accept the Key's authenticity.

Key believed that by deploying to Iraq he would be going to defend the defenseless, and in many of the interactions that he shares through performance, Key presents a Marine on a quest to do just that. Key tells the audience that through his interactions with the children of Iraq, "I have found the very seed of all that is beautiful and perfect and right" (9). In those opportunities Key played games with the children, he washed the sand from their hands and faces, and shared pieces of candy with them (9). On one stopover, a young boy serenades him with an Arabic song. Key shares the story of a young boy named Mehadi who brought him a cold can of soda and refused to take a dollar for it. The boy affectionately calls Key "Mista! Mista,!" and becomes Key's tour guide whenever the Marines return to his town. This friendship inspired Key to begin a non-profit organization, The Mehadi Foundation, dedicated to using art to assist veterans with issues stemming from their experiences in war. Using creativity and peer support to promote the healing of psychological wounds in veterans, the Mehadi foundation organizes workshops that promote writing and other artistic activities that assist in the healing of psychological wounds veterans may be experiencing as a result of their time overseas. The foundation is open to assisting all veterans who wish to utilize their services; however, the foundation is particularly interested in bringing together veterans affected by the stresses of serving under the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. (Key 2).

Key's interactions with Iraqis also include an experience between Key, a gay Iraqi, and a tube of lip balm. This scene begins with Key standing watch in the man's

village. The initial moment of romance is initiated when the man passes by Key's watch station. Initially, Key is only aware that an Iraqi is passing his watch station. Later, the man crosses by again. It is at this moment that the two make eye contact. The two hold eye contact long enough for both men to recognize a mutual attraction. Key explores the town after he is relieved, hoping to make contact with the Iraqi. It is not long before the two find one another. A flirtatious conversation between Key and the Iraqi is held just out of sight and hearing of Key's fellow Marines and other Iraqis. The Iraqi makes a bold request, when he asks Key for a tube of lip balm. Key hands him one and the Iraqi applies and returns it with a smile spread across his face and a whisper "kiss" (20). Stunned by the gesture, Key applies the lip balm to his own lips, accepting the kiss, before returning the balm to the Iraqi who can then mutually experience the kiss as well. The intimate moment is subtle, the flirtation is not anything that would be of major significance if it occurred on the streets of Key's home back in the United States. And though the experience they share lasts only moments before Key and his Marine unit roll out, through Key's performance, he shows how two people from opposite sides of the world, with different cultures and established norms, during a period of war, and in an area not recognized for intimate encounters between U.S. service members and Iraqis—especially intimate encounters between two men—can overcome the divide purported to exist between them. The two interactions that Key shares between himself and the Iraqi community are each intimate moments in their own way. An audience acting as an active participant to Key's performance witnesses an authentic portrayal of the human capacity to show love and compassion overcoming the capacity to show mistrust or ignorance that

might normally exist between competing identities forced to exist alongside one another in a conflict situation.

The dramatic arc of Key's performance is discovered in his transition to peace activism. Key situates his transition to peace activism in the discoveries he makes regarding the misleading reasons for initially going into Iraq. Key does not become aware of these issues until he returns home from deployment. However, within the performance piece, there are still a number of situations that address Key's evolving understanding of the mission in Iraq. Key is not as afraid of losing his life in Iraq as he is of the potential for suffering psychological wounds, which for him are the "mental postcards . . . I don't think I can handle" (39). Key refers to the potentiality for such injuries early in his performance. These psychological scars that Key is referring to have passed down through generations of warfare, and because they typically lie below the surface, popping up only after the service member has returned home, they are much less apparent to the public. In an article titled, "A Short History of PTSD", Steve Bentley traces a few recorded instances of psychological trauma. In the article, he talks about Herodotus who writes about a soldier stricken blind after a soldier standing next to him was killed, and a Spartan soldier nicknamed "The Trembler" for the shaking spells he suffered from war trauma (Bentley 1). This soldier later hanged himself in shame. The condition these two suffered from we now know of today as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). The condition has undergone many names. Swiss doctors were the first to attribute a name to the condition; they called it nostalgia and the symptoms recorded by the Swiss included: melancholy, disturbed sleep, and anxiety, among others. German doctors named it "heimweh" (homesickness). Doctors in Spain came closer to the current understanding of

the condition when they began recognizing it in their own soldiers and calling it “estar roto” (to be broken) (Bentley 2).

Out of the 2.2 million service members that deployed to the War on Terror, 670,000 are on some sort of disability. A study of post-deployment disability claim activity shows that about 30% (211,000) of patients in the VA system potentially suffer from PTSD; of the 211,000 veterans with potential PTSD, 107,000 veterans have an approved claim; and approximately 9,500 average new claims are filed every month. New veteran patients continue to walk into VA hospitals each month (Veterans for Commonsense). To its credit, the VA recognizes the seriousness of PTSD resulting from the current conflicts. The National Center for PTSD since 2004 has engaged actively in addressing PTSD in Iraq and Afghanistan veteran service members. Their first study looked at Army and Marine Corp soldiers one-month prior and four-months post-deployment (Litz and Schlenger 1). Later studies show that redeployments increase the occurrence of PTSD prevalence. Several other studies conducted with service members of multiple deployment cycles agree with the increased level of PTSD occurrence (Litz and Schlenger 2).

The National Center for PTSD recognizes a host of experiences that may contribute to a PTSD diagnosis. As laid out by numerous studies, including a report by the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN), perhaps the most recognized is combat exposure; however, role expectations, morally challenging acts of omission or commission, observing carnage and loss of life, and exposure to the elements are other factors the center recognizes as contributing to PTSD (Litz and Schlenger 2). As expressed previously, Jeff Key knew joining the Marines that he might lose his life. As

the driver of a light armored vehicle, he points out that in the event of an attack, killing the driver disables the vehicle, placing the soldiers inside it at greater risk as they try to bring the vehicle back to operability. While this honest revelation is disconcerting to say the least, the issue that seems to factor most in Key's mind is the civilian suffering he may experience.

Key addresses examples of innocent suffering in his performance. Looking back at Key's interactions with children that were previously expressed, an interaction between another Marine and a group of children particularly troubled Key. The Marine in this example stood on the top of his truck and toyed with a group of children, holding out candy and pretending to offer it to them, only to take it back again. Observing the Marine's game troubles Key, and he exposes the game for its sick nature. Key observes that the Marine's childhood experiences are "a literal cornucopia" compared to the experiences of this group of children (51). In the same example, Key writes that he is troubled by a growing concern exhibited by many of his Marine friends that they may never have the opportunity to kill while they are in Iraq. It seems that the conditions for combat are clear and present. Key talks about going into the homes of Iraqis, guns drawn and barrels pointed at wives and children of Iraqi fathers. When he speaks to the audience about these actions he says, "We're supposed to be here fighting the war on terrorism" (50), but he fears that the actions they are engaging in will actually recruit the terrorists. This fear is present despite the mission the brass continues to tell the Marines they are there to fulfill, "Alright men, we got to win the hearts and minds of the people" (50). Key's biggest fear is not the danger to the Marines inherent in their actions; the Marines trained to respond to the threat of danger. His fear is couched in the danger their actions



expose the innocent Iraqis, the friendly men who assist the Marines. This fear is fully realized as Key is preparing to leave Iraq. The Iraqi men, who come to say good-bye to him during his final hours in Iraq he realizes, remain behind to live in the dangerous environment he has created. They will be the casualties of the Marines actions, of his actions. Key is visited with the emotional post-cards he feared experiencing, despite his efforts to be peaceable during his tour in Iraq. In these examples, an audience witnesses an authenticity in Key that translates to a believable concern for the evolving understanding of Key's mission in Iraq.

There are numerous stories about the reality of the danger the Iraqi people face, especially the men and women who became interpreters in the weeks and months following the fall of the Ba'athist regime. Many English speaking Iraqis came forward to the coalition forces and offered their interpretive services. George Packer dramatized instances of this particular example in his play *Betrayed*, which he wrote after publishing a story in *The New York Times* about the young Iraqi men and women who embraced the American project in Iraq in the early days of the war. The danger to these young men and women was very real. In his introduction to the play he tells how any wrong move by the interpreters could mean their lives, mistakenly using English in public, being recognized in or around the coalition bases. As the violence in Iraq escalated, their position became dire. Worse yet, the United States refused to allow the interpreters to cover their faces or wear ski masks to hide their identities whenever they went out on patrol ("US Ban on Masks Upsets Interpreters" 2008), this ban on the policy met widespread disapproval and the military war forced to rescind and allow masks to be worn ("Iraqi Interpreters May Wear Masks" 2009).

In his performance, Key makes mention of exposures to violence and mortality. This concern of Key's would fall under observing carnage and loss of life. Key shares a story of one Marine friend who died in Iraq. Like Key, the Marine was a transport driver. He was transporting supplies when the vehicle he was driving rolled over. Key and his fellow Marines erected a battle-field cross at the site of the crash. Key offers a description of the place where the crash occurred, in his description two small streams merged, the sun sparkling on their waters; on the water's edge shrubs bloomed into new life. It was one of the few actually beautiful places Key saw (19). Scattered across the stage are bottles of water. Key takes one, drinks it, and offers a salute to the fallen Marine. It is in this moment that Key recognizes his own mortality. The reality of this produces a change in Key, who says that up to that point he sought to hide any open displays of compassion around his fellow Marines. This desire to hide compassion was steeped in an attempt not to look weak, or that ". . . I would be automatically outing myself, or at least draw suspicion" (54). Key decides at this moment that he will no longer feign a lack of compassion around his fellow Marines.

Key's performance includes an example of an exposure to violence as well. The performance never mentions an actual experience where he used his weapon in a combat situation. However, Key does relate to the audience a moment during his deployment where he experiences the potential for engaging in violence, and a change in his identity as a Marine as a result of this experience. This is how the event is described: Coming off a night watch, Key finds himself running with a group of Marine's to a post engaged in a firefight. Key runs in place, and mimes holding a weapon in his hand. As he runs he reflects on the ignorance of the word haji used to refer to the enemy in Iraq. Haji, we

come to find out, is a term of reverence for a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Suddenly, he jumps into a prone position, his weapon trained on the audience in front of him. “Come on, motherfucker; give me an excuse” (58), he says. Key breaks character, he stands up and while looking at the Marine in the prone position on the ground he asks rhetorically, “Who is this guy” (58)? The conflict in identity causes Key to laugh. He realizes in the moment, “I don’t want to die yet” (58). Previously, Key has accepted that there is a real possibility that he may die, and in an early scene he reflects that if that is the result of his deployment, “So be it” (37). Now that he is presented with his own mortality, he determines he does not want to die. For Key, the “excuse” to fire on haji never materialized, the firefight was over by the time he and his Marines arrived at the position, and his engagement with mortality does not go beyond laying in the sand, gun pointed down range at an enemy that never emerges. Key wonders in the earliest stages of the script how a peace loving guy like himself found himself in the Marines and now in Iraq (5). Despite his naturally peaceful nature Key found himself a Marine in a time of war and felt his duty was to protect his fellow Marines as he was trained. The months in Iraq and the nature of his mission there eventually lead him to choose a life of peace activism over fighting.

Throughout his performance, Key questions the mission he accepted in putting on the uniform of a United States Marine. Early in his solo-performance, Key reflects on what led him to this point in his life. It is days before he is to deploy to Iraq and his unit is driving the vehicles they will deploy with to Iraq to load them onto the C-130s that will fly them and their equipment to Iraq. The stage directions tell us this is the first time Key brings the audience “into his confidence, we get the first intimate look into his fears and

concerns.” (36). Despite a naturally peaceful nature that Key seems to give off in this early scene, he has found himself a Marine in a time of war. Ultimately, it is this status as a Marine that brings Key to deploy. These fears echo again, later in the play. “I have seen enough to know my mission. Enough to never go back.” (44). When he argues for a humanitarian mission to begin after the fall of Baghdad—“Let’s hand out food or build schools...” (45)— Key is addressing the mission he initially joined the Marines to do, that is defend the defenseless. It is during his deployment cycle that he is forced to confront the realities of serving as a gay man, closeted due to policies in place in the armed forces.

An estimated 70,000 gay and lesbian individuals served at the time of the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”(SWAN). The policy barring openly gay men and women from serving in the military took effect in 1993 and remained U.S. policy until September 20, 2011. The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” applied to gay and lesbian members of the armed forces. Transgender, androgynous, gender queer and other designations of sexual orientation and identification which are not gay and lesbian are still barred from talking openly about their status.

Key addresses the policy, and its reception amongst straight Marines in his performance piece. Key comes out to a fellow Marine while on duty one night in Iraq. The Marine is neither shocked nor bothered by the revelation, his response “That’s cool” (60). In fact, Key goes on to point out how most Marines who knew of his identity did not take issue with it, or report it to superiors. Key makes a valid argument against the policy: “The nature of our relationship is changed by the nature of our relationship” (24). Key qualifies this statement by addressing the way society views our Marine Corps. He

addresses the warrior spirit attributed to Marines, the mission the American people expects them to carry out in their name, and in each case he addresses his capacity for carrying out that directive as a queer Marine. The remaining monologue is an awakening; standing before the audience is a queer Marine ready and willing to carry out the mission expected of him. His sexual orientation has nothing to do with his capacity to fulfill this function.

Sexual orientation is now mostly open in the US armed forces. And yet LGB service members still struggle with harassment and discrimination. (Moradi 2009: quoted in SWAN). As stated earlier, the ban on transgendered service members still stands. Even after repeal, several states continue to place restrictions on openly gay reserve service members and their spouses. The Service Members Legal Defense Network (SLDN) estimates that around 13,650 discharges took place under DADT. For those discharged under the DADT policy, discrimination due to sexual orientation still continues. And this harassment has continuing effects long after the service member's discharge.

The type of discharge one receives from the military is contingent upon their service record. A service member who serves honorably and faithfully executes the oath they swore receives an "Honorable" discharge. Service members, who were discharged because of sexual orientation, provided their service record did not reflect other than honorable infractions, typically received an "Honorable" or "General under Honorable Conditions" discharge. However, service members discharged for a "Homosexual Act" found themselves discharged "Other Than Honorable", a discharge given to service members who failed to meet the standards of the military and a category that includes rapists, child molesters and prostitutes (Bodnar 31). The manner in which "Homosexual

Act” could be defined, according to SLDN, included acts committed openly in public (public displays of affection), and acts committed on military grounds.

SLDN fights for the rights of service members discharged under “Less Than Honorable” conditions. This discharge distinction carries with it many repercussions, including limited access to benefits earned from service such as the G.I. Bill and other VA services (Bodnar 31). This discharge may also carry a stigma in society, especially amongst employers that the former service member did not meet the standards of military service. Since the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” SLDN continues to fight for service members whose records carry these “Less Than Honorable” discharges. They take challenge these discharges in court and request service members discharges be changed to “Honorable” in those cases where it applies (SWAN). Even after the repeal of DADT gay service member’s spouses do not receive the benefits such death pensions and access to medical services, to name two that straight service member’s spouses receive because federal law does not include a definition of spouse that recognizes same-sex partners (SWAN). As evidenced here, while the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has made it possible for gay and lesbian individuals to serve openly in the military, there are still necessary issues to address moving forward.

Key’s deployment in Iraq is cut short when a hernia forces him to be flown back to the United States for surgery. When he lands back in the states he is confronted by a reality he had not expected. “The earth seems to move and I feel weak and dizzy” (65). The adjustment from hyper-vigilance in a war zone to life back in the States can be a difficult one for the returning service member. Key sums it up as “this is the strangest life I have ever known” (66).

Integrating back into society is a process for returning service members and much has been documented about this transitional phase. This was true for Vietnam Veterans, just as it is true for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans (Fenn 198). The organization, Veterans for Common Sense has documented many of the figures coming out of government reports concerning the financial and human costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This organization uses reports from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), and Department of Defense (DoD) available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and release quarterly reports with updated figures. (Veterans for Common Sense). This document has discussed the 2.2 million service member figure that has deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The figures from these wars are eye-opening: 108,974 total war casualties, 6,211 deaths including 298 war zone suicides, 56,874 non-fatal medical evacuations due to injury or disease—Key's hernia would fall into this category. 1.4 million Veterans are eligible for VA health care, only about 49% of that figure have sought access to the VA. 211,819 Veterans potentially have PTSD and about 9,700 new Veteran patients become eligible for VA access each month (Veterans for Common Sense). For soldiers like Key there may be the feeling that the service member has abandoned the battle buddies they protected while deployed, and such thoughts could become triggering mechanisms for PTSD. The role expectation changes when the service member returns to the states, especially if this service member returns on their own due to a non-fatal injury or disease. Returning service members may have psychological wounds from their wartime experience. Reintegrating with family and friends may prove stressful for the returned service member. Away from the dangers inherent in deployment, returned service members may begin to feel the stress of adjusting out of a hyper-vigilant

state of mind. Key experiences several transitional problems upon his return to the states (Key 67). Key found himself in a situation similar to the returning Vietnam Veteran. The Vietnam veteran was unique in his experience. In other wars, the service member joined a unit, deployed with that unit, served in theatre with that unit, and returned home with that unit. The Vietnam War veteran found himself isolated in the military structure (Fenn 198). The Vietnam veteran deployed to Vietnam alone. His unit assignment occurred once he was in country. He served his one year period of service, and then he returned, again on his own. A period between a Vietnam veteran completing his service time and returning home might be as little as 48 hours. Further, the Vietnam veteran did not have psychological support when he returned. These veterans often immediately took off their uniform, for fear of reprisal from civilians protesting against the war (Fenn 198). Key finds himself in a similar situation. He returns to Los Angeles and is picked up at the airport by another Marine. Key fully expected to be sent to the hospital right away for surgery, instead, the Marine drops him off in the parking lot of a restaurant. Key struggles to cope with this extreme change in realities.

In the months that followed his return, Key fell into a deep depression brought on by news reports revealing that there existed no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Key's reaction to the news is a feeling of betrayal, "My most noble oath had been disrespected" (67). Key mentions the Marines he left behind to continue fighting in a war whose motivating characteristics were crumbling as the war-effort continued building. The finishing touch to the scene, "I knew I had to do something, I just didn't know at the time what to do" (67), sets the stage for the dramatic conclusion to both the Jeff Key's life as a Marine and *The Eyes of Babylon*.



The performance at this time transitions to the projection screens to show the interview between CNN's Paula Zahn and Jeff Key the morning after a deadly attack took the lives of several American service members. Key is joining Zahn's live broadcast to give his reaction to news clips coming out of Iraq that show a terrible attack against U.S. Service Members. In the video, a torched Humvee burns as an Iraqi man stands next to it. Zahn opens the interview asking Key to respond to the images and videos of American service members being beaten, dragged down the streets, and killed. Jeff Key's talks about the anger he felt initially, and the sadness that followed after for the families of the men who died. The interview begins to make a dramatic shift at this point. Key brings up the conflicting narrative for the war in Iraq, he follows this by talks about his own response to this conflicting narrative. As the interview continues images of burning vehicles and Iraqi civilians play out before her audience. Then, Key comes out of the closet as a gay man before her and her national audience. Zahn is floored. Key has masterfully taken over the interview; Key seizes the opportunity to eviscerate the station's coverage of the war on terror, pointing out the complete lack of coverage of flag draped coffins from Iraq and Afghanistan that land at Dover Air Base every day (Zahn).

A compelling and powerful punch occurs simultaneously to the point Jeff Key is making in this moment: scrolling underneath the faces of Paula Zahn and Jeff Key are the most recent numbers of fallen service members from Iraq and Afghanistan. Key goes on to address the troubling statistics of suicides among service members in Iraq at the time. It seems that the stars aligned in this moment, as Key completely controls the dialogue in this interview, Paula Zahn can only remark, "wow" (Zahn), before wishing him the best as he begins a life as a civilian again. The video alone speaks volumes to the veteran

voice. In just three minutes Key is able to address the myriad problems American service members are facing in Iraq and at home, and he is able to initiate a dialogue with the viewers of Paula Zahn's show about the nature and effectiveness of the America's presence in Iraq.

Key chose to close his performance transitioning from Marine to civilian. In the final scene Key meticulously cares for and puts away for the last time his Marine Corps dress blue uniform. Key performs for the audience the letter he wrote to his commanding officer the day he made the decision to oust himself under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. Key confronts the code Marines and Sailors live by: honor, courage, commitment. He expresses to his commanding officer the inability to live a lie and stay true to that code. Jeff Key includes in the piece the most recent casualty numbers for the war in Iraq. The casualty number is updated based on the most recent statistic at the point of performance. Key also addresses suicide among active duty and veteran service members. Jeff Key promises to continue performing his play until American middle-East policy is changed, for him surrender is not an option.

Since leaving the service, Jeff Key has gone on to work extensively with peace projects. Key stood with Cindy Sheehan outside of President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas and he marched with Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) during the 2008 National Convention. Key participated in the Gender and Sexuality panel during the IVAWs Winter Soldier project in Washington D.C. and his foundation, The Mehadi Foundation, uses art in its myriad forms to assist troops returning from war. Key also has two new plays in development. The journey that led him from an active duty Marine to a peace activist is a remarkable story to tell, and the work he has done since *The Eyes of*

*Babylon* closed in an off-Broadway theatre would make an intriguing and interesting new solo-performance work.

Jeff Key has performed his one-man show in theatres around the country and in Dublin, Ireland. *The Eyes of Babylon* first opened in 2008 at a small theatre in Hollywood where it ran for six months. It was picked up by E59E Theatre in New York as part of the city's "America's Off Broadway Festival", after a successful run at the Bristol Theatre in Bristol Pennsylvania. Critics have called the show "intelligent, evocative, and psychologically shrewd, one of the finest solo-performance pieces I have ever encountered" (Haagensen). Key's performance has received other rave reviews in major newspapers around the country, *The Los Angeles Times* called the production, "A poetic depiction worthy of Allen Ginsburg!" (Nichols), "[It's] As if Jack Kerouac went to war", said the critic at the *Salt Lake City Weekly* (Tennant). Jeff Key has tattooed on his arms in large block letters the words "Warrior Poet", a self-identification that some reviewers agree with completely. "His keen eye and poetic sensibility" (Wittman) "interlaced with rich detailed language" (Bacalzo) and "a soft-southern accent and demeanor" (Haagensen) wins audiences over. The performance is "a serious soul searching exploration" that is unabashedly patriotic, "a mature view of humanity and hard fought wisdom" from a soldier's perspective of the war. (Wittman)

Though Jeff Key does reveal his homosexuality early in the play, his performance is not primarily about his homosexuality. His sexual identification does come up at certain points during performance, but even in those cases the resounding theme of the play remains the story of a Marine living through deployment. "The story is about the desert heat, loneliness and companionship, Army food, and daily discomfort" this makes

for a play not about war, “this is not war-porn” it is not a play about anger, protest and pleas for peace, like many plays inundating the stage (Wittman). Not every soldier who deploys to Iraq and Afghanistan deploys in a combat related function. Soldiers work in aviation departments, and repair shops; sailors steam off-shore providing security at sea, monitoring shipping, and ensuring that sea-lanes important to world trade stay open; airmen deploy to bases in Kuwait where they work in intelligence and aviation; and marines drive Light-Armored Vehicles as part of maintenance and vehicle recovery; and back at home soldiers serve in rear-detachments, or fly unmanned aircraft in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Across the branches of services soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coast guardsmen contribute in invaluable and necessary functions that do not simply include combat specific functions. All of the 2.2 million service members who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, endured the desert heat, loneliness, military food, and daily discomforts. Key’s performance includes many of these circumstances, and Key is incredible in dramatizing these events, while showing the humanity and beauty, “Even in a war zone, he looked for and found beauty and transcendence” (Wittman). Most media stories are typically about the deployed combat soldier and in an environment inundated with these accounts a take on deployment from the other perspective is welcome. Key’s performance presents such an account.

*The Eyes of Babylon* may never have become the engaging and eye-opening account of war it is today. After returning from Iraq Jeff Key fell into a deep depression brought on by his experiences while deployed and the realities of the war movement coming to light back in the United States. He was sober when he returned and did not relapse; however, new addictions did control his life. In an interview with *Gay Theatre*

NYC Key tells us that he started drinking copious amounts of coffee, “I’m surprised I did not give myself a heart attack” (Harrison), he also turned to sex clubs and online sex sites to cope with PTSD. Whenever someone asked him about his experience in Iraq he would take out his journal and read to them from the entries scribbled into its sandy pages.

Some of the earliest incarnations of the performance work came from the readings he would give to his fellow Marines in Iraq. Back home when the question came up, “What was Iraq like?” Key would respond by reading to them from the same journal.

Key decided for himself he would pull out of his depression before it killed him. He returned to the gym and a daily workout routine. It was at the gym that Key first met Yuval Hadadi, an Israeli veteran of the 1982 Israel/Lebanon war and an openly gay man himself. The two sat down for coffee and when Hadadi asked Key about Iraq he turned to his journal. Yuval Hadadi and Key shared many commonalities: war, veteran’s status, gay identification, and theatre. Hadadi was finishing a directing project in Hollywood at the time and after hearing Key read from his journal asked him if he would be interested in turning the journal into a one-man show. Key was reluctant at first, while he felt as though a weight had lifted off his shoulders after his CNN interview, it attracted unwanted attention and congratulations. Speaking out was not about garnering attention it was about staying true to his conscience (Harrison). Hadadi and Key worked together for six weeks, polishing the journal entries into a dramatic work for the stage. *The Eyes of Babylon* has gone on to play in numerous theatres around the country.

The journey that Jeff Key’s solo-performance piece follows is particularly intriguing for its compelling account of a war-time experience. Solo-performance art is uniquely positioned to allow veterans to tell their stories and have their voices heard in

front of audiences interested in discovering these experiences, in supporting the telling of these stories, and in standing in solidarity with these voices. Jeff Key joins renowned solo-performance artists, such as Jon Leguizamo, and Tim Miller, in challenging the theatre norms that dictate how and what kinds of voices are told on stages. The reviews from popular critics suggest that this powerfully moving piece of theatre is reminiscent of avant-garde artists like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg. Jeff Key's performance piece will not be the last we hear from this artist. Jeff Key has applied to playwrighting programs at major universities around the country, and is developing two new works. Jeff Key uses the opportunities his performance work has provided him to work with other veteran poets and writers to have their voices heard. If the men and women from this conflict respond to the wars as this nation enters a period of non-war, and as we transition from a war-time posture to a posture of peace, more voices from these conflicts will come forward to give voice to their experiences. American theatre audiences need to be open, receptive, and captive listeners to these stories. These voices will express the roles of the individual within the context of the War on Terror

## CHAPTER III

### *AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS ON PATROL IN AFGHANISTAN*

Distinct parallels exist between the war plays of the Vietnam era and the war plays coming out of the War on Terror era. Dramatizations of the Vietnam War on American stages found positive reception among theatre audiences and critics alike. In the decades following the conclusion of hostilities, playwrights who experienced the war first hand found in drama an appropriate medium to contextualize their experiences of war. In 1985, Theatre Communications Group published *Coming To Terms: American Plays and the Vietnam War*, an anthology of plays concerning the war. This volume includes plays by Vietnam Veterans and plays from non-veteran playwrights significantly influenced by the experiences of this war. In his book, *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam Era*, J.W. Fenn takes up the monumental task of critically analyzing several of the plays that arose from this war, and their impact upon American theatre.

Fenn divides the plays into three categories: “Plays of Initiation” (137), “Plays of Experience” (168), and “Plays of Homecoming” (197). He examines the dramatic action of some of the most influential plays of the Vietnam era and immediately after it as they

relate to his three categories. Fenn places David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, and *Streamers*, into the category "Plays of Initiation" (173). H. Wesley Bulk's *The Dramatization of 365 Days*, and David Berry's *G.R. Point*, falls under the category of "Plays of Experience" (168). Fenn concludes his analysis of Vietnam era plays in his chapter "Plays of Homecoming" by examining Adrienne Kennedy's *An Evening with Dead Essex*, and Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag* (197). The plays mentioned above make up a few of the Vietnam era plays examined in *Levitating the Pentagon*. Fenn's examination of Vietnam veteran inspired plays in his book shapes the process used to approach the play in this chapter.

"Plays of Experience" contributes the most to the idea behind this chapter. The war in Iraq has only recently ended, and the war in Afghanistan is nearing its conclusion, with American combat forces expected to be out of the country by the end of 2014. With their conclusions, American stages may soon see more veteran plays from these two wars. In all likelihood, the anxieties and frustrations dramatized in the Vietnam plays will find their way to the Iraq/Afghanistan plays as well.

This chapter analyzes the actions of the characters in the play *American Volunteers* as Acts of Acculturation, Acts of Aggression, and Acts of Aborted Assimilation. Acts of Acculturation either build cohesion among the characters or deny a character the opportunity to build cohesion. Acts of Aggression are the moments in the plays where an aggressive act is carried out upon another soldier or upon a civilian. Acts of Aborted Assimilation show a character's inability to reintegrate with the civilian world back home.



This chapter examines Johnny Meyer's play *American Volunteers*. The play follows two combat units fighting in the War on Terror. In describing the play, Johnny Meyer says, "Wartime havoc clashes with American values in a pitch-black depiction of the democratic psyche at war" (Meyer ii). *American Volunteers* is about two teams of Army Rangers patrolling the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The insular, testosterone charged dynamic of the two squads is upset by the introduction of a rookie female Private attached to search the Afghan women the unit encounters during their patrol. The dramatic action centers on two non-commissioned officers leading the squads, and the burdens each carries with him during his deployment.

The play consists of ten scenes and takes place over a two-day period in Afghanistan. It follows two squads of Army Rangers as they conduct a secret operation along the border of Pakistan and the psychological breaks of the two Sergeants entrusted with the lives of the men. Written in meter, Johnny Meyer's play incorporates blank verse reminiscent of Shakespeare, and poetic verse in the scenes that occur in the minds of various soldiers. The characters deliver these moments as asides addressed to the audience. Meyer calls for a minimal set capable of portraying at different times an Afghan home, a series of blasted craters, or a rock-strewn desert. The premier production at the Austin FronteraFest 2010 used a bare stage, allowing movement, and dialogue to suggest multiple locations.

*American Volunteers* asks, what are the consequences of long, sustained conflicts on our military members? It portrays the myriad complexities of self and service asked of soldiers to negotiate while performing their duty. The soldiers in *American Volunteers* represent a cross-section of the American population. Almost every character is between

the ages of nineteen and twenty-five. From World War II on, America has sent each generation of young Americans off to fight in wars far from home.

Since the Vietnam War, America has not instituted the draft. The all-volunteer force is representative of a diverse sampling of young American men and women (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 1). A person drafted into the military is less likely to commit to career in the Armed Services. The American youth who participated in conscripted service wars viewed military service as a period in between—or interrupting—their transition into adulthood. In the all-volunteer Armed Forces of the War on Terror generation, service in the armed forces community is not necessarily viewed as an interruption; rather, it is more often seen to be a positive step in this transition. An all-volunteer military is more likely to recruit a military force who will serve in the armed services as a career.

The youth who make up today's armed forces come comprise a diverse sampling of the population. Today's military is representative of many ethnicities, genders, religions, and sexualities. The opportunities that service in the military provides to young people such as specialized training, education and health benefits, excellent pay, and opportunities for travel around the world makes an enlistment an attractive career option.

Enlisting in the Armed services also carries with it a risk, as evidenced by the men and women in uniform on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Since the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, nearly 2.2 million service members have deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan. Of those, service members, a little less than half have deployed twice or more. The 2.2 million service members' deployed represents roughly 0.5% of the American population in total has deployed to the current wars. As the wars have raged on over the past decade,

approximately 30% of the total number of service members have not deployed to the War on Terror. The military member who have not deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan is comprised of new recruits, college ROTC members, and military occupation service (MOS) positions that fulfill deployment missions from home bases in the United States. There are increasingly fewer and fewer members of the armed services who have not deployed at least once to one of the active war zones; and as the wars continue more and more of those who have deployed at least once are deploying second, third and even fourth times (Baiocchi 1-6).

The transition into adulthood that military service provides, the diversity of personnel enlisting in the service branches, and the representation of service members, who have deployed multiple times, are all issues to keep in mind during the examination of the plays that this chapter addresses. The two Sergeants in *American Volunteers* are representative of the young men and women sent to fight without many civilians knowing the weight of the burden they are asked to bear. Both men have deployed before and are now deploying for their second time. In both plays, a central theme is ineffectual senior enlisted members placed into leadership positions over the main characters of both plays is a central theme. Disorganized and wavering senior enlisted members place into jeopardy the ability to carry out their missions safely. This threatens the lives of the men assigned to the Sergeants. When the Army decides to attach a female private to the unit, the insular male dominated unit is forced to acculturate their group dynamic.

## ACTS OF ACCULTURATION

The men and women who enlist in the armed services spend the first several months of their service in boot camp and other training environments. The purpose of boot camp and training schools is to modify the traits of the individual through his or her prolonged contact with a highly regimented and organized new environment. The purpose is to restructure the mentality of the individual with the mentality of the group. The Army Rangers in *American Volunteers* represent a cross-section of American youth commensurate with what one might find in an actual active duty company of soldiers. The two leaders who lead these units through Afghanistan are Sergeant Ron who leads Team Alpha, and Sgt. Williams who leads Team Bravo. Sgt. Ron struggles to keep together the last vestiges of his marriage, torn apart by multiple lengthy deployments. He is also concerned with ensuring that his relationship with his young daughter is not adversely affected by his failing marriage. Sgt. Williams leads team Bravo. Williams' commitment to his men and the mission defines his character. Among the soldiers in his unit, he is the model of *esprit de corps*, and has little patience for anyone, or anything that might upset that balance. This is exemplified when the realities of the mission on the ground get in the way of his warrior ethos, and place him and his men at risk. Staff Sergeant Mitchell, is the ineffectual superior to whom Sgt. Ron and Williams report. Mitchell rejoined the Army after failing to transition to civilian life once before. Mitchell was unable to acculturate into the civilian world, and now he is failing to assimilate back into an Army existence.

Pvt. Martin, the female attached to the Marine unit, is referred to as a cherry early in the play. A "cherry" is a term for a service member who only recently graduated from

boot camp. The Army sends Martine to the teams to search women and children Afghans the unit comes across while on patrol. The male dominated group is not afraid to voice their displeasure at the Army's placing a POG—Personnel Other than Grunt— into their fraternity. From the moment she reaches the squad of soldiers in *American Volunteers* she is the odd (wo)man out. Martin trained as a mail clerk; however, after posting stellar physical fitness results, her assignment changes to patrolling with Ranger squads. Pvt. Martin feels her accomplishments earned her a place on patrol; however, the Rangers quickly remind her of the gender barriers that have excluded women from the most competitive and career forwarding occupations in the military.

Regulation on how, where, and in what capacity female service members may serve precludes them from career forwarding occupations. This affects how quickly and how high they may climb in rank (Keltly, Kleykamp, and Segal 185). When Pvt. Martin informs Sgt. Ron she maxed her physical fitness test. Sgt. Ron ridicules her accomplishment, attributing it to little or nothing in the field, where physical strength and stamina are more important than the time it takes a soldier to run two miles. Ron says, “Are you stronger than Ski? Tougher? No. You’re not. He barely passes a physical fitness test. If you run two miles at 15:30, you get a slap on the ass. He gets a kick in the ass. By Ranger standards he failed. By female standards, you maxed out. That’s as good as you’ll get” (42). The standards are higher in the field, where death may be imminent at any time. Gender discrimination against female service members is a troubling issue in the active duty military and this issue surfaces several times in the play, from the exchanges between the other Rangers to and about Martin, it becomes quite clear that the unit is not pleased and does not invite her into the unit. Gender discrimination is noticeable in the

exchanges between Pvt. Martin and the other soldiers, and this discrimination complicates both the success and the failure of her acculturation into the military. Martin successfully acculturates, in that the military has forced acculturation onto her by way of her induction through boot camp into the Army, and she fails to acculturate because the military still has in place mechanisms to preclude her from becoming an equal with male service members.

The military bases leadership and rank structure upon a hierarchy that promotes from within. Unless you are a returning service member—like Mitchell—regardless of one's age, education, and specialization, there is no lateral entry into the enlisted ranks (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 183). Furthermore, the demanding physical fitness requirements of the military serve to make military enlistment a mission for the nation's youth. The characters of *American Volunteer*, who are almost all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five, exemplify this. Sergeants Ron and Williams, who lead the units through Afghanistan, are themselves 21 and 23 years old. The responsibility of leading a squad of young men and women into war at such a young age may be difficult to fathom; however, the reality is that amongst our active duty service members, approximately 50 percent are under the age of 25 (Kelty, Kleykamp, Segal 185).

The camaraderie of the unit is built upon trust, with each soldier watching out for the soldier next to him or her. This becomes apparent when the units first gather on stage. The senior enlisted men stand center stage discussing the nature of the latest mission assigned to them, while the others form a perimeter around them, vigilant for signs of trouble. During this scene, the units dominate the stage space while pulling security. At this time, Pvt. Martin is standing off to one side, trying to remain inconspicuous while

awaiting admission into this exclusive club. The treatment of Martin in these opening moments reminds the audience just how unwelcome she is among the male soldiers.

Private First Class (PFC.) Taylor, a handsome and sarcastic soldier who joined the Army to escape the rural Kansas town he grew up in refers to Martin's presence as "a condom in a nunnery" (14), and when she challenges this harassment her superiors rebuke her for failing to address a senior enlisted member by his name and rank. For the most part, the men, junior and senior alike, are free to address one another without minding rank and name; however, Pvt. Martin is required to address everyone by rank and name before she may speak. PFC. Taylor attempts to establish further dominance outside of his rank over Martin. He tells her,

How much do you weight? One-thirty?

I wear armor all around.

Ammunition and explosives.

One day's water.

And now we get to carry you as well.

Worthless (14)

before reiterating, "A condom in a nunnery" (14). Williams then chimes in, "This is a threat to the squad" (14). Here, we see PFC. Taylor dismiss the intended mission that Martin is there to accomplish, the culturally sensitive role the Army assigned her to carry out. To Taylor Martin is just another weight that they have to carry. The instinct of the men is that a woman amongst their ranks is trouble. Her presence shatters the semblance of fraternity of the unit.

The military is one area where gender discrimination directed at female service members' opportunities for advancement remains. Discrimination based on gender is prevalent and accepted in the military (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 185). Female service members are able to select from approximately 90% of Army occupations; however, Army regulations prohibit females from serving in occupations that include direct or indirect involvement in combat operations, or those specialties who routinely work with ground forces. This means that about 25% of classifications in the Army, classifications that usually help someone advance a career, fall in a category excluded to women. (United States, *Army Directive 2012-16*).

This impediment is interesting considering that the all-volunteer military today has seen an increase in the number of women joining its ranks since its inception in 1973. Whereas women once made up less than 2% of active duty members, now 40 years later they make up about 15% of active duty personnel; amongst officers that number is about 12%. The Marine Corps is distinct in that only about 6% of the active component is female, and 3% of its office component (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 185).

Military regulations exclude Pvt. Martin from engaging in combat, and strict guidelines establish what she may and may not do. Chief among those is she may not fire her weapon. Lacking a secret clearance, the unit keeps Martin in the dark about the nature of the mission the group is conducting while on patrol. In one instance the two squads move out on patrol to a military cadence without informing Pvt. Martin, and she is left by herself on stage, or in this case by herself in the desert of Afghanistan. When Sgt. Williams notices her absence, he returns. In chastising her, he tells her that many of the Afghani people they will come across will appear friendly,



But if you mess up, and stumble, or look weak, or draw attention to yourself, then the Afghan who pretend to be our friends will become our enemies, and then we will have to shoot lots of people (17).

Martin asks, if they should be in the habit of shooting their enemies, and Williams replies that the time and place of the killing of their enemy should be determined by the unit and not by the enemy. In these few examples, we see Private Martin attempting to come to understand the culture, and thereby acculturate into the group the Army attached her to, and we see the barriers the men erect to keep her separated from them. Despite the important role that she will play in the unit's mission, acculturation into the group is denied her.

## **ACTS OF AGGRESSION**

The military is characterized as a hyper-masculine occupation that devalues feminine qualities (Keltly, Kleykamp, Segal 185). Feminine qualities are often the subject of ridicule when presented in men. In women, they are considered barriers to their performance ability. Sentimentality is one such quality that is singled out for ridicule many wartime plays. Sgt. Ron carries around his neck a yellow plastic key chain his daughter gave him prior to leaving on a previous deployment. Specialist Wakin notices the keychain hanging out from Sgt. Ron's uniform, he calls attention to it asking, "What kind of high-speed shit is that?" (12). Strict regulations regarding what may and may not be worn on the uniform normally would prohibit Sgt. Ron from carrying this item around his neck. The keychain is not a standard uniform issued item, and by military regulations is not allowed; however, such talismans are not uncommon among military men and

women. In his book, *The Things They Carried* Tim O'Brien, a Vietnam War veteran who wrote about his experiences in a tetralogy, records in detail the weights and significance of the talismans the men in his story carried with them through the jungles of Vietnam. The Vietnam veterans carry talismans similar to the plastic key chain Sgt. Ron has attached to his dog tags. O'Brien is careful to attribute both the emotional weight and physical weight significance to the items the veterans carried with them into Vietnam.

The emotional weight of Ron's talisman becomes apparent during a raid on an Afghan home. The action takes place off-stage, and is relayed through offstage dialogue (Meyer 62). Mitchell wanders around the compound only to be reprimanded by Williams when he nearly silhouettes himself by walking in front of a set of windows. Outside the compound and on a hill overlooking it are Army gun trucks prepared to lend fire support should the situation call (Meyer 60). In the course of carrying out the raid, Sgt. Ron lost his plastic keychain; the significance of its loss incapacitates Ron for a short time. In the brief moments of that incapacitation, a woman attempts to flee the compound. The gun truck outside opens fire on the compound and kills the woman and a young girl still inside. Ron mistakes this girl's body for the body of his daughter. He reenters carrying the body of the young girl in his arms, followed by Williams. It is some moments before Williams is able to reassert to Ron the reality of the situation. During the firefight, Staff Sergeant Mitchell trips over Pvt. Taylor, pushing him in front of a group of windows, and exposing him to friendly fire that critically wounds him (Meyer 70-6).

Staff Sergeant Mitchell's wavering leadership and his lack of mission awareness has become a danger to the men in the unit. Fenn discusses similar examples in his anthology of Vietnam War texts. "The death of friends in battles that seem inconclusive

and ill-planned lead the men to doubt the ability of their commanders” (Fenn 172).

Mitchell’s capacity to lead is brought into question. He shrinks away from junior enlisted men who question his command decisions, and he refuses to request additional support for dangerous missions. The mission that nearly took Taylor’s life should never have been assigned to the single unit (Meyer 55). The complications are exacerbated when those immediately superior to Mitchell notice his uncertainty in himself and his ability to lead. They seem cognizant of his lack of efficacy in leadership and yet refuse to remove him from the field (Meyer 82).

The inefficacy of the military leader is to the dramatic action of a war play what the introduction of a gun on stage is to a realistic play; everyone knows both are going to be shot. As dramatic action goes, the playwright holds his audience in suspense until the very last possible moment. It becomes obvious Mitchell is going to die the moment the audience recognizes his lack of leadership and the danger it brings to all of his men. The intentional killing of an officer—fragging—receives its name from “the fragmentation of the social order within the military that is apparently widespread” at the moment of doubt in the ability of a military leader to effectively lead (Fenn 172). When this fragmentation occurs under the stress of deployment, and when the break down can be traced to a specific person, internecine warfare seems to become the *modus operandi* for reestablishing homogeneity (Fenn 172). The act of fragging specifically refers to the act of throwing a grenade at or near the person it is intended to kill. The title character in *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* is killed in such a manner (Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* 98). Williams frags Staff Sergeant Mitchell when the unit is ordered to make camp in a ridge that intelligence expects Al Qaeda operatives to pass through.

Again, lacking situation awareness, Mitchell steps out of protective cover without his gear, and waves at his men he ordered to camp out on the ridge. Mitchell's exposure gives Williams the opportunity to kill him while making it appear it was a sniper (Meyer 102). Williams believes fragging Mitchell will save the lives of the other men in the unit. Later in the play, the complications stemming from Mitchell's fragging will result in his abandoning assimilation back into civilian life.

Another example of acts of aggression is the way the men subject Pvt. Martin to extreme sexual harassment. The sexual harassment is immediate, and her status as a female and the sexuality the men attach to the female body is a constant source of obsession among the men. She is called a "sexual assault waiting to happen" by the most senior enlisted man of the group before he is even aware of the Army's reasons for attaching her to his unit (Meyer 9). After gathering the two Ranger squads together Sgt. Ron calls attention to the presence of Pvt. Martin, "We've got a female around. So watch your eyes, your language, and your manners" (Meyer 11). Gender discrimination is seen as hostile and discriminatory attacks based upon one's biological sex (Street, Vogt, and Dutra). The denial of acculturation is established by this senior unit members and trickles down to the lower ranks.

The devaluation of feminine qualities leads inexorably to physical and symbolic devaluation of women. Sexual harassment invades the ranks of officer and enlisted personnel. The Department of Defense defines sexual harassment as a form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (United States, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Annual Report* 18). In early 2003, an email circulated between

the Secretary of the Air Force, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the Senators and U.S. Congressmen of Colorado, where the Air Force Academy is located. It implicated the Air Force Academy's leadership in ignoring an increasing problem of sexual harassment and assault at the Academy. The email concerned roughly half a dozen female cadets who came forward to address allegations of sexual harassment and rape taking place at the Academy. When the story broke in *The New York Times*, a firestorm erupted across the country and the Department of Defense took immediate steps to address the crisis of sexual trauma prevalent in the military service academies. The results of the investigation determined that of the 659 women enrolled at the Academy at that time, 70% reported an experience of sexual harassment, 22% reported experiencing pressure to perform sexual favors, 19% were victims of sexual assault, and in more than 7% of the cases that assault took the form of rape. The investigation further found that women at the Academy feared coming forward with allegations of sexual misconduct because they had seen other classmates face punishment for minor infractions after coming forward with their allegations, while their accused attackers escaped judgment.

The Department of Defense now produces a yearly *Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Academies*, to assess the effectiveness of the policies, training, and procedures instituted following the Air Force reports. Furthermore, the Department of Defense's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) monitors the effectiveness of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) and Prevention of Sexual Harassment Programs (POSH) established at each of the Military Service Academies (MSA). Now, a decade after the scandal at the Air Force Academy broke, the United States Military Academy (USMA) is in partial compliance with the

policies regarding sexual harassment and assault; the United States Naval Academy (USNA), and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) are both in compliance.

Integrated into their training while at their MSA, Cadets and Midshipmen are trained to recognize sexual harassment and assault. The training and implementation seems to be working as intended, with the number of reports significantly decreasing, and the culture of confidence that allows sexual assault victims to feel comfortable coming forward increasing. Still, 65 cases of sexual assault occurred at the three military service academies in 2011. The 2012/13 *Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at Military Service Academies* states, “Preventing sexual harassment and assault at the MSAs, as well as in all aspects of military service, remains a top priority for the Department. The APY 12-13 report demonstrates some progress towards that goal. However, more can be done in the prevention of and response to sexual misconduct” (6). The 65 cases of sexual assault on service academy campuses is certainly an alarming figure. It is far fewer than were reported on the Air Force Academy campus just seven years prior. Moving forward, the Department of Defense will need to address the issue of military sexual trauma on the MSA campuses. A figure of zero occurrences should be the end goal, and yet even if this goal could be reached, continuing training on recognizing such behavior is paramount to ensuring that the officers of the Armed Forces are able to quickly address such behavior when they come across them once they are assigned to leadership positions within their respective branches, duty stations, bases, ships, and commands.

The service branches put in place the necessary steps to reduce military sexual trauma across the service as a whole. The rules and policies in the MSAs concerning sexual discrimination are also in place in the individual branches of the military.

Compliance officers and senior enlisted members are responsible for addressing problems of sexual harassment and assault. While the service academies have been successful at reducing the number of sexual assault reports that take place amongst cadets and midshipmen, the reports of sexual assault in the service branches rose considerably during the 2013 fiscal year (Steinhaur). A report published in *The New York Times* on November 7, 2013, found there were 3,553 reports of sexual assault in the service branches according to the Department of Defense—a 50% increase over last year’s reported figures. Military officials believe that the increase in the number of sexual assault reports is a positive step in the right direction, noting that service members now feel more comfortable coming forward with their complaints of unwanted sexual attention (Steinhaur).

As the number of cases of sexual assault increase, Senators around the country are proposing new avenues for dealing with cases of sexual assault. As of the end of fiscal year 2013, there were over 1600 cases of sexual assault awaiting action from commanders (Cooper). A few of the proposed changes include placing jurisdiction in the cases in the hands of a military tribunal and out of the hands of the Commanding Officers of the accused and accuser. Other propositions call for allowing an accuser to refuse to testify against themselves at pre-trial hearings, a motivating factor some feel keeps victims from coming forward (Steinhaur). The military justice system is unique and separate from its civilian counterpart, and the Pentagon fiercely contests several of the proposed changes. On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, the Senate voted down a bi-partisan bill overhauling how the military handles sexual assault cases. The measure received only 55 votes, five short of the 60 necessary to receive a floor vote (Cooper).

In *American Volunteers* sexual assault against Pvt. Martin comes in both subtle and unsubtle forms. Martin is immediately pegged as the odd (wo)man out from the moment she arrives. From the most senior sergeant, to the lowest Private, the barriers are in place to remind her that gender carries with it exclusions from acculturating into the group. This exclusion is obvious in even the most mundane assignments. When a care package arrives addressed to the “Soldiers of Operation Enduring Freedom” rather than “Rangers of Operation Enduring Freedom”, it is Martin, the non-Ranger tabbed member of the unit, who is tasked with opening it.

The Rangers make camp overlooking the Afghanistan and Pakistan border. The package they task Martin with opening comes from a church group in Mobile, Alabama. The rangers place wagers on its contents, Specialist Wakin jokes that the package will contain a blow-up doll and when it does not, he jokes with the other Rangers that Pvt. Martin will not let the men down.

Included in the package are bars of soap, chocolates, and children’s hand drawn pictures. Pvt. Martin eats one of the chocolates, but immediately spits out the chocolate when she discovers that soap residue has mixed with the chocolate rendering it inedible. Pvt. Martin is scolded “Good girls don’t spit, they swallow” (32), a innuendo for oral sex. When Wakin is reprimanded for his misconduct, instead of apologizing, he disguises the harassment by saying, “Remember—spit dip, swallow chocolate” (32). Later that night, while pulling security with Sgt. Ron, Martin comments on the harassment she has to this point incurred.

After chastising her for not sleeping next to her weapon, Ron instructs her to use her night vision device to aid her in monitoring the Rangers’ position. Martin questions



Sgt. Ron concerning the Rangers' mistrust of her. He informs her that her gender is only partly to do with their distrust. The cohesion and trust these men have for one another is the result of spending months together. Each member's contribution to the group is weighed by their performance. The Rangers view Martin's performance in relation to her gender. The intrinsic difference that they attribute to this correlates directly to their mistrust of her abilities. Martin is not the only one who sees impediments to her inclusion in the masculine dominated culture of the military; many women in uniform face similar challenges.

Qualifications in the form of badges and tabs worn on uniforms distinguish particular specialists from other service members. Women are precluded from obtaining a number of these badges and tabs. These insignia devices become especially important for service members who intend to make a career out of the military. At present, Pvt. Martin is the most junior of the members in the unit Martin says, "I think I'm outranked by everyone here, Except the Afghans. That will change over time, if not in months, then in two or three years." ( 17) However, she looks forward to the time when she gains rank, as she hopes advancement will bring with it equity between herself and the men she serves with. We know that rank establishes how the soldiers address each other, and Martin anticipates that by gaining rank she might resolve the inadequacy with which the men view her.

Reports suggest it is often the case that female service members will need to pull rank to gain subordination from junior personnel (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 186). Further, they suggest it is also more likely that female service member will feel pressured to prove herself as capable and as qualified as her male counterparts. This finding is

interesting, given that the number of women who decide to make a career out of military service has grown over the past 20 years. This may suggest that instances of gender discriminatory attacks against female service members may make women in the military feel they must work harder to prove themselves as qualified as their male peers.

The acts of aggression that surface in *American Volunteers* may be attributed to deployment stressors that arise from long deployment cycles. The Army has deployed more service members for longer periods than other armed service branches (Baiocchi 3). The soldier is not in a position to determine the length of his or her deployment, and often extensions occur in the weeks leading up to the conclusion of the deployment cycle. When an extension on deployment length comes down, it may lead soldiers not to trust the stated deployment timetables given to them prior to the deployment. The examples of aggressive acts in *American Volunteers* may come from the already lengthy deployment. Certainly the presence of Mitchell plays a role. This is evidenced by the entire team's mistrust in their appointed superior. While Martin's added presence may not have so negatively impacted the troop's morale had she been with the unit from the beginning of their deployment, the gender discrimination visited against her still likely would have occurred. The stress of multiple and lengthy deployments may lead soldiers to respond aggressively to situations that they feel are in their control, and how they choose to treat other service members they deem unacceptable is one such example. Some of the aggressive acts that occur in *American Volunteers* occur in similar manner in plays from the Vietnam War era as well. It may take several more plays from the War on Terror veteran community before audiences and critics alike will be sure that the aggressive acts

and their genesis that exists in the Vietnam era plays and resurfaces in the War on Terror plays may have a universalizing theme that spans across many wars and many responses.

### **ACTS OF ABORTED ASSIMILATION**

Acts of aborted assimilation occur when a character in a war play fails to integrate back into civilian society. This failure to assimilate negatively influences the soldier's ability to come to terms with the experiences of his or her deployment. A significant contributor to this alarming trend may come from multiple deployments. A report by RAND in 2011 found that a remarkable 73% of War on Terror Army soldiers deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan at least one time (Baiocchi 3). In *American Volunteers*, Sgt. Ron struggles to keep together a crumbling marriage. A letter from his wife informs him she wants a divorce and this all but destroys any hopes of salvaging the marriage. Rates of divorce among US military members have increased each year since the wars began. The divorce rate for female service members stands at 9.2%, three times higher than the national average (Williamson and Mulhall 1). The burden of responsibility for the safety of the men under his command combined with his failed marriage deals a devastating blow to Ron, who discovered earlier in the play that he would be given mid-deployment leave to allow him time back home with his wife and daughter. It was his hope to return home and work on his marriage. It would seem now that even with the leave granted there is little likelihood of salvaging his marriage. Sgt. Williams is conflicted by his own struggles. He admits to Sgt. Ron that he drew their superior out of protective cover and then shot and killed him. The military will trace the bullet that killed Mitchell back to Williams and his career will be over. Both Sgt. Ron and Williams are suffering from

psychological injuries incurred as a part of their deployment, and likely from traumatic brain injury incurred from the explosion they experienced at the Afghan compound. Furthermore, the men in *American Volunteers* have just had their deployments extended from twelve to eighteen months. This was an increasing trend among deployment statistics during the most active periods of the war on terror. The Army's Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) reports that soldiers deployed for periods of more than six months are at significant risk of experiencing psychological injuries. MHAT recommends increasing troops' rest times and decreasing deployment lengths to address these injuries.

With Mitchell's death comes word the Ranger team will retreat to a safer location. The men know that abandoning the border checkpoint means it will fall back into the hands of Al Qaeda. Williams see the abandonment of the checkpoint as a failure of their mission. Williams says,

This was my chance  
to make a difference  
and save  
something  
instead of destroying it.

I was going to save the Afghan checkpoint" (Meyer 150).

By abandoning the Afghan checkpoint and it falling into the hands of Al Qaeda, Williams knows that at some point in the future another group of US service members will need to come back to complete the mission this team failed to complete (Meyer 114). He admits to Ron that it was he who shot Mitchell when he stepped out from cover (149). Williams hoped that by fragging—intentionally killing a senior officer—Mitchell he would end the

threat the two squads were under. Williams did not anticipate that that Army would pull the two teams back to base after Mitchell's death. Sgt. Ron has been assigned to take over as team leader (Meyer 110). Under Ron's leadership the Ranger teams would be safer, the mission could be conducted successfully. With the teams pulled back to base, Mitchell's realization that another team will now have to retake the checkpoint puts in danger the lives of other men. Complicating the matter, Williams knows that the bullet in Mitchell's body will be traced to his rifle and he will be court martialed and jailed for murder.

The conclusion to *American Volunteers* finds Sgt. Williams and Sgt. Ron come to accept that they will never assimilate back into civilian society. Ron accepts he cannot go back to his marriage or his daughter, and Williams accepts he would rather sacrifice himself than face court martial for murder. The two men decide that they would rather storm the Pakistan border and engage as many Al Qaeda operatives as they can then return crestfallen and defeated (Meyer 152-3). The play ends with the sounds of machine gun fire as Wakin, Davis, and Martin watch the men disappear over the border into Pakistan.

This chapter examined a combat veteran inspired play from the War on Terror as told by the experiences of a veteran playwright. *American Volunteers* represents the veteran experience through three distinct acts: acts of acculturation, aggression and abandoned assimilation. The chapter analyzed several examples of these acts as they occurred in the script and connected the actions of the characters to statistics and research findings that actually occur in the armed services. The ability to connect these dramatized events to real world occurrences lends credibility to the veteran experience and opens

doors to social and political commentary on the issues addressed in the plays. Like the Vietnam era veterans who came before, as the United States' two longest wars draw to a close the men and women who fought in the campaigns may find in theatre an appropriate avenue of expression. Just as the plays of the Vietnam era covered a variety of subjects, in time, we may see this generation of veterans cover such an array of diverse and engaging topics the War on Terror war dramas.

## CHAPTER IV

### ADAPTATIONS OF ANCIENT WAR TIME TRAUMA: *AJAX IN IRAQ*

In *Performance in Place of War* James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour, describe reconciliation as a process whereby communities torn apart by conflict learn to live together peaceably (204). Thompson explains reconciliation through the example of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission enacted by the minority white and majority African communities of South Africa. Borrowing the ideas presented by Thompson, Hughes, and Balfour, this chapter addresses reconciliation as a means of restoring or re-striking a balance in the deployed service member. The chapter begins by unpacking the play *Ajax in Iraq* by Ellen McLaughlin, by examining the ways in which this play is a representation of the veteran's voice in theatre and searching for parallels between the text and today's veteran population. In addressing reconciliation, this chapter will explore the multiple veteran voices that inspired McLaughlin's piece. The veterans' voices in *Ajax in Iraq* speak to two key issues veterans face: disconnects that take place between the service members and their families/friends, and disconnects that takes place within the service member before, during, and after the experience occurs. Ellen McLaughlin and the 2009 American Repertory Theatre/Moscow Art Theatre School (ART/MXAT) at Harvard University collaborated together to write

this play over the course of a sixteen-month residency supported in part by Theatre Communications Group and the National Endowment for the Arts. A range of attitudes and opinions from the various group members collided together in the creation of the play (McLaughlin 7). The residency allowed McLaughlin and the group to develop a new play that spoke to the issues of war and its impact on soldiers. During the sixteen-month residency, McLaughlin and the A.R.T. Company exhaustively explored many social issues as they relate to war. A list of the resources students consulted as inspiration in their exploration were interviews conducted with veterans from World War II, Vietnam, and the War on Terror, soldier's blogs, and military recruitment practices (Nelson; quoted in McLaughlin 8). The students presented the material they researched in a dramatic form before McLaughlin, the institute's director, and their classmates. Much of the research presented focused on American soldiers' experiences during and after war, women in war, combat trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual assault, and military suicide. McLaughlin realized early in the process that the students' interests and the material they presented paralleled Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*. Adapting Sophocles' original text to a contemporary war and pulling inspiration from contemporary issues provided McLaughlin and the ART/MXAT class with a modernized classical story modernized to contemporary veteran and wartime experiences (Nelson quoted in McLaughlin 8).

Neither Ellen McLaughlin, nor any of the class members at A.R.T that worked with her in developing *Ajax in Iraq* are veterans. Still, the interview process and inclusion of actual veteran experiences in writing *Ajax in Iraq* ensures the play presents veteran voices. The adaptation becomes more than a retelling of the *Ajax* story adapted to a contemporary setting. Interspersed between the scenes that comprise the main dramatic



action are short vignettes taken from the interviews conducted in the early stages of the work's creation. These vignettes back-up the dramatic action with recorded veteran experiences.

The fusion of actual stories of veterans' and their families' experiences alongside McLaughlin's adapted text ensures the script is a representation of the veteran voice. McLaughlin brings Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax* (written in the 5th century BCE) into a modern context and adapts it to include experiences of modern day soldiers. She places beside the original Ajax a twenty-first century female soldier, AJ, who undergoes a similar wartime experience and reacts in similar fashion to the Greek character. Ajax is a Greek soldier of Salamis fighting in the Trojan War. After Achilles is slain by Paris, it is thought that his golden armor will pass down to Ajax. When the armor passes to Odysseus instead, the humiliated Ajax decides to avenge the scorn visited upon him by killing Odysseus and the Atreid generals Menelaus and Agamemnon. Athena intervenes, clouding Ajax's vision and driving him to slaughter a herd of cattle instead. When Athena's spell over Ajax breaks, he is overcome with shame. Ajax chooses suicide over living with the humiliation he has brought down on his family and the people of Salamis.

The play takes place in the midst of the war between the Athens and Troy and, it is possible to view it as an interpretation of the effects of war trauma on soldiers. Ajax is the battle-hardened hero of Greek mythology, second only to Achilles. Where Achilles was quick and cunning, Ajax was ferocious and impregnable. Peerless in battle, he stood as the shield of the Greeks. In describing his character, most scholars call him the bulwark of the Greek army (Golder 3). Ajax's heroics in battle are defined by the battle he engages with Hector, the Trojan hero slain by Achilles; and by his heroics performed

on the beaches of Troy, where he stood alone against an onslaught of Trojan warriors. As the legend has it, Ajax scorned the aid of Athena during this battle. This act of scorning earns him the ire of the goddess, who takes revenge by humiliating Ajax through the slaughter of the Greek army's cattle. Like many Greek playwrights, Sophocles was once a general of the Greek army. He served in war, as was common for the playwrights of the day, and the playwrights often used the heroes of Greek mythology to examine war. As a veteran writing from a veteran's perspective about veteran's experiences, *Ajax* fits securely in the narrative of the veteran voice.

The story of the title character in *Ajax in Iraq* and the original *Ajax* undergo similar experiences as a result of their deployment. The title character Ajax is included in the adaptation along with familiar characters Tecmessa, Ajax's war bride, Teucer, Ajax's brother, Odysseus, Ajax's enemy, and Athena, who acts as a mediator between the classical and contemporary drama. The title character in the contemporary storyline is AJ, a female Army soldier deployed in Iraq. A.J.'s experiences mirror the experiences of Ajax in several ways: she is respected and feared by the soldiers she serves with; she performs exemplary feats in the heat of battle; and a superior officer humiliates her after her efforts. In modernizing the script, McLaughlin includes several stories of modern soldiers' experiences in Iraq. The chapter will explore these modern experiences and address them as processes for reconciliation, remembering, and creating community. It will also address the performance of violence as it is depicted in McLaughlin's script.

The class members who conducted the interviews that later comprised the vignettes bore witness to veteran experiences through the interviewees personal testimony. The interviewers then took this witnessed material and through collaboration

with McLaughlin turned the accounts into dramatic material to which an audience could then also bear witness. The act of recounting those events gives them agency and by testifying makes them real for an audience (Duggan 89).

This chapter uses the ideas presented in *Performance in Place of War* to examine how veterans use theatre to express their voice through performance. Specifically, I intend to examine the script *Ajax in Iraq* and the veteran voices contained within it, to show how a veteran might reconcile/restore (restrike a balance with) his/her wartime experiences with the person he or she was before the event occurred.

In some ways, McLaughlin's chorus functions as a traditional Greek chorus. Her chorus interacts sometimes with AJ, other times with Ajax, and still other times in vignettes independent of either plot line. These independent vignettes support or comment upon the action in AJ's story line. It is from these vignettes that McLaughlin captures her veteran voice.

The floor of the stage is a map of the Middle East. The boundaries of countries are represented by mounds of sand. At the top of the show a woman who we will come to find out is Gertrude Bell arranges the mounds of sand. Bell was "a British Arabist, political analyst, and senior political officer" who worked with the British government to draw the borders of modern Iraq (McLaughlin 4). The only standing structure on stage is the tent Ajax retreats to with the animals slaughtered during his night mission. In the traditional Greek play the skene would represent this tent. At the beginning of the play, Ajax is already inside the tent and from it come indiscernible sounds and shadows. The sounds and shadows are Ajax torturing and killing the animals he mistook for Odysseus and Agamemnon in the classical play. At the end of the preshow, Bell exits the stage

while the sounds from inside the tent continue and the lights change to introduce the first character (McLaughlin 9).

*Ajax in Iraq* begins with an introduction by Athena, who acts as an expository device, addressing the audience and revealing the necessary information it needs to understand all that has taken place up to that point. She is speaking to the audience about the sounds they hear coming from the tent. She begins by telling the audience they do not want to go into the tent, they do not want to see what terrible things are taking place inside. As the noises from within continue, we begin to make out screams coming from within. Athena plays with the audience's growing curiosity about what is taking place inside the tent. She asks, "You can't see what exactly is going on, it's enough for you. Isn't it? That's all you need to know". In this first scene, Athena seems to be drawing comparisons between the audience's curiosity about the stage event, and American curiosity towards events in Iraq and Afghanistan. She says, ". . . who wants to think about this stuff? What's going on right now? Nobody. Ya, it's bad. In fact it's worse, it's worse than what you're imaging right now. Or even right now" (McLaughlin 9). Athena encourages the audience to distance itself from the uncomfortable position she places it in, before critically engaging the ambivalence of the American people to the reports in papers and broadcasts on televisions concerning the events coming out Iraq and Afghanistan on a daily basis. Athena does not actually mention Iraq or Afghanistan in this first scene. However, the analogy between the stage picture and the collective amnesia of a United States citizenry whose engagement with the wars occurring in its name is as clearly drawn as the boundaries on the stage floor.

In the first vignette that follows Athena's initial appearance, the chorus enters dressed as modern male and female soldiers. The characters are not named and instead are represented by letters. Because none of the vignette characters appear more than once in the script, McLaughlin stresses in her stage directions—for this and each subsequent vignette—that chorus actors take pains to differentiate each vignette character from other characters they play throughout the performance. This first vignette consists of modern male and female soldiers of various ranks and eras. As opposed to the unison chanting of a traditional Greek chorus, the actors address the audience individually. From this vignette comes a better understanding of the costs of war on military men and women. A few soldiers speak of events in their past; some speak of events in the present. The vignettes bring an intimate and personal account to bear on the veteran voice. No character in the chorus is given a name, and no character exchange dialogue with another. The responses are broken up and in some cases one character does not complete a thought before the dialogue switches to another character. In some cases the dialogue is broken up between two characters whose experiences closely mirror one another. The exchanges are powerful, and cover a multitude of experiences to include the moral imperatives that soldiers face, frustrations directed at superior officers or at Iraqi civilians, and rules of engagement (Brady 2). Another topic covered is the overconfidence of the Bush administration's response in the early days of the Iraq war. The administration's bravado meant to bolster support and rally Americans behind the war. Sarah Brady calls this bravado "Bushismo" (Brady 2). As the conflict in Iraq escalated and sectarian violence spilled American blood, this Bushismo quickly toned down.

The audience bears witness to actors dramatizing the words of actual service member's experiences. The dialogue is at one powerfully upsetting and powerfully uplifting. McLaughlin does not stray into polemics, instead she presents real life experiences for the audiences benefit. In *Trauma-Tragedy* Patrick Duggan defines this kind of performance as "second-order witnessing" (Duggan 89). Second order witnessing implies a burden of responsibility to the witnessed event. In this case, the audience is witness to second-hand actual experiences of veterans dramatized in their own words by an actor who takes on that veteran's persona in the performance event. By engaging the text not as a character but as an unnamed character, the actor is not masked in a character and thus is bears witness to the other veteran's voices at the same time (Duggan 90)

Chorus member "A" opens by establishing the moral imperative that soldiers face. This character stresses the soldier's desire to do right by the Iraqi people. At the same time the character reminds the audience they are soldiers, they train to kill, and will kill when the situation arises. "We take a life, that's what soldiers do. And once you've done it, you are never the same . . . for the rest of your life, that is what walks with you" (McLaughlin 10). The character spends considerable time admonishing military brass for training them to do their mission but failing to provide them with the necessary tools to carry out their mission (McLaughlin 10). "A" confronts the Bushismo of the administration and the anger felt when Bush encouraged the forces fighting the Americans in Iraq to "bring it on" (McLaughlin 11). Like Dirty Harry's challenge "make my day", the aggressive posturing served only to strengthen the President's position at home.

Character “B” shares the communication barriers between the American military forces and the Iraqi civilians. “We can’t talk to them and they can’t talk to us” (McLaughlin 12). Armed soldiers only exacerbated the problem, “We’re here to help you, we’re screaming at them while were pointing guns at them” (10). The dominant language spoken in Iraq and the region is Arabic and at the earliest stages of the war thousands of Iraqis stepped forward to work as translators between the Iraqi people and U.S. service members (Pincus par. 1). In many cases, the decision to aid the American forces made them vulnerable to insurgents. Concerns for personal safety forced many of the translators to wear ski masks to hide their identity for fear of reprisal should their identity be found out (“U.S. Ban on Maska Upsets Iraqi Interpreters” 1). There are many Arabic dialects spoken in Iraq, of those who stepped forward to serve as interpreters, in many cases the differences in dialect were just as much a barrier to communication as not speaking the language at all.

In McLaughlin’s script several chorus members stress the fears and anxieties of their deployment cycle, “You just live in fear, all the time (10). Another character says, “You are always second guessing yourself . . . the rules of engagement are unworkable . . . we have to draw fire in order to legitimize firing in a civilian situation” (10). Character C chimes in “How do you know who the insurgents are” (11), and character E retorts, “. . . when I am in a firefight I am calm, because it’s finally clear, that guy who’s shooting at me? I can kill that guy with no hesitation at all” (11). It seems in other cases it appears the unworkable nature of the mission creates an ambivalence in the characters, “After a while it got to be: if you kill him that was an insurgent” (11). The characters in this first vignette echo frustrations at the ambiguities under which the service member operated.

Here, veteran's attempts to reconcile through the veteran voice give some understanding of the difficulties service members faced in carrying out the mission in Iraq.

The exchanges involved in this first vignette focus on the frustrations felt by some veterans in the early stages of the war in Iraq. These difficulties do not disappear once the veteran returns home. Character F expresses the ire he feels towards civilians who attribute their support of the troops to the mantra Bring the Troops Home. "How is that supposed to work?" he asks, "If I go home, who doesn't? And I don't just mean Americans at this point. I mean Iraqis. There are people I don't want to leave behind, I can't just walk away at this point. Don't ask me to do that" (11). Character C expresses a similar concern,

"When you say you disagree with this war, okay, I get that . . . but I know people who died, people who lost arms and legs. People who will always be haunted by what they did. It has to be for something. Don't tell me I did this for nothing. That makes me crazy" (12).

Character B expresses it as,

"Its half of one percent, that's who's fighting this thing. What kind of division of labor is that? I want to feel like I am doing this for something, but when I get home I can't stand the people I am fighting for . . . and I can't wait to get back . . . and then I get back here and I go, oh fuck, that's right, life here is just as bad as I remembered and I can't wait to get out of here and go...well, where am I supposed to go?" (12).



These early vignettes are powerful. The veteran's points of view expressed are at once individual and unique and at the same time their experiences are strangely concomitant of one another.

## **REMEMBERING**

Speaking from two distinctly different periods of Iraqi history, the characters Gertrude Bell and the Captain are the dramatic devices used by McLaughlin to introduce her audience to the complex history of the Iraq state. McLaughlin begins her brief history with Gertrude Bell, a British political analyst, Arabist, and cartographer who is credited with writing the map of modern day Iraq. As a historian she recorded the outcomes Britain hoped to achieve in establishing an Iraqi nation, and the failures that Britain experienced in its endeavor. Juxtaposing Gertrude Bell is an American Army Captain who took part in the initial push into Iraq in 2003. The American Captain outlines the similar American investment in creating an Iraqi democracy and the early mistakes made along the way that seem to be leading us to the same failure the British experienced.

The two enter the scene as the chorus marches off to an Army marching cadence. Gertrude uses a stick to adjust the sand on-stage to represent contemporary borders of Iraq and its neighbors. The Captain and Bell both recount for the audience the complications both countries experienced in an attempt to impose Western traditions on the Iraqi state. Bell begins, "Perhaps we were doomed from the start" (McLaughlin 13). Similarly, the Captain says, "I guess it should have been obvious what would happen..." (McLaughlin 13). Bell, speaking 100 years in the past reflects, "We rushed into the business with our usual disregard for a comprehensive political scheme"

(McLaughlin 13). Great Britain drew boundaries for Iraq during a period of colonization. The British saw Iraq as a “tractable, well-reared child” who would return the favor of British rule with gratitude and loyalty (McLaughlin 14). As “victors”, the British saw Iraq as a place ripe for carving and dividing into borders. In McLaughlin’s text, she refers to the first King of Saudi Arabia, who challenged the notion of drawing borders around a fictional Iraq. According to Saud, the Iraqis saw themselves as nomads wandering the deserts, concerned only with the horizon in front of them. The Iraqis of the early twentieth century would not comprehend the idea of a border delineating their movement, fixing them into location and calling it Iraq (McLaughlin 14).

A similar hubris plagued the United States in the weeks and months following the fall of Saddam, an action that destabilized the existing government structures and the scene dramatizes the mistakes made by the US in the earliest stages of the 2003 invasion. Imperialism and Bushismo are dominating themes throughout the Captain’s dialogue, and yet the scene is not without merit. Bell refers to the early stages of the British experiment in Iraqi nation building by saying, “The Sunni nationalists want an Arab kingdom; the Shiites want an Islamic religious state; and of course the Kurds in the north want an independent Kurdish entity. No one can agree on what they want except that they don’t want us” (McLaughlin 15). The captain reflects that the American forces expected to go into Iraq, take down Saddam, and establish a democracy that the Iraqi people would accept with open arms. After Saddam’s government fell, the United States saw an opportunity to make Iraq into a western democracy in the Arab world. One of the first missions that the United States undertook after the fall of Iraq was to disband the Army and police forces. While it is true that sectarian violence did erupt in the streets of Iraq

after the fall of the Ba'athist regime, the story presented to the American population depicted an Iraqi people unable or unwilling to smoothly transition into a functioning democracy. This is a sharp contrast to an Iraqi people standing up against another foreign power who expected the Iraqi people to behave as tractable, well-reared children. The Iraqi people took to the streets after the fall of Saddam Hussein. They toppled a statue of his likeness. Early on, sectarian violence exploded in the streets of Iraq. In several towns and communities, local leaders held elections and began the process of restructuring their communities. The United States was quick to quash these efforts, fearing that Iraq might break into innumerable small factions. Under US influences, an interim Iraqi government was set up with its leaders appointed by the United States. Following these appointments, many Iraqi citizens took to the streets to criticize the American appointed leaders. The streets became a place where Iraqi citizens could voice their concerns over a variety of issues, the people took to the streets to protest the American occupation, they took to the streets to form political and religious factions and begin debates concerning the emergence of policy agendas. In 2005, Iraqi people braved the dangerous environment of the streets to vote in the country's first democratic elections in decades (Isakhan 193).

McLaughlin blasts the United States disregard for the political complexities of building a new government in Iraq. She calls it an American "delusion" that the will to power will naturally work itself out in the end. The United States either does not remember, or willfully forget that the Iraqi people have shrugged off occupiers for centuries. For all the good will the United States initially intended, it is the mistakes, small and great, that the Iraqis remember. The Iraqis remember that the British attempted to establish a colony loyal to Britain, they failed, and they left. The Iraqis know that, in

turn, the Americans will not last. They know that no occupying force lasts. It is only a matter of time, says the captain, “We’re the ones who leave. That’s what they know.” (McLaughlin 16). On December 18, 2011 the final American forces in Iraq crossed the border into Kuwait, thus ending the eight and a half year war (Logan par. 1). The United States stumbled at times and whether the government established by the Iraqi people lasts only time will tell. At the time of this writing Al Qaeda forces in Iraq have retaken cities the United States fought fiercely to wrestle from Al Qaeda’s grip (Gordon par. 4.).

The mistakes made by the United States in the earliest periods of the war in Iraq could have been avoided. A better understanding of the complex history of the Iraqi people and the struggles that the British incurred during their experiment with colonization there may have proven valuable in the US’s approach to the transfer of power in the country. The United States proclaimed the Iraqi people were to be liberated from Saddam’s rule, and yet, in occupying the country during the transfer of power the Iraqi people were liberated from one dominating power only to be subsumed under another dominating power. Many Iraqi people welcomed the United States, as evidenced by the thousands of Iraqi people who stepped forward to assist the US in its efforts to stabilize the country and establish a democratic form of government. And yet, mistakes were made, and often times it is the small mistakes, the dismantling of the police and military, that upsets the careful balance necessary to smoothly transition power. Furthermore, sectarian violence and the drawn out campaign to secure the people of Iraq from Al Qaeda forces that came into the country during the transition of power turned a mission expected to take weeks or months into years of fighting and unknown thousands

of Iraqi dead. These mistakes inevitably led to mistrust between the people of Iraq and the US forces in the country.

## **VIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION**

In *Theatre & Violence*, Lucy Nevitt discusses the importance of giving voice to experiences of violence. The voice can also be used to promote violence or produce new episodes of violence. Episodes of violence run counter to a properly functioning society, and continued exposures to violence or to threats of violence will cause a community to direct angers and frustrations towards those they feel are responsible for the violence. Examples of this type of behavior abound, and the United States has been overtly reactionary when responding to violence inflicted on its people. After the September 11th attacks, rhetoric in the United States escalated quickly as the nation attempted to understand the meanings behind the violent attacks. For hours after the attacks the media replayed the images of the planes flying into the buildings, and images of the men responsible for carrying out the attacks streamed on a loop by the media. The over exposure of these images ensured that the men and the attacks grafted themselves into the collective American conscious.

While collectively the United States struggled to come to an understanding of why the attacks occurred, the anger, fear, and hatred many Americans felt in the days following the attacks needed a target. The media and political leaders labeled the men responsible as Islamic fundamentalists. In the days and weeks that followed this identity was inappropriately attributed in many cases to any appearance of Muslim identity. The “other” in this case became the neighbors and community members who practiced the

Muslim faith. The fear, hate, and anger translated into an Islamaphobia. The Muslim identity was dehumanized, their traditions of dress and worship were ridiculed through hate speech. In several of the plays explored in this thesis soldiers refer to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan as rag-heads or towel-heads. The same language was attributed to men, women, and children in the United States who identified as Muslim.

The violent experiences in the play takes several forms. The contemporary storyline begins with A.J. slumbering on a cot off to the left of a group female soldiers playing cards, and mocking the sexual bravado exhibited by the men in their unit. Mangus, AJ's closest friend shares with the audience the overwhelming pressure placed upon female soldiers to perform at or above the level of their male counterparts. She says, "If you even for a second can be seen to be, like, indulging yourself . . . I just have no patience for people who seem to need a lot of attention for doing the job they signed up for" (McLaughlin 16). The women credit her perseverance. For some time before the other women arrived AJ was the only woman in the unit. A respect is translated not only in dialogue but also in the treatment of AJ during the scene:

MANGUS: I know, she scared the shit out of me when I first got here. So hoo-ah.

SICKLES: Well ya, she had to be. Until we showed up, she was the only woman in the unit. It was like months. She must have taken unbelievable shit.

REBO: She's been the first in line every time for anything going out, she's got nothing to prove, that's for sure. (McLaughlin 19-20).

Over the course of the deployment, she has built a reputation as one of the toughest soldiers on base. The women's rough housing wakes up A.J., she exits to take a shower and the women begin to voice their concerns about the changes they have begun to notice

in her. These tough as nails females exchange insults and low blows with the males in the unit without missing a beat; it becomes clear that these female soldiers are accustomed to the unit's sexually charged male bravado. Two men from the unit join in the women's card game. The men have noticed changes in A.J.'s behavior as well. A.J. catches the ending remarks of one conversation when she re-enters. The group quickly breaks up, the men beat a hasty retreat but not before attempting to establish their dominance.

A possible interpretation of this introduction to the contemporary storyline suggests that the experiences that ultimately lead AJ to commit suicide are already present and noticeable. Dissociative disorders, eating disorders, and personality disorders are indicators the V.A. has recognized as accompanying cases of PTSD (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 198). In the scene, Sickles notices that AJ has chewed her fingernails down to nubs, and the group comments on changes in her sleeping patterns. The physical and psychological indicators that something is troubling their friend and fellow soldier upsets them, however, they are afraid to approach AJ and ask her directly what is troubling her. Instead, they choose to discuss it amongst themselves. The patterns of behavior AJ presents indicates that the soldier is suffering from PTSD. We see a very similar occurrence in Sophocles' text. The chorus and the other characters comment on Ajax and the psychological indicators they see troubling him. AJ does not voice her troubles openly to her fellow soldiers and they do not voice their concerns to her.

We see from this entire exchange that the soldier AJ was at the beginning of the deployment is startlingly different from the soldier she is at the present moment in the play. Disconnects in AJ begin to show in the performance of her duties and this disconnect is commented on by the other soldiers. Throughout the play behaviors

exhibited by A.J. depict a soldier silently crying out for help as she negotiates the internal struggles many soldiers and veterans suffer as a result of their service.

McLaughlin reinforces this concept of identity clashes between the soldier pre- and post- deployment with a vignette that occurs between a therapist and the wife of a recently returned soldier. The discussion is grounded in the changes the wife notices in her husband after he comes home from war. The transition back to civilian life is a struggle for this veteran. He now sleeps with a gun under his pillow, which forces his wife to sleep in another room. Nightmares flood his dreams and she reports that his nightmares often wake her. He is afraid to be around his children, afraid that he may hurt them. His return from previous deployments had come with fraught periods, but from her exchange we notice that the man who has returned this time is not the same man who deployed, it is not the same man she married and who fathered their children. The chilling conclusion to the scene is the revelation that this wife is anticipating returning home one day to find that her husband has taken his life. This scene plays alongside a scene between Tecmessa, Ajax's war-bride, and the chorus, who now plays a group of soldiers in Ajax's unit. Tecmessa recounts a harrowing night spent with Ajax after he butchered the herd of cattle. She crawls out from the tent without making a sound. Both the therapist, and the chorus in the Ajax scene ask the two women about their husband's state of mind. Similar adjustment disorders affect Ajax. Tecmessa fears sleeping in the same tent with him. His dreams are also flooded with nightmares, and Tecmessa hides his son from him out of fear he may harm him. The two scenes show that the traumas of war are visited upon the families of those who fight, and that these traumas have visited families for generations. It becomes clear that while the nature of how war is engaged has



evolved over the centuries, the traumas that come out of war and the manner in which they affect not only those who fight but the families they return to, has not changed. (McLaughlin 29-31).

The military recruits individuals but retains families. Families are integral components of the military and they are acutely affected by the policies that the military passes. Marriage rates of young enlisted men and women are higher in the military than in the civilian population. Military members who marry at a young age are more likely to marry another military member. While the marriage rates are relatively higher among young enlisted members, the divorce rates of military families also are high. Stressors that may contribute to the high divorce rates could include separations from a family support network, frequent moves to new duty locations, and the service member's struggle with issues stemming from deployments. It is evident from the attention the military pays to the families of its service members that a healthy home environment contributes towards a healthy service member. The issues that McLaughlin addresses in the vignette between the therapist and the patient shows how the home environment may be negatively affected as a result of the wartime traumas service member's may bring home with them.

Military sexual trauma (MST) is a growing problem in the United States military. Female soldiers who experience sexual trauma while in uniform are three times more likely to diagnose with PTSD than male veterans. Furthermore, female service members are five times more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD as a result of military sexual trauma than are civilian women who experience sexual trauma. Women in uniform who experience sexual trauma are more likely to attempt suicide or engage in some other

destructive behavior, like alcohol abuse. Among the service branches, women who enlist in the Army are more likely to be subjected to sexual trauma at some point during their period of service. Women who enlist in the Air Force are the least likely to experience military sexual trauma (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 197-8). A.J. is subjected to sexual violence from a superior non-commissioned officer. The sexual relationship has been occurring for some time, and it is one of the factors that effects A.J.'s ability to perform. The relationship is introduced to the audience during a scene in almost complete blackness. A.J. has come to ask her Sergeant to end the relationship. The Sergeant places the blame for the relationship on A.J., telling her he cannot help himself, that she drives him crazy. The Sergeant feigns ignorance of her request and insists that she use the proper decorum expected of a junior enlisted personal toward a superior. It is a short scene, only ten lines and the subject of sex never surfaces, still it is clear that the relationship which A.J. is asking to end is a sexual (McLaughlin 28).

Performing violence on stage is a subject that has intrigued scholars, audiences, and artists. Violence communicated on stage is analyzed intellectually by the audience (Nevitt 15). Depictions of violence are choreographed in such a way that they will be read from the stage by the audience in the house. Audience assess the level of truth behind the violence they see performed. As the violence is being performed an audience member use his or her frame of reference to understand the performance. Audiences will pay particular attention to the faces of the victim and the aggressor, and audiences may recognize a self-conscious actor who is aware of the performativity of the violence. A particularly violent rape occurs in *Ajax in Iraq* . The rape takes place on stage, in front of the audience. The rape occurs shortly after AJ makes it safely back to base after her

patrol was attacked by insurgents. The attack kills everyone in her unit, only AJ make it out alive. She returns to base blood soaked and exhausted. Back at the base she is seen as a hero by all but her Sergeant, who rather than commending her actions ridicules and insults her, and then seizes her, rips down her pants, and rapes her. McLaughlin's stage directions say, "It is fast and brutal and over in seconds. She makes no sound at all, staring out, simply enduring it" (McLaughlin 38). The rape becomes important to the play because it allows the audience to see that the AJ is living in an environment where not only is she subject to the possibility of being blown up or shot, as she witnessed happen to her unit earlier that day, back at the base, where she should be able to expect some level of safety, she is subjected to a violent rape at the hands of her superior. Not only that, but she and the other females there, are subjected to verbal abuse and sexual assault at the hands of the men. It becomes apparent to her that there is no safe place for her in this environment.

In Sophocles' play after Ajax is cheated out of Achilles armor by the Atreid generals, his attempt at avenging the slight on his honor ultimately ends in his suicide after Athena blinds him and turns his vengeance on a herd of cattle instead. This action may be seen as a psychological break in Ajax ultimately resulting from trauma suffered in war. In the contemporary story-line, AJ goes on a rampage and shoots a herd of sheep after the staged rape—one of several sexual assaults suffered—causes a psychological break. When AJ realizes what she has done, and is unable to explain what drove her to commit such an action—"While I wasn't looking, I went off and became a person who could do this" (McLaughlin 40)—the humiliation she feels drives to commit suicide.

Ajax and AJ are unable to reconcile the breakdown in self that results from their detachments. They lose the ambition to continue living and chose to take their own lives. They take their own lives with the same tools placed in their hands in order to take other's lives. Ajax takes his life by the sword and AJ takes her life by the gun. McLaughlin text stages both suicides side by side. The actual violence of the suicide is not seen by the audience. The climactic moment is brought to its full potential, with Ajax placing his sword in the ground and preparing to fall on its point, and AJ placing a gun into her mouth, but the resulting violence of these actions is interrupted by a complete blackout (McLaughlin 51).

In both suicides the result is confusion and bewilderment on the parts of the characters most affected by their death. Mangus responds to AJ's suicide by saying, "And nothing was going to keep her from doing what she'd decided to do" (McLaughlin 51). Tecmessa responds in a similar fashion, she comes to understand that Ajax has decided to go off to die. The conflict becomes how one should honor the lives of a service member who commits suicide. The reason given by Agamemnon and Menelaus for refusing to allow Ajax a proper burial is that he attempted to take the lives of Greek soldiers. The argument over Ajax's burial rights is resolved when Odysseus comes forward and in an eloquent speech convinces the Atreid generals allow Ajax to receive a proper burial.

The contemporary storyline raises a similar conflict. AJ's memorial service takes place around a battle-field cross. The cross is commonly erected when a US service member losses his or her life while deployed. It represents an opportunity for fellow service members to honor the memory of the fallen service member and many times it is the only memorial service that unit members can participate in when one of their own

dies. Two soldiers in *Ajax in Iraq* argue whether AJ's suicide is deserving of a cross or of their memory. One soldier contends that she took the easy way out; in taking her own life she betrayed the members of her unit who deployed with her and depended on her. The second soldier argues that they betrayed A.J. by not recognizing and responding to her cries for help. (McLaughlin 51-3)

McLaughlin's play ends in a powerful way. AJ's son is at home with her sister when the representatives from the Army arrive to inform her of AJ's death. The sister refuses to let them into her home, however, AJ's son motions the representatives to come around the back of the home, where he lets them into the house. The boy calls out, "Mommy, the war is in the kitchen, they want to apologize" (McLaughlin 54). Here, McLaughlin seems to be touching again on a theme that has appeared at other points in the play, the necessity of dialogue of and about the war on terror. In a closing monologue, Mangus tells the audience she will honor AJ's memory. Like Teucer who takes custody of Ajax's bastard son to protect him from the Atreid generals, Mangus decides she to find AJ's child. The play ends somberly. McLaughlin's text is effective and powerful throughout and it addresses several veteran experiences.

After its premier in 2011 at A.R.T., *Ajax in Iraq* moved to an Off-Off-Broadway stage in New York City, and a production in Minneapolis as well. Both productions in New York and the Minneapolis received critical acclaim. Flamboyant Theatre and the Flux Theatre Company partnered together to bring *Ajax in Iraq* to Flamboyant's theatre. The Flux Theatre Company is a moderately young up-and-coming ensemble. The mission of Flux is to collaborate and develop long term relationships with their artists and audiences and thereby bring transformative theatre to New York (Flux Theatre

Ensemble). Anita Gates, reviewed the production for the *New York Times* calling it a “fervent and valiant production”. She praised the production’s direction and spoke highly of the actors, especially Stephen Conrad Moore (Ajax), Raushannah Simmons (Athena), Christina Shipp (AJ) and the chorus. The production at Flamboyant “preaches calmly” that the war in Iraq is not quite over, despite the attention we might pay attention to it in our daily lives (Gates). The review praises Will Lowry’s set design, including his sand outlines of the borders of Iraq which are kicked over and stepped on throughout the production.

*Backstage* critic Clive Johnson also mentioned the choice to blur the sand borders, stating it “calls attention to the messiness of war”. Johnson judges the production as “ambitious but uneven” and points out that the two competing stories at time got in each other’s way, leaving the audience with little more at the end than the statement “war is bad” (Johnson III). He praises the performance of Tiffany Clementi, who played the character of the Wife in the therapist scene and Lori Parquet who played Tecmessa, Ajax’s war bride. This review also highlights the speeches by soldiers, veterans and their families. Both this review, and the one in the *Times* make reference to an anti-war agenda on the part of the New York production.

A second production staged in Minneapolis by Frank Theatre at the Playwrights Horizon has been called “bluntly affecting”, by Rob Hubbard. The production directed by Wendy Knox, Artistic Director of Frank Theatre, examines the play in a touching pro-soldier voice. Knox was introduced to the play by friends of Frank Theatre who read reviews of the New York productions. Knox’s initial reading of the script cemented the play as a show her theatre company needed to produce. Frank Theatre selects shows that

challenge their artists and their community. They seek out productions that examine social, political and cultural concerns. In the wake of the longest war American forces have ever participated in, a play that examines the traumas of our service members fit that bill. “The actors thrill,” writes area critic John Olive on his personal blog. Reviews praise Katie Guentzel in the role of AJ. In the *Pioneer Press* Rob Hubbard calls the performance “powerful and moving”. Wendy Cox wanted to keep from making any statements pro- and anti-war in the piece. Instead she wanted to focus on the soldiers’ voices and allow that to come through in the play. For Knox the play was less about political partisanship and more about the distinctions between national policy and the men and women who are sent to carry out that policy. It seems that the productions in New York and Minneapolis approached McLaughlin’s play from different angles, one chose to approach the play from a decidedly anti-war sentiment, while the other approached the play not from any stance on the war itself, but from the perspective of the veterans and their families whose voices are given agency through the script.

Many of the issues presented in the script come from the interviews the class conducted with veterans and family members of veterans. The approach utilized by Ellen McLaughlin and the ART/MXAT class when writing *Ajax in Iraq* and the successful productions of the play in Minneapolis and New York, makes this play a successful account of War on Terror veteran experiences.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Almost a decade and a half after it began the War on Terror is drawing to a close. The Obama White House anticipates that all combat troops will soon be out of Afghanistan, the only remaining theatre of operation in the thirteen-year-long war. There are now over 33,000 troops in Afghanistan, however, in February of 2014 the White House made it clear that the US would completely pull out of Afghanistan at year's end if a security agreement between the US and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai is not reached. Currently, the White House anticipates keeping a small contingent of troops in Afghanistan post-2014 to act as advisors and trainers to the Afghan forces. While the casualties from this war are significantly fewer than other conflicts, as of April 2, 2014, there were 6,587 US military casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan combined ("U.S. Casualty Status"). The wounds visible and invisible that service members suffer are significantly higher and growing. Every month more and more veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan file into VA hospitals around the country to seek care for these injuries. Addressing these injuries and ensuring the veteran population receives the greatest level of care and treatment is of monumental importance. However, medical treatments may not be the only course of action. Theater of War, a military and civilian based project of Outside the Wire, presents readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* at theatres



across the United States and Europe. Their goal is to “de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, disseminate information regarding available resources, and foster greater family, community, and troop resilience (*Outside The Wire*). Many of the playwrights of these ancient texts, written during the Peloponnesian war, were veterans. War as a subject in Greek drama surfaces again and again, suggesting that these dramas came about as a way of addressing veteran reintegration into society. The plots of these plays center on soldiers struggling to overcome psychological and physiological wounds from war. *Arête*—Latin for honor—is a constant theme and the struggle to maintain honor and dignity reverberates throughout these texts. In the twenty first century, honor, courage, and commitment seem to reverberate still among the veteran community.

As a whole, these three plays are dramatically compelling in the way they speak to and about War on Terror veterans’ voices. The plays not only address issues that seem to pass down from other wars, they explore newly developing issues as the nature of how we engage in war and who engages in war changes. The plays are each anchored in the unique experience of their individual veteran playwrights, and yet still manage to speak to a wider audience of not just veterans—of any war—but audiences of all levels of experience, whether they are peace-activists, ardent supporters of military policy, or friends and family of service members. The dramatic contribution of plays written or inspired from the War on Terror is still relatively minute. The veteran written and inspired plays analyzed in this thesis are some of the first plays to come out of this community of dramatists. Plays that gave voice to the experiences of veterans from the Vietnam War emerged during, in the immediate years following, and as late as a decade

after the war ended. Already, as proven in this thesis, we have plays emerging from the War on Terror. As these conflicts end, it will be important to pay attention to the plays that come about in their aftermath. It may be that, as was the case in Vietnam, time, and distance from the veterans' experiences is necessary before we see major contributions from this veteran cohort.

The plays in this thesis speak to the particular experiences of War on Terror veterans. Like many Vietnam War veteran dramatists, few of whom were already established playwrights before releasing their dramas (Fenn 137), the veteran playwrights of this thesis had not yet written for theatre before writing these plays. These playwrights chronicle their wartime experiences and expose audiences to the boredom before, the dedication during, adrenaline after the experiences they confront. In a similar fashion, Vietnam War veterans "confronted the fact of war directly and chronicled in dramatic terms its psychological horrors" (Fenn 137). Interestingly, an examination other war plays from previous conflicts, reveals that many of the topics covered in the Iraq and Afghanistan plays are not unique to the War on Terror veteran. Technological advances have adapted and evolved the manner in which war is waged, however, the actualities of life on the ground during war and the crises the men and women who wage war undergo has not dramatically changed. Even a cursory exploration of plays from other veteran communities will uncover similar themes throughout the history of war-inspired plays. This suggests that the experiences of war do not appear to drastically change through time.

Jeff Key's *The Eyes of Babylon* is explored as a voice of a gay veteran who deploys to Iraq only to discover that the mission he expected to perform, defending

the defenseless, does not materialize and instead quite the opposite happens. A non-combat related injury forces him to return to the states before the conclusion of his deployment. Confronted at home by the revelation that no weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq, Key undergoes a radical transformation from warrior to peace activist. Jeff Key ultimately decides that he cannot serve his country honorably knowing that the ultimate sacrifice he may make (his life), would be for a cause he is unable to support. He further decides that the military's policy banning gay and lesbian service members from openly serving is damaging to himself and to his comrades. Before transitioning to a peace activist, Jeff Key "comes out" publically on CNN's nationally syndicated new show *Paula Zahn Now*.

The play *American Volunteers* by Johnny Meyer explored depictions of combat stressors on men and women in Afghanistan. The play also looked at gender discrimination in the military, explored the dramatic action for its depictions of acts of acculturation, aggression, and abandoned assimilation. The play's themes seem to be universal among plays about wartime experiences. One of those themes is fragging, the intentional killing of a superior. The play is similar to Vietnam War plays—*The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* by David Rabe (1968), and *G.R. Point* by David Berry (1975)—in its presentation of combat and the effects of combat related exposure on the characters.

The final play examined in this thesis was Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq*. This play explored military sexual trauma as it exists in the ranks of the military. McLaughlin bases her script on the Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*. Working with the 2009 American Repertory Theatre MFA Acting class at Harvard University, she borrowed from devised

theatre practices to develop interviews and stories collected from a multitude of sources that came from multiple generations of war veterans and their families. These stories were placed alongside *Ajax* and a contemporary story of a female soldier deployed to Iraq during the US invasion.

Looking forward, future research into plays of, by, and about the War on Terror could address a plethora of different issues. The future of veteran voices from the War on Terror is only now emerging. This new generation of warrior poets will engage audiences with their dramatizations of their war experiences. The expectation should be that these plays may reflect unique veteran experiences, while maintaining many of the themes that come up repeatedly in war-themed drama. The veteran written plays in this document all come from a male perspective. Another development to look forward to is the dramatization of female service veteran's experiences. With the evolving inclusion of women in more occupational service jobs in the military, and with the increase in female service members seeing combat situations as a result, the introduction of women veteran playwrights writing about their deployment experiences should bring a new light to the veteran dramatic narrative.

Other experiences, such as those that occur on "the home front" are also compelling areas of further analysis and dramatization. One play that addresses the home front during the War on Terror is Steven Levenson's *The Language of Trees*. The play is about a civilian translator who deploys to Iraq and the over-friendly neighbor back home who steps in to help out when things at home begin to spiral out of control. "I'm a translator, OK? I don't even have a gun. I'm a civilian" (11), the father Denton says to his wife on the morning of his departure, only to be taken prisoner by insurgents after he

arrives in Iraq. Back at home, Loretta and Eben must come to terms with his capture and the eventual loss of Denton. The play confronts the complexities of modern war and the inclusion of civilian contractors in war zones. In addition to these issues, the play also examines the struggles families undergo when a loved one deploys to a war zone. This compelling theatrical work challenges audiences to consider the lives most directly affected by war deployments. War touches the families of the deployed more directly than other socially constructed groups. Dramas about the home front wartime experience deserve a place alongside the growing body of wars coming out of the War on Terror.

The plays analyzed in this thesis represent the most dramatically compelling and engaging works to emerge up to this point from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They are stage-worthy tales of wartime experiences, and each received critical acclaim from audiences and critics. The plays represent a unique cross section of veteran experiences and cover contemporary veteran issues that are socially and politically important to this generation of war veterans. The playwrights are still writing and working in the theatre and have new plays in development. They continue to dramatize the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. As new playwrights join this group, the field of veteran inspired drama from the war on terror will only grow. A growing body of plays will demand a growing body of scholars interested in analyzing these plays. The work involved in dramatizing Iraq and Afghanistan is far from over, and the work involved in staging and bringing attention to the veteran plays of Iraq and Afghanistan is a career goal moving forward upon completion of this thesis.

## WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

### Books, Articles, and Reports:

- Aronson, Anrold. *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Baiocchi, Dave. "Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan." Santa Monica: RAND Arroyo Center, December 2013. Web. February 2014.
- Balfour, Michael, Jenny Hughes, and James Thompson. *Performance in Place of War*. New York: Seagull, 2009. Print.
- Bentley, Steve. "A Short History of PTSD from Thermopylae to Hue Soldiers Have Always Had A Disturbing Reaction to War." *Veteran* 11.1 (1991): 13-6. *ProQuest*, Web. February 2014.
- Bonney, Jo, ed. *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000. Print.
- Bodnar, Brandon, John Goodman, David McKean, et. al. "Freedom to Serve: The Definitive Guide to LGBT Service." Washington DC: Service Members Legal Defense Network, 2011. Web. March 2014.
- Brady, Sara. *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

- Catron, Louis, E. *The Power of One: The Solo Play for Playwrights, Actors, and Director*. Porstmouth: Heinemann, 2000. Print.
- Champagne, Lenora. *Out From Under: Texts by Women Performance Artists*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990. Print.
- Colombani, Jean-Marie. "L' Amerique frappee, le monde saisi d'effroi: Nous sommes tous Americains." *Le Monde*, 12 Sep. 2001. Web. August 2013.
- Crick, Bernard. *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.
- Duggan, Patrick. *Trauma-tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*. New York: Manchester UP, 2012. Print.
- Street, Amy E., Dawne Vogt, and Lissa Dutra. "A New Generation of Women Veterans: Stressors Faced by Women Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan." *Clinical Psychology Review* 29.8 (2009): 685-694. *ScienceDirect*, Web. February 2014.
- "Fact Sheet: After Repeal: LGBT Service Members and Veterans." *Service Women's Action Network*. October 2012. Web. November 2013.
- Freshwater, Helen. *Theatre & Audience*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Fenn, Jeffery, W. *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992. Print.
- Govan, Emma, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington. *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Golder, Herbert. Introduction. *Ajax* by Sophocles. Trans. Peter Burian and Herbert Golder. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. 3-24. Print.

- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. New York: Abrams, 1988. Print.
- “Hadji.” *OED Online*. Oxford UP, March 2014.
- Hartigan, Karelis. *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage: Ancient Drama in the Commercial Theatre, 1882-1994*. Westport: Greenwood, 1995. Print.
- Hesk, Jon. *Sophocles: Ajax*. London: Duckworth, 2003. Print.
- Hughes, Jenny. *Performance In A Time of Terror: Critical Mimesis and the age of Uncertainty*. New York: Manchester UP, 2011. Print.
- Isakhan, Benjamin. “The Streets of Iraq: Protests and Democracy after Sadaam.” *The Secret History of Democracy*. Ed. Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2011. Web. February 2014.
- Kelty, Ryan, Meredith Kleykamp, and David Segal. “The Military and the Transition to Adulthood.” *The Future of Children* 20.1 (2010): 191-207. *JSTOR*. Web. February 2014.
- Key, Jeff. Interview by Byrne Harrison. “Interview with Jeff Key of ‘The Eyes of Babylon’.” *Gay Theatre NYC*. n.p., July 1 2011.
- *The Eyes of Babylon*. 2004. TS. Collection of Jeff Key.
- Ley, Graham. *A Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theatre*. Rev. ed. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006. Print.
- Litzz, Brett, and William Schlenger. “PTSD in Service Members and New Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars: A Bibliography and Critique.” *PTSD Research Quarterly* 20.1 (2009): 1-8. *U.S. Government Documents*, Web. March 2014.
- McLuaghlin, Ellen. *Ajax in Iraq*. New York: Playscripts, 2011. Print.



- Meyer, Johnny. *American Volunteers*. 2012. TS. Collection of Johnny Meyer
- Moradi, Bonnie. "Sexual Orientation Disclosure, Concealment, Harassment, and Military Cohesion: Perceptions of LGBT Military Veterans." *Military Psychology* 21.4 (2009): 513-533. *PsycARTICLES*. Web. November 2013.
- Mosher, Gregory. "Introduction to John Leguizamo." *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Jo Bonney. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000. 305-313. Print.
- Mulhall, Erin, and Vanessa Williamson. "Invisible Wounds: Psychological and Neurological Injuries Confront a New Generation of Veterans." *Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America*. New York: Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, 2009. Web. January 2014.
- Muller, Christine. "Witnessing the Fall: September 11 and the Crisis of the Permeable Self." Hill, Andrew Schopp and Matthew B. *The War on Terror and Popular American Culture*. Cranbury: Associated UP 2009. 45-65. Print.
- Nelson, Heidi. Program Note. *Ajax in Iraq*. By Ellen McLaughlin. New York: Playscripts 2011. Print.
- Nevitt, Lucy. *Theatre & Violence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Packer, George. *Blasted*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008. Print.
- Rabe, David. *The Basic Training and Pavlo Humeel and Sticks and Bones: Two Plays by David Rabe*. New York: Viking, 1973. Print.
- Roman, David. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998. Print.

Saal, Issak. "It's About Us! Violence and Narrative Memory in Post 9/11 American Theatre." *International Journal for Literary Studies*. 45.2 (2011): 353-73.

*Arcadia*. Web. March 2014.

United States. *Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers*. Washington: GPO, 1992. Web. 01 May 2014.

---. Dept. of Defense. *Army Directive 2012-16 (Changes to Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers)*. Washington: GPO, 2012. Web. 01 May 2014.

---. Dept. of Defense. *U.S. Casualty Status*. Washington: GPO, 01 May 2014. Web. 01 May 2014.

---. *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies: Academic Program Year 2012-2013*. Washington: GPO, 2013. Web. 01 May 2014.

Zahn, Paula. "Jeff Key CNN Interview." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 8 Dec. 2011.

Newspapers:

Balcazo, Dan. Rev. of *The Eyes of Babylon*, by Jeff Key. Semaphore Projects and The Mehadi Foundation, 59E59 Theatre, New York. *TheatreMania.com* 19 Jun. 2011. Web. September 2013.

Cooper, Helen. "Senate Rejects Blocking Military Commanders From Sexual Assault Cases." *New York Times.com*. New York Times Company, 6 March 2014. Web. 07 March 2014.

- Denvir, Daniel. "\$12 Million Army Video Game Recruitment Center to Close." *Huffington Post.com*. HuffPost News, 20 June 2010. Web. September 2013.
- Finn, Robin. "One to Watch: Playwright Ann Nelson." *NewYorkTimes.com*. New York Times Company 26 Feb. 2006. Web. 30 March 2014.
- Gates, Anita. Rev. of *Ajax in Iraq*, by Ellen McLaughlin. Flamboyant Theatre, Flux Theatre Ensemble, New York. *NewYorkTimes.com*. New York Times Company 17 June 2011. Web. January 2014.
- Gordon, J.D. "Al Qaeda Retakes Fallujah; Obama Frees Cohorts from Gitmo." *The WashingtonTimes.com*. The Washington Times, 6 Jan. 2014. Web. 28 April 2014.
- Haagensen, Erik. Rev. of *The Eyes of Babylon* by Jeff Key. Semaphore Project and The Mehadi Foundation, 59E59 Theatre, New York. *Backstage.com*. BackStage 21 June 2011. Web. September 2013.
- Hubbard, Rob. Rev. of *Ajax in Iraq*, by Ellen McLaughlin. Playwrights Horizon, Frank Theatre Company, Minneapolis. *TwinCities.com*. Pioneer Press 07 Nov. 2011. Web. January 2014.
- Johnson III, Clive. Rev. *Ajax in Iraq*, by Ellen McLaughlin. Flux Theatre Ensemble, Flamboyant Theatre, Minneapolis. *BackStage.com*. BackStage 09 June 2011. Web. January 2014.
- Londono, Ernesto. "Iraqi Interpreters May Wear Masks." *WashingtonPost.com*. Washington Post, 13 Feb. 2009. Web. 14 March 2014.
- . "U.S. Ban on Masks Upsets Iraqi Interpreters." *WashingtonPost.com*. Washington Post, 17 Nov. 2008. Web. 14 March 2014.

- Logan, Joseph. "Last U.S. Troops Leave Iraq, Ending War." *Reuters.com*. Thomson Reuters, 18 Dec. 2011. Web. 14 March 2014.
- Pincus, Walter. "Asylum Program Falls Short For Iraqis Aiding U.S. Forces." *Washingtonpost.com*. Washington Post, 22 Jan. 2008. Web. 12 March 2014.
- Marks, Peter. "A Theatrical Candle In A Shrine to Sept. 11; A Small Play Offers a Focus for Solace." *New York Times*. New York Times Company, 01 May 2002. Web 30 March 2014.
- Nichols, David. Rev. of *The Eyes of Babylon*, by Jeff Key. Tamarind Theatre, Los Angeles. *Los Angeles Times.com*. Tribune 03 Jun 2005. Web. September 2013.
- Steinhauer, Jennifer. "Reports on Military Sexual Assault Rise Sharply." *NewYorkTimes.com*. New York Times Company. 07 Nov 2013. Web. March 2014.
- Tennant, Rob. Rev. of *The Eyes of Babylon*, by Jeff Key. *SaltLak CityWeekly.com* Copperfield. April 16, 2008. Web. September 2013.
- Wittman, Juliet. Rev. of *The Eyes of Babylon*, by Jeff Key. American Junction Productions, Denver. *Westword.com* Westword 28 Aug. 2008. Web. September 2013.
- Other Sources:
- Department of Defense. U.S. Casualty Status.
- "Mission Statement." *The Mehadi Foundation*. The Mehadi Foundation. 2011. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.
- "Mission and Values." *The Flux Theatre Ensemble*. The Flux Theatre Ensemble. 2006. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

“Overview.” *Theatre of War*. Outside The Wire. 2014. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

## VITA

Steven Michael De Loose

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: DRAMATIZING IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: VETERAN VOICES FROM  
THE WAR ON TERROR

Major Field: Theatre

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Theatre at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Theatre at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, AK, USA in 2011.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant and Guest lecturer to Dr. Maria Beach and Professor Susan Felder in "Introduction to Theatre" (two semesters)

Graduate Teaching Assistant to Professor Lloyd Caldwell in "Play Analysis"

Graduate Teaching Assistant to Dr. Maria Beach in "Theatre History II"

Pedagogue in Performance to Professor Tom Skore in "Acting I"  
University of Alaska, Anchorage

*(Forthcoming)* "(Don't) Tell It to the Marines: A Gay Veteran's Public Coming Out and Anti-War Resistance," to be presented at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's annual conference in Scottsdale, AZ, July 2014.

## Professional Memberships: American Theatre in Higher Education