

Chiara Manghi, Mareike Spsychala, Lina Stempel (Eds.)

War and Trauma in Past and Present
An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays

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Edited by Chiara Manghi, Mareike Spychala, Lina Stempel. -
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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
CHIARA MANGHI, MAREIKE SPYCHALA, LINA STREMPER Introduction.....	1#
RÜDIGER HEINZE Waltzing with War: The Representation of Trauma and War in Comics.....	9
AMY PARZIALE Dresden, War, and Trauma in Two American Novels	33
OLGAHAN BAKŞI YALÇIN Unraveling the Past: Su Friedrich's <i>The Ties That Bind</i> (1984) and Mindy Faber's <i>Delirium</i> (1993).....	43
CLAUDIA ZINI Healing Trauma of Displacement and Loss with Art: Autobiographical Survival Strategies in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	55
FLORIAN LÜTZELBERGER Reading Apollinaire's <i>Calligrammes. Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre</i> as an Attempt of Processing the Horrors of War.....	65
KERSTIN-ANJA MÜNDERLEIN "Perhaps some day the sun will shine again": The (In)ability of Processing War Trauma in Vera Brittain's Poetry	79
LINA STREMPER Planting your Flag on the Summit of Sorrow: Writing War and Trauma in Sebastian Barry's <i>On Canaan's Side</i>	91
MATTHIAS ANDRÉ VOIGT Indigenous and non-Indigenous Combat Veterans and the Lakota Sweat Lodge (<i>Inipi</i>) Ritual: War-related Trauma, Ceremony, and Transformation	103
ÁNGELA MARÍA BELTRÁN HERNÁNDEZ Civilian Empowerment: A Healing Experience after the War	117

ILIAS BEN-MNA	
How Rambo and Reagan Returned to Vietnam: The Cinematic Renegotiation of a National Trauma Through Spectacle and Wish Fulfilment.....	129
 BRAHIM BENMOH	
Writing Trauma and the Iraq War in Post-9/11 Prose Fiction: Kevin Powers' <i>The Yellow Birds</i> as a Case Study	143
 NADIA NAAR GADA	
The Trauma of the Colonial War in Algerian Fiction	153
 RIKKE SCHUBART	
Trauma, War, and Female Leadership in the Fantastic Genres: <i>Game of Thrones</i> , <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> , and <i>Vikings</i>	163
 RAFFAELE CUTOLO	
The Trauma of Self-Loathing: War, Stillness, and Atonement in John Boyne's <i>The Absolutist</i>	179
 MAREIKE SPYCHALA	
"There is a definite minority of round-eyed women": Gender, Ethnicity, and Militarism in Women's Vietnam War Autobiographies	191
 MARIA-VIRGINIA TSIKOPOULOU	
Defending Freedom or Traumatizing Individuals? Exploring the Dimensions of Trauma in Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo's <i>Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'</i> (2004).....	203
 KALLIOPI FRAGKOULI	
Identities at War: Fragmentations of Self, Space and Time in Naomi Wallace's <i>In the Heart of America</i>	213

Chiara Manghi, Mareike Spsychala, Lina Strempel

Introduction

This collection developed out of a conference titled "War and Trauma in Past and Present" that was held at the University of Bamberg in March 2018 and brought together graduate students, post-docs, and professors working in British and American literary and cultural studies, French literary studies, history, art, social sciences, and other fields. In addition to being multidisciplinary, the conference was highly international, featuring representatives from several continents and ten different countries. Over the three days of the event, these scholars presented and discussed their research and ideas on the representation of trauma and war in the literature and various forms of art and media of different cultures.

Rather than aiming at a focus on particular wars, regions, cultures, nations, we have sought a plurality of thematic contexts in order to approach experiences and representations of war and trauma, addressing both their universal and specific characteristics. Therefore, the conference presentations and papers were also concerned with a range of periods from the 19th century up to the present day. As a result, by including perspectives and discourses on wars and traumas that traditionally lie outside the realm of anglophone research, our project and this collection uniquely broaden and complement the scope of previous publications dealing with the topics of war and trauma.

In the face of the centenary of the First World War from 2014 to 2018, the continuation of the 'War on Terror' and numerous other armed conflicts, like the Syrian or the Yemeni Civil War, we consider our project to be of particular topicality and relevance. Apart from works commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Europe's so-called 'original catastrophe', each year sees the publication of new novels, autobiographies, movies, comics and video games about past, present, and possible future wars and, increasingly, about the wounds – both physical and psychological in nature – that they inflict on those involved in fighting them as well as the civilian population.

War and trauma are central in contemporary cultures and literatures and continue to be prolific subjects across various genres and media. Wars and their representations have long been subjects of scholarly interest, and the end of the 20th century saw an upsurge of attention on trauma and its representation in literature, art, and the media. A vast majority of the fictional and non-fictional representations of war and trauma concern themselves with those wars that the United States and Western Europe participated in. In recent decades, the experiences and effects of the World Wars and the Vietnam War, and the way in which they have been represented in literature and other media, have been at the core of popular and scholarly attention. The predominance of books, films, and other art concerned with the First and Second World War, the Vietnam War, or, more recently, the Iraq War, can also be explained by the political

and cultural dominance of the United States and its cultural imperialism. Naturally, the focus on Western wars and cultural contexts also exerts influence on the thematic focus of scholarly work that is concerned with these literary and artistic representations of war.

Trauma studies emerged as a new branch of literary and cultural studies, initially being predominantly concerned with the traumatizing legacy of the Holocaust. As such, trauma studies have long been centered around Western experiences of war and trauma. The cultural dominance of the United States has also gendered and raced implications for the representations of war and trauma. In addition, the ongoing focus on war narratives across all media is an indication of the continuing militarization of US society, a militarization that is also being exported to other countries.¹ The influence of US American "militainment" and its gendered and raced subjects is most notable when considering whose perspective on a given war is centered upon and who is represented as a heroic participant in war, but also whose traumas are recognized as traumas.²

In the conceptualization of the conference and the work on the proceedings, our aim was, accordingly, to expand upon this established discourse and to create a more inclusive, international and cross-cultural dialogue about these topics. With our project – through the conference and this collection – we thus aim to facilitate an ongoing exchange about 'war' and 'trauma' across disciplinary, national, and cultural boundaries.

After the First World War, as Jay Winter points out, "[a]mong the major combatants, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that every family was in mourning: most for a relative – a father, a son, a brother, a husband – others for a friend, a colleague, a lover, a companion" (2). Similar assertions could probably be made about the aftermath of the Second World War, but the same is not true for more contemporary wars, which, at least from the perspective of Europe and the United States, are often perceived as far away and not directly related to people's everyday lives. Even in the United States and Great Britain, which deployed significant numbers of their Armed Forces during the 'War on Terror', this war, or rather the wars usually collected under this umbrella term

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- 1 Scholars who have written about militarization include Cynthia Enloe, for example in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (2014) and *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War* (2010), and Henry A. Giroux, for example "War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States" (2004). While Enloe focuses most on the gendered effects of militarization on women across different social classes and different countries, Giroux's subject is the effect of militarization on American democracy. Further, work on how militarization affects indigenous people has been done by Winona LaDuke and Sean Aaron Cruz in *The Militarization of Indian Country* (2012).
 - 2 Roger Stahl, in his influential *Militainment, Inc. War, Media, and Popular Culture* (2009), has noted that the term "militainment" first appeared in 2003 (6) and defines it as "state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption" (6). Multiple other scholars have used the concept in the intervening years, but Stahl's book remains the most comprehensive exploration of the ways in which entertainment media's representations of war affect audiences.

were not as present as the wars of the 20th century, also because of both countries' shift to all-volunteer forces.³ In addition, wars in other parts of the world, for example the colonial wars in North Africa in the middle of the 20th century, or the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, and the traumas they have engendered are often even farther outside of the consideration of anglophone scholars.

As stated before, the conference and this subsequent collection of essays aim to further explore and challenge the existing discourses while also widening the horizon of war and trauma studies by incorporating perspectives of the Global South. Thematically and methodically, our project is placed within long-standing discussions and analyses of the thematic fields of 'war' and 'trauma' in such varied disciplines as literary, cultural, and media studies, as well as social and political sciences. The topics addressed by the contributions in this collection thus range from an investigation of comics and their unique suitedness for the representation of war and trauma, to examinations of contemporary war novels, like Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2012), to analyses of the representation of war trauma in First World War Poetry, and an essay tracing the restorative work of dealing with PTSD based on the example of a community project for women in Colombia.

In spite of the thematic and methodological variety displayed in the contributions, at their core they all seek to provide answers to similar fundamental questions surrounding the representation of war and trauma in literature and the arts. Particularly the questions of if and how experiences of war and trauma can be represented authentically are underlying ones in a majority of the articles. Closely related to this is the debate over whether war and trauma defeat language and, if so, which alternatives for their expression are possible.

In his contribution "Waltzing with War: The Representation of Trauma and War in Comics", Rüdiger Heinze offers an introduction to the (im-)possibilities of representing war and trauma in general before analysing the particularities of their portrayal in comics. Despite the fact that comics might predominantly be associated with entertaining topics, they are often the first to artistically take up collective traumatic events, and Heinze demonstrates why they are in fact particularly well-suited to represent war and trauma. By analysing selected sections from *Maus* (1996), *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), *Safe Area Gorazde* (2007), *Persepolis* (2008), and *Waltz with Bashir* (2009), Heinze shows that the comics share similar structural characteristics and means of representing war and trauma, while at the same time differing vastly in the thematic and formal aspects.

3 While Germany only suspended the draft in 2011, the German Military's participation in the UN mission in Afghanistan has, for wide stretches of time, also taken place outside of public consciousness. However, with the shift to an all-volunteer force, tendencies of militarization similar to those described for the US and the UK by scholars like Enloe can be observed in German society, often in conjunction with advertisement campaigns that use some of the strategies of positioning citizens as "virtual citizen-soldier" (16) that Roger Stahl describes.

Amy Parziale, in her essay "Dresden, War, and Trauma in Two American Novels", examines the representation of war and trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, two American novels that both challenge the collective memory of Dresden and the Vietnam War. In her analysis Parziale particularly focuses on the hybridity of both novels: By mixing textual and visual components in the attempt to narrate trauma and war, both texts put emphasis on the representational limitations connected to them. The paper shows how both novels similarly reveal the difficulties of representing traumatic experiences and war through the fragmentation of narrative.

Two further essays deal with the questions raised above but move away from literary representations of war and trauma. The first of these is Olgahan Bakşı Yalçın's "Unraveling the Past: Su Friedrich's *The Ties That Bind* (1984) and Mindy Faber's *Delirium* (1993)". It investigates the ways in which traumatic experiences can be represented but also processed with the help of autobiographical documentaries. Yalçın exposes Friedrich's and Faber's personal documentaries about their mothers' biographies and family histories as quests for self-knowledge and searches for the roots of traumatic memories and their influence on the directors' current lives.

The second of these contributions is Claudia Zini's "Healing Trauma of Displacement and Loss with Art: Autobiographical Survival Strategies in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina", which analyses the documentary *Nostalgia/Heimweh* (2016) made by Ervin Tahirović, Adela Jušić's video *The Sniper* (2007), and Enes Žuljević's video work *Trapped in a Loop* (2014). Zini investigates the impact of war and trauma on the artists' aesthetics and narrative, while also looking at the phenomenon of a new generation of visual artists and cultural workers belonging to the Bosnian diaspora who are coming back to their country of origin out of a need to express and work through their traumatic war experience via the medium of art.

Just as the contributions to this collection point out universal aspects of war and trauma, they also reveal the differences between particular wars and their representations: Obviously armed conflicts differ regarding factors like the political and cultural context, time and place, and weapons used, but many wars are also associated with a certain genre, as Kate McLoughlin points out (1). Where the First World War is concerned, this has, undoubtedly, been poetry. Two of the articles in this volume deal with the question of how poets expressed and attempted to come to terms with their traumatic experiences of the First World War in their work. Florian Lützelberger's essay "Reading Apollinaire's *Calligrammes. Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre* as an Attempt of Processing the Horrors of War" argues that Apollinaire, suffering from a severe form of post-traumatic stress disorder accompanied by symptoms of clinical depression and dissociation of parts of his own memory, tried to process the horrors rather than hiding from them in a lyrical parallel universe he had created. Thus, his contribution presents a new reading of Apollinaire's war poetry that focuses more on the poems as an attempt at processing his war trauma.

Similarly, the essay "'Perhaps some day the sun will shine again': The (In)ability of Processing War Trauma in Vera Brittain's Poetry" by Kerstin-Anja Munderlein also deals with poetry as a means of working through war trauma. In her analysis Munderlein shows that not only does Brittain's memoir *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1900-1925* (1933) reveal the author's attempts to come to terms with her experiences as a V.A.D. nurse in World War I, but that her poems allow equally valuable insights into the (im-)possibilities of processing war trauma. By applying Joshua Pederson's alternate model of literary trauma theory to the poems, Munderlein demonstrates that the analysis of Brittain's poetry can help to shed more light on the process of Brittain's coping with her traumatic experiences during the First World War.

In a similar vein, but focused on the importance of fictional accounts in representing war and trauma, Lina Stempel's contribution looks at the portrayal of expressive writing as a method for coping with traumatic experiences of war in Sebastian Barry's *On Canaan's Side* (2011). In her essay "Planting your Flag on the Summit of Sorrow: Writing War and Trauma in Sebastian Barry's *On Canaan's Side*", Stempel moves beyond established, psychoanalytic theories of trauma theory by highlighting trauma's representability and towards an examination of so far neglected aspects of contemporary trauma novels.

Shifting the attention away from literary representations of war and trauma and from writing as a way to process these painful experiences to other means of overcoming traumatic memories, Matthias Voigt's article "Indigenous and non-Indigenous Combat Veterans and the Lakota Sweat Lodge (*Inípi*) Ritual: War-related Trauma, Ceremony, and Transformation" takes a closer look at the sweat lodge ceremony (*Inípi*), a ritual that has been employed by the Lakota to aid their veterans in the treatment of PTSD. More recently, other tribal communities across the United States, as well as the Veterans Administration have also begun to utilize the ritual to help veterans to recover from war-related stress. Through a closer look at ceremonialism, the essay offers a better understanding of how the sweat lodge ceremony comforts veterans, helps to reduce the symptoms of PTSD, and, more generally, helps veterans in transforming their masculine identities after they return home from war. Matthias Voigt demonstrates why the sweat lodge is employed as an alternative treatment method – in addition to animal-assisted and outdoor approaches such as horse riding, scuba diving, and service dogs – to better aid veterans to cope with their traumatic war experiences.

Ángela María Beltrán Hernández's essay "Civilian Empowerment: A Healing Experience after the War" introduces a social community project in the Colombian village of El Chocó for women that have been traumatized by war-related violence. By providing a safe community with other women who have had similar experiences and with the help of a variety of creative and artistic projects, the scheme has shown to be highly beneficial for the participants' ability to overcome war-related trauma and for their overall well-being. Hernández has carried out extensive research on the effects

and positive impact of the project using the biographical method. The paper offers an outline of this bigger research project and it provides valuable insights into successful measures to support people in coping with traumatizing experiences as well as in finding new strength and enabling them to focus on their future.

Questions surrounding cultural and national identities and how they are linked with and informed by the ways in which war and trauma are narrated, and especially whose perspectives are foregrounded in these narratives, are raised by several other essays in this collection. The article "How Rambo and Reagan Returned to Vietnam: The Cinematic Renegotiation of a National Trauma Through Spectacle and Wish Fulfillment" by Ilias Ben-Mna investigates the "Return-to-Vietnam" movies of the mid-1980s, which sought to revisit the war and its effects on the US-American psyche, either through assigning a redemptive meaning (e.g. *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*) or by refighting it on the screen in a spectacle-laden role reversal (e.g. *Rambo II*, *Missing in Action*). Mna addresses questions like why this filmic treatment of the Vietnam trauma appeared during the Reagan era, why Hollywood was ripe for engaging this topic in the 1980s, and why these movies were rewarded with critical and financial success by the movie-going public. Furthermore, he investigates how Reagan's ideology and public image fueled this renegotiation of history in popular and political culture. Using a few key examples of the "Return-to-Vietnam" cycle and looking at them in their respective historical and political contexts, the article lays out how they reframed debates surrounding the legacy of the Vietnam War. Ultimately, Mna aims to provide a deeper understanding of the narrative revision of war traumas in the entertainment industry and its role in shaping images of history across generations.

The events of 9/11 and the War on Terror are focused on in Brahim Benmoh's article "Writing Trauma and the Iraq War in Post-9/11 Prose Fiction: Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* as a Case Study" on the representation of war and trauma in *The Yellow Birds* (2012) by American author and Iraq War veteran Kevin Powers. Against the background of Dominick La Capra's trauma theory, Benmoh investigates how Powers' account not only represents the experiences of terror and war but also how post-9/11 literature played a significant role in framing reality and shaping American cultural identity. Benmoh reads these processes as being connected with hegemonic tendencies and political motives.

Moving away from the United States, Nadia Naar Gada's essay "The Trauma of the Colonial War in Algerian Fiction" examines the painful experience of the colonial war as a central distinguishing feature in novels by Kateb Yacine and Rachid Mimouni. In her analyses, she draws on the theoretical perspective of Frantz Fanon's theory of revolution, which he develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and focuses on how the violence and trauma of the Algerian War of Independence, and their effect on the nation, are portrayed and negotiated in the two novels.

These discourses of cultural and national identity often closely intersect with those surrounding race and gender in portrayals of war and trauma. Paying attention to the way raced and gendered identities are framed and presented once again leads to